

EDITORIAL

Give students more options

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Past efforts by Sheridan High School and Denver's Abraham Lincoln High School to encourage students to earn community college degrees along with high school diplomas were commendable and imaginative. But they unfortunately fell outside state budget rules.

Faced with that kind of conflict, the obvious solution is to change the guidelines rather than scrub the good idea. Fortunately, state Rep. Fran Coleman and Sen. Dan Grossman, both Denver Democrats, and their allies agree.

Last week, the House Education Committee approved their bill, HB 1358, to fund a limited "dual enrollment" program for as many as 500 students who want to blend college work into their high school programs.

The notion of shoehorning community college courses into a high school curriculum is an effective way to reduce the dropout rate.

Doing so gives bright but bored students an incentive to stay in high school and also challenges and provides motivation for many kinds of students.

Sheridan Principal Greg Gotchey told the education panel last Thursday that the opportunity to see college as a realistic goal also helps keep struggling students from poor families from dropping out before they finish high school.

"This brings hope. I can see it. It happens at our school," Gotchey said.

Jared Polis, vice chairman of the Colorado State Board of Education and an avid education reformer, also supports the dual degree effort, saying: "The Colorado paradox is that, while we have one of the most educated states in the nation, we consistently rank in the bottom half of all states in both high school graduation and college enrollment rates for low-income students."

The potential cost of such a program could be big, but it's hard to pinpoint because of the difficulty of predicting what college options students might choose.

In the interests of prudence, Coleman thus amended her bill to limit it to just \$2 million next year to fund the pilot program for 500 students.

We urge support for HB 1358 as it moves through the legislative process. (And, lawmakers should ignore the misplaced fears of some Republicans that the bill would somehow allow illegal immigrants to go to college at resident rates.)

Colorado's dropout rates are at crisis levels, and the state can't afford to reject good ideas for attacking the problem.

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