

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION

Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework



COLORADO
Department of Education

Design pathways to provide students with clearly defined opportunities to customize their education to meet their unique needs and circumstances and gain real-world knowledge, skills, and experiences leading to high school and postsecondary success.

Pathways are structured academic and work based learning opportunities that increase the relevance and alignment of learning experiences to student interests and postsecondary education and workforce skills and goals by providing targeted and personalized instructional and learning programs. This can include pathways for students who are missing previous learning. Developing multiple pathways requires programs, schools, or systems that are tailored to student interest, postsecondary education and workforce opportunity, and community need. Pathways are intended to increase opportunities for success by providing students with options and increase agency in their own learning through rigorous, relevant, and supportive approaches to learning.

Pathways build personalized experiences and make real-life connections between school and career options. Sometimes a pathway is a sequence of courses, sometimes it is applied learning opportunities within the same course, and sometimes it connects students with real-life or skills-based learning outside the classroom. Regardless of structure, all pathways should provide rigorous instruction and include core principles of student success, such as positive relationships with caring adults, quality instruction, opportunities to engage in learning experiences that connect life beyond school, as well as support and resources to help students explore postsecondary education and workforce options. Pathway programs in Colorado include: [Career and Technical Education](#) (courses and certifications); [Work-based Learning](#) (job opportunities and work training); [Innovative Learning Opportunities](#) Pilot Program (blend of in-person, off-campus, or outside of the classroom opportunities); [Concurrent Enrollment](#); [Early College High School](#); [Colorado P-TECH](#); [Online and Blended Learning](#); and [Alternative Education](#) programs or schools

In designing pathways, districts need to align to Colorado graduation requirements and should refer to and discuss local board policy with district leadership. In Colorado, three specific requirements are outlined in state statutes and board rules. All other graduation requirements are determined by local school board policy. The three requirements are:

- Civics: All students receiving a diploma must pass one [course in civics](#).
- [Holocaust and Genocide Studies](#): All students receiving a diploma must pass one course that incorporates Holocaust and genocide studies.
- [Graduation Guidelines](#): All students receiving a diploma must demonstrate readiness for college and career based on at least one measure in reading, writing, and communicating; and one measure in mathematics.



How Multiple Pathways to Graduation Support Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement

- Programs and curricula targeted at increasing the relevance of school can help prevent disengagement and reconnect students with relevant content (Rose & Bowen, 2021).
- Pathways that are connected to postsecondary career and education opportunities engage students in learning and provide a clear path after graduation (Dougherty, 2021; Heinrich, 2021; NCES, 2013; U.S. Ed, 2019).
- Multiple pathways can be leveraged as a schoolwide approach as well as serve as an intervention for individual students (Gottfried & Plasman, 2018; Phelps & Chan, 2016; Stipanovic et al., 2017).
- For students who are behind, pathways can provide a clear direction and needed scaffolds for high school and secondary success (Frost, 2016; Rix, 2022).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *Multiple Pathways to Graduation Research Synthesis*

Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation strategy.

Strengthen Foundational Practices. The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guide districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

Develop Multiple Pathways. Districts can provide multiple pathways to graduation. Some pathways may be more universal and aimed at redesigning systems to meet the needs of large groups of students (e.g., career and technical education (CTE) pathways, academy structures, or alternative education programs or schools), while other pathways may work in current structures (e.g., work-based learning, innovative learning options, theme-based courses or course sequences, college credit in high school, career planning).

Using data (including needs assessments) as a guide, district leaders can develop pathways that allow students to customize their education to meet their unique needs and circumstances while accessing relevant experiences in which they gain real-world knowledge and skills. For example:

- CTE programs or other real-world learning experiences may provide direct skill-building opportunities that keep students engaged or to reengage students who would otherwise drop out.
- Schools and districts may consider flexible scheduling, including evening and weekend classes and work-based learning credit, to recognize students who are working and keep them engaged in learning.
- Schools and districts may build programs for career exploration and planning to help students better understand options, identify goals, and create plans for success.
- Schools and districts may build schools (e.g., career academies, early college whole school model) or programs to help students who are behind in credits.

When developing and implementing pathway programs, it is important for districts and schools to consider the needs of their special populations including, but not limited to, differently abled students, pregnant or parenting teens, homeless students, or students who have been incarcerated. When schools and districts provide students with options, students may then customize their education pathway to meet their unique needs and circumstances and gain real-world knowledge, skills, and experiences.

Connect Students to Appropriate Pathways. Districts and schools will also need to design systems to connect students to the appropriate pathways and to ensure that student's previous learning doesn't entirely limit their future access opportunities. CDE's [Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness](#) (PWR) provides supports and resources to help schools work through the personalization of a pathway through high school and to college and/or career for each student.

A key resource to help connect students to relevant pathways is the use of an [Individual Career and Academic Plan](#) (ICAP). The ICAP process guides students and families in the exploration of career, academic, and postsecondary opportunities. The [PWR Playbook](#) includes key guidance, examples, and resources to support districts and schools in

Implementation Considerations

- Strengthen Foundational Practices
- Develop Multiple Pathways
- Connect Students to Appropriate Pathways

Implementation Tools and Resources

- [Competency-Based Learning School-Design Rubric](#)
- [What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition](#)
- [Work-Based Learning Implementation Guide](#)
- [Career and Technical Education: An Evidence-Based Dropout Prevention Strategy](#)

implementing the ICAP process, including a [searchable database](#) of tools and resources developed by Colorado districts and schools. In addition to using ICAP as a universal strategy to support students in exploring personalized pathways through high school, districts and schools should also leverage existing systems such as EWS and MTSS to proactively identify students who may be in need of additional supports, and to explore whether alternative pathways may be appropriate and effective in meeting their needs.

Equitable Implementation of Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Implementing multiple pathways to graduation that are focused on producing equitable student outcomes requires strategic and intentional planning to target the unique needs of students. School communities need to collaborate and problem solve in determining student needs and finding solutions to fit those needs. Multiple pathways to graduation include programming that is regularly reviewed and modified for a student's unique situation from year to year.

To support equitable implementation of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation strategy, districts and schools can consider the strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

Equity in Access. What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure students have equitable access to and participate in available pathways?

- Develop inclusive recruitment strategies in partnership with students and families.
- Prioritize positive student and family outreach that includes focusing on groups that have not previously participated.
- Set clear participation targets.
- Intentionally and seamlessly integrate ICAP in school curriculum beginning as early as the sixth grade.
- Analyze policies and build in planning process such as ICAP to ensure that all students have access, even those with previous low performance.

Equity in Representation. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure student representation across pathways reflects the demographics of the overall student population?

- Collect and routinely examine participation data for over- and under-representation of student groups and engage students to capture input about barriers to access and engagement.
- Examine data from early warning systems to determine appropriate interventions based on root cause that targets increasing participation and engagement of traditionally marginalized students and provides multiple entry points for students.
- To the extent possible, avoid ability tracking or grouping students in ways that will result in de facto segregated pathways (e.g., specific subgroups of students overrepresented in college-bound pathways).

Equity in Quality. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure students are provided high-quality experiences in these pathways that are meaningful, meet rigorous standards, and adequately prepare students for college and/or career?

- Develop clear standards, expectations, and support for pathway experiences.
- Collect and routinely examine data from employers and community partners about pathway experiences.
- Collect data from students about pathway experiences.

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