



SYMPOSIUM BREAKOUT SESSION  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2021 | 3:40-4:00 PM ET

# Colorado's Graduation Guidelines: An Implementation Study

## **PRESENTER:**

- Amy Spicer, Colorado Education Initiative



## ABOUT ME

Amy Spicer

- Doctoral Candidate at the University of Colorado Denver
- Senior Director of Implementation, Partnership, and Strategy at the Colorado Education initiative (CEI)
- Former teacher



## ABOUT CEI

### Colorado Education Initiative (CEI)

- Non-profit that was formed by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in 2007
- Vision: every student in Colorado is prepared and unafraid to succeed in school, work, and life and ready to take on the challenges of today and tomorrow
- CEI has supported schools and districts in designing performance-based options pursuant to the guidelines for the past three years.



BEFORE WE DIVE IN...

How did you know you were ready to graduate high school?

Type your answer in the chat.



## LOCAL CONTROL IN COLORADO

- **Colorado believes that control of local decisions should be as close to the people as possible.**
- **Colorado's state constitution states, "control of instruction requires power or authority to guide and manage both the action and practice of instruction as well as the quality and state of instruction." (Denver Bd. of Educ. v. Booth, 984 p.2d 639, 648 (Colo. 1999).)**
- **Within state guidelines, local school boards in Colorado make decisions pertaining to curriculum, instruction, educator evaluation, calendars, spending of locally raised funds, and more.**

# INTRODUCTION

## **Concerning Guidelines for High School Graduation Act (2007)**

- C.R.S. § 22-2-106
- Required the development of state high school Graduation Guidelines
- Could first impact this year's graduating class (delayed from impacting the class of 2021 due to COVID)
- Each local Colorado school board tasked with establishing its own high school graduation requirements, called IKF policies, that meet or exceed the state-level graduation guidelines.
- Local graduation policies must allow students “multiple, equally rigorous and valued pathways to demonstrate competency of the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education and meaningful careers” (Colorado Department of Education, 2020-b)

# THE GRADUATION GUIDELINES

## **Before**

- 178 school districts had 178 different policies in place.
- Exception: one semester of Civics

## **After**

- There are still 178 different policies in place...but they all *should* have the guidelines in common.



# MENU OF OPTIONS

## Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations



Local school boards establish high school graduation requirements that meet or exceed the Colorado Graduation Guidelines for the graduating class of 2021 and/or 2022.

**Local school boards and districts** select from this menu to create a list of options that their students must use to show what they know or can do in order to graduate from high school, beginning with the graduating class of 2021 and/or 2022. School districts may offer some or all of the state menu options, may raise a cut score on an included assessment and may add graduation requirements in other content areas.

Graduation Guidelines begin with the implementation of Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP), 21st Century Essential Skills, and Colorado Academic Standards for all content areas, including Civics.

Students must demonstrate college or career readiness in English and math based on at least one measure.

Districts have the authority to provide accommodations to students in meeting the college and career demonstrations necessary to earn a standard high school diploma for: English learners, gifted students and students with disabilities.

**MENU OF OPTIONS:** This menu lists the minimum scores required.

ACCUPLACER		
Classic	<b>ENGLISH</b> 62 on Reading Comprehension OR 70 on Sentence Skills	<b>MATH</b> 61 on Elementary Algebra
	<b>ENGLISH</b> 241 on Reading OR 236 on Writing	<b>MATH</b> 255 on Arithmetic (AR) OR 230 on Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics (QAS)

ACCUPLACER is a computerized test that assesses reading, writing, math and computer skills. The results of the assessment, in conjunction with a student's academic background, goals and interests, are used by academic advisors and counselors to place students in college courses that match their skill levels.

ACT	
<b>ENGLISH</b> 18 on ACT English	<b>MATH</b> 19 on ACT Math

ACT is a national college admissions exam. It measures four subjects – English, reading, math and science. The highest possible score for each subject is 36.

