



Final Report to the General Assembly

*Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Committee
December 2024 | Research Publication 821*



Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Committee

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December 2024

To Members of the Seventy-fourth General Assembly:

Submitted herewith is the final report of Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee. This committee was created pursuant to Section 2-2-1305.5, Colorado Revised Statutes. The purpose of this committee is to review the work of the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) and to recommend legislation regarding issues affecting Colorado youth.

At its meeting on October 15, 2024, the Legislative Council reviewed the report of this committee. A motion to forward this report and the bills therein for consideration in the 2025 session was approved.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rep. Julie McCluskie
Chair

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This report is also available online at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/colorado-youth-advisory-council-committee/2024-regular-session>

Committee Charge

The Representative Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee (review committee) was created in House Bill 19-1024 to review the work of the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) and to recommend legislation regarding issues affecting Colorado youth.

Pursuant to Section 2-2-1302, C.R.S., COYAC is charged with examining, evaluating, and discussing the issues, interests, and needs affecting Colorado youth. The issues may include, but need not be limited to:

- education and skill development;
- employment and economic opportunities and educational opportunities, including increased accessibility to opportunities for youth in rural communities;
- access to state and local government services;
- the environment;
- behavioral and physical health, including suicide prevention;
- safe environments for youth, including preventing bullying;
- substance abuse;
- poverty; and
- increased youth participation in state and local government.

COYAC consists of 35 members representing each state senate district, one member representing the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, one member representing the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and three nonvoting at-large members. The three at-large members must be selected to help ensure diversity on the council, with an express concern for adequate rural representation. Members must be between 14 and 19 years old and be enrolled in and attending school in Colorado. They serve two-year terms. COYAC meets three to four times per year and received organizational support from a vendor, Bighorn Leadership Program, under contract with the General Assembly. Four legislative members of COYAC are appointed by House and Senate leadership to two-year terms.

Each school year, COYAC makes policy recommendations to the General Assembly through the review committee, which can approve up to three interim committee bills. The four legislative members of COYAC serve on the review committee, along with one additional legislator from the Legislative Council Committee.

Committee Activities

The committee held three meetings during the 2024 interim. The student members of the committee presented the COYAC proposals for legislation to address a wide range of subjects, including:

- Opioid antagonist availability;
- Lower-cost energy for schools;
- School accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- Promoting youth health literacy;

- Reducing food waste in schools;
- Youth involvement in environmental justice; and
- School transportation options.

The following sections discuss the committee’s activities during the 2024 interim.

Opioid Antagonist Availability

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the challenges youth face with access to naloxone and other opioid antagonists across both urban and rural regions of Colorado. The students discussed how individuals in disadvantaged communities face dire financial barriers that prevent them from being able to easily access naloxone. The students presented studies that showed that people living at or below the poverty line suffered from increased deaths related to substance abuse, and were more likely to seek help for substance abuse. They made special note of the increased effects that this lack of access has had on the rural portion of Colorado. The students also identified age related factors such as inability to legally drive, as well as accessibility to public transport as additional barriers to opioid antagonists.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee drafted but did not recommend [Bill 1](#) to create the Opioid Antagonist Free Distribution Program in the Department of Public Health and Environment. The bill would have, among other things, allowed schools to maintain an opioid antagonist in an automated external defibrillator cabinet in the school or on a school bus.

Lower-Cost Energy for Schools

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the challenges youth face as heating, cooling, and other large utility costs continue to rise for individuals, businesses, and schools. The students highlighted several studies that back up their claim in both residential and commercial areas. The students also referenced Colorado’s Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap as a reason that schools and other public institutions should begin the transition to renewable energy.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee drafted but did not recommend [Bill 2](#) to create the Solar Energy for Public Schools Program within the Colorado Energy Office. The program would have awarded grants or loans to public schools to purchase and install solar energy devices on school buildings.

School Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the ways disabled youth are excluded from parts of their high school experience due to school buildings not adhering to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The representatives cited many of their own experiences, discussing how the inability to access some buildings or portions of buildings has affected their school experience and mental health. The students also highlighted,

in detail, the lack of accountability that they experience with schools following the requirements that have been set in place by the ADA for decades.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee drafted but did not recommend [Bill 3](#), which would have added duties to the Colorado Disability Opportunity office including expanding audits of school facilities for ADA compliance, amongst other duties.

Promoting Youth Health Literacy

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the challenges youth face with navigating the healthcare system. The students referenced several peers who have benefited directly from being able to understand what medications and doctors are best prepared to assist them with their various illnesses. They also referenced studies that found that students who are more health literate are able to make better choices for their health that can affect their entire lives moving forward. The students proposed efforts to reduce health disparities between various communities through early education and health literacy training for youth.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee recommended [Bill A](#), which creates a youth literacy oversight panel in the department of Public Health and Environment. The bill was not approved by Legislative Council at its meeting on October 15, 2024.

Reducing Food Waste in Schools

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about both food waste and food insecurity. The students introduced this issue as having three parts. The first part is how much food is thrown away in schools across the United States, both in terms of weight and monetary value. The second part is that a very small portion of the food that is thrown away is recycled or composted, with the majority instead going to landfills. The third issue of interest is the prevalence of food insecurity in less affluent areas. The students discussed their goals of reducing food waste, increasing environmental protections, and reducing food insecurity by addressing food waste in schools.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee recommended [Bill B](#), which encourages education providers to adopt a policy to reduce food waste in school cafeterias. The bill would also extend limited immunity to school personnel who supervise food redistribution.

Youth Involvement in Environmental Justice

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the challenges youth face with changes in the environment. The students discussed the limited resources available to students participate in, and learn about, the transition to renewable energy. They also noted that youth in marginalized communities that are disproportionately effected by changes in climate also do not have a say in how renewable energy may affect their neighborhoods.

Committee recommendations. As a result of its discussions, the committee recommended [Bill C](#), which, among other things, adds two seats for youth aged 14 to 21 to the Environmental Justice Advisory Board in the Department of Public Health.

School Transportation Options

The committee heard presentations from the COYAC student representatives about the challenges youth face as a result of bus driver shortages in many school districts, as well as the resulting increase in student absenteeism. The students used several studies to illustrate that this is a problem in many school districts across the state. The students also cited the lack of a requirement for school districts in Colorado to provide transportation to and from school and school activities as causing absenteeism and reducing participation in school related activities amongst Colorado youth.

Summary of Recommendations

As a result of the committee’s activities, the committee recommended three bills to the Legislative Council for consideration in the 2025 session. At its meeting on October 15, 2024 the Legislative Council approved two recommended bills for introduction. The approved bills are described below.

Bill B — Food Waste Reduction in Public Schools

The bill encourages school districts and charter schools to adopt policies aimed at reducing food waste in school cafeterias. These policies could include adding composting tables, setting up redistribution policies, setting up education programs for students and parents, and extending limited immunity to personnel that supervise food and beverage distribution.

Bill C — Youth Involvement in Environmental justice

The bill adds two youth members between the ages of 14 and 21 to the Environmental Justice Advisory Board, and requires the Colorado Energy Office to develop best practices for adopting and financing clean energy resources in schools.

Resource Materials

Meeting summaries are prepared for each meeting of the committee and contain all handouts provided to the committee. The summaries of meetings and attachments are available at the Division of Archives, 1313 Sherman Street, Denver (303-866-2055). The listing below contains the dates of committee meetings and the topics discussed at those meetings. Meeting summaries are also available on our website at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/colorado-youth-advisory-council-committee/2024-regular-session>

Meetings and Topics Discussed

August 1, 2024

- Discussion of COYAC Topic Areas

August 15, 2024

- Discussion and Vote on Draft Legislation Proposals

October 1, 2024

- Discussion and Vote of Bill Drafts
- Public testimony
- Discussion of COYAC Age Restrictions