

Colorado Youth Advisory Council Committee

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Committee Charge

Pursuant to Section 2-2-1305.5, C.R.S., the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) Committee was created to review the COYAC's work and to recommend legislation regarding issues affecting Colorado youth. The COYAC consists of 44 members and is charged with examining, evaluating, and discussing the issues, interests, and needs affecting Colorado youth.

Committee Activities

During the 2022 interim, the committee held three meetings. The committee discussed the COYAC's work and heard presentations from the COYAC youth on their legislative recommendations. The committee then held two meetings to determine which recommendations would become the committee's bills. Below are the topics of interest to the COYAC youth members.

Increasing the Number of Licensed Psychologists for Youth. The committee heard presentations from the COYAC students concerning the worsening mental health of students across the state and a lack of access to mental health providers, particularly in rural areas and among minority populations. Access to mental health services in schools is severely limited, per the students' report, and this is exacerbated by the lengthy and expensive process to become a licensed psychologist in Colorado.

Youth Public Health: Eating Disorders and Weight Discrimination. Among mental illnesses, the COYAC students discussed the pervasiveness and deadliness of disordered eating. The students expressed concerns that the current school health curriculum may exacerbate this problem and that weight-based discrimination affects students and adults in school, at work, and in health care settings.

Reforming Intervention Response to Substance Abuse in Secondary Schools. The COYAC students presented the committee with information on the pervasiveness of substance abuse among Colorado students, noting that Colorado ranks among the top 10 states for youth substance abuse. The students' report noted that there is no uniform or evidence based program for schools to follow in addressing student drug abuse and what programs exist may lack adequate funding.

Youth Sexual Health: HIV Education and Prevention. The COYAC students made presentations to the committee regarding the lack of HIV and AIDS education and information among Colorado youth. Young adults may not know how to access care if they believe they may be HIV positive and a stigma remains for those who are diagnosed. The students noted this lack of comprehensive knowledge about both the disease and how to care for those who get it makes it hard for young people to protect themselves and maintains ignorance and discrimination toward those who are HIV positive.

Youth Participation in Updating Educational Standards. The process for updating educational standards involves many entities associated with education in Colorado. The process does not, the COYAC students argued, involve students in any meaningful way and has no representation on review commissions.

Disciplinary Equity in Education: Co-Creation and Accountability in Restorative Planning. The committee heard presentations from the COYAC students addressing disproportionate discipline in public schools. The students noted that Colorado students of color, students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and English learners are overrepresented in school discipline.

Committee Recommendations

As a result of committee discussion and deliberation, the Colorado Youth Advisory Council Committee recommends the following three bills for consideration in the 2023 legislative session.

Bill A — *Disordered Eating Prevention.* The bill establishes the Office of Disordered Eating Prevention in the Department of Public Health and Environment and requires the office to create resources and partner or work with other agencies. The bill also creates the Disordered Eating Prevention Commission to advise the new office. The commission will have 17 members with professional or personal connections to disordered eating prevention. Finally, the bill creates the Disordered Eating Prevention Research Grant Program to provide financial assistance to eligible applicants to conduct research on risk factors for disordered eating, the impact disordered eating has on Colorado, or public health interventions that examine and address the root causes of disordered eating.

Bill B — *Secondary School Student Substance Use.* The bill creates the Secondary School Student Substance Use Committee in the Department of Education to develop a practice, or identify or modify an existing practice, for secondary schools to implement that identifies students who need substance use treatment, offers a brief intervention, and refers the student to substance use treatment resources. The department is required to publicly publish a report of the committee's findings and submit the report to the superintendent of every school district and chief administrator of every institute charter school that is a secondary school.

Bill C — *Disproportionate Discipline in Public Schools.* The bill requires each school district board of education, institute charter school board for a charter school authorized by the state charter school institute, or governing board of a board of cooperative services (BOCES) to adopt a policy to address disproportionate disciplinary practices in public schools. In addition, the bill requires school districts to consider current factors in law before suspending or expelling a student. Finally, the bill requires school districts to document in a student's record and compile in the Safe Schools report any alternative disciplinary attempts before suspending or expelling a student.