



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR THE COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Higher expectations help all Colorado students prepare for college and careers

Schools must do a better job preparing students for the increasingly high-skill jobs available in Colorado. The world is changing – economic growth and competition for jobs are accelerating. Not only do Colorado students have to compete against other students in the U.S., but with students internationally and for jobs in every industry. Schools must educate students to become critical thinkers, communicators, and problem-solvers; skills that top the wish list for Colorado colleges and employers.

Future Forward is a coalition of Colorado's business community that supports this crucial step for Colorado education. Visit the coalition online at www.futureforwardcolorado.org for more information and resources.

Important improvements are underway in Colorado's schools that hold great promise for creating a more highly skilled workforce – one that is better equipped to meet the needs of employers at home and around the globe. At the center of these changes are new, more rigorous standards called the Colorado Academic Standards, which require students to learn at much higher levels than in the past. They are designed to better prepare students to succeed in both college and the workplace. The Colorado Academic Standards are comprised of 10 high academic content areas and include the English Language and Mathematics Common Core State Standards, and they were implemented in classrooms across the state during the 2014-2015 school year.

Employer support for this work is critical to moving Colorado in the right direction. Here are a few reasons why the business community supports the Colorado Academic Standards:

- The standards are rigorous, streamlined, relevant, and better able to prepare students for college and the workforce.
- They challenge students to read critically, write extensively and solve real-world math problems at greater capacity, raising the bar for all students and resulting in a more valuable education.
- They are benchmarked to high international standards to guarantee that American students are equipped to compete in the 21st century global economy.
- They build in complexity from grade level to grade level to eliminate skill gaps and ensure our students are prepared for graduation.
- They establish what students need to learn but do not tell teachers how to teach. Teachers and school leaders will determine how the standards are to be taught and will establish the curriculum, just as they currently do, allowing for continued flexibility and creativity.

These standards are the public education system's equivalent of an NFL playing field. Across all states, every football is the same length and width; each team plays by the same rules of the game. In the exact same way, the Colorado Academic Standards identify the standards needed for every student in Colorado to compete globally in college and career. Teachers, administrators, and parents maintain local control, putting together the equivalent of an NFL playbook. Their strategies include curriculum, programs, and other factors that consider each student's unique needs. It's a game plan for students to reach the end zone: graduation.



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Why does Colorado need to improve students' preparation for college and career?

Our workforce's skillset is disconnected from the current and future skillsets needed by employers. The way things stand now, too many students drop out of high school or graduate unprepared for adult success. If academic performance is not rapidly improved, our workforce problems will only increase.

Each year, nearly 17,000 students drop out or fail to graduate from high school on time. Of those who do graduate, only 23% are academically prepared for the rigors of college, leading to costly remedial classes at the college level. As a result, Colorado schools are producing less than half of the workers needed to fill the top 30 occupations with the largest projected openings.

Due to this deficit in our K-12 education system, Colorado employers don't have an adequate supply of talent and are forced to import college-educated workers from other states and countries.

Why should employers support this new work in Colorado schools?

Competition from around the world is getting stronger every day. The only way to ensure economic growth is for Colorado to step up and do a better job of developing a highly skilled workforce. The state has a great reputation for a strong work ethic, but it comes up short too often in education and skills development.

For more information and resources about the Colorado Academic Standards, please visit:

www.futureforwardcolorado.org.