



Higher Education Student Success Finish What You Started

House Bill 21-1330
Legislative Report

2022

**Prepared and submitted by the
Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)**

Report to the Colorado General Assembly
Statute: 23.3.3.1005

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1600 Broadway, Suite 2200, Denver, CO 80202

For more information contact:
CDHE@dhe.state.co.us

Introduction

Program Overview

The **Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI)**, a division of the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), was created to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials and degrees for underserved students in Colorado.

The program addresses the challenge in two ways: **accessibility** and **affordability**. To increase accessibility, COSI funds programs that prepare students for postsecondary education and supports them through completion. To increase affordability, COSI provides cost-of-attendance support via matching funds for scholarships so that attendance costs are not a barrier and student loan debt can be mitigated.



By leveraging state funds to generate local giving, the program grows community efforts and engages private donors to increase available scholarships well beyond the investment from the state. Knowing that scholarships must be paired with student support to impact completion rates, the program's Matching Student Scholarship (MSS) component complements the Community Partner Program grants.

COSI reaches students from a range of socio-economic classes (from 0-250% Pell-eligible based on FAFSA and CASFA) and underserved students for whom college seems out of reach. COSI helps students afford a degree and access the support they need to persist and graduate. **COSI has served more than 75,000 students across the state, providing scholarships and wraparound student support services utilizing more than \$60 million of state funds and leveraging an additional \$30 million in local and private investment.**

COSI's most recent program evaluation (20/21) demonstrates that the program and its evidence-based supports are having a positive impact throughout the state.

- Most students served are students of color, 59-64% depending on the program.
- Program participants have completed more than 16,000 postsecondary credentials.
- COSI scholars have up to \$4,277 less debt per year than their peers.
- Students persist at rates of up to 29% (depending on the program) higher than their peers.
- When students receive COSI scholarship funds and participate in a COSI postsecondary wraparound support program, they are even more successful and persist at rates of up to 92%.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

This proven model has fostered commitment and confidence in COSI, which is demonstrated by the increase in funding in 2021. **COSI received approximately \$65 million in federal funds to expand and create programming focused on addressing equity gaps, significant enrollment declines, high job loss rates, continuing unemployment, and overall disruption to the workforce caused by the pandemic.**

In Spring 2020, COSI responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic to support Coloradans by providing a grant opportunity that prioritized workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and provided participants wraparound and financial support to access and complete their credentials.

The Colorado Recovery Plan-Developing Our Workforce expanded COSI's Displaced Workers Grant, named the **Back to Work** program. Through Senate Bill 21-232, a total of \$15 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds are supporting students through June 2024 per HB22-1192. The Back to Work grant prioritizes individuals whose employment was impacted due to the pandemic and provides participants with wraparound and financial support to access and complete credentials or a degree within the grant term. Participants are incentivized to reskill, upskill, or complete industry-recognized credentials aligned with Colorado Top Jobs, prioritizing health care, education, information technology, and jobs with the most significant projected annual opportunities. **Over the three-year grant term, the program will distribute \$15 million to facilitate the completion of approximately 4,000 certificates and degrees.**

Through House Bill 21-1330, COSI received \$49 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to support Higher Education Student Success, named the **Finish What You Started (FWYS)** program. The program prioritizes individuals who experienced an economic loss due to the pandemic and provides participants with wraparound student support services and direct financial assistance to support continued persistence and certificate or degree completion. These funds help address the significant decline in enrollment in public institutions of higher education, the high rate of job loss, continuing unemployment, and the overall disruption to the workforce caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These disruptions have resulted in significant economic harm to individuals and businesses. FWYS responded quickly and effectively by providing support for students to return to the public institutions of higher education to complete their postsecondary credentials and help rebuild and revitalize Colorado's workforce— \$46.55 million in funds are provided directly to higher education institutions and have spending authority through June 2026, and \$2.4 million in administrative funds to support through June 2026.

Higher Education Student Success

Program Overview

With the \$3.8 billion of state aid provided by the American Rescue Plan Act, the Governor and Colorado legislature allocated approximately \$200 million towards workforce development and education. COSI received \$49 million to expand the Finish What You Started (FWYS) program, focusing on providing

direct and indirect support to students. The program prioritizes individuals who experienced an economic loss due to the pandemic, undergraduate and in-state students who:

- Earned some postsecondary credits from a public or private higher education institution but did not complete a credential before deciding not to enroll for two or more consecutive semesters (amended by SB22-192); or
- Was admitted to a public institution of higher education as a first-time student for the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 academic year but did not enroll at any institution for the 2020-2021 academic year.

