



SMART Act Hearing

January 16, 2026



Agenda

- ***Introductions***
- ***Overview of CDE and Strategic Plan***
- ***Increasing Student Engagement including School Safety***
- ***Accelerating Student Outcomes, including READ Act and SB 25-315***
- ***Strengthening the Educator Workforce***
- ***Providing Operational Excellence, including School Finance Formula Implementation***
- ***Additional Requested Topics***
- ***Questions***



Overview of CDE and Strategic Plan

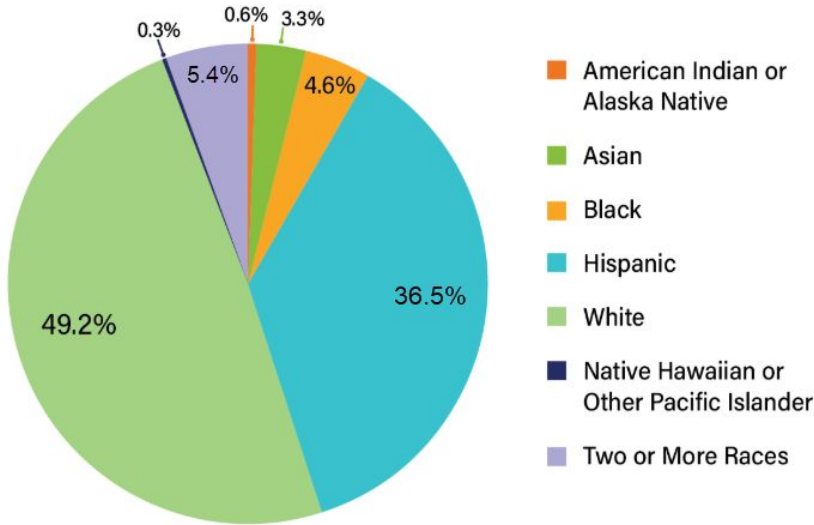
Our Colorado students

178
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS

1,933
SCHOOLS

870,793
PUBLIC
SCHOOL
STUDENTS

Student Demographics*



*October 2025 Data

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch:

389,397 (~45%)

Students with Individualized Education Programs:

119,443 (~14%)

Multilingual Learners*:

99,385 (~11%)

McKinney Vento:

11,693 (~1%)

*Includes both Non-English Proficient and Limited English Proficient students

A lot has changed over the last year...

MARCH

U.S. Education Department says it is cutting nearly half of all staff

UPDATED MARCH 12, 2025 · 12:40 AM ET



Trump signs order closing Education Department to 'maximum extent appropriate'

Published March 20, 2025

The directive comes on the heels of U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon's decision to gut half the agency as its "final mission."



JULY

Gov. Polis vows to fight for education funds the Trump administration withheld from Colorado

COLORADO **NEWSLINE**

AUG.

Polis calls special session, hiring freeze to deal with anticipated state budget shortfall

Passage of federal "Big Beautiful Bill" drives projected \$738 million loss in state revenues

August 6, 2025



OCT.

Education Department layoffs hit offices that oversee special education and civil rights enforcement

Politics Oct 13, 2025 2:04 PM EDT



Government shutdown threatens November SNAP benefits for more than 600,000, CDHS says

Oct 16, 2025



The federal government is still shut down. Here's what that means across the country



UPDATED OCTOBER 28, 2025 · 3:49 PM ET

NOV.

Colorado voters approve boost to free school meals program

COLORADO **NEWSLINE**

Propositions LL and MM would fully fund program created by voters in 2022

Our commitment to Colorado schools, educators, and students is unchanged.

Our vision is to create an equitable educational environment where *all* students and staff in Colorado thrive.

To improve student outcomes and ensure students and families across Colorado have access to high-quality schools, we will:

> **SERVE**

Provide actionable support to local educational agencies

> **GUIDE**

Implement policy and legislation in an effective way

> **ELEVATE**

Share the experiences of local educational agencies and students

Our Core Values: INTEGRITY | EQUITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | TRUST | SERVICE

Our Priorities:

Increase Student Engagement

Accelerate Student Outcomes

Strengthen the Educator Workforce

Provide Operational Excellence

We have set five Wildly Important Goals aligned to our priorities.

Increasing Student Engagement

Reduce K-12 student chronic absenteeism by more than 50% from its pandemic high of 35.5% in 2021-22 to 15% in 2027-28.

Strengthening the Educator Workforce

By 2027-28, 98% of teacher positions are filled with educators who either hold (1) a professional teaching license or (2) are in a teacher preparation program, have demonstrated content knowledge in their teaching endorsement, and are supported by a trained mentor, an increase from 94.2% in 2023-24.

Providing Operational Excellence

Over the next three years, increase the percentage of employees who indicate that the department is proactively addressing the critical factors that impact the employee experience.

Accelerating Student Outcomes

1) Increase the percentage of third graders meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA CMAS from 42% in 2024 to 60% by 2028.

