



Colorado On-Ramp to Postsecondary Transitions (OPT)

Request for Applications

At a Glance

Jobs for the Future (JFF), in partnership with Colorado Succeeds (CS) and NORC at the University of Chicago, is pleased to announce an exciting new funding opportunity to support Colorado high schools and districts.

On-Ramp to Postsecondary Transitions (OPT) is a groundbreaking model that builds an on-ramp to successful postsecondary transitions including early high school graduation. Schools and districts participating in OPT will leverage existing programs including:

- ▶ Concurrent enrollment
- ▶ Work-based learning
- ▶ Student advisory models
- ▶ Wraparound support for disengaged youth

The intent is to create a connected, streamlined college and career navigation system of support for their students. What is most exciting about OPT is the opportunity to create a college and career navigation system that centers students who often face barriers accessing these supports in traditional models, including students from low-income households, students of color, and students who were significantly impacted by COVID-19.

OPT will provide participating schools with technical assistance and other resources to help them reimagine and strengthen their existing programs and layer in new ones to achieve the ultimate goal of all students successfully transitioning to postsecondary education and training. Through customized coaching, virtual network events, a stipend of \$35,000, and access to research-based best practices and models, OPT schools will be able to create a best-in-class college and career navigation system to support their students and drive improvements in academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and transitions into postsecondary opportunities.¹

We invite your district and high schools to apply to join the OPT network as we seek to redesign and showcase how to implement a comprehensive support system that meets the needs of your students.

This grant will launch in January 2024 and continue through the 2026-2027 school year. We seek to engage a diverse set of 20 high schools across Colorado to implement the OPT model, leveraging the technical assistance and resources provided through JFF and Colorado Succeeds.

Acknowledgments

This opportunity is funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Education Innovative and Research Program.

About JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all.

www.jff.org.

About JFF's Language Choices

JFF is committed to using language that promotes equity and human dignity, rooted in the strengths of the people and communities we serve. We develop our content with the awareness that language can perpetuate privilege but also can educate, empower, and drive positive change to create a more equitable society. We routinely reevaluate our efforts as usage evolves.

info.jff.org/language-matters

About Colorado Succeeds

Colorado Succeeds (CS) is a nonprofit organization that brings business, government, and education leaders together to create, invest in, and scale what's working and put pressure on the education system to ensure all students have access to high-quality experiences that are relevant, rigorous, and result in multiple pathways to success. The mission is to ensure all of Colorado's kids are educated to their greatest potential and businesses have the homegrown workforce needed to thrive. The vision is that by 2030, all Colorado students will graduate with a high school diploma, a postsecondary credential, and a career-connected learning experience.

www.ColoradoSucceeds.org

About NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.

Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration.

<https://www.norc.org>

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Executive Summary

The On-Ramp for Postsecondary Transition (OPT) model focuses on increasing and strengthening support for students who face barriers accessing college and career navigation resources, including a strong student advisement model, work-based learning, and concurrent enrollment. OPT builds on several existing efforts in Colorado, including [ICAP](#), [ILOP](#), [CDIP](#), [CTE](#), concurrent enrollment programs, Path4Ward, and work-based learning.

While high schools often have strong results in one of these college and career navigation supports, OPT seeks to demonstrate the value of creating an integrated support system for students using all three: a student advisement model, work-based learning, and concurrent enrollment. With this integrated support system, schools will likely see increased academic achievement, increased student engagement from students who face barriers accessing these supports, and potentially increased early high school graduation rates or on-ramps to postsecondary transitions.

OPT will focus on evaluating impact for students experiencing poverty, youth who are disengaged, students of color, and students impacted by COVID-19. To review the application process and apply to participate in OPT, please see the OPT Application Process section at the end of this document.

