



COYAC
Colorado Youth Advisory Council

Memo

TO: Legislators and Staff
Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee

FROM: Sarah E. Moss, MPA, Director; and Brenda Morrison, Program Manager
Colorado Youth Advisory Council

DATE: July 31, 2024

SUBJECT: 2024 policy proposals for interim committee

On behalf of the students of the 2023-24 Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC), we are pleased to submit their policy proposals and representatives for the 2024 interim committee.

2024 interim committee members and presenters

Committee members

- Alex Fabbri, Senate District 4
- Ranye Ezenekwe, Senate District 17
- Alternate: Ashna Shah, Senate District 18
- Suyash Shrestha, Senate District 24
- Alternate: Rohan Kotwal, Senate District 30
- Irene Kim, Senate District 32
- Adalee Campbell, At-Large

Additional students presenting

- Makena James, Senate District 8
- Sophie Tipper, Senate District 16
- Pragna Yalavarthy, Senate District 19
- Peter Hollywood, Senate District 23
- Cate Preece, Senate District 26
- Kate Glover, At-Large
- Mia Portillo, alum

2023-24 COYAC members

Bold = executive committee

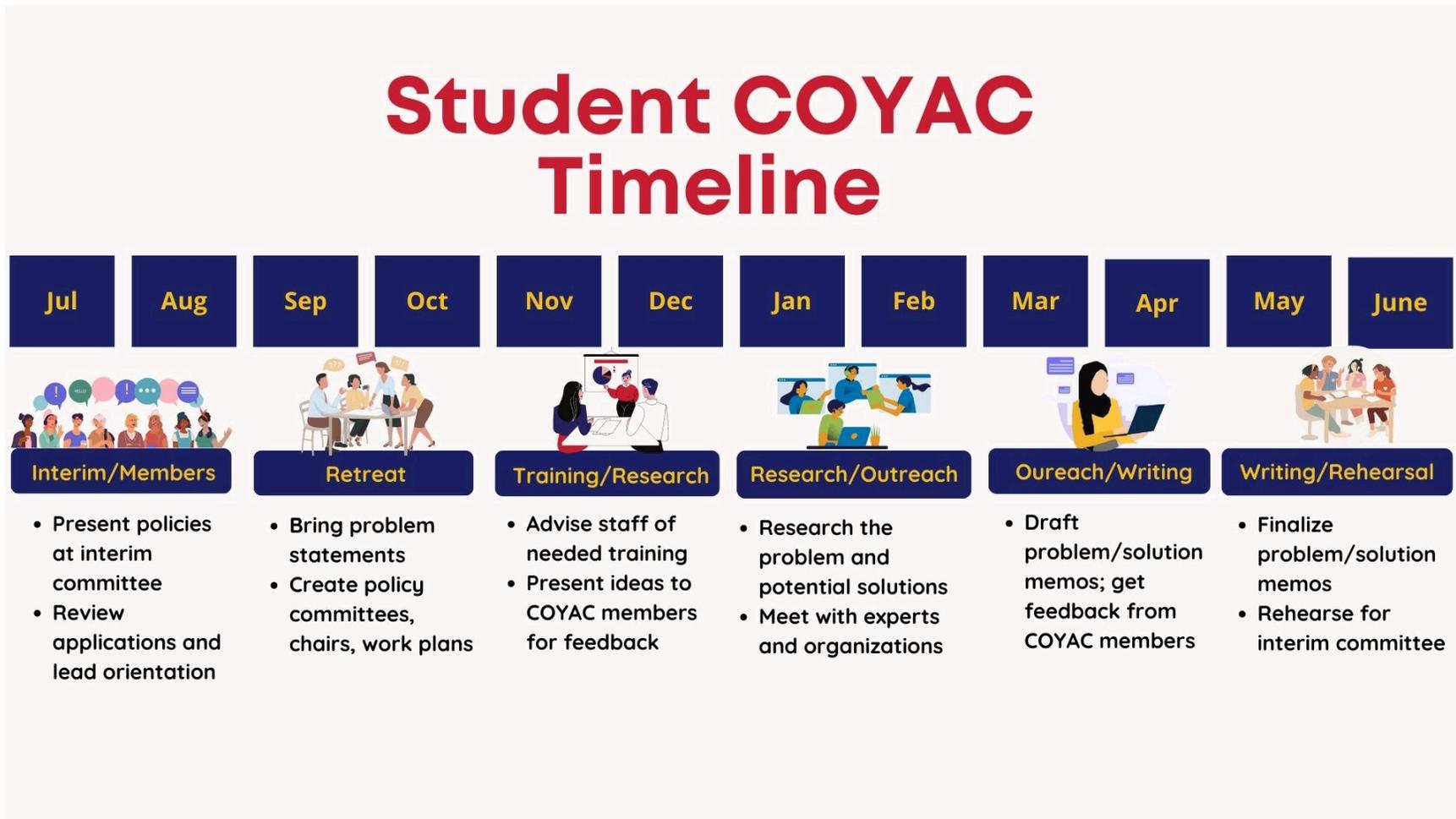
- Braylon Bruns, Senate District 1
- **Mason Evans (he/him), Senate District 3**
- Alex Fabbri, Senate District 4
- **Jessica Buser (she/her), Senate District 6**
- Makena James, Senate District 8
- **Reese Van Dyke, Senate District 9**
- Adalee Campbell, Senate District 11
- **Meghan Taylor (she/her), Senate District 12, and representative to the Colorado Suicide Prevention Commission**
- Kate Glover, Senate District 14
- Addy Frahm, Senate District 15
- Sophie Tipper, Senate District 16
- Ranye Ezenekwe, Senate District 17
- Ashna Shah, Senate District 18
- **Eileen Farrell, Senate District 20**
- Erick Nieves, Senate District 22
- Peter Hollywood, Senate District 23
- Suyash Shrestha, Senate District 24
- **Siddharth Nareddy, Senate District 25**
- Ava Safavi, Senate District 26
- Mbone Elango, Senate District 27
- Rohan Kotwal, Senate District 30
- **Cami Sample, Senate District 31**
- Irene Kim, Senate District 32
- Mia Portillo, Senate District 33
- **Cate Preece, At-Large 1**

COYAC staff

- Director: Sarah E. Moss, MPA
- Program Manager: Brenda Morrison
- 2023 Summer Assistant: Mason Evans
- 2023 Summer Assistant: Leigh Schmidt
- 2024 Summer Assistant: Meghan Taylor

Process

Students lead the COYAC policy work. During Fiscal Year 2023-24, COYAC students discussed dozens of problems, divided themselves into committees, and conducted research and outreach. The policy memos on the following pages contain their viewpoints, research, outreach, and writing.



As the students generate the policy ideas, COYAC staff supports the students similarly to the way Legislative Council staff supports legislators. COYAC staff provides:

- Training on government roles and structures, nonpartisanship, the policy process, and research methods
- Timelines, work plans, and leadership coaching
- Templates and examples
- Recommendations for research sources and outreach meetings
- Planning and logistics for virtual meetings and in-person meetings including a fall retreat, spring day at the State Capitol, and summer awards & senior send-off dinner
- Public speaking training and rehearsals

In 2023-24, COYAC students formed committees to:

- Review applications from new members
- Serve as small group leaders/mentors to welcome new members
- Lead COYAC as an executive committee
- Research and address four policy issues affecting youth: Environmental Action, Healthcare, Substance Abuse, and Transportation

On the following pages are the students' policy proposals:

- Healthcare Committee
 - [Increasing Accessibility in School Buildings](#)
 - [Increasing Health Literacy for Youth](#)
- Transportation Committee
 - [Piloting Innovative Options for School Transportation](#)
- Environmental Action Committee
 - [Funding Solar Panels for Schools](#)
 - [Adding Youth Representatives to the Environmental Justice Advisory Board](#)
 - [Educating Youth on the Transition to Renewable Energy](#)
 - [Reducing Food Waste in Schools](#)
- Substance Abuse Policy Committee
 - [Distributing Naloxone to Prevent Overdoses](#)



Healthcare Committee

1: Increasing Accessibility in School Buildings

Background

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – The ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in many areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and many public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life.¹

Inclusive – Individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in every aspect of life to the fullest extent possible²

Accessible – Refers to a site, facility, work environment, service, or program that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, and/or use safely and with dignity by a person with a disability³

¹ *An overview of the Americans with disabilities act.* ADA National Network. (2023, November 28). <https://adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview>

² Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Inclusion and accessibility.* Inclusion and Accessibility | Youth.gov. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/inclusion-and-accessibility#:~:text=Disability%20inclusion%20means%20that%20in%20individuals,community%20living%2C%20and%20service%20learning.>

³ Office of Disability Rights. (n.d.). *Ada 101 - Ada Glossary - legal and practical terms A-B.* ADA 101 - ADA Glossary - Legal and Practical Terms A-B. <https://odr.dc.gov/book/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms>

Disabled ° An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.⁴

Otherring: the act of treating someone as though they are not part of a group and are different in some way⁵

Problem: Schools in Colorado are not fully ADA compliant which creates daily barriers to education for students with disabilities.

Many schools in Colorado are not fully accessible to disabled students and do not meet ADA standards. This non-compliance means that students miss out on important parts of high school, like sitting with peers at events or doing group work in the classroom. A lack of accessibility can also perpetuate othering and prejudice among peers because disabled students aren't able to participate in the full group. The same barriers may stop friends and family members with disabilities from attending their student's events.

These ADA violations range in severity across Colorado. One of the most severe issues is Fairview High School in Boulder, CO which is built diagonally on a hill. This means the main hallway of the school is a sloped ramp-like structure, and its grade is not compliant with ADA standards. If a person isn't able to navigate the sloped hallway, they cannot access most of the classrooms, the library, or other vital parts of the school environment.

⁴ *Guide to disability rights laws*. ADA.gov. (2023, November 14). <https://www.ada.gov/resources/disability-rights-guide/#:~:text=An%20individual%20with%20a%20disability%20is%20defined%20by%20the%20ADA,as%20having%20such%20an%20impairment>

⁵ Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Otherring* | definition in the Cambridge english dictionary. Cambridge English Dictionary . <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/othering>



Figure 1: Fairview’s main hallway which has a steep slope which exceeds the limits set in the ADA. This hallway is the only way to access areas of the school such as the cafeteria and library. As a student with a mobility disability visiting for competition, I could only access a few classrooms through a side entrance. Students and community members with similar access needs would not be able to independently attend events or classes. Even with assistance, there are stairs throughout the school which may completely prevent entry to areas such as the cafeteria. (Image source: The Royal Banner)

Violations of this severity are uncommon, but smaller gaps in accessibility are still harmful to the student experience. Unfortunately, these barriers have not been studied or evaluated at the state level, so we don't have a comprehensive understanding of how much needs to be addressed. However, students from around the state have experienced obstacles in their schools.

I began using a wheelchair in June of 2023, before entering my sophomore year of high school in August. In my experience at Fort Collins High School, I could not independently enter the building for the entire year. FCHS, like many other schools, has heavy exterior doors, and the electronic opening equipment was nonfunctional through the 2023-2024 school year. Despite my conversations with counselors and administrators beginning in August, the door equipment was only repaired on the last day of the school year.

The need for accessibility doesn't end at the door, and ADA violations are present throughout school buildings. A student in Littleton had to fight to have an elevator installed because administrators often forgot to activate the stair lift they needed to attend classes. At another Denver school, a teacher explains that middle school students with mobility-related disabilities can't take a music course, due to the location of the classroom. The school does not have a stair lift or elevator. As an athlete for my school, I changed into practice clothes and uniforms in my car for our 3 month season. My school's locker room has heavy doors and narrow walkways that prevent me from using the facility.

Every student should have reliable access to their school facility, yet, this is not the case in Colorado.

The schools mentioned above are not alone in this issue, as “two-thirds of U.S. public school districts have schools with physical barriers that may limit access for people with disabilities...Barriers, such as a lack of accessible door hardware and steep ramps, can make it challenging for students, teachers, and others with disabilities to use public school facilities.”⁶

Further evaluations are necessary to understand how Colorado impacts the national statistics. This study also does not consider charter schools, which are a major part of the Colorado educational system. However, these schools enroll far fewer disabled students.

“Overall, differences between charters and non-charters tend to be small, with one notable exception: the proportion of students with disabilities has remained lower in charter schools than

⁶ United States Government Accountability Office . (2020, June). School Districts Need Better Information to Help Improve Access for People with Disabilities. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-448.pdf>

it has in other public schools. This enrollment gap has persisted at approximately 4.8 percentage points since 2016-17 despite efforts to close it.”⁷

Colorado’s difference in this proportion is one of the largest across the nation. While a common assumption is that a charter school does not have to provide accommodations, these institutions fall under Title III of the ADA, and “as a public school, must comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and any state special education laws.”⁸ All students should have a full array of options for attending school, but students at charter schools face barriers to access due to a lack of knowledge and compliance about required accessibility.

Solution: Colorado should establish a program for schools to be audited for ADA compliance.

