Postsecondary Workforce Readiness and School District Accountability

Overview

Recently, the Colorado Legislature has reaffirmed its commitment to postsecondary success with streamlined funding opportunities and funding in support of postsecondary success. In addition to programs and funding, these efforts have integrated the state's accountability system for schools and districts, specifically the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) performance indicator in performance frameworks. This resource specifically addresses the relationship between legislation regarding PWR programming and accountability. The following provides a high level summary of policy changes for each area, followed by responses to questions that have arisen about the implementation.

Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) - The Secondary, Postsecondary, and Work-Based Learning Integration Task Force (H.B. 22-1215) was convened to make policy recommendations to support the equitable and sustainable expansion and alignment of programs to support PWR. The task force's final report provided the foundation for the subsequent legislation, S.B. 25-315. This legislation consolidates multiple statutory program and funding mechanisms into three funds: Start-Up, Sustain, and the John W. Buckner Innovation Grant Fund, with the goal of supporting every student in achieving at least one of the Big Three milestones upon graduation. This priority is in alignment with the Colorado Department of Education's *Accelerating Student Outcomes* High School Goal in the Strategic Plan.

The "Big Three"

College Credits	Industry-Recognized Credential	Work-Based Learning Experience
CC	IRC	WBL

Accountability - Passed during the 2025 legislative session, the Education Accountability System bill (H.B. 25-1278) makes modifications to various elements of the system, with specific changes to the PWR indicator of the performance frameworks in alignment with S.B. 25-315. The bill builds from the 1241 Task Force recommendations.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Questions related to the relationship of postsecondary and workforce readiness and accountability are organized in the following categories. Additional resources for topics outside the overlap of these two areas are linked at the end. This FAQ resource will continue to be updated, as new questions and responses arise. To submit additional questions, please use the QR code or this link to the submission form.

1. **Overall**
2. **Timeline**
3. **Performance Frameworks**
4. **Stakeholder Engagement**

Overall

1a. What is driving the emphasis on college credit (CC), work-based learning (WBL) and industry-recognized credentials (IRC), or the Big Three?

The emphasis on college credit, work-based learning and industry-recognized credentials is driven by Colorado's goal to make readiness after high school more meaningful, measurable and connected to opportunity. These priorities align with Governor Polis's focus on strengthening career pathways, meeting future workforce needs and connecting more Coloradans to quality careers. They also align with CDE's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan, *Start Strong, Stay Engaged, Leave Ready*, which includes a focus on all students graduating with one of the Big Three.

Together, the Big Three help define readiness beyond earning a high school diploma. They give students clearer pathways to college, career, economic mobility and Colorado's workforce of the future.

Start-Up and Sustain Funding through S.B. 25-315 will support local education providers (LEPs), including schools and districts, in expanding these opportunities, providing funding to improve student outcomes and making pathways more accessible statewide. Beginning in 2028-29, the John W. Buckner Innovation Fund will also support schools and districts to improve student outcomes measured by the revised PWR indicator.

1b. How do college credit, industry-recognized credential and work-based learning support positive outcomes for students?

Survey data and research explain how college- and career-connected learning leads to better short and long term student outcomes:

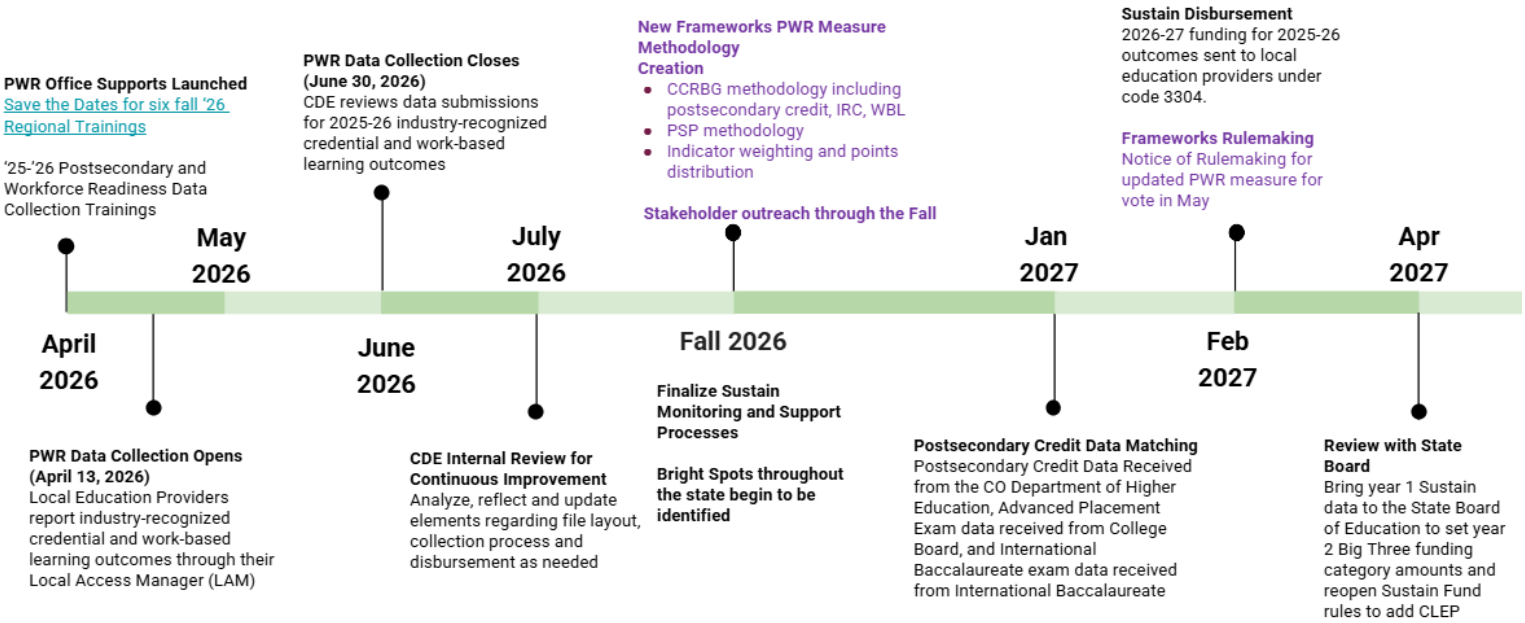
- ***Importance of School-Career Connection.*** A growing body of evidence indicates that participation in career-connected learning can promote strong attendance, engagement, and academic achievement by helping students forge direct and durable linkages between what they learn in school and their personal and professional interests and aspirations for their futures. (2024, USDOE Fact Sheet)

- ***Power of Concurrent Enrollment.*** Students participating in concurrent enrollment are 25% more likely to attend college, 10% more likely to earn a 4-year college degree on time or early and have higher workforce earnings after five years. (2020, University of Denver Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab)
- ***PWR Planning Improves Student Mental Health***. Youth who talked with school staff about future plans after high school were 13% less likely to experience feelings of depression, 15% less likely to experience poor mental health and 1.2 times more likely to report their stress levels are manageable. (2023, Healthy Kids Colorado Survey)

Timeline

2a. What is the timeline for including the Big Three (college credit, work-based learning and industry-recognized credentials) programs in the performance frameworks?

The new PWR measures aligned with the Big Three will be integrated into performance frameworks no sooner than 2028. At its April 2026 meeting, the State Board of Education voted to delay implementation of all performance framework changes to no earlier than fall 2028 and to pursue any necessary legislative changes in the next session. Current frameworks will be produced for points in fall 2026 and fall 2027. It is anticipated that *informational* frameworks will be produced in spring 2028 so that districts and schools can see how revisions to the PWR indicator required by H.B. 25-1278 impact ratings. Frameworks including H.B. 25-1278 updates will be produced *for points* no sooner than fall 2028. Additional information and guidance will be shared when available. The response to question 3d, steps for performance framework cuts, and 3f, related to framework analysis, will also influence the timeline. The graphic below describes the anticipated timeline for the next year.



Performance Frameworks

3a. How will the programs described in S.B. 25-315 be represented in the school and district performance frameworks?