Quick Highlights

- › Grant begins January 2024 and ends in August 2027.
- › 40 schools will be selected across several diverse districts in Colorado.
- › Schools will be divided into *treatment* (20 schools that will implement the OPT model) and *control* (20 schools that will continue business as usual) for the purposes of evaluating the impact of the OPT model.
- › Schools will share data related to the OPT model to support the evaluation process.
- › OPT *treatment* schools will receive comprehensive professional development, resources, and access to a national network of experts and best-in-class models related to student advisement models, concurrent enrollment, and work-based learning.
- › All 40 schools will receive a small grant for participation. *Treatment* schools will receive \$35,000 and *control* schools will receive \$5,000.

OPT Program Model

Program Description

The OPT program model is designed as a cohort model to provide support for the class of 2028 in each of the treatment schools. JFF and Colorado Succeeds will provide guidance, professional learning, and research-based resources to support participating schools. **The goal of the OPT model is to build a comprehensive, fully integrated college and career navigation support system that creates equitable access for all students to earn postsecondary credentials and access employment with a living wage.**

The college and career navigation support system will include grade 9 college and career navigation curriculum (CCNC), participation in work-based learning (grades 9 through 11), and concurrent enrollment (grades 10 and 11).

Please see [Program Timeline](#) for more program details.

Table 1: OPT Key Program Components

Key Program Component	Acronym	Description
College and Career Navigation Curriculum Modules	CCNC	A series of modules that address three main content areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. College introduction, which will incorporate academic content alongside student success skills with practicum experiences2. Ethnographic approach to exploring the world of work3. Early career navigation
Continuum of Comprehensive Services	CCS	A collaborative design for schools, community organizations, government agencies, and postsecondary institutions to implement targeted strategies to engage or re-engage students who are disengaged

Key Program Component	Acronym	Description
Work-Based Learning	WBL	A continuum of activities that occur in part or in whole in the workplace, providing the learner with hands-on, real-world experience. Through WBL, students will learn about work, learn through work, and learn at work.
Concurrent Enrollment	CE	College-level courses in which students earn both high school and college credit simultaneously. CE courses are part of a sequence aligned to pathways and designed to maximize students' choices and options without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.

Evaluation Considerations

The OPT project is part of a federal U.S. Department of Education grant and includes an evaluation component. The evaluation is a random-controlled trial method, which means only a portion of the selected schools will receive the OPT program intervention and support. The selected schools will be randomized into a treatment group of 20 schools and a control group of 20 schools for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the OPT intervention.

Upon selection, all schools will need to coordinate with NORC, the evaluation partner, to provide initial baseline data. This data will be used to randomize the schools into two groups.

Treatment schools: Twenty schools will receive the OPT technical assistance supports and \$35,000 in grant funding to support their participation.

Control schools: Twenty schools will receive \$5,000 to share data for evaluation purposes. These schools will continue with operations as normal and will not receive the OPT technical assistance.

Treatment School Participation

- ▶ Customized professional learning through one-on-one monthly coaching calls, office hours, and learning events.
- ▶ Toolkits to support development and integration of the college and career navigation curriculum modules, work-based learning opportunities, and concurrent enrollment courses.
- ▶ Program of study map to support the advisement of students and engagement in concurrent enrollment and transition to postsecondary programs aligned to in-demand, high-wage jobs.
- ▶ Participation in a network of Colorado schools implementing OPT and a national network of resources through JFF to support adoption and professional learning related to college and career navigation systems.

Control School Participation

- ▶ Coordinate with NORC, the evaluation partner, to share data related to targeted student outcomes.
- ▶ Identification as a control school will not impose any restrictions on a school and district leaders' choices to adapt or increase their services for students.



Program Timeline

OPT will occur in two phases: planning and implementation. The phases will occur from January 2024 through August 2027. Below is a description of the expectations for planning and implementing the key program components.

OPT is designed as a cohort model. Students in the class of 2028 will participate in the key program components identified in [Table 1](#). Schools may choose to expand services to additional students as desired, though only one class cohort will be evaluated.

