

Student Story Museum Activity

These student stories were collected from 8 districts through CEI's rural CCL work in collaboration with our implementation partners.

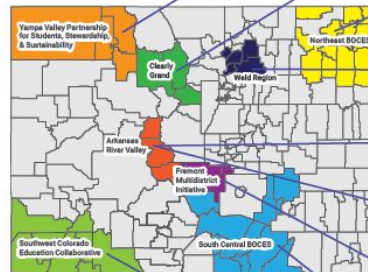
You will get to listen to one story during the opening activity... feel free to peruse more now!

LISTEN TO STUDENTS TELL THEIR STORIES!

AN INTERACTIVE EXHIBIT OF
CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING
IMPACT ACROSS COLORADO.



Welcome to the Elevating Rural Colorado Student Stories Exhibit! We have structured this exhibit as a gallery walk where you will interact with posters that spotlight student stories from eight regions across the state and listen to students' career-connected learning interests, experiences, and impacts as told by them. These stories highlight the educators, staff, and industry partners who have been impacted by career-connected learning work throughout Colorado—and most importantly, students—as they prepare for fulfilling careers and thriving, hopeful futures. These student stories exemplify the experiences of many others across the state. Based on initial data collection, in 2023-24 more than 400 students earned an industry credential, and more than 600 students participated in internships across the Rural Coalition regions supported by CEI, CO Succeeds, Empower Schools, and Lyra. Each student poster shares additional data that demonstrates the scale and context of career-connected learning within their community.



- Engineering & Architecture Pathway**
GABRIELA GARCIA-ARMENDARIZ
Steamboat Springs High School
Steamboat Springs RE-2 District
- Business CTE Pathway**
FLYNN REESE
Clear Creek High School
Clear Creek RE-1 District
- CNA Pathway**
ADRIAN RASCON-SUAREZ
Yuma High School
Yuma 1 District
- Agriculture Pathway**
RAEYLYNN HANAGAN
Socrast High School
Johnstown-Mt. View RE-57 District
- CNA Pathway**
MICHELLE RAMIREZ
Cloud City High School
Lake County R-1 District
- Internship in IT**
ANTHONY SCHADEGG
Horizon Exploratory Academy
Salida R-32 District
- Veterinary Assistant Pathway**
JACOB BROOKS
Florence 3rd High School
Premont RE-2 District
- Internship in IT**
COLTON HARDY
Manitou High School
Manitou 37 District
- Environmental Science Pathway & Educator Pathway**
AUTUMN & WILLOW SCHULZ
Bayfield & Grand High Schools
Bayfield R-77.5 & Grand R-77 Districts



Scan the QR codes on the posters to hear audio clips from students.



This Isn't Business as Usual:

Reimagining High School in an Evolving State and Federal Context

Objectives

- Deepen understanding of the Big 3 (what, why, how)
- Start to build your personal why for the Big 3 work
- Generate ideas about how School Boards can support Superintendents

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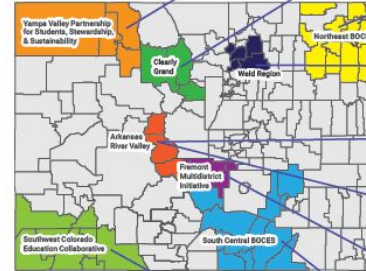
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*Data is missing, incomplete, or only focuses on select pathways in some regions and therefore does not represent complete student participation.

Museum Activity

Main CCL Experience
Highlighted

 Engineering CTE Pathway



Student Name &
Community
Details

**GABRIELA
GARCIA-
ARMENDARIZ**

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL
STEAMBOAT SPRINGS RE-2 DISTRICT
YAMPA REGION



Summary of
Student Story

Gabriela is forging her own path within the Architecture and Engineering Pathway! As a rising senior, she has learned that high school is what you make of it, so she set out to design an experience that both she and her family can be proud of. Gabriela has completed internships, volunteers regularly with youth, and works as a translator in her school and neighboring districts. She credits Mr. Brabec, her physics and applied engineering teacher, for motivating her to create things she never dreamed would be possible. She is very interested in the differences in architecture across places and cultures and, after college, hopes to design memorable buildings that bring more cultures alive right here in Colorado.

“The experiences I had in architecture and engineering have helped me as a person to understand how my emotions also play a part in my work. Seeing how me, myself, as a person can do what I can do. I've learned that I'm not as weak as I thought I was.”

Meaningful
student quote

Collaborative
Details

Steamboat Springs is part of the Yampa Valley Partnership for Students, Stewardship, and Sustainability (YVPS3), which partners four K-12 districts, two institutions of higher education, and multiple industry partners to provide shared career-connected learning opportunities for students. See more at yvps3.org.

Data details on
region/district/
school

**2023-24
REGION
DATA
DETAILS**

Students: 1,617

Within the agriculture pathway, 26 students across Hayden, Moffat, and South Routt obtained an industry certificate and 60 students completed an internship with a business partner in the agriculture sector.

148 students participated in concurrent enrollment with Colorado Northwestern Community College within the focus pathways.

Other sectors: Agriculture, Natural Resources, Construction, and Health Sciences.



