



Educator Recruitment & Retention Financial Assistance Program

2024 Implementation Update for Stakeholders

Background

The Educator Recruitment and Retention (ERR) program was created by SB21-185 to provide qualified program applicants with up to \$10,000 in one-time financial assistance toward their educator preparation program costs. Recipients must commit to teaching in a [shortage area](#) for three years in a Colorado public school. Educators who are enrolled in a Colorado-approved educator preparation program (EPP) and employed as an alternative teacher, Temporary Educator Eligibility (TEE) authorization holder, paraprofessional, or CTE instructor are eligible to apply. Employment must be in a Colorado public school, which includes charter schools. The program has received \$5 million annually for the last three Colorado state fiscal years (FY22, FY23 and FY24). Unspent funds must be returned to the general fund at the end of each fiscal year.

First Year of Implementation

The program was first implemented in fiscal year 2022 and at that time was only open to educators in rural and small rural districts. Financial assistance totaling \$420,857 was awarded to 80 educators. These educators served in 45 school districts across the state and were supported by seventeen different EPPs. In fiscal year 2023, the retention rate for educators awarded funds in fiscal year 2022 was 99%.

Expansion to All Shortage Areas

In response to ongoing workforce challenges across the state, HB22-1390 expanded eligibility to include all educator shortage-area positions. This change resulted in an increased number of applicants. Financial assistance totaling \$5.15 million was awarded to 749 educators in this second year of the program. 43% of these recipients filled positions in 102 rural and small rural districts. In contrast, 17% of Colorado's teachers teach in rural and small rural school districts. In fiscal year 2023, \$4.4 million was paid to 34 EPPs.

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This document is intended to provide stakeholders with detailed information on the implementation and status of the ERR financial assistance program.



Process Improvements in Fiscal Year 2024

CDE implemented significant improvements to the application and payment process to reduce the amount of time it takes to deliver funds to EPPs and increase the accuracy of real-time information available to program administrators regarding the balance of available funds to award. Key among these were the following:

- Replacing the PDF contract (3-year commitment) with an attestation section signed electronically during application submission. This eliminated the waiting period between application approval and Grant Award Letter (GAL) creation that consistently resulted in processing delays and confusion across monthly batches.
- Implementing a standardized cost demonstration form to replace the varied evidence of program cost that was previously accepted. This form expedited application review times and provided CDE with additional information on expected spending in the current fiscal year.
- Implementing discrete application windows to allow for more predictable processing timelines and increased transparency in communication with applicants and EPPs.

Applications have always been processed on a first-come-first-served basis. This has not changed and will not change under the current authorizing statute and rule. No educator type or shortage area is prioritized over another.

For fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024), the first application window was open July 1 through Aug 30.

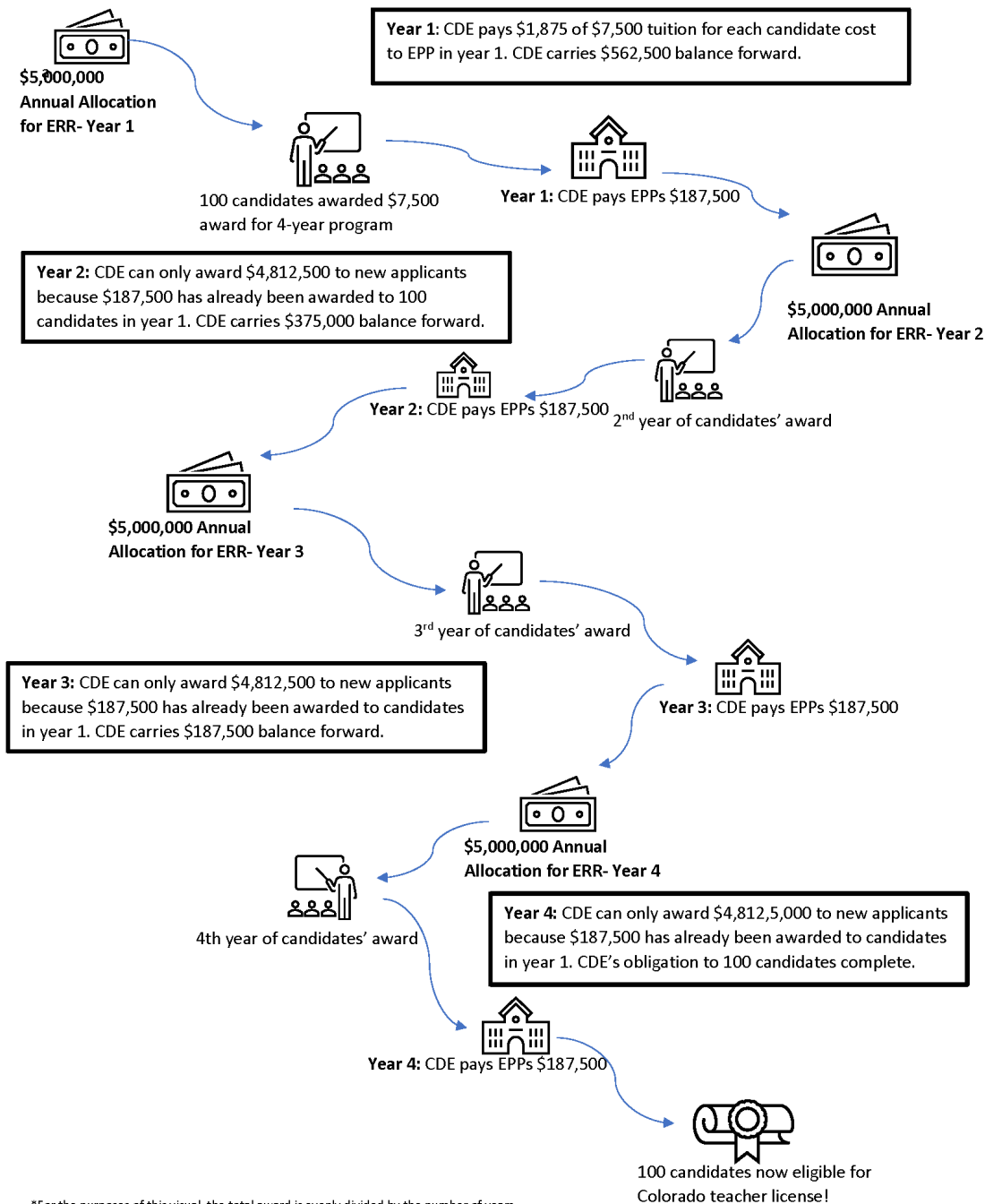
- Approximately \$4 million was awarded to 554 educators during this window, of which roughly \$3.8 million is expected to be spent in the 2024 fiscal year.
- The application re-opened for the second window on Sept. 29 and closed on Nov. 15.
 - As of Nov. 16, an additional \$859,000 has been awarded to 104 educators during the second application window, \$821,000 of which is expected to be spent in the 2024 fiscal year.
- The total amount expected to be spent out of fiscal year 2024 funds on awards approved in both windows as of Nov. 29 is \$4,681,457.

