COLORADO
Department of Education

Beyond Grant Management: Using Data, Stakeholder Input, and Policy Priorities to Drive Strategic Investment

September 2026

Overview

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  Shelbie Konkel, Deputy Commissioner of Strategy & Finance
- **Driving Strategic Investments: Aligning Funding to Drive Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) Outcomes**
  Danielle Ongart, Assistant Commissioner Student Pathways & Engagement Unit
- **Looking Forward: Continuing Our Strategic Investments**
  DeLilah Collins, Director of Grants Program Administration
- **Lessons Learned**

Using Data, Stakeholder Input, and Policy Priorities: The 2024 Grant Project

2024 Grants Project

Building a more strategic, responsive and efficient state competitive grant portfolio.

Leverage grant funding and activities to best target high-leverage and/or evidence-based activities;

Tie grant funding to identified state and district needs;

Streamline grant opportunities and administration internally and externally.

Grants were created in a fragmented fashion over more than 35 years.

As needs and priorities have evolved, state competitive grants have been added over time across many areas—resulting in complexity and variation today.

1990
- Comprehensive Health: Education Grant

1991 - USSR Dissolved

1997
- Expelled and At Risk Students Grant

2006
- Special Education Fiscal Advisory Committee: High Cost

2007 – Rockies Win World Series

2008
- Comprehensive Health: Student Wellness

2009
- School Counselor Corps Grant

2012 – Windows 8 Released

2012
- Early Literacy Grant Comprehensive Program
- Early Literacy Grant for Professional Development
- Early Literacy Grant for Sustainability

2014
- Adult Education Grant
- Quality Teacher Recruitment Grant
- School Health Professionals Grant
- School Transformation Grant (part of the EASI comprehensive application)

2015
- Bullying Prevention And Education Grant

2016
- Career Development Incentive Program
- Colorado Student Re-Engagement Grant
- Gifted Educational Universal Screening And Qualified Personnel

2017
- Computer Science Education Grant / Grant for Teachers

2018
- Accelerated College Opportunity Exam Fee

2019
- Automatic Enrollment In Advanced Course Grant Program
- Concurrent Enrollment Expansion And Innovation Grant Program
- Local School Food Purchasing Programs

2020
- Education Stability Grant K-5 Social and Emotional Health Act
- Local Accountability Systems

2021
- Dyslexia Pilot Program
- Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant
- Ninth Grade Success Grant Program
- Physical Education Instruction Pilot Program

2022
- Adult Education Credential Attainment (SB22-192)
- Colorado Career Advisor Training Program
- Postsecondary, Workforce, Career, and Education Grant Program

2023
- Adult High School Program
- Colorado Academic Accelerator Grant Program
- Facility Schools Operational Shared Service Grant

2024
- Substance Use Disorders Recovery
- Out-of-School Time Grant Program

35 Grant Programs | **17** Offices | **$85M** Total Funding

Key Findings

- State competitive grants are meeting important educational needs.
- The grant portfolio has evolved without a unified statewide strategy.
- Grant funding has become fragmented across numerous independent programs.
- Complex application and reporting requirements create barriers for LEPs to access funding.
- Grant structures make it difficult to consistently evaluate effectiveness across programs.

The Recommendations Created a Roadmap for Transformation

1. **Develop a statewide grant framework.** Create a unified framework that aligns grants with Colorado's strategic priorities.
2. **Consolidate the grant portfolio.** Develop a multi-year plan to align and streamline state competitive grants.
3. **Expand equitable access.** Address eligibility gaps so all qualifying LEPs can compete for funding.
4. **Strengthen technical assistance.** Expand support for applicants and grantees before, during, and after the grant process.
5. **Implement the grant management system.** Fully implement the Grants Administration Implementation and Navigation System.
6. **Establish continuous portfolio review.** Create a recurring process to evaluate and modernize the grant portfolio.
7. **Simplify applications and reporting.** Streamline grant applications and reporting requirements.
8. **Increase transparency through annual reporting.** Publish a comprehensive annual report on state competitive grants.
9. **Standardize grant data.** Develop consistent statewide grant reporting and data structures.
10. **Modernize grant scoring.** Review and update grant scoring criteria and rubrics.

Driving Strategic Investments:
Aligning Funding to Drive Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) Outcomes

SB 25-315 - Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness (PWR) Programs Summary

SB 25-315 reinvented Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness (PWR) programs by consolidating six PWR programs into “The Big Three” outcome categories:

A. 12 College Credits
B. Industry-Recognized Credentials
C. Work-Based Learning Experience

The intention was to create a more equitable distribution of funds among all local education providers that was easier to access with three distinct funds:

Start-Up Fund

- Three years (2025-26 - 2027-28)
- \$4.5M year 1, \$9.5M after
- Not a grant, formula distribution based on available student data
- To start and/or expand PWR programs and does not expire
- Final State Board of Education Start-Up Fund rules

Sustain Fund

- 2026-27 and onward
- \$12.7M year 1, \$14.2M after
- Builds off of the success of CDIP
- Not a grant, funds are distributed for reported Big Three outcomes students achieve
- Final State Board of Education Sustain Fund rules

