STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Colorado teachers and education support professionals are on the front lines of education every day. We became educators because we care deeply about our students’ future and we are committed to each student’s success.

We believe that the only way to guarantee our students’ success is to put our students at the center: the center of our classrooms and our schools, the center of education reforms, and the center of attention in every conversation about public education.

We believe our students learn best when the expectations for all students are high and when our students’ families and communities support students, schools, and educators.

We believe that everyone is accountable for students’ success in school – teachers, support staff, school administrators, parents, businesses, elected officials, and students themselves. Shared accountability includes an understanding that:

- In these rapidly changing times, ensuring that every student has a quality education requires more from all of us. Teaching and learning cannot occur just in the classroom.
- Students’ academic success requires an effective partnership that holds everyone accountable.
- Parents are a child’s first teacher. Parents must ensure that their children come to school ready to learn by teaching them values, such as responsibility and respect for others, and they must inspire their children to have a love of learning.
- Students must be motivated to work hard and reach their full potential.
- Communities must engage in and support their neighborhood schools.
- Citizens and elected officials must provide schools with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

We believe that everyone is accountable for students’ success in school: teachers, educational support professionals, school administrators, parents, elected officials, and students themselves.
For Colorado to be a state of opportunity for its citizens, we must start with public education. It is imperative that every Colorado student gets off to a firm start in the journey to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to graduate from high school and be ready for a globally competitive career or postsecondary education. Everything builds on this foundation.

We understand that we must prepare our students for 21st century success. Our students and their parents, future employers, and the public expect this. Colorado’s economic vitality and our quality of life depend on a well-educated, well-prepared workforce.

**Early Childhood Preparation:** A high-quality education in a child’s early years is essential for the child’s success in school and in life. Students who complete preschool and kindergarten are more likely to graduate from high school and be prepared to enter college or the workforce. Early education provided by licensed preschool teachers is essential, and fully-funded preschool and full-day kindergarten are worthy investments in every school district.

**Literacy:** All students can succeed in school if they have strong foundational skills. The ability and skill to read, understand, interpret, and apply information are the most important foundational skills. A student’s proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening are the starting points for learning all other academic content.

**Mathematics:** All students benefit from having strong mathematics skills. Learning mathematics develops one’s practical, life-long skills in logic, reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving. Strong math skills are necessary in many careers, including those in science, engineering, technology, music, and art. Everyone uses math skills to some degree, whether they own a small business or need to solve a math problem at home.

**Higher-Order Thinking Skills:** Students must master a diverse set of critical and creative thinking skills to succeed in our knowledge-based, technology-driven economy. Higher-order thinking skills beyond knowledge and comprehension are important 21st century skills for every student; these include application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. Every student needs to learn creative thinking skills, such as flexibility, originality, and fluency, which can stimulate curiosity and initiative and help one learn how to manage change and adapt.

― Kristin Donley, High School Science
Boulder Valley Education Association
SUPPORT FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Only a multi-dimensional public education system will meet the diverse needs of all Colorado students and their families and communities. Advancing this system requires a student-centered environment which educates the whole child and allows for individual experiences and interests to drive students’ learning opportunities.

Class Size: The number of students competing for a teacher’s attention directly impacts student learning. It has been well-documented for years that smaller, more intimate schools and classroom settings produce better learning environments, most especially in the early grades. A smaller class allows a teacher to assess individual students’ learning needs and styles and focus instruction and feedback accordingly. Small classes help students get more individual attention, more interaction with their teacher and other students, and learn more quickly. While the teacher-to-student ratio differs among grade levels and subjects, flexible scheduling and grouping students based on individual learning needs can help optimize class sizes. Smaller class sizes will predict better performance because teachers can readily assess student progress and intervene quickly to deliver the customized instruction necessary for deep learning by students with differing levels of ability, development, and interests.

A Comprehensive, Well-Rounded Education: When graduation rates increase, Colorado’s economy and its families and communities flourish. An effective strategy to increase Colorado’s high school graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate is grounded in understanding students’ learning needs and interests.

Students are less likely to drop out of high school when they can pursue a well-rounded education that includes elective courses in vocational training, foreign language, and the arts, along with generous offerings of athletics, clubs, and extracurricular activities.

A “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching does not address students’ diverse learning needs, particularly at the high school level. Students are less likely to drop out of high school when they have the opportunity to pursue a different pathway to a high school diploma while achieving the same proficiencies as students in traditional classrooms. Multiple pathways to graduation may include blended learning, a combination of online and face-to-face teaching and learning, vocational courses, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs, International Baccalaureate programs, specialized schools for the arts, evening school, and customized programs for individual students.

“Education Support Professionals consider ourselves educators. In my school, we are all involved in our students’ academic success, from custodians and paraprofessionals, to a food service worker and a health technician. Our engagement with students reinforces the important roles that we provide in supporting our schools and helping students learn.”

– Judy Near, Health Technician
Canon City Education Support Professionals Association
Expanded Learning Opportunities: Educators are thoughtful about expanding learning opportunities that may alter the traditional school day and school year to address the needs of all students. Educators are adapting their instruction to address the reality of how, when, and where students learn in the fast-paced world of technology. Educators will continue to explore options at the school and district level to expand and deepen students’ learning opportunities through programs such as after-school programs, summer school, and online learning programs that complement the school day and provide enrichment that enhances student learning. Partnerships with school-community groups and finding ways to engage families in the educational experience provide students with academic enrichment, involvement in their communities, and opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Data and Assessments: Educators must combine various types of data to create rich analyses of their students’ learning. Data must include multiple measures of achievement data from state assessments, interim achievement tests for benchmarking, curriculum-based assessments, classroom activities, students’ daily work, quizzes, and performance on informal tasks. Other data are demographic and behavioral metrics to help educators learn about students’ background, attendance, mobility, and social and behavioral issues.

Formative assessment is part of the instructional process and, when incorporated into teaching, it can provide information to both teachers and students about student learning at a point when adjustments can be made to help ensure students achieve. Formative assessment helps a teacher determine “next steps” during the learning process and provides students with descriptive feedback before the more final summative assessment.

Students must be involved in authentic formative assessment as critics of their own learning and as resources to fellow students. Research shows that involvement in and ownership of their learning engages students and increases their motivation to learn.

Intervention: Intervention is an important support because the sooner the teacher detects and remedies a student’s learning deficiency, the quicker the student’s learning needs are met. Intervention specialists provide an important service that augments the work of classroom teachers. They are able to help many students, including those who are learning English, have special learning needs, or benefit from help in a particular subject, such as reading.

Longitudinal Growth: Colorado’s model for student performance measures growth over time and provides schools, districts, and the state data to analyze student and school performance in a more complete view. A growth-based model that assesses student learning and performance over relevant time periods provides the optimal, most enduring measure of student achievement.