



## **Frequently Asked Questions: Endorsed High School Diploma**

### **1. What is an endorsed high school diploma?**

An endorsed diploma signifies a student has completed additional requirements toward high school graduation. Students earning Colorado's Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) endorsed diploma must show that they are ready for college without the need for remediation or additional coursework and that they have mastered academic content in three subject areas. They also are required to complete a career plan and to demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as collaboration through participation in extracurricular activities, internships or work.

### **2. Why is this needed?**

The PWR endorsed diploma is part of the state's initiative to align education from preschool through postsecondary. Students earning endorsed diplomas are required to carefully consider and plan for life after high school, whether that involves college or career. In return, students with endorsed diplomas are guaranteed placement in college-level courses at most state public colleges and universities, and will be given priority consideration for admission and placement at highly selective institutions such as the University of Colorado. This diploma is Colorado's first diploma identifying students who have gone beyond the basic graduation requirements.

### **3. Will all Colorado school districts have to offer these?**

No. The PWR endorsed diploma is part of the 2008 state law, the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids, or CAP4K. But it is not a mandate. School districts can choose whether to offer the endorsed diploma, or not. A statewide task force of parents, high school leaders and postsecondary administrators created the criteria for the diploma, which was later approved by the governing boards of all 23 state public colleges and universities.

### **4. Won't this be more work for school districts?**

School district leaders who choose to offer endorsed diplomas would likely need to set up some systems, whether on paper or via computer, to monitor student progress in meeting the diploma requirements. They would need to figure out, for example, how to track a student's participation in extracurricular activities, internships or work. However, the state intends to provide technical assistance such as voluntary rubrics, samples and content-specific exemplars to ease the burden on participating districts. In addition, students already are completing some tasks set out in the endorsed diploma criteria, such as taking state tests and college entrance exams.

### **5. How much will this cost and who's paying for it?**

Offering endorsed diplomas is a voluntary decision on the part of a school district. While the state plans to offer technical assistance such as examples of documentation, any additional costs would be paid by the participating school district. To date, one school district, Aurora Public Schools, has piloted the endorsed diploma. Principals at all APS high schools recently voted to continue making this option available to their students. A study analyzing costs associated with offering the endorsed diploma is expected to be completed in October 2013.



## **6. What if a student wants an endorsed diploma but a district can't offer it?**

The endorsed diploma task force recognized some districts may not be able to offer the breadth and rigor of academic coursework required to fulfill the criteria. Task force members are recommending the state support efforts to provide access to online learning opportunities that will allow all students to participate in college-level courses. Districts can take advantage of the fact Colorado's community colleges offer 100 percent of their associate's degrees online.

## **7. Why differentiate diplomas in this way – isn't this just sorting kids?**

The goal is to make it clear to students the steps they need to take to graduate and earn a diploma that will ensure their admission to a state college or university without the need for remediation or additional coursework. It's intended to create more opportunities – not narrow them. The PWR endorsed diploma gives value to careful planning for life after high school and to learning 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as communication and collaboration through participation in sports, clubs, community service, internships and work.

## **8. Are other states doing this?**

Yes. Research by the Denver-based Education Commission of the States shows some 20 states offer some type of differentiated diploma rewarding students for completing additional coursework, earning a certain GPA or fulfilling other requirements. Examples include Nevada's "advanced diploma" and Wyoming's "advanced endorsement."

## **9. When could we see the first endorsed diplomas?**

Aurora Public Schools, which piloted endorsed diplomas in 2012-13, would likely issue the first endorsed diplomas in spring 2014.

## **10. How does the endorsed diploma fit with the new graduation guidelines?**

The Colorado State Board of Education recently adopted new high school graduation guidelines that local school districts are required to meet or exceed for the graduating class of 2021 (students who are fifth-graders in 2013-14). There are some similarities in the criteria for the PWR endorsed diploma and the graduation guidelines, such as the successful completion of an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) by high school graduation. However, the graduation guidelines are a requirement for school districts while the PWR endorsed diploma is an option and school districts may choose or decline to make it available for their students.

*To learn more about the graduation guidelines, visit this Department of Education webpage:*  
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-graduationguidelines>

*To learn more about the PWR endorsed diploma, visit this Department of Education webpage:*  
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/hsdiplomaendorsement>