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# Blueprint for Opportunity

No. 6

## Implementation Memo

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TO: Governor-elect Ritter  
Members of the 66th Colorado General Assembly

FROM: The Bell Policy Center – Frank Waterous, Senior Policy Analyst

DATE: December 4, 2006

**RE: Implementing Bell's Blueprint recommendation No. 6  
to improve guidance for students, and expand the reach of pre-collegiate programs.**

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In the 2006 Blueprint for Opportunity, the Bell Policy Center recommends:

**Improve the guidance students get to plan their futures, and expand the reach of pre-collegiate programs so no kid falls through the cracks.**

Colorado should help districts create a culture in the schools in which all students believe they can succeed and every adult takes responsibility for helping students chart productive futures.

One way to help is to increase the number of counselors, and to ensure the student-to-counselor ratios are lowest in the schools that serve the most low-income kids. We should also ensure counselors, teachers, principals and parents get the training and support to be effective mentors.

And we should encourage greater use of and coordination with pre-collegiate programs throughout the state. (*See Blueprint, pages 12-13*)

This memorandum briefly discusses the issues surrounding this proposal, describes steps for implementing it, outlines some of the factors to consider and lists sources for additional information and resources.

If you are interested in pursuing this issue further, we are prepared to work with you. Please contact the author of this memo directly at (303) 297-0456 or [waterous@thebell.org](mailto:waterous@thebell.org), or Rich Jones, director of policy and research, at (303) 297-0456 or [jones@thebell.org](mailto:jones@thebell.org).

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### Overview of the issue

Effective school counseling at both the elementary and secondary levels contributes significantly to the personal and academic success of students, reduces dropout rates, and influences students' college-going decisions.<sup>1</sup>

Quality training and on-going professional development help to ensure that counselors and other school staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to best serve the diverse needs of today's students. Additionally, a reasonable

student-to-counselor ratio ensures that students are provided the type of support they need to make informed choices.

In order for counselors to be most effective, the American School Counseling Association recommends a maximum ratio of 250 students for every counselor. Based on 2004-05 data, however, the national average is 479 students per counselor. Colorado's average is 544 students per counselor.<sup>2</sup> To achieve the recommended ratio, Colorado would need to double the number of counselors in its schools. To be close to the



national average, about 200 more counselors would be needed statewide. Based on average counselor compensation in Colorado, adding 100 new counselors would require about \$5.9 million per year. Funding for 200 additional counselors would cost about \$11.8 million per year.

A broad range of organizations also support pre-collegiate programs in Colorado, including government (for example, the federal TRIO and GEAR UP programs), colleges and universities, school districts, non-profits and foundations.

Pre-collegiate programs vary widely, but their main goal is to help students — often from low-income and minority families — prepare for, apply to and enroll in college. The evidence indicates that pre-collegiate programs assist many students who might not otherwise go to college enroll in postsecondary education.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the state’s College In Colorado campaign, a statewide Pre-Collegiate Partnership has been established to help coordinate the efforts of such programs. The partnership is composed of a broad range of individuals and organizations, including pre-collegiate service providers, P-12 administrators and counselors, higher education officials, community-based and business organizations, public agencies and policy makers.

☞ See Pre-Collegiate Partnership information on CollegeInColorado.org’s website at [www.collegeincolorado.org/Pre-Collegiate/partnership/](http://www.collegeincolorado.org/Pre-Collegiate/partnership/)

Despite the hard work of pre-collegiate programs and the partnership, only a fraction of the eligible students in the state are served by them. According to figures provided by CollegeInColorado.org staff, approximately 75 to 100 pre-collegiate programs annually serve about 12,000 low-income students across the state, about 12.5 percent of the estimated 96,000 low-income students in middle and high schools in Colorado. While some state money is contributed to these programs indirectly through universities and school districts, the state government provides no direct financial support.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, the legislature for the first time appropriated \$800,000 to the Colorado

**“Despite the hard work of pre-collegiate programs and the Pre-Collegiate Partnership, only a fraction of the eligible students in the state are served by them.”**

Commission for Higher Education under its financial aid programs for Colorado Pre-Collegiate Scholarship funding. Preference is to be given in the awarding these funds to students who have successfully completed a pre-collegiate program.

### Implementation steps

In order to improve the guidance students get to plan their futures, and expand the reach of pre-collegiate programs in the state, four policy actions could be taken.

- **Appropriate at least \$5.9 million in the 2007-08 Appropriations Bill (Long Bill), the School Finance Act, or through separate legislation, to hire new counselors.** Include a statement of legislative intent to appropriate an additional \$5.9 million the following year so that Colorado can move closer to the national average in student-to-counselor ratio. In addition, include language in the bill stating that the priority use for these funds is to place additional counselors in schools serving significant populations of low-income and at-risk students. The State Board of Education should promulgate policies related to the distribution of this funding to school districts, and the identification of schools to be given priority for additional counselors based on student needs.
- **Appropriate \$5 million in the 2007-08 Long Bill, the School Finance Act, or through separate legislation, for pre-collegiate programs in the state.** The money would be earmarked for use in expanding the reach of these programs, and in facilitating the coordination and delivery of pre-collegiate services to as many eligible students as possible throughout Colorado.