As of the close of the second application window, a total of 201 applications submitted between Sept. and Nov. are either pending review or awaiting additional information requested from the applicant. The financial assistance requests in these applications total approximately \$1.4 million. The fiscal year 2024 available funds have been fully allocated and sufficient funds are not currently available to approve these applications.

Ensuring funds availability for recipients' ongoing program costs incurred over multiple fiscal years

To ensure awards made to educators in previous years are completely honored, CDE maintains an ongoing accounting of the remaining balances on those awards (referred to as ongoing awards). At the start of a new fiscal year, the amount of these remaining balances is withheld from that year's funds available for new awards. The ERR program is also subject to encumbrance toward the [BOCES grant writing allocation](#) (22-2-122(3) C.R.S.) each year.

UNDERSTANDING THE ERR FUNDING STREAM*



*For the purposes of this visual, the total award is evenly divided by the number of years. \$7,500/4=\$1,875. However, EPPs can invoice CDE based on individual program and candidate needs, and the yearly costs could vary.



Impact of Ongoing Awards on Funds Available in Fiscal Year 2024

The amount of fiscal year 2024 funds available for new awards was depleted early in the second application window (Sept. 29-Nov. 15, 2023). At that point, CDE paused application processing and took a closer look at ongoing awards with remaining balances to determine if the full amount withheld at the beginning of the application year was still needed. Program administrators reached out to EPPs to identify remaining balances that could be reallocated to new applicants. That effort resulted in roughly \$100,000 being reallocated for new awards.

The fluid nature of this part of the process has sometimes made it challenging to clearly communicate with stakeholders about the status of available funds. CDE’s top priorities have included avoiding announcing the depletion of funds prematurely and not giving a false representation of the likelihood of new applicants receiving approval.

Original window schedule planned for fiscal year 2024

Three application windows were planned for the fiscal year 2024 application:

	Application Open	GALs sent to EPPs	Invoices due to CDE	Payments Sent By
Window 1	July 1-Aug. 30	Sept. 15	Oct. 15	Nov. 30
Window 2	Oct. 1-Nov. 15	Dec. 1	Dec. 30	Jan. 30
Window 3	Jan. 3-Feb. 15	March 1	April 1	May 1

Window 1 GALs were sent on Sept. 26, so the due date for invoices was extended to Oct. 26. This information was communicated via the program webpage, email, and designated agency office hours. Payments have been sent and are expected to be received by Nov. 30. The second application window opened on the evening of Sept. 29 since Oct. 1 fell on a Sunday. It closed at COB on Nov. 15. Emails were sent to all applicants and their EPPs on Dec. 1 and GALs were sent to EPPs on Dec. 13 and 14. The invoice portal was re-opened on Dec. 1 and will remain open through Jan. 15.

Potential Solutions

The first implementation of the window schedule revealed that more time between the first and second windows is needed to identify the status of educator candidates with remaining balances on their ongoing awards and ensure that EPPs are aware of these balances and invoicing accordingly and in a timely manner. One possible solution is to incorporate balance checks, reminders, and deadlines for invoice submission on ongoing awards. CDE is currently considering a solution that will stagger separate windows for new applications and processing ongoing awards. The application would be open for up to 90 days in both the fall and spring. Balance updates, reminders, invoices, and payments would be processed simultaneously with the application being open so that the accounting of available funds is updated in real-time as new applications are received and processed.

EPP input on this schedule will be gathered in late spring 2024. While this option has the potential to improve clarity on remaining balances and communication transparency, it does not solve the problem of demand for



this program exceeding available funds. There are over 200 educators who have requested approximately \$1.4 million in financial assistance that is not available for fiscal year 2024. This estimate does not include any candidates who would have submitted an application in spring 2024.

Spring 2024 Implementation Plans

To maintain fidelity to the practice of processing applications first-come-first-served, any fiscal year 2024 funds that can be reallocated for new awards must go toward those 200 candidates that have already applied. CDE is piloting the ongoing awards portion of the process solution above in spring 2024. If this process yields additional funds that can be reallocated for new awards, processing the remaining window 2 applications will resume at that time. An [online interest form](#) will again be utilized to capture information regarding unmet need from educators who did not get the opportunity to apply.