Only schools in the treatment group will be required to participate in the activities outlined in Table 2 below.

Planning Phase: January 2024 through August 2024

Table 2: Planning Phase

Program Requirement	Description
Attend a kickoff event (virtual)	OPT orientation will include a review of program goals, key components and expectations, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all partners.
Meet data sharing expectations	Each school will need to coordinate with NORC, our evaluation partner, to review data sharing expectations and provide baseline data to support the randomization process.
Participate in monthly one-on-one coaching calls	Calls will be facilitated by JFF and CS to design and plan for the implementation of OPT program components (CCNC modules, WBL, CE, and CCS).
Participate in network learning opportunities	Two or three network-wide virtual learning opportunities will be provided to support peer learning and address timely questions in the planning phase

Table 2: Planning Phase (continued)

Program Requirement	Description
Submit a syllabus for the CCNC modules	<p>Incoming grade 9 students will receive a core set of college and career navigation modules. JFF and CS will provide schools with guidance on designing the modules.</p> <p>Important to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Can use existing curriculum ▶ Can purchase or adopt national curricular materials ▶ Can be integrated into an existing course(s) or as a standalone course ▶ Can be designed for concurrent enrollment
Submit a CCNC module delivery plan	<p>Schools will develop a delivery plan to ensure all students can participate in the CCNC modules.</p> <p>Important to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide minimum of 90 minutes of instructional time per month ▶ Can be integrated into an existing course(s) or as a standalone course ▶ Can be designed for concurrent enrollment
Submit a plan to offer a work-based learning opportunity	<p>WBL plan must be aligned to the Colorado Work-Based Learning Continuum.</p> <p>Important to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Will begin in grade 9 with career awareness ▶ Will add additional experiences for grades 10 and 11 in years two and three of implementation

Implementation Phase

During this phase, OPT treatment schools will provide the key components shown in Table 3 to the class of 2028, while continuing to receive technical assistance from JFF and CS. OPT control schools will continue to provide data to NORC for evaluation purposes. They will not be required to implement any additional program requirements or participate in the OPT technical assistance.

Table 3: Student Experience Timeline

School Year	Class of 2028	CCNC	CE	WBL	CCS
2024-2025	Grade 9	CCNC modules	N/A	Career-awareness experience	Students engage in at least one CCS strategy (college and career advisement, wraparound services, and/or navigation supports)
2025-2026	Grade 10	N/A	Some students enroll in at least one CE course	Learning through work or at-work experience	
2026-2027	Grade 11	N/A	Most students enroll in two CE courses Some students enroll in three CE courses	Learning through work or at-work experience	

School Implementation Timeline

Table 4: September 2024 through August 2025 (Grade 9)

Program Requirement	Description
Participate in ongoing technical assistance	Technical assistance includes monthly one-on-one coaching calls and virtual network learning events (e.g., office hours, professional learning).
Embed college and career navigation modules	Grade 9 students will participate in and complete the CCNC modules.
Implement a work-based learning experience	Grade 9 students will participate in a WBL experience aligned to the <u>Colorado Work-Based Learning Continuum</u> (e.g., career fair, career presentations, informational interviews).

Table 4: September 2024 through August 2025 (Grade 9) (continued)

Program Requirement	Description
Submit a partnership plan to provide a continuum of comprehensive services	<p>Upon completion of the community asset meetings with CS, develop a plan with partners to integrate a CCS to support youth who are disengaged.</p> <p>Important to know: Services may include any or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College and career advising • Wraparound services • Navigation supports

Table 5: September 2025 through August 2026 (Grade 10)

Program Requirement	Description
Participate in ongoing technical assistance	Technical assistance includes monthly one-on-one coaching calls and virtual network learning events (e.g., office hours, professional learning).
Enroll students in at least one strategic concurrent enrollment	CE courses are part of a sequence aligned to pathways and designed to maximize students' choices and options without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.
Implement a work-based learning experience	Grade 10 students will participate in a WBL experience aligned to the <u>Colorado Work-Based Learning Continuum</u> (e.g., industry-sponsored projects, internships, pre-apprenticeship).
Implement a continuum of comprehensive services strategy	Collaborate with community partners to offer CCS strategies to support students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. This includes college and career advising and navigation supports and wraparound services related to transportation, childcare, housing, and nutrition needs.

