

Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) 2015-2016 Policy Recommendations



2015/2016 COYAC Members

Last Name	First Name	Senate District	City/Town
Vela	Alexander	2	Woodland Park
Zinno	Tony	3	Lone Tree
Grier	Kelly	4	Parker
Fallon-Cyr	Raven	6	Durango
Barad	Matthew	9	Colorado Springs
Barnett	Sofia	10	Colorado Springs
Christensen	DeAnna	11	Colorado Springs
Janssen	Emme	15	Loveland
Strasser	Pierce	16	Evergreen
Kohnert	William	17	Lafayette
Schiller	Ryan	19	Westminster
Cheong	Se Young	22	Littleton
Chen	Jackson	23	Broomfield
Hancock	Cole	26	Littleton
Ramesh	Rahul	27	Centennial
Heide	Alexiss	28	Denver
Kopuri	Himanvi	29	Aurora
Fisher	Jason	30	Lone Tree
Burnite	Kate	31	Denver
Robinson	Shannon	33	Aurora
Romero	Carla	34	Denver
Mathews	Anastasia	35	La Junta
Hearty	Caitlin	26AL	Littleton
Mohamed	Yasmine	29 AL	Aurora
Wollins	David	31AL	Denver
Scott	Abigail	6 AL	Durango

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.

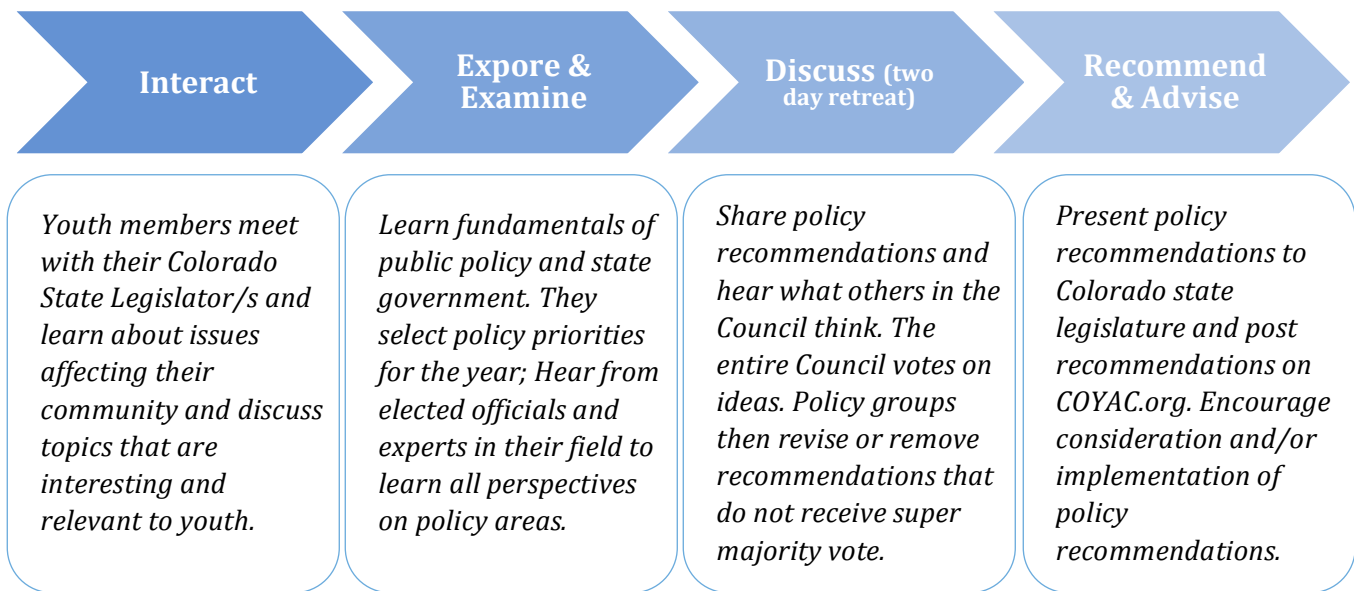
In addition to the 40 youth Council members, there are four members of the Colorado General Assembly that serve as members of COYAC. The speaker and minority leader of the House of Representatives, and the president and minority leader of the Senate each appoint one member to COYAC.

