Offered Services: Connect for Success

Introduction

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The Connect for Success (CFS) grant was the result of a 2014 Colorado Department of Education (CDE) study of five high achieving elementary schools identified based on their overall performance, as well as the performance of their student groups, specifically English Learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing poverty, and racially diverse students. The study focused on how these schools are attaining higher academic achievement than other schools in the state. The school and LEA leadership, personnel, families, and students participated in surveys, focus groups, and interviews to help identify the factors contributing to the schools' success with the identified groups. The following High Achieving Schools (HAS) Study summarizes the study purpose and methods, overall findings highlighting effective strategies common across the five schools in the 2014 study, and effective strategies unique within each school: www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/dper/evalrpts.

In 2018, CDE added four new high achieving schools to the study: a rural elementary school, a middle school, a high school, and an alternative education campus (AEC). The same methodology was used to identify practices that are contributing to the success of the newly identified schools. Although three of the four schools were secondary schools, many of the same trends were noted across the second round of High Achieving Schools as has been evidenced in the first study. CDE is in the process of updating the HAS study and any new related reports will be posted with previous reports on Federal Programs- Program Evaluations and Analyses website (www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/dper/evalrpts).

A recent evaluation of CFS Cohorts 3-7 found that 35% of schools were no longer identified for support and improvement by the end of the grant. In addition, more than half (56%) of schools that were federally identified for support and improvement at the beginning of the grant were no longer identified by the end of the grant and 63% of schools improved their percentage of points earned on the SPF from the time they were selected for the grant to the end of the grant. The most recent Cohort evaluated (CFS Cohort 7) showed a 100% improvement rate in CMAS Math scores. TLCC survey data showed that schools also demonstrated improvement in the areas of Student Conduct Management and Community Support and Involvement.

The CFS grant creates a 2.5-year opportunity to network with and learn from high performing schools and use grant funds to implement strategies and practices that contributed to their success. Schools that participate in the Connect for Success grant receive a diagnostic visit developed from the findings of the HAS study and an in-person debrief with school leadership to discuss findings followed by a report that summarizes the team's recommendations. After hearing a panel of HAS school leaders and connecting with them at a kickoff meeting, grantees visit one of the HAS to see the effective practices in practice. Schools

identify and/or hire an implementation coach who works with a CDE assigned Implementation Manager to replicate HAS strategies aligned to the school's Major Improvement Strategies as well as monitor the implementation of those practices. The goal of CFS is not to interrupt the work happening to improve outcomes in Colorado schools, but instead to provide resources to enhance and adapt the work to support teachers and school leaders to accelerate student growth.

Eligibility & Prioritization

Eligibility. Schools that meet the following criteria are eligible to apply:

- Schools identified for improvement under ESSA as Comprehensive Support (CS), Targeted Support (TS), or Additional Targeted Support (ATS); and/or
- Schools with a state identification School Performance Framework plan type of Priority Improvement, Turnaround, or On Watch

Prioritization. If not all EASI proposals can be funded, proposals that meet grant expectations will be funded in the order of the EASI school-level prioritization list, with particular priority given to schools identified as CS Year 3 or beyond who have not had a diagnostic review in the last two years. Details on how prioritization points are calculated and the points for each EASI eligible school are available on the EASI Resources and Technical Assistance webpage.

Service Capacity Limitations. Connect for Success is a direct CDE support, and the number of new schools awarded each grant cycle may be limited due to capacity including CDE staffing, number of active school sites from prior cohorts, level of need at each site, and number of schools in each geographic region with available staff. If not all EASI proposals for Connect for Success can be supported, prioritization points and service capacity in a single district or region may be considered.

Program Considerations & Fit

Program Considerations. Schools should demonstrate readiness and willingness to refresh current strategies and seek opportunities to align practices with those of HAS.

Program Fit. Connect for Success is a good fit with current or potentially new EASI supports including School Turnaround Leadership Development or Facilitated Board Training for School Improvement. Connect for Success is not a good fit for schools that:

- Completed Exploration Supports in the last two years;
- Currently supported by Accountability Pathways or in Year 3 or later on the state Accountability Clock;
- Currently supported by or recently completed (last two years) Transformation Network; or
- Online schools or other schools with unique program models

Sequence of Program Support

The sequence of the work is informed by the diagnostic review and the school's visit to one of the HAS. In partnership with CDE, schools will then prioritize areas for improvement, develop an implementation plan, and monitor plan implementation using a CFS progress monitoring tool.

