

**Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC)
2013-2014 Policy Recommendations**



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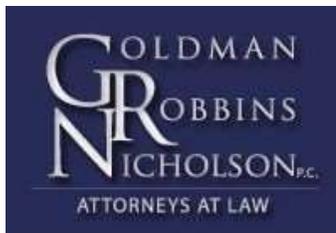
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COYAC Introduction and Process

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) is a vehicle created by the Colorado State Legislature, to bring the voice of youth to the Capitol. Since the 2008 legislation that launched COYAC, (Youth Advisory Act in House Bill 08-1157) the mission of the Council has been to examine, evaluate and discuss the issues, interests and needs affecting Colorado youth now and in the future and to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues. The Council is made up of 40 young people, representing Colorado's 35 state senate districts, and five at-large seats. These students have an interest in learning more about public policy, state government and are passionate about making a difference in their community and their state.

Throughout their two year commitment, Council members explore topics that are interesting and relevant to youth including education, employment and economic opportunity, access to state and local government services, the environment, behavioral and physical health, substance abuse, driver's license requirements, poverty, and increased youth participation in state and local government.



In addition to the 40 youth Council members, there are four members of the Colorado General Assembly that serve as members of COYAC. The speaker and minority leader of the House of Representatives, and the president and minority leader of the Senate each appoint one member to COYAC. The four members of the Colorado State Legislature who currently advise the Council and participate in meetings and discussions with youth members include:

- John Kefalas, Colorado State Senator for District 14
- Clarice Navarro, Colorado State Representative for District 47
- Cherylin Peniston, Colorado State Representative for District 35
- Ellen Roberts, Colorado State Senator for District 6

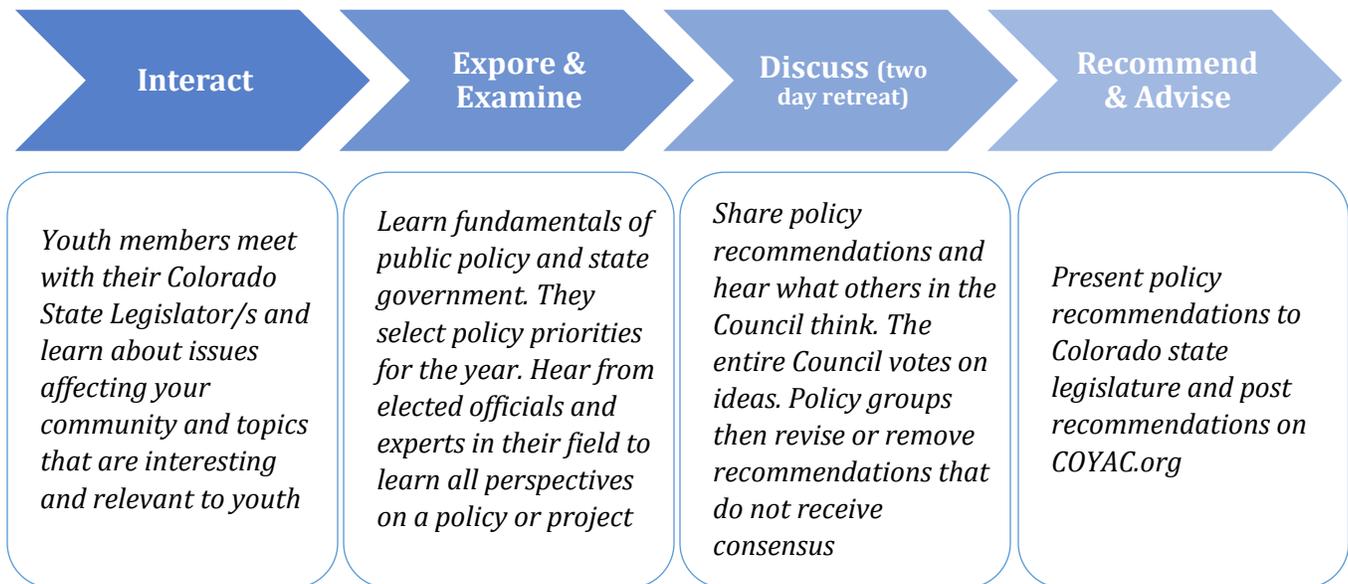
The Colorado Youth Advisory Council is open to all Colorado youth between the ages 14 and 19 who are attending a Colorado junior high, middle or high school, including online schools; nonpublic, home-based educational programs; or general equivalency degree programs. All eligible applications are reviewed by the COYAC recruitment and membership committee and then sent out to the entire Council for approval or denial. Current 2013-2014 members live in Aurora, Boulder, Broomfield, Burlington, Centennial, Clifton, Colorado Springs, Craig, Denver, Durango, Fort Collins, Highlands Ranch, La Junta, Lafayette, Lakewood, Poncha Springs, Superior, and Woodland Park.