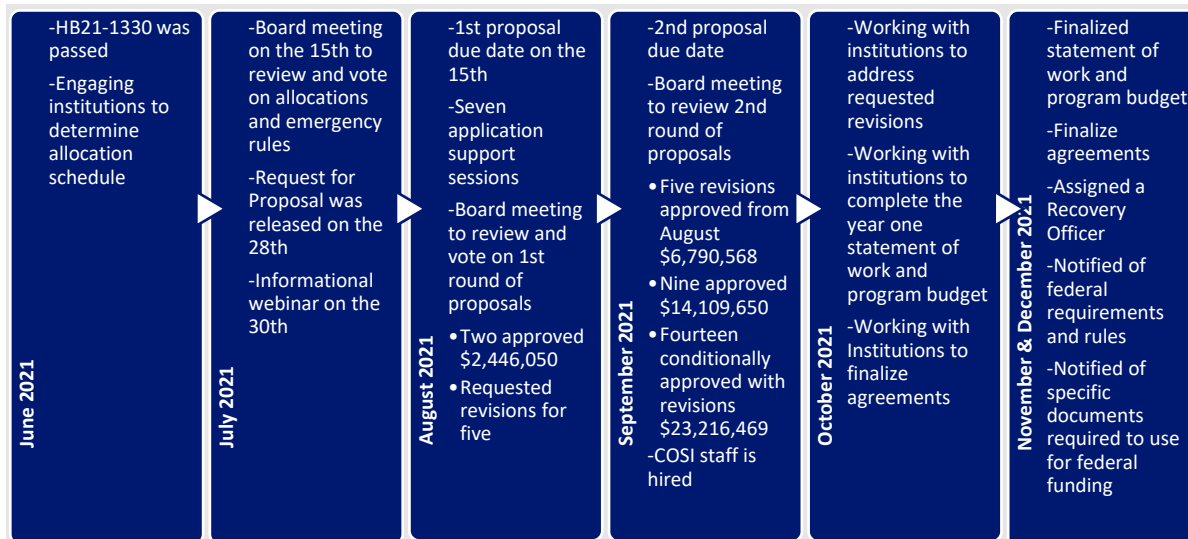
The statute required the COSI Advisory Board (The Board) to allocate the funds appropriated following a very specific allocation formula.

- 50% based on each institution's headcount enrollment for the 2019-2020 academic year of undergraduate, in-state students whose expected family contribution did not exceed 250% of pell-eligibility.
- 50% based on each institution's full-time equivalent enrollment for the 2019-2020 academic year of undergraduate, in-state students whose expected family contribution did not exceed 250% of Pell eligibility.
- Allowed The Board to adopt rules that identify additional criteria for allocating the money, considering characteristics of the public institutions of higher education, including location in a rural area of the state, total headcount enrollment, and characteristics unique to area technical colleges.

In addition, the statute laid out specific guidelines as to how the institution can use the funds requiring more funds to be used for direct financial support than indirect student support services. Institutions were required to submit Student Assistance Plans as part of their application and each year through the end of the grant term. The plans must detail the use of funds, programming, and the goal of each plan must be to increase eligible student enrollment, persistence, completion, and reduce student loan debt. All plans must be reviewed and approved annually by The Board.

Program Progress

Federal funding has provided COSI with an opportunity to utilize its proven model of financial and student support services to assist all Colorado public institutions and expand and create programming focused on addressing equity gaps, significant enrollment declines, high job loss rates, continuing unemployment, and address the disruption to the workforce caused by the pandemic. COSI was tasked with moving the program forward quickly to get funds into the hands of institutions to launch programs and support students. COSI and The Board accomplished this within a few short months, as detailed below.



The bill became law in June, and COSI moved to finalize allocations by July and released a request for proposal within the same month. Institutions applied for the funds in August and September, and the applications were reviewed by the Board within the same months. The statute provides The Board discretion to require revisions to the student assistance plans to ensure compliance with the statute and progression toward meeting goals. During this initial approval process, The Board required some institutions to revise their student assistance plans before final approval and awarding the allocations.

During this time, The Board also worked with the Attorney General’s office on emergency rules, which were [final](#) in November 2021. COSI was fortunate to receive administrative funds, and the staff was hired in September to support administrative operations and provide technical assistance for institutions. October was spent training new staff, working with institutions to address Board requested revisions, working on the year one statement of work and program budget, and preparing agreements. By November and December, staff and institutions were on target to finalize year-one documents and agreements. At this time, CDHE was assigned a Recovery Officer. This individual’s knowledge of the federal rules and support of programs and the department was essential to ensuring alignment between the program as defined in statute with federal guidelines for funds required additional administration for both COSI staff and the institutions.