ACT WorkKeys – National Career Readiness Certificate	
<b>ENGLISH</b> Bronze or higher	<b>MATH</b> Bronze or higher

ACT WorkKeys is an assessment that tests students' job skills in applied reading, writing, mathematics and 21st century skills. Scores are based on job profiles that help employers select, hire, train, develop and retain a high-performance workforce. Students must score at the bronze level (at least 3) in all three assessments – Applied Mathematics, Graphic Literacy and Workplace Documents, and they will earn the ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate.

Advanced Placement	
<b>ENGLISH</b> 2	<b>MATH</b> 2

AP exams test students' ability to perform at a college level. Districts choose which AP exams will fulfill this menu option. Scores range from 1 to 5 (highest).

ASVAB	
<b>ENGLISH</b> 31 on the AFQT	<b>MATH</b> 31 on the AFQT

The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is a comprehensive test that helps determine students' eligibility and suitability for careers in the military. Students who score at least 31 are eligible for service (along with other standards that include physical condition and personal conduct). Students who take the ASVAB are not required to enlist in the military.

Concurrent Enrollment	
<b>ENGLISH</b> Passing grade per district and higher education policy	<b>MATH</b> Passing grade per district and higher education policy

Concurrent enrollment provides students the opportunity to enroll in postsecondary courses, simultaneously earning high school and college credit. School districts and institutions of higher education each determine passing grades for credit and concurrent enrollment. An eligible concurrent enrollment course is 1) the prerequisite directly prior to a credit-bearing course or 2) a credit-bearing course, and 3) governed by a district-level cooperative agreement or MOU.

District Capstone	
<b>ENGLISH</b> Individualized	<b>MATH</b> Individualized

A capstone is the culminating exhibition of a student's project or experience that demonstrates academic and intellectual learning. Capstone projects are district determined and often include a portfolio of a student's best work.

Industry Certificate	
<b>ENGLISH</b> Individualized	<b>MATH</b> Individualized

Industry certificates are credentials recognized by business and industry. They are district determined, measure a student's competency in an occupation and they validate a knowledge base and skills that show mastery in a particular industry.

International Baccalaureate (IB)	
<b>ENGLISH</b> 4	<b>MATH</b> 4

IB exams assess students enrolled in the official IB Diploma Programme. Courses are offered only at authorized IB World Schools. Scores range from 1 to 7 (highest).

SAT: Scores updated for SAT (2016)	
<b>ENGLISH</b> 470	<b>MATH</b> 500

The SAT is a college entrance exam that is accepted or required at nearly all four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. The current SAT includes sections on reading, writing and math. The highest possible score for each section is 800.

Collaboratively developed, standards-based performance assessment	
<b>ENGLISH</b> State-wide scoring criteria	<b>MATH</b> State-wide scoring criteria

An authentic application of Essential Skills for Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, through the creation of a complex product or presentation. (In development)



## MENU OF OPTIONS

Test-based options	Programmatic options	Performance-based options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accuplacer</li><li>• ACT</li><li>• ACT WorkKeys</li><li>• ASVAB</li><li>• SAT</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advanced Placement (AP)</li><li>• International Baccalaureate (IB)</li><li>• Industry Certificate</li><li>• Concurrent Enrollment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District Capstone</li><li>• Collaboratively developed, standards-based performance assessment</li></ul>

## STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

CDE is a regulatory agency with authority that only extends so far.

- Though CDE has identified several exemplars and shared them on its website and through consortia convenings, the full extent of statewide implementation is unknown at this time (Colorado Department of Education, 2020-c).

There is a lack of broad understanding as to how districts and schools – both within and across them – plan to implement the graduation guidelines.

CDE will require schools and districts to report how many students used particular options as an indicator in the state accountability system, but this will not provide a comprehensive picture of the landscape of this policy implementation or how it is affecting students of various subgroups such as Black, Latinx, FRL, and special education students.