COYAC is intended to be a youth-led Council. The Council elects a Youth Co-Chair, Youth Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer who serve with a Legislative Co-Chair and Legislative Vice-Chair to lead the Council. Engaged Public (EP) supports the youth within the framework outlined by the enabling legislation, which provides guidance for leadership and structure. EP also helps determine policy priorities, develops a work plan, and provides the content for annual reports and the COYAC web page.

Engaged Public began facilitating COYAC in late 2013 and created the following process:



The Council is tasked with coming up with policy areas to focus on each year. The process for selecting these policy areas began with each youth member meeting with their state legislator to get a better understanding of their policy priorities and community needs. After a large group discussion with the entire Council, key themes and trends emerged in what the legislative focus is this year. From those themes, youth members discussed which were most important and relevant to youth in Colorado. This year, Council members selected the following four policy areas

1. Narrowing the Achievement Gap
2. Exploring Jobs and Higher Education Opportunities
3. The Future of Energy Development
4. Access to Behavioral Health Care (mental health access & drug and alcohol use prevention)

Each policy group met with a subject matter expert (SME) who provided contextual information about each policy area. The SME's are experts in the respective fields and brought a wealth of knowledge and information to the COYAC policy groups. The SME's were:



1. Narrowing the Achievement Gap:
Robert E. Reichardt, Senior Associate and Nathan Roberson, Associate, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA)
2. Exploring Jobs and Higher Education Opportunities:
Mark Cavanaugh, Chief Financial Officer, Colorado Department of Higher Education
3. The Future of Energy Development:
Chris McGowne, Community Outreach Coordinator, Colorado Oil & Gas Association, and Mark Safty, Partner, Holland & Hart LLP and UCD School of Public Affairs Wirth Chair in Environmental and Community Development Policy
4. Access to Behavioral Health Care:
Terri Hurst, Director of Public Policy, Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council



During their two-day retreat, policy groups worked on formulating and researching their recommendations. Each policy group presented their draft recommendations to the entire Council for approval and suggestions. Amendments were made based on the feedback and opinions of the entire Council. Finally, policy groups worked extensively in the interim, finalizing their recommendations for presentation to the Colorado State Legislature.

Each COYAC member serves on two committees: one procedural and one policy. Policy committees fluctuate every year based on subjects that are relevant and timely to youth and the priorities of the state legislature. There are four procedural committees that help COYAC run efficiently and help manage administrative tasks. There is also an Executive Committee includes Youth Co-Chair, Youth Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. These positions are voted on by the entire Council.



2013/2014 COYAC Members

Last name	First name	Senate District	City	Zip code
Penny	Jansen	1	Burlington	80807
Vela	Alexander	2	Woodland Park	80863
Vanatta	Demi	5	Poncha Springs	81242
Fallon-Cyr	Raven	6	Durango	81301
Graham	Logan	6 (at large position)	Durango	81301
Kostreva	Caleb	7	Clifton	81520
Ferree	Nicole	8	Craig	81625
Barad	Matthew	9	Colorado Springs	80919
Singh	Serene	10	Colorado Springs	80920
Christensen	DeAnna	11	Colorado Springs	80909
Vyvlecka	Jacob	12	Colorado Springs	80922
Atencio	AmyJo	12 (at large position)	Colorado Springs	80951
Weaver-Adeyemi	Hannah	14	Fort Collins	80525
Gonzalez	Itzel	15	Fort Collins	80526
Quinn	Ali	16	Superior	80027
Nehring	Matthew	17	Lafayette	80027
Gunther	Nick	18	Boulder	80305
Kostelnik	Jessica	21	Lakewood	80232
Rodriguez	Juliana	22	Lakewood	80227
Chen	Jackson	23	Broomfield	80020
Kallsen	Taylor	27	Centennial	80016
Burdick	Michael	28	Aurora	80013
Zheng	Christopher	29	Aurora	80016
Bratten	Cody	30	Highlands Ranch	80130
Schaack	Margaret	31	Denver	80230
Glickstein	Adina	32	Denver	80218
Steele	Suzanna	32 (at large position)	Denver	80230
Pryor	Raymond	33	Denver	80207
Esparza	Julia	34	Denver	80204
Mathews	Anastasia	35	La Junta	81050