2) Starting with the anticipated year of graduation of 2029, 100% of graduates will have achieved at least one of the following:

- Earned a quality, in-demand non-degree credential
- Earned 12 college credits that count toward a postsecondary credential
- Participated in one high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunity

3rd
grade

H.S.



Increasing Student Engagement

Increasing Student Engagement

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND BELONGING | ATTENDANCE | STUDENT HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND WELLBEING



Reduce K-12 student chronic absenteeism by more than 50% from its pandemic high of 35.5% in 2021-22 to 15% in 2027-28.

KEY STRATEGIES

**Fostering
student and
staff well-being**

**Building
capacity for
effective
strategies and
structures**

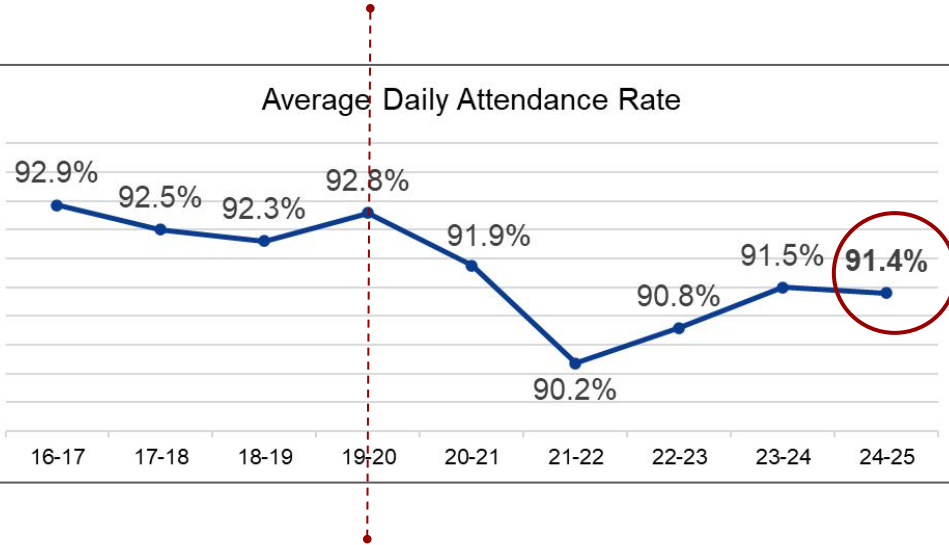
**Focusing on
physical,
mental, and
behavioral
health**

**Strengthening
family and
community
partnerships**

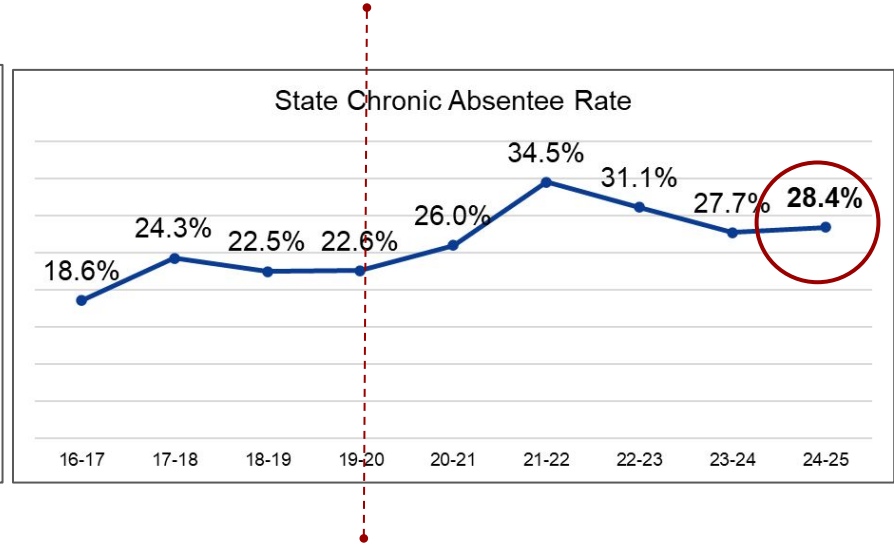
**Supporting
effective and
engaging
instruction**

While we are making progress on attendance, our schools are still working to close the gap between pre- and post-pandemic rates.

Average Daily Attendance Rate



State Chronic Absentee Rate



Chronic Absenteeism:
Students missing 10%+ of
school days for any reason.