Schools cannot effectively understand and fix ADA violations without an inspection that addresses them. By implementing an audit program, schools will be able to recognize their gaps in accessibility and have a more comprehensive understanding of their building. This measurement will also fill a gap in data, and provide a baseline for future accessibility improvements.

The state should hire or create a team of building inspectors (specifically trained for ADA compliance) to conduct these audits. Having a state-level team would be more cost effective to schools, and allow accessibility to be measured comprehensively. This team of inspectors would be similar to programs such as Facility Insights, but focus on compliance with Title II and Title III ADA requirements, and the [2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#). Differentiating electronic and mechanical equipment into categories such as not present, not functional, or present and functional will also be a crucial part of this process.

Options for establishing this team include expanding current Facility Insights operations, creating auditor positions in the Colorado Disability Opportunity Office, or contracting with a third party. The American Institute of Architects would be able to assist with some of the logistics for hiring auditors.

⁷ Kottenstette, B., & Skalla, J. (2024). State of Charter Schools Report 2019-2023. Colorado Department of Education. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/2019charterschoolsreport>

⁸ Colorado Charter Schools Frequently asked questions | CDE. (n.d.) <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/faq>

By establishing a specific team or project to conduct audits at the state level, we streamline the financial and oversight process of creating this program.

Audits would allow for proactive repairs and improvements to schools. The current method of ADA enforcement is reactive, meaning a student must face an access barrier before it gets repaired. Working with administrators at schools can be an extensive process, and a formal ADA complaint can take up to 3 months to be reviewed.⁹ After working through the initial complaint process (informally with the school, or formally), repairs to accessibility still take time to be put in place. With the reactive method, some access improvements don't take place before the student has aged out of that particular school. Reactive methods can also lead to large fines, penalties, or lawsuits against school districts. On the other hand, proactive repairs would prevent many formal complaints or lawsuits while providing equal access to schools.

If schools are audited, they gain a better understanding of their facility and can make changes before a student experiences barriers to education. This solution also allows historical schools to be evaluated, as the ADA may not have existed at the time of their construction. While 100% compliance may not be a structural possibility in historical schools, audits would give districts the ability to advise and better accommodate students, and highlight areas that could be reasonably improved.

The auditing team should get to as many schools as possible within each year, but this will be a multi-year project due to the size of the Colorado school system. A timeline will heavily depend on the size of the team, and their ability to travel to rural schools.

One option for establishing the scope of this project would be auditing a flat number of schools/districts/year. With 187 districts, this may require a revolving system where some districts are audited in even years, and some are audited in odd years. This would allow all districts to have equal priority, and many smaller districts could be finished in only 1-3 cycles.

Another option for determining which schools are audited first is a priority system based on factors including, but not limited to, the number of students with 504/IEP plans (considering students who may track into the building in upcoming years), years since construction/last renovation, and frequency of noncompliance complaints. While more difficult to implement, this system would target schools more specifically, and increase positive impacts for students who benefit from this program.

Schools should also have the option to be re-evaluated 5-10 years after their initial audit, to evaluate repairs and updated compliance with current design standards. The current Facility

⁹ *File a complaint.* (n.d.). ADA.gov. <https://www.ada.gov/file-a-complaint/>

Insight cycle is 5 years, so ADA audits could be synced with this cycle. However, availability of third party companies or the size of hired staff may impact this schedule. First time audits should take priority over re-evaluations.

An additional audit would be recommended for all schools in the event that new accessible design standards are published.

With these audit results, schools will be able to have a greater understanding of their facilities, and properly advise students and community members. This information will also benefit disabled people across the state, who may need to access it for educational or event purposes.

Schools who are out of compliance will also have the necessary information to create transition plans, which are specific plans to achieve ADA compliance. These plans have been commonly implemented as businesses and public areas improve their accessibility. Transition plans have also been successful in higher education, such as at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign,¹⁰ and include timelines for completion. This allows schools to work in manageable steps, and make improvements as they are able to, instead of having to fix everything at one time. This maintains a good faith, proactive approach to ADA compliance, and schools would be less likely to face legal issues later. Organizations such as the Rocky Mountain ADA Center provide consulting services for transition plans, if districts need additional support.

Auditing and transition plans also reduce a student's need to advocate for their own existence in a space. With ADA violations being addressed and schools meeting more standards, disabled students can easily participate in more school and extracurricular activities. Disabled people gain experiences and opportunities as access barriers are removed which allows students, friends, and families to have a more positive experience with our schools.

The costs of audits and repairs vary considerably from district to district, and even school to school. However, there are many opportunities to provide funding for this project.

Options for Funding

1: Establish an "Equal Access" grant for schools — Washington state also funds an ADA Equal Access grant for school districts through OSPI (the main education oversight and management in the state). This grant is funded through the state legislature ([WA State 2024 Supplemental Capital Budget ESSB 5949, Section 5004 - School District Health & Safety, Subsection \(3\) - Equal Access Grant Funding.](#)). This grant could be flexible in overall amount/frequency of

¹⁰ ADA Transition Plans - Office for Access and Equity (OAE), University of Illinois. (2023, April 5). Office for Access and Equity (OAE), University of Illinois. <https://oae.illinois.edu/ada-transition-plans/>

award, but would provide schools with supplemental funding. Due to an inequity in access to grants and funding, rural districts should be given priority where possible.

The Colorado Disability Funding Committee (moving to: Colorado Disability Opportunity Office) currently administers two grants, as well as the Colorado Department of Education Division of Capital Construction, which works with the BEST grant. Both offices and frameworks would be potential homes for this program.

2: For state-hired auditors, write a budget line to fund the salaries of new ADA auditors and/or provide training to current staff. With the large size of the Colorado educational system, these state employees could work for several years on this project, and having ADA auditors available on a state level would be a versatile resource for many other initiatives. This funding could also be used to hire a private firm or additional third party to conduct the audits. Third party companies would create a faster timeline, but additional state staff members would be less expensive.

In either scenario, if the state has paid these auditors, school districts would not face an expensive bill. This means every school will be able to reap the benefits of this program, regardless of their ability to pay for an evaluation.

3: Funding repairs/post-audit improvements can be done in a number of ways. The Department of Public Safety has specific school safety grants, which could apply to some accessibility updates (such as fire and lockdown alarms, emergency exits, etc.). For other ADA compliance updates, the ADA National Network and several private companies offer grants. Some school districts may be in the position to fund repairs themselves.

Ultimately, funding audits and repairs in advance will be financially beneficial in the long run. ADA noncompliance complaints can result in large fines and penalties, and any lawsuit will add legal fees to the existing costs.

*Options exist beyond the ones listed here. These are a few starting points, but we have many different opportunities to provide funding and support to schools during this process.

Problem: Schools do not publish accessibility information.

On a typical school website, there is information about registration, clubs, sports, courses, and almost every important part of a school day. However, information about accessibility – such as how to get and use accommodations, where ramps and elevators are located, and which activities

are (in)accessible – isn't presented anywhere.¹¹ This means that many disabled students have to work much harder to gain information, and it creates uncertainties for these students around their entire school experience.

A high school student from Cheyenne Mountain (Colorado Springs) had to undergo another round of testing to re-document their disabilities, or their accommodations would not be provided at school. This was a requirement they hadn't had any warning of when they transferred, due to a lack of published policies or information. This student is just one of many facing the consequences of low transparency. "The majority of Colorado charter schools' websites (61%) lack descriptions of how they enroll students with disabilities—thereby presenting an opportunity to quickly improve outreach that may have otherwise been unintentionally overlooked. Similarly, 63% of Colorado charter schools' websites lack pages about or descriptions of how they educate students with disabilities"¹²

Schools of all types across the state fail to provide crucial and comprehensive information about accessibility. While able-bodied students are able to evaluate schools, and quickly sign up for classes, clubs, and activities, a lack of accessibility disclosures prevents disabled students from doing the same.

Joining academic or athletic teams can be challenging, especially if travel is involved in competitions. Athletic and academics rarely have published information about lighting, bathroom facilities, path material, or even entering the building. Even art programs, such as band or theater, take additional research for a disabled student to join. While an able-bodied student could apply for any stage crew they wanted, a disabled student has to meet with directors and teachers to get information about the environment and accommodations that can be made. Being a member of a team or activity is a valuable part of the high school experience, and disabled students should have equal access to the information they need to join these organizations. Attending events, especially away games, can also be difficult. The majority of schools do not publish information about ADA compliance in their stadiums or gyms. While a few gyms have specific ADA seating in the bleachers, most do not, meaning some students aren't able to join the group. Some auditoriums have lighting along seating rows, while others do not, which can be a determining factor for navigating a space.

The presence or lack of access features is make or break for disabled community members, but schools do not publish this information. This means that disabled students or family members

¹¹ Example: <https://fah.bvsd.org/students/disabilities>

¹² Shared Responsibility, Shared Accountability: An Analysis of Enrollment of Students with Disabilities in Colorado's Charter School Sector. (2020). *National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools*. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/nationalcenterreport2020>

have to put in hours of extra work, through emails, phone calls, and even driving several hours to unfamiliar venues, just to see if they could attend an event or participate in an activity. On the other hand, students without disabilities are simply able to attend and participate. The lack of public information creates inequities, extra work, and anxieties for the disabled community.

Solution: All schools must make their accessibility features and audit results public on the school or district website.

Making accessibility information publicly available, disabled community members are more informed about their options. Publishing audit results can alert disabled people to barriers that may impact them, and publishing a transition plan will help disabled students with their long-term planning or decision-making. Accessibility graphics, disclaimers, or lists are a great way to showcase where ramps and elevators are, list any particularly loud/quiet areas, and the location of other resources or spaces a disabled person may need to be aware of. While schools may have concerns about security, this requirement would not require a schematic of the school or compromise any information. Accessibility can be shared by means of:

- Showing how to get to accessible entrances (if different from the main entrance) with a satellite map of the surrounding area, and a highlighted route.
- Specifically noting different seating arrangements on athletic/performing arts websites (i.e. wheelchair accessible seating is available in rows 1 and 2, an interpreter will be available in section A, etc.), and noting what seating options are NOT available
- A chart or table explaining what building features are present. (Yes/no notations for elevators, door opening hardware, visual alarms, etc.)
- Writing out the location of different accessibility services, (i.e. a sensory room is available in the library, a service animal relief area is outside the west doors, etc.)

This is not an exhaustive list of options for schools, but sharing information through these methods still preserves the safety of the facility. No internal schematics would be required to be shared, entrances could all be locked/monitored with the same methodology, and exterior images don't reveal sensitive information.

Knowing about the items listed above (and more) would be helpful for disabled people in many different situations.

For students using the school of choice program, they would be able to see if needed accessibility features are available at a school. This would remove a lot of the “shot in the dark” risks that disabled students currently take when moving schools. In the same vein, disabled students who are moving from middle to high school (or any other level/building switch) would be further prepared for their new environment. Instead of following a lengthy process to see if they can access the facilities in a school, they would be able to visit the website and go over the audit results and accessibility options for their school.

This solution would be beneficial to entire communities, as schools are also used as event and emergency gathering spaces. Student-athletes, debaters, and club members often travel to other schools as part of their extracurricular involvement. Community members who want to attend sporting events, musicals, or competitions also need accessibility information. Having ADA information publicly available helps these people make their travel arrangements, and places less burden on them and/or their organization. By publishing the audit results and accessibility features, everyone is able to ensure they can attend an event. This also gives people the opportunity to recognize barriers to participation, so they can plan additional accommodations or reach out for support beforehand.

By releasing accessibility information, disabled students, friends, family, and community members are all better informed. They have the same decision-making ability as an able-bodied student would. Disabled people in the wider town/city would know if the school is a feasible shelter/post-disaster location, and be able to plan for emergencies. Students would also be more informed about their school environment, and know what to expect. Being able to plan which competitions to enter, which clubs to join, and even which school to attend gives disabled students the same opportunities within the Colorado school system.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we’ve considered include:

- Some schools may worry about security when making exterior adjustments. Additional modifications to door locks or other security features would need to be considered.
- Repairs can be expensive in some cases, so ADA violations may not be resolved for some time.
- Not every school district has a grant writer on staff, which could create inequities in access to funding.