The 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.



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 develops a work plan, and provides the content for annual reports and the COYAC website.

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

- 21st Century Learning
- Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Issues of Underrepresented Populations in Colorado (refugee/LGBTQ+)
- Access to Mental Health Services

Each policy group met with a subject matter expert (SME) who provided contextual information about each policy area:

- **21st Century Learning:**
Mike Porter, Director of Technology, Littleton Public Schools
- **Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse:**
Ali Maffey, MSW, Policy and Communication Unit Supervisor, Colorado Dept. of Health and Environment
- **Issues of Underrepresented Populations in Colorado (refugee/LGBTQ+, group was also looking at rural issues at this time):**
Reeves Brown, former Executive Director, DOLA/ Project Coordinator. Building a Better Colorado
Lauren Cikara, Safe Schools Manager, One Colorado
Yazan Fattaleh, Young Adult Career Counselor, ECDC/African Community Center
- **Access to Mental Health Services:**
Moe Keller, Vice President Public Policy and Strategic Initiatives, Mental Health America of Colorado

2015-2016 COYAC Donors and Supporters

COYAC would not be possible without the generosity of the following donors:

El Pomar Foundation



21st Century Learning

Policy Group Members

Matthew Barad, Colorado Springs
Jackson Chen, Broomfield
William Kohnert, Lafayette

Ana Mathews, La Junta
Alexander Vela, Woodland Park
Himanvi Kopuri, Aurora

Why We Chose 21st Century Learning as a Policy Priority

Education, especially related to high schools, is arguably the issue of most importance to Colorado Youth. There is very little that can determine one's future as much as their education. For that reason, all of us on this committee are driven to represent our peers and do what we can to improve Colorado's current education system. Indeed, three of us on this group are so impassioned by these issues that we have focused our recommendations around this subject area for the past three years.

21st Century Learning Policy Recommendations:

1. Promote vocational learning.

Most students in Colorado today are faced with two choices: go to college and face student debts, or start working after high school and risk failing to find a job for which they are qualified. While current vocational programs do help make the second option feasible for some students; these programs rarely match the range or depth of study many high school students seek. Moreover, many small businesses would love to provide internships to area youth, but the cost of spending time training them is too large. Therefore, this committee recommends that the legislature consider rewarding businesses which provide internships with a tax break.

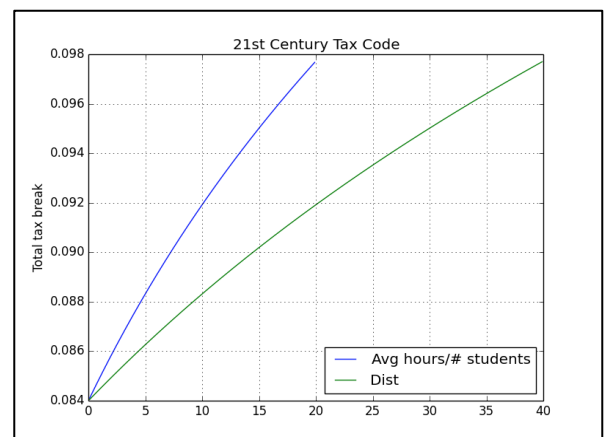
We suggest that this tax break be modeled similarly to the following equation:

$$\text{Log}_{1.2}(2A+2S+D) = \text{Break}$$

With the following conditions:

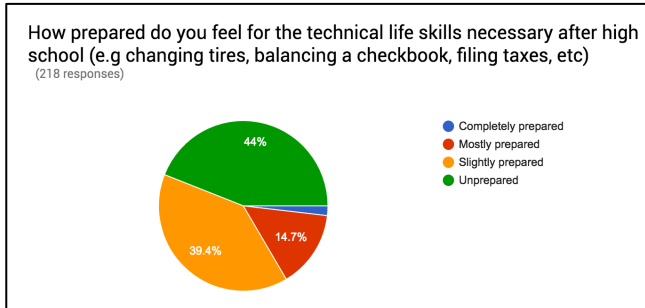
- Maximum measured hours per student per week (A) = 3
- Maximum students measured (S) = 25, and no more than ¼ the number of staff members may be measured.
- Maximum measured distance (D) = 40 miles.
- Minimum of 3 students and at least 1 hour per student per week.