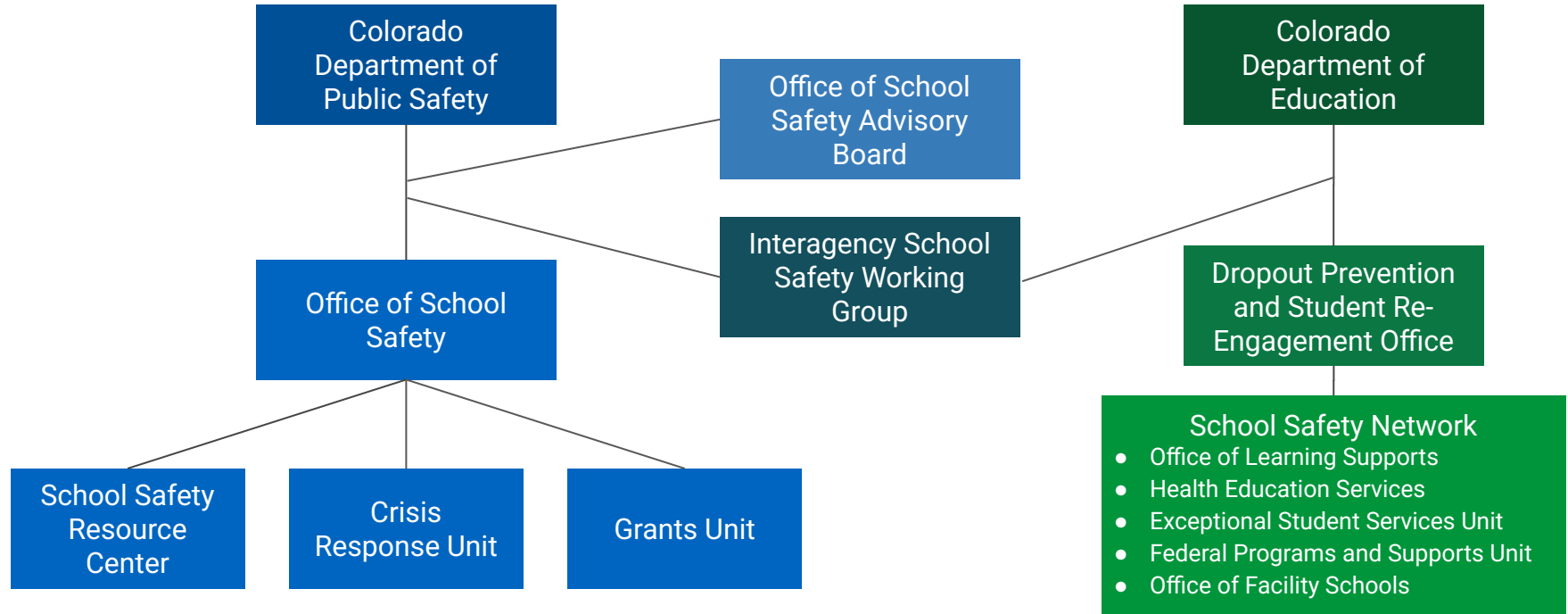
We are also seeing some promising progress.

2,054 fewer students
chronically absent in K, 1st, 2nd !

- **60%** of districts and BOCES saw **gains** in attendance between 23-24 and 24-25
- **59%** of districts and BOCES saw **declines** in chronic absenteeism between 23-24 and 24-25
- Chronic absenteeism is also declining in the early grades
 - K: **-0.6% pct. points** (29.3% in 23-24 to 28.7% in 24-25)
 - 1st: **-0.4% pct. points** (24.7% in 23-24 to 24.3% in 24-25)
 - 2nd: **-0.2% pct. points** (22.9% in 23-24 to 22.7% in 24-25)



School safety efforts are coordinated across the Colorado Department of Public Safety and CDE.





Accelerating Student Outcomes

Accelerating Student Outcomes

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | ACADEMIC GROWTH | GRADUATION RATES

ELEMENTARY



Increase the percentage of third graders meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA CMAS from 42% in 2024 to 60% by 2028.

KEY STRATEGIES

Redesign our data systems for support & coherence

Leverage state data to identify and scale successful strategies

Elevate effective practice models

Strengthen local instructional leadership

Target resources strategically

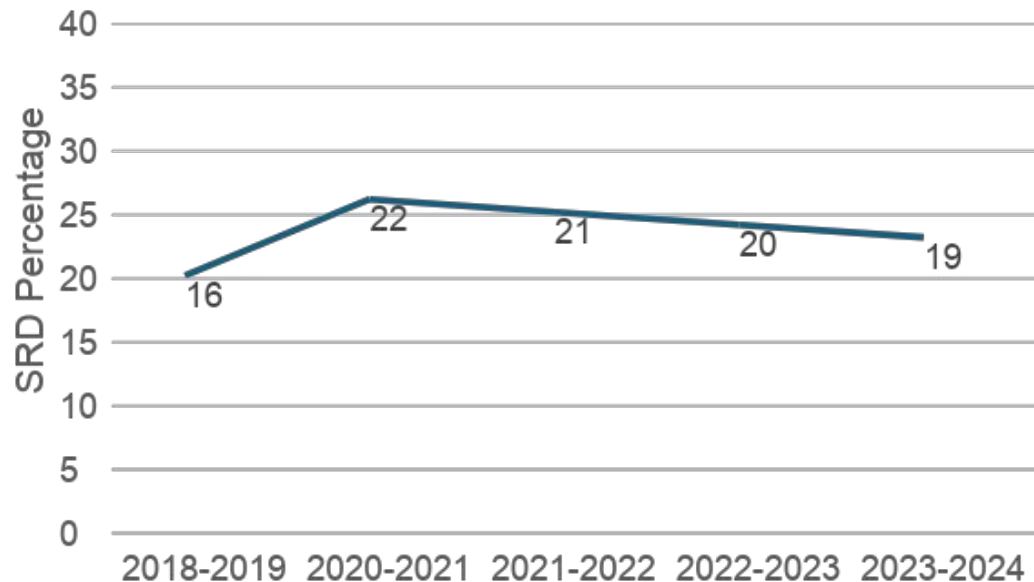
We are making progress on implementation of the READ Act required components.*

