

Gifted Funding in Colorado

Money for gifted education in Colorado all falls within the Categorical Fund of the state budget. Categorical funding is designed to specifically protect funds for special programs as this pot of money cannot be affected by declines in state budgets in the same way as per pupil funding. In fact, Amendment 23 actually requires that categorical funds be increased each year by the rate of inflation. However, this is true for the pot of money as a whole, and the total increase does not have to be applied equally to each program within the categorical pot. Other categorical programs include Special Education, ELL Education, Vocational Education, and Small Centers. Each year, the Joint Budget Committee can decide how to use the overall increase to categorical funding for each of the subgroups covered. Historically, Special Education has received the greatest share of inflationary increase, while gifted education funding has received less than the inflationary amount.

In the 2025-2026 school year, total categorical funding allotted to gifted education was \$16.79 million. Administrative Units see distributions from this funding in two primary ways: through AU annual distributions (referred to as 3150 funds) based, in part, on overall student count, and through the Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel (USQP) grant (referred to as 3228 funds). Of the total amount, approximately \$5 million must be allocated specifically to the Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel Grant per state statute for the 25-26 school year. The remaining \$11.5 million is used for both per pupil gifted funding and administrative costs determined by the Gifted Office at the Colorado Department of Education.

Administrative Unit annual distributions are allotted based on a formula at the state level that takes into account total student population in an AU (not total gifted student count), rural and/or remote school district designations, and designation as a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). There is no statutory authority that requires distribution by a described formula. Instead, this formula has been traditionally set and monitored by the State Gifted Education office. Administrative Units are not required to ask for their annual distribution of gifted funds in any way, and they are not allowed to turn away the money and decline to provide gifted education.

The Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel grant was established in 2015, and the Colorado State Legislature set the total amount at \$1.79 million. Thanks to a provision in the School Finance Act in 2022, an additional \$5.29 million was allocated over a five-year period specifically to increase and eventually fully fund the USQP grant. This allocation will be complete in the 2027-2028 school year and bring total USQP funding to approximately \$7.1 million. Administrative Units are required to apply for this funding by April 15 of each year and can only use this for two reasons: universal screening of students at the primary level and/or middle school level and the hiring of a 0.5 FTE qualified employee to administer the gifted program at the AU level. Applications require AUs to submit qualifications for personnel that show an endorsement in Gifted Education in Colorado or a plan must be filed describing how that endorsement will be achieved within a specified time frame. Administrative Units must report each year how this money was spent. As long as an AU submits a complete application for this funding by midnight on April 15, the AU is guaranteed to receive money toward USQP needs.