This comes out to a maximum tax break of .0977%, which amounts in an approximate 2% decrease in taxes paid. In reality, the average small business would only be able to intern one or two students. This means the maximum fiscal note for this program would be a 1.42% decrease in state corporate income, or about \$7.1 Million maximum. This comes out to a .065% decrease in total tax revenue for the state. However, as not every business is likely to take advantage of this program, the actual note may very well be much lower.



2. Promote life skills courses.

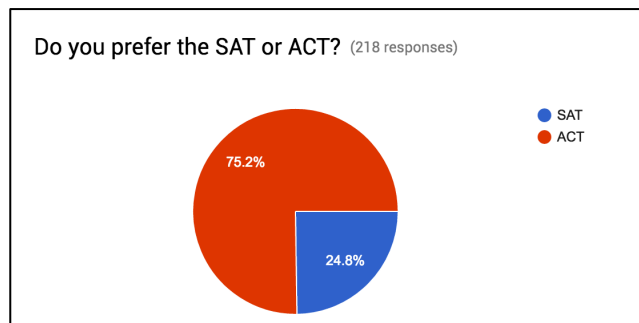
A recent poll by Sallie Mae found that 84 percent of high school students desire more financial education. Among 16- to 18-year-olds, 86 percent said they would rather learn about money management in the classroom than make financial mistakes in the real world, according to a 2011 survey by investment bank Charles Schwab. Beyond this, our survey demonstrates that 84% of Colorado youth identify as either unprepared or slightly prepared. Because of this we recommend that the legislature consider implementing



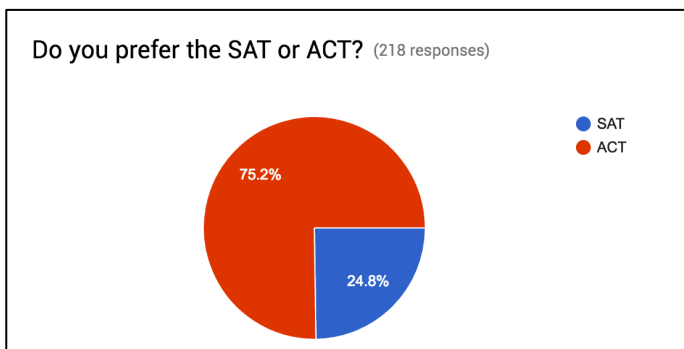
a life skills program similar to the current Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) program, wherein the districts are left to decide their own implementation, while the state board of education simply ensures that a program exists. Such an action would resolve the life readiness crisis in Colorado, while still allowing school districts significant freedom in implementation.

3. Cancel plans to switch state test to SAT.

Last year, this council proposed that the legislature replace the then PARCC standardized test with the ACT and PLAN, both of which were already required by the state and had innate worth to students. This recommendation indirectly resulted in the passage of HB-1323, which decreased testing and used ACT results in lieu of the PARCC. This recommendation was specific to the ACT not only because it was already the state test, but because it best matched Colorado



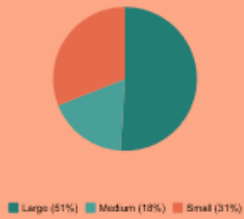
standards, and was by far the most popular test among Colorado students. Earlier this year as a result of a bidding war, it was decided that the state would switch the now cheaper SAT test. Because of our experience with standardized testing, as well as because of our survey which found that just over 75% of Colorado youth prefer the ACT, we feel obliged to ask that everything that still can be done to stop this transition is at least considered.



Internship Incentive Plan COYAC 2016

Jackson Chen, Matthew Barad, Alex Vela,
Ana Mathews, Will Kohnert

Business Size Distribution



Small Business Employment



Tax Credit

Revenue Reduction Comparison



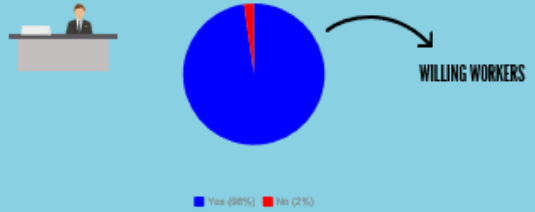
'I'd LOVE to let more kids work with me, especially because of how hard it is to find **WILLING WORKERS...**with your tax cut, I can see letting kids intern with me.'