- **98%** of districts used CDE-approved core instructional reading programs *(required)*
- **29,000** teachers and **3,000+** principals and administrators have completed our evidence-based literacy training (including all required teachers and leaders, as well as 4-12 teachers on an opt-in basis) *(required)*
- **63.6%** of Comprehensive Early Literacy Grant participant schools (READ Act funded) reduced significant reading deficiency identification rates *(optional)*
- Our Early Literacy Assessment Tool (READ Act funded) end of year scores for moving students into "at or above benchmark" on READ Act Assessment **outpaced the national scores by 6% - for two consecutive years** *(optional)*



*23-24 school year data

Since COVID, we are seeing incremental declines in the rate of students identified as having significant reading deficiencies.



**6,092 fewer
students with
SRDs!**

Overall rates: 3% points ↓

Students with IEPs: 15%
points ↓

English Language

Learners: 23% points ↓

Our Read.Learn.Lead. public awareness campaign is providing resources for parents to support their child's reading journey.



It's never too late to build strong reading skills!



Cada palabra construye su mundo.



Strong Reading Starts Here!

Find the resources, tips, and support you need to help your child strengthen their reading skills.

ReadLearnLeadCO.org



Haremos que leer esté al alcance de todos los estudiantes.



Si crees que tus hijos/as tienen dificultades para leer, ha recibido apoyo a tiempo y una gran diferencia.

Obtén consejos para el maestro/a de tu hijo en LeeAprendeAvanzaC

Building Strong Reading Habits Today Inspires Even Brighter Thinking Tomorrow.



Strong reading skills give kids the confidence to shine and take on any challenge. Parents who read, sing, talk and play with their child help them build the skills to be strong readers.

Help your child's reading skills shine—find tips at ReadLearnLeadCO.org

Opening the Book on Reading Challenges: How to Spot the Signs

Early support makes a big difference!

Many kids struggle with reading, and reading disabilities are a lot more common than parents may realize. With the right help early on, every child can succeed.

These may be signs your child is struggling with reading

- Guessing words instead of sounding them out
- Not reading at all
- Trouble remembering what they read
- Only reading the first letter of words

Starting the conversation with your child's teacher

If you're worried about your child's progress, don't wait to speak up. You could say something like:

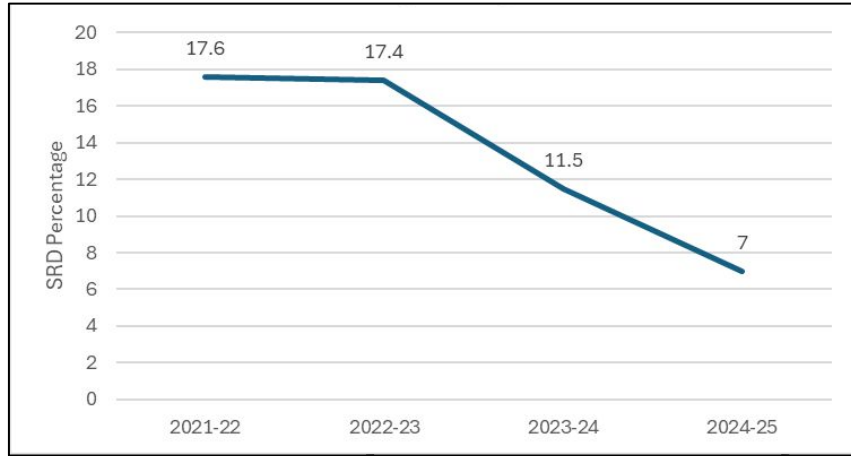
- "My child is having a hard time with reading. What resources or extra help is available to them?"
- "I want to make sure my child is keeping up with reading. What can we do together at home and at school to help them improve?"



The sooner parents speak up about reading struggles, the sooner their child can get the support they need.

