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**Prime Sponsor:** Rep. Frangas

**Bill Status:** House Education

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The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

## Title: Concerning Underserved Students at Institutions of Higher Education

### Net Opportunity Gain/Loss

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. It establishes an accountability mechanism within the state's higher education performance contracts that specifically addresses institutional commitment to, and support for, retention and success of low income and minority students.

The support services specified in the bill align with actions proven to succeed. Requiring institutions to provide these services could help these students stay in school and complete their degrees.

Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) data show that in 2003, Colorado colleges and universities awarded 4,552 certificates and degrees to undergraduate minority students.<sup>1</sup> By implementing the support services identified in HB06-1024, this number would increase.

Based on the 2003 figure, every 1 percent increase would represent 45 more certificates or degrees earned by these students.

Over time, this means hundreds more underserved students could graduate from college with better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and self-sufficiency.

### Summary of Legislation

This bill requires each institution of higher education to add to its performance contract, by Aug. 1, 2006, an addendum requiring the institution to demonstrate its commitment to the

retention and success of underserved students through the institution's use of support services.

These support services shall include:

- Individual cognitive and social diagnostic assessment tools for underserved students or students in need of basic skills instruction.
- Institutional mechanisms designed to identify students at risk of not achieving satisfactory academic progress.
- Faculty mentoring programs for underserved students.

The bill authorizes governing boards to annually negotiate fee-for-service contracts with the department of higher education for the delivery of services that include proven, research-based support services for underserved students related to the strategies noted above.

The bill makes other provisions regarding work-study financial aid awards and a pilot program for online textbook libraries.

### Background

Colorado's education pipeline leaks at several key transition points along its path. Of 100 ninth graders in our schools, only 20 graduate from college within 150 percent of the time it takes to complete degree requirements.<sup>2</sup>

In Colorado, college participation rates show marked differences based on income level and race/ethnicity. In 2002, 22 percent of 18- to 24-

year-olds from low-income families attended college. This was below the national average of 25 percent and ranked Colorado 35th in the nation.

During the same year, Colorado’s college participation rate for whites ages 18-24 was 36 percent, or about the same as the national average. By comparison, only 28 percent of African-Americans and 11 percent of Hispanics of the same age were enrolled.<sup>3</sup>

Data from CCHE illustrate that college retention, persistence and graduation rates for minority students at Colorado public higher education institutions fall short of those for all students, as well.<sup>4</sup>

In Colorado, CCHE retention data is a measure of those students who start at a public college or university and return to the same institution the following year.

Likewise, CCHE’s persistence data is a measure of those students who start at a public college or university and return to any public institution in the state the following year.

**Research and Evidence of Effectiveness**

Research indicates that “to ensure student persistence and success, retention programs should address both academic and non-academic factors.”<sup>5</sup>

Vincent Tinto, a leading expert in retention research, has identified institutional actions that enhance retention and graduation. They include:

- Implementing an effective program to assess student skills at time of entry, student progress, learning in the classroom and early warning signals.
- Involving students with other students, faculty, and staff to increase the students’ level of engagement with the institution.

- Providing students with clear guidelines on what is required to succeed, through effective advising.
- Providing academic, social and personal support through programs connected to everyday student learning needs.
  - Academic support can be in the form of tutoring, developmental education courses and study groups.
  - Social support can include advising, counseling, student support groups and mentoring.<sup>6</sup>

The support services specified in the bill are consistent with these actions identified through the research.

**Estimate of Impact and Benefits**

A college degree is the single most effective way for a student from a low-income family to escape poverty and enter the Cycle of Opportunity. Because of the close correlation between race and income in America, this also is largely true for minority students.<sup>7</sup>

According to CCHE, there were approximately 37,000 minority undergraduate students enrolled in Colorado public higher education institutions in 2003.<sup>8</sup>

In 2001, almost 41,000 undergraduate Pell-grant recipients were attending these institutions. Pell Grant recipient numbers are the best indicator of low-income enrollment.<sup>9</sup>

Requiring institutions to demonstrate their commitment through the provision of services specifically targeting these students could help them stay in school and complete their degrees, thus increasing the state’s minority and low-income retention and graduation rates.

**End Notes**

<sup>2, 3, 7 & 9</sup> Bell Policy Center 2005 reports: “Exploring Colorado’s Educational Pipeline,” “Colorado: The State of Opportunity 2005 Report,” and “Who Serves Low-Income Undergraduates in Colorado?” [www.thebell.org](http://www.thebell.org).

<sup>1, 4 & 8</sup> Colorado Commission on Higher Education reports: “Quality Indicator System Report,” Colorado Commission on Higher Education” (2005) and

“Statewide Report on Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students and Faculty,” (2004).

<sup>5</sup> “The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention,” ACT Policy Report, October 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Tinto, “Student Retention and Graduation: Facing the Truth, Living With the Consequences,” The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. July 2004.