



AUGENBLICK,
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Analysis of the Impact of Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K)

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness

FINAL REPORT

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By

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Introduction

This report is the final report designed to estimate the impact of Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (SB 212 of 2008, commonly referred to as CAP4K). CAP4K is designed to “align the public education system from preschool through postsecondary and workforce readiness” [22-7-1002 (4)(a)] and to create a “seamless system of standards, expectations, and assessments from preschool through postsecondary and workforce readiness” [22-7-1002 (4)(c)]. The legislature recognized that in order to meet such goals it is necessary that “the State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, with the departments of education and higher education, work in close collaboration” [22-7-1002 (4)(b)] and that it is a “multi-faceted and complex project that will require multiple stages of planning, design, and implementation ... that will likely continue over years” [22-7-1002 (4)(c)]. Fulfilling these expectations “will likely require ...the allocation of new resources to meet increased needs at the state and local levels, including but not limited to significant investment in professional development for educators.” [22-7-1002 (4)(c)]. CAP4K encompasses three key areas: school readiness, content standards and assessment, and postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR).

SB 212, further required that a multi-year study of the impact of the law be undertaken and that the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), in consultation with the Colorado Department of Higher Education (DHE), contract with an independent entity to do this work (22-7-1018). The study is mandated to examine the separate impact estimates for: 1) CDE; 2) DHE; 3) school districts in the aggregate (including Boards of Cooperative Education Services and the Charter School Institute); and 4) 27 postsecondary institutions in the aggregate (including 12 four-year public institutions and fifteen two-year public institutions, which includes the community college system).

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA) was awarded the contract for this multi-year study in October of 2009. APA is a Denver-based education consulting firm that has worked with policymakers around the nation on issues related to education funding since 1983. APA has undertaken a variety of projects for CDE, numerous Colorado school districts, and several local foundations including studies focused on the use of pupil-weighted funding formulas, analyses of school district budgets, the impact of legislation, alternative teacher compensation models, and assessment use. For this project, the Colorado School Finance Project (CSFP) is a subcontractor to APA for the purpose of providing support and assistance. The CSFP was created in 1995 by the Colorado Association of School Boards, the Colorado Education Association, and the Colorado Association of School Executives to monitor school funding in the state. As of 2014, CSFP is now operating as an independent non-profit.

The first two phases of the study identified cost estimates related to implementing all components of CAP4K, including school readiness, new content standards and assessments, and postsecondary and workforce readiness, for all impacted entities. Reports detailing these cost estimates were produced in March 2010 and October 2011.

The third and final phase of the study focuses specifically on the needed resources, benefits, and successful models of preparing students to exit the system prepared for postsecondary education and

the workforce. Information presented was gathered through document review, interviews with CDE and DHE, interviews with higher education institutions, and focus groups and interviews with K-12 school districts.

This report is divided into the following sections:

1. Study questions and data collection methods;
2. Description of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR), including implementation timelines, related policies, and ongoing CDE and DHE efforts as detailed during interviews with both departments and in available documents; and
3. Findings from focus groups and interviews with school districts and higher education institutions, including:
 - a. Discussion of perceived barriers, capacity issues and concerns for K-12;
 - b. Discussion of promising PWR practices from both K-12 districts and higher education institutions; and
 - c. Suggestions for how the state could support PWR implementation at both the K-12 and higher education level.

Study Questions and Data Collection Methods

APA undertook a number of data collection activities to understand the impact of new postsecondary and workforce readiness requirements for each of the impacted entities, including CDE, DHE, school districts, and higher education institutions. We also interviewed staff from the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) as well.

CDE and DHE

APA interviewed representatives from CDE and DHE to gather information on PWR policies and ongoing implementation efforts on behalf of the agencies. During interviews, we also discussed their global perspective on the impact of these policy changes.

CDE and DHE staff members were involved in early conversations to draft study questions specific to K-12 districts and higher education institutions.

K-12 School Districts

APA first held three focus groups in different parts of the state (Limon, Grand Junction, and Pueblo), as well as individual interviews with metro area districts (due to difficulties setting up a focus group in this area during the summer) to speak with Superintendents and others in Colorado districts. The initial focus groups and interviews addressed district approaches to postsecondary and workforce readiness and the graduation guidelines, perceived capacity issues, ways the states could help support districts, and to identify promising practices. Specific study questions addressed included:

1. What is the capacity of districts to support students in meeting the graduation guidelines what are ways the state can provide differentiated levels of support to districts based upon their capacity?
 - a. What barriers (financial, policy, or otherwise) inhibit academic preparedness?
 - b. Are there any school and district practices which are required but do not add value to the objective of increasing the number of students existing prepared for college and careers that the state could provide assistance in changing or removing?
2. What are successful district models/practices that increase students’ postsecondary and workforce readiness? Are there any associated additional costs?
 - a. Are there any innovative partnerships, cost sharing, bundling, and other strategies that districts may use to maximize resources in support of increasing student success?