In 2021-2022 institutions advocated for flexibility in eligibility to participate in the program. The original definition for the some college, no degree population in statute was limiting as it did not allow students to pursue career pathways and stackable credentials. CDHE supported SB22-192, which amended the program eligibility to ensure more students could participate and pursue sustainable careers.

What’s Next

As the program moves into the second year (2022-2023) and the first full year of programming, COSI anticipates that programs will be fully implemented with state and federal guidelines solidified. The institution’s first quarterly report for 2022-2023 was submitted in October and covered July- September 2022. The increase in the amounts spent in the first quarter and students served speaks to the

challenges in the first year of creating programs on a very short timeline while navigating enrollment declines, hiring issues, and state/federal changes—the numbers reflect these challenges. Grantees are working hard to get funds spent, and students served to help ensure the success of the program and students.

COSI will continue to closely evaluate spending and progress toward meeting goals. To create alignment and use a consistent measurement tool, COSI has implemented a thorough compliance and monitoring process. Each institution’s “health” is evaluated on a semester basis in such areas as; reporting, progress toward goals (enrollment, persistence, and completion), and spending. Institutions are then placed in either a good standing, caution, warning, or probation category. The level of technical assistance provided by COSI is dependent on the institution’s health status and can range from monthly to semester meetings. The use of this tool and level of monitoring and interaction allows COSI to quickly determine areas of concern and provide the support needed to ensure compliance.

Legislative Reporting Requirements

The areas detailed in this section are self-reported by institutions and specific to the requirements in statute. COSI’s annual reporting and availability of institutional data through the Student Unit Records Data System (SURDS) are misaligned with the December 1 deadline. A more detailed report with the information confirmed by SURDS and federal quarterly reporting will be available in June of each grant year beginning in June 2023.

The amount allocated and distributed to each public institution of higher education

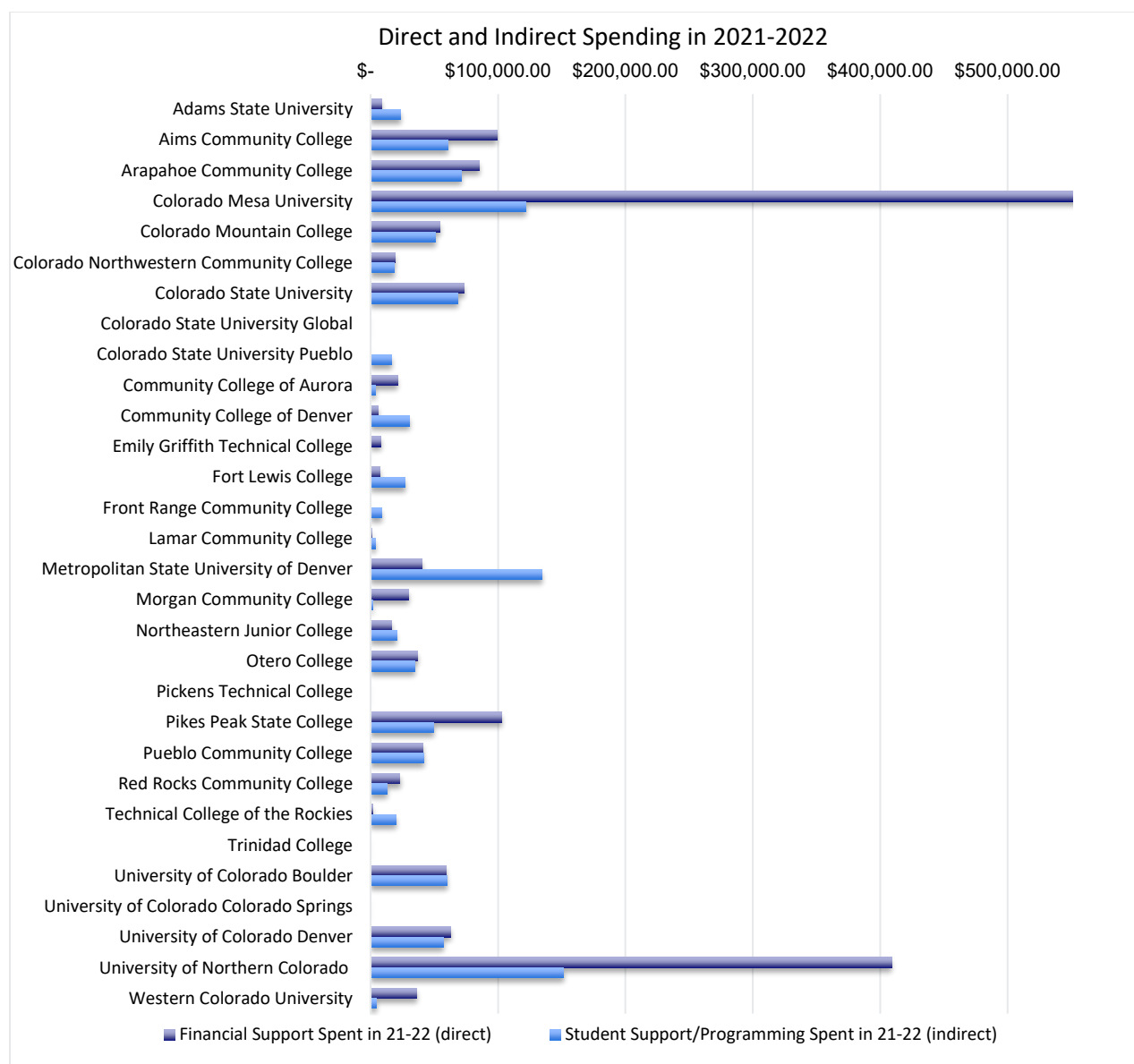
The total allocation for 31 institutions is \$46,550,000, with \$7,893,612.84 disbursed in 2021-2022. Amounts for the first disbursement were determined by each institution of higher education to support their first (6-9 months) year of implementation.