Table 6: September 2026 through August 2027 (Grade 11)

Program Requirement	Description
Participate in ongoing technical assistance	Technical assistance includes monthly one-on-one coaching calls and virtual network learning events (e.g., office hours, professional learning).
Enroll students in two or three strategic concurrent enrollment courses	CE courses are part of a sequence aligned to pathways and designed to maximize students' choices and options without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.
Implement a work-based learning experience	Grade 11 students will participate in a WBL experience aligned to the <u>Colorado Work-Based Learning Continuum</u> (e.g., apprenticeship, on-the-job training, employee development).
Implement a continuum of comprehensive services strategy	Collaborate with community partners to offer CCS strategies to support students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. This includes college and career advising and navigation supports and wraparound services related to transportation, childcare, housing, and nutrition needs.

Data

The Value of a Program Evaluation

OPT is an innovative model that connects several proven interventions into a comprehensive network of supports for both students and participating schools. Participation in the OPT model will provide students with intentional layers of support to prepare them for high school graduation and successful postsecondary credential attainment. Through the evaluation process, we have the opportunity to understand the fundamental elements of the model that drive impact for students and increase their likelihood to graduate early and attain postsecondary credentials. Schools and districts in the network will have the opportunity to share their success and best practices with their peers across the country, while showcasing Colorado as an example in the national college and career readiness dialogue.

What Is a Program Evaluation?

NORC at the University of Chicago will be conducting an independent, third-party evaluation that will examine the implementation of the OPT model and measure its impact. The evaluation will test whether OPT successfully improves achievement and attainment—including college and career readiness (CCR), progress to high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment—for students in any of the targeted groups.

Selected OPT high school partners will engage with the NORC evaluation team throughout the grant period to support the research and evaluation of the OPT model. OPT will work with partnering school districts to make sure they comply with local research requirements.

Once schools have been selected to participate, the data point of contact should connect with NORC's principal investigator, Dr. Jaunelle Pratt-Williams (pratt-williams-jaunelle@norc.org), to begin conversations about school research requirements and any applicable research applications.

What Will Be Studied in the Evaluation?

NORC will conduct a rigorous, independent evaluation of OPT that will include an Impact and Implementation study. The evaluation will

- 1) Provide formative feedback to guide OPT development,
- 2) Measure the extent to which OPT is implemented as intended
- 3) Estimate the impact of OPT on student CCR outcomes.

The implementation study will support continuous improvement to refine OPT components and produce measures of fidelity of implementation. Data to support the implementation study will be collected from OPT program records, interviews with OPT coaches and staff, student focus groups, and staff and student surveys.

The impact study will examine the effect of OPT on college and career readiness, high school and college credit attainment, accelerated paths to high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and participation in training programs that leads to a credential of value. Data for the impact study will be obtained primarily through administrative records, measures of secondary school outcomes, a student survey, demographic and background characteristics, and school-level characteristics from districts.

Data Collection

Table 7 outlines information about the data that will be collected throughout the grant period. This includes what data will be collected, from whom, and the frequency at which data will be collected. NORC will develop all data collection protocols in coordination with JFF and CS, and protocols will be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to administration.

More details about data collection expectations will be shared with selected schools.

Table 7: Data Collection Timeline

Data Source	Data Collection									
	Year 1 2023		Year 2 2024		Year 3 2025		Year 4 2026		Year 5 2027	
	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall
Administrative Data										
Staff Survey										
Student Survey										
Student Focus Group										
Staff and Coach Interviews										
National Student Clearinghouse										
OPT Program Records ²										

Note: Data collection in year 4 will be virtual.