APA spoke with 49 districts from around the state through this process, including:

Agate	Cheyenne Wells	Greeley	Moffat	Rangeley
Archuleta	Clear Creek	Hinsdale	Monte Vista	Rifle
Arickaree	Cotopaxi	Hoehne	North Conejos	Sargent
Arriba-Flagler	Crowley County	Huerfano	North Park	South Routt
Aurora	D11	Ignacio	Norwood	Steamboat
Bayfield	De Beque	Kiowa	Ouray	Strasburg
Burlington	Elizabeth	La Veta	Parachute	Stratton
Byers	Fowler	Las Animas	Park County	Telluride
Campo	Genoa Hugo	Limon	Platte Valley	Thompson
Cherry Creek	Glenwood	Mesa Valley	Pueblo	

These districts represent a wide variation in: (1) size; (2) geographic location; (3) student need; (4) concurrent enrollment participation rates; and (5) graduation rates.

APA then conducted follow up interviews with eight districts and two BOCES to discuss promising practices in their districts in more detail. These districts and BOCES were:

- Aurora
- Archuleta
- Cherry Creek
- D11
- Greeley
- La Veta
- Platte Valley
- Thompson
- San Juan BOCES
- San Luis BOCES

It is important to clarify that these are not the only districts in the state that have promising practices related to PWR. We selected this group of districts and BOCES of varying size and from different parts of the state for a number of reasons including: (1) promising practices heard during focus groups; (2) high concurrent enrollment or CTE participation; or (3) being an implementation pilot district.

Higher Education Institutions

APA interviewed representatives from six higher education institutions, including four community colleges: Arapahoe Community College, Aurora Community College, Pikes Peak Community College, and Pueblo Community College; and two 4-year institutions: Metro State University and Colorado Mesa University. Additionally, we spoke with representatives from the Colorado Community College System, CTE Office to gain their global perspective. During these interviews, APA addressed the following questions:

1. What innovative partnerships do IHEs have with districts to increase student success and postsecondary preparedness?
 - a. Any suggestions for how the state could help higher education institutions successfully partner with school districts, or vice versa?
2. Are there any anticipated impacts at your college/university due to new PWR policies?

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Description

In 2009, the Colorado State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education jointly adopted the following definition of postsecondary and workforce readiness:

Postsecondary and workforce readiness is "the knowledge, skills, and behaviors essential to high school graduates to be prepared to enter college and the workforce and compete in the global economy including content knowledge, learning and behavior skills."

Postsecondary and workforce readiness assumes that before graduating high school students are ready and able to demonstrate the following without the need for remediation:

1. **Content knowledge** in the areas of (1) literacy; (2) math; (3) science; (4) social sciences; and (5) the arts and humanities.
2. **Learning and life skills** in the areas of (1) critical thinking and problem-solving; (2) finding and using information/information technology; (3) creativity and innovation; (4) global and cultural awareness; (5) civic responsibility; (6) work ethic; (7) personal responsibility; (8) communication; and (9) collaboration.

While part of separate legislation, CDE believes Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs) will serve as an additional tool for tracking students' PWR planning, preparation, and progress. Based upon the language of the ICAP legislation, all students are required to develop an ICAP starting in 9th grade in collaboration with their school counselors, school administrators, school personnel, and/or "Approved Postsecondary Service Providers" that is used to help establish personalized academic and career goals, explore postsecondary career and educational opportunities, align course work and curriculum, apply to postsecondary institutions, secure financial aid, and ultimately enter the workforce school. "Each ICAP shall include a career planning, guidance and tracking component and a portfolio that reflects, at a minimum: (1) Documentation of the student's efforts in exploring careers including: a written postsecondary and workforce goal for the student; yearly benchmarks for reaching that goal; interest

surveys that the student completes; and anticipated postsecondary studies; (2) The student’s academic progress including the courses taken, any remediation or credit recovery and any concurrent enrollment credits earned; (3) An intentional sequence of courses reflecting progress toward accomplishment of the student’s postsecondary and workforce objectives; (4) Relevant assessment scores; (5) The student’s plans for and experiences in Contextual and Service Learning, if applicable; (6) A record of the student’s college applications or alternative applications as they are prepared and submitted; (7) The student’s postsecondary studies as the student progresses through high school; (8) The student’s progress toward securing scholarships, work-study, student loans and grants; and (9) Other data reflecting student progress toward postsecondary and workforce readiness, including the student’s understanding of the financial impact of postsecondary education.”¹ ICAPs should be easily accessible to students, guardians and educators through a computer-based system and be transferable in print or electronic form for internal and external district use.