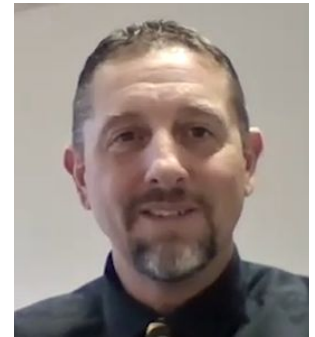
Get more tips to support your child's reading at ReadLearnLeadCO.org

Bright Spot to Learn From: Meeker Elementary reduced the percentage of students with significant reading deficiencies with support from the Early Literacy Grant



10.4% 
Fewer students with
significant reading deficiencies

“We typically don’t have instructional coaches in a district our size because all of our funds are going into classroom teachers. The access to additional resources that the grant provided really helped us put in place those support systems [for literacy instruction] that were necessary.”
-Supt. Chris Selle



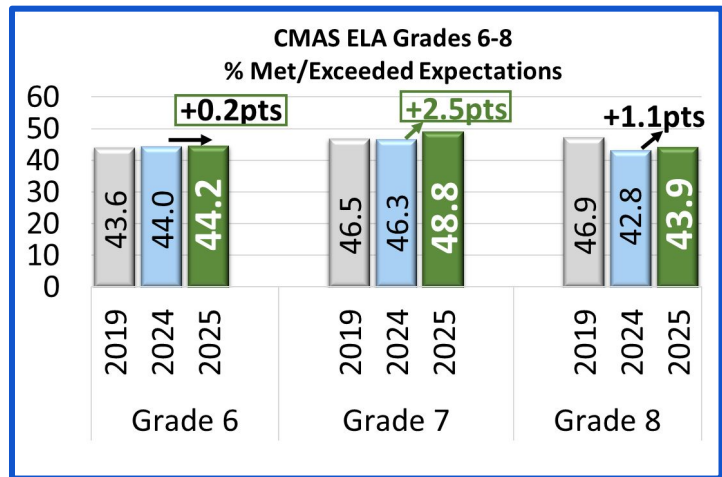
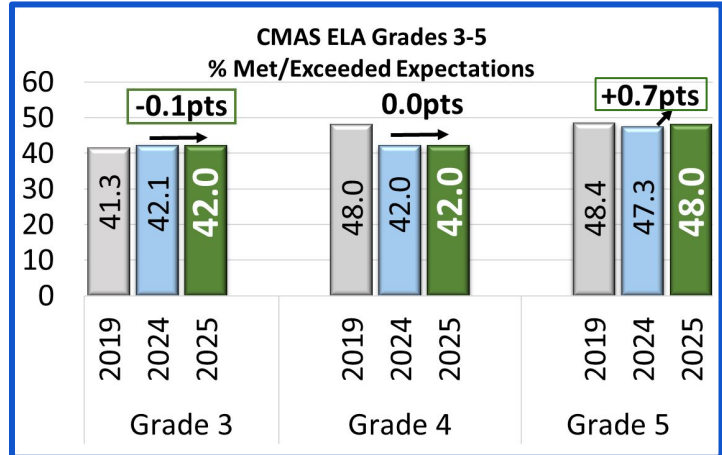
Our 2025 CMAS ELA results show ongoing need for improvement.

Overall Student Performance

- Most grades consistent with 2024
- Gains in Grades 5-8; strongest improvement in Grade 7
- Most grades at/above pre-pandemic levels (except 4 & 8)

Key Student Group Performance

- **Gender:** Steady in most grades. Strong male and female Grade 7 gains. Females performed higher than males (gaps: 2.8–12.7 pts).
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Black gains in grades 4, 7, 8; Hispanic gains in Grade 7; 25–32 point gaps with White/Asian peers persist.
- **FRL-Eligible:** Performance consistent with last year. Gaps with non-FRL peers: 28.9–32.4 points.
- **Multilingual Learners (NEP/LEP):** Declines continue. About 75-80% remain in lower performance levels. Widening Met/Exceeded Expectations gaps (30+ points).
- **Students with IEPs:** Gradual gains; 9–14% Met/Exceeded Expectations. Gaps remain wide (30+ points).



Accelerating Student Outcomes

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | ACADEMIC GROWTH | GRADUATION RATES

SECONDARY



Starting with the anticipated year of graduation of 2029, 100% of graduates will have achieved at least one of the following:

- Earned a quality, in-demand non-degree credential
- Earned 12 college credits that count toward a postsecondary credential
- Participated in one high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunity (from Learning Through Work and Learning at Work sections of the Work-based Learning Continuum)

KEY STRATEGIES

Supporting multiple pathways aligned to student interests and goals

Implementing Senate Bill 25-315 and House Bill 25-1278

Providing regional trainings to build local capacity

Connecting data to inform decision making

Our four-year grad rate continues to rise and drop-out rates continue to decline.

85.6% four-year graduation rate (2025)