Outreach

While researching and writing this proposal, we reached out to:

Did not respond

* *Responded but declined to discuss our proposal*

Government agencies

State

- Dianne Primavera, Lieutenant Governor of Colorado
- Colorado Department of Education
 - Shelbie Konkel, Senior Legislative Advisor
 - Andy Stine, Director, Division of Capital Construction
- Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Office of Health Equity #
- Colorado Disability Funding Committee: Josh Winker, Coordinator and Senior Policy Advisor on Disability
- Colorado Office of School Safety: Brandi Vos, Crisis Response Specialist

Local

- Thompson Valley School District: Todd Piccone, Chief Operations Officer, – Scheduled for August 5
- Poudre School District: Dave Montoya, Chief Financial Officer #

Organizations that work in this policy area

- Advocates for Children of New York #
- American Institute of Architects: Nikolaus Remus, Advocacy Engagement Director
- Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB): Matt Cook, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
- Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) #
- Colorado Rural School Alliance #
- Colorado School Finance Project #
- Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition: Meeting scheduled
- Disability Law Colorado: Jack Johnson, Public Policy Liaison
- Great Education Colorado
 - Valeria Contreras, Director of Organizing & Partnerships
 - Max Mapes, Great Education Staff Extraordinaire
- PEAK Parent Center
 - Melissa Edwards, Youth Trainer & Mentor
 - Quinna Phillips, Youth Advisory Committee Support
 - Student: Youth Advisory Council

- Poudre School District Facilities Department #
- Poudre School District Student Advisory Council: multiple students and adults
- Rocky Mountain ADA Center: Emily Shuman, Director

Other subject matter experts

- State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
 - Scott Black, ADA Equal Access Grant Program Development Manager
 - Randy Newman, Director of School Facilities and Organization
- Dr. Cathy Bodine, Director, Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering at the University of Colorado Denver

Legislators

- Senator Mark Baisley, Senate District 4 #
- Senator Janice Rich, Senate District 7
- Senator Janice Marchman, Senate District 15
- Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, Senate District 23 #
- Senator Janet Buckner, Senate District 29 #
- Representative Jennifer Bacon, House District 7
- Representative Rose Pugliese, House District 14
- Representative Steph Vigil, House District 16
- Representative Don Wilson, House District 20
- Representative Lindsey Daugherty, House District 24 #
- Representative Meghan Lukens, House District 26
- Representative David Ortiz, House District 38
- Representative Ron Weinberg, House District 51
- Representative Cathy Kipp, House District 52
- Representative Andrew Boesnecker, House District 53
- Representative Ryan Armagost, House District 64

2: Increasing Health Literacy for Youth

Background

Health Literacy – The degree to which people have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.¹³

Youth – School-aged children between the ages of approximately 5 to 18.

Disparity – A lack of equality or similarity, especially in a way that is not fair.

Health Equity Fund – An organization based in the City of Boulder, Colorado, that aims to reduce disparities and improve health equity among at-risk populations, particularly minority and low-income groups.

Health education – Any combination of planned learning experiences using evidence-based practices and/or sound theories that provide the opportunity to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to adopt and maintain healthy behavior.

Problem: Colorado youth lack health literacy, accessibility, and opportunity.

Brandon Salido, a teenager from Colorado, is a living representation of the impacts health education programs can have on the lifestyles of youth in recent years. After being diagnosed with obesity and hypertension, Salido was placed in a weight control program offered at Children's Hospital Colorado.¹⁴ Armed with new techniques that aided with managing a healthy diet, accessing actionable health information, and maintaining an active routine, Salido altered the course of his life and took accountability for his well-being. Now, he is able to run, hike, ski, and take part in an active lifestyle.

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *What is Health Literacy?* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/index.html>

¹⁴ Children's Hospital Colorado. (n.d.). Brandon's New Lifestyle | Children's Hospital Colorado. [Www.childrenscolorado.org](https://www.childrenscolorado.org); Children's Hospital Colorado. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from <https://www.childrenscolorado.org/community/patient-stories/brandon/>

Health education programs not only benefit the health of youth, but also have a prevalent effect on their lifestyle choices over the course of their lives. A study conducted by the Carolina Abecedarian Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that “children enrolled in schools lacking in health resources and teacher support tend to experience poorer physical and mental health.”¹⁵ In Healthy People 2030 — a set of national objectives to improve health and well-being over the next decade — researchers found that children who participated in high-quality early childhood education programs that included healthcare and nutritional components have a lower risk for heart disease and associated risk factors, including obesity, high blood pressure, elevated blood sugar, and high cholesterol by the time they are 30 years old.¹⁶ Although the benefits are seemingly endless for youth, there remains a statewide gap in health literacy rates.

Access to equitable health opportunities and outcomes varies widely depending on age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.¹⁷ Across Colorado, youth are not equitably provided with the ability or knowledge to navigate our complex healthcare system, and simply communicating with doctors can prove difficult. This discrepancy is linked to society’s failure to emphasize health literacy among teens.

¹⁵ Tulane University. (2021, January 27). Social Determinant of Health: Education Is Crucial. [Publichealth.tulane.edu](https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/social-determinant-of-health-education-is-crucial/); Tulane University. <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/social-determinant-of-health-education-is-crucial/>

¹⁶ Healthy People 2030. (n.d.). Early Childhood Development and Education - Healthy People 2030 | health.gov. Health.gov; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/early-childhood-development-and-education#cit13>

¹⁷ Missouri Foundation for Health. (n.d.). Healthy Schools Healthy Communities Initiative Summary. Missouri Foundation for Health. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from <https://mffh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/HSHC-Initiative-Summary.pdf>

County Health Literacy Levels

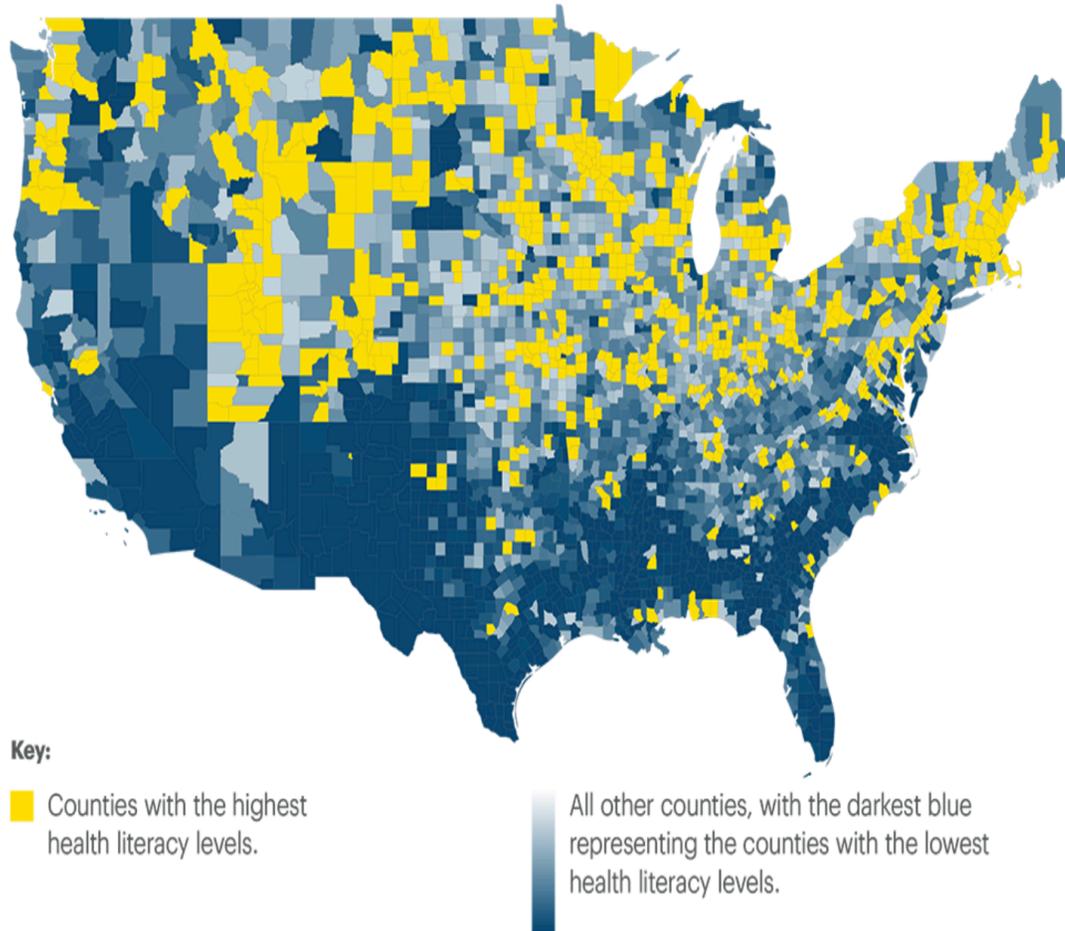


Figure 2: Wide variations in health literacy are profound across individual neighborhoods, cities, and school districts, demonstrating a need to emphasize health literacy education and accessible services amongst youth. From UnitedHealth Group. (2024, February 15). *Health literacy Key to better health outcomes*. <https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/newsroom/research-reports/posts/health-literacy-research-462863.html>.

As seen in Figure 3, adults without health insurance have the lowest rates of health literacy, with these deficits contributing to poorer health outcomes, higher medical costs, and mitigated use of preventive care.¹⁸

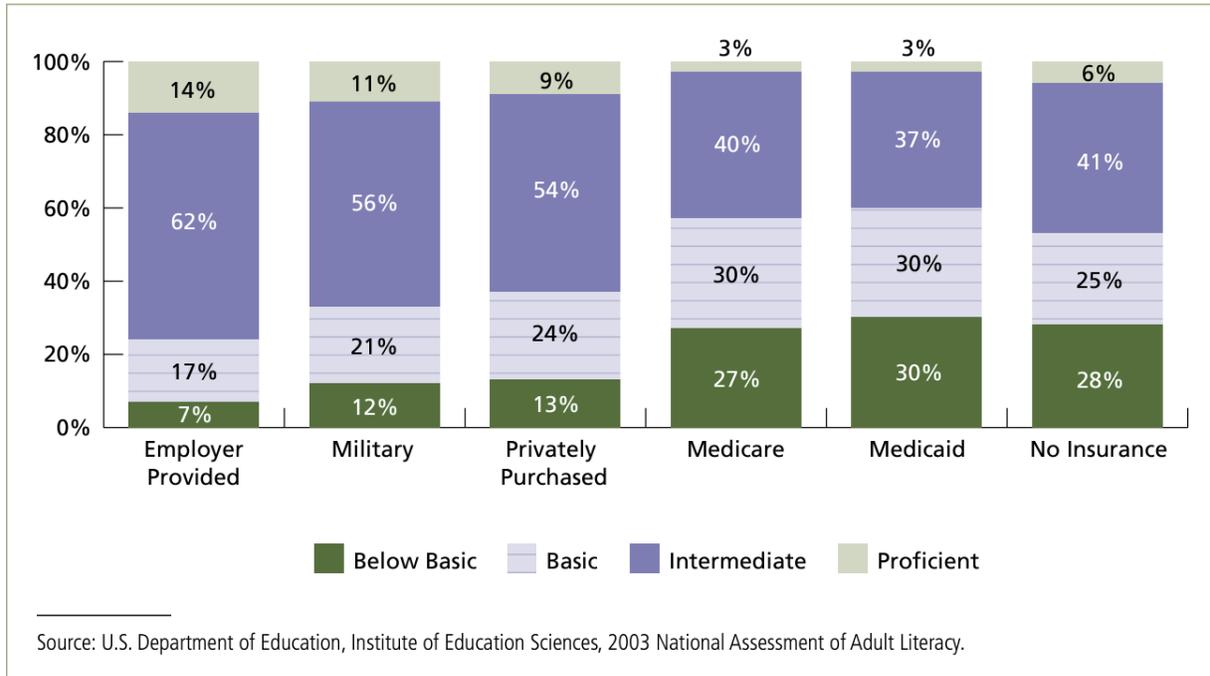


Figure 3: Adults’ Health Literacy, By Type of Health Insurance: 2003. This study, conducted in 2003, indicates a strong correlation between health insurance and health literacy among adults. Individuals without health insurance have greater rates of health illiteracy when compared to those with Medicare, Medicaid, Employer-Provided Insurance, etc. From U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). America’s Health Literacy: Why we need accessible health information. <https://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/health-literacy/dhhs-2008-issue-brief.pdf>.