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Implementation Timeline

According to CDE and DHE, the following PWR implementation timeline is in place for Colorado:

2009	Postsecondary & workforce readiness definition adopted
2010	Standards and assessments adopted
2010	Concurrent enrollment/ASCENT begins
2013	Graduation guidelines and PWR endorsed diploma criteria adopted
2013	Revised higher education admission and remediation policies adopted
2014-15	New state assessments in place (PARCC, Science, Social Studies)
2014-15	New remediation policy in place
2019-20	Graduating HS seniors must meet new admission policy
2020-21	Graduating seniors must meet new graduation guidelines

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Policies

Following the joint adoption of the PWR definition, a number of policies for both K-12 and higher education were developed and adopted according to the timeline above, including: (1) K-12 graduation guidelines, including the voluntary endorsed diploma guidelines; and (2) a revised higher education admissions and remediation policy.

Graduation Guidelines

In May 2013, the Colorado State Board of Education adopted the graduation guidelines which constitute minimum competency levels in math, English, science, and social studies that graduating students need to have met to be considered postsecondary and workforce ready. The graduation guidelines are presented as a menu of options for each content area, such as meeting certain levels on state assessments, ACT, AP/IB, or ASVAB, obtaining a minimum grade in a concurrent enrollment course,

¹ State Board of Education, Department of Education, 1 CCR 301-81 “Rules governing standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans.”

successfully completing a student capstone, or earning an industry certificate. The specifics of what student capstones or industry certificates will look like are still being developed.

The following table² presents the established graduation guidelines:

Minimum Colorado College and Career Ready Determinations Established by the Colorado State Board of Education				
<p>The state’s minimum College and Career Ready Determinations for English, math, science and social studies are set to match proficiency levels on the state assessment, higher education’s cut scores for placement in credit bearing classes, industry certificates, and the military’s cut scores for academic consideration for preferred career training. They are designed to be of approximate comparable rigor and will be refined, improved, and added to over time.</p> <p>Students must demonstrate competency in each content area using any one of the items in the competency demonstration menu for that content area. Students wishing to attend four-year postsecondary institutions will also need to meet the entrance requirements for their institutions of interest.</p>				
Competency Demonstration:	English	Math	Science	Social Studies
TCAP (2013-14 only)	663	627		
State Test (2013-14 onward)			TBD	TBD
PARCC (2014-15 onward)	4 or higher	4 or higher		
ACT^r	18	19	TBD	
SAT^r	430	460		
International Baccalaureate	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher
Advanced Placement	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher
Verified District Capstone (Start 2015-16)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Concurrent Enrollment College Course	C- or higher	C- or higher	C- or higher	C- or higher
ASVAB (military) preferred AFQT score for career level jobs	50	50		
Select, Earned Industry Certificate	Awarded (Depending on the certificate, may qualify as interdisciplinary proofs; list of eligible certificates will be developed in 2013-14)			
Additional State Board Approved Demonstrations of Student Competency	Additions will be made as advances in competency demonstrations become more standardized			

² Colorado High School Graduation Guidelines, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/graduation-guidelines>

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Endorsed Diploma

In August 2013 the Colorado State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education jointly approved and adopted the criteria for students to receive a PWR Endorsed Diploma. According to policy language the PWR endorsed diploma guarantees that students meet "minimum academic qualifications for admission" and are "eligible, subject to additional institutional review of other admission and placement qualifications," for "placement into credit-bearing courses at all open, modified open, or moderately selective public institutions of higher education in Colorado" and will also "receive priority consideration for admission into Colorado's selective and highly selective institutions."³

It is important to note that the endorsed diploma is not required and local adoption is voluntary. If locally adopted, a student would need to meet the following readiness indicators to receive an endorsed diploma:

1. Student is college ready in Math and English Language Arts, as demonstrated by meeting Higher Education Admissions Requirements (HEAR) for course credits, and meeting certain assessment benchmarks that indicate the student will not require remediation for higher education credit-bearing courses in math or literacy;
2. Student completes ICAP;
3. Student demonstrates 21st Century Skills (Information Literacy, Invention, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Self-Direction) in coursework and through high quality extracurricular activities; and
4. Student demonstrates mastery of academic content in three of the following content areas: Reading, Writing, and Communicating Mathematics, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural and Physical Sciences, Arts and Humanities, World Languages, and, Career and Technical Education. Varying by content area, this could include earning a GPA of 3.0 in content area courses and meeting a proficiency benchmark such as an advanced score on a state assessment, a certain score on the ACT, SAT, AP or IB, a certain grade in a concurrent enrollment course, or another demonstration of mastery.

Higher Education Admission and Remediation Policies

Adopted in 2014, the revised higher education admission and remediation policy is to be applied to students graduating in 2019 (this year's 9th graders) and later.

Previous admission policies were based upon students meeting the set Higher Education Admission Requirements (HEAR) as well as being measured by their admissions index which included a students' scores on ACT or SAT and their Grade Point Average (GPA) or class rank.