- Chuck Shwartz
Colorado Springs small business owner

Internship Opportunities

Student Support of Increase



Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Policy Group Members

Tony Zinno, Lone Tree
Abby Scott, Durango
Pierce Strasser, Evergreen

Se Young Cheong, Littleton
Raven Fallon-Cyr, Durango

Why We Chose Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse as a Policy Priority

Despite prevention efforts, substance abuse amongst Colorado youth continues to be a prevalent issue. As students and youth, it is our perspective that current zero tolerance policies of substance abuse of adolescents are not only ineffective, but detrimental to teens. We feel that a more pragmatic approach, pushing for education and restoration rather than punishment, would result in lower drug use amongst teens. Current alternative programs (such as Juvenile/Teen Courts) exist that embrace this idea- offering offenders an opportunity to expunge their records through completing programs that encourage further understanding of substance abuse and personal rehabilitation. Such programs have great success, showing exceptionally low recidivism rates. Current programs partner with school districts, allowing teens with substance abuse infractions at school to complete alternative programs rather than have a charge on their records. It is our recommendation that the state set aside funding for the expansion of current alternative programs, urge schools to partner with such programs, and simplify the startup process.

Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy Recommendations:

1. Establish, develop, and implement Teen Courts or other alternative restorative justice programs across the state in communities with increasing drug and alcohol related issues.

The scarcity of state laws asserting direct control over teen courts is understandable when the voluntary and consensual nature of these programs is taken into account. However some states have recognized teen courts in fiscal measures that allocate funds to these programs, resulting in low recidivism rates statewide, increased respect for the law, and bridging the gap between the youth involved and legislators. Texas is a consummate example of such a state; having identified Fort Worth as an at risk area for youth, legislators developed and sanctioned a teen court. Deme, a past defendant, guilty of drinking and driving, is an adamant supporter of the state funded teen court, “really opened my eyes to the second chances that Teen Court gives to people because many times we see these individuals as people who have broken the law but they’re just average individuals like you and me,” she remarked, “it was truly an eye-opening experience to have been given a second chance by my peers”. Such an eye-opening experience has positively altered the path of countless youth across the state of Texas. The Drug and Alcohol Committee understands that Colorado possesses the potential to similarly influence teens, simply by earmarking funding for Teen Courts.

The primary steps in implementing teen courts on a statewide basis include:

- Identifying at risk communities and creating a local board/leadership.
- Boards would then be able to outreach to the local law enforcement, school districts, and appropriate legal contacts. The implementation of teen courts may vary slightly due difference in communities, however the overall structure will remain prevalent throughout.
- For basic jurisdictional authority, the state should rely on juvenile court diversion statutes that have been on the books for many years. These diversion statutes allow a law enforcement agency, a probation department, or a juvenile court to suspend or dismiss formal delinquency proceedings

pending successful completion of a diversion program. Teen courts are accepted as referral programs under these basic juvenile diversion laws. However, the construction of a teen court cannot be detailed in just a few lines, so to gain a better understanding we suggest referring to the Colorado Teen Court website.

2. Fund current Teen Courts in Colorado thus allowing them to expand their jurisdiction into adjacent communities.

Colorado currently has three major teen courts: Colorado Springs Teen Court, Town of Castle Rock Teen Court, and Parker Teen Court. Over 6,000 at-risk teens in the last twenty years have walked through the doors of the Municipal Courthouse (Colorado Springs Teen Court) on their way to Teen Court. Less than 5% of them return with a second offense. The success of Colorado Springs Teen Court is shared by programs in Castle Rock and Parker. Despite this success, an effort has never been made to extend the jurisdiction of current Teen Courts into surrounding communities. With financial backing, overwhelming benefits that Teen Courts have brought to communities throughout Colorado, could be shared with neighboring communities.