Graduate
Profile



 LISTEN TO MY STORY

Scan to hear
clip of student
tell her story

Connecting our why to student stories

- **LISTEN:** Pick **one** poster to read and listen to the student story - each story is about 3 minutes.
- **REFLECT on a personal connection to this work**
 - Can you think of a student who would have benefited from engaging in career-connected learning experiences? Obtaining an industry credential, college credit or work-based learning before graduation?
 - How could have you (or did you) benefit from these experiences as a high school student?
- **PAIR and SHARE:**
 - Find someone to connect with and share what you discussed

Objectives

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- Generate ideas about how School Boards can support Superintendents in development and implementing their Big 3 Strategy

CEI Vision and Theory of Change

CEI Vision and Mission

CEI's vision is that all young people in Colorado exit K-12 education boldly taking their next steps toward hopeful, equitable, and prosperous futures.

Achieving this vision requires an education system that delivers on the promise of public education to develop thriving young people and flourishing communities.

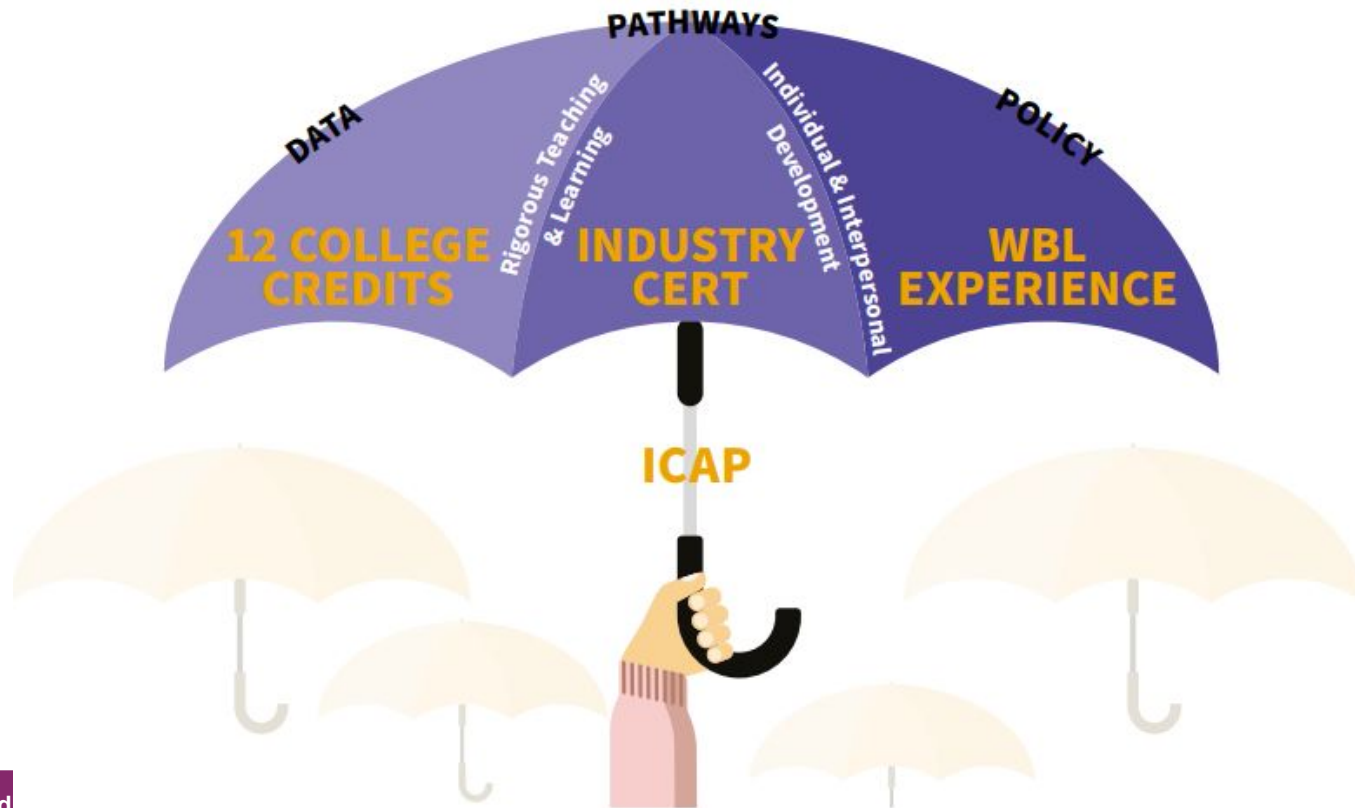
CEI District Theory of Change

To realize this vision, CEI partners with school districts to transform teaching and learning environments so they ignite student readiness, spark, and motivation, and build the systems conditions that make these shifts lasting and scalable.

CO/CEI Vision to Reimagine High School

One way we bring this theory of change to life is through our CCL work. This strategy advances Colorado's vision for K-12 pathways – known as the Big Three – focused on ensuring every student graduates ready to pursue their passion, purpose, and economic mobility.

The Big 3 - The Umbrella Framework



What are The Big Three?