Available Funds & Duration

Available Funds. Applicants may request up to the maximum award amount for a school. Award may be:

- Up to $20,000 per school in Year 1 (2026-27)
- Up to $80,000 per school in Year 2 (2027-28)
- Up to $80,000 per school in Year 3 (2028-29)

Duration. Program support is designed to support schools for a period of 2.5 years (2026-27 to 2028-29).

Allowable Use of Funds

Funds are intended to support evidence-based strategies and practices that align with the recommendations of the CFS diagnostic review and support identified major improvement strategies. Allowable uses of funds include costs associated with:

- Site visits to High Achieving School site (travel, substitutes, stipends) and other bright spots, as approved by CDE
- Travel and attendance of school/LEA leadership to attend state meetings in Denver area
- Hiring an Implementation Coach (appointed or hired by LEA)
    - Funding requests for full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, other than the Implementation Coach, are generally not approved. Narrow exceptions are allowed if the school or district can clearly demonstrate that the position is intended to build capacity through the development of systems, practices, and structures for the respective improvement strategy. Additionally, there must be a clear plan for sustainability for the position after the grant concludes, and the position must be considered supplemental. Any FTE request must also be aligned to the school's identified major improvement strategies.
- Cost associated with the CDE diagnostic visit (surveys, translating, and substitutes)
- Professional development aligned to needs including registration and travel costs
- Stipends and benefits for additional planning time for teachers to bring staff back early or costs for substitute teachers during the school year
- Stakeholder engagement strategies
- Purchasing supplemental curricular resources and/or intervention materials
- Visiting bright spot schools or exemplar schools

Budget Recommendations. A budget and plan will be jointly developed and finalized with CDE following the CDE site visit and diagnostic review. For the application submission, the budget should include placeholder budget lines for each fiscal year as outlined below:

- Year 1 (2026-27)- Placeholder for activities informed by the spring diagnostic review determined in partnership with CDE for $20,000
- Year 2 (2027-28)- Placeholder for activities determined in partnership with CDE for $80,000
- Year 3 (2028-29)- Placeholder for activities determined in partnership with CDE for $80,000

Note- If entering indirect costs, the total request amount may not exceed the maximum allowable amount.

Indirect Costs. Applicants may elect to include indirect costs in the application budget. Indirect cost rates based on the district's restricted indirect cost rate. The total request amount (indirect costs plus other budget lines) may not exceed the maximum allowable amount. There are some exclusions for distorting items that apply, such as the limitation of indirects on the first $50,000 on provider contracted services. Grantees should note that indirect costs are only allowed on federal awards. If the grantee receives a state award, indirect costs must be removed during the post-award revision process. More information regarding indirect cost rates is available on CDE's School Finance webpage at https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/icrc.

Fund Considerations.

- Funds from this opportunity must be used to **supplement and not supplant** any federal, state, and local funds currently being used to provide activities.
- Post-award revisions must be submitted and approved in the online system prior to incurring expenses. Any expenses incurred prior to approval are the responsibility of the LEA. All post-award revisions must be approved by 06/30.
- For federal awards, funds must be obligated by 09/30 and requested by 11/1 of each respective fiscal year.
- For state awards, funds must be obligated by 06/30 of the final year of the grant cycle.
- A school or district may carry funds forward in alignment with funding source restrictions and with CDE approval. At the end of the grant performance period, any non-requested federal funds are reverted, and any unspent state funds must be returned to the state.
- CDE may terminate a grant award upon thirty days' notice if it is deemed by CDE that the applicant is not fulfilling the requirements of the funded program as specified in the approved project application, or if the program is generating less than satisfactory results.
- Multi-year or future award year amounts are contingent on allocations of state and federal funds to CDE in each respective fiscal year.