The new admission policy revises student academic performance indicators for admissions to include assessment scores, GPA and rigor. Minimum assessment scores include college-ready cut scores on ACT,

³ Colorado's Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) High School Diploma Endorsement Criteria, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/pwrcriteria>

SAT, Compass, Accuplacer, PARCC (Partnership for Assessing Readiness for College and Career), and Smarter Balanced. Rigor could include:

- Completed high school core-content courses;
- Sequences of career and technical courses;
- Quantity and quality of high school core-content courses completed;
- Successful completion of Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses or Pathways concurrent enrollment courses (grades of "C-" or better);
- High school senior year coursework; and
- High school courses in a chosen career path.

The revised remediation policy says that students scoring at or above the cut score are ready for college-level courses, and as such institutions may not require students to take remedial coursework.

Institutions may place students scoring below the cut score into college-level courses in some cases with supplemental academic instruction (SAI) based on the institution's secondary evaluation process and if that institution has an approved SAI program.

Ongoing CDE and DHE Implementation Efforts

In addition to CDE and DHE efforts related to policy developments and regular department operations; both agencies have identified a number of specific ongoing efforts to support PWR implementation by districts and higher education institutions.

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

Communication Outreach

CDE continues to conduct outreach efforts through meetings and electronic communications to keep districts informed with the most up-to-date implementation information.

Work Groups

The following work groups are currently being convened focused on specific postsecondary and workforce readiness areas including: (1) Capstone; ICAP; (3) 21st Century Skills; (4) Industry Certificate; (5) Special Populations- which has been divided into subgroups; (6) Assessment; and (7) Endorsed Diploma.

Each work group is charged with: implementation recommendations, tools and resources, and best/promising practices; developing implementation recommendations; and explore and outline resources and tools. Starting in the fall/winter of 2014, each working group will put forth an independent report to the Department.

Implementation Tools for Districts

CDE recently produced a Graduation Guidelines Engagement Toolkit intended for use by school district school boards, superintendents, and other district administrators designed to explain the graduation guidelines, and recommend next steps for implementation and available resources to carry them out.

A full implementation guide will also be developed combining the findings from all current working groups. CDE anticipates a draft of this implementation guide being completed in summer 2015.

Department of Higher Education

Policy Implementation Committee

A policy implementation committee has been convened to address how higher education institutions can implement newly adopted policies.

Ongoing Research and Tool Development

DHE has a number of projects underway to model and understand the impact of new admission and remediation policies.

Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

The following section details findings from with conversations with districts and higher education institutions about: (1) potential barriers, concerns and impacts for implementation; (2) promising practices; and (3) suggestions for state support. A text box highlighting key findings from each area is included at the beginning of each subsection.

Potential Barriers and Concerns for Implementation

Potential Barriers and Concerns

A number of common themes emerged from conversations with school districts regarding potential barriers and concerns about the graduation guidelines and the PWR endorsed diploma.

Key Barriers and Concerns

- Districts are experiencing reform fatigue.
- Having sufficient resources to implement PWR (and other reforms), such as needed staffing or technology, is difficult with current budget constraints.
- Many districts are concerned with the following:
 - The performance levels set for many of the graduation guidelines representing college readiness, and not workforce readiness.
 - Students that may not be able to meet assessment-based guidelines will become disengaged.
 - Impact of graduation guidelines for special education students.
 - Graduation rates may be negatively impacted with new graduation guidelines.
- Many districts are unsure if they will offer endorsed diploma; feels like an unnecessary hoop for students that are already college ready and will create inequity between students, schools and districts.

As noted above, the vast majority of the districts that participated in focus groups and interviews indicated that there district was experiencing reform fatigue. Many argued that while individually, each

reform had value, it was the sheer volume of new requirements (including new standards/assessments, school readiness, education evaluation, READ, graduation guidelines, endorsed diploma, etc.) for districts in a limited time period that was overwhelming staff beyond their capacity and putting stress on their already reduced budgets. Further, districts expressed that the state needs to be clear about expectations and not shift guidelines, as initiatives have felt like a moving target. This has led many districts to adopt a “wait and see” approach, particularly around the endorsed diploma.

District participants stressed meeting these graduation guidelines is a matter of good instructional practice, which often brings up much larger concerns about the need for high quality teachers- including attraction and retention issues, staff development, compensation- and overall funding. Many districts expressed staffing availability impacted their ability to offer needed courses and monitor PWR progress, with budget constraints preventing them from purchasing needed technology to offer virtual courses or having appropriate facilities these courses. In rural districts, these funding and staffing concerns were particularly highlighted. Several districts indicated that these constraints limited which graduation guideline options they can actually offer their students, so the menu of choices is more restrictive than it initially appears. For example, a district may not be able to offer IB or AP courses, or have a wide range of higher level courses, which removes those competency demonstrations as viable choices. Both school districts and higher education institutions noted that limited resources could also restrict the number of concurrent enrollment courses that students could take.