| Institution | Total Grant Term Allocation | Year One Allocation | Percentage of Total Allocation Disbursed in Year One |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Adams State University | \$678,546.00 | \$ 112,251.00 | 17% |
| Aims Community College | \$1,250,756.00 | \$ 312,689.00 | 25% |
| Arapahoe Community College | \$1,111,149.00 | \$ 557,874.64 | 50% |
| Colorado Mesa University | \$2,118,620.00 | \$ 706,206.00 | 33% |
| Colorado Mountain College | \$983,646.00 | \$ 327,882.00 | 33% |
| Colorado Northwestern Community College | \$246,845.00 | \$ 70,500.00 | 29% |
| Colorado School of Mines | \$521,426.00 | \$ 3,000.00 | 1% |
| Colorado State University | \$3,655,937.00 | \$ 453,771.00 | 12% |
| Colorado State University Global | \$785,340.00 | \$ 130,890.00 | 17% |
| Colorado State University-Pueblo | \$1,015,124.00 | \$ 194,528.00 | 19% |
| Community College of Aurora | \$1,318,414.00 | \$ 160,659.00 | 12% |
| Community College of Denver | \$2,002,754.00 | \$ 474,420.00 | 24% |
| Emily Griffith Technical College | \$863,084.00 | \$ 239,922.00 | 28% |
| Fort Lewis College | \$552,344.00 | \$ 84,891.00 | 15% |
| Front Range Community College | \$3,206,928.00 | \$ 72,985.00 | 2% |

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---------------|-----|
| Lamar Community College | \$251,898.00 | \$ 79,410.00 | 32% |
| Metropolitan State University of Denver | \$5,712,650.00 | \$ 390,474.00 | 7% |
| Morgan Community College | \$344,391.00 | \$ 114,797.00 | 33% |
| Northeastern Junior College | \$353,211.00 | \$ 117,737.00 | 33% |
| Otero College | \$422,134.00 | \$ 176,054.00 | 42% |
| Pickens Technical College | \$626,982.00 | \$ 133,456.00 | 21% |
| Pikes Peak State College | \$3,728,872.00 | \$ 375,281.00 | 10% |
| Pueblo Community College | \$1,430,926.00 | \$ 84,565.00 | 6% |
| Red Rocks Community College | \$1,328,254.00 | \$ 331,704.00 | 25% |
| Technical College of the Rockies | \$191,590.00 | \$ 50,500.00 | 26% |
| Trinidad College | \$567,165.00 | \$ 189,055.00 | 33% |
| University of Colorado Boulder | \$3,122,075.00 | \$ 234,867.00 | 8% |
| University of Colorado Colorado Springs | \$2,398,588.00 | \$ 238,588.00 | 10% |
| University of Colorado Denver | \$3,205,271.00 | \$ 678,930.00 | 21% |
| University of Northern Colorado | \$2,024,812.00 | \$ 674,938.00 | 33% |
| Western Colorado University | \$530,269.00 | \$120,788.00 | 23% |