- 1.4% point ↑ from 2024
- 6.7% point ↑ in the last decade

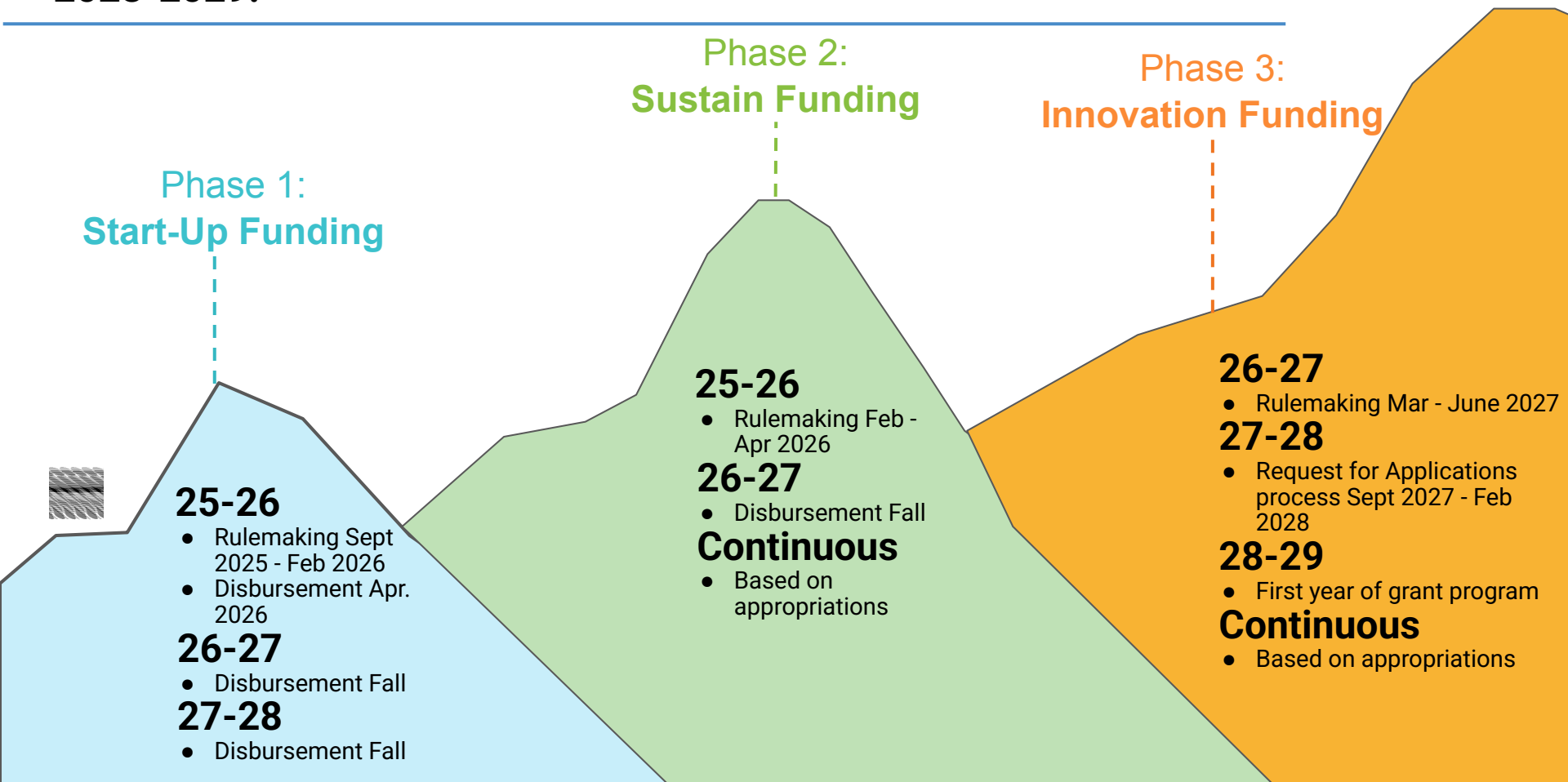
1.6% drop-out rate (2025)

- 0.3% point ↓ from 2024
- 0.7% point ↓ in the last decade
- Lowest rate in Colorado history

Significant disparities persist across student demographics and groups.



Our work on SB25-315 is on track for full implementation in 2028-2029.





Strengthening the Educator Workforce

Strengthening the Educator Workforce

EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT | SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS | EDUCATOR RETENTION



By 2027-28, 98% of teacher positions are filled with educators who either hold (1) a professional teaching license or (2) are in a teacher preparation program, have demonstrated content knowledge in their teaching endorsement, and are supported by a trained mentor, an increase from 94.2% in 2023-24.

KEY STRATEGIES

Building capacity for local Grow-Your-Own programs

Strengthening field-facing teacher retention resources

Improving internal alignment for field supports

Elevating the profession through strategic communications

Supporting aspiring educators with pathways to licensure

We are strengthening our educator workforce through recruitment and retention efforts, focused support, and elevating the profession.