¹⁸ Harnett, S. (2019). Financial and health insurance literacy: a necessary addition to health literacy programming. *Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet*, 23(2), 168–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15398285.2019.1614844>

Map 1. Probability of Being Uninsured by ZIP Code, Colorado*

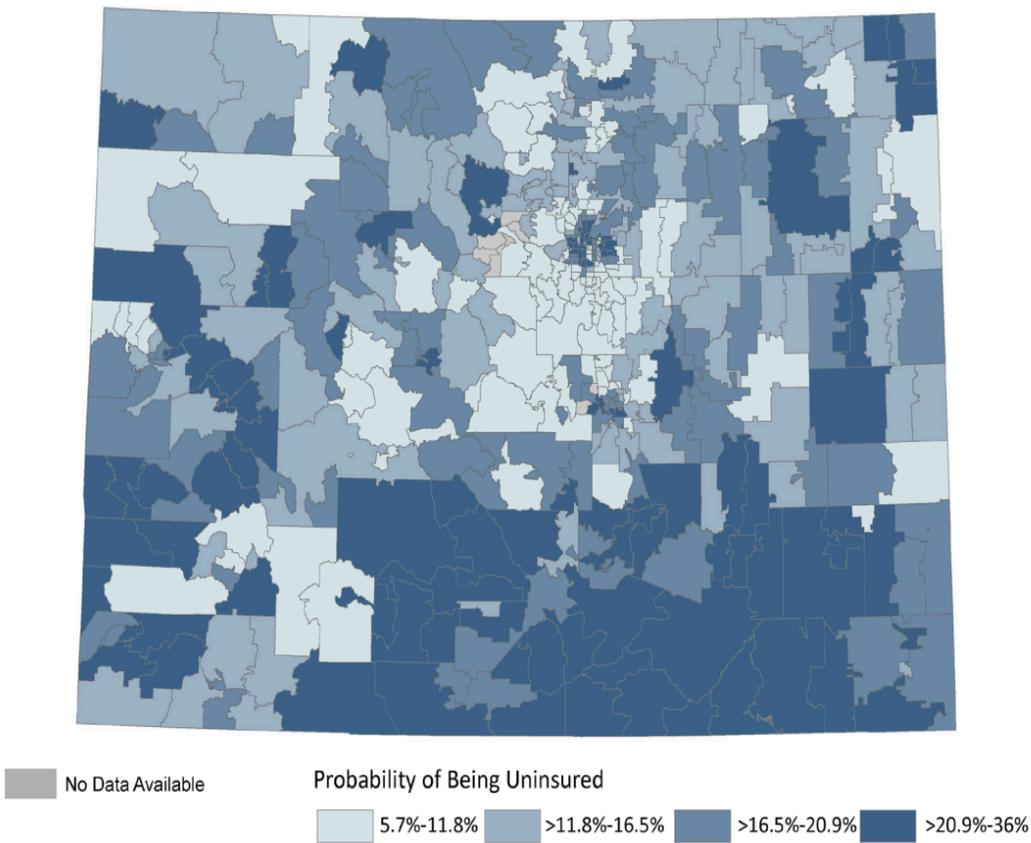


Figure 4: Wide variations in health insurance are profound across individual neighborhoods, cities, and school districts, demonstrating the magnitude of healthcare inequity across the state. High health literacy rates often correspond to having health insurance, indicating a statewide need to expand health promotion services to underserved areas. Colorado towns with the poorest health literacy rates include Sugar City, Rocky Ford, and Pagosa Springs. From Location, location, location: Health insurance by ZIP code in Colorado. (2015). In *Colorado Health Institute*.

https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/sites/default/files/migrated/postfiles/CHAS/CHAS_ZIP_code_analysis_245.pdf.

Problem: Colorado lacks education and educators in health-related subjects.

Nationally, schools have adopted various curriculums that focus on health education. However, within Colorado, health literacy learning programs are not readily available to all. Low health literacy is considered a “silent health epidemic,”¹⁹ leading to serious consequences such as preventable hospitalizations, chronic conditions, poor health, and unhealthy diets.²⁰

A large contributor to these outcomes is the shortage of qualified health educators. Aside from the home, school is the most important place in which students spend a large portion of their time, developing their health attitudes and behaviors. Statewide, among K-12 subject areas, health education has had one of the highest shortage rates by around 2.5 percentage points within recent years.²¹ Thus, schools face challenges in providing adequate instructional content to improve student welfare.

Meanwhile, health illiteracy is a nationally-acknowledged issue. Schools within other states have begun implementing programs that provide frameworks that support access to health education and literacy. In 2016, an Executive Order by Alabama’s governor created the Health Literacy Partnership of Alabama, which was tasked primarily with creating a strategic plan that focused on improving health literacy in Alabama. An initiative that emerged from this partnership aims to break down barriers to health equity and support patient-centered educational opportunities.²²

¹⁹ Jafari, A., Sany, S. B. T., & Peyman, N. (2021). The Status of health literacy in students aged 6 to 18 old Years: A Systematic review study. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v50i3.5584>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alabama Health Literacy Initiative. (n.d.). Alabama Health Literacy Initiative. www.alhealthliteracy.org; The University of Alabama at Birmingham. <https://www.alhealthliteracy.org/>

Problem: Colorado’s standardized health surveys lack questions assessing students’ health literacy, resulting in an inability for the state to gauge the needs of youth.

Current youth-focused standardized health surveys do not account for health literacy, which is essential for youth to navigate healthcare systems beyond adolescence. The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) “is the state’s most comprehensive survey on the health and well-being of young people.”²³ In 2023, the HKCS surveyed 120,239 young people at 344 middle and high schools across Colorado. Survey topics included mental health and suicide, motor vehicle safety, sexual health, etc. While comprehensive, the survey fails to gauge students’ health literacy. For instance, it does not assess whether students can identify the side effects and dosing of over-the-counter (OTC) medication or whether they can read nutrition labels to make good decisions, which would help determine whether they are “health literate.” According to the Children’s Hospital Colorado, “30% of parents had a hard time understanding basic healthcare information and nearly 50% had a hard time understanding medication labels.”²⁴ The lack of data regarding student health literacy levels presents a false understanding of citizens’ healthcare needs, their ability to access preventive care, and capacity to communicate with health professionals about medical conditions. These deficits need to be firmly addressed by the state to enable youth to seek effective channels of health advocacy and become health literate adults.

Solution: Colorado should establish a Health Literacy Oversight Panel to gauge current health literacy deficits, collaborate with government organizations and health professionals, and work with school districts to improve health literacy education.

Colorado should oversee the creation of a Health Literacy Oversight Panel (HLOP), a committee composed of 10-15 individuals committed to improving health literacy statewide. To maintain diversity on the panel, the HLOP should have similar numbers of rural and urban residents, a range of health professionals, various socioeconomic groups and ethnicities, health educators, and youth aged 14-19. Generally speaking, the panel should have 3-5 youth, 7-9 health educators

²³ *2023 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey Results* | Department of Public Health & Environment. (n.d.). <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/prevention-and-wellness/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-information/2023-healthy-kids-colorado-survey>

²⁴ *Health Literacy* | Children’s Hospital Colorado. (n.d.). <https://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/parenting/parenting-articles/health-literacy/>

and professionals, and 1-2 consultants/analysts. HLOP members can serve one or two year terms, and their primary responsibilities will include:

- Proposing and submitting health literacy-focused questions to the HKCS. Such additions may consist of questions that test students' knowledge of various healthcare terms, insurance mechanisms, personal health data analysis techniques (i.e. reading blood test charts), types of medical practitioners, and disease prevention methods.
- Analyzing data from HKCS to formulate recommendations and establish areas for improvement in the realm of health literacy.
- Establishing a multi-year process designed for 6th-12th graders that helps students explore health literacy based on the results of the annual report and the HKCS. Through this self-guided learning platform, students would develop the awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and advocate for their health. They would be provided with numerous informative resources in the form of literature, auditory materials, and visual aids. The resources would be offered in multiple languages and centered in a variety of cultural contexts to increase accessibility. This pathway would cover basic healthcare terms, healthy behaviors, mechanics of policy comparisons, different channels of *accurate* health information, and daily health scenarios. This process would aid students through their education to meet their learning, living, and health goals. In addition, this multi-year journey would encourage students to plan for successful futures while providing them with the tools necessary to navigate the healthcare system.
- Advising the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to revise the Academic Standards in a way that fulfills youth health literacy needs. These changes should help students use digital technologies to access health information, act on public health alerts, and provide resources in a more culturally-relevant context (i.e. rural vs. urban concerns, ethnic health values, social media use, obtaining affordable health insurance). These resources would prepare students for various healthcare scenarios such as which doctor to seek for a sudden migraine, how to dose over-the-counter medications, and where to access medical aid in a rural environment. Additionally, youth should be able to understand the mechanisms behind health disparities in the 21st century and feel empowered to advocate for improved health outcomes not just in a clinical setting, but also through local organizations, volunteer work, and political involvement. This would deepen how the Academic Standards prepare Colorado youth to apply their new skills to make health-enhancing decisions and advocate for both individual and community health.²⁵

²⁵ CDC. (n.d.). *Health Literacy Activities by State | Health Literacy* | CDC. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 25, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/statedata/index.html#Colorado>

- Creating an annual report that highlights health progress within different regions, analyzes HKCS results in depth, incorporates student testimonies, consults health practitioners, etc. This report would be made available to the public, allowing organizations, school boards, and health clinics to better understand and address the needs of youth. Also, this report should be reviewed by the state legislature, especially the Health and Human Services and Education Committees, to instruct future legislation and assess the work of the HLOP.
- Meeting with youth organizations, health professionals, students, parents, faculty, and schools to identify community needs and health literacy gaps.
- Connecting with School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) to strengthen health literacy training, provide developmental resources and support, introduce educational materials surrounding health literacy, and empower students to become health advocates for their communities.
- Hiring a consultant/analyst to perform research, coordination, and drafting for the annual report, serving as a communications liaison between governmental organizations and the HLOP.

If needed, the state can allocate funds to support the HLOP’s goals and subsidize members’ transportation to organizational events, in-person meetings, community workshops, etc. At the end of their term, members should receive a stipend for their contributions to the HLOP.

Solution: Colorado should implement health literacy resources in school-based health centers, providing students with actionable information and tools to advocate for their health beyond adolescence.

In Colorado, school-based health centers (SBHCs) are medical clinics that offer healthcare to children and youth on school grounds.²⁶ These clinics allow students to conveniently access full-time doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and mental health providers. SBHCs are funded by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) and offer:

- Well-child exams
- Sick visits

²⁶ *What is a school-based health center?* | Department of Public Health & Environment. (n.d.). <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/sbhc/what-school-based-health-center>

- Health screenings
- Immunizations
- Mental health and other counseling
- Substance use screening
- Oral health screening
- Reproductive health services
- Classroom/school-wide health education or promotion activities²⁷

The primary benefit of SBHCs is comprehensive accessibility. Due to the wide range of medical services offered, parents and guardians do not have to take time off work and students spend less time away from school. Several elementary, middle, and high schools have SBHCs. To strengthen the efficacy of these clinics, Colorado should add a “health literacy” branch/component into the SBHCs that provide youth with tools to advocate for their health beyond adolescence. Within this area, students would learn about health insurance plan comparisons, public health, common medical scenarios, and health advocacy. This information is quintessential to employing youth with the resources to reduce health literacy barriers as they approach adulthood, creating more resilient and informed communities.

Approximately 45 percent of high school graduates have limited health literacy.²⁸ To reduce this disparity, Colorado should require SBHCs to provide culturally relevant educational tools for students to advocate for their health beyond a clinical setting. Such tools may include a take-home packet that walks students through acquiring health insurance, educational videos that help students analyze medical charts, or a list of doctors in the local area with their specialties. Other forms of education that could reach a broader audience include a health-literacy focused website page, a podcast channel, comic series, or a virtual reality game that takes students through real-life medical experiences. While SBHCs currently offer school-wide health promotion activities, strengthening health literacy learning ensures that education, and not just medical treatment, becomes a priority. Depicted below are maps of SBHCs funded by the CDPHE within Colorado.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2010). *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy*. https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Health_Literacy_Action_Plan.pdf

School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) By Urban and Rural Counties

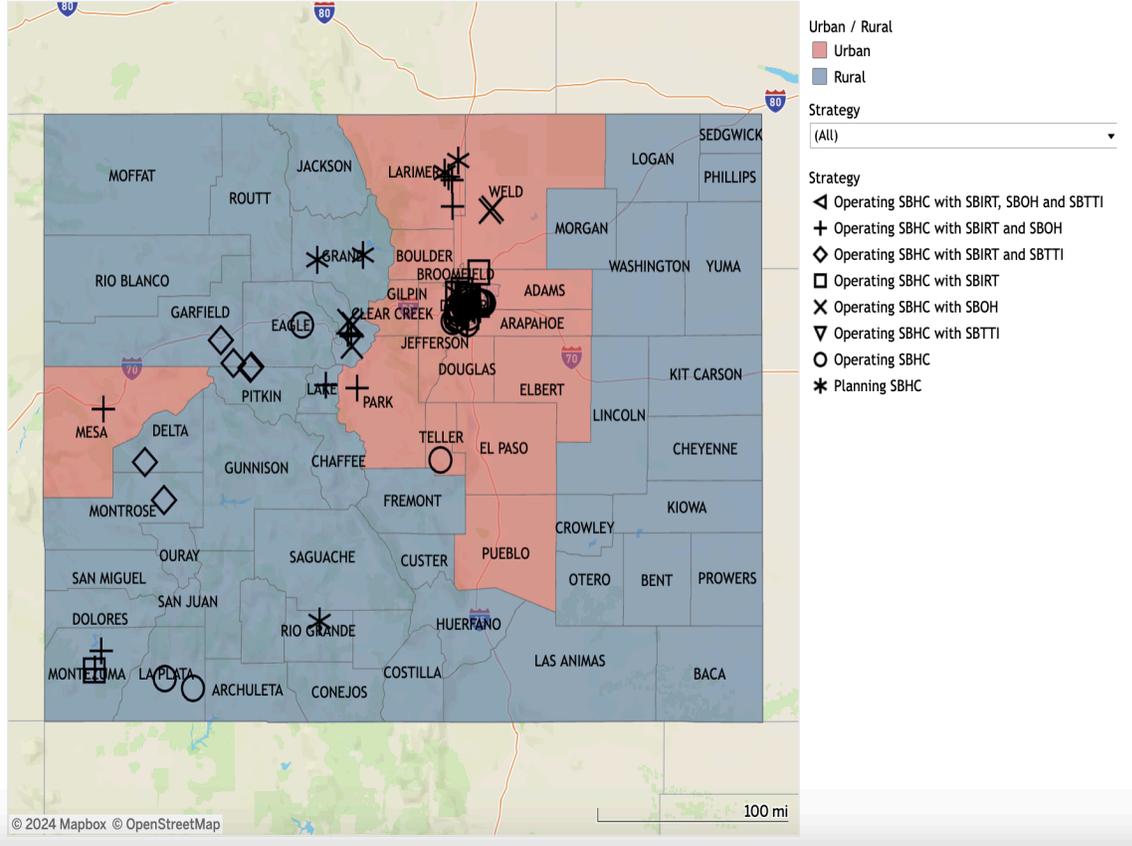


Figure 5: SBHCs by urban and rural counties in Colorado. This chart does not account for locally/privately funded school-based health clinics. From *Looking for SBHCs?* | Department of Public Health & Environment. (n.d.). <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/sbhc/locations>.