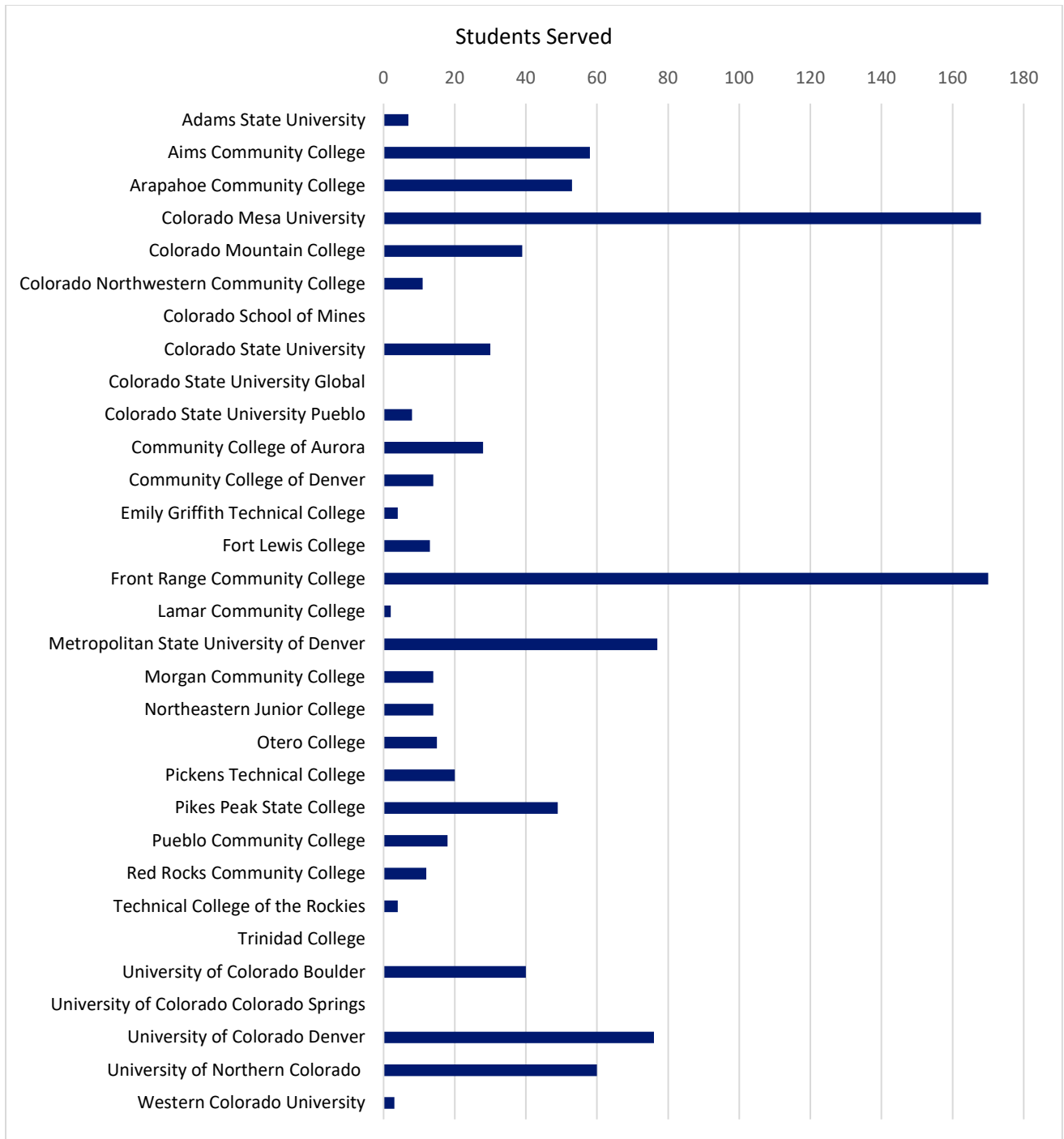
The amount each institution spent in providing direct student financial assistance and services and support provided (indirect).

Statute requires that the institution use more of its total allocation toward direct student financial support (scholarships, other educational expenses, and/or incentives issued to the student) over indirect student support (personnel, programming, and outreach). Institutions faced challenges in the first year in spending funds. This was due to the short runway (6-9 months) and the task of developing and launching programs while also re-engaging students. In addition, staffing positions in this short time were difficult, as were the changes in federal and state requirements of eligible students and reporting. Several institutions spent more this year on indirect funding, which can be attributed to the development and launch phase of the program.