Students have access to and complete at least one of the following:



Earned a quality, in-demand [non-degree credential](#)



Completed 12 college credits that count towards a postsecondary credential



Participated in one high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunity (from the Learning Through Work and Learning at Work on the [Work-Based Learning Continuum](#))

WHY The Big Three?



College Credit: Access to college credit in high school saves families money and time while building momentum toward degree completion. These credits should be part of defined postsecondary and workforce readiness pathways that connect education to real-world opportunities.



IRC: Industry-recognized credentials open doors to high-demand, high-paying jobs. By equipping high school students with these certifications before graduation, we ensure they leave with tangible skills valued by employers, setting them on a clear path to career success.



WBL: Work-based learning offers students hands-on experiences in the workplace, bridging the gap between classroom knowledge and career readiness. These opportunities empower learners to develop problem-solving and critical-thinking abilities, apply classroom learning to real-world settings, explore career options, build professional networks, and improve postsecondary and employment outcomes.

WHY The Big Three?

Pathway Component	Evidence of Impact for Students
Industry Recognized Credentials	A study from the Fordham Institute shows that students who earn industry-recognized credentials in HS generally have better college outcomes, higher employment rates, and high rates of college enrollment and persistence.
Work-Based Learning	A report from Strada Education shows that paid internships are associated with higher earnings, increased confidence, and increased satisfaction with education and career.
Concurrent Enrollment Coursework	A What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report identified five studies that collectively found dual enrollment increases the likelihood of high school graduation, college access and enrolment, college credit accumulation, and college degree attainment. Studies from the Community College Research Center show that concurrent enrollment programs, which allow HS students to earn college credit that counts towards graduation requirements, are linked to increased college enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment.

Research on the why was compiled from Empower Schools in their [Colorado Rural Collaborative Guide](#).

Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRC)

From [SB25-315](#), C.R.S. 22-54-202(7):

“Industry-recognized credential” means an industry certification and a nondegree credential, as both are defined in section 23-5-145.8, that satisfy the requirements developed pursuant to section 23-5-145.6(2) and identified in the most recent annual Colorado Talent Pipeline report prepared pursuant to section 24-46.3-103(3).

QUALITY AND IN-DEMAND NON-DEGREE CREDENTIAL RUBRIC

To determine if a credential meets the above definition and should be designated as a quality and in-demand non-degree credential, the following rubric should be applied.

The credential must demonstrate each of the four signals of quality: Demand, Evidence of Skills, Employment Outcomes, and Stackability. The credential must meet at least one (1) of the following criteria in each category.

 Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Connects to a Top Job or critical occupation listed in the Talent Pipeline Report over the last three years.<input type="checkbox"/> Defined as a regional need or emerging credential by the local Workforce Development Board or Approving Agency.<input type="checkbox"/> Accredited or recognized by a statewide or national industry-recognized accredited body.
 Evidence of Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provides clearly identified information on what skills and competencies are demonstrated by earning the credential.
 Employment Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Directly leads to a job paying a living wage (as defined by the MIT living wage calculator for each county).<input type="checkbox"/> Develops the essential skills and competencies needed for jobs that pay a living wage.<input type="checkbox"/> Can be stacked with other credentials to earn a living wage in an in-demand occupation or career pathway.
 Stackability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Exists as part of a stackable sequence of aligned credentials allowing for skill development, career progression, and increased earnings over time.<input type="checkbox"/> Is a prerequisite to a credential required by industry to obtain a job.<input type="checkbox"/> Leads to family living wage in a growing occupation on its own.

Qualifying Credentials:

[SY25-26 CDIP List](#) (soon to be renamed IRC List)
- is updated yearly

A couple of examples:

- Health Sciences - Certified Nursing Assistant
- IT - CompTIA A+ or Python

Postsecondary Credit Attainment

From [SB25-315](#), C.R.S. 22-54-202(7):

“Postsecondary credit attainment” means a transferable college credit that may be attained while a student is in high school, in alignment with the CCHE admissions standards set forth in section 23-1-113, which may include the successful completion of a concurrent enrollment course as described in sections 22-35-103, a sufficient score as determined by the state board of education on an end-of-course advanced placement exam, or a sufficient score in an international baccalaureate course.

Postsecondary Credit Attainment

Qualifying College Credits:

- Concurrent Enrollment courses
 - Currently only written as courses on the “Guaranteed Transfer List”
- Qualifying Advanced Placement (AP) Exam Scores
- Qualifying International Baccalaureate (IB) Exam Scores

Work-Based Learning

From SB25-315, C.R.S. 22-54-202(7):

“Work-Based Learning means demonstrating learning through work or at work, consistent with the work-based learning quality expectations pursuant to section 8-83-602(5). “Work-Based Learning” includes the same meaning as set forth in section 8-83-601.

COLORADO'S WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUUM

Work-based learning is a continuum of activities that can be done in part or in whole, in the classroom or at a work site, providing the learner with hands-on, real world experience.

LEARNING ABOUT WORK

Career awareness and exploration helps individuals build awareness of the variety of careers available and provides experiences that help inform career decisions.