Issues of Underrepresented Populations in Colorado (refugee/LGBTQ+)

Policy Group Members

Rahul Ramesh, Aurora

Yasmine Mohamed, Aurora

Emme Janssen, Loveland

Alexiss Heide, Denver,

Why We Chose Refugee Issues as a Policy Priority

In the state of Colorado we allow 1,500-2,000 refugees into our state every year and the majority of the refugees are children and teens. The biggest barrier for refugees is language, thus 90% or higher of all refugees do not speak English proficiently enough to communicate with English speakers. If we can give refugees the tools to speak English, they will be able to do better in school, work, and everyday life. Another problem we face with refugees is that they are unable to get off of public assistance programs such as Food stamps; thus if they can speak English better they will be able to get a job and be more self-sufficient.

Refugee Issues Policy Recommendations:

1. We would like to increase the amount of support from the Tony Grampas Youth Services Grant to go increase funding for refugee resettlement agencies to teach Adolescents and children a sufficient amount of English and teach basic life skills.

As we know, knowing the language and critical life skills are a must for refugees to get acquainted with living in Colorado and without it, it could be detrimental to their futures. With the two resettlement agencies in the state of Colorado (*The African Community Center & Lutheran Family Services Of Colorado*) have programs to teach life skills (i.e.; Using RTD, paying bills, job searches, applying for public assistance etc.) to adults but zero programs that solely help children and adolescents to learn life skills (i.e.; Taking the RTD/School bus, safety, how to manage money, how to keep on top of schoolwork etc.). Also, there are programs for adults only that they can learn English (up to a 6th grade level), but there are no programs for adolescents or children except for in school I.E.P plans. ESL & IEP plans do not teach the kids English, rather they put them in separate classrooms and teach the same things, but slower, thus alienating refugee kids/adolescents from kids/adolescents whose first language is English. That is making it even harder for refugee adolescents to make more friends and transition better to a life in Colorado. This would help refugee adolescents to better themselves, succeed in their schooling/career life, get them off of public assistance, and make Colorado a happier, more successful place.

Please Note:

- Refugees that will be receiving this funding/program are legal refugees coming to Colorado/are here through a reputable refugee resettlement agency
- This recommendation is not asking for more funding, we are asking to set aside a set amount of monies for these specific programs

Information about the Tony Grampas Youth Services Grant:

The Tony Grampas Youth Services (TGYS) Program is a statutory program providing funding to local organizations that work with youth and their families through programs designed to prevent youth crime and violence, youth marijuana use, and child abuse and neglect. Funds for the 2015-16 state fiscal year are allocated to TGYS from the tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, the State of Colorado General Fund, and the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund.



Why We Chose LGBTQ+ Teen Issues as a Policy Priority

Statistics from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) show that youth who identify within the LGBTQ+ community are almost three times as likely to struggle with depression, more than four times as likely to consider suicide, and almost seven times as likely to attempt suicide as other youth their age. We feel that these statistics are far too high and underscore a substantial need for continued intervention and help for this population.

Information about the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey 2013:

- 40,000 students took this survey
- 59% identified LGBT and answered yes to questions pertaining to depression (compared to 20.8% of heterosexual students)
- 49% considered suicide (compared to 11.7% of heterosexual students)

28% attempted suicide at least once in the past year (compared to 4.5% of heterosexual students)

Sexuality and gender identity is often a difficult topic to discuss at home, church, with friends and relatives; and more often than not the best place for youth to reach out for help is at school. Continuing to providing middle and high school educators and counselors with the tools needed to help these youth at the place the majority of youth spend most of their day-school- will help lower these startling numbers.

LGBTQ+ Teen Issues Policy Recommendations:

1. Create an expansion on middle and high school educators and counselor's knowledge on the LGBT teen community; and how to support these youth through the difficulties they may face regarding their sexual and gender identity.

Teens who identify within the LGBTQ+ community often face difficulty when coming out to their peers, counselors, friends and family. Statistics have shown that many youth who are struggling with the sexual and gender identity are more likely than not to struggle with depression, anxiety, and insecurity, and in some very tragic cases, have led some youth to committing suicide. Middle and High school counselors should continue to receive educational training courses providing them with the tools they need in order to help support their students who are struggling with these issues. Having an expanded knowledge on LGBT issues and how to support youth facing them will allow our counselors and educators to help youth through their depression, insecurity, anxiety, etc. and possibly even prevent suicide.

