

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

A State Policy Roadmap for Equity & Quality in
College in High School Programs



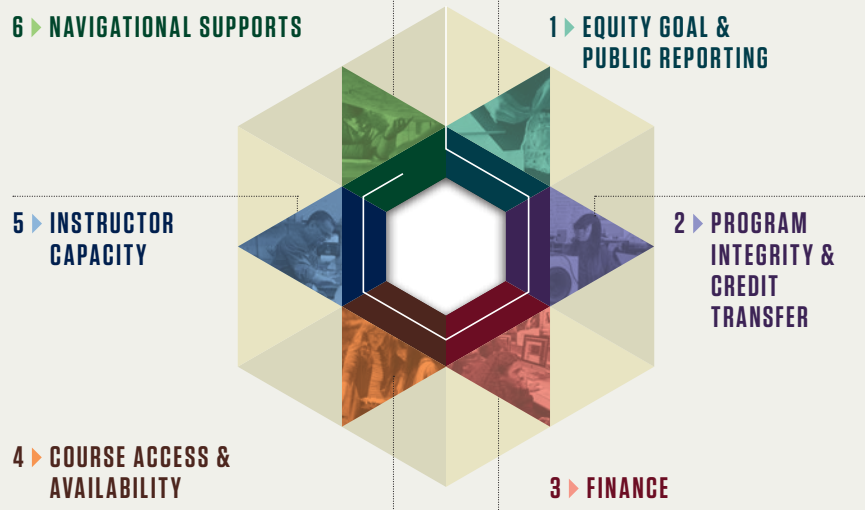
PROFILES IN PROGRESS

Colorado

Every state has more work to do in order to advance policy that supports equitable access to high-quality college in high school programs such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school. However, several states are standing at the forefront of progress in intentionally crafting policies to support college in high school programs that center on equity and quality, and Colorado stands out for their decade of intentional statewide work to advance these programs.

Colorado's efforts are highlighted frequently in the College in High School Alliance and the Level Up Coalition's 2019 publication, Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs. This landmark resource provides a six-part framework for policymakers to assess and build upon their current policies for these programs, with multiple policy recommendations and examples from select states.

This profile is designed to demonstrate how states can think holistically across the six framework categories of Unlocking Potential and use the experiences of Colorado as a guide for their work. Though Colorado still has work to do to ensure equitable participation in college in high school programs, particularly among low income students, there are many instructive examples that can be derived from the state's experiences.



▶ COLLEGE IN HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN COLORADO

A number of college in high school models operate in Colorado. Partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education that follow the conditions prescribed under statute are labeled as “Concurrent Enrollment.” The Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment Program (ASCENT) also provides students with opportunities to take college courses, full or part time, in a fifth year of high school.

In addition, the state supports a number of early college high schools and Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) throughout the state. Programs that operate outside of the conditions described in the statute governing Concurrent Enrollment are largely called “dual enrollment,” or are given institution-specific branding.

- ***Concurrent Enrollment*** — The simultaneous enrollment of a student in a local education provider and in one or more postsecondary courses, including academic or career and technical education courses, which may include course work related to apprenticeship programs or internship programs, at an institution of higher education.
- ***Early College*** — A secondary school in which high school students complete secondary and postsecondary courses while enrolled high school such that, upon successful completion of the curriculum, the student will have completed the requirements of a high school diploma and an associate’s degree (or other postsecondary credential) or at least sixty credits. The curriculum must be designed to be completed within four years. Early colleges must be designated by the state as an early college.
- ***Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH)*** — P-TECH is an innovative partnership between a school district, a community college, and one or more industry employers. Students begin in 9th grade and may go through 14th grade, for a total of up to 6 years. Students graduate with both a high school diploma and an industry-recognized associate degree, in addition to gaining relevant workplace skills. The associate degree is in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) focused high-growth industry.
- ***The Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment Program (ASCENT)*** — A Concurrent Enrollment program that allows ASCENT students to remain enrolled at their high school for one year following their 12th grade year (creating a 5th year of high school). The school receives ASCENT-specific, per-pupil state funding that it uses to pay the student’s college tuition at the resident community college rate. The state legislature allots a specific number of ASCENT slots each year for program participation. These slots are allocated to local education providers based on a specific formula.

The following sections will provide an overview of Colorado’s progress along the six framework categories of Unlocking Potential.

▶ EQUITY GOAL & PUBLIC REPORTING



From Unlocking Potential: States set an equitable, statewide public goal for increasing the participation and success of traditionally underserved student groups in college in high school programs, with clear, disaggregated public reporting and accountability for progress toward the goal.

Equity Goal

Though Colorado lacks a specific equity goal for participation and success in college in high school programs, Colorado policymakers have made their intentions clear that equitable expansion of access to these programs is a priority. The [Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act of 2009](#) states in its Legislative Declaration its intention that “[a]ll of the state’s high schools should eventually develop equitable access to concurrent enrollment programs to provide the infrastructure necessary to improve high school retention, to motivate young people to take seriously the need to become postsecondary- and workforce-ready, and to accelerate students’ progress toward a postsecondary credential.”

In addition, while it lacks a definitive call out to equity, the Colorado Department of Education’s [Strategic Plan for 2017–2022](#) includes the goal that “[s]tudents earning college credit in high school will increase from 35% in 2018 to 50% of students in 2022.”

