



Colorado Department of Education

Alternative Education Campus Work Groups: Summary Report



June 23, 2025

Introduction

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE, or “the department”) initiated three work groups during the 2024–25 school year to improve the way that alternative education campuses (AECs) are supported and held accountable for their performance. These work groups provided a forum for the department to gather input from district and school leaders about the ways that specific department policies and practices facilitate their work and to collaboratively determine recommendations for ways to adjust or strengthen those policies and practices. CDE teams leading and participating in this initiative include the Accountability Analytics team, School Improvement Planning team, Transformation Specialists, Federal Programs unit, Dropout and Student Re-Engagement team, and the Charter Online team.

Led by a team of 12 CDE support staff from the departments listed above, a group of 68 district leaders, school leaders, and other experts (see table below for participant details) convened in December 2024 to outline the purpose and intended outcomes of the work groups and to gather initial feedback.

Staff from the CDE teams listed above used that feedback to develop three draft proposals in the following areas: the AEC Framework, AEC designation and renewal, and AEC supports. The department shared these proposals via a collaborative online platform and designated three work groups to focus on the three areas. Each work group held an initial meeting to discuss the proposal, developed and gave feedback on the proposals through the collaborative space, and then reconvened to finalize the proposals and discuss additional feedback on recommendations. Finally, the whole group convened in March 2025 for a wrap-up meeting where each work group shared its recommendations. The chart below summarizes the process for these three work groups.

Work Group	Participants	Meetings
Work Group 1: Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop guiding principles for optional measuresGive policy feedback on timeline and scope for re-norming measuresDevelop a process for sunseting or removing an optional measure for AEC school performance frameworks	10 members, including school leaders and district level experts in data analysis and school accountability	January 2025 February 2025 March 2025
Work Group 2: Designation and Renewal <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide feedback on the department’s process for data submission (for AEC designation and for accountability measures)	27 members, including school leaders and district/state level experts in assessment and accountability, teaching and learning, and school improvement	January 2025 February 2025

Work Group 3: Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on technical assistance, grants, and professional development 	19 members, including school leaders and school/student support staff	January 2025 February 2025
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Work Group 1: AEC Framework

Purpose and overall outcomes

Work Group 1's purposes were to 1) review current AEC framework plan type distributions and framework cuts, 2) review the process for approving optional accountability measures, 3) review the process for measuring schools' progress toward those optional measures, and 4) explore methods to determine the validity, quality, and equity of optional measures across the AEC landscape. The work group's intended outcomes were to inform CDE's optional measure policy (how to determine the most effective and insightful ways to determine the extent of AECs' student engagement, achievement, and growth) and cut score policy (how to evaluate an AEC's achievement and growth based on those measures).

Work Group 1 produced the following recommendations:

Recommendations regarding the process to approve a new optional accountability measure

- The work group articulated specific criteria that a proposed optional accountability measure must meet. An optional measure must:
 - be a technical fit with general CDE performance frameworks
 - be based on student outcome/performance data
 - demonstrate the level of rigor and validity that is required for a measure of accountability
 - demonstrate sufficient variability in performance to justify its use in CDE's normative accountability system
- To determine whether a proposed optional measure meets these criteria, the work group defined some specific pieces of information to consider, including:
 - the student population to be included in the measure, as well as the extent to which the population represents the school's overall student population
 - administration information about the way data is collected for the proposed optional measure
 - whether the proposed measure is aligned to Colorado's academic standards and normed at the national level
 - calculation details and validity checks for the proposed measure
- The work group defined a process to collect specific information to inform CDE's decision-making process about whether to approve a new optional accountability measure.
 - Key considerations:
 - Reduce the burden on AECs to participate in the process: streamline the negotiation process, simplify the collection of evidence (described below), and shorten the timeline.

- Be flexible and transparent, incorporate input and expertise from a range of stakeholders, and ensure the continued the legitimacy of the process.
- The work group proposed a one-year timeline for this process; for example, to submit and gain approval to use a new optional measure for the 2026 framework cycle, new measure negotiation would occur between October and December 2025, data supporting the proposed new measure would be submitted in May and June 2025, and if approved, the new measure would be incorporated into the 2026 frameworks by September 2026.