- Career Counseling
- Career Planning
- Career Fairs
- Career Presentations
- Industry Speakers
- Informational Interviews
- Mentoring
- Worksite Tours
- Project-based Learning

LEARNING THROUGH WORK

Career preparation supports career readiness and includes extended direct interaction with professionals from industry and the community.

- Clinical Experiences
- Credit-for-work Experiences
- Internships
- Pre-apprenticeship
- Industry-sponsored Project
- Supervised Entrepreneurship Experience

LEARNING AT WORK

Career training occurs at a work site and prepares individuals for employment.

- Apprenticeship
- On-the-job Training
- Employee Development

Education Coordinated



Business Based

OUTCOMES:

Skilled Talent for Business + Meaningful Careers for Students & Job Seekers



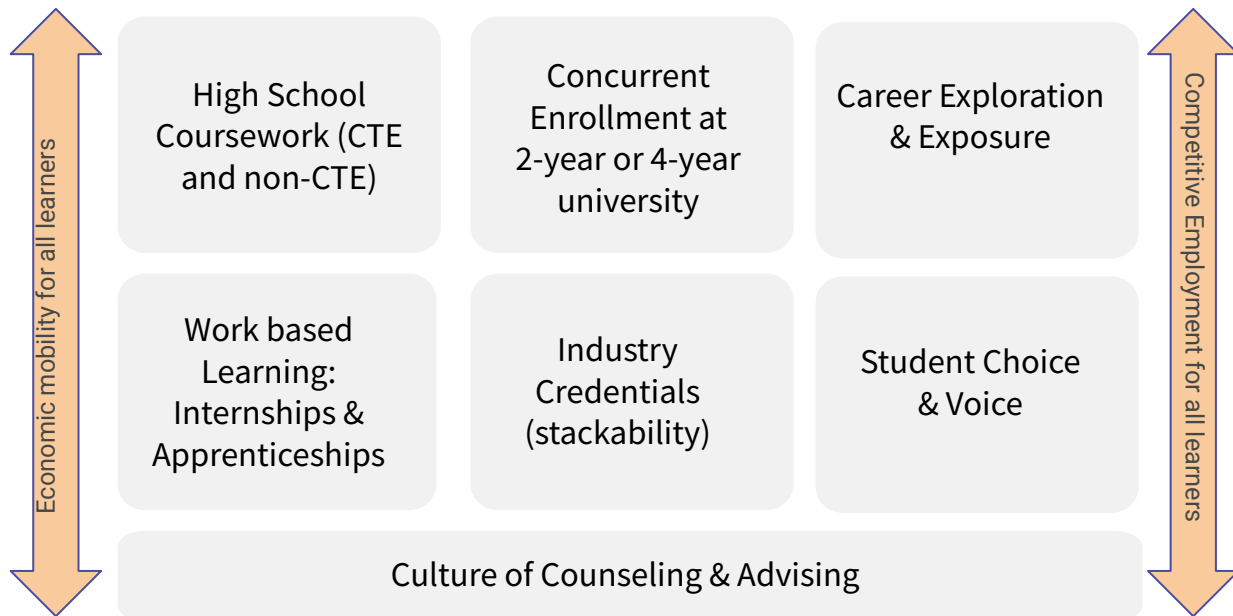
**Qualifying
WBL
Activities**

How do students access the Big 3?