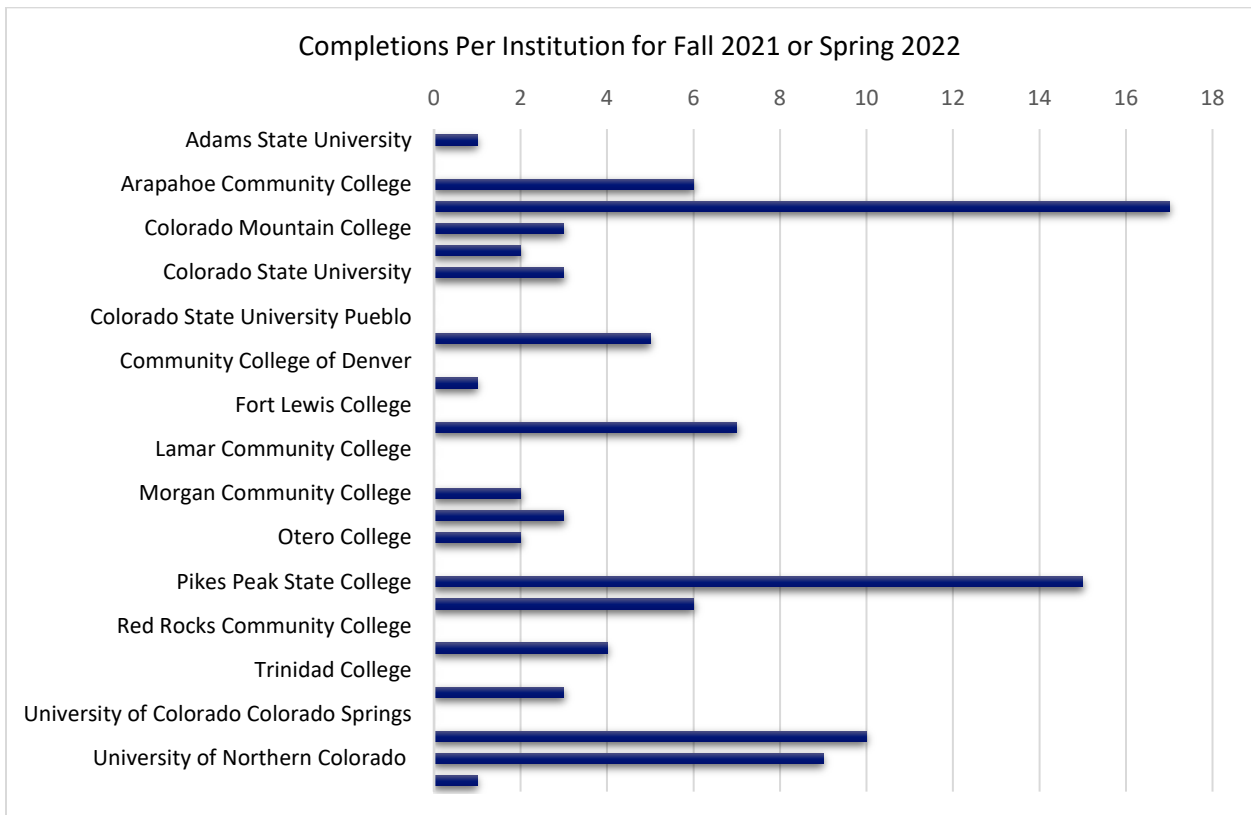
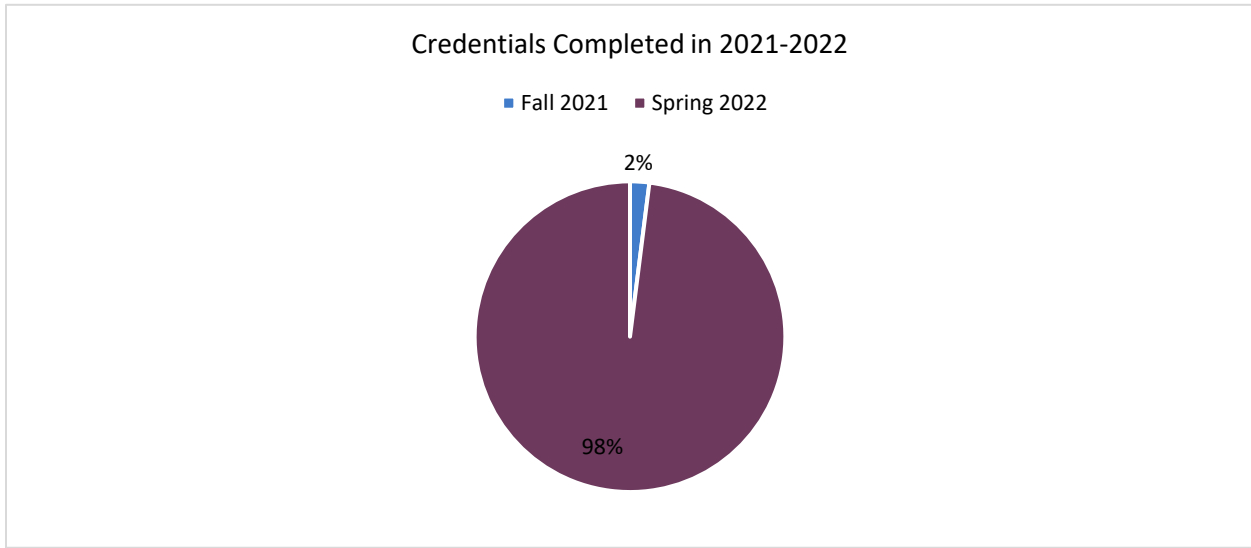
The number of eligible students who re-enrolled in the academic years in which each institution’s student assistance plan was implemented.