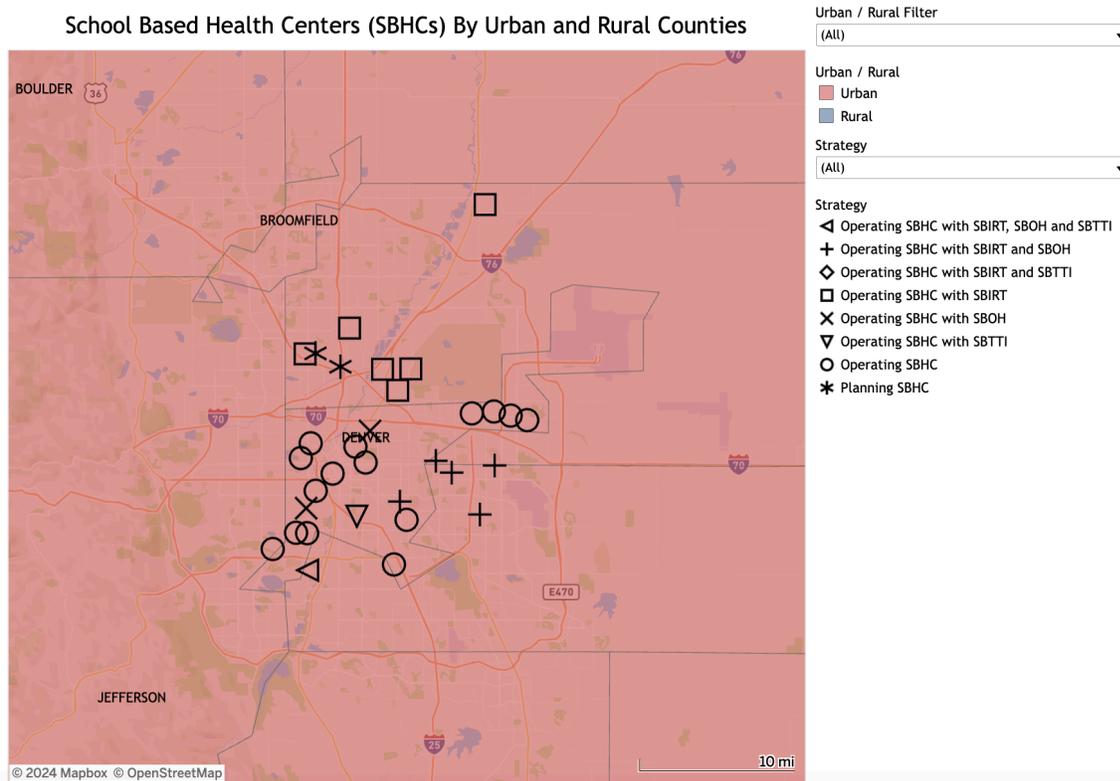


Figure 6: SBHCs in Denver and neighboring urban counties (Jefferson, Boulder, Broomfield). This chart does not account for locally/privately funded school-based health clinics. From *Looking for SBHCs?* | Department of Public Health & Environment. (n.d.). <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/sbhc/locations>.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we've considered include:

- Equipping all SBHCs with health literacy resources and tools will require extensive coordination on the statewide level, some degree of funding, accessibility options, and organization.
- Applicants to the HLOP may not reflect the broader Colorado citizenry, as language barriers and rural-urban divides may prevent people from accessing information about this opportunity or participating fully.
- Due to a lack of professional experience, youth voices may be undermined or underrepresented in the process of creating questions for the HKCS, forming the annual report, or performing other HLOP-related work.

Outreach

While researching and writing this proposal, we reached out to:

Did not respond

* *Responded but declined to discuss our proposal*

Government agencies

State

- Colorado Department of Education: Rebecca McClellan, State Board Chair
- Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (met with twice)
 - Met with the School-Based Health Center Program and the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey experts
 - Meghna Patta, MPH, Community Engagement and Resource Specialist, Violence and Injury Prevention–Mental Health Promotion Branch
 - Paxton Hyde, Legislative Policy Advisor
 - Michelle Shultz, Program Manager
 - Liz Atwood, Program Coordinator
 - Alicia Haywood, Legislative Services Director
 - Emily Fine, School and Youth Survey Manager for the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey

Local

- Denver Public Schools
 - Dackri Davis, Principal of George Washington High School #
 - Marie Quinn, Director of Nursing Services and Health Education
 - Jessica Rodriguez Bracy, Principal of Northfield High School #
- Durango Public Schools Health Services #
- Jefferson County Public Schools Health Services #

Organizations that work in this policy area

- American Association of Pediatrics - Colorado Chapter: Ellen Brilliant, Executive Director
- Children's Hospital Colorado
 - Margaret Wilkerson, M.Ed, Program Manager, Health Literacy Specialist, Educational Leader at Children's Hospital Colorado
 - Ellen Stern, Government Affairs
 - Kay Jenner, CPXP, Family Engagement Specialist, Patient & Family Experience Team
 - Dr. Daniel Searing, Allergy & Immunology, Pediatrics
- Colorado Children's Campaign: Madi Ashour, Director of Youth Success

- Colorado Health Literacy Coalition: Monique McCollum, RN, MPH, CPHQ, MCHES | Health Literacy Manager | Co-Chair, Patient and Family Advisory Council |University of Colorado Hospital
- Colorado Health Institute: Emily Johnson, Managing Director of Research, Evaluation, and Convening
- Health Access Branch at Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: Steve Holloway, Branch Director #
- Health Equity Advisory Committee (HEAC) #
 - Tracy Kirkland, PhD, Environmental Sociologist at CU Boulder and HEAC member #
 - Laura Bellows, PhD, Department of Community & Behavioral Health at CU Anschutz and HEAC member #
- Health Equity Fund (Boulder, Colorado): Jahlia Daly, Chief Outreach Manager, Administrative Leader #
- Kaiser Family Foundation #
- Young Invincibles #
- Youth Healthcare Alliance (formerly Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care): Aubrey Hill, Executive Director

Other subject matter experts

- Whitney Weathers, Managing Director of UpStart, former K-12 educator

Legislators

- Senator Mark Baisley, Senate District 4
- Senator James Coleman, Senate District 33
- Senator Sonya Jacquez Lewis, Senate District 17 #
- Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, Senate District 23 #
- Senator Janice Rich, Senate District 7
- Representative Mary Bradfield, House District 21 #
- Representative Kyle Brown, House District 12 (met with twice)
- Representative Eliza Hamrick, House District 61
- Representative Leslie Herod, House District 8 #
- Representative Ron Weinberg, House District 51



Transportation Committee: Piloting Innovative Options for School Transportation

Background

Chronic absenteeism – A student missing 10% or 18 days out of the school year ²⁹

Problems

1) Colorado faces a school bus driver shortage that leads to chronic absenteeism for students.

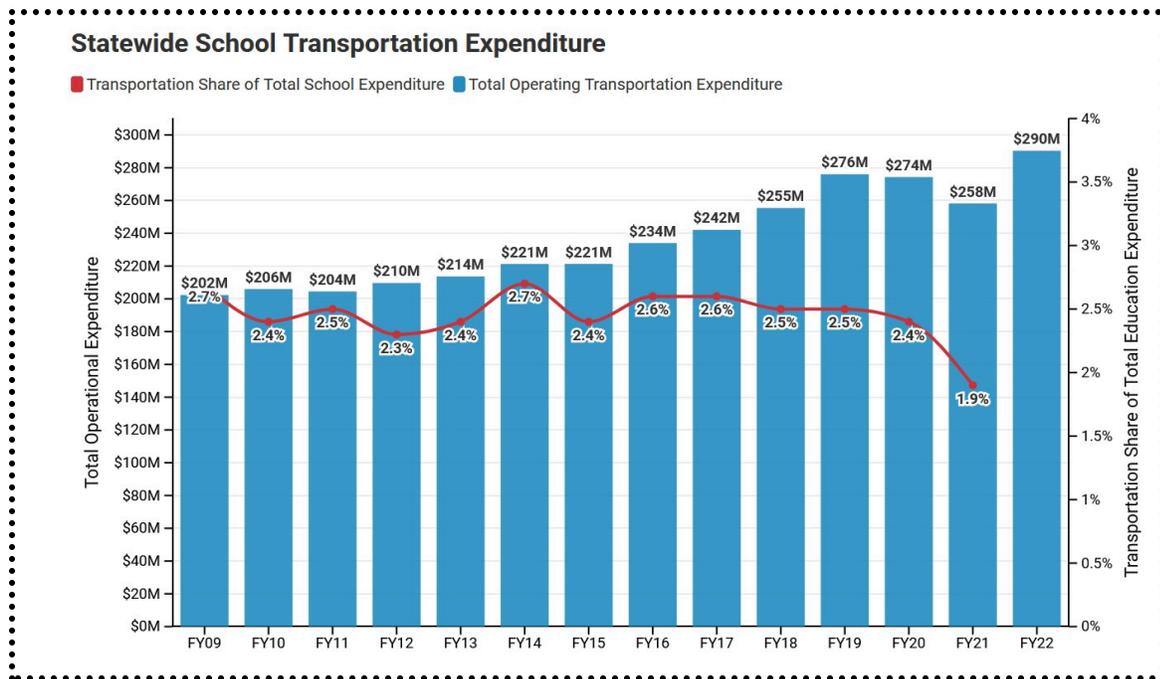
In Jefferson County Colorado, there is a severe school bus driver shortage. It has come to the point where many parents have to drive their children to school or to “hubs” where buses can pick up children in large quantities. These school bus drivers are being paid \$23 an hour, yet Jefferson County is still struggling to find school bus drivers. This is also seen in school districts such as District 11 in Colorado Springs facing large bus driver shortages, and District 8 in Fountain Colorado Springs being short drivers as well. This is clearly a burden on parents with working parent Stephanie Ruswick remarking, "Really it's just the timing and having to spend 45 minutes to take my kid to school and make sure I pick him up on time too."³⁰

The problem does not stop in Jefferson County, as Boulder County has a mere 40 to 50 drivers. And Douglas County is short 104 drivers, operating with just 55% of their necessary staff; thus,

²⁹Attendance and Truancy | CDE. (n.d.). <https://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/attendanceandtruancy>

³⁰ Sallinger, R. (2023, August 10). *Several counties face school bus driver shortages in the Denver metro area*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/several-counties-face-school-bus-driver-shortages-in-denver-metro-area/>

the district has decided to implement rolling cancellations where bus routes will be canceled for five days every fifth week.



This graph demonstrates that although the amount of money schools require for transportation has steadily increased, the amount schools are willing or able to spend on this service has slowly declined. This is a key component of the school transportation crisis as schools now have limited funding to solve their transportation issues.³¹

Lack of school bus drivers has led to a host of problems for Colorado families, one of these being chronic absenteeism. The Denver Public Schools chronically absent rate in the 2022 school year was 41.1%. While pandemic recovery plays a factor, there have been suggestions that transportation issues might also be contributing to this problem. "At Green Valley Ranch, to take public transportation, we're finding there is not a bus stop right at our school. And, so, a student has to walk multiple blocks even if they are taking public transportation just to get to school," said Quincy Shannon, Dean of Students at Denver School of Science and Technology Green Valley Ranch Middle School.³²

³¹ <https://commonsenseinstituteco.org/roadblocks-in-getting-kids-to-school/>

³² Vidal, G. (2023, October 5). *Chronic absenteeism situation in some Colorado schools is improving, but there's still a long way to go*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/chronic-absenteeism-some-colorado-schools-improving-still-long-ways-go>

2) Colorado school districts do not have a mandate to provide transportation, which limits access for low-income and minority families.