We have several open positions and would like youth representation from the following Senate Districts:

3 (Pueblo); 4 (Douglas County); 13 (Greeley), 19 & 20 (Jefferson County); 24 & 25 (Adams County); 26 (Arapahoe County)

If you would like to nominate someone to serve as a youth representative, please contact Maureen at info@coyac.org



Narrowing the Achievement Gap

Group Members:

Matthew Barad, Colorado Springs

Jackson Chen, Broomfield

Matthew Nehring, Lafayette

Jansen Penny, Burlington

Raymond Pryor, Denver

Juliana Rodriguez, Lakewood

Margaret Schaack, Denver

Why We Chose the Achievement Gap as a Policy Priority

COYAC members represent much of the diversity of Colorado including urban and rural, and low to high income, and we agree that these distinctions should not dictate the quality of education for a student.

Unfortunately, each of us witness divisions within our schools both academic and social. The achievement gap in Colorado is an issue that we all experience and see every day. For this reason, we felt it was critical to lend a student perspective on the achievement gap. Who better to speak about the inequality facing our schools than the students experiencing it?

Narrowing the Achievement Gap Policy Recommendations

1. Create a school-based, peer-mentor, program in Colorado high schools, which promotes academic accountability, leadership and community involvement.

This program would be based on a peer-to-peer mentorship model (seen in Chicago or New York high schools), which functions by having fellow students encourage each other in their academics, share in their struggles, support and keep one another accountable, ultimately resulting in fewer drop-outs and greater student success. These programs also partner with other community organizations and business leaders who provide mentorship and support. The programs work by creating a culture of academic success and leadership amongst students, who historically, have struggled the most. To make this vision a reality, we propose the Colorado State Legislature create a peer-to-peer mentorship program fund, for schools to apply for small grants to start up this unique program. The state would also provide “how-to” materials to help schools begin their program. We believe that this program would greatly improve school communities and student achievement, while minimizing state costs by making use of expertise within the community and existing school infrastructure.

2. Create a state administered and funded database to provide free language exposure educational materials for early education and elementary school teachers and parents.

According to a new early-childhood language study conducted by Anne Fernald at Stanford University, the average low-income student hears a total of 30 million fewer words than the average middle to high-income child before entering first grade. This “word-gap” clearly shows that the largest gap between students in education starts before they ever enter public school. In an attempt to reconcile this gap in education, we recommend the creation of a state education database for early education and elementary school teachers and parents. This new database would particularly focus on providing effective online tools which focus on word and language exposure. Our proposed database would be similar to the already existing eNetColorado Digital Resource and Exchange Marketplace (DREAM), which provides computer programs, recorded stories, and many more educational resources to Colorado schools, at the cost of a subscription. The database could work together with existing databases (such as DREAM) to maximize existing state infrastructure. This new database would give Colorado teachers and parents, from Fort Collins to Durango, the tools needed to fill the gap at an early age.



Exploring Jobs and Higher Education Opportunities

Group Members:

DeAnna Christensen, Colorado Springs
Demi Vanatta, Poncha Springs

Alexander Vela, Woodland Park
Jacob Vyvlecka, Colorado Springs

Why We Chose Jobs and Higher Education Opportunities as a Policy Priority

In our committee we overwhelmingly agreed that there are areas of insufficient and/or inconsistent higher education preparation and information in Colorado high schools. It is necessary that students be prepared for post-secondary life in disciplines outside math, history, and science, giving them the skill set to be competitive in the workforce. Students also need help and guidance in applying for financial aid, scholarships, and college. As the workforce of tomorrow, we feel that Colorado schools could be doing more to prepare us for the future.

Exploring Jobs and Higher Education Opportunities Policy Recommendations

1. Form a higher education preparation advisory group consisting of legislators, teachers, youth, and school administrators to revisit the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) and other college preparation resources like College in Colorado in order to explore areas of improvement and enforcement.

In our personal experience, online resources and other post-secondary planning tools like the ICAP are inconsistently utilized in Colorado high schools, leaving students confused about career and higher education opportunities. Based on a survey at Palmer High School in Colorado Springs, 76 percent of students said that they were applying to college. However, even though a majority of students are applying, as upperclassmen 92 percent of students didn't know how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and had not done so. We recommend the formation of a higher education preparation advisory group which would revisit the Colorado State Department of Education's "Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans CCR 1 301-81" which outline the administration of the ICAP. We also suggest the advisory group assess the content on the College in Colorado website, particularly looking at tools and information related to application help and tax and loan information.