A total of 1,007 eligible students (some college, no degree, and first-time) participated in the program during the 2021-2022 academic year. A breakdown by institutions is detailed in the graph. Institutions faced challenges in the re-enrollment of participants in the first year. This was due to the short runway (6-9 months) and the task of developing and launching programs while also re-engaging students. In addition, the federal rules and state statute regarding eligible students were not aligned and caused some disruption in programming and student eligibility.



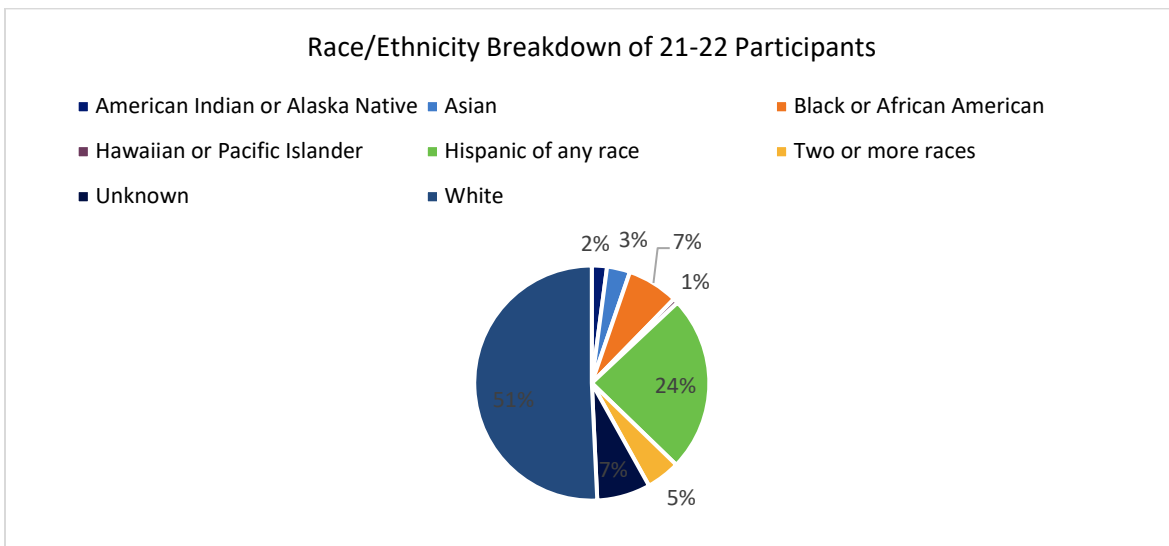
The postsecondary credentials awarded to eligible students who received assistance through each institution's student assistance plan.

Of the 1,007 students served in 2021-2022, 100 students earned a credential (through June 30, 2022), which was roughly 6-9 months from the launch of the program.

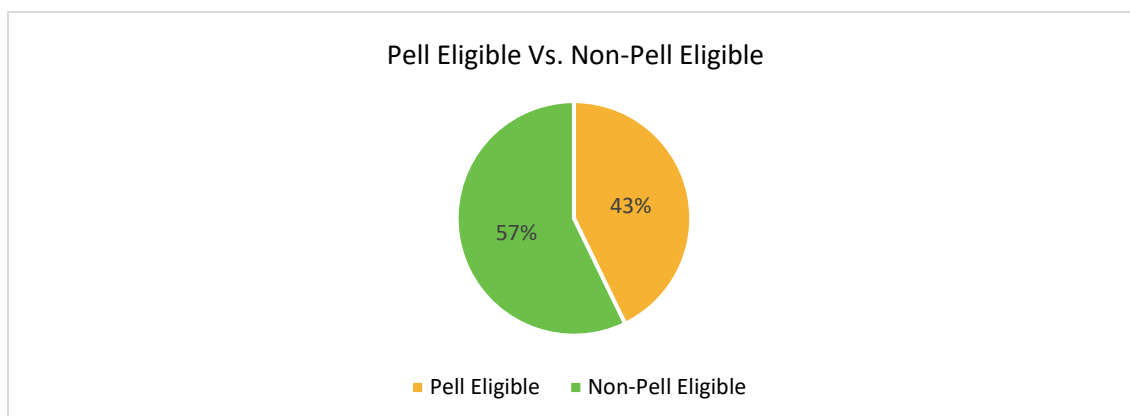


Any additional information The board deems useful in determining the degree to which the money appropriated to the fund pursuant to section 23.3.3.1005 was successfully spent to increase eligible student enrollment, persistence, completion, and decrease in student debt.