On top of a school bus driver shortage, Colorado school districts are also not required to provide transportation for their students, whether that is from home to school, field trips, or from school to home. According to the Colorado Secretary of State 200.03 Pursuant to 22-32-113. C.R.S. “The board of education of a school district is authorized but is not required to furnish student transportation home to school, school to school, and school to home, and on school sponsored activities.”³³

Thousands of Colorado families who may not have access to transportation depend on their school district’s provided transportation to get their children to school. This creates an economic disparity between classes and even racial groups. Lower-income families want to send their children to a school that will provide them with a good education; mainly found in high-income areas. Transportation is a critical component of allowing these students to attend these schools, but is not provided, as seen by Denver parents, “transportation is indeed a barrier of choice.”³⁴ This dilemma not only restricts children's ability to access an education, but also puts a higher restraint on those with low income parents, minorities, and single parents.

As with providing transportation to students with disabilities, the State passed a bill in 2020, SB20-015, stating that school districts do not have to directly supply transportation for these families, but can instead provide reimbursement for the cost of parents supplying specialty transportation. “The bill allows a school district to provide transportation, or reimburse a parent or guardian for providing transportation to the schools of its district to a student from any other Colorado school district who is enrolled in its schools, if the student is, or has been in the preceding school year, eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch under the national school lunch program or who is a student with a disability and who is, or was in the preceding school year, receiving special education services.”³⁵ While this financial reimbursement may be helpful for parents who have access to transportation, it limits those who do not have access or do not have proper tools to access private transportation companies. Adding on, school districts funding for

³³ *Transportation of Unsafe Items 4204-R*. (2009).
<https://www.sos.state.co.us/CCR/GenerateRulePdf.do?ruleVersionId=70>

³⁴ Cornwall, G. (2018, May 1). *How Lack Of Access To Transportation Segregates Schools*. Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/gailcornwall/2018/05/01/why-tech-is-prepping-to-overhaul-school-transportation/?sh=aa823f6588a8>

³⁵ Student Access To Transportation To Other Schools, no. SB20-015, Senate (2020).
<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb20-015>

transportation has only decreased from 2017, making it less likely for schools to provide accommodations for students with disabilities.

Solution

Colorado should fund innovative school transportation options and start with one rural and one urban district as a pilot project.

HB22-1395, the Transportation Innovation Grant Program, was introduced to provide a grant program to districts and schools who are struggling with school bus driver shortages. This grant program would have encouraged schools to try innovative solutions for their problem including encouraging carpool coordination through the help of companies such as HopSkipDrive. HopSkipDrive is a company that provides transportation targeted for youth to school and home. Through a thorough authorization process, the safety of the children riding is a top priority.

This Transportation Innovation Grant Program bill failed to pass through the House Committee on Appropriations, as it was estimated to cost \$7.6 million to the Colorado Department of Education.³⁶ If the COYAC Interim Committee would propose a similar bill that proposes a Grant Program for School Districts using HopSkipDrive, the potential costs could decrease as well as limit the number of school bus drivers needed, opening transportation to new areas in districts. Kindergarteners have particularly low attendance rates in Colorado, and this proposal has the potential to decrease absenteeism rates with young children if they have access to stable transportation.

In a recent meeting with HopSkipDrive, their leadership informed us on their two main ways of helping the young community access transportation including RouteWiseAI and their collaborative driving program. With this company's innovative AI they created, it allows school districts to log all students that attend their school district in need of transportation, in which the AI then creates the most efficient bus routes in accordance to the amount of drivers and buses available. This system was implemented in Colorado Springs District 11 where there were positive impacts of improved on-time attendance rates increasing from 85% to 99%, as well as a 40% budget decrease in District 11. Due to District 11 partnering with HopSkipDrive, their budget was nearly cut in half, allowing an increase in school bus wages as well.

³⁶ Simpson, C., Zenzinger, R., Young, M., & LFearson, C. (n.d.). *Transportation Innovation Grant Program*. Colorado General Assembly; Colorado General Assembly. Retrieved June 19, 2024, from <http://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1395>



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Additionally, HopSkipDrive has a collaborative driving program where volunteers can create their own schedules and drop kids off in their personal vehicles to school if bus drivers are not available. By including this program within District 11’s bus routes, the needed number of drivers decreased, while more students were able to access transportation.³⁸

To begin, one urban and one rural school district could apply for this program in which an online program such as RouteWiseAI will be implemented, as well as a collaborative driving program with personal vehicles rather than school buses, where changes in attendance and costs will be monitored for each district to see if positive changes will be found and if the grant program could potentially be expanded.

If the amended Transportation Innovation Grant Program was implemented into a rural school district and urban district, the Grant Program will allow these districts to focus their budgets towards companies such as HopSkipDrive and more, potentially decreasing costs by half, while improving current routes. This would minimize the legislatures’ appropriation concerns due to previous cost amounts.

³⁷ HopSkipDrive. (n.d.). *Morning On-Time Arrival Rates*. Colorado Springs School District 11: How HopSkipDrive RouteWise AITM Is Helping Solve the Bus Driver Shortage. Retrieved July 8, 2024, from <https://www.hopskipdrive.com/clients/d11>.

³⁸ *Springs School District D11 and HopSkipDrive*. (n.d.). Wwww.hopskipdrive.com; HopSkipDrive. Retrieved June 19, 2024, from <https://www.hopskipdrive.com/clients/d11>.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we've considered include:

- Limiting opportunities for other companies to impact their community
- School districts could start fully relying on companies for their transportation, gradually eliminating school buses.
- School districts could potentially start charging parents for school bus transportation over another form such as through a company.
- Potential price increases – Is a company funded by investors? How will this impact sustaining low prices for schools?

Outreach

While researching and writing this proposal, we reached out to:

Did not respond

* *Responded but declined to discuss our proposal*

Government agencies

State

- Colorado Department of Education
 - Miller, Susan - School Transportation Supervisor
 - Stewart, Fred - Transportation Consultant
 - Sykes, Rebecca - Transportation Consultant
- Colorado Department of Transportation

Local

- Denver Public Schools: Quincy Shannon, Dean of Students at Denver School of Science and Technology Green Valley Ranch Middle School
- District 11 transportation director
- District 8 transportation director
- Las Animas RE-1: Animas High School

Organizations that work in this policy area

- Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) #
- Colorado Children's Campaign: Madi Ashour #
- Colorado State Pupil Transportation Association #

- Common Sense Institute #
- Denver Streets Partnership
- Great Education Colorado #
- HopSkipDrive

Legislators

- Senator Tony Exum, Senate District 11
- Representative Karen McCormick, Senate District 11



Environmental Action Committee

1: Funding Solar Panels for Schools

Problem: The cost of energy for heating and cooling is rising for all of us: residents, businesses, and schools. Rates for natural gas and electricity are increasing every year and this impacts all budgets – including schools. Many schools in Colorado lack the resources and infrastructure to implement solar energy solutions, not benefitting from this sustainable and renewable energy source.

According to the March 2023 presentation from the Public Utilities Commission, electricity prices had gone up 25% compared to the previous year (2022) and gas prices had increased 75% for the average customer.³⁹ In my school district, Jefferson County, costs of natural gas have doubled from 2020-2023 despite usage going down.⁴⁰ Unlike private homes or businesses, which can combat these rising prices by installing more reliable, lower-priced options such as solar, public schools don't have the resources to implement such options even though they have been proven to lower electricity bills for schools.

Beyond saving money, the installation of solar and energy-efficient devices would help to achieve Colorado's Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap, which includes the goal of reducing 90% of 2005 emissions by 2050.⁴¹

³⁹ O'Neill, Erin, and Colorado Public Utilities Commission. Joint Select Committee on Rising Utility Rates. (2023, March 7).

⁴⁰ Copeland, Brenna, and Jefferson County Budget Office. (2023, June 22). 2023-24 Adopted Budget.

⁴¹ Colorado Energy Office. (2021 January 2021). Home Climate & Energy GHG Pollution Reduction Roadmap 2.0. <https://energyoffice.colorado.gov/climate-energy/ghg-pollution-reduction-roadmap-20>.

Solution: Colorado should create a pay-by-performance program similar to a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)⁴², where a company owns and operates solar panels for a customer, in exchange for lower energy prices.

Schools would receive a no-interest loan, either from the Colorado Government or private companies, such as Xcel Energy (that have been open to promoting solar energy in the past), to install solar panels in locations like parking lots (in the form of roof structures over cars) or in open lots near schools. Schools could pay back either a portion of the loan or the entire loan through saved funds in energy costs, allowing for ownership and control over energy. Unlike PPAs, this would ensure that schools own their own systems, allowing them to claim the Renewable Energy Credits that are produced, a priority for Denver Public Schools according to LeAnn Kittle (the DPS head of sustainability). Grants would also be awarded to some schools, lessening the amount they have to pay.

Pittsburg Unified School District (California) lowered energy costs by up to 90% after implementing energy-efficient heating/cooling systems and installing solar at all K-12 sites.⁴³ This was possible because of funding from California Proposition 39, which funded renewable energy installations and the transition to energy-efficient devices across the state.

According to Mike Kruger of the Colorado Solar and Storage Association (COSSA), schools can act as power batteries for their communities. In case of an emergency such as a power outage, schools can be reliable spaces for power. He also mentioned that utility companies could use the power from the batteries during the day, and a portion of the installations could be paid by local utility companies.

Colorado would implement a plan for making solar available to all school districts. Options for renewable energy in schools are missing from Colorado's Renewable Energy Roadmap. Colorado could lay the framework for sustainable infrastructure within schools to allow smaller districts to implement renewable energy as well. Allocating state funds and federal grants toward the installation of solar panels will reduce the amount of money schools spend on electricity.

⁴² U.S. Department of Energy. "Better Buildings Initiative." Better Buildings Initiative, <https://betterbuildingssolutioncenter.energy.gov/financing-navigator/option/power-purchase-agreement>. Accessed February 11, 2024.

⁴³ Pittsburg Unified School District. "Pittsburg Unified School District." *Pittsburg Unified School District - Energy Management*, pittsburgusd.net/Departments/Business-Services/Maintenance--Operations/Energy-Management/index.html. Accessed November 11, 2023.

Utilities like Xcel Energy have partnered with urban school districts to install solar panels and have created successful programs that unfortunately aren't available to schools statewide.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we've considered include:

- Lack of space for solar panels – Some schools, especially in suburban and urban areas don't have large fields that can be allocated to solar panels, but most schools have large parking lots and empty roofs that can be used for solar panels.
- Limited funding for grants and loans – While available funding should be granted to schools, this plan allows for more limited funding to be spread across several schools, allowing more to receive solar installations.

2: Adding Youth Representatives to the Environmental Justice Advisory Board

Problem: As the climate crisis worsens, it disproportionately affects those of marginalized communities. However, in efforts to improve climate justice, Colorado has disregarded the youth perspective. Therefore, youth who are affected by the climate crisis do not have the resources or power they need to create change in their communities.

Across Colorado and the world, temperatures have been increasing steadily over the past 50 years. In Colorado, temperatures have risen approximately two degrees Fahrenheit between 1977 and 2006.⁴⁴ Climatologists say this will lead to an increase in destructive, unusual weather such as wildfires, which have become a year-round threat rather than a seasonal occurrence.⁴⁵ Recently, Colorado youth in particular have experienced the devastating effects of climate change through climate-caused natural disasters including the Marshall Fire in 2021 and the Thompson River floods in 2013.

The communities that face the effects of the climate crisis most acutely are often home to low-income families and people of color. For example, a study by the University of Michigan states that “The changing demographics of urban areas, loose permitting requirements, and exclusionary zoning laws have funneled racial and ethnic minorities into areas with a greater degree of environmental degradation and reduced support.” and that “low income families spend three times as much of their income on energy than non-low energy households, despite consuming less energy.”⁴⁶ Additionally, Indigenous populations that rely on subsistence farming practices for food have limited options for adapting to climate change threats. In this way, the struggles of already marginalized and systematically disadvantaged communities are exacerbated by the presence of severe environmental threats.

⁴⁴ CBS Colorado.com Staff. (2023, August 21). More frequent extreme weather events on the horizon, Colorado climate experts say. CBS News.
<https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/colorado-more-frequent-extreme-weather-events-horizon-colorado-climate-experts-say/>

⁴⁵ Gonzalez, P., & Johnson, B. (n.d.). Climate Change In Colorado - What Is Climate Change? 350 Colorado.
<https://350colorado.org/climate-change-in-co/>

⁴⁶ University of Michigan. (n.d.). Environmental Justice Factsheet. Center for Sustainable Systems.
<https://css.umich.edu/publications/factsheets/sustainability-indicators/environmental-justice-factsheet>

Overall, youth are more likely to agree with the consensus of scientific evidence about climate change. One study suggests that 79% of all teenagers in the U.S. believe climate change is real and caused by human activity, which is a massive increase compared to the 58% of American adults who believe that climate change is caused by human activity in 2023.⁴⁷ While most youths view climate change as a human-caused issue, they face a challenge with gaining support from adults, as only 24% of people who live in Colorado view global warming as a personally important issue.⁴⁸

In spite of the fact that the youth demographic harbors the most support for efforts to improve our environment, previous Colorado bills intended to address climate change and environmental justice have not centered the voices and experiences of youth. For example, HB21-1266 established an environmental justice task force, intended to propose recommendations to the general assembly⁴⁹ and an Environmental Justice Advisory Board.

