



The
Bell
Policy
Center

STATE and LOCAL OPPORTUNITY NOTE



POSITIVE

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Prime Sponsors: Sen. Hudak, D-Westminster,
Reps. Benefield, D-Arvada, Merrifield, D-Colo. Spgs.

Bill Status: Senate Education
Policy Analyst: Frank Waterous (303) 297-0456

Title: Concerning measures to increase parent involvement in public education

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. Parental involvement is one of the most important elements in children's academic success. By creating a state advisory council and grant program to increase parental involvement in education, the bill will take an important step toward closing the state's achievement gaps, reducing the dropout rate and increasing the number of students who successfully transition to post-secondary educational opportunities and careers.

Colorado Department of Education data show that in 2006-07, 18,027 students dropped out of school statewide.¹ By helping schools to engage more parents – and particularly those from low-income and minority families – as partners in their children's academic success, the number of dropouts would likely decrease. Based on the figure above, every 1 percent decrease in the number of dropouts would represent 180 more students remaining in school. Over time, this means hundreds more students could graduate from high school and earn post-secondary certificates or degrees, giving them better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and economic self-sufficiency.

Summary of Legislation

The bill creates within the Colorado Department of Education a state advisory council for parent involvement in public education. Council membership would represent a broad range of relevant groups, organizations, and state agencies. The bill directs the council to advise public education entities on best practices and strategies for increasing parental involvement and promoting family and school partnerships.

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.

The bill also creates a grant program to provide funds to public schools for the creation and implementation of parental involvement programs. It specifies the eligibility criteria to be considered in making the grants, including schools' free or reduced-cost lunch and English Language Learner student populations, dropout rates and achievement gaps.

The bill sets requirements for parental representation on school district accountability committees and requires at least one parent to be appointed to the School Leadership Academy board, district and institute charter school governing boards, each of the Regional Service Area Councils, the State Charter School Institute board, the Board of Trustees for the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind and the advisory committee to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

Background

Persistent achievement gaps exist for Colorado's low-income and minority students, and research shows that these students drop out at significantly higher rates than students from higher-income and non-minority families.² Parental involvement in children's education is consistently cited as one of the key elements associated with lower dropout rates and increased student achievement. Significantly, given the changing demographics of Colorado's school population, recent findings suggest that parental involvement is the single strongest predictor of Latino academic performance.³

In order to provide state-level input, direction and advice on improving student achievement through increased parental involvement in public education, a variety of states (e.g., Delaware, Maryland,

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.

Massachusetts, Nevada and New Mexico) have established state advisory councils.⁴ Although the specifics of council membership and duties vary from state to state, all are focused on expanding policies and practices that increase student success. This student-centered approach to education reform is a key element in Colorado's ongoing "P-20" education improvement efforts.⁵

Research/Evidence of Effectiveness

The evidence clearly indicates that supporting parents' involvement in education is a key strategy for closing achievement gaps, cutting dropout rates and increasing post-secondary participation. A review of the research conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory found that students with involved parents were more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs.
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits.
- Attend school regularly.
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school.
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education.⁶

Other research concludes that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning.
- Communicate high yet reasonable expectations.
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.⁷

Several studies have found that while families of all incomes, educational levels, and ethnic/racial backgrounds are engaged in supporting their children's learning at home, white, middle-class families tend to be more involved at school.⁸

Given the evidence, creating a state advisory council and grant program to increase student success through expanded parental involvement – particularly among those from low-income and minority families – is a prudent public policy decision.

Estimate of Impact and Benefits

Students whose parents are involved in their

educational success both at home and at school are more likely to graduate and go on to earn postsecondary credentials. Because of its potential to increase student success in Colorado, SB 09-090 carries both individual and societal benefits. On an individual level, earnings dramatically increase and unemployment rates decrease with each higher level of education attained.⁹ On the societal level, the foundation of a strong and competitive state economy is a well-educated citizenry and workforce.

For these reasons, the Bell Policy Center supports SB 09-090 as an important step forward for educational opportunity in Colorado.

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, *2007 Colorado Education Facts*.

² Rich Jones, *Understanding and Closing Colorado's Achievement Gap*, The Bell Policy Center Policy Brief, Vol. 1, No.2, March 21, 2006, *Colorado Education Statistics: 2006-2007 Dropout Data*, Colorado Department of Education and *Event Dropout Rates By Family Income, 1972-2001*, National Center for Education Statistics.

³ See for example Andrew Behnke and Sue Rosman, *Latino Family Engagement: How to Effectively Engage and Connect with Latino Parents and Youth* and Axel Lluch, *The New Latino South: Latinos in North Carolina*, Governor's Office of Hispanic/Latino Affairs.

⁴ For information on various state parental advisory councils, see the following: *Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico*.

⁵ *Colorado's P-20 Education Coordinating Council* website.

⁶ Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002.

⁷ *Effective Strategies: Family Engagement*, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

⁸ Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence*.

⁹ For data on the differences in earning-potential and unemployment based on educational attainment see *Education and Training Pay*, Postsecondary Education Opportunity, Oskaloosa, Iowa, and Dr. Tucker Hart Adams, *The Impact of Public Higher Education on the State of Colorado*, Dec. 2007.