Many districts expressed concern with students’ ability to meet the graduation guideline benchmarks, particularly the high assessment score levels set, and that these performance levels will be unattainable for some so graduation rates will suffer. In particular, there was concern about special education students. While many participants said they support competency based objectives, they are not sure if the benchmark levels are correct. Districts worry that these benchmarks are geared towards postsecondary readiness, and not workforce readiness. For example, a participant pointed to the ASVAB benchmark which was set well above the criteria for enlistment (for the army this would be a score of 31), and instead was the higher “career level jobs” criteria (score of 50) and similarly, a participant expressed the opinion that the ACT benchmark being used was at a level for college entrance, and not workforce. Participants indicated workforce guidelines should be focused on getting sustainable employment and leveraging area industry options. Districts indicated they need clarity around industry certificates, and capstones, as many view these as the pathway to graduation for students that cannot meet assessment-based objectives.

Most districts we have spoken with have not spent a lot of time on the endorsed diploma and are unsure whether they will offer it, but at the same time worried that they may need to if other districts adopt it to ensure the education in their community will not be viewed as having lower value than other districts. Further, they expressed concern that having an endorsed diploma undermines and devalues the regular diploma in the eyes of students, employers, and the community, and creates inequity. Further, some districts indicated that the students that would likely receive the endorsed diploma would already be deemed college ready when applying to schools, so it represented an unnecessary hoop for both students and schools/districts. One participant said the endorsed diploma created a solution to a

problem no one had. On the other hand, postsecondary institutions had a more positive outlook on the endorsed diploma because it would guarantee students were college ready, which would lower their need to test students for placement and lower the need for remediation.

Other barriers and concerns that one or more district expressed: (1) concern that concurrent enrollment cannot be done across state lines which could be helpful in border districts; (2) that distance from IHEs can be an issue; (3) concern about balance between importance of test scores and other important student traits, which may sacrifice students ability to excel in an area/explore their interests when have to be equally good at everything; (4) concern with grad guidelines just being metrics and not competencies- over reliance on metrics does not improve instructional practice; (5) that the accountability system was already strong so additions are unnecessary and that districts cannot really be held accountable if the state defines the inputs, and (6) concern about politics overstepping into classroom.

Potential Impacts of Policy Changes

Given that districts and higher education institutions are still in the earliest phases of implementation, feedback in this area was limited and many participants we spoke with expressed that they were unsure of what the impacts would be until policies were fully implemented.

Key Potential Impacts

- Potential impacts for school districts:
 - Increased emphasis on postsecondary readiness and conversations prompted by ICAPs is seen as a positive.
 - As noted earlier, there are concerns about potential negative impacts on student engagement and graduation rates.
 - Increased student participation in postsecondary courses, like concurrent enrollment, CTE, and AP/IB, is positive and students who participate in these experiences are more likely to be successful.
 - As noted earlier, there are concerns about potential negative impacts on student engagement and graduation rates.
- Potential impacts for higher education institutions:
 - Increased student enrollment in concurrent enrollment courses, which could lead to increased matriculation and persistence rates.
 - If students enter more prepared, it could mean less remediation needed for students and increased college completion rates.

Potential Impact on School Districts

Many participants we spoke with welcomed the conversations that CAP4K has prompted about the structure of high school and student preparedness, and particularly noted how beneficial ICAPs have

been in facilitating these conversations. However, school districts were also often concerned about potential negative impacts the new graduation guidelines and the optional endorsed diploma may have on students and schools, such as negatively impacting graduation rates and further disengaging some students from school by making earning a diploma harder. They also expressed concern about the impact on equity, between students and between schools that may have differentiated diplomas. Districts are still waiting to see what graduation guideline alternatives, such as industry certificates and capstones, will look like and cannot yet say what the impact of these options will be. Additional participation in concurrent enrollment opportunities, which is being seen as a scalable option for meeting the grad guidelines, was seen as a positive impact and many indicated that students who participate in concurrent enrollment are more likely to be engaged and successful, both in high school and college.

Potential Impact on Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions we interviewed indicated that they expected increased enrollment in concurrent enrollment, both academic and CTE, primarily at community colleges. They were optimistic that increased participation in concurrent enrollment would lead to increased matriculation and increased persistence. Further, if students exit high school more prepared they believe it could mean less remediation for students and increased postsecondary success and lead to increased completion rates. Additionally, if PARCC can be used to determine preparedness, it will likely reduce the amount of testing they have to do to place students.

Promising Practices

Promising Practices for School Districts

During the district focus groups several districts indicated that in light of the graduation guidelines, they have been strengthening their concurrent enrollment, adding IB/AP offerings, adding capstone courses, and adding counselors to oversee ICAPs, or revising local grad guidelines to match. APA conducted individual follow up interviews with some of these districts to explore the promising practices in greater detail. APA interviewed the following school districts: Aurora, Archuleta, Cherry Creek, D11, Greeley, La Veta, Platte Valley and Thompson, as well as two BOCES: San Juan Valley and San Luis Valley.