To what degree are district-level IKF policies consistent with the state requirements of Colorado's Graduation Guidelines?



To what degree have Colorado's Graduation Guidelines shifted practice in districts and schools?



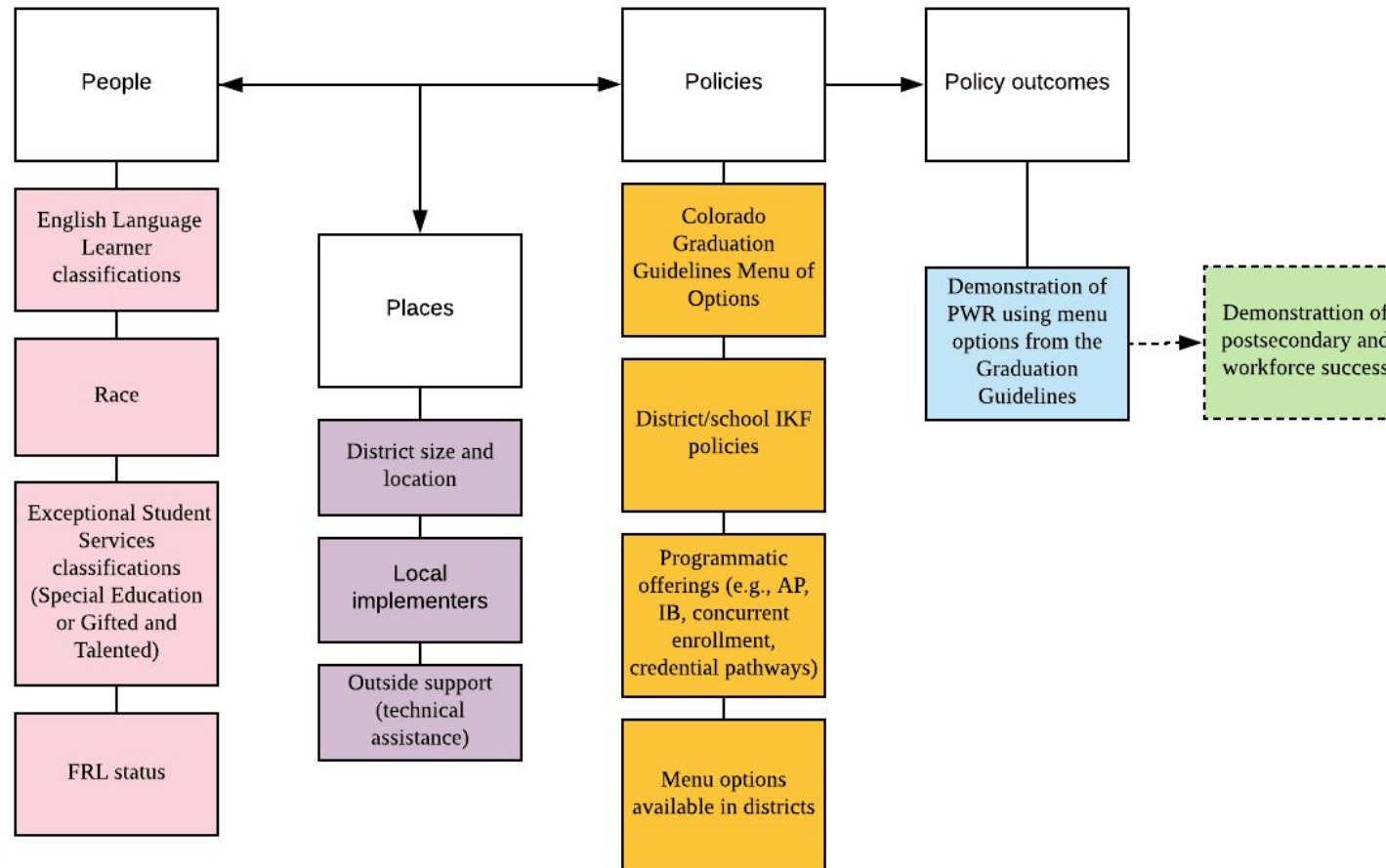
To what degree and how has support from external entities had an impact on district-level practice regarding the Graduation Guidelines?