OPT Application Process

Applications will be submitted through HubSpot. In this section, we provide guidance regarding the application timeline, questions, and the selection process. Applications are still being accepted. Notices of selection will be made no later than December 4, 2023.

Grant Components	Description
Application requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Application questions ▶ Budget ▶ School selection form signed by selected schools ▶ Data sharing agreement signed by district
Application submission	Apply here
Type of award	Restricted Use Funds
Disbursement of funds	JFF
Total funds available	\$400,000
Maximum funds awarded per eligible recipient	\$35,000 for treatment schools \$5,000 for control schools
Matching requirements	None
Period of availability	January 5, 2024 to August 31, 2027
Reporting and accountability	Invoices will be submitted at the end of the planning phase and the end of year two (treatment schools); control schools will invoice upon execution of contract

Timeline

Key Deadlines	Dates
Application window	Applications are still being accepted.
Application due date	Applications are still being accepted.
Notice of selection	December 4, 2023
Contract development	December 5, 2023 to January 2, 2024
Start date for contracts	January 5, 2024

Application

Application Questions:

Please review each question carefully, noting the level of details required in each response. The overall goal of the application is to gain an initial understanding of the current initiatives in your district. Applications will be evaluated to ensure we include a diverse set of schools in the pool.

Applications will not be evaluated based on the quality of implementation.

The questions are provided below for ease of review. Note the first two questions are designed to gather profile data on the schools included in your application. The last three questions are designed to understand district-wide supports and strategies.

How to Submit:

To submit your application, please [apply here](#).

- 1. OPT key components:** OPT implementation will create a holistic approach to supporting students in the transition from secondary to postsecondary. To ensure we create a diverse pool of schools, it is important to understand the level of implementation for each of the key OPT components for each selected school. Participating schools will be required to submit the following information as part of the application process.

School Name:					
Key Component	CCNC	WBL	CE	CCS	ICAP
District-wide or school-specific implementation?					
What percentage of students are currently participating by grade level?	Grade 9:	Grade 9:	Grade 9:	Grade 9:	Grade 9:
	Grade 11:	Grade 11:	Grade 11:	Grade 11:	Grade 11:
	Grade 10:	Grade 10:	Grade 10:	Grade 10:	Grade 10:
	Grade 12:	Grade 12:	Grade 12:	Grade 12:	Grade 12:
How are you currently measuring and reporting progress on the program?					

2. Partner engagement: Successful implementation for OPT requires partners across higher education, industry, and community. Participating schools will be required to submit the following information as part of the application process.

School Name:		
Concurrent Enrollment	Work-Based Learning	CCS Strategies (community-based organizations, local government agencies, other)

3. Targeted student engagement: OPT has a specific focus on increasing access and engagement for students experiencing poverty, youth who are disengaged, students of color, and students impacted by COVID-19. Please describe any targeted strategies your district currently uses to recruit and/or engage students in any of these groups to participate in concurrent enrollment and work-based learning.

Responses may be bulleted and should be limited to 250 words or less per component.

- a. *Targeted recruitment and/or engagement strategies for concurrent enrollment:*
- b. *Targeted recruitment and/or engagement strategies for work-based learning:*

- 4. Early high school graduation:** Increased eligibility and attainment of early high school graduation is one of the possible outcomes for OPT. In 250 words or less, please describe any strategies or tools your district uses to support students eligible for early high school graduation. Additionally, describe any successes and challenges the district has seen related to early high school graduation.
- 5. Vision:** In 250 words or less, describe your district’s overall vision and approach to support high-need students to access postsecondary education, work-based learning, and early high school graduation. How will the OPT interventions advance your vision?

District Checklist for School Selection

Districts are invited to submit applications for the OPT grant and will serve as the fiscal agent should funds be awarded. Districts should work with their high schools to identify which schools will participate in the OPT model. Districts with multiple high schools are encouraged, but not required, to select at least two high schools to participate.

