

6. Low-Income and At-Risk Students

As we have not opened yet, we do not know the number of low-income and at-risk students who will attend Colorado Springs Charter Academy. If we get a proportional representative sample of D-11 students enrolling in our school, then based on recent statistics about 41% of our students would qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program (FRL). After we have a signed charter contract with our authorizer, we will require parents to fill out Enrollment forms (as opposed to Letters of Intent to Enroll forms). On this form, we will ask if the students have in the past qualified for FRL. This will give us an early indication of what kind of numbers to expect. Further, we will strongly encourage parents to fill out the FRL eligibility form, and we will offer to help them do this, to the extent allowed by law. One issue with tracking at-risk kids being served by charter schools is that if there is no hot lunch program, there is little incentive for parents to fill out these forms. A side effect of this is that it appears that the percentage of at-risk students attending charter schools is vastly underreported. We are mindful of this, and want to report the most accurate information as is possible. All told, though, we are not anticipating that CSCA will qualify as a Title 1 school in the first year of operation.

A. Outreach

Our school has been publicized on local television and in the Colorado Springs Gazette. To date, three community meetings about CSCA were held in different parts of Colorado Springs to make it more likely that a broad cross-section of parents would be able to attend. Press releases for our community meetings were distributed to the major media outlets in Colorado Springs including *Hispania News*. Our founders are fluent in multiple languages (including Spanish) so we are able to produce our documents in both English and Spanish. CSCA has also partnered with Padres Unidos/United Parents, a grassroots group in D-2 and D-11, which uses parent and community volunteers to walk the streets of the more disadvantaged parts of Colorado Springs. They share information about educational choices, including CSCA, with the parents they meet. We did a limited mailing to 65 families in south Colorado Springs who indicated an interest in charter schools. When we raise enough money through donations and grants, we plan a larger targeted mailing to households around the Title 1 schools, especially where achievement is low. Eight D-11 schools would meet these criteria based on 2003 SAR ratings.

B. Addressing Needs of At-Risk Students

“At-risk” students are defined many ways in Colorado Law. In the Charter Schools Act, they are defined as “*those students who because of physical, emotional, socioeconomic, or cultural factors are less likely to succeed in school.*”¹ More specifically, among the possible groups that are sometimes referred to as at-risk are:

- Students who have scored Unsatisfactory on the CSAP;
- Students who attend a school that has a School Accountability Rating (SAR) of “Low Performing”;
- Students who attend a Title I-designated school;
- “Twice Exceptional” students (both learning disabled and gifted);
- Students who qualify for Free Lunch under the federal “National School Lunch Act;”²
- Gifted students and all others not meeting academic expectations befitting their documented ability;
- Students whose dominant language is not English; and
- Expelled students and students not accessing educational opportunities.

Colorado Springs Charter Academy will provide rich educational experiences for all students, whether or not they are viewed as “at-risk.” We will hold high expectations for every child, and we will address the educational needs of each enrollee. While this may not sound notable, all too often students perform only to the expectations that are held by their teachers and parents. If students have been in a learning environment where they were held to low expectations, then the fact that they have not yet blossomed is no surprise. Being held to high standards at Colorado Springs Charter Academy will therefore represent increased learning opportunities for such students. We will set our students up to succeed—it will be hard work for some of the students, but they will succeed.

An additional “at-risk” group not yet identified in the law, but very prominent in the research literature, is reading-disabled pupils. This could include students who read several years below grade level as well as dyslexic students. Because dropping out of high school is strongly tied to a lack of reading ability, Colorado Springs Charter Academy will place a special emphasis on literacy for all. With the aid of active teachers, professional tutors, and researchers, we are designing an original reading remediation strategy for those who struggle with reading. CSCA will lead the way in literacy learning. We refuse to give up on kids, and one reason is that we take it personally as many of the founders have children with learning disabilities.

The key to our meeting the needs of at-risk students is to continually teach them at the correct instructional level. The way we will be sure of this is our process of: pre-assess, teach, mini-assess, teach, mini-assess, teach, formal assessment, adjust. Each group of students will be using the same process regardless of if they are above or below grade level.

CSCA’s differentiated grouping for instruction will ideally prevent the need for significant corrective action. However, as necessary CSCA will have an ongoing child study team that will meet regularly to identify and assist students who are at risk of failing. Depending upon the student and his or her needs, the team may be composed of regular classroom teachers, the administrator, and any other relevant learning specialist. Strategies that will be used to assist students at risk of not meeting school standards include one-on-one after school tutoring, individualized learning plans, and supplemental programs.

¹ Colorado Revised Statute 22-30.5-103(a).

² United States Code: Title 42—The Public Health and Welfare. Ch 13—School Lunch Programs. Section 1751 *et seq.*