How are districts considering impacts for students in different demographic categories as a result of implementation? Which students are expected to use which options?

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Informed by Higin's (2006) People, Places, Policies framework and Najam's (1995) 5Cs framework



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical lens of Critical Policy Analysis will be employed, which focuses on exposing inconsistencies between what policy says and what policy does.

Critical policy analysis has five main areas (Dien, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014):

- (1) The exploration of policy roots and processes;**
- (2) The difference between what policy says and how it plays out in reality;**
- (3) The inequitable distribution of knowledge, power, and resources;**
- (4) How educational programs and policies reproduce inequities, regardless of intent; and**
- (5) How individuals react (e.g., resistance or acceptance) to policies and their implementation.**

# LITERATURE REVIEW: KEY RESULTS

## Graduation Policies

Graduation policies have grown increasingly complex in response national policy contexts over time

- Carnegie unit standard
- ESEA (1965) □ *A Nation at Risk* (1983) □ NCLB (2000) □ ESSA (2015)
  - Over time, there has been an intent to both improve achievement scores and work skills and ensure more uniformity in the types of courses students take (McDonnell, 1988).
- Increasing accountability policies
  - Each state's accountability system must include indicators that measure academic achievement, another academic measure, graduation rates, the progress of English learners in achieving English language proficiency, and school quality or student success (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

The intent of graduation policy reform has had a central theme throughout its journey to the current state: **a consistent and evolving desire to better prepare students for the world they would face after exiting high school.**





## LITERATURE REVIEW: KEY RESULTS

### **The Graduation Guidelines**

- Predictable equity gaps
  - Test-based options
  - Programmatic options
  - Performance-based options
- Alternative graduation options
  - Exit exams
  - Community service
  - Graduate profiles
  - GPA requirements



# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

This study is being conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

- In March 2020, schools across the state and country pivoted to remote learning to contain the spread of the virus.
- The federal Department of Education allowed a waiver for annual high stakes testing required under ESSA for the 2019-20 school year, including several of the test-based Graduation Guidelines menu options (DeVos, 2020).
- Last year, Colorado districts have the decision to fully implement the guidelines for the class of 2021 or delay implementation to next school year.
- This year...

## METHODOLOGY

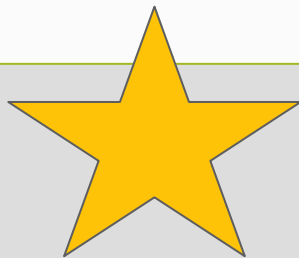
(1) Policy analysis of  
Colorado school  
district IKF policies

