



# Centennial BOCES Migrant Education Program: Leveraging Community Partnerships to Support Families

The [Colorado Migrant Education Program \(MEP\)](#) aims to ensure that migrant children are provided with appropriate educational services and opportunities so they can succeed in school and graduate from high school being postsecondary education or employment ready. The Colorado MEP coordinates and delivers services through five regional offices, which may serve children from birth to the age of 21 who are eligible for a free public education. This brief summarizes work being done by the [Centennial Board of Cooperative Educational Services](#) (Centennial BOCES), which administers the largest MEP in the state, serving over 2,500 students in North Central and Northeast school districts and communities.

Centennial BOCES has cultivated partnerships over the last decade with a diverse array of groups—including school districts, higher education institutions, early learning centers, churches, community health clinics, local non-profit organizations, and state departments like the Division of Housing—to expand the services available to migrant families. By sharing their story, we aim to support others, including other MEPs, interested in growing or strengthening their offerings.

## Building Partnerships in Northern Colorado

As noted in its mission statement, collaboration is baked into the organization’s DNA. Centennial BOCES develops partners by considering two fundamental questions: (1) What are the community needs? and (2) How can a partnership provide mutual benefit (mission alignment)? To identify community needs and understand shifting demographics, Centennial BOCES conducts routine community outreach as a part of its day-to-day work as well as a formal comprehensive needs assessment whenever there are substantial changes in the student population (last done in 2018). Centennial BOCES utilizes its deep understanding of community needs to build relationships and grow available services.

National organizations, such as the [Urban Institute](#) and [National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants](#), point to the importance of establishing cross-sector partnerships as a strategy to support migrant populations in accessing basic services such as healthcare, housing, food, employment, and education. Partnerships among community organizations, social service agencies, faith communities, and private industries make it possible for programs to leverage each other’s resources and increase their reach; this is especially important in rural and less resourced areas.

### Centennial BOCES Mission Statement

Through collaboration, provide value-added resources that enrich educational opportunities for all students.

## Project READY

In November 2020, Centennial BOCES leveraged its partnerships to secure close to half a million dollars from the [Response, Innovation, and Student Equity \(RISE\) Education Fund](#) to address the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and support innovation. Project READY (Resources for Education and Development for Youth) focused on addressing the unique needs of families in rural communities exacerbated by the pandemic, such as internet access, school supplies, and family and student support. Project READY’s three-pronged initiative was rooted in Centennial BOCES’ collaborative approach:

- **READY for Technology**, a partnership with the [Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado](#), increased access to technology (hot spots and computers) and supported adults in developing English language and technology skills.
- **READY for School**, a partnership with the [University of Northern Colorado Speech Language Pathology program](#), delivered emergent literacy and oral language enrichment to preschool-aged children to help them be “preschool ready” and coached parents to build self-efficacy.
- **READY for Graduation**, a partnership with the [Colorado State University Access Center’s First-Gen Near-Peer Mentoring Project](#), paired first generation college students with K-12 students in the MEP to provide near-peer mentoring and social-emotional support.

These partnerships have supported Centennial BOCES in growing its reach and improving outcomes for migrant families across areas of Colorado that have been historically underserved.

The partnerships established thanks to RISE have been invaluable. We have been able to reach and serve isolated communities that we had not done so before. I would definitely recommend others look into these types of partnerships with higher education institutions, community resource centers, and other agencies. We can all accomplish more working together.

**READY for Graduation Manager, Centennial BOCES**

The RISE grant allowed us to deepen our partnership with Centennial BOCES. We were able to expand our services to rural areas of Colorado, now engaging non-native English-speaking families in 18 different cities across 7 counties in Colorado. We have made enormous strides in bridging the digital divide. I highly recommend pursuing partnerships where there is natural overlap in mission, and where front-line staff have an opportunity to work collaboratively to more holistically meet the needs of families.

**Executive Director, Immigrant & Refugee Center of Northern Colorado**

## Factors Shaping Successful Partnerships

Project READY stakeholders identified four key factors that have supported them in developing and maintaining successful partnerships.

<b>Identify aligned partner organizations</b>	In seeking to meet community needs, Centennial BOCES cultivated partnerships with organizations that they felt had shared core values, including equity, access, a service-oriented mindset, and parent and family engagement.
<b>Maintain mutual trust, respect, and a spirit of collaboration</b>	Stakeholders identified the importance of taking the time to get to know each other at the beginning of the project period—and to continue to check in often. All Project READY initiatives met routinely to identify shared goals, celebrate successes, and to troubleshoot implementation challenges. Stakeholders expressed the importance of maintaining a “learner mindset” to learn from different perspectives. In addition, each initiative made it a priority to connect with other MEP staff to share project goals and support cross-program referral.
<b>Set shared goals, but remain flexible</b>	Stakeholders expressed the importance of establishing shared goals and outcomes, while maintaining flexibility to adapt in the face of unexpected challenges. When delivery of program sessions had to shift from in-person to hybrid/virtual approaches due to COVID-19, both READY for School and READY for Graduation adapted by sharing cost, time, and resources in developing solutions.
<b>Establish clear roles</b>	Centennial BOCES designated one program coordinator for each Project READY initiative who worked directly with leaders from the three partnering organizations.

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