- **Enact legislation similar to SB06-046 that includes the creation of a “P-16” (preschool through higher education) council in Colorado** to study the creation and implementation of an integrated system of education in the state. In terms of council membership, the legislation should specifically include representatives of both the school counselor and pre-collegiate program communities.
- **The governor could issue an executive order creating a task force to study and recommend how best to coordinate and maximize the efforts of the wide array of pre-collegiate programs serving students in the state.** The task force could expand on the efforts already underway by the state’s Pre-Collegiate Partnership, and should include representatives from all components of the existing pre-collegiate community and any other key stakeholders from education, business, non-profits and state and local government.

### Factors to consider

This year in California, for the first time in that state’s history, funds were earmarked to enhance school counseling for middle and high school students. Specifically, a bipartisan budget agreement provides \$200 million to increase the number of middle and high school counselors and bring the state ratio closer to the national average. These funds will pay for approximately 3,000 counselors statewide.<sup>5</sup>

SB06-046, sponsored by Sen. Ron Tupa, was approved by the legislature in 2006 but vetoed by Gov. Owens. The bill would have established a P-16 council and legislative oversight committee in the state. In that bill, the P-16 council included a member representing middle and high school counselors, but did not specifically include a representative from the pre-collegiate program community. Sen. Tupa has indicated that he will likely re-introduce a similar bill in 2007. If he does, legislators should include pre-collegiate program representation on the council.

🔗 [SB06-046 text](#)

🔗 [SB06-046 final fiscal note](#)

### Information and resources

Colorado Department of Education, “Full-time Equivalence (FTE), Average Salary, and Average Experience of Administrators, Professional-Instructional, Paraprofessionals by College Preparation, Fall 2003.”

🔗 [www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/pdf/2004Staff/hdcollprep.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/pdf/2004Staff/hdcollprep.pdf)

Colorado Pre-Collegiate Programs, Joint Education Committees Briefing, March 15, 2006, by Gully Stanford, director of pre-collegiate programs, CollegeInColorado.org.

A wealth of detailed information on the state’s efforts related to pre-collegiate programs can be found on the Pre-Collegiate Resources pages of CollegeInColorado.org’s web site at

🔗 [www.collegeincolorado.org/Pre-Collegiate/.](http://www.collegeincolorado.org/Pre-Collegiate/)

These include the Pre-Collegiate Service Directory and other publications, and information on legislation and regulations related to pre-collegiate programs.

📞🔗 Gully Stanford, director of pre-collegiate programs for CollegeInColorado.org, (720) 264-8563, or [Gully.Stanford@cic.state.co.us](mailto:Gully.Stanford@cic.state.co.us)



## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Research on School Counseling Effectiveness,” California Department of Education.  
☞ <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/rh/counseffective.asp>  
“Effectiveness of School Counseling,” American Counseling Association, Resources for Counselors.  
☞ <http://www.counseling.org/Files/FD.ashx?guid=4757e7f7-85ad-456b-88c3-5fb6a60b9eba>  
Christopher Sink and Heather Stroh, “Improving Academic Achievement in Primary Students Through a Systemic Approach to Guidance and Counseling,” Research Report No. 4, April 2003, Washington School Research Center.  
☞ <http://www.spu.edu/orgs/research/WSRC%20Report%20CGCP%202003.pdf>  
G. Brigman and C. Campbell, “Does Implementing a Research-Based School Counseling Curriculum Enhance Student Achievement?” School Counseling Research Brief 2.3, April 15, 2004, Center for School Counseling Outcome Research.  
☞ <http://www.umass.edu/schoolcounseling/PDFs/ResearchBrief2.3.pdf>  
Colorado Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, Interim Report, Nov. 1, 2004, Colorado Department of Education.  
☞ [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecare/clg\\_download/Interim\\_Final\\_CTAG\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecare/clg_download/Interim_Final_CTAG_Report.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> “United States Student-to-Counselor Ratios,” American Counseling Association  
☞ <http://www.counseling.org/Files/FD.ashx?guid=d3e066a4-384f-4669-8c4b-f93314410aa1>
- <sup>3</sup> “Distribution of College Prep Programs in Colorado,” *Headfirst: The Magazine of Enterprising Ideas for Education*, Winter 2004.
- <sup>4</sup> Personal communications (e-mail and telephone) with Gully Stanford, director of pre-collegiate programs, CollegeInColorado.org,  
☎ (720) 264-8563,  
☞ [Gully.Stanford@cic.state.co.us](mailto:Gully.Stanford@cic.state.co.us) and information on CollegeInColorado.org website,  
☞ <http://www.collegeincolorado.org/Pre-Collegiate/>
- <sup>5</sup> Press release: “School Counselor Funding In California to Dramatically Increase,” American School Counselor Association, June 30, 2006.  
☞ <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/PR6-30-06.pdf>  
Press Release: “Governor Schwarzenegger Highlights Proposal to Increase School Counselors to Ensure Student Success,” Office of the Governor, State of California, June 16, 2006.  
☞ <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/press-release/1002/>