(2) Follow-up  
interviews with districts  
and schools

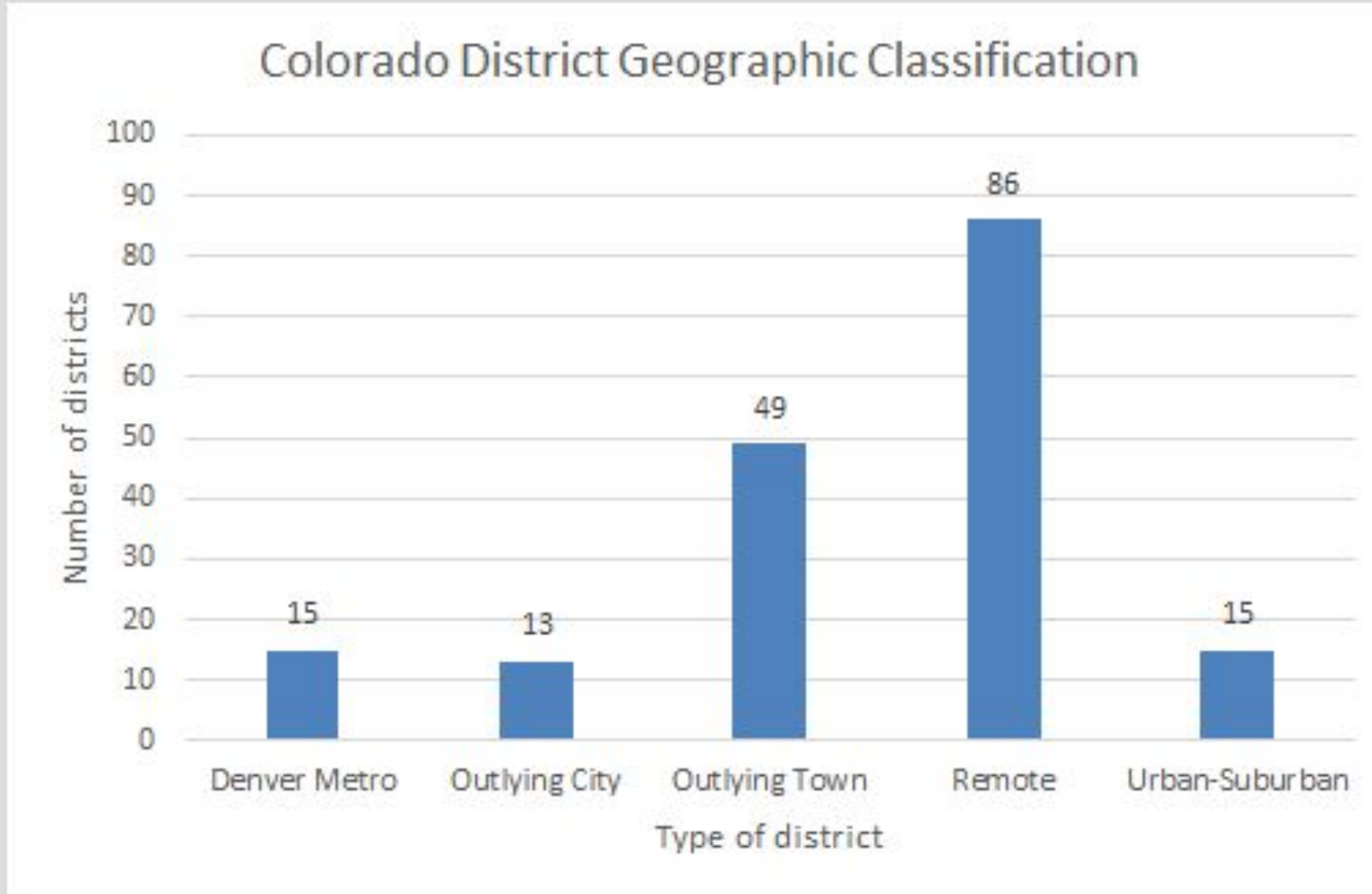
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