These promising practices relate to the following area:

1. Increasing concurrent enrollment, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and AP/IB participation;
2. Effectively using ICAPs and advising students;
3. Aligning district policies and structure; and
4. Maximizing limited resources and other lessons learned.

Increasing Concurrent Enrollment, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and AP/IB Participation

Key Promising Practices

- Increase concurrent enrollment and CTE offerings, including:
 - Certify HS teachers to teach concurrent enrollment courses on high school campuses.
 - Have CTE courses aligned with Colorado Career Clusters that result in an industry certificate- districts still waiting to see if current certificate practices match state guidelines. *(Example districts: Thompson, D11, Platte Valley, Greeley)*
- Increase AP/IB course offerings (in districts that already can offer these courses); focus on increasing equity of participation. *(Example districts: D11, Cherry Creek)*
- Set district goal of at least one postsecondary experience for every student before graduation. *(Example district: Cherry Creek)*

APA often heard from these districts that they were primarily focused on increasing concurrent enrollment options, CTE options, and increasing IB/AP participation. Cherry Creek School District has gone so far as to set a district goal to have every student participate in at least one postsecondary experience. Many felt that the new assessments were still too unknown, and that improving test scores to meet benchmarks was a matter of good instructional practice.

Districts that we spoke with report having strong partnerships with one or more higher education institutions to facilitate concurrent enrollment. Concurrent enrollment is offered either at the higher education institution, or more commonly, at the districts own high school campuses. These concurrent courses are typically taught by their own high school teachers who have been certified by the higher education institution; teachers who meet the requirement of having a master's degree in the course's content area can go through a credential review process by the IHE to get this certification. Further, the IHE either provides or approves course syllabuses to ensure that the course meets the IHE's requirements for rigor, so that a course taught on a high school campus is the equivalent of a course taught on their campus. Many rural districts and BOCES are also leveraging technology to offer courses; often they use grant funds to get the costly technology set-ups needed. This allows these districts, which are smaller and often more isolated, to partner with neighboring districts when they might only have a few students needing a course to allow for wider offerings, or virtually access college classes when distance is an issue. Archuleta School District described a model that they felt simulated the college experience from afar. In this model, students participated in a college course twice a week that is taught virtually with independent study on other days which mirrors a typical college schedule. Further, a traveling professor visits monthly, or every other month, to teach a class session to allow for face-to-face interactions.

Districts are also considering specifically increasing CTE pathway offerings, again either on their high school campuses or through nearby postsecondary institutions that have may have better facilities. A couple of the postsecondary institutions we spoke with discussed partnerships to invest their own resources to set up CTE facilities at high school campuses as well. Many districts felt that CTE was crucial to fulfilling the workforce readiness component and to connect students to industry employment options and meet community workforce needs. Platte Valley in particular has significant CTE participation and stressed how valued this is in their community. D11 has made career pathways an integral part of their district plan, and have set a goal to increase the percentage of students participating in pathway programs by 10 percent annually. Greeley also has strong CTE offerings that culminate in a certificate. Districts are waiting to see what the industry certificates will look like and how that will fit with their CTE offerings.

Districts that currently offer IB/AP are also looking to expand participation, including Cherry Creek and D11. Cherry Creek, which has an already high percentage of students taking an IB/AP course (estimated at about 50-60% of high school students) is working to increase participation and specifically to increase participation by removing barriers for students of color. D11 indicated that they pay for students to take the AP exams to encourage greater participation and access.

Effectively Using ICAPs and Advising Students

Key Promising Practices

- ICAPs are considered essential tool; many districts are starting ICAPs in 6th grade.
- Have sufficient counseling staff to oversee ICAPs and provide PWR guidance- districts are often using Counselor Corps Grant.
- Offer seminar courses or advisory periods to address 21st Century Skills and ICAPs- possible avenue for capstones. *(Example districts: La Veta and Archuleta)*

For the districts that APA spoke with, ICAPs are considered an integral component of PWR and necessary to ensure students are making progress toward PWR goals and the graduation guidelines. Districts stressed the importance of counselors, or well trained teachers with counselor oversight, to manage the ICAPs, with a number of districts starting ICAPs in 6th grade. San Luis Valley BOCES helps its district with the Counselor Corps grant, and also has coordinator position to oversee counselors across districts. Many of the districts also had Counselor Corps grants and indicated how beneficial these resources had been and shared concerns about the sustainability of these valuable positions after they no longer receive these grant funds.