The current Advisory Board is made up of twelve volunteer members. As outlined in its bylaws, the board consists of seven voting members appointed by the governor: four members from disproportionately impacted communities, one member from a non-governmental organization that “represents statewide interests to advance racial justice,” one member from a non governmental organization that “represents statewide interests to advance environmental justice,”⁵⁰ and one member that represents worker interests in disproportionately impacted communities. The remaining members include four voting members appointed by the Executive Director of the department and one non-voting member, the Executive Director.

In its current form, there is no seat on the Board that is held by or reserved for a youth member. Therefore, while this Board is a helpful instrument in addressing issues of environmental justice, the Advisory Board is devoid of any youth perspective or input, which creates a significant deficiency as youth voices are some of the most powerful in the face of the climate crisis.

⁴⁷ Prothero, A., Peetz, C., & Heubeck, E. (2022, November 18). *Teens Know Climate Change Is Real. They Want Schools to Teach More About It*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teens-know-climate-change-is-real-they-want-schools-to-teach-more-about-it/2022/11>

⁴⁸ McDonald, J., MacInnis, B., & Krosnick, J. A. (2020, October 27). Climate Insights 2020. Wikipedia. https://media.rff.org/documents/Climate_Insights_2020_Opinion_in_the_States.pdf

⁴⁹ Colorado General Assembly. (2021). Environmental Justice Disproportionate Impacted Community. Colorado.gov. <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1266>

⁵⁰ Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment. (2024, January 12). Environmental Justice Advisory Board. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/ej/advisory-board>

Without the necessary support, youth cannot implement environmental change, especially youth of marginalized communities that have historically been underrepresented in policymaking. While these young people have opinions and solutions to the climate crisis due to their disproportionate exposure to it, they do not have the resources or power to act on it within their communities. Centering their voices and experiences in the approach to climate justice – as well as providing them with education, resources, and support – are some of the most integral steps in the fight for a sustainable and equitable future for all.

Solution: Colorado should add two youth advisor seats to the Colorado Department of Public Health’s Environmental Justice Advisory Board.

This would require an amendment to HB 21-1266, Section 12, item 2 of the bill text, titled “Environmental Justice Advisory Board,”⁵¹ and concerned with the establishment of the board and the demographics of its members. This amendment would reserve seats on the Board – either in addition to the current twelve seats, or in replacement of two of these seats – for two young people aged 14-19 in Colorado who demonstrate significant interest and involvement in climate issues, ideally including at least one young person from a community identified as disproportionately impacted. These advisors would be appointed to the board by the Governor as voting members.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we’ve considered include:

- As these seats will be filled by young people, most likely of high school age, there may be constant turnover of the advisors holding this seat.
- Due to systemic disadvantages, disproportionately impacted communities are often also lower income, minority communities. Therefore, students from these communities may be less likely to participate in this program than students from affluent areas who have access to more resources. To ensure that the Board has a youth perspective that represents the needs of disproportionately impacted or underrepresented communities, appointments to this seat should be done in a fashion that prioritizes equity and inclusion.

⁵¹ Colorado General Assembly. (2021). Environmental Justice Disproportionate Impacted Community. <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1266>

3: Educating Youth on the Transition to Renewable Energy

Problem: While the consensus that energy sources should be transitioned to renewable ones when possible is widely accepted, there is limited education/communication regarding this process, especially involving youth.

Fossil fuels – specifically oil and gas – are the largest contributor to climate change. A United Nations report shows that fossil fuels account for over 75% of global greenhouse emissions and 90% of carbon emissions.⁵² In the face of the climate crisis,⁵³ these industries pose more and more of an existential threat. Colorado has begun to transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable sources when possible, for example through Senate Bill 22-193 concerning air quality improvements. The Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap also includes a goal of reducing 90% of emissions reported in 2005 by 2050. However, various issues have hindered this transition.

For one, disconnects across both non-governmental and governmental organizations exist on what the transition to clean energy will look like. Jeff West of Xcel Energy shared that although they are working towards renewable energy targets, the current power grid infrastructure cannot support this and must be updated statewide. In addition, abandoning fossil fuels proves difficult in a state largely defined by oil and gas production. Finally, the climate crisis – and therefore energy policy – will have the most impact on young people in the coming years. However, youth voices are often not included in this discussion, preventing young people from gaining insight into energy issues and taking action in their communities.

⁵² The United Nations. (n.d.). Causes and Effects of Climate Change. UN. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>

⁵³ The United Nations. (n.d.). The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win. UN. <https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>

Solution: Colorado should fund and organize a conference for youth featuring testimony from government departments and independent organizations on the transition to renewable energy sources.

To allow young people to gain clarity on the solutions to energy issues, Colorado would host an annual conference specifically targeted towards youth focused on the transition away from fossil fuels and towards more renewable sources of energy. State agencies, including the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado Energy Office, and the Colorado Energy and Carbon Management Commission would be invited to the conference to hold a panel on their respective work in the energy sector. In addition, non-governmental organizations focusing on a range of topics in the energy sector, including oil and gas, renewables, environmental justice, and more would be invited to participate and present at the conference. This way, agencies across a diverse range of focuses and perspectives would be able to collaborate, allowing a smoother and better supported energy transition.

Any interested young people ages 13-19 from around the state would be invited to attend. This age range allows a space open to all high school aged youth. This would allow young people who are involved with environmental, climate, or energy issues to gain insight into energy production from those with multiple viewpoints on the issue, to provide their perspective on the future of climate policy, be empowered to take action in their communities, and be involved in a solution to the pressing climate crisis.

The intended conference would be state-sponsored and administered by the Colorado Energy Office. Holding a conference through the State of Colorado, rather than through independent corporations or agencies, will create a space to facilitate open discussions across agencies and institutions with different perspectives and priorities, allowing all sides to be considered in the transition to renewable energies.

System thinking

Unintended consequences we've considered include:

- Encouraging the transition away from oil and gas may result in a loss of jobs in this sector. However, it will also create jobs in renewable energy, so those who may lose their jobs should be given the opportunity to seek employment in the renewable energy industry if they choose.
- Transitioning away from oil and gas may harm communities producing these resources economically. However, this consequence is temporary and can be addressed through government programs, as over time, this will actually have a positive economic impact.

An analysis by Colorado Fiscal Institute found that “the social cost of carbon for all of the emissions created during drilling, production, and transmission of oil and gas in Colorado is 1.5 times greater than the revenue the state collects from the oil and gas industry,”⁵⁴ meaning that oil and gas have more negative economic impacts than positive ones. In addition, the Colorado Fiscal Institute also found that climate disasters associated with fossil fuels have cost Colorado between \$20B-\$50B dollars. In the transition away from fossil fuels, the State of Colorado must specifically work to support producing communities economically, such as by analyzing the money that will be saved by switching to renewables, and how that money can be reallocated to producing communities. Overall, while a transition away from oil in gas in Colorado will be initially difficult, it will also be ultimately beneficial for both the planet and the economy.

⁵⁴ Stiffler, C., & Jalali, P. (2023, January). Clearing the Air: The Real Costs and Benefits of Oil and Gas for Colorado. Colorado Fiscal Institute.
<https://www.coloradofiscal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/OG-paper-1-5-23-final.pdf>

4: Reducing Food Waste in Schools

Problem: School cafeterias and students waste food.

The Nevada Independent shares that American schools waste approximately 530,000 tons of food annually which costs \$1.7 billion each year.⁵⁵ Instead of being composted or shared with hungry students, food waste (and, ironically, compostable trays) are being thrown into landfills.

Throughout Colorado school campuses, trash cans overflow with untouched meals. Students often discard food bought or given to them in school cafeterias because they:

- Can't compost it – Composting companies will not accept school compost for fear of contamination. Without a thorough system of educating students and monitoring compost bins, there is no large-scale place to send compost from schools. In fact, while Cherry Creek School District has switched to compostable trays, they continue to landfill them for lack of a place to compost!
- Can't share it – Share tables are tables where students can return uneaten food to give to hungry students. They are one of the best ways to reduce food waste in schools,⁵⁶ yet are often not used in schools for fear of allergies and spoiled food. After COVID, schools don't have enough staff to manage share tables safely.
- Don't know or don't care – Students are not empowered to reduce and recycle food because they are not educated in the environmental impacts of food waste or where their food comes from and goes. Without a sense of ownership for food waste reduction, students will not take action.

Why do we care? Wasted food is an environmental problem. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), only 5% of wasted food is composted while the rest is sent to landfills.⁵⁷ Composted food can be used to make animal feed or make the soil more fertile.

⁵⁵ Butterworth, T. (2023). Does a significant percentage of school meals wind up in the trash? *The Daily Indy*. <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/fact-brief-does-a-significant-percentage-of-free-school-meals-wind-up-in-the-trash#>

⁵⁶ Prescott, M. P. (2020). A systems examination of school food recovery in Northern Colorado. *Science Direct*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921344919304355?fr=RR-2&ref=pdf_download&r=89241c5e6f5c799f

⁵⁷ *Impact of sending food and other organic materials to landfills*. (2023, October). EPA. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from

The Nevada Independent shares that American schools waste approximately 530,000 tons of food annually, which costs \$1.7 billion each year.⁵⁸ Instead of being composted or shared with hungry students, food waste (and, ironically, compostable trays) are being thrown into landfills.

Why don't cafeteria staff fix it on a local level? Especially after COVID-19, there is a shortage of lunchroom staff. Schools simply don't have the bandwidth to manage share tables and compost bins safely and effectively. While certain training is required for cafeteria staff, share table training is optional, meaning employees are more concerned about liability than conservation even though they are protected by the Limit Liability for Food Donations to Nonprofits bill of 2020.⁵⁹ Finally, when schools reach out to composting companies, they are often rejected for fear of contamination.

Solution: Colorado should implement a pilot grant program, funding schools to hire or promote staff to manage share tables and composting bins in schools by forming a climate team of students.⁶⁰

With state-funded employees to support them, students can help them monitor lunch rooms and empower students to protect the environment. This program would feed hungry students, keep waste out of landfills, empower students, and save money on waste removal.

This would be an opt-in program, meaning schools would receive the grant money if they choose to participate. Smaller schools that create less waste and can more easily manage waste may decide not to apply. Schools in the program would be required to compost food waste and run share tables.

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/composting#:~:text=In%202019%2C%2066.2%20million%20tons,that%20wasted%20food%20was%20composted.&text=In%20the%20U.S.%2C%20food%20is,percent%20of%20municipal%20solid%20waste>

⁵⁸ Butterworth, T. (2023). Does a significant percentage of school meals wind up in the trash? *The Daily Indy*. <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/fact-brief-does-a-significant-percentage-of-free-school-meals-wind-up-in-the-trash#>

⁵⁹ Limit Liability for Food Donations to Nonprofits, S. 20-090, 2020th Gen. Assem., Regular Session (Colo. 2020).

⁶⁰ Redistribution of returned food/share tables. (n.d.). In *Standard operation procedure (SOP)*. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/sharetatablesop>

System thinking

Unintended consequences we've considered:

- Composting companies or local governments could still refuse waste even when it is closely monitored
- Student councils could be ineffective in keeping compost uncontaminated
- Certain areas have less access to composting by companies or local governments
- Students may not want to participate in districts that have opted into the program

Outreach by the Environmental Action Committee

While researching and writing this proposal, we reached out to:

Did not respond

** Responded but declined to discuss our proposal*

Government agencies

State

- Colorado Department of Education:
 - Shelby Konkel, Legislative Liaison
 - Melissa Bloom, Principal Policy Advisor
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:
 - Lindsey Ellis, Director of Legislative Affairs
 - Tracy White, Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Director
- Colorado Energy Office
 - Adair Andre, Legislative Liaison
 - Christine Berg, Policy Analyst
 - Ari Modelina, Program Manager
- Public Utilities Commission: Alex Rozen, Research Analyst

Local

- Cherry Creek School District
 - Kale Johnson, Energy and Environmental Manager
 - Brehan Riley, Executive Director of Child Nutrition Services
 - Ashley Verville, Communications Expert
- Denver Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency: Vincent Fuggeta
- Denver Public Schools
 - Students for Climate Action: Amelia Fernández Rodríguez, Co-Chair
 - Department of Sustainability: LeAnn Kittle, Head of Sustainability
- Jefferson County School District: Tracy Dorland, Superintendent #

- Weld County RE-5J Schools: Scott Nielsen, Superintendent #

Federal

- Environmental Protection Agency: KC Becker, Region 8 (Mountains and Plains Region) Administrator
- National Environmental Youth Advisory Council (NEYAC): Carissa Cyran, Office of Public Engagement and Environmental Education #