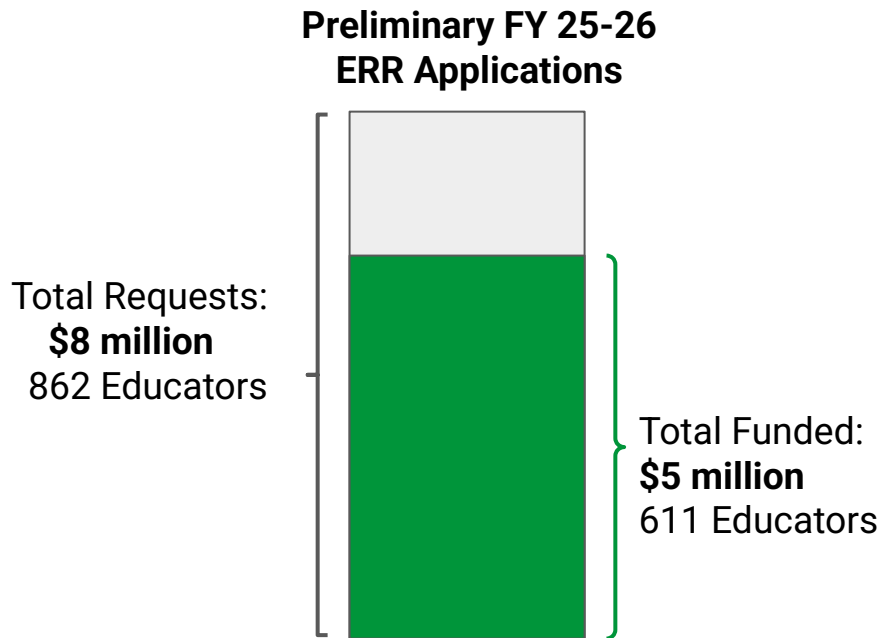
Goal- 98% fully
licensed or in
program, with
content
knowledge and
a mentor

- Hosted **62** “Grow Your Own” consulting sessions and launched the **Teacher Degree Apprenticeship Playbook**
- Attended **150** events targeting aspiring educators
- Provided pathways support to **2,736** current and future teachers
- Awarded **\$5 million** to **611** current and aspiring educators through the ***Educator Recruitment and Retention Grant***
- Record growth in our Colorado Teacher of the Year program with **1,802 nominees** and **419 applicants**



Educator Retention & Recruitment (ERR) Program

Up to \$10,000 in financial assistance to candidates working in a shortage area for at least three years.



- **81%** of ERR participants continue to work in a Colorado public schools
- Nearly **50%** (1,083 of 2,182 lifetime participants) were from rural or small rural districts
- **80%** of respondents reported they considered dropping out or delaying their educator preparation program before receiving funding through the ERR program and **98%** reported that the financial assistance positively impacted their careers.



Providing Operational Excellence

Providing Operational Excellence

CDE TEAM EXCELLENCE | CDE SERVICE EXCELLENCE



Wildly Important Goal: Over the next three years, increase the percentage of employees who indicate that the department is proactively addressing the critical factors that impact the employee experience.

KEY STRATEGIES

Developing a culture of employee growth and opportunities

Analyzing our internal systems for efficiency and automation

Leveraging those improved efficiencies to strengthen field-facing supports

We have worked to balance improving routine operations with an uncertain and challenging federal context.

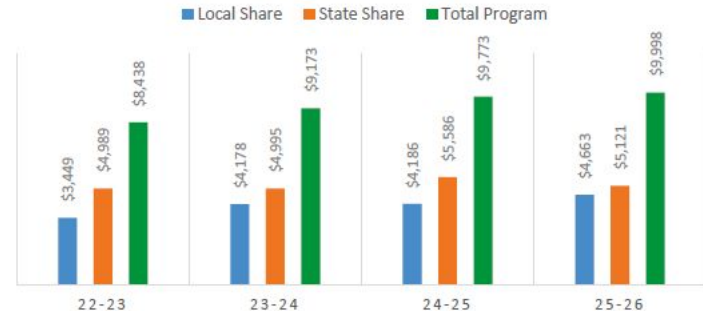
- Implemented **new time and leave system** to improve payroll and leave-tracking accuracy.
- Launched **regular federal updates** to the field in January 2025; 60+ sent to date.
- Continued to implement the Grants Project recommendations to **consolidate and streamline grants** and **reduce administrative burdens** on the field.
- Redesigned and **relaunched our website** responsive to wide-ranging feedback from the field, team, and partners.
- Stood up **emergency supports for the field** during the both the federal SNAP funding delays and federal education funding freeze.

School Finance Formula Implementation Update

- HB24-1448 established a new School Finance Formula, set to phase in from (FY25-26 to FY30-31), with full implementation in FY31-32.
- We are implementing the statutory requirements for phase in, which include calculating the “old” formula and the new formula, and providing funding based on a combination of both.

	FY2024-25	FY2025-26
Base PPR Rate	\$8,496.38	\$8,691.80
Average PPR Rate	\$11,451.65	\$11,874.40
Funded FTE	853,964.1	841,967.3
October K-12 Student Count	785,348.5	772,081.0

SCHOOL FINANCE FUNDING FY23 -
FY26 IN BILLIONS



School Finance Modernization IT Request

- CDE is currently responsible for the calculation and distribution of approximately **\$10 billion dollars in FY 25-26** across 178 school districts.
- We **received \$3 million** (out of \$9 million requested) in FY 25-26 to begin this modernization.
- The **request for additional funding for Phase II is being withdrawn** as the final cost of the project was less than anticipated.