Public Reporting

As required by [statute](#), the Colorado Departments of Higher Education and Education jointly publish an [Annual Report on Concurrent Enrollment](#). The report includes an analysis of both participation in the various college in high school programs in the state, broken down by demographics including race and gender, but also looks at student success as well.

The most recent report, for school year 2017-2018, shows significant participation gains, particularly for students of color. Nearly 35 percent of all Colorado 11th and 12th graders participated in their college in high school programs, a nearly 10 percent increase in the number of students participating from the previous school year. In addition, “[c]ompared to the previous year, participation in [Concurrent Enrollment] increased 16 percentage points among African American and black students, 17 points among Hispanic students and 18 points among Native American and American Indian students.”

PROGRAM INTEGRITY & CREDIT TRANSFER



*From **Unlocking Potential**: States support and promote high-quality college in high school programs through effective oversight and cross-sector collaboration between the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, as well as ensuring credit articulation.*

Credit Transfer

The [Expanding Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities Act](#), passed in 2019, re-affirms that the courses students complete through Concurrent Enrollment must apply to developmental education, an approved career and technical education (CTE) certificate or degree, a state-wide approved transfer course, and/or be part of a statewide transfer agreement.

Ensuring Equivalency with College Courses

The Colorado Community College System has a [Statement of Standards & On Site Best Practices](#) providing a guide for Concurrent Enrollment programs, which covers areas such as curriculum, faculty training and professional development, student services and advising, assessment, and facilities. The standards outlined by the Colorado Community College System mirror [national program quality standards](#) from the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, the sole program accreditor for concurrent enrollment in the nation.

Cultivating Cross-System Collaboration

The Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act lists the requirements for cooperative agreements between K-12 and higher education partners across these programs. In addition, the state manages a Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board, which includes representatives from K-12, higher education, and includes a representative sample of students, parents, and counselors. The board meets quarterly. The board's mandate includes "[m]aking recommendations as necessary to the general assembly, the state board, and the commission concerning the improvement or updating of state policies relating to concurrent enrollment programs."

FINANCE



From Unlocking Potential: States design funding mechanisms that remove financial barriers for low-income and moderate-income students to participate and excel in college level work in high school.

For more information on state financing mechanisms for dual enrollment, see [Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps](#).

Remove Barriers

As part of the [development of cooperative agreements](#) between school districts and colleges, school districts must participate in the state's Concurrent Enrollment program and agree to pay the college on the student's behalf expenses up to the resident community college tuition rate. Following the passage of the [Expanding Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities Act in 2019](#), colleges are no longer allowed to charge students additional tuition beyond that paid by the school district. As a result, Concurrent Enrollment is now tuition free for participating students, though, depending on the agreement, they may be expected to pay any costs associated with fees, books, and transportation.

To help ameliorate some of those additional non-tuition expenses, Colorado has launched the [Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program](#). Grants are targeted at school districts with low participation in Concurrent Enrollment, and among other uses can fund eliminating the costs associated with books, fees, supplies, or transportation. For 2019-2020, the program was funded at \$1.5 million.

Balancing Incentives Between K-12 and Higher Education

Concurrent enrollment [students count towards funding](#) for both the school district and the institution of higher education partner in their formula funding from the state.

COURSE ACCESS & AVAILABILITY



From Unlocking Potential: States ensure that students are able to access college in high school courses, regardless of geography, with pathways that maximize opportunities for students to earn multiple college credits, and facilitate students exploring academic and career areas of interest while ensuring that those courses count toward high school graduation requirements.

Making Courses Available to All Students

Colorado requires that each district, board of cooperative services, and charter schools annually notify all students and parents of Concurrent Enrollment opportunities for qualified students in postsecondary courses, including academic courses and career and technical education courses. The notification must include how any credits earned will transfer (such as whether they apply towards a specific major), and must also specify any anticipated fee or text book costs.

Pathways to Areas of Student Interest

With the 2019 passage of the Expanding Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities Act, districts are required to offer concurrent enrollment courses and do not allow schools to unreasonably limit the number of courses students can take.

▶ INSTRUCTOR CAPACITY



From Unlocking Potential: States develop strategies to recruit, support, and diversify the pool of instructors with the qualifications to teach college in high school while encouraging collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary partners as college in high school programs are scaled.

Expanding the Pool of Qualified Instructors

Grants awarded through the previously referenced Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program may also be used to support teachers obtaining a graduate degree or 18 graduate credits in a specific subject so that the teacher may be certified to teach a postsecondary course at a high school. In its first year, the majority of grant funding supported high school teacher education to earn qualifications to teach Concurrent Enrollment.

▶ NAVIGATIONAL SUPPORTS



From Unlocking Potential: States prioritize the student navigational supports and advising needed to ensure student success in college in high school courses, particularly for those students historically underserved by these programs.

Providing Student Supports

The Expanding Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities Act mandates the creation of a “concurrent enrollment website, to provide information to students, parents, and legal guardians concerning concurrent enrollment options and requirements.” The website must clearly explain and differentiate between the different kind of college in high school programs in the state, eligibility requirements to participate, work-based learning opportunities, and the benefits, challenges, and costs associated with participating. The website launched in July, 2020.

In addition, Colorado’s school counselor corps grant program provides funding to eligible school districts to increase the availability of school-based counselors. Approximately 56% of the students attending the schools served by the grant program are eligible for free and reduced lunch.