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Colorado Lab Newsletter

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Back to School Issue

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The new school year is underway with most students returning to in-person classes. Even as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread more than a year and a half since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Centers for Disease Control](#) and others have urged a return to in-person learning. The toll taken on children and youth as a result of social isolation and disengagement from school has been [well documented](#).

This Back to School issue features some of the critical work we are supporting with partners across Colorado to heal and strengthen the social and emotional well-being of children and their families, and to fortify foundations for academic growth and healthy development.

RISE: Innovating Improved Student & Family Outcomes in the Wake of COVID-19

Bennett 29J, Strasburg 31J, and Weld RE-3J School Districts

As the 2020 school year wound down, the Children's Hospital of Colorado declared a state of emergency for youth mental health. Atop already high needs, the impacts of COVID-19 were devastating, resulting in a 90% increase in demand for behavioral health treatment and the emergence of suicide as the number one cause of death for children in Colorado.

With fewer resources available, the mental health epidemic has been felt acutely in Colorado's rural communities. To address this crisis, the neighboring, rural school districts of Bennett 29J, Strasburg 31J, and Weld RE-3J partnered to harness the unique position of schools in communities to strengthen social-emotional learning and provide mental health support for students, their families, and school staff.

With a grant from the [Governor's RISE fund](#) - Response, Innovation, and Student Equity Education - the three school districts partnered with the evidence-based [TRAILS](#) (Transforming Research into Action to Improve the Lives of Students) program to help them:

- Raise mental health awareness for all students,
- Provide support to students experiencing mental health difficulties, and
- Improve their ability to identify and quickly connect students at risk of suicide to care.



TRAILS utilizes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Mindfulness - the gold-standard for improving mental health and promoting social-emotional skills in both clinical and school settings.

The Colorado Lab is supporting this effort, as well as the work of nine additional RISE grantees, to ensure the approaches being used grow to be effective in improving student and family outcomes. To lay the groundwork for long-term project success and sustainability, the Lab works with partners to identify and engage an Implementation Team for each of the RISE-funded projects. These implementation teams actively support planning, execution, improvement, and sustainability of their RISE-funded project.

The implementation teams for Bennett, Strasburg, and Weld came together in person last month to coalesce, learn, and launch their work. The convening began with the districts' superintendents thanking the team's elementary- and secondary-level teachers and mental health professionals for their expertise and dedication in taking on this work and pledging their support for efforts to improve students' and teachers' lives and educational outcomes.

The Colorado Lab will share lessons learned through the RISE grant projects with other schools who might benefit from similar approaches. If you would like to learn more about the RISE project, contact [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#).

[Colorado's RISE Fund](#) has awarded over \$40 million to address the learning

challenges in pre-K-12 through higher education related to the economic, social, and health impacts of COVID-19. The Colorado Lab supports these RISE grantees in the effective implementation and long-term success and sustainability of their projects.

- A coalition of charter schools including AUL Denver, Colorado High School Charter, Academy 360, Girls Athletic Leadership Schools, RiseUp Community School, Highline Academy
- Adams 14 School District
- Bennett 29J, Strasburg 39J, and Weld RE-3J School Districts
- Centennial BOCES
- Bayfield, Silverton, Ignacio, Durango and Archuleta School Districts, with Pueblo Community College and Fort Lewis College
- Montezuma-Cortez High School
- Montrose County School District
- New Legacy Charter School
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- West Grand School District

School Counselor Corps Grant Program Evaluation

Nationally, COVID-19 has highlighted the instability of relying on a small number of school counselors to guide hundreds of students through changing academic hurdles, prepare them for an uncertain future, and triage increasing mental health challenges. Colorado has one of the lower [students-per-counselor ratios](#) nationally—with 295 students per counselor in the 2019-20 school year—in part because of the state’s long-term investment in the [School Counselor Corps Grant Program](#). This grant program not only aims to decrease the school counselor to student ratio, but create culture change in schools that promotes asset-based and data-driven approaches to improving educational attainment.

COVID-19 has highlighted the instability of relying on a small number of school counselors to guide hundreds of students through academics, prep them for the future and triage increasing mental health challenges.



National research shows that effective school counseling has a dramatic impact on the academic success of students. Low-income students are more likely to attend college if they meet frequently with a school counselor who supports their postsecondary goals. Students attending high schools with effective school counseling programs earn higher grades and receive more postsecondary-related information, which improves enrolling and persisting in postsecondary education.

The Colorado Lab is beginning an in-depth study of Colorado’s School Counselor Corps Grant Program (SCCGP) to assess the impacts of SCCGP on program outcomes at the elementary, middle school, high school, and postsecondary educational levels. The evaluation is designed to inform how school counseling program resources and intersecting pathways and practices—such as work-based learning—can advance progress toward equitable academic and postsecondary success for all students. This includes how the program can help to strengthen systems and effectively support student achievement so the pressure isn’t only on a relatively small number of counselors.

Throughout the multi-year evaluation, findings will inform policy and practice decision-making and ensure data-informed strategic investments in Colorado’s educational system. To learn more, contact [Dr. Elysia Clemens](#).

Colorado Lab in the News:

AP's Equity Face-Plant

In an interview featured in the latest edition of [Washington Monthly](#), Kristin Klopfenstein, Colorado Lab director and a nationally recognized expert on Advanced Placement (AP), notes that "AP was designed in the 1950s to be a program for precocious high schoolers who were very privileged. AP is serving exactly who it's designed to serve, which is mostly upper-middle-class whites."