Below is a checklist districts can use to help schools assess their readiness to participate in the OPT model.

Concurrent enrollment:

- › Does the school currently offer CE courses?
- › If not, does the school have the capacity to begin offering CE for grade 10 students by year 3 of the grant (SY 2025-2026)?
- › Does the school have the capacity to expand participation in CE by year 3 of the grant (SY 2025-2026)?
- › Is the school willing to review requirements for participation in CE to increase access for all students?
- › Does the school currently have or is it willing to sign a formal MOU with its postsecondary

partner to ensure students completing CE will receive both high school and college credit for completion?

▶ **Work-based learning:**

- › Does the school offer WBL experiences for students?
- › Does the school have the capacity to expand WBL experiences for the class of 2028?
- › Does the school have the capacity to offer at least one WBL experience from each part of the Colorado Work-Based Learning Continuum (learning about work, learning at work, and learning through work)? Examples include informational interviews, pre-apprenticeship, internships, and apprenticeships.

▶ **CCNC modules:**

- › Does the school currently offer an advisory period or standalone course that could integrate CCNC modules?
 - If not, does the school have the capacity to identify an opportunity in the master schedule for Grade 9 students to complete a minimum of 90 minutes instructional time dedicated to the CCNC modules?
- › Does the school currently offer a curriculum with one or more elements of the CCNC modules (see the “OPT Core Program Elements” table above)?
 - If not, does the school have the capacity to design or adopt a curriculum that includes these elements?

▶ **ICAP:** Eligible districts will identify high schools that currently have a structure in place to support students in completing their ICAP. This may include technological resources, advisement models, and/or other alternatives

- › Does the school have a structure for implementing ICAP for all students? This may include technological resources, advisement models, and/or other alternatives.
- › If not, does the school have the capacity to integrate a structure for students to learn about and complete their ICAP?

▶ **Data sharing:**

- › Is the school willing to share any school-specific data related to student participation in OPT interventions?
- › Is the school willing to share any school-specific data related to its participation in OPT technical assistance?

- ▶ **School Selection Form (found on application page):** Please use this form to identify the schools in your district that will participate in the OPT model. The form also includes an attestation that identified schools are aware of the OPT model and the program requirements.

OPT School Selection Process

All applications must meet the eligibility criteria stated above and be submitted in HubSpot by 11:59 p.m. Applications are still being accepted.

If we receive more eligible applications than allowable for the grant, we will implement a more competitive scoring process to identify the pool of participating schools. The selection process is as follows:

1. Each application will be scored using a rubric aligned to the criteria for the key application questions.
2. Each application will be scored collaboratively by JFF and collaboration partners.
3. A selection committee will review all scored applications to determine final selections.
4. Applications that include schools with one or more of the following criteria will be given priority points for consideration:
 - a. 50% or more population of students who identify as students of color, students experiencing poverty, students who are disengaged, and students impacted by COVID-19
 - b. Existing Learning Through Work work-based learning opportunities (e.g., internships, pre-apprenticeships)
 - c. Existing concurrent enrollment for more than 25% of grade 11 population (in at least one of the selected schools or across the selected schools in aggregate)

5. The selection committee may request additional information from applicants to make final selections and final award decisions.

All applicants will be notified of their application status by **December 4, 2023**.

Contact Information

For additional information regarding the Colorado OPT grant, please contact:

Shana Payne, Director, JFF, spayne@jff.org.





Endnotes

- 1 What Works Clearinghouse, *Transition to College Intervention Report: Dual Enrollment Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2017). https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/docs/interventionreports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf; and Martha Ross et al., *Pathways to High-Quality Jobs for Young Adults* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution and Child Trends, 2018), www.brookings.edu/articles/pathways-to-high-quality-jobs-for-young-adults/.
- 2 Data related to school implementation and participation of OPT.



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