2. Making sure that House Bill 11-1254 (Colorado's anti bullying law) inclusive anti bullying policies are implemented in 80% of schools by 2020.

In middle and high school sadly bullying is a "normal" experience. We know the physical, emotional, and psychological issues that can be caused due to bullying and we know that adolescents should not have to go through this. This recommendation is to show our support for House Bill 11-1254's inclusive bullying policies and to express our urge to get it implemented in 80% of schools by 2020. Schools would be protecting the LGBT students along with everyone else. Making sure that these policies are being enforced and implemented is making sure schools can be as LGBT friendly and as safe as possible.

Access to Mental Health Services

Policy Group Members

Sofia Barnett, Colorado Springs
Kelly Grier, Parker
Cole Hancock, Littleton

Caitlin Hearty, Littleton
Ryan Schiller, Denver

Why We Chose Access to Mental Health Services as a Policy Priority

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24, ranking only behind motor vehicle fatalities. In 2014 Colorado had the highest suicide rate in its history and ranked seventh in the nation for suicides. In this day and age it is nearly impossible to find a teenager who has yet to be personally affected by suicide in one way or another. Consequently we feel a need to address this issue, to curtail the rise of teen suicide in Colorado. For the third year in a row, COYAC has selected suicide prevention as a policy priority. We see friends struggle with mental health issues and have each been touched by teen suicide. Because of this, we continue to focus on this topic, in hopes that Colorado can one day be a teen suicide-free state.

Access to Mental Health Services Policy Recommendations

1. We would like to acknowledge our support for the bill regarding “Suicide Prevention Through Zero Suicide Framework” This should be in the beginning

We believe that adopting the zero suicide prevention framework, provides for an improved systematic approach to training and resources through the Colorado Public Health and Environment department. We believe that improving mental and behavioral health systems will reduce suicides throughout the state and help our target demographic, teens. The Zero Suicide Framework sets up goals and organizational structure to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). This will help organize the work that the department does and give some organizational structure to help prevent and mitigate suicide for all demographics including teens. For these reasons we fully endorse and support the Legislation to pass the Zero Suicide Prevention Framework.

2. We ask the General Assembly to find monies, specifically from marijuana based revenue, to create a teen focused, interactive-website for general mental health and suicide prevention.

We ask that the Legislature provide funds using Marijuana revenue to allow for the building of a teen targeted interactive website, based off the existing mantherapy.com program. We believe that the Marijuana funds would be an appropriate funding resource for this program because, there is a noticeable link between teens who use marijuana as a way to self-medicate, as well as a link between marijuana use and depression rates.

Throughout our research we found a plethora of resources that focused on statistics or what to do directly in a moment of crisis, but one website stood out to us: www.mantherapy.org (created by the Carson J. Spencer Foundation in collaboration with Cactus and the CO Office of Suicide Prevention). This website allows for a sense of approachability to the suicide conversation that didn't seem to be present in the other websites that we researched of statistics and hotlines.

COYAC recommends that the Legislature allocate appropriate funds to provide for the creation of a similar website focused on a teen demographic. We believe that this would link teens in need of mental health services to existing resources provided by the state or non-profits, presented in an accessible and engaging



format. We understand that this initiative would require significant funding, however when looked at in comparison to the average cost of death per suicide, estimated at \$1,104,000 per suicide, it justifies the cost associated with the creation of this website.

We strongly suggest that this new website be modeled after the very successful award winning man therapy website. According to studies run by the website about one year after its launch, 51% of viewers strongly agreed that they were more likely to seek help after viewing the website. 80% of the viewers were within the target demographic, and 83% of the viewers would recommend to a friend in need. We feel that the website is so successful not only in a moment of crisis, but also as a general well-being check. In the words of the man therapy creators, “The last place that a person struggling wants to go to is a ‘sterile’ site that sucks out the last bit of dignity”. We want to be able to connect teens with pre-existing resources to help themselves or a friend in need.