



2022 SMART Act Report

Colorado's strategic plan for higher education, [Colorado Rises: Advancing Education and Talent Development](#) supports the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's vision that all Coloradans have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities. To accomplish these goals, the Department supports students, advocates and develops policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all. The plan provides a series of metrics pursuant to CRS 23-1-108 (1.5)(f). More detailed information on the Department's work can be found in its [annual report](#).

The Colorado Rises Goal – Reaching 66% Statewide Attainment by 2025:

Colorado established an attainment goal in 2012 that has risen from 47.5% to 61% over the past ten years.¹ Factoring the state's changing demographics, the Commission has also set an ambitious equity attainment goal of 66% for African American or Black, Hispanic or Latinx and American Indian or Alaska Native populations. Current statewide attainment levels for those population are as follows: 37.9% for African American or Black, 25.1% for Hispanic or Latinx, and 30.9% for American Indian or Alaska Native.² By pursuing the following four strategies and tracking the associated metrics, Colorado can close the gap and expand educational opportunity.

CCHE identified four strategic goals within the scope of the public postsecondary system to make this plan actionable:

STRATEGIC GOAL #1: Increase Credential Completion

STRATEGIC GOAL #2: Erase Equity Gaps

STRATEGIC GOAL #3: Improve Student Success

STRATEGIC GOAL #4: Commit to Affordability, Cost Containment and Innovation

Highlights from this year's report:

- Impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic continue to affect various measures of postsecondary education success.
- Colorado must accelerate credential completion and better align with workforce demands.
- While some groups continue to increase their credential completion, Colorado has significant work to do to improve outcomes for Coloradans of color and lower income students.
- The most recent year of data shows significant improvements in graduation rates.
- Colorado continues to see growth in dual and Concurrent Enrollment courses among Colorado high school graduates.
- Efforts to contain costs and make postsecondary education more affordable and have helped lower the number of students with debt and the amount of debt that students have after completing a degree.

¹ [Lumina Foundation's Stronger Nation report on Colorado](#) using American Community Survey Data through the U.S. Census. These data only reflect 2019 number due to data limitations from the US Census Bureau and impacts on their American Community Survey due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² [Lumina Foundation's Stronger Nation report on Colorado](#) using American Community Survey Data through the U.S. Census

This report includes select performance metrics related to these four strategic goals.

A  indicates positive progress in the most recent year.

While the state has made progress in most areas, we must accelerate to reach our 2025 goal.



STRATEGIC GOAL #1—Increase Credential Completion:

The first strategic goal is to significantly increase the number of credentials that students earn.

CREDENTIAL COMPLETION CONTINUES TO BE IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC³

Academic Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Credentials	46,023	48,643	49,816	51,477	56,019	57,353	59,155	59,232	57,412
1-Year Change		6%	2%	3%	9%	2%	3%	.13%	-3%
Certificates	13,859	15,604	15,373	16,217	20,069	20,214	21,393	21,215	19,652
1-Year Change		13%	-1%	5%	24%	1%	6%	-1%	-7%



STRATEGIC GOAL #2—Erase Equity Gaps:

With our state’s changing demographics, the goal of 66% is unattainable if we do not make major progress on erasing equity gaps—the racial disparities in educational attainment. *Colorado Rises* aims to raise African American or Black, Hispanic or Latinx and American Indian or Alaska Native students to 66%.

DESPITE CHALLENGES FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, HISPANIC AND LATINX STUDENTS HAVE SEEN INCREASED CREDENTIAL COMPLETION FOR THE PAST 9 YEARS; PELL STUDENT CREDENTIAL COMPLETION CONTINUES TO DECLINE.⁴

Academic Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Race/Ethnicity									
African American	1,449	1,741	1,844	1,809	1,942	2,057	2,164	2,164	2,038
1-Year Change		20%	6%	-2%	7%	6%	5%	0%	-6%
Hispanic	5,761	7,096	7,755	8,307	9,402	10,281	11,365	11,625	11,862
1-Year Change		23%	9%	7%	13%	9%	11%	2%	2%
Native American	485	511	532	502	565	536	567	507	467
1-Year Change		5%	4%	-6%	13%	-5%	6%	-11%	-8%
Income									
Pell Eligible	14,084	15,029	14,904	14,926	15,005	15,536	15,483	14,823	13,980
1-Year Change		7%	-1%	0%	1%	4%	0%	-4%	-6%



3 Source: SURDS Data. Also available on the [CDHE Strategic Plan Dashboard](#).

4 Source: SURDS Data. Also available on the [CDHE Strategic Plan Dashboard](#).



STRATEGIC GOAL #3—Improve Student Success:

To graduate more students, Colorado must focus on promoting and improving successful student retention and momentum.