2. Create a state administered, school-work program in which students of Colorado public institutes of higher education can work at a local business, learning pertinent career skills in exchange for pay and college credit.

With the rising cost of higher education, many students are feeling the pressure of finding a way to finance their tuition. We propose the creation of a school-work program, so student's enrolled in Colorado public universities would be able to gain real world work experience with a local business. The schools would be required to work with businesses in the area who would be willing to join the program. Students would be matched with businesses based on their professional and academic interests. Students would work for the business in varying capacities for at least one semester or quarter. The students would receive a majority of their above minimum wage income (as agreed to by the local business), while the university would take a small portion to fund the program and transportation costs. In order to receive class credit, the employer would evaluate the students' performance and overall growth in their position. To compel business to partner with the program they would receive free advertisement and publicity from the university.



The Future of Energy Development

Group Members:

Cody Bratten, Highlands Ranch
Michael Burdick, Aurora
Nicole Ferree, Craig

Logan Graham, Durango
Nick Gunther, Boulder
Suzanna Steele, Denver

Why We Chose Energy Development as a Policy Priority

Energy development, use, reuse and waste effects everyone, and youth are no exception. We realize that choices being made today will determine the energy future of Colorado. Therefore, we want to recommend policies and themes that we hope will lead to effective, inexpensive, long-term solutions for the energy future of Colorado. While energy planning and policy is crucial to the success of Colorado, it is particularly vital to the mining communities in our state. Finding a solution to keep these communities alive while in tune with the evolving energy landscape is a priority for us.

The Future of Energy Development Policy Recommendations

1. Continue state investment in clean energy development.
2. Establish better practices for communication between oil and gas companies and landowners.
3. Cap increases in direct payments to cities and counties that place a moratorium on drilling.
Much of severance tax monies are returned to municipalities in the form of direct payments based on the number of coal/oil/gas employees, road use, and population of that community. Capping direct payments to cities and counties that place a moratorium on drilling would ensure that increases in severance tax revenue due to expanded drilling stay in the communities that encouraged expanded drilling. Severance tax grants are intended to compensate the community for drilling, but if there is no new drilling, there is no need for new severance tax grants.
4. Include all new hydroelectric energy in the definition of a renewable energy resource under Colorado's Renewable Energy Standards (CRES).
As outlined in Colorado Revised Statutes, 40-2-124 (via [Senate Bill 13-252](#)), in order for hydroelectricity to be considered a renewable energy resource it must have a nameplate rating of ten megawatts or less. Larger hydroelectric facilities should be included in this definition as they do not produce significant amounts of carbon pollution. While there may be environmental concerns surrounding the construction and maintenance of large dams, they should be addressed outside the context of the CRES.
5. Extend the renewable resources mandate deadline from 2020 to 2025.
The Colorado Renewable Portfolio Standard requires 30 percent renewable energy by 2020 for investor owned utilities and 10 percent renewable for cooperatives and municipal utilities. While we agree with the mandate, we recommend an extension of when communities and utility companies need to comply with the standard. Five more years would allow co-ops and municipal utilities to find reliable and cost-effective renewable solutions.
6. In an effort to ensure clean, healthy water is abundant in our state, we recommend the Colorado State Legislature prioritize the protection of Health Rivers and the restoration of degraded rivers. We want to emphasize water efficiency and conservation in Colorado's cities and towns including creating water friendly agricultural practices that keep the best interests of Colorado's farmers and ranchers and Colorado's water future in mind.



Access to Behavioral Health Care Includes Mental Health Access and Drug and Alcohol Prevention

Group Members:

Julia Esparza, Denver

Raven Fallon-Cyr, Durango

Adina Glickstein, Denver

Itzel Gonzalez, Fort Collins

Taylor Kallsen, Centennial

Jessica Kostelnik, Lakewood

Caleb Kostreva, Clifton

Anastasia Mathews, La Junta

Serene Singh, Colorado Springs

Hannah Weaver-Adeyemi, Fort Collins

Christopher Zheng, Aurora

Why We Chose Mental Health Access as a Policy Priority

According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, more Coloradans died by suicide in 2012 than ever before. In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 22 percent of the youth in Colorado face depression. Youth are surrounded by many forms of pressure and stress, with few tools or experience to cope with the ensuing anxiety, causing them to develop mental health issues that they may not even be aware of. In some cases, these pressures cause them to deny help or the search thereof. However, in many circumstances, students do not have access to the help they need. We have created three effective policy recommendations that will provide the necessary mental health access and support to the students of Colorado.