The article examines why the benefits of the AP program continue to flow disproportionately to white students in affluent school districts—even as state and federal policy makers have worked to change this.

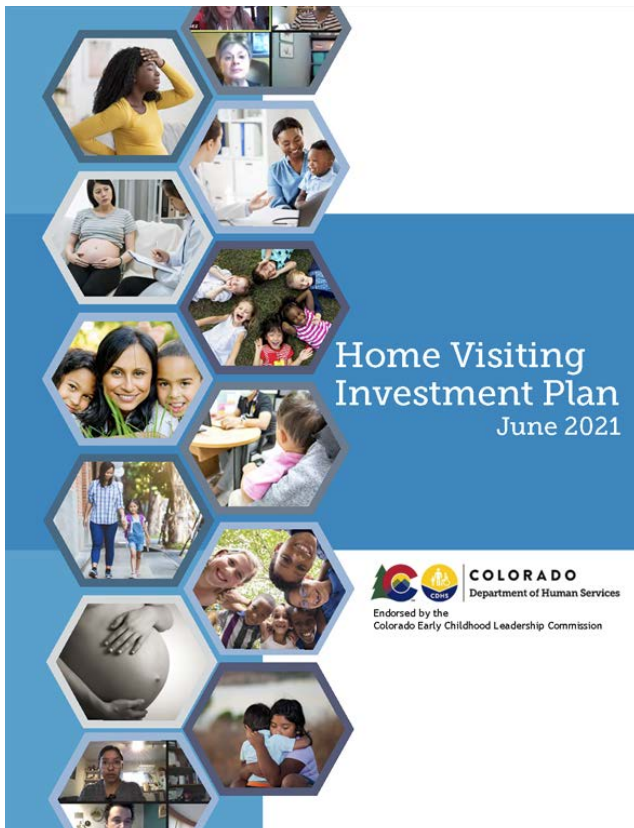
When students have access to classes and the resources to succeed, the program provides undeniable benefits. Ending the program won't solve the underlying inequities in the K-12 system that created AP's disparate outcomes in the first place. "The challenge," said Dr. Klopfenstein, "is that AP is coming in at the very tail of the educational experience. While it's certainly desirable to make AP accessible to all, the first and best solution would be to make sure that all kids are having a K-through-10 educational experience that prepares them to be ready for AP."

Advanced Placement comes at the very tail of the educational experience. While it's certainly desirable to make AP accessible to all, the first and best solution would be to make sure that all kids have an educational experience that prepares them to be ready for AP.



Read the [full article](#) and reach out to [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#) with your thoughts and reactions or to learn more.

Colorado Home Visiting Investment Plan



Benefits of Home Visitation

Home visiting services are a crucial element of the support system available in Colorado to families with young children. Evidence shows home visitation provides multiple, sustained benefits for children, caregivers and families:

- Promotes child health, development, and school readiness.
- Improves positive parenting practices and caregiver mental health.
- Increases family functioning.
- Reduces child maltreatment and family violence.

Colorado's Home Visiting Investment Task Force was formed by the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) and charged with developing a set of recommendations to expand access, promote equity, and increase the quality of home visiting services across the state. Dr. Courtney Everson, Senior Researcher and Project Director for the Colorado Lab, serves as a task force member and chaired the Innovations Committee.

Following nearly a year of work by the task force—and years of groundwork leading up to the task force being convened—the [Home Visiting Investment Plan](#) was officially released on August 18th. Senator Rhonda Fields, who endorsed the task force process, provided opening remarks at the plan release event at the Governor’s Residence at Boettcher Mansion. The event brought together task force members, parent representatives, state legislators, the Governor’s Office staff members, providers, and other home visiting champions.

Members of the task force developed recommendations in partnership with families, communities, providers, policymakers, and system leaders. Recommendations will help to:

- **Expand Access:** To reach more families and ensure culturally and linguistically-appropriate services.
- **Grow Innovations:** Capitalize on lessons learned and innovations achieved—like virtual service delivery—as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to maximize service efficiencies.
- **Provide Consistency:** Increase advocacy and partnerships to achieve more consistent service provision across the state, regardless of the program providing services.
- **Strengthen Profession:** To grow and diversify the workforce and reduce burnout, recognize home visitors as professionals who contribute to the overall health of Colorado families.

The task force has been re-authorized by ECLC and will continue its work by planning approaches to effectively implement all recommendations. Collectively, their efforts will focus on expanding and strengthening home visiting to further promote well-being for children and family.

Read the [Home Visiting Investment Plan](#) to see all recommendations. To learn more, contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

Lab’s Dr. Courtney Everson Named to Prevention Task Group

Dr. Courtney Everson, Senior Researcher and Project Director for the Colorado Lab, has been named to the [Colorado Prevention Task Group](#). As an advisory group of the Child Welfare SubPAC within the Colorado Department of Human Services, the task group was formed to guide and foster prevention efforts within child welfare, including preventing out-of-home placement, reducing further involvement in the child welfare system, and preventing re-entry into the system.

Dr. Everson serves as one of three members representing the research and evaluation community on this multi-sector task group. She brings deep knowledge on the intersection of child welfare, prevention sciences, and social policy, and will leverage the Colorado Lab’s unique cross-sector expertise to inform the work within a broader context. The Lab’s extensive relationships also offer the opportunity to communicate with the research community, bringing additional perspectives and growing the strengths-based, data-driven prevention approaches.

Join us in congratulating Courtney and learn more about the Colorado Prevention Task Group. Contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

Stay Connected!

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Email us at admin@coloradolab.org if you have any questions or feedback.



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