Educator Recruitment and Retention Financial Assistance Program: 2025-26

Legislative Intent and Goals

The Educator Recruitment and Retention Financial Assistance Program (ERR Program) provides tuition support to individuals enrolled in educator preparation programs who commit to working in educator shortage areas in Colorado for at least three years. The program is intended to reduce financial barriers to entering the profession and strengthen the educator workforce in high-need areas.

Legislation: SB21-185

CO Rev Stat § 22-60.3-202 (2024)

ERRP Dashboard link

The General Assembly appropriates $5 million annually for this program. Eligible participants may apply once and receive up to $10,000 in tuition assistance. Per State Board of Education (SBE) rule, the maximum amount an educator may receive was reduced to $7,500 beginning in the 2026-27 school year.

Program Summary 2025-26

- 663 educators were awarded $5.2 million in tuition assistance during 2025–26.
- Thirty-two percent of recipients identified as educators of color, compared to 17% of Colorado's statewide educator workforce.
- Twenty-seven percent of recipients identified as male or non-binary, compared to 24% of Colorado's statewide educator workforce.
- Thirty-one percent of recipients work in rural districts, compared to 17% of Colorado's statewide educator workforce.
- Approximately 76% of recipients from the first three cohorts (2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24) remain employed in Colorado public schools.
- Ninety-seven percent of Local Education Agencies agreed that ERR Program participants were needed in their schools.
- Demand for assistance exceeded available appropriations by approximately $4.2 million.

Program Participation and Impact

The Colorado Department of Education actively shared information and promoted the ERR Program, reaching an estimated 100,000 educators. As a result of these outreach efforts, the program experienced strong interest during the 2025–26 school year, receiving 755 applications, of which 709 qualified for funding. Ultimately, 663 participants received approximately $5.2 million in awards. The remaining 46 were not

funded because available funds were exhausted. Within two months of the application opening, applicants requested approximately $6 million in assistance, exceeding available funding.

After the application period closed and all funds were awarded, CDE launched an interest form on the ERR website to allow candidates to express interest in future funding opportunities. These individuals either missed the application window or were unable to apply before funds were exhausted. A total of 338 individuals completed the form, collectively requesting more than $3.4 million in funding. Because the maximum ERR award is $10,000, some responses may not accurately reflect the amount of financial assistance needed. Reported amounts ranged from “unknown” to $93,000. When combined with applications that met eligibility requirements but were not funded, demand exceeded available funding by more than $4.2 million during the 2025-26 school year. Taken together, these findings suggest an unmet need among prospective educators entering the profession.

Participant Demographics

Applicant and recipient demographics were largely aligned. Approximately 31% of applicants and 32% of recipients identified as educators of color, and 29% of applicants compared to 27% of recipients identified as male or non-binary. Compared to the statewide educator workforce, ERR Program recipients were more diverse. Educators of color represent 17% of Colorado’s educators statewide, compared to 32% of ERR Program recipients. Similarly, male or non-binary educators represent 24% of the statewide workforce, compared to 27% of ERR Program recipients.

Most participants (571, 86%) participated through the alternative licensure pathway. Smaller numbers of participants utilized the Temporary Educator Eligibility (TEE) pathway (51 participants, 8%) or the paraprofessional-to-teacher pathway (40 participants, 6%).

Workforce Impact

ERR Program recipients were employed across a wide range of education settings, including 116 school districts, four Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), the Colorado Charter School (CSI), and two facility schools. They served in 26 identified shortage areas (see Appendix A for a complete list), and more than 31% worked in rural districts. Recipients most commonly worked as Special Education Generalists (164, 24.7%) or Elementary Education teachers (157, 23.7%). Mathematics and Science each accounted for 51 recipients (7.7%), followed by English Language Arts with 44 recipients (6.6%).

Licensure and Program Completion

As of July 31, 2026, ERR recipients held a variety of educator credentials. The largest groups held an initial teacher license (26.2%), alternative license (21.1%), or an interim teacher authorization (18.3%). Smaller proportions held a professional license (14.3%) or did not hold an active teaching credential (8.1%). Four recipients held a Teacher Apprenticeship Authorizations. Table 1 below summarizes the teaching credential status of 2025-26 ERR recipients.