Recommendations regarding the process to remove an existing optional accountability measure

- Work Group 1 developed recommendations for a process to stop using (or “sunset”) an optional measure that no longer fits with the AEC frameworks. The proposed criteria to sunset an optional measure include:
 - The measure not meeting all AEC guiding principles for optional measures (as described above: technical fit, employs student outcome/performance data, rigor and validity, and sufficient variability in performance)
 - Lack of consistent use (e.g., three years with no submissions)
 - The methodological approach being unable to be maintained year over year
 - The work group also noted that a measure that is sunset could be re-approved if it is renegotiated with any necessary adjustments to bring it back in line with the guiding principles.
- The proposed sunset process and its timeline:
 - September and October of a school year: all optional accountability measures that were employed on the most recent frameworks will be reviewed for quality and rigor
 - October and November of that school year: CDE will publish a list of measures flagged for sunset to inform AEC staff
 - May and June of that school year: measures that have been flagged for sunset can be submitted for accountability purposes one final time
 - The work group proposed a timeline to phase in this new process: for the current 2025 frameworks, all current optional measures in use will be allowable for submission; CDE will do a review as outlined above, but all current measures will continue to be allowable for submission for the 2026 frameworks. Measures flagged for sunset will not be submittable for the 2027 frameworks.

Recommendations regarding the process to evaluate cut points for optional accountability measures

- The department outlined three methods for evaluating cut points for optional measures: a “between group” approach, a “within group” approach, and a mixed approach (“between and within”).
- The “between group” approach establishes cut points based on the performance distribution of multiple sites within a single year. Benefits of this approach:
 - Useful when a high number of AECs are using the same measure in the same framework cycle
 - Establishes consistency between schools
 - Ensures comparable data
 - Can establish cut points based on a single year of data
- The “within group” approach establishes cut points based on the performance distribution of a single site across multiple years. Benefits of this approach:

- Useful when a small number of AECs or a single AEC is using a given measure
- Allows for the continued use of highly specific measures
- Requires at least three years of clean performance data from a single site to establish validity of a cut point
- The mixed approach establishes cut points based on the performance distribution of multiple sites across multiple years, including both between and within group data points in a single set. Benefits of this approach:
 - Enables an AEC to incorporate all submitted data points
 - Assumes that performance over time and across sites is relatively comparable
 - Can establish cut points based on all data available to CDE
 - *NOTE: After outlining the three approaches, CDE will be moving forward with this mixed approach for studying how to update existing and new cuts, as well as for ongoing evaluations*
- Analysis of the process to collect non-submitted data points in order to create a more accurate performance distribution for popular optional accountability measures:
 - Participation in this cut point field research would be optional
 - AECs would be encouraged to participate to increase the accuracy of the findings
 - The non-submitted data collected in this field research would not impact performance frameworks
 - All collected data would be aggregated and analyzed to gain insight into possible cut points.
 - The following optional measures could be candidates for this field research:
 - NWEA MAP median percentile rank
 - Star median percentile rank
 - WorkKeys achievement in reading and mathematics
 - Credit course completion
 - Post-completion success rate
 - WorkKeys certificate earned rate
 - Returning student rate

Work Group 2: AEC Designation and Renewal

Purpose and overall outcomes

While Work Group 1 focused on articulating the rules and the negotiation process for AEC accountability measures, Work Group 2's purpose was to review the structure and process used by CDE to help AECs determine appropriate data and other evidence for progress monitoring and accountability. Currently, districts and AECs submit data to the department to meet AEC designation criteria, planned measures of accountability, and actual measures of accountability. Districts and AECs may negotiate with CDE about potential new optional accountability measures (e.g., assessments or other measures that have not been employed by CDE in the past). District and AECs may also work with the department to select the most appropriate measures for specific

programs. To ensure accuracy and consistency, CDE may monitor AECs through desk audits and/or site visits. The outcomes for Work Group 2 were to inform the timelines, scope, and components of CDE's process of collecting data and evidence to monitor AECs through the AEC School Performance Framework indicators.