Buckner Innovation Fund

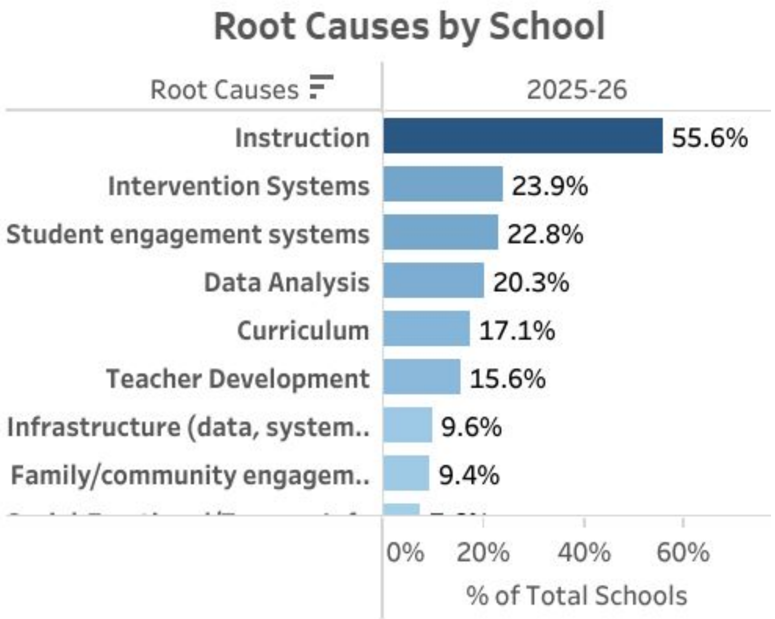
- 2028-29 and onward
- \$9.5M each year
- Grant program with limited eligibility
- Support for local education providers to improve student outcomes measured by the PWR indicator in the revised accountability system
- Rulemaking will be fall 2027

Use of the formula for the Start-Up Fund resulted in 62 school districts receiving PWR funding for the first time!

	2025-26 Start-Up Fund Numbers
Funded Local Education Providers (LEPs)	46%
Percent Rural School Districts Funded	64%
Percent Non-Rural School Districts Funded	13%
School Districts Funded for the First Time	62 (77%)
Percent Charter High Schools Funded	27%
LEP Funding Amount Range	\$28,033 - \$135,218
Average LEP Funding	\$36,455

Looking Forward:
Continuing Our Strategic Investments

CDE's current grant structures are meeting some level of needs, but are not addressing districts greatest needs.



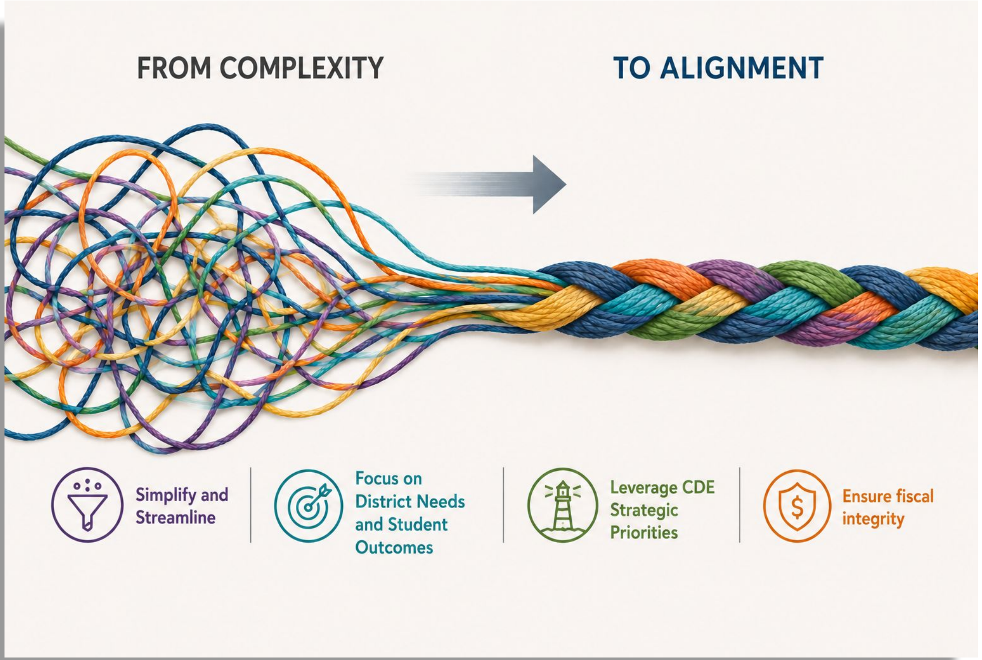
- Statewide, schools have identified "instruction" and "intervention systems" as the top two underlying systems needs (root causes) for the last three years.
- "Student engagement" has been consistently remained in the top five identified areas.
- Schools on Performance Watch are more likely to identify "instruction" (59.2% in 2025-26) and then other areas associated with the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement (e.g., data analysis, student engagement, teacher development).

Source: Statewide Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) Elements Dashboard
Note: The dashboard was launched in 2023-24. Some categories have been consolidated over that time (e.g., student engagement).

Streamlining Grant Opportunities and Administration

Vision, Principles, and Coherence Across Workstreams

- Create the vision and principles for grant making
- Identifying work streams and potential areas of overlap



Q: Have you done this work in your state? What are some strategies that you found to be the most effective?

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- We wish we would have communicated the arc of the project – and not just the problem and our most immediate first step (SB25-315) to address it.

- This was a marathon, not a sprint – slowing down and developing internal coherence first (beyond just grants) would have allowed us to use the momentum coming off the grants project to go farther and not just faster.

- You can never have too much communication with your stakeholders – and that includes your internal staff.

- The most firmly held beliefs are still contextual. Develop routine opportunities for feedback and be willing to refine your approach.

Questions?