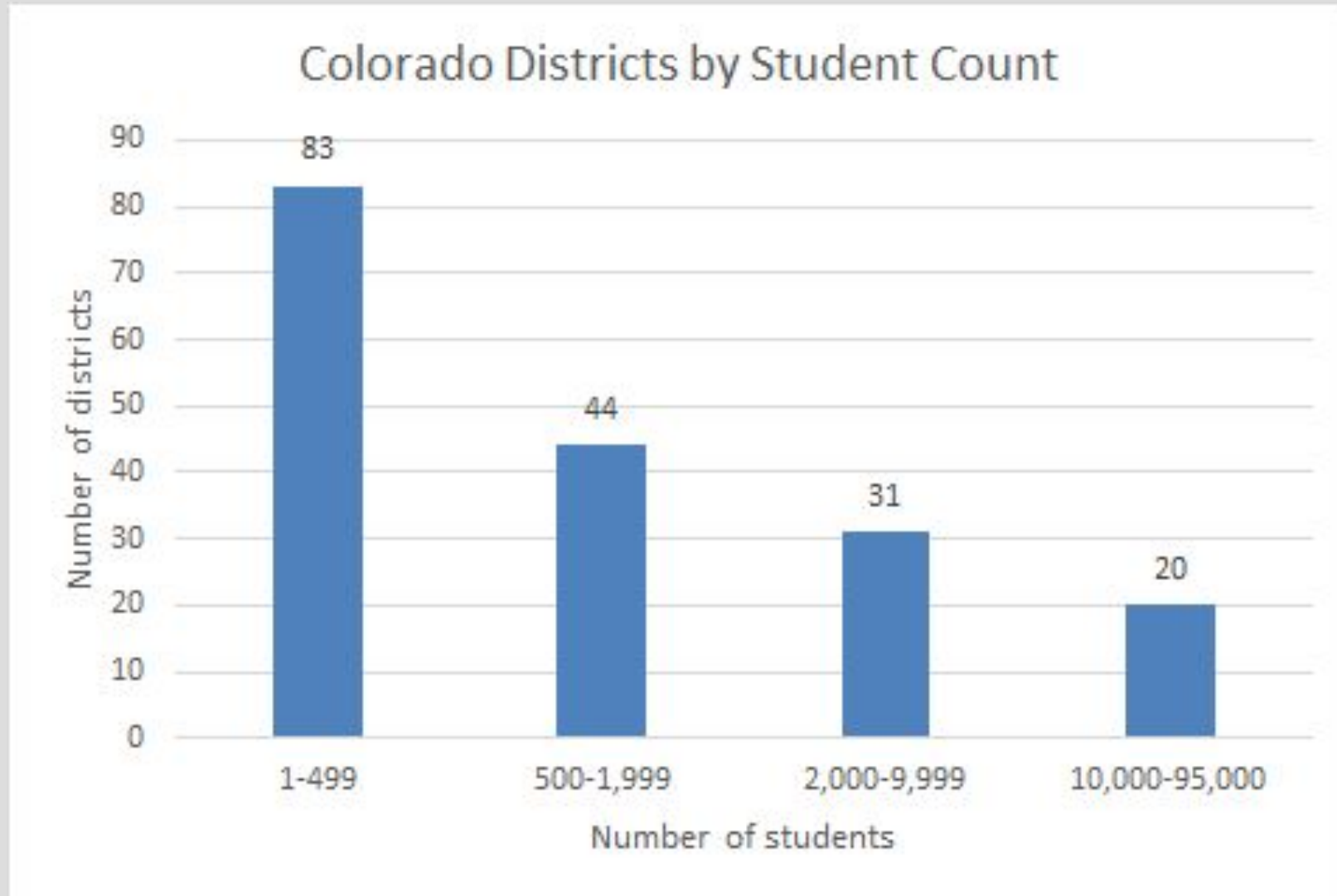
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## Colorado District Demographic Data