RETENTION RATES (THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO START AT A COLLEGE ONE FALL AND ENROLL THE NEXT FALL) STAYED RELATIVELY CONSTANT DESPITE CHALLENGES FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.⁵

Cohort	Fall 12-13	Fall 13-14	Fall 14-15	Fall 15-16	Fall 16-17	Fall 17-18	Fall 18-19	Fall 19-20
Fall to Fall Retention	70.4%	70.2%	72%	72.5%	71.8%	73%	73.8%	73.2%
1-Year Change		0%	2%	1%	-1%	1%	1%	-0.6%

AT TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS, GRADUATION RATES INCREASED 10 PERCENTAGE POINTS BETWEEN THE FALL 2010 AND FALL 2017 COHORTS. AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS GRADUATION RATES INCREASED.⁶

2-Year Institutions									
Cohort Year	Fall 10	Fall 11	Fall 12	Fall 13	Fall 14	Fall 15	Fall 16	Fall 17	
3 Year Graduation	21.0%	20.8%	21.8%	21.6%	24.3%	26.9%	29.2%	31.4%	✓
4-Year Institutions									
Cohort Year	Fall 07	Fall 08	Fall 09	Fall 10	Fall 11	Fall 12	Fall 13	Fall 14	
4 Year Graduation	31.8%	32.8%	32.9%	34.2%	34.5%	36.1%	37.4%	39.0%	✓
6 Year Graduation	59.3%	59.2%	60.2%	59.9%	59.3%	61.8%	61.1%	63.2%	✓

ENROLLMENT IN CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT CONTINUE TO GROW.⁷

High School Graduating Class	Class of 2013	Class of 2014	Class of 2015	Class of 2016	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019	Class of 2020	
Enrollment									
High school graduates attempting Concurrent Enrollment	18.6%	22.0%	25.7%	26.5%	28.7%	30.4%	32.8%	36.0%	
1-Year Change		3%	4%	1%	2%	2%	2%	3%	✓
High school graduates attempting Any Dual Enrollment	22.8%	25.7%	31.1%	33.3%	35.7%	38.2%	39.5%	42.4%	
1-Year Change		3%	5%	2%	2%	3%	1%	3%	✓
Academic Year	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	
Outcomes									
Credentials Produced	956	1,231	1,491	2,017	2,758	3,116	2,877	2,821	
1-Year Change		23%	29%	21%	35%	37%	13%	-8%	-2% ⁸

⁵ Source: SURDS Data, also available in the annual Retention Rate Report

⁶ Source: SURDS Data, also available in annual Graduation Rate Report

⁷ Source: SURDS and CDE, also available in the annual [Postsecondary Access and Success For Colorado's High School Graduates report](#)

⁸ Credential completion via Concurrent Enrollment and ASCENT continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.



STRATEGIC GOAL #4 — Commit to Affordability, Cost Containment and Innovation:

To help ensure affordability for Colorado students and strengthen Colorado’s economic and community development, Colorado needs to encourage efficient institutional delivery models that reduce costs and time-to-degree.

AVERAGE DEBT OF DEGREE OF RESIDENT COMPLETERS CONTINUES TO DECLINE⁹.

Graduation Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Associates Degree Average Debt	\$13,800	\$13,500	\$13,400	\$13,400	\$13,200	\$12,900	✓
Bachelor’s Degree Average Debt	\$26,500	\$26,700	\$25,700	\$25,700	\$25,700	\$25,300	✓

PERCENT OF RESIDENT COMPLETERS WITH DEBT CONTINUES TO DECLINE.¹⁰

Graduation Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Associates Degree with Debt	50%	48%	45%	42%	39%	36%	✓
Bachelor’s Degree with Debt	60%	59%	56%	55%	55%	53%	✓

For More Information

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Colorado Department of Higher Education <https://highered.colorado.gov/>

Colorado Rises: Advancing Education and Talent Development <http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/>



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⁹ CDHE’s Return on Investment report: <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/return-of-investment>

¹⁰ CDHE’s Return on Investment report: <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/return-of-investment>