Two of the districts highlighted their efforts to incorporate the ICAPs into regular instruction. La Veta School District has introduced two bookend courses, a freshman seminar and a senior seminar, to address both 21st Century Skills and ICAPs, while Archuleta School District has an advisory period to

stress these skills and work on ICAPs. It was also stressed how important facilitating transitions between high school and postsecondary was by ensuring students understood different expectations and advising them while taking concurrent courses; this guidance could occur either at the high school, at the IHE campus, or both.

Aligning District Policies and Structure

Key Promising Practices

- Engage stakeholders in PWR policy setting discussions.
- Ensure postsecondary and workforce readiness is a key component of district plans and align district policies to meet these goals.
- Have early discussions about what it takes to be postsecondary and workforce ready and set key milestones throughout grade progression. *(Example district: Cherry Creek)*
- Align school feeder patterns and district staffing to focus on PWR. *(Example district: Aurora)*

A few of the districts APA interviewed have already adopted new district policies that are aligned with PWR and the graduation guidelines. Typically, these policy changes were enacted because the new state policies fit well with existing district goals and conversations about post-graduation success were already underway; some of the districts indicated that postsecondary and workforce readiness was a driving component of their district plans. For Aurora Public Schools, PWR was a focus of the district's Unified Improvement Plan, so the district recently has reorganized into P-20 feeder districts with a Learning Community Director heading each, shifting existing positions and resources accordingly. Two districts, Archuleta and La Veta, have already shifted their graduation guidelines to match and are exploring offering the endorsed diploma. When we spoke with CCCS staff, they also spoke about districts aligning their CTE offerings with Colorado's 17 career clusters, and they have started to see both districts and colleges color coding their course guides to map to the related career cluster; this simple color coding allows students and families to see the links between different courses and the path to a career in an industry.

Many of the other districts have started to have these policy conversations, including Cherry Creek, D11, and Thompson, which have convened Task Forces and having ongoing board conversations. Cherry Creek further stressed that the graduation guidelines have prompted discussion of milestones throughout a student's school career and how they will ultimately lead to a student meeting the guidelines, such as 3rd grade reading, 5th grade math, algebra by 8th, and a capstone of at least algebra II by the end of high school. The districts we spoke with stressed the importance of engaging the community in policy setting discussions.

Maximizing Limited Resources and Other Lessons Learned

Key Promising Practices

- Leverage all available grant funds, such as Counselor Corps, technology grants, and Perkins Federal Funds for CTE courses.
- Streamline and automate processes; consolidate tasks at district-level when possible. *(Example district: Thompson)*
- Partner with neighboring districts (and/or through BOCES) and postsecondary districts to offer needed courses- either in person or virtually. *(Example: San Juan BOCES and its member districts)*
- Have a long-term plan in place to strategically hire staff and expand course offerings. *(Example district: La Veta)*

All districts stressed the need to leverage all grant funds available- often Counselor Corps grants, other state grants, technology grants, Perkins grants for CTE- to deal with ongoing budget issues. Further districts indicated that there needed to be thoughtful prioritization and maximization of the limited resources available, such as focusing resources on automating processes, consolidating tasks like data management and reporting at the district-level when possible, having long-term plans in place for hiring and expanding course offerings, and partnering with neighboring districts (possibly through BOCES) or with postsecondary institutions to offer needed courses, either in person or virtually. Districts also stressed how important it was to engage stakeholders throughout process and have clear, proactive communications. One district found that most community anxiety is around competency cut points so they need to be clear about other options to meet graduation standards.

Promising Practices for Higher Education Institutions

The majority of the higher education institutions stressed how critical strong partnerships with school districts are to increase student postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Key Promising Practices

- Have staff to work directly with districts, schools, counselors, teachers, and students to build relationships, oversee concurrent enrollment process, and provide advisement.
- Assist schools and districts to offer concurrent enrollment courses of their own high school campuses, including managing teacher certification, reviewing or providing curriculum, or investing resources to have needed facilities.
- Create a continuum of postsecondary experiences for students, starting on their high school campus then later at the college or university.
- Streamline concurrent enrollment process for partner districts, such as common MOUs and fee schedules.

In order to have increased concurrent enrollment offerings- including CTE- districts and higher education institutions need to have strong relationships. At the higher education institutions we spoke with they have staff members that work directly with districts, schools, and counselors to oversee and engage students in the concurrent enrollment process. Aurora Public Schools and Aurora Community College have a particularly strong partnership with including shared positions to manage concurrent enrollment; nearly a quarter of students at Aurora Community College being from Aurora Public Schools. Pueblo Community College also detailed their efforts to build a strong relationship with partner districts, schools, administration, counselors, and the students they serve. Pueblo CC staff members maintain a regular presence at high schools and have made it a point to get to know high school students personally. Similarly, Arapahoe Community College described two specialist positions that work with all high schools in their partner districts to build relationships and support counselors around concurrent enrollment. Many of the institution representatives we spoke with also talked about helping districts to use Perkins federal dollars or other available funding to offer CTE courses in order to make these courses more affordable for a district.