Mental Health Access Policy Recommendations

1. Increase the funding for School Based Health Centers by 5.5 percent annually by means of the School Based Health Centers grant so that every public high school will have a center for student's use by 2025.

The current status of student health resources in high schools across Colorado varies significantly, but there is a resounding consensus within our Council that access to behavioral health/substance abuse treatment is very limited. Whether it is limited staff, minimal operating hours, or simply a far too minor presence in schools, health centers are greatly restricted in their options which have a profound impact on student's education, personal safety, and the safety of their peers. Through our research, the Council has concluded that School Based Health Centers are the best policy option in order to guarantee vital access to treatment. The Colorado Association for School Based Health Care (CASBHC) has conducted momentous work in establishing centers across Colorado. CASBHC monitored the type of visits made to Colorado centers from 2010-2011, and showed that school based health centers offer over 30 percent more treatment in addition to the primary care that is offered at non-health center schools. We recommend allocating funding to CASBHC through a state grant. We further advise that the resources are first allocated to schools that demonstrate the highest need for behavioral health services. These health centers can provide easy access to treatment, and confidential service, which will decrease the social stigma involved with a search for help. As students, we see that our peers feel lost in their search for help. We have witnessed the dire need for behavioral health services amongst peers who have taken to self-harm or have even taken their own lives because of a lack of access to treatment. The Council believes that school based health centers are the key to a successful, healthy future for Colorado.

2. Create/fund a new education program for public schools in Colorado to educate students on early warning signs of student mental health issues, available programs for support/outreach, and school protocol on how counselors, teachers, and administrators address such issues.



We cannot ignore the merit of many of the health facilities and 52 school based health centers currently available to youth in Colorado. However, even if adequate health centers and/or behavioral health facilities are in place, a staggering 45 percent of Colorado students are unaware of the existence of these services, or how to access them. We as students need to be informed of the statutes and limitations of such facilities, along with the details of who within the school staff is available for further council. We therefore propose that public high schools throughout Colorado be required to inform their students of the existence of in-school health facilities (if applicable), the hours in which a staff member is available, and of the school's individual disciplinary policy involving drug and alcohol abuse.

3. In order to decrease mental health concerns currently in the State of Colorado, we recommend all schools implement an online chat relief system for students 24/7.

In our experience, it is often easier for a student to express their thoughts online instead of in person. A chat system would be an option for all students to express their concerns, needs or anxieties by writing to a counselor at their school. If necessary, the school counselor can then develop a plan of treatment with the student over the short or long term. This system avoids 1) the embarrassment that students face having to leave class to go visit the counseling office and 2) allows students the resource and access to help even when they are not in school. Arizona is a prime example of a system almost identical to this recommendation, and has received very positive reaction, and result. We want students to understand that seeking mental health services is not a weakness, or a negative asset, but rather something that should be addressed and managed. This policy allows us to do just that. By providing both in school and out of school relief, students have every option and availability to gain help.

Why we chose drug and alcohol use prevention as a policy priority:

According to a Colorado survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, almost 40 percent of Colorado high school students had consumed alcohol within 30 days prior to taking the survey. This is concerning to us, youth in Colorado continue to illegally use drugs and alcohol. More so, many of these youth do not receive mental or physical care to prevent substance use or treat substance addictions. It is a result of these issues that we present to you these policy recommendations which we believe will assist Colorado's youth.

Drugs and Alcohol Use Prevention Policy Recommendations

4. Create a new program to be implemented in Colorado schools that is comprised of fact-based and comprehensive state and national drug policy information, health effects of drugs including prescription drugs, available support/outreach programs, and consequences.

Rather than using a fear-based approach similar to those in programs like D.A.R.E., this should be a comprehensive education that informs students on relevant dangers as well as harm reduction. The program should help students understand the adverse health effects of drug and alcohol use in an informative and educational manner. This policy recommendation seeks to develop a program that is not simply a cause and effect lecture to students on abuse. But rather, a comprehensive study, and system by which schools can help teens understand not just the effects of abuse, but the legal, health, and societal harms that will result from abuse. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1997, fear appeals are ineffective. The study goes on to note that, "Students learn better with a low fear appeal message and with a credible communicator." Fear appeals may cause an audience to tune out a message or not believe it, or worse, be encouraged to do the opposite of the intended behavior because they like taking risks. This system will eliminate the fear factor, allowing teens to find a solution out of problems they are in, or will be in, rather than finding ways to hide their concerns.