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Geographic classification	Number of districts	Demographics
Denver Metro	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FRL percentage: 17% to 90%</li><li>• Student count: 1,359 to 92,112</li><li>• Minority percentage: 27% to 91%</li></ul>
Outlying City	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FRL percentage: 14% to 76%</li><li>• Student count: 881 to 6,215</li><li>• Minority percentage: 20% to 75%</li></ul>
Outlying Town	49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FRL percentage: 4% to 90%</li><li>• Student count: 68 to 7,313</li><li>• Minority percentage: 8% to 91%</li></ul>
Remote	86	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FRL percentage: 33% to 59%</li><li>• Student count: 48 to 471</li><li>• Minority percentage: 3% to 59%</li></ul>
Urban-Suburban	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FRL percentage: 17% to 90%</li><li>• Student count: 1,441 to 30,754</li><li>• Minority percentage: 19% to 84%</li></ul>

## EMERGING RESULTS

	Count (n=178)	Percentage (rounded to nearest whole percentage)	Notes
<b>Graduation requirements policy located</b>	173	97%	Seat time requirements for all 173
<b>Confirmed Grad Guidelines alignment</b>	155	87%	
<b>Confirmed non-Grad Guidelines alignment</b>	6	3%	All under 1,000 students 3 Remote, 1 Outlying Town
<b>Unknown Grad Guidelines alignment</b>	17	10%	All under 1,500 students 16 Remote, 2 Outlying Town
<b>No information located</b>	5	3%	All under 400 students (42 - 365) All Remote



## MENU OF OPTIONS

Test-based options	Programmatic options	Performance-based options
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## MENU OF OPTIONS

Test-based options	Number of districts (n = 155)	Percentage
Accuplacer	147	95%
<b>ACT</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>96%</b>
ACT WorkKeys	122	79%
ASVAB	147	95%
<b>SAT</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>Total districts with a test-based option</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>98%</b>

Note: the PSAT and SAT are given annually as part of Colorado's state accountability system. PSAT is not eligible as a menu option per the state guidelines.

## MENU OF OPTIONS

Programmatic options	Number of districts (out of 153)	Percentage
Advanced Placement	136	88%
International Baccalaureate	86	55%
Industry Certificate	131	85%
<b>Concurrent Enrollment</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>97%</b>
<b>Total districts with a programmatic option</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>98%</b>

Note: Concurrent Enrollment is the most used option on the entire menu.

## MENU OF OPTIONS

Performance-based options	Number of districts (out of 153)	Percentage
<b>District Capstone</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>94%</b>
Collaboratively developed, standards-based performance assessment	58	37%
Total districts with a performance-based option	146	94%

Note: No district has PBA without also having capstone.

## EMERGING RESULTS:TRENDS

### **Out of the 155 districts with identified GG alignment:**

- Approximately 1/4 of districts have adopted the full menu (n = 47)
- The most often menu option not included: performance assessment (n = 96)
- Approximately 1/4 of districts have additional requirements (n = 43), most often this is Community Service (n = 26)
- Concurrent Enrollment is the most used option (n = 145); it also has the most variation in allowable score (e.g., “passing”, D-, C-, C, B)

## EMERGING RESULTS:TRENDS

### **Out of the 172 districts with identified seat time requirements:**

- Seat time requirements range from 14.5 to 32 traditional Carnegie units
- Most common credit requirement is 26 (n = 55)
- Average credit requirement is 25.5
- Most common core credit minimum requirement is: 4 units of English, 4 units of math, 3 units of Social Studies, 3 units of Science
- 46 districts have multiple pathways (16 of these have 2 pathway options: honors/college and general)

*Note: 16 districts have credit systems that are not calculated on an annual Carnegie unit basis. These districts' requirements were converted for this analysis.*