Work Group 2 produced the following recommendations:

Recommendations regarding the collection of evidence for accountability measures

- Modify the process that AECs follow to discuss and select accountability measures that have not previously been utilized, including both brand new measures and measures that have already been approved by CDE but that must be reviewed for appropriate applicability to the specific AEC.
- Enhance the process by which AECs propose new optional accountability measures or modify existing optional measures, as well as the process by which AECs negotiate with CDE for approval of these changes.
- Create a dashboard or web portal for all AEC resources and timelines to make it easier for AECs to access and navigate across systems (e.g., Syncplicity, Pipeline, email, and the CDE website).
- Create a resource for optional measures that includes documentation on any measures that are currently in use, as well as explicit business rules for the calculation of performance results using these measures.
- Create data templates to help AEC leaders calculate their own optional accountability measure performance results.

Recommendations regarding AEC designation and monitoring

- Create guidance documents on acceptable documentation for high-risk identifiers.
- Create a guidance document for audits and site visits so that AECs can understand the protocols for these monitoring activities and can conduct self-audits to gauge their own progress.

Further considerations for state policy

- Change the annual AEC designation cycle to a biannual or triannual cycle for existing AECs so AECs are not required to renew their designation every year.
- Change the 90 percent requirement for small systems
- Create a new high-risk identifier for students in grades 6 through 8 (an identifier equivalent to the over-aged, under-credited identifier for students in grades 9 through 12).
- Create a new high-risk marker that would allow districts to designate students who identify as LGBTQ+ as high risk.

Work Group 3: AEC Supports

Purpose and overall outcomes

Work Group 3's purpose was to review input (via a survey and two live meetings) from AEC leaders about areas of need, particularly regarding professional development and funding from school improvement grants. Work Group 3's objective was to inform professional development offerings from the department and school improvement support (e.g., through state and federal grants) for AECs.

Work Group 3 proposed the following recommendations:

Recommendations about training or professional development for AEC leaders and staff

- Conduct regular (monthly or quarterly) sessions to bring together AEC staff with various CDE departments to learn about ICAP and work-based learning; scheduling, student count, and finances; effective instructional approaches; AEC program accountability; enrollment, anticipated graduation, and coding; building AEC capacity through effective community partnerships; and ensuring effective succession planning for AEC leadership.
- Offer new leader orientation on CDE supports, AEC designation, the optional accountability measures process, etc.
- Investigate mentorship opportunities for new and experienced AEC leaders.
- Develop effective ways to coordinate across CDE's diagnostic visits, supports, technical assistance, and monitoring practices.
- Develop a checklist of best practices for maintaining effective community partnerships (e.g., Are community partners meeting the AEC's needs? How is the collaboration beneficial to the community partner as well as the AEC?).

Recommendations about training or professional development for district leaders and staff

- Hold a general training about the purpose of AECs, ways that they benefit students, and ways that districts can support them.
- Highlight bright spots – districts that cultivate effective partnerships with AECs.
- Share the best practices for modifying funding allocations for AECs mid-year.
- Help AECs to coordinate community partnerships throughout the district.

General recommendations

- Shared recommendation with Work Group 2: Create a dashboard or web portal for all AEC resources and timelines to make it easier for AECs to access and navigate across systems (e.g., Syncplicity, Pipeline, email, and the CDE website).
- Create an efficient way to inform AECs about grant opportunities specifically aligned to AECs' programming.
- More funding for AECs, a need for continuous sources of funding for things beyond academics.
- A challenge of funding not following the students to AECs—students arriving after the October count, tracking for out of district/state students

Wrap Up/Other Considerations for Future Investigation

All three work groups had robust conversations in areas that did not rise to the level of recommendations. Some areas they requested the department investigate further include:

- Considerations for the AEC Performance Framework:
 - Analysis of the Attendance measure, including challenges with the measure being duplicative or punitive for certain school types

- The overlap and relationship of Attendance and Truancy
 - Using one or two years of data for required measures
 - Using optional measures in more than one indicator
- A process for organizing and sharing out community partnership opportunities; this could be AEC-led or a part of a Request for Proposal process (e.g., EASI).
- Training for district staff on support and funding AECs:
 - Bright spots of AEC–district partnerships
 - Funding allocation modifications mid-year (what are best practices?)
 - Coordinating community partnerships across the district (ensuring AECs have access to larger contracts)
 - Training for district leaders on what AECs do, how they are supported, and how AECs benefit districts
- How to increase transparency on how department resources related to workforce, CTE support, and college courses are relevant or appropriate for AECs, or if unique resources are needed
- Unique staffing pipeline, recruitment and retention issue