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## **News Release**

### ***Colorado Wins Five-Year \$15 Million Grant To Boost Graduation Rates In 32 Schools***

Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones announced today that Colorado has won a five-year \$15 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education's High School Graduation Initiative Program.

"We are extremely pleased to be supported by the U.S. Department of Education on this important work," said Commissioner Jones. "There is valuable research that tells us what works in keeping students engaged, and these federal resources will allow us to put these programs and strategies into place in Colorado's public schools and verify that they work."

The Colorado Department of Education's Unit of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement identified 32 schools to receive the intensive support available through the grant (full list below). All these schools have a dropout rate higher than the state average and all serve at least 400 students.

Participating schools were required to demonstrate their ability to implement intensive interventions and also to show that additional resources were needed. Participation also required schools to agree to implement research-based programs and best practices in dropout prevention and student re-engagement.

An additional 22 schools will receive support from the grant through access to local and statewide trainings, technical assistance in data analysis and a toolkit designed to build knowledge of best practices in dropout prevention and student recovery. Approximately \$200,000 will

be allocated to provide the training and technical assistance to all schools.

### **Intensive Intervention in 32 Schools**

Fourteen schools agreed to participate in the grant at the “systems change” level, and 18 at the “capacity building” level.

In the “systems change” group, the schools represent a current enrollment of 39,015 middle and high school students and will receive support to implement the proven framework in dropout prevention. Strategies include:

- Analyzing student data
- Conducting an assessment of programs and policies
- Developing dropout prevention and recovery plans
- Developing and implementing early-warning systems
- Implementing research-based best practices in dropout prevention and recovery
- Strengthening community collaborations

In the “capacity building” interventions group, the 18 schools represent a current enrollment of 17,262 middle and high school students. These schools will develop project plans to integrate best practices and strategies into school improvement plans. Examples of strategies include, but are not limited to:

- Tutoring and mentoring students who are off track to graduate
- Expanded learning opportunities including summer programs
- Early-warning system development and implementation
- Family-school-community engagement

The mission of the Unit of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement is two-fold: first, to work with districts to keep students engaged in school and, second, to engage students who have already dropped out.

“Research has shown that effective dropout recovery efforts must be seen as a coordinated continuum of services and strategies,” said Judith Martinez, director of the CDE Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement Unit. “The strategies start with identifying students who have dropped out, re-engaging the students, providing multiple pathways to graduation, monitoring their progress and providing individualized support through graduation. Limited, piecemeal or

partially implemented prevention or recovery efforts are likely to have limited success.”

### **Participating Schools**

- Adams City High School (Adams School District 14)
- Aurora Central High School (Aurora Public Schools)
- Brady Exploration School (Jefferson County Schools)
- Colorado Virtual Academy (Adams 12 Five Star Schools)
- Colorado’s Finest Alternative School (Englewood School District)
- East High School (Pueblo City Schools)
- Fort Lupton High School (Weld County School District 8)
- Gateway High School (Aurora Public Schools)
- Grand Mesa High School (Plateau Valley School District 50)
- Greeley Central High School (Greeley-Evans School District 6)
- Hidden Lake High School (Adams County School District 50)
- Hinkley High School (Aurora Public Schools)
- Insight School (Julesburg School District Re-1))
- Jefferson High School (Jefferson County Schools)
- John F. Kennedy High School (Denver Public Schools)
- Keating Continuing Education (Pueblo City Schools)
- Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts (Mapleton School District)
- McClain High School (Jefferson County Schools)
- Montezuma-Cortez High School (Montezuma-Cortez School District Re-1)
- New America School (Aurora Public Schools)
- New America School (Mapleton School District)
- New Horizons Day School (Harrison School District 2)
- Northglenn High School (Adams 12 Five Star Schools)
- Northridge High School (Greeley-Evans School District 6)
- Overland High School (Cherry Creek School District)
- R-5 High School (Mesa Valley County School District 51)
- Rangeview High School (Aurora Public Schools)
- Skyview Academy High School (Mapleton School District)
- Thornton High School (Adams 12 Five Star Schools)
- Vantage Point High School (Adams 12 Five Star Schools)
- Vilas Online School (Vilas School District)
- Wasson High School (Colorado Springs School District 11)
- West High School (Denver Public Schools)

### **Colorado’s Dropout Rate**

The Colorado Department of Education reported the 2008-2009 annual dropout rate at 3.6 percent, .2 percentage points better than the 3.8

percent rate posted in 2007-2008. (The 2009-2010 data are not yet available.) In 2006-2007, the statewide dropout rate stood at 4.4 percent.

The 32 schools receiving support under the grant served approximately 11 percent of all students in grades seven through 12 in Colorado's public schools in the 2008-09 academic year, but generated nearly 28 percent of the state's dropouts during that same period of time. The aggregated dropout rate for the 32 schools was 8.9 percent.

Under the CDE formula, the dropout rate reflects the percentage of all students enrolled in grades 7-12 who leave school during a single school year. It is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts by a membership base, which includes all students who were in membership any time during the year. Between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, the number of students considered dropouts declined from 15,524 to 14,975.

### **High School Graduation Initiative—National Program**

The grants were announced Thursday, Sept. 30, by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. In all, almost \$100 million in grants were awarded to support state and local efforts to reform high schools and improve the educational outcomes of students.

"These grants will help our local communities and states in working towards President Obama's goal of once again having the highest college completion rate in the world by the end of the decade," Secretary Duncan said. "To achieve this goal, high schools must ensure more students graduate and are prepared for success in college and careers."

There are 28 recipients for \$52.2 million under the Smaller Learning Communities program and 29 recipients under the \$46.6 million High School Graduation Initiative program. Colorado was one of only two state agencies to receive a grant. A complete list of grant recipients is here: <http://bit.ly/bgXjrY>

The U.S. Department of Education's High School Graduation Initiative supports activities such as early-warning systems designed to identify students at risk of dropping out, rigorous academic programs and support services to engage students and implement dropout prevention, credit recovery programs, and targeted re-engagement programs that identify out-of-school youth and encourage them to

reenter school. The initiative targets high schools with high dropout rates or middle schools that feed into schools with high dropout rates.

### **Economic and Social Impact**

A 2009 study by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies found that the average dropout, over the course of his or her lifetime, will cost taxpayers in excess of \$290,000 due to higher incarceration rates, lower tax revenues generated for local government needs and higher societal costs overall. High school dropouts are more likely than their graduated peers to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, incarcerated and unhealthy, according to a 2006 report "The Silent Epidemic Perspectives of High School Dropouts" for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

### **Areas of Highest Need**

In Colorado, like much of the nation, dropouts are disproportionately concentrated in a few areas. In 2008-2009, 20 percent of Colorado's 473 high schools accounted for 70 percent of all the dropouts in grades nine through 12. Among the 34 high schools with more than 100 dropouts, 76 percent were found in metropolitan Denver. Other areas of higher concentration outside of Denver included El Paso, Weld and Mesa counties.

### **Legislative Support**

In May 2009, Gov. Bill Ritter signed H.B. 09-1243 to provide focus, coordination, research and leadership in reducing the dropout rate and increasing graduation and completion rates in Colorado. (The bill is now in C.R.S. 22-14-101.) The law enhances the work of the Colorado Department of Education by expanding assistance to local education providers and increasing cooperation and collaboration with state agencies and non-profit organizations.

The new legislation focuses on five areas:

- Creating the Unit of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement within CDE.
- Requiring reports on student attendance, policies and practices and the overall incidence, causes and effects of student dropout, engagement and re-engagement in Colorado. These reports are posted online and submitted to the Colorado State Board of Education, the governor and the state legislature.
- Requiring identification of high-priority and priority local education providers in need of assistance to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. Identification is based on the

state's accreditation rubric for graduation rates and a criteria adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education. Local education providers that are designated as high-priority and priority are required to complete practice assessments and graduation and completion plans.

- Creating the Student Engagement Grant Program within CDE to be funded with gifts, grants and donations.
- Amending previous legislation, such as notifying parents when a student drops out of school. Notification is now required even if the student is not subject to the compulsory attendance age requirement. The law also repealed the mandate to expel habitually disruptive students and repealed the requirement that a suspension or expulsion count as an unexcused absence under a school district's attendance policy.

In addition to this legislation, Colorado has a variety of statutes and initiatives in areas such as parent involvement, postsecondary and workforce readiness, truancy, school attendance and alternative education that support the effective implementation of dropout prevention and recovery priorities. Examples of recent legislation include, but are not limited to:

- Parent Involvement in Education (S.B. 09-090)
- Healthy Choices Dropout Prevention Pilot Program (S.B. 09-123)
- Education Accountability Act of 2009 (S.B. 09-163)
- Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment (S.B. 08-212)
- School Counselor Corps Grant Program (H.B. 08-1370)
- Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement (H.B. 09-1243)
- Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment (H.B. 09-1319)

**For more information, contact** Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

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