Table 1. Teaching Credential Status of 2025-26 ERR Recipients as of July 31, 2026

Teaching Credential	Percent of Recipients
Initial Teacher License	26.2%
Alternative Teacher License	21.1%
Interim Teacher Authorization	18.3%
Professional Teacher License	14.3%
No Active Teaching Credential	8.1%
Other Teaching Credentials	12.4%

In the 2025-26 school year, 48.7% of recipients were reported as having completed an alternative preparation program. Individuals participating in the Paraprofessional-to-Teacher pathway or TEE program may take several years to complete their preparation, as they are typically working toward a bachelor's degree and, in some cases, a master's degree while employed.

Retention

The percentage of ERR Program recipients working in Colorado public schools during the 2025-26 school year was 65% for 2021-22 recipients, 74.4% for 2022-23 recipients, and 79.8% for 2023-24 recipients. Retention rates were higher among more recent cohorts, which is expected because those recipients have had less time to exit the workforce or leave Colorado public schools. Across all three cohorts, 76.4% of ERR recipients remained employed in public schools.

Fiscal Overview

The ERR Program receives an annual appropriation of $5 million. In 2025-26, almost $5.2 million was awarded, and approximately $442,000 was reserved to meet future obligations associated with multi-year awards. Although recipients may only apply once, their awards can be distributed over multiple years. Across all recipients, the average award was $7,798. Average awards varied by pathway, with alternative educator recipients receiving an average of $7,496, compared with $9,523 for TEE recipients and $9,925 for paraprofessional-to-teacher recipients. Due to a change in SBE rule, beginning in 2026-27, the maximum award amount will be $7,500. These differences reflect the varying levels of education and time commitments required to enter the profession. For example, alternative licensure candidates already hold a bachelor's degree and may only need to complete a one-year program. In contrast, paraprofessionals working toward a teaching license often need a bachelor's degree, which may take up to four years to complete.

Participant and LEA Feedback

Survey data from participants and local education agencies indicates the program is meeting its intended goals.

Participant Feedback

- 91% reported that financial assistance was essential to becoming an educator
- 62% reported they would not have become an educator without the program

- 99% reported that the program had a positive impact on their career

Local Education Agency Feedback

- 97% agreed ERR Program participants were needed in their schools
- 93% reported participants were valuable to their districts
- 76% reported improved or stable class sizes due to ERR Program participants

Recommendations

Pursuant to C.R.S. 22-60.3-205(1)(h), the Department provides the following recommendations:

- Continue investment in the ERR Program to address ongoing educator shortages.
- Consider expanding the State Board of Education's authority to establish funding priorities that target certain applicant groups that are consistently underfunded, such as rural school districts or candidates pursuing a particular licensure pathway.
- Consider allowing applicants to apply for financial assistance more than once, up to the maximum allowable award of $7,500. Under multi-year awards, a portion of each future year's appropriation must be set aside to cover commitments already made. Annual awards would remove the need for those reserves, making more funding available to new and returning applicants each year.

Conclusion

The Educator Recruitment and Retention Financial Assistance Program continues to be an effective strategy for addressing Colorado's educator shortages. The program reduces financial barriers for educators, supports service in shortage areas, and helps build a more diverse educator workforce. Demand for assistance continues to exceed available funding. Strong retention rates and positive participant and employer feedback indicate the program is meeting its intended outcomes. Continued investment would allow the program to serve more educators and further strengthen Colorado's educator workforce.

Contact Information

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APPENDIX A: Count of Recipients by Shortage Area

Shortage Area	Count of Recipients
Agriculture and Natural Resources	5
Business/Marketing	7
Computer Science	1
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education	1
Drama Theater Arts	3
Early Childhood Education	22
Early Childhood Special Education	22
Elementary Education	157
English Language Arts	44
Family and Consumer Sciences	1
Health	3
Industrial Arts/Technology Education	4
Mathematics	51
Music	14
Physical Education	20
Rural (SSP)	2
Rural (Teacher)	15
School Counselor	22
School Social Worker	1
School Speech-Language Pathologist	1
Science	51
Social Studies	23
Special Education Generalist	164
Special Education: Deaf and Hard of Hearing	1
Visual Arts	16
World Languages	12
Grand Total	**663**

Note: Rural SSP and Rural Teacher indicate that the recipient will remain in a rural school district for their three-year commitment.