S.B. 25-315 and H.B. 25-1278 work together to bring greater clarity and alignment around how Colorado recognizes postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR). S.B. 25-315 focuses on expanding and supporting access to the Big Three, which includes college credit, industry-recognized credentials and work-based learning. H.B. 25-1278 complements this work by requiring updates to the PWR measure in performance frameworks so they better reflect the many pathways Colorado students may take after high school. Changes include modifying the **postsecondary and workforce readiness indicator** to have four subindicators: (1) graduation, (2) dropout rate, (3) **college and career readiness before graduation (CCRBG)** and (4) **postsecondary progression (PSP)**. Graduation and dropout subindicators are not new and will be included in frameworks as in the past. The new CCRBG subindicator will be organized around the Big Three. The PSP subindicator is a renaming of the matriculation measure and will continue to include matriculation to Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) and military enlistment. Additionally, the CO SAT will be moved to the Achievement indicator.

Together, these updates are aligned with recommendations from the 1215 Task Force report and the 1241 Task Force Report and support a broader understanding of student readiness. The tables below summarize the changes to the PWR performance indicator.

CURRENT PWR INDICATOR		
Sub Indicator	**Measures**	**Points**
Graduation Rate	Overall	8
	Disaggregated Groups	2 each
Dropout Rate	Overall	8
	Disaggregated Groups	2 each
Matriculation	2 year IHE Enrollment	4
	4 year IHE Enrollment	
	CTE	
	Military Enlistment	
	Postsecondary Program	
SAT (11th grade)	ELA Overall	4
	ELA Disaggregated Groups	1 each
	Math Overall	4
	Math Disaggregated Groups	1 each

NEW PWR INDICATOR		
Sub Indicator	**Measures**	**Points**
Graduation Rate	Overall	TBD
	Combined Group	
Dropout Rate	Overall	
	Combined Group	
College & Career Readiness Before Graduation (CCRBG)	Post Secondary Credit	
	Industry Recognized Credential	
	Work Based Learning	
Post Secondary Progression (PSP)	Military Enlistment	
	2-4 year IHE enrollment	

3b. What is the relationship between performance framework ratings and funding?

Performance framework ratings and funding are connected through the John W. Buckner Innovation Funding, which is scheduled to begin in 2028-29. This program will provide ~$9.5 million annually to support districts and schools with low attainment on the PWR indicator in the revised performance frameworks.

The purpose of this funding is to help eligible organizations improve student outcomes connected to PWR. Eligibility and implementation details will be determined through Colorado State Board of Education rulemaking, which is expected to begin fall 2027.

Sites with low performance on the PWR indicator leading to lower performance framework ratings may also be eligible for the EASI Grant. Funds and associated services can be used to support school improvement efforts which may impact PWR outcomes.

3c. What new data will be used in the performance frameworks?

The new PWR data collection closed June 30, 2026 for the 2025-26 school year. This new collection builds off of the Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP) data collection in previous years. Industry-recognized credential data from this collection will be used for fall 2027 frameworks (for the existing matriculation sub-indicator) and work-based learning data is anticipated to be included in spring 2028 informational frameworks (in the new PWR indicator). In addition to the PWR data collection, CDE anticipates including concurrent enrollment data provided by Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), as well as Advance Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) credit data provided by College Board and International Baccalaureate. CDE will explore including other data sources that could inform the PWR indicator. Timing for the collection of these data necessitates that reporting for the PWR indicator is lagged one year, consistent with existing practices for graduation and dropout rates. See the related responses to 3d regarding cut points and 3f on framework analysis below.

3d. What steps will the department take to determine new cuts (targets) for framework points?

Cut points for the new CCRGB and PSP subindicator measures will use data collected from the PWR data collection for IRC and WBL; and for college credit will use concurrent enrollment data from Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), as well as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) data. The methods for setting cut points will follow the same methodology used to establish cut points for other PWR measures such as matriculation (to be moved to the PSP sub indicator). This involves examining the statewide school distribution of matriculation rates, or in the case of the CCRGB, the new measures of college credit, IRCs and WBL. The distribution of these rates is taken across all eligible schools in the state of Colorado. The measure rates for all eligible schools in the distribution are then rank-ordered. Based on the rank ordering, percentile ranks are developed for each distribution. The cut points as established by the school distribution are then applied to both the School Performance Framework and the District Performance Framework. Cut points for each rating band (Does Not Meet, Approaching, Meets, Exceeds) are derived from these percentile ranks, which follow the 15th-50th-80th percentiles as other sub-indicators do. More detail on how CDE establishes cut points can be found in the District and School Performance Framework Calculation Guide.

Once cut point analysis is complete, the exact values will be reviewed by the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) before being presented to the State Board of Education during rulemaking and target setting in 2027. Given that this is the first year of the PWR collection, it is likely that cutpoints will need to be re-normed in subsequent years as participation in the Big Three shifts with the distribution of Start-Up Funds, Sustain Funds and additional programming. See the related response to 3f below on framework analysis.

3e. How are the rules for funding to local education providers the same or different from those used in the performance framework?

CDE is striving for coherence in its implementation of both S.B. 25-315 and H.B. 25-1278 legislation, and will make efforts to coordinate rules between PWR funding and frameworks as much as possible. PWR funding and school and district frameworks have distinct purposes that may result in differing criteria between funding eligibility and performance framework measures. PWR funding is focused on opening opportunities for students to prepare for life **after** high school. This may include opportunities that individual students might access on their own, outside of school or district structures. In contrast, the mandate of performance frameworks is to evaluate schools and districts through student outcomes **during** high school, ensuring school and district accountability for providing quality education.

3f. How will the department ensure that certain types of districts/schools won't be "dinged" on the performance framework ratings based on certain characteristics (ex. Rurality, poverty, size, etc.)?

As one of CDE's core values, equity is a critical component of how measures are built in the performance frameworks. In the process of crafting the new PWR indicator, CDE will conduct analysis on new data for the CCRGB indicator by demographic group and school characteristics. This analysis will inform criteria for the measures, ensuring they do not have outsized negative impacts on specific groups while still setting ambitious targets for PWR engagement.

In addition, the TAP will provide feedback on CDE's analysis and proposed measures and weights. The TAP voted on a set of principles to guide their recommendations around accountability measures. These focus on:

- ensuring consistency across grade bands, schools, and districts;
- grounding recommendations in empirical analysis when possible, including deliberate study of the impact on historically disadvantaged groups and the schools and districts that serve them; and
- considering the need for flexibility to adapt to changing contexts across schools.

The TAP will follow these guiding principles as CDE and the TAP engage in PWR indicator revision discussions in fall 2026. See the related response to 3d in this document regarding cut points.

Stakeholder Engagement

4a. How can I stay informed of the input opportunities, processes and decisions related to the Big Three (college credit, work-based learning and industry-recognized credentials) and accountability?

There are many ways that you can stay abreast of updates around the Big Three and their integration into performance frameworks.

- Attend or review TAP meetings, where technical decisions around performance frameworks, specifically the PWR indicator and subindicators will be discussed in the fall. Meetings are held

virtually, open to the public, recorded, and posted online if you are not able to attend. Agendas typically are posted one week in advance.

- Attend or review Accountability Work Group (AWG) meetings, where discussions around guiding principles for PWR indicators and supports will be discussed in the fall. Meetings are held virtually, open to the public, recorded, and posted online if you are not able to attend. Agendas typically are posted one week in advance.
- Sign up for or review Accountability Contacts communications. These are sent to district accountability contacts about all accountability topics on a monthly basis and will include updates about progress on PWR indicator calculations and rulemaking. They are also posted online.
- Follow State Board of Education meetings in 2027 when rulemaking around the performance framework and the PWR indicator will occur. As rulemaking progresses, there will be opportunities for public comment on the draft rules.
- Sign up for the monthly/quarterly PWR Newsletter.
- Register for and attend a PWR Regional Training. Trainings occur each fall and are held in various locations around the state.
- Check out the S.B. 25-315 Implementation Website

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Postsecondary Workforce Readiness

- SB 25-315 Big Three Implementation webpage
- Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Collection Homepage
- PWR Newsletter
- CDE's 2025-28 Strategic Plan

Accountability

- Accountability Contacts communications
- 1278 Implementation Update
- Technical Advisory Panel (TAP)
- Accountability Work Group (AWG)

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To access a digital version of this document to access the links and questions submission form, please use this QR code: