



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

# Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K)

## 2021 Annual Legislative Report

Submitted to:

**House Education Committee and Senate Education Committee of the  
Colorado General Assembly**

By:

**Colorado Department of Education**

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## Overview

The Colorado General Assembly passed S.B. 08-212 in 2008. Known as Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), the law called for an alignment of the preschool through postsecondary education system to enable Colorado students to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and careers. Central to CAP4K was the regular review of Colorado’s preschool through high school student learning standards, an aligned state assessment system, and expectations for postsecondary and workforce readiness for all Colorado high school graduates.

Pursuant to section 22-7-1019 (2), C.R.S., the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is required to provide annual reports related to the provisions of CAP4K, including the results achieved through the implementation of school readiness, the preschool through elementary and secondary education standards, and postsecondary workforce readiness.

### Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on CAP4K Implementation in 2019-20

The suspension of in-person learning in the spring of 2020 resulted in necessary policy changes from CDE. Where appropriate, this report will note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on policy implementation. The most notable policy impact was the cancellation of the administration of end-of-the-year assessments, including the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS).

## Kindergarten School Readiness

### Background

Kindergarten school readiness describes the status and ongoing progress a child makes within the domains of physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition and general knowledge. By monitoring each child’s progress in these areas, teachers, parents, schools, and caregivers can provide needed support to ensure each child’s success in school. Information gathered from kindergarten school readiness assessments should be used for supportive and instructional purposes. According to CAP4K, results from the kindergarten school readiness assessment cannot be used to deny a student admission or progression to kindergarten or first grade.

Each approved kindergarten school readiness assessment provides information on whether a kindergartner is meeting age expectations in each of the required school readiness domains at the beginning of the school year:

- Physical well-being and motor development;
- Social and emotional development;
- Language and comprehension development;
- Cognition; and
- General knowledge.

### Kindergarten School Readiness Description

School readiness describes both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten. School readiness is enhanced when schools, families, and community service providers work collaboratively to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content.

Source: Adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education (April 2017).



For reporting purposes, the general knowledge domain consists of mathematics and literacy, such that six domains are reported to the state.

At the March 2020, State Board of Education meeting the board of education voted to make changes to the kindergarten school readiness reporting system. Whereas previously, districts submitted only aggregate readiness information not by domain but by number of domains in which students demonstrate readiness, the new system will produce population level kindergarten school readiness levels in each of the required domains. The system will report aggregate student data for statewide results and disaggregate by school district, school, grade level, free or reduced-cost lunch eligibility status, gender, and ethnicity as required in statute. This new system will enter in effect during the 2021-2022 school year.

Kindergarten school readiness assessments are observational in nature where teachers use information gathered during the learning process to determine children's progress toward age-appropriate expectations. The variability of in-person learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the administration and statewide comparability of the results of the kindergarten school readiness assessment. As a result, the State Board of Education voted in September 2020 to pause the kindergarten school readiness data collection for the 2020-2021 school year.

## The Colorado Academic Standards

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### Background

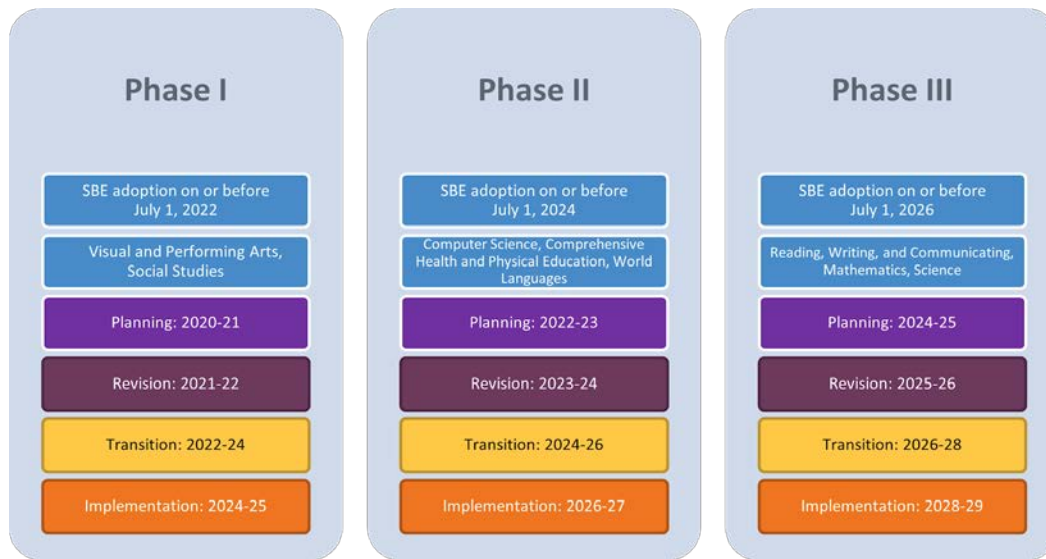
CAP4K required the state board to adopt standards that identify the knowledge and skills a student should acquire as the student progresses from preschool through elementary and secondary education. In the spring of 2020, the General Assembly passed H.B. 20-1032 which revised the standards revision timeline.

The changes now require the state board to review and revise approximately one-third of the standards beginning in 2022 and an additional one-third every two years thereafter. An overview of the plan of implementation can be found below.

### Standards Review and Revision Process

The department is currently in the process of preparing for Phase I of the standards review process. Phase I of the standards review and revision process will include the arts (dance, drama and theater arts, music, and visual arts). Due to overlap with recent legislation (House Bill 20-1136) calling for revisions to the social studies standards regarding genocide and Holocaust studies, in addition to recommendations from the House Bill 19-1192 Commission for history and civics standards, the social studies standards are recommended for review in Phase I to incorporate all the recommendations from the committee and commission. Content areas planned for Phase III are due to the overlap with state-level assessment contracts for these tested content areas. Therefore, the content areas in Phase II will consist of the remaining content areas. Figure 1 illustrates key components of the review and revision process.

FIGURE 1: Three Phases of the Standards Review Process



## Colorado’s Statewide Assessment System

The Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) were developed to assess the Colorado Academic Standards adopted in 2009 and 2010. The CMAS assessments in science and social studies were administered for the first time in 2014 with English language arts (ELA) and mathematics added in 2015. CMAS was administered in 2019 to measure student mastery of the standards in English language arts (grades 3-8), mathematics (grades 3-8), science (grades 5, 8 and 11), and social studies (sampled in grades 4 and 7). In 2019, Colorado administered the SAT Suite in high schools (PSAT in grades 9 and 10 and SAT in grade 11). Alternate assessments to the CMAS and SAT assessments (CoAlt) were administered to eligible students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Due to extensive school closures throughout Colorado to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the state paused administration of the CMAS, PSAT, SAT and CoAlt assessments in the spring of 2020. The list of assessments in Colorado’s assessment system are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: State Content Assessments

Assessment	Grades Administered
CMAS and CoAlt: English Language Arts	Grades 3-8
CMAS and CoAlt: Mathematics	Grades 3-8
CMAS and CoAlt: Science	Grades 5, 8 and 11
CMAS and CoAlt: Social Studies	Grades 4 and 7 (sampled)
PSAT and CoAlt	Grades 9 and 10
SAT and CoAlt	Grade 11

CMAS and CoAlt testing was not conducted in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To view results from previous years, please visit: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment>.



## Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness

### Background

CDE and the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) worked together to develop a description of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR). As required in Colorado law, every six years the Colorado State Board of Education and Colorado Commission on Higher Education are required to review the PWR description and adopt any appropriate revisions.

After extensive educator, community, and business input, the updated PWR description was jointly adopted by the State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in winter 2016. This description serves as the basis for the state's alignment efforts including the Colorado Academic Standards, assessments and informing student demonstrations of skills and knowledge required to be ready for college and a career upon earning a high school diploma.

### Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Description

Colorado high school graduates demonstrate the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to succeed in postsecondary settings and to advance in career pathways as lifelong learners and contributing citizens.

Source: Adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education and Colorado Commission on Higher Education (winter 2016).

### Progress in 2019-20

In alignment with the PWR description for Colorado, CDE and CDHE measure several factors that reflect levels of PWR for students beyond high school, including graduation rates, dropout rates, college entrance scores, participation in concurrent enrollment courses during high school, matriculation and persistence rates to and through postsecondary education, remediation rates for students who enter college at a Colorado public institution of higher education, and implementation of Colorado's graduation guidelines.

To support postsecondary and workforce readiness statewide for all Coloradans, CDE collaborated with other state agencies to develop the [Colorado Career Conversations Framework](#). Funded by the Colorado State Legislature, this effort is the first of its kind across our nation to support coordinated career advising and coaching between K-12, higher education, adult education, and workforce systems. During the 2019-20 school year, after a competitive procurement process, CDE contracted with the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) to provide training in the Colorado Career Conversations Framework to more than 2500 career development professionals. The training is now available online to support other professionals in the efforts to align career development messaging into the future.

### Graduation Rates

The four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2020 is 81.9 percent, which signifies a 0.8 percentage point improvement compared to the previous year. The Class of 2020 had 981 more graduates than the Class of 2019. The state's four-year graduation rate has increased 9.5 percentage points since 2010. Extended year rates for high school students taking five, six and seven years to graduate also show improvement in 2019-20. See the state's [graduation data dashboard](#) for more information. The dashboard features longitudinal data by student groups, schools, and districts.

The 2019-20 dropout rate for Colorado is 1.8 percent. This represents an all-time low in the state's dropout rate among students in grades seven through 12. Colorado's statewide dropout rate has reduced by more than half over the past decade, largely due to concerted efforts at the state- and district-level to engage students more



fully in their education and to re-engage those youth who have disengaged. [Details on the dropout rate](#) are available on the CDE website.

### **Concurrent Enrollment**

The state of Colorado passed the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act (CEPA) in 2009, which provides a structure for local education providers and institutions of higher education to enter into cooperative agreements to offer college courses to high school students. Due to changes in CEPA per S.B. 19-176, in an effort to expand concurrent enrollment opportunities for high school students, especially in areas with historically low (or no) student enrollment in concurrent enrollment opportunities, local education providers are now required to offer Concurrent Enrollment opportunities to qualified students in grades nine through 12 at no tuition cost to students and families. Most of these provisions will take effect in the 2020-21 school year.

S.B. 19-176 also created a [grant program](#) to fund expansion and innovation efforts and created [a statewide comprehensive website for students and parents](#) to inform them of what Concurrent Enrollment and other dual credit opportunities exist for students, what they cost, and the benefits and challenges of each option.

For more information about statewide student participation in Concurrent Enrollment and other dual credit programs, please see the Colorado Department of Higher Education's [annual Concurrent Enrollment report](#).

### **Graduation Guidelines**

CDE is also implementing graduation guidelines as established under H.B. 07-1118 and S.B. 08-256, requiring the development of statewide high school graduation guidelines that local school boards must meet or exceed. The purpose of graduation guidelines is to articulate Colorado's shared expectations for the meaning of a high school diploma and to outline the minimum components, expectations, and responsibilities of local districts and the state to support students in attaining their high school diploma. The graduation guidelines took effect for ninth graders in fall 2017, for the high school graduating class of 2021, and align with the state's description of postsecondary and workforce readiness and postsecondary entrance requirements.

To support local education providers in implementing the graduation guidelines, for the past two years, CDE staff has been hosting regional symposia to support collaborative conversations among interested stakeholders, including school and district administrators, school counselors, teachers, and community partners, focused on the unique ways that they are using graduation guidelines to drive programming in their schools. In addition, the Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness offers monthly virtual town halls to support implementation of graduation guidelines and other PWR programs.

In partnership with CDE's Office of Standards and Instructional Support, the Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness updated the list of PWR essential skills that assist students in reflecting readiness for next steps beyond high school and included these skills in the recent revisions to the Colorado's Academic Standards.

Due to the impacts of COVID-19, in July 2020, the State Board of Education provided flexibility in how graduation guidelines measures are reported for the 2020-21 school year, with full implementation of these guidelines anticipated for the class of 2022.

## **Admissions and Developmental Education Policy Review and Revision**

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## Background

CAP4K and subsequent state law (section 23-1-113, C.R.S.) required the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHHE) to review and revise the admission standards policy (CCHHE policy I, F) and the developmental/remedial education policy (CCHHE policy I, E) by December 15, 2013. Statute required CCHHE to align the admissions standards policy with the state's description of postsecondary and workforce readiness and graduation guidelines. After extensive institution and community input, CCHHE approved revisions to the admission policy in November 2014.

## Admission Standards Policy

The revised admission standards policy took effect for all students seeking admission for fall 2019 and thereafter. The key elements of the new admission standards policy directly support the shift in focus in Colorado from enrollment to student success. The changes included aligning postsecondary admissions expectations with high school graduation guidelines. Further, the policy increased flexibility for institutions to determine their own specific admissions requirements and increased the number of tools they may use to do so within the scope of their statutory role and mission. The policy presupposes that institutions will admit students whom they are best able to serve to be successful and earn a credential.

As required by the new policy, institutions submitted their proposed admission standards, which were approved by CCHHE in December 2014 and have been evaluated on an annual basis. The admissions standards include the mid 50 percent range of assessment scores and grade point average (GPA) for each institution's previously admitted student class, as well as academic rigor and mix information. In alignment with the upcoming graduation guidelines, academic rigor can specifically include competency-based education. Institutions' assessment score standards must meet or exceed college-ready standards, unless an institution shows that it is able to support the student adequately.

An interactive web-based admission tool was created that clearly explains admission standards at each institution. The online tool is found at this link: [www.coadmissionstool.org](http://www.coadmissionstool.org).

## Developmental Education Policy

Colorado's developmental (formerly "remedial") education policy provides criteria to be used by all public higher education institutions in the state in identifying students who need developmental courses in English and mathematics. The change from "remedial" to "developmental" was made by the Commission on Higher Education in 2017 to reflect the national movement away from using the term "remedial." The policy lays out standards whereby institutions may offer developmental courses.

The developmental education policy aligns with postsecondary expectations and with high school graduation guidelines. The goal of the policy is to improve the effectiveness of developmental placement and education, and to increase the number of credentials received by Colorado high school graduates, especially by those from underrepresented backgrounds. In 2013, the policy was updated to increase institution flexibility by giving more placement options, including allowing institutions to place students into college level courses along with supplemental academic instruction. The updated policy also increases the number of assessment options to use in placement. Assessment options have been expanded from including ACT/ SAT college entrance exam scores and the Accuplacer tests, to also including the General Education Development test (GED) and the two new high school equivalency exams (TASC and HiSET), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced scores. Also, institutions may use additional means of evaluating a student's readiness such as high school GPA and prior learning experiences (e.g., work experience).





In 2019, H.B. 19-1206, titled “Concerning removing equity gaps in higher education by ensuring more student have access to supplemental academic instruction,” was passed. Among other things, beginning in fall 2022 Colorado’s public institutions of higher education can enroll no more than 10 percent of students into traditional stand-alone pre-requisite developmental education courses that delay degree completion. This change will also impact school districts that offer developmental education courses through Concurrent Enrollment. The Colorado Department of Higher Education is holding ongoing meetings with academic and data representatives from institutions of higher education to determine how to best implement this change effectively.