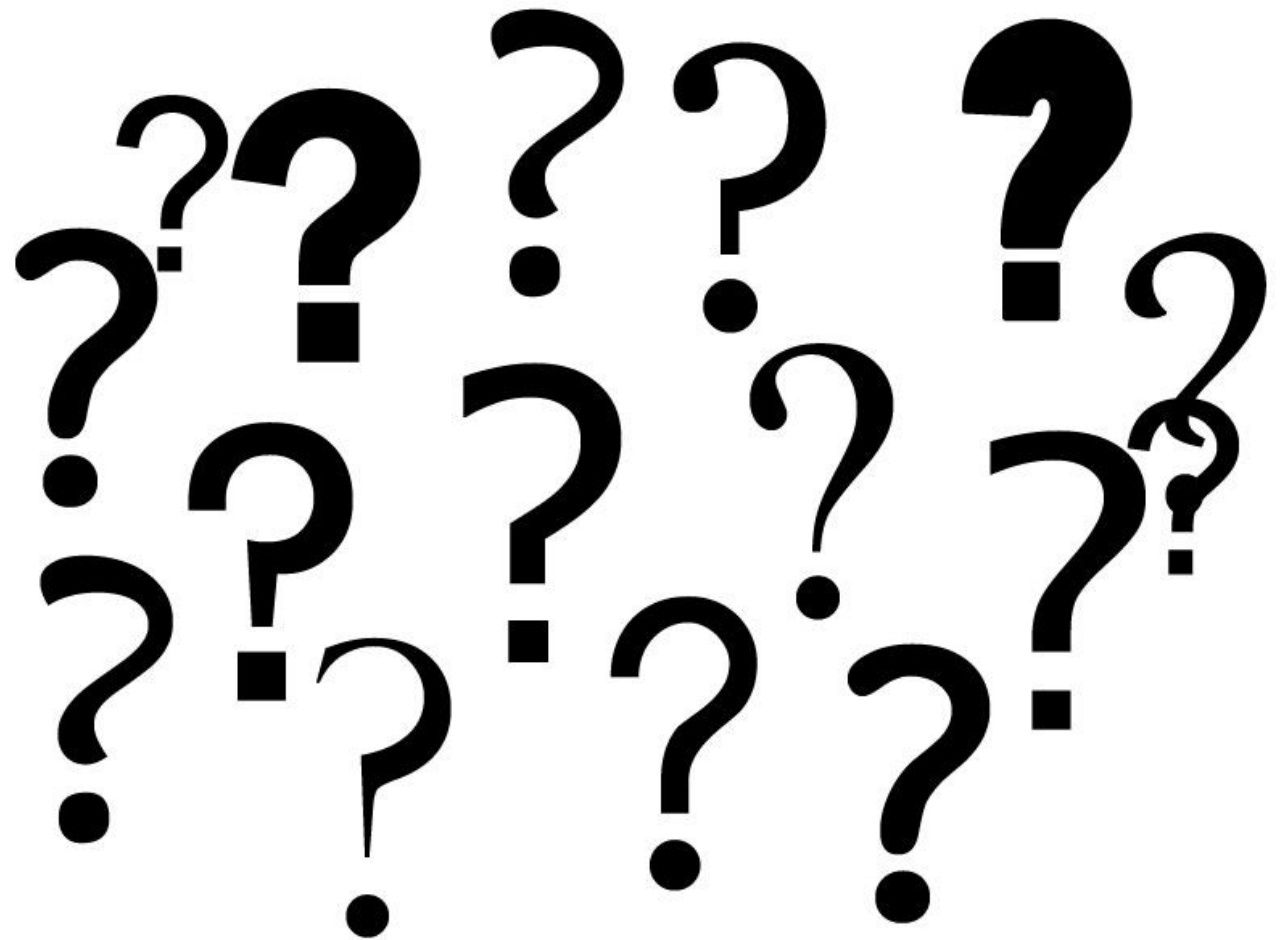
## EMERGING RESULTS: OUTLIERS

- 5 districts have only one option, always Capstone
- 3 districts increased cut scores from the CDE menu
- 19 districts have options not on the menu (e.g., CMAS, NWEA)



WHAT  
QUESTIONS DO  
YOU HAVE?

WHAT ELSE  
WOULD YOU  
LIKE TO SEE?



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The background is a dense collage of various photographs from the Aurora Institute Symposium 2019. The images show people in various settings: some are speaking at podiums, others are in group discussions, and some are posing for photos. The collage is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The Aurora Institute logo, featuring a stylized star and the word 'AURORA', is visible in the top left corner of the collage.

# AURORA INSTITUTE *Symposium*

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OCTOBER 25-27, 2021 | VIRTUAL

*“Leading Competency-Based Education Redesign”*

Thank you for joining us!

**Share Your Thoughts.**

Participate in our one-minute poll (link in chat box).