We work with the **EDAC** (Education Data Advisory Council) to ensure the minimum burden for required and optional **data collections**.*

EDAC (22-2-304 C.R.S.) was created to review data burden placed on Colorado K-12 public education. Each year, all data collected by CDE and other state agencies from LEAs are reviewed by EDAC.

We classify data collections by types*:

- **Mandatory:** collections of state or federal required reporting elements **(80 EDAC-reviewed)**
- **Required to Maintain Benefit:** grants or collections where support (benefit) would be provided (like grants) **(81 EDAC-reviewed)**
- **Voluntary:** collections districts are not required to submit (pilots, surveys, feedback on process) **(56 EDAC-reviewed)**

Since 2022, there have been 26 statutorily required new or modified collections.

*Only necessary data elements are collected to fulfill obligations.

We attempt to add new data elements or deadlines into the existing collection calendar as efficiently as possible with focused mindfulness on district burden.

Our approach often results in a single collection being structured to fulfill multiple requirements – as a result, it is difficult to eliminate one collection without impacting other state or federal requirements.

Reviewing recent years, instances where legislation required a modification or new data collection include:

- 2022 - 9 collections
- 2023 - 7 collections
- 2024 - 5 collections
- 2025 - 5 collections



Additional Information Requested

Enrollment across all online school types has increased since 2019.

Single district online schools are the smallest group, but have seen the highest rate of growth.

School Type	2019-20 Funded Pupil	2025-26 Funded Pupil	# Difference 2019-2025	Growth 2019 to 2025
Online Schools Overall	22,022	34,043	12,021	54.6%
Multi-District Online Schools	20,129	30,116	9,987	49.6%
Single District Online Schools	1,893	3,927	2,034	107.4%

Note: Data includes K-12 even if a school has PK.

Online schools are held to the same accountability standards - we are working to address implementation challenges.

Students in online schools are **required to take the CMAS assessment**.

- Participation is significantly lower at 23% (v. 91% in brick and mortar schools for grades 3–8)
- Senate Bill 24-070 will allow remote testing starting spring 2026

Online schools are evaluated through the state's accountability system, the **School Performance Frameworks (SPFs)**.

- SPF includes achievement, growth, graduation, dropout rates, and postsecondary readiness
- Due to low participation, 48% of online schools receive an “Insufficient State Data” rating
- Under HB25-1278, the State Board of Education will develop rules for these insufficient data ratings.



Our **CMAS assessments** are supported through state and federal funding.

- State Funds: \$18,678,000 (*development, administration, scoring, and reporting*)
- Federal Funds: \$2,251,000

 The logo for CMAS Colorado Tests features a stylized green tree on the left, a circular emblem in the center with red, yellow, and blue segments, and the text 'CMAS' above and 'CoAlt' below the emblem. To the right of the emblem, it says 'COLORADO TESTS' in large blue letters and 'BY COLORADO TEACHERS' in smaller blue letters below it. COLORADO TESTS BY COLORADO TEACHERS	Grades Assessed	Number of Assessments
CMAS English Language Arts	3-8	6
CMAS Mathematics	3-8	6
CMAS Science	3,5,11	3
CMAS Colorado Spanish Language Arts	3 & 4	2
CMAS Social Studies	4 & 7	2
Total	-	19

State assessments undergo a rigorous federal peer review that confirms alignment with ESSA requirements.

Peer Review Focus Areas



Content Area	Federal Requirements	Colorado Additions
Mathematics	Grades 3-8, once in high school	Grades 9 and 10 (PSAT)
Reading/English Language Arts	Grades 3-8, once in high school	Grades 9 and 10 (PSAT)
Science	At least once per EMH grade span	-
Social Studies	Not required	Grades 4 and 7, sampled

John W. Buckner Automatic Enrollment in Advanced Courses Grant Program

- The John W. Buckner Automatic Enrollment in Advanced Courses Grant Program was created by Senate Bill 19-059
- The goal was to increase the number of students enrolled in advanced courses for subjects in which the student has demonstrated proficiency.
- The program was repealed through SB25-315

Self reported data on enrollment by grantees is available [here](#).

Annual SMART
Act Fact Sheets:

- [2021-22](#)
- [2022-23](#)
- [2023-24](#)



Questions



Reference Slide

Students spend approximately 1% or less of annual instructional time on state assessments.

Grade(s)	Available Testing Time	Number of Units/Test
3, 4, 6, 7 (ELA and Math)	7 hours, 45 minutes*	3 ELA Units; 3 Math Units
5 and 8 (ELA, Math, and Science)	11 hours	3 ELA Units; 3 Math Units; 3 Science Units
9 (PSAT)	2 hours, 14 minutes	2 Reading/Writing Units; 2 Math Units
10 (PSAT)	2 hours, 14 minutes	2 Reading/Writing Units; 2 Math Units
11 (SAT, CMAS Science)	3 hours, 54 minutes	2 Reading/Writing Units; 2 Math Units; 2 Science Units

* $\frac{1}{3}$ of schools are selected to administer the social studies assessments in grades 4 and 7. Social Studies adds 65 minutes to available testing time in tested grades (1 Unit).