Working with districts to offer courses on their own campuses is a focus of many of the higher education institutions we spoke with. For these courses, higher education institutions handle the certification process for high school teachers, as well as reviewing or offering the course's curriculum. Further, they oversee all courses to ensure that they meet the institution's rigor requirements. In addition to making sure schools had the right staff and course curriculum in place, a couple of the postsecondary institutions we spoke with discussed investing their own resources to set up CTE facilities at high school campuses as well to ensure they were up to the institutions standards.

Some representatives also suggested that a continuum of experiences for students could be a promising practice, with students having experiences with concurrent courses on their own campuses first in earlier grades, then moving to courses on the community college campuses. It was suggested that it is often best for students if they first start in a concurrent enrollment course in their high school, then move on to a course on a college campus so they can gradually learn college expectations in a familiar, supportive environment. By building relationships and progressing through a continuum, students will be more likely to be successful and continue to a postsecondary option.

Participants we spoke with also suggested that streamlining processes for working with districts was also beneficial to successful partnerships with K-12 districts.

Suggestions for State Support

During conversations with both school districts and higher education institutions there were a number of common suggestions for state support.

Key Suggestions for State Support

- Provide additional unrestricted and sustainable general funding, or alternatively, provide targeted funds to:
 - Ensure essential counseling staff to manage ICAPs and oversee concurrent enrollment process, such as through the continuation and expansion of the Counselor Corps grant;
 - Incentivize high school teachers to get certification needed to teach concurrent courses; or
 - Increase the number of concurrent courses a district can afford to have students take.
- Streamline processes, reduce reporting requirements (not limited to PWR reporting), and ensure state student data system is working correctly and includes all needed data for graduation guidelines documentation.
- Provide timely information and greater clarity around capstone and industry certificate options.
- Increase communication with families and students to educate them about postsecondary and workforce readiness, and options to meet graduation guidelines.

Suggestions from Districts

In all interviews and focus groups, APA asked participants if they had suggestions for how the state could provide support to address district capacity issues and any current obligations that do not support PWR and to support postsecondary partnerships.

While not specific to implementing PWR, it is important to note that an overwhelming response from districts about what they needed most from the state was to provide additional general funding given current budget constraints. Specifically, districts saw the need for ongoing or sustainable funding that was not restrictive on how it could be used to best fit district needs. Districts stressed how difficult it was to continue to implement new legislative initiatives when their funding has been reduced.

More specific to PWR and in absence of more unrestricted funding being available, many districts wanted the state to find a way to continue and expand Counselor Corps grants which are essential to ensuring districts have the needed counselors to oversee ICAPs and monitor student progress toward graduation guidelines.

Rural districts also indicated that regional trainings or support around PWR would be helpful so these districts did not always have to travel to receive needed information and training. An example of this was another state initiative that had retired teachers working in the different parts of the state to support implementation. It was also suggested that the state could help build a statewide network for district representatives that manage PWR in the same way they have in other areas, like district

assessment coordinators. The state could help facilitate postsecondary partnerships by helping connect districts and IHEs and streamlining concurrent enrollment processes, like MOUs, if possible, and addressing any perceived barriers to partnerships, such as course cost differences and boundary issues.

The need for streamlining in all areas, especially reporting, was also noted. This was not specific to PWR reporting but overall state reporting that districts found to be burdensome and often duplicative. Similarly, districts wanted the state to ensure systems worked smoothly and required less district staff time. For example, districts wanted the state to ensure the state data system is working properly, as many have experienced issues with the new data pipeline as its being introduced.

Finally districts asked for clarity on capstone and CTE industry certificate options, as well as more information on the endorsed diploma; districts requested timely information once available in these areas.

Suggestions from Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions we spoke with also had a number of suggestions for how they state could support postsecondary partnerships.

First, targeted additional funding from the state was suggested both to help districts offer more concurrent enrollment opportunities to students, as well as to incentivize teachers to get the credentials needed to teach concurrent enrollment courses. Higher education institutions noted that the financial burden on districts for sending students to concurrent courses, particularly at four year universities, can limit their ability to send students. It was also suggested that reviewing funding and payment timelines would be helpful. Included in this is ensuring the state's student count is flexibly enough to account for concurrent enrollment students. Interviewees mentioned instances where district did not receive full funding for students because issues with student count when students are enrolled in classes at the higher education institution.

Second, as noted by the districts as well, any assistance the state could provide to streamline process the concurrent enrollment process, from having standardized documents to moving enrollment online, would be helpful. CCCS facilitates much of the process for CTE courses for school districts and higher education institutions.

Third, the state could help by increasing communications with families and students about what it means to be college ready and about concurrent options, such as what options are guaranteed for credit transfer or how courses fit with a path towards a career in an industry. Similarly, guidance on how to help students manage transitions from high school to college, knowing there are different expectations and cultures, would be helpful.