Organizations that work in this policy area

- A1 Organics #
- Amaxa (Connects youth with volunteer opportunities; run by former Cherry Creek High School student)
- Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (CAEE) #
- CalRecycle #
- Colorado Association of School Executives #
- Colorado Coalition for a Livable Climate: Jan Rose, Legislative Analyst *
- Colorado Solar Association: Mike Kruger, President and CEO
- Colorado League of Charter Schools #
- Colorado Oil & Gas Association (COGA)
- CORE Electricity Cooperative: Robert Osborn, Director of Business Development
- Environment Colorado #
- Great Education Colorado: Lisa Weil, Executive Director
- Namaste Solar #
- Ready Colorado
- Recycle Colorado #
- Solar Energy Industry Association: Sean Gallagher, Senior Vice President of Policy #
- We Don't Waste #
- Xcel Energy
 - Grace Lopez Ramirez, Senior Area Manager of Community and Government Affairs
 - Chloe Figg, Colorado State Government Affairs Manager
 - Jeff West, Senior Director of Environmental Services

Other subject matter experts

- Jeffery Boyce, Teacher of Advanced Placement Environmental Science at Cherry Creek High School; former employee of the Environmental Protection Agency
- Gabriel Nagel, former Denver Public Schools student who helped implement Denver Public Schools Climate Action Plan

Legislators

- Senator Mark Baisley, Senate District 4 #
- Senator Janet Buckner, Senate District 29
- Senator Lisa Cutter, Senate District 20
- Senator Stephen Fenberg, Senate District 18
- Senator Chris Hansen, Senate District 31 #
- Aide to Senator Dafna Michaelson Jenet, Senate District 21
- Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, Senate District 23 #
- Senator Chris Kolker, Senate District 16
- Senator Byron Pelton, Senate District 1 #
- Senator Janice Rich, Senate District 7 *
- Senator Cleave Simpson, Senate District 6
- Senator Faith Winter, Senate District 25 #
- Representative Kyle Brown, House District 12
- Representative Chad Clifford, House District 37
- Representative Ken DeGraaf, House District 22
- Representative Ruby Dickson, House District 37
- Representative Gabe Evans, House District 48
- Representative Meg Froelich, House District 3
- Representative Cathy Kipp, House District 52
- Representative Barbara McLachlan, House District 59
- Representative Manny Rutinel, House District 32
- Representative Tammy Story, House District 25
- Representative Elizabeth Velasco, House District 57 #
- Representative Mike Weissman, House District 36



Substance Abuse Policy Committee: Distributing Naloxone to Prevent Overdoses

Background

Harm reduction – Harm reduction is a community-driven approach to aid individuals using drugs through prevention, risk reduction, and health promotion strategies.⁶¹ Examples of Harm Reduction programs include: syringe exchange programs, naloxone distribution, etc.

Opiate antagonist – A medication that blocks the activation of opioid receptors in your central or peripheral nervous system, enabling the ability to reverse actively occurring overdoses.

Naloxone – Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, is an opioid antagonist that can be used by any member of the general public to reverse an opioid overdose, providing time for emergency responders to administer care.⁶²

Problem

Naloxone access is not standard across the state, leaving geographically isolated and low-income youth struggling to acquire it.

There is a concerning lack of access to Naloxone in low-income communities across both urban and rural regions in Colorado, in turn impacting the wellbeing of youth located in those areas.

⁶¹ *Harm reduction*. SAMHSA. (2023, April 24). <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction>

⁶² Naloxone. SAMHSA. (2023, September 18). <https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders/medications-counseling-related-conditions/naloxone>

The individuals in these disadvantaged communities face dire financial barriers that prevent their ability to easily access naloxone, even when the medication is made readily available over the counter. This is incredibly impactful because these individuals are often the most vulnerable in the opioid crisis: in a nationwide study conducted by the Public Library of Science, people living below the poverty line accounted for 24.6% of opioid overdose deaths.⁶³ The prohibitive price of life-saving medications like naloxone is a significant deterrent for acquisition, hurting the populations who need help the most. The reality is that for individuals with limited financial resources, the \$35-\$65 cost of an average dose, not including the retailer's mark-up, prevents purchase on a regular basis. Furthermore, state residents reported that individuals with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level were more than twice as likely to not attain substance abuse treatment.⁶⁴ Without the existence of expanded programs and reform to bridge the critical gap in naloxone access, life-saving treatments will remain out of reach for low-income individuals grappling with opioid addiction in Colorado, furthering the crisis and preventing reception of proper treatment.

Rural counties in Colorado compose some of the most impacted areas in the opioid epidemic. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE), the highest average annual crude rate of drug overdose deaths per 100,000 residents from 2020-2022 could be found in remote jurisdictions including Las Animas, Alamosa, and Saguache. Furthermore, an analysis of the Naloxone Finder from the National Harm Reduction Coalition reveals a concentration of naloxone providers and Harm Reduction agencies in urban areas (Denver), leaving rural communities like Limon facing a prohibitively long drive to Colorado Springs for simple naloxone access.⁶⁵

Moreover, rural areas grapple with a shortage of first responders compared to their urban counterparts, as indicated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's analysis of Colorado EMS response times, showcasing an average 20-minute response time in rural

⁶³ Altekruse, S. F., Cosgrove, C. M., Altekruse, W. C., Jenkins, R. A., & Blanco, C. (2020, January 17). *Socioeconomic risk factors for fatal opioid overdoses in the United States: Findings from the mortality disparities in American Communities Study (MDAC)*. PLOS ONE. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0227966>

⁶⁴ Colorado Health Institute. (2020, July). Many Coloradans Not Getting Needed Treatment for Substance Use Disorder. Colorado Health Access Survey. https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/2019%20CHAS%20Substance%20Use%20Brief_1.pdf

⁶⁵ National Harm Reduction Coalition. (2021, May 24). *Harm reduction resources near you*. National Harm Reduction Coalition. <https://harmreduction.org/resource-center/harm-reduction-near-you/>

communities in comparison to an 11-minute average response time in urban areas.⁶⁶ Due to these factors, access to naloxone in rural areas is a challenge.

For youth in Colorado, both impediments of expense and placement are heightened. Many young individuals lack the ability to drive, making it difficult for them to reach pharmacies or distribution centers that stock naloxone. Public transportation options may be limited or impractical, especially in rural areas, and in an emergency is not an option.

Additionally, financial barriers exacerbate the situation, as naloxone can be costly and not all insurance plans cover it adequately. In a study done by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, only 40 percent of Colorado teens ages 16 to 19 were actively participating in the workforce, meaning that the majority of youth do not have their own income, and therefore do not have the ability to independently pay for naloxone. Consequently, these obstacles create a precarious situation for Colorado's youth, hindering their ability to obtain lifesaving intervention in times of need.

Solutions

1. Colorado should introduce Naloxone into AED cabinets in secondary schools.

Developing an AED Naloxone cabinet program in secondary schools would increase the accessibility of opiate antagonists to youth populations. Colorado Revised Statutes - 13-21-108.1 serves as a foundation to health-equity across the state encouraging school districts to acquire an automated external defibrillator (AED) cabinet for placement in public schools along with athletic facilities. This infrastructure serves as a wide platform to ensure youth across the state access to naloxone, if added to AED Cabinets within secondary schools.

A study of nasal Naloxone usability illustrated 90.5% of individuals were able to properly administer it without training. Availability of such an easy-use and overdose treatment ensures that first responders can administer the medication as timely as possible in addition to surrounding individuals in more complex circumstances. AED cabinets containing nasal Naloxone should be clearly marked to indicate the presence of Naloxone, and school faculty should be trained to recognize which AED cabinets contain Naloxone so they can quickly

⁶⁶ Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment. (n.d.). Colorado EMS Response Times: A comparison to national estimates - NHTSA. <https://one.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/stateCatalog/states/co/docs/EMSResponseTimesAnalysis.pdf>

respond in the event of an overdose. This model has been highly proven with states including Illinois, Maine, and Rhode Island requiring select or all schools to stock Naloxone.⁶⁷

2. Colorado should introduce funding for businesses to hand out Naloxone to the public.

To increase public accessibility to Naloxone – especially those in both rural and socioeconomically disparaged communities– small businesses across the state such as coffee shops or restaurants have begun to hand out the opiate antagonist to members of the community. While this, in addition to the organizations providing Naloxone through the Bulk Fund, has had an immense impact on Naloxone accessibility, this proposed solution would further increase rural communities’ access to Naloxone, thus creating more equitable access statewide.

While not all rural communities have organizations eligible for the bulk fund, or coffee shops that hand out Naloxone, they all have smaller, local businesses. With the funding, these businesses – hardware stores, ranching supply stores, and community convenience stores – would be able to hand out Naloxone without worrying about the cost to their businesses. It would be an opt-in program.⁶⁸

Possible sources of funding we’ve learned about:

- Colorado Health Institute
- Colorado Naloxone Bulk Fund

System thinking

Unintended consequences we’ve considered include:

- There could be possible conflict with school district policy, as implementing legislation in schools often can involve a variety of stakeholders.
- Bills with fiscal notes are usually challenging. However we have preemptively worked around this issue by finding alternate sources of funding, and meeting with different legislators and organizations to discuss the capacity and reality of the sources.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Pharmacy Benefits Management Academic Detailing Service, "Naloxone Toolkit" (2018), available at https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/AcademicDetailingService/Documents/508/VAAEDNaloxoneToolkit_508.pdf

⁶⁸ Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 13, Article 21, Part 1, Section 13-21-108(1) (2022), available at <https://law.justia.com/codes/colorado/2022/title-13/article-21/part-1/section-13-21-108-1/>.

Outreach

While researching and writing this proposal, we reached out to:

Did not respond

* *Responded but declined to discuss our proposal*

Government agencies

State

- Colorado Attorney General's Office: Natalie Sandoval, Opioid Response Coordinator
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:
 - Lindsay Ellis, Director of Legislative Affairs
 - Mica Moeller, Project Coordinator
 - Liz Atwood, Project Coordinator
 - Office of Behavioral Health Strategies
- Colorado Department of Public Safety

Local

- Weld RE-5J School District
- Steamboat Springs School District:
 - Celine Wicks*, Superintendent
 - Jay Hamric, Principal of Steamboat Springs High School
- Public Health Departments for these counties:
 - Adams: Ellen Velez, Associate Harm Reduction Manager
 - Archuleta: Emily Blocki, Public Health Nurse
 - Baca
 - Boulder #
 - Broomfield
 - Kelsey Warren, Community Health Coordinator
 - Laura Paulson, Youth Projects Coordinator
 - Chaffee
 - Clear Creek #
 - Denver: Ally Arnaiz, Opioid Overdose Prevention & Education Coordinator
 - Eagle: Rebecca Larson, Deputy Public Health Director
 - Fremont
 - Garfield #
 - Gilpin #
 - Grand: Abbie Baker, Director #
 - Gunnison #
 - Jackson: Marcie Clenden, Public Health Nurse #

- Jefferson
- La Plata #
- Larimer: Tom Gonzalez, Public Health Director
- Moffat: Amanda Pipher, Administrative Assistant
- Montrose #
- Northeast Public Health Department (Morgan, Logan, Phillips, Sedgewick, and Yuma Counties): Trish McClain, Public Health Director
- Otero
- Park
- Pueblo
- Rio Blanco: Makayla Sheridan, Director
- Routt: Cecelia Vann, Community Health Specialist
- Summitt: Dr. Amy Wineland, Director
- Weld: Robert McDonald, Director of Health Education, Communication, and Planning

Federal

- U.S. Attorney's Office for Colorado

Organizations that work in this policy area

- American Red Cross #
- Britta Horn, Republican Activist
- Caring for Colorado
- Colorado Association of School Boards
- Colorado Association of School Executives #
- Colorado Association of School Nurses #
- Colorado Children's Campaign: Toni Sarge, Director of Child and Family Help #
- Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention
 - Jennifer Mackender, External Relations Strategist
 - Hilary Bryant, Program Manager
- Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
- Colorado Education Association #
- Colorado Health Foundation
- Colorado Health Institute
- Colorado Health Network Inc.
- Colorado Rural Health Center
- Denver Health Paramedics
- Embark Behavioral Health
- Harm Reduction Center

- Lifepoint from Vivent Health
- North Colorado Health Alliance
- Once Chance to Grow Up #
- Partners for Youth
- Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) #
- Rise Above Colorado:
 - Kent MacLennan, Executive Director
 - Liz Sielatycki, Manager of Communication & Community Partnerships
- Sandstone Care
- Star Guide Wilderness (Based in UT, locations in CO)
- The Colorado Naloxone Project
- University of Colorado Denver/Anschutz public health professors/researchers
- Youth Healthcare Alliance (formerly Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care): Michaela Cardinal, Manager of Youth Engagement

Legislators

- Senator Mark Baisley, Senate District 4
- Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, Senate District 23 #
- Senator Janice Rich, Senate District 7
- Senator Cleave Simpson, Senate District 6
- Representative Ryan Armagost, House District 64
- Representative Chris deGruy Kennedy, House District 30
- Representative Megan Lukens, House District 26
- Representative Mike Lynch, House District 65
- Representative Barbara McLachlan, House District 59 #
- Representative Ron Weinberg, House District 51 #
- Representative Jenny Willford, House District 34
- Representative Mary Young, House District 50