



STATE and LOCAL OPPORTUNITY NOTE

(Revised, replaces Opportunity Note of Feb. 15, 2007)



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Prime Sponsor: Sen. Romer, D-Denver
Rep. Casso, D-Thornton

Bill Status: House Education
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Title: Concerning simultaneous enrollment in secondary and post-secondary institutions.

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. Along with assisting students to complete high school, the Fast College Fast Jobs pilot program proposed by the bill would make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable for students who might otherwise drop out.

Colorado Department of Education data show that, in 2003-04, 11,503 students dropped out of school statewide.¹ A recent study by the Alliance for Excellent Education estimated the number of dropouts for Colorado's class of 2006 at 16,145.²

Among the many reasons that students leave school without finishing their diplomas is that they do not see going to college and earning a degree as an attainable goal. By providing alternative pathways to high school completion, and a smoother transition to post-secondary education, the number of dropouts would decrease.

Based on the figures noted above, every 1 percent decrease in the number of dropouts would represent 115 to 161 more students remaining in school. Over time, this means hundreds more students could graduate from high school and earn post-secondary credentials with better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and reaching economic self-sufficiency.

Summary of Legislation

The bill creates the Fast College Fast Jobs pilot program that would allow eligible school districts to contract with higher education institutions to create programs through which participating high school

students could simultaneously complete, within five years, both a high school diploma and an associates degree or career and technical education certificate.

To be eligible for the pilot program, school districts must have a graduation rate of less than 75 percent for the 2004-05 academic year. Students would begin the program in the ninth grade, would be required to maintain a minimum 2.0 grade point average each semester, and would have to meet any other requirements established by the school district.

School districts would include students participating in the program in their pupil enrollment and would receive full per-pupil operating revenue for them. However, in any academic year that a student was enrolled in at least 12 credit hours of post-secondary coursework through the program, the district would receive only 85 percent of the per-pupil revenue for that student.

School districts and higher education institutions would negotiate, as part of the contract, the amount and payment of participating students' post-secondary tuition, course fees, book costs and the costs of counseling and tutoring services. Students would be ineligible for College Opportunity Fund stipends for courses taken through the program.

Background

Colorado's education pipeline leaks at several key transition points. Of 100 ninth graders, only 42 graduate from high school and go directly to college, and only 20 graduate from college within 150 percent of the time it takes to complete degree requirements.³

The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

In response to similar issues, some states have started to develop programs to better connect K-12 and postsecondary education. The Colorado Commission for High School Improvement recommended the development of “new arrangements between high schools and colleges that help make the transition from high school to college faster and easier.”⁴ One such approach is dual enrollment, where high school students can also take postsecondary coursework and, in certain cases, earn their diplomas and post-secondary credentials simultaneously.

Dual enrollment programs are not new, but a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education says, “The idea that they should be accessible to a broader range of students is a new approach. In the past, [such programs] enrolled primarily academically proficient and high-achieving students. Today, however, a growing number of policymakers, education reform groups, and researchers argue that middle- and even low-achieving high school students may benefit from participation.”⁵

Research/Evidence of Effectiveness

Research on the effectiveness of dual enrollment programs serving at-risk students is still developing. Nevertheless, the Education Commission of the States notes that many states are achieving successful outcomes through them.⁶ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which sponsors a national initiative on the “early college” approach to dual enrollment, reports an average promotion rate, for students passing a grade and moving on to the next, of more than 90 percent.⁷

Overall, the case study evidence cited by ECS and others suggests that such programs have the potential to lower dropout rates, improve high school performance, and increase the number of low-income and minority students who go on to college. They also reduce some of the costs for college and are a step in the process of implementing a preschool through post-secondary “P-16” education system.⁸

Estimate of Impact and Benefits

Ensuring that students succeed in school and go on to earn post-secondary credentials carries both personal and social benefits. On average, a worker with a college degree earns thousands of dollars more per year than one with a high school diploma. In addition, unemployment rates for those with post-secondary credentials are much lower than those for

high school graduates, and even lower compared to those who drop out of school.⁹ Ultimately, the foundation of a strong and competitive state economy is a well-educated workforce.

Senate Bill 07-148 is a step forward in helping at-risk students, who might not otherwise view post-secondary education as within their reach, to stay in school, complete their diplomas and go on to college. Such an approach will help more students succeed, which in turn will benefit the state and expand opportunity for all Coloradans.

End notes

Note: Underscored titles indicate links to the documents online. To get an electronic version of this Opportunity Note with active hyperlinks, please visit our website, www.thebell.org.

- ¹ Colorado Department of Education, [2004 Colorado Education Facts](#).
- ² [The High Cost of High School Dropouts. What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools](#), Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief, January 2007.
- ³ [Student Pipeline—Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College, 2004](#), The National Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, Crosscutting Info section.
- ⁴ [High School Reform in Colorado: Meeting the Expectations of a New Era](#), Final Report of the Colorado Commission for High School Improvement, December 2005.
- ⁵ Katherine L. Hughes, et.al., [Pathways to College Access and Success](#), U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, September 2005.
- ⁶ Carl Krueger, [Dual Enrollment: Policy Issues Confronting State Policymakers](#), Education Commission of the States, Policy Brief, March 2006.
- ⁷ Jennifer Jacobson, [The Early-College Experiment](#), *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2005.
- ⁸ Bell Policy Center 2005 reports: “Colorado: The State of Opportunity 2005 Report” and “Exploring Colorado’s Educational Pipeline.” www.thebell.org
- ⁹ For various estimates of the difference in earning potential based on educational attainment see [Education and Training Pay, Postsecondary Education Opportunity](#), Oskaloosa, Iowa, (which includes unemployment rates); [The High Cost of Not Graduating High School](#), Colorado Children’s Campaign, commissioned by the Donnell-Kay Foundation; “The High Cost of High School Dropouts,” Alliance for Excellent Education.