



Joint Budget Committee Staff

# Memorandum

To: Joint Budget Committee Members  
From: Amanda Bickel, JBC Staff (303-866-4960)  
Date: Monday, April 28, 2025  
Subject: [New RFI for CDE – Colorado Empowered Learning Program](#)

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Members of the Joint Budget Committee,

Staff has been asked to present the following proposed new RFI for the Committee's consideration:

Department of Education, School Quality and Support, Schools of Choice, Supplemental On-line Education Services – The Department is requested to work with interested stakeholders to review the adequacy of funding for the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program. As part of this review, the Department is requested to:

- 1 Assess the growth and demand for the program, including participation trends and areas of unmet need.
- 2 Evaluate whether additional funding would enhance the availability, accessibility, and quality of online and blended course offerings and professional development opportunities for educators.
- 3 Examine how the program aligns with state educational goals, including equity in access for underserved populations, workforce readiness, and student outcomes.
- 4 Identify any potential barriers to program expansion and recommend strategies to address them.

The Department is requested to submit a report of its review, along with any recommendations, by November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

## Background

The Colorado Empowered Learning Program is funded through the Supplemental On-line Education Services line item in the Department of Education's School Quality and Support division, Schools of Choice subdivision. This line item is appropriated \$1,220,000 cash funds from the State Public School Fund for FY 2025-26.

Pursuant to H.B. 06-1008 [Section 22-5-119, C.R.S.], this program provides funding to ensure that supplemental on-line courses are affordable for school districts, BOCES, and charter schools. This line item provides funding to the Colorado River BOCES (formerly part of the Mountain BOCES) to contract with a supplemental on-line course provider to offer on-line courses at a cost of no more than \$200 per student per semester course. This is subject to

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available appropriations. The source of funding is federal mineral lease revenues that are credited to the State Public School Fund.

For FY 2007-08 through FY 2015-16, the General Assembly annually appropriated \$480,000 cash funds for this purpose. The enactment of H.B. 16-1222 (Supplemental Online and Blended Learning Resources) increased the appropriation to \$960,000 in FY 2016-17. The General Assembly increased the appropriation to \$1,020,000 for FY 2017-18 and further increased the appropriation to \$1,220,000 in FY 2018-19. The Colorado River BOCES contracts with providers for courses and to provide professional development opportunities for districts and schools.

The Colorado River BOCES has reported significant increases in enrollment in this program since 2015, with course enrollments increasing from 432 in FY 2015-16 to 3,352 courses in FY 2019-20 to 11,943 course provided in FY 2021-22. JBC staff has previously observed that this program model is a cost-effective way to ensure that schools – particularly rural school districts – are able to purchase on-line courses to supplement their course offerings and help students comply with higher education admission guidelines.