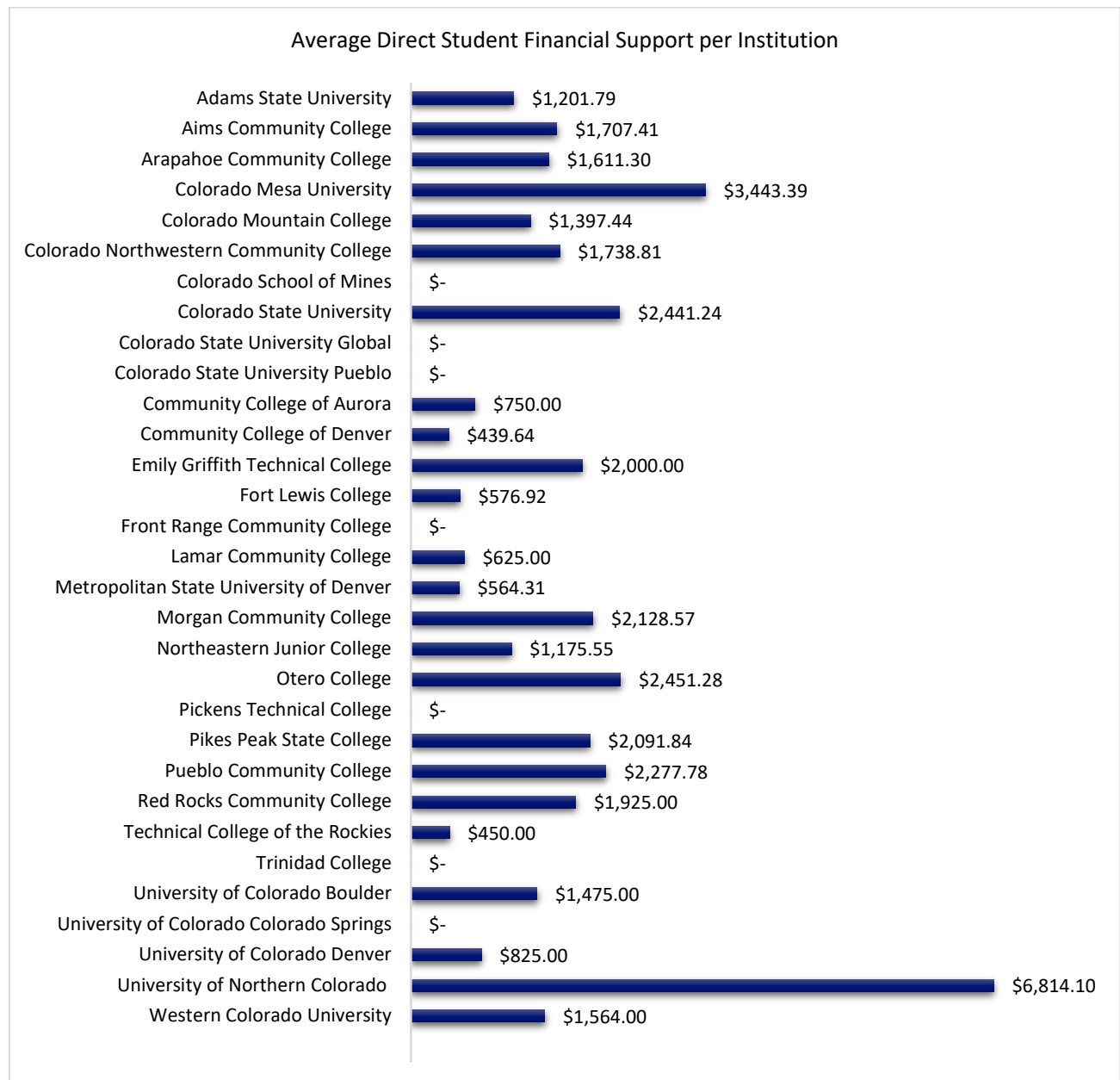
422 of the 1,007 program participants identified as students of color. COSI continues to prioritize students of color in alignment with CDHE and its focