

# Accreditation

## Accreditation and Accountability Act



### Colorado Accountability Act

The Education Accountability Act of 2009 requires the Colorado State Board of Education to accredit school districts and their schools that meet the requirements of the act.

The State Board of Education annually accredits each school district and the Charter School Institute. The Colorado Department of Education annually assigns each district to an accreditation category based on factors listed in the Accountability Act and rules approved by the state board.

#### Accreditation Categories:

- Accredited with Distinction
- Accredited
- Accredited with Improvement Plan
- Accredited with Priority Improvement Plan
- Accredited with Turnaround Plan
- Insufficient Data
- Unaccredited

Details of the accreditation expectations are outlined for the district's accreditation contract. The accreditation process is described in the [District Accountability Handbook](#), including a sample of the accreditation contract in the appendix. The state board may remove a district's accreditation under a few circumstances:

1. The district has been on performance watch for the full five years, and the State Board directs that the district's accreditation be removed.
2. The district has substantially failed to comply with state laws on budget and financial policies and procedures, on accounting, and on financial reporting; it hasn't timely remedied its noncompliance; and enrolled students' and parents' interests are at stake.
3. The district is not substantially in compliance with other applicable statutory or regulatory requirements and hasn't timely remedied its noncompliance.

---

### Common Questions

#### What happens when a district loses accreditation?

Most importantly, student learning continues. The district's schools remain open and funded. However, it means that the district is not in good standing with the state and the State Board of Education will likely get involved.

If the state board removes a district's accreditation under the Accountability Act, the state board will likely direct other actions, such as reorganization or converting schools into charter schools. When the district takes these other actions,

the state board must reinstate the district's accreditation at the accreditation category the state board feels is appropriate.

There are other indirect implications that occur when a district loses its accreditation. Additionally, the loss of accreditation clearly indicates to the community that the district is not satisfying the Accountability Act's requirements

**Does the district lose its state or federal funding?**

No. Neither state nor federal funding depends on a district's accreditation.

**Will students receive their diplomas?**

Yes. School districts, not CDE, award diplomas, and local boards of education establish graduation requirements that meet or exceed the state's graduation guidelines. A district's accreditation status does not affect its awarding of high school diplomas to students who satisfy graduation requirements.

**How does district accreditation impact students' access to higher education?**

Accreditation does not have the same meaning in K-12 education that it does in higher education. Whether a school district is accredited or not, or at what level, does not affect the validity of high school diplomas, for example. An unaccredited district still operates schools under the same rules that apply to all Colorado public schools.

**Are students still eligible for scholarships?**

Scholarship eligibility is determined by the organization awarding the scholarship.

As to scholarships from Colorado's public higher education institutions, nothing in higher education statutes ties scholarships and other financial assistance to the accreditation status of the applicant's high school.

**Will the schools remain accredited?**

Yes. Each school is accredited by its local board of education -- not by CDE and not by the State Board of Education. And nothing in the Accountability Act or its rules limits a local board of education's responsibility for accrediting its schools based on the district's accreditation status. So, even if a district loses its accreditation, it still must accredit its schools.

**Can parents enroll their children in a different district?**

Yes. Under Colorado's public schools of choice law, students may request to attend any public school in the state, even if it's not in their home district.

But a student isn't guaranteed a seat in another district's school. A district may deny a nonresident student enrollment on certain grounds, such as that the nonresident student is applying after pupil enrollment count, the district doesn't have enough room or staff to accommodate nonresident students, or the school doesn't offer appropriate programs or facilities for the nonresident student's needs.

**Does the district lose its authority to charter schools?**

No. The Charter Schools Act does not limit a local board of education's authority to enter a contract with a charter school based on the district's accreditation status.

**Does this mean the district needs to be reorganized, which could include dissolving the district or merging it with other district(s)?**

No. The loss of a district's accreditation does not automatically trigger its reorganization. However, the state board may also order that the district reorganize, dissolve, or merge if that appears to be the best path forward to improved student outcomes.

Under the Accountability Act and its rules, when a district has been on performance watch for five years, the state board must direct the local board of education to implement at least one action listed in statute and rule. Among the possible directed actions: directing that “the school district’s accreditation be removed” “or” directing that “that the school district be reorganized pursuant to [the School District Organization Act of 1992.” Nothing in the statute or rules requires the state board to direct reorganization if it directs removal of the district’s accreditation. And nothing in the statute or rules makes loss of accreditation an automatic trigger for district reorganization.

The state board may choose, however, to direct that a district lose its accreditation and that it be reorganized. The state board would have to be explicit that it was directing both actions though.

### **Can the district appeal its loss of accreditation?**

If a district loses its accreditation under a State Board of Education accountability order -- after five years on performance watch -- it cannot appeal its accreditation loss to the state board.

If CDE recommends that the state board remove a district’s accreditation for reasons related to budget and financial policies and procedures or accounting and financial responsibilities, the district has the right to appeal to the state board. The rules for the Accountability Act lay out this appeals process.

Regardless of why the State Board of Education takes away a district’s accreditation, the district may seek judicial review of the state board’s action.

### **How is a district notified of its loss of accreditation?**

Statute and rule do not specify how a district will be notified of its loss of accreditation.