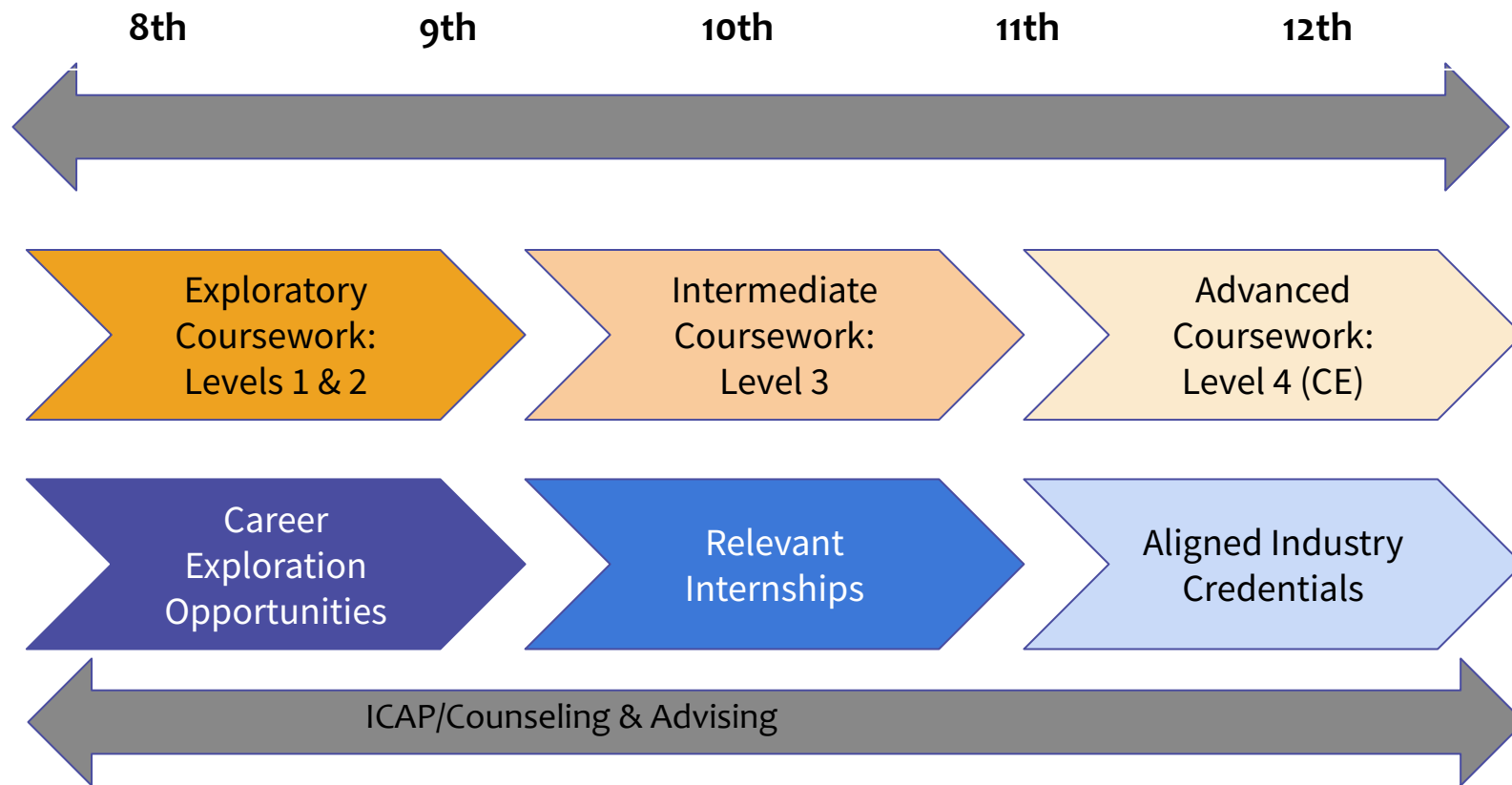
- HS CTE Pathways are the most common way that students can access one or all of the Big 3 - a high quality CTE pathway should include all of these components
- Direct partnerships with higher education that may not be high school CTE pathways also facilitate access to CE and some industry-recognized credentials
- In some districts, WBL is offered outside of CTE as well - districts are also piloting ways for students to earn industry credentials in a self-paced format outside of CTE
- Strong Career Advising and Navigation, through the ICAP process is an essential component of student access and attainment of the Big 3

What do we mean when we say “pathway”?

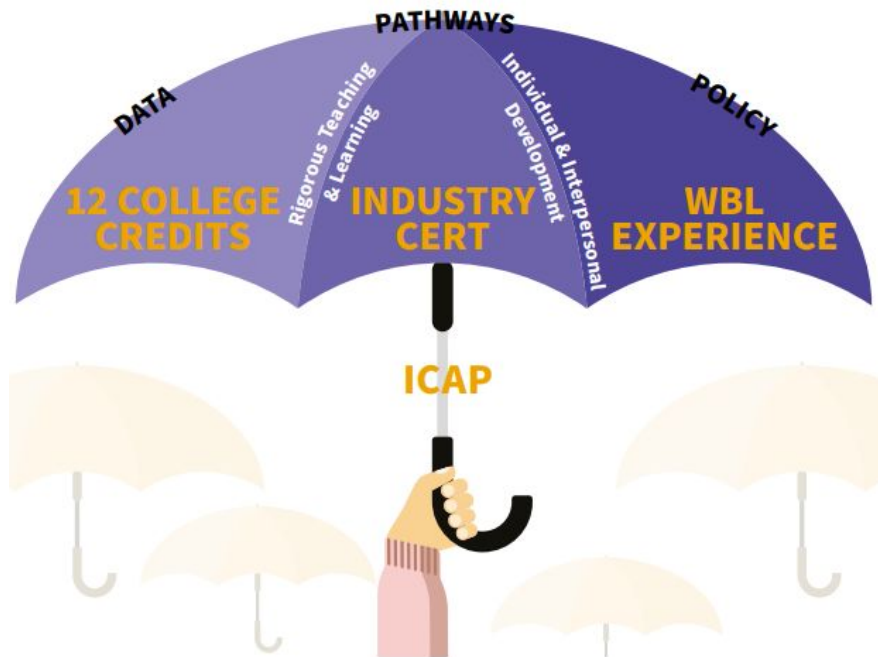
Each pathway is clearly defined with the components below, leading to a specific and meaningful outcome for students.



Course of Study → Pathway Progression



ICAP is the Handle!



Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) is a student-centered process that LEPs use to guide learners in exploring career interests, academic pathways, and life goals.

By fostering personalized planning and self-awareness, ICAP equips students with the tools to navigate their educational journeys and prepare for future success.

This evolving, integrated process also aligns with the Big Three outcomes, connecting academic choices to meaningful postsecondary and career opportunities.

Why ICAP Matters

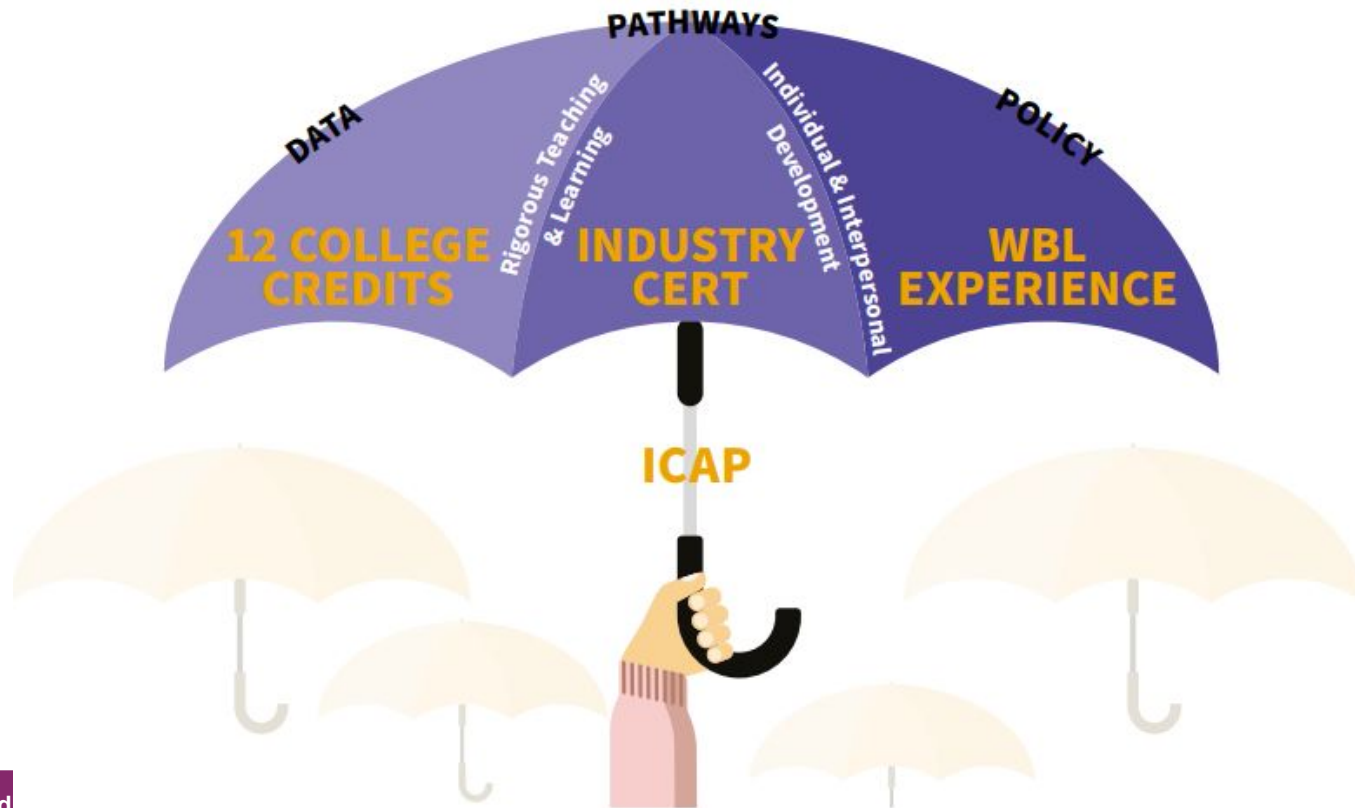
ICAP helps advance goals for students and Colorado's economy by:

- Improving student engagement and graduation rates by providing a clear sense of purpose and actionable plans.
- Enhancing equity in postsecondary planning, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources and opportunities needed to pursue their goals.
- Bridging academic and career planning, helping students understand how their decisions in school connect to long-term career opportunities.
- Supporting Colorado's economic vitality by supplying talent pipeline data that educators use to design meaningful experiences, enabling students to envision their roles in the state's economic future



Moving towards our Big 3 Vision

The Big 3 - The Umbrella Framework



Statewide Vision

- By June 2027, there will be a 25% increase in the number of students statewide participating in at least one Big Three program compared to 2024 available baseline data.
- By 2027-28 school year, 100% of Colorado high schools offer at least one of the Big Three opportunity.
- **CDE Strategic Plan:** Starting with the Class of 2029, 100% of graduates will have achieved at least one of The Big Three.

Guiding Question: How do you support student access and attainment of the Big 3 in your district?

How We Got Here

2009: Concurrent Enrollment
2009: ASCENT
2009: Early College High Schools

2016: Career Development
Incentive Program (CDIP)

2021: 1330 Task Force:
Student Success and
Workforce Revitalization
2021: TREP
2021: Path4Ward

2023: 1241 Accountability Task
Force

2024: 1364 Bill
- Cost Study
- Statewide Longitudinal Data
System

2015: Pathways in Technology Early
College High school (P-TECH)

2019: Innovative Learning
Opportunity Pilot (ILOP)

2022: 1215 Task Force:
Secondary, Postsecondary and
Workforce Integration



From 1215 to Now - Funding

1215 Recommendations

Recommendation 1 and 2:

Streamlined PWR program structure and reporting

Recommendation 9: Sustainable PWR funding

Recommendation 10: Innovation Fund

Recommendation 3: Establish and utilize a robust statewide longitudinal data system(SLDS).

HB24-1364 Legislation

1364 Financial Study:

Understanding the costs of implementing PWR programs and recommendations for a streamlined program

1364: Establishes statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) in response to 1215 recommendation 3.

New Legislation

SB25-315: Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Program

District, school, learner and family voice informed the 1215 recommendations.

From 1215 to Now - Accountability

1215 Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Update the PWR measures in Colorado's accountability performance framework, including data elements (and ultimately, weights) to reflect the importance of learners graduating ready for jobs and additional training

1241 Recommendations

More detailed recommendations on how PWR measures are included in sub-indicators, building off of the 1215 recommendation.

District, school, learner and family voice informed the 1215 recommendations.

New Legislation

HB25-1278: Education Accountability System

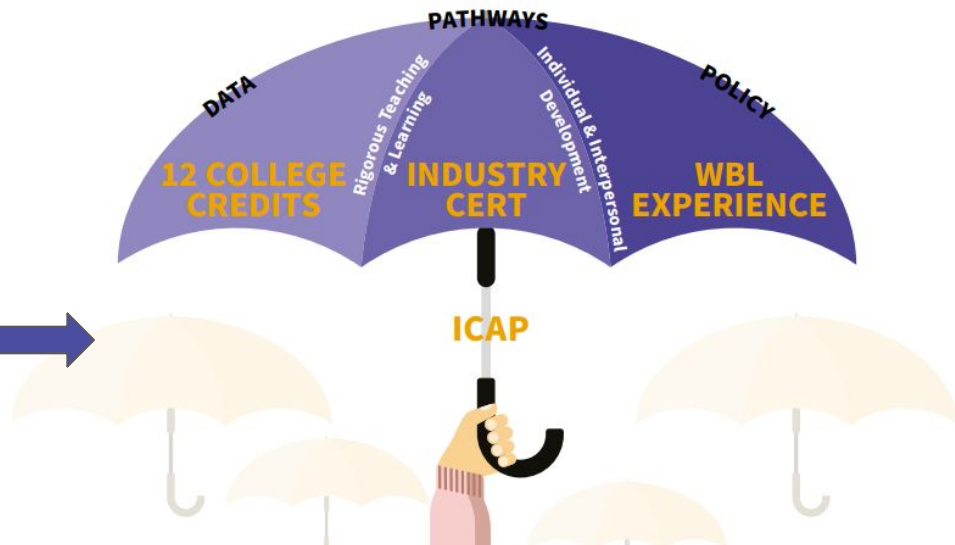
Moving to a streamlined PWR system

Before/Current System

- 12+ PWR Programs
- Different funding streams
- Different timelines & reporting requirements
- Some districts have capacity to navigate the complex system and others do not know where to start



Future System



One PWR system with reliable and sustainable funding that incentivizes attainment of the Big 3 outcomes.

Colorado's Big 3 Strengths



Policy momentum in Colorado since 2009



Robust network of CCL technical assistance providers of which CEI is a core part



Significant statewide and district infrastructure due to both public and private investment



CEI has supported this work in districts since 2019 since the launch of the Homegrown Talent Initiative in partnership with Colorado Succeeds

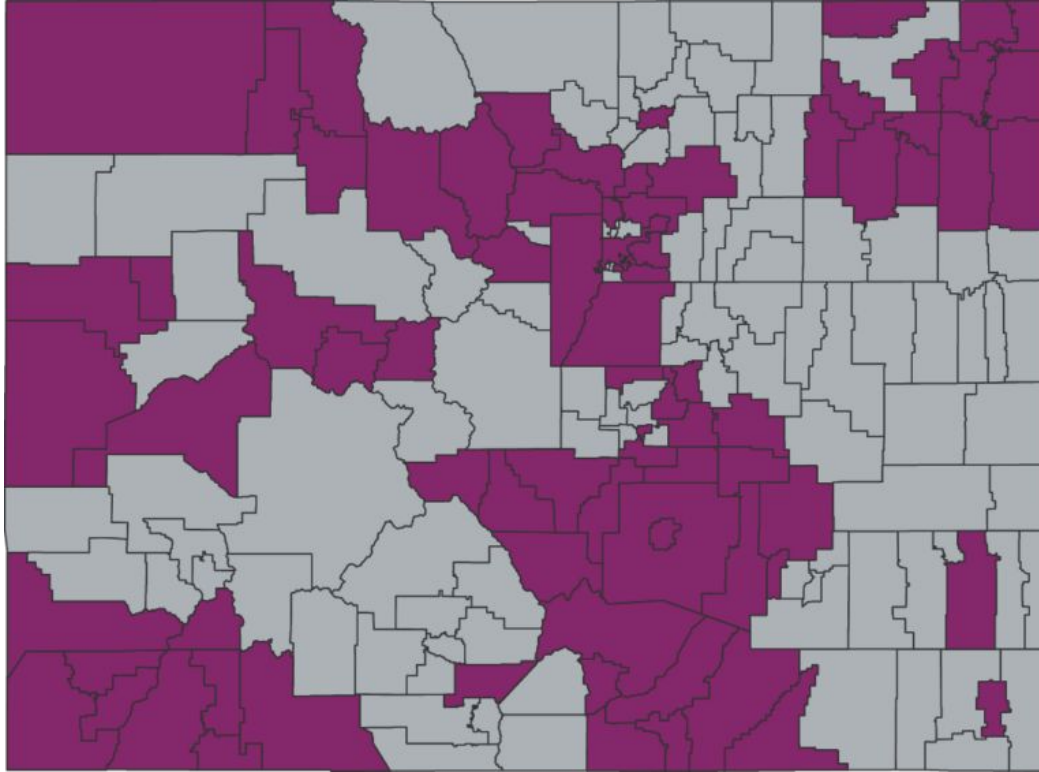
Homegrown Talent Coalition

United by a shared vision for college- and career-connected learning, we have come together to identify the most urgent priorities and outline a collaborative model for advancing and sustaining K-12 pathways to college and career in Colorado.

This is not new work; but it's a new way of working: together.



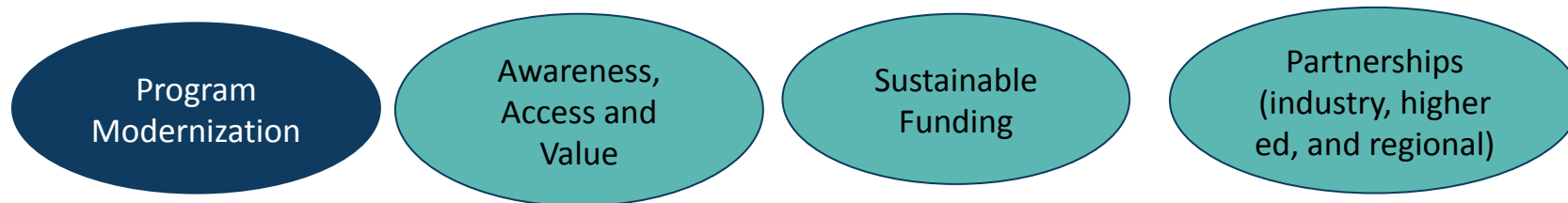
Spread of CEI CCL Partnership



During the 2024-25 school year, CEI partnered with 68 districts in statewide CCL efforts through projects such as Opportunity Now, ILOP, Jumpstart Concurrent Enrollment, Career Catalyze, Credentials of Value, and district-level ICAP redesign and implementation.

Understanding some of the barriers

The 1215 Postsecondary Workforce and Readiness Task Force identified four primary buckets of barriers in the statewide system with aligned recommendations that are in the process of being addressed:



These are common barriers the CCL team sees and works to support districts in addressing:

- Student and family awareness of programs (including translation of marketing materials)
- Narrative challenges around college vs. career, including CTE stigma
- Sustainable funding to support staffing, launch and maintain programs and ensure equitable access (i.e. cover costs of industry credential exams, CE books)
- Staffing challenges (licensed instructors for CTE/CE, funding for a dedicated personal WBL coordinator)
- Transportation infrastructure to support access to out of school opportunities

Reflection & Gallery Walk

Individual Reflection

- **Excitement:** What excites you? Where do you see yourself in this work?
- **Questions:** What questions do you have? What questions should school boards be asking?
- **Wonderings:** What are you wondering about?

Gallery Walk - add your reflections to the chart paper and walk around to read what others are thinking.

Excitements	Questions	Wonderings

Cañon City Schools

Cañon City's focus on this work has driven impressive results, outperforming the similar district average on the majority of longer-term outcomes CEI reviewed.



Cañon City has made significant improvements in recent years:

- Overall graduation rate increased by 4.6 percent, **significant higher** than the 0.8 percentage point average increase statewide
- DPF performance improved **significantly more** than similar Colorado districts in recent years, rising by 8.6 points—from 54.9 in 2023 to 60.2—far exceeding the average increase across similar districts of 1.7 points

By comparison to similar school districts—those with between 44-60% FRL enrollment and categorized as rural—Cañon City demonstrates **higher than normal** percentages of:

- Students enrolling in college or receiving a certificate
- Principal, teacher, and all staff retention rates - *with principal retention exceeding the similar district average by more than 10%*

Holyoke School District

Holyoke's focus on this work has driven impressive results.



By comparison to similar school districts—those with high % FRL (i.e., between 60.5-94.0% FRL enrollment) and categorized as Small Rural—Holyoke demonstrates:

- **Significantly higher** percentage of students **not** chronically absent (**82% compared to 68%**)
- **Higher than normal** student post-secondary outcomes (college enrollment and/or credential attainment)
- **Higher than normal** employee retention rates

Small Group Discussion

- What exists in your district that gives momentum to your district's Big 3 strategy?
- How can you as a school board member support equitable access and attainment of the Big 3?
- How does the work you are doing support districts in overcoming these barriers?
- What are some additional barriers you foresee?

Closing