Important Program Dates

Program Dates	Activity
September- December	Meet with the appropriate school and district teams to discuss interest in applying for EASI support and develop an application. If needed, meet with supporting CDE staff.
December	Application due
January	Award notifications
February/March	CDE will host a Kickoff meeting where new grantees can learn about grant expectations and connect with current High Achieving Schools.
February-April	CDE conducts school visits and provides recommendations for HAS strategies and practices to be implemented
May	School, LEA and CDE collaborate to conduct initial planning, goal setting, and budget development/finalization
June	School submits next year's plan, budget, and baseline monitoring indicators
August	Planning and learning opportunities for all Connect for Success grantees

Evaluation and Reporting

Each grantee of the program must, at a minimum, agree to the following evaluation, reporting, and/or progress monitoring components:

- School information as part of the diagnostic review school visit after the grant is awarded but before planning and implementation
- Parent surveys – distributed by the school; collected and analyzed by CDE; 30% of parents' (or at least 50) response
- Personnel surveys – distributed by the school; collected and analyzed by CDE; at least 50% of staff response
- Observation/walkthrough data – collected by a team from CDE and/or the CDE Implementation Manager; and
- Interviews with school leadership, teachers, staff, families, and students – collected by a team from CDE and/or the CDE Implementation Manager. At the end of Year 1, schools must provide a description of the planning process and plans for the next year of the grant. Description must include an implementation plan to replicate the HAS strategies and practices and based on CDE recommendations from the diagnostic visit.
- Implementation plan and, when available, implementation data to demonstrate the extent to which implementation occurred with fidelity
- Quarterly progress monitoring meetings with CDE Implementation Manager and the quarterly completion of progress monitoring report using the CDE Progress Monitoring Template
- Final Expenditure Report (FER) in GAINS each fiscal year by 09/30.

Note: All data collected will protect personally identifiable information (PII) protected and is only reported on an aggregate level for purposes of evaluating the EASI support and/or supporting future program improvements.

Program Assurances

LEA Commitments:

- Hire or designate an Implementation Coach that meets the minimum competencies
- Ensure both district and building leadership possess the qualifications and have committed the time necessary to accomplish grant activities to lead to student achievement gains
- Allow flexibility for school to adjust for mid-course corrections if data does not indicate progress toward increasing achievement
- Support school in using data to monitor student progress to inform instructional practice to accelerate performance
- Conduct monthly instructional rounds at school site (LEA /school/implementation coach, if applicable)
- Foster principal's leadership in the school and support leadership growth opportunities
- Ensure that funds are being leveraged with other local, state, and federal funds (e.g., Titles I, II, III, V, and IDEA) and that accountability for cost-effective management is provided
- Work with and provide requested data to CDE for the Connect for Success funding opportunity within the periods specified
- Maintain sole responsibility for the project even though subcontractors may be used to perform certain services
- Ensure the LEA and staff will not discriminate against anyone regarding race, gender, national origin, color, disability, or age.
- LEA will be required to submit Final Expenditure Reports (FER) the end of each fiscal year.

- LEA understands that unobligated state funds will be returned to CDE and unobligated federal funds will be rescinded at the conclusion of the grant cycle.
- Funds will be used to supplement and not supplant any federal, state, and local moneys currently being used to provide services and grant dollars will be administered by the appropriate fiscal agent.
- Funded projects will maintain appropriate fiscal and program records and fiscal audits of this program will be conducted by the grantees as a part of their regular audits.
- If any findings of misuse of these funds are discovered, project funds will be returned to CDE.

School Leadership Commitments:

- School team will visit one of the CFS identified High Achieving Schools.
- Provide CDE with the annual evaluation and quarterly progress monitoring information required
- School leadership team with LEA representation will attend the state sponsored professional development and/or networking opportunities
- School leadership will collaborate with the Implementation Coach, hired or designated by the LEA, to develop and implement a plan to replicate HAS practices and strategies based on the CDE recommendations from the diagnostic visit
- School leadership, including Implementation Coach, will meet at a minimum quarterly with the CDE Implementation Manager to evaluate the implementation of chosen strategies.
- Reevaluate use of Title I and IDEA funds (e.g., Coordinated Early Intervening Services - CEI) to meet needs of minority students, students experiencing poverty, students with disabilities, and English Learners
- School Leadership will:
    - Conduct regular instructional walkthroughs
    - Perform ongoing performance monitoring of instructional staff and provide timely feedback to teachers
    - Ensure ongoing data analyses and participating in data meetings
    - Ensure that time for data meetings, analysis, and use is protected
    - Ensure time for collaboration is created and protected
    - Make student-centered decisions (including grouping of students, class schedules, etc.)
    - Set high expectations of staff, families, and students
    - Budget sufficient funds and time to participate in required grant activities
    - Address issues of teacher stability and training
    - Exercise leveraging of Title I, IDEA, and other funding sources
    - Evaluate the impact of these funds on student achievement and participate in the external evaluation of the initiative

Related Resources & Information

EASI: Connect for Success- www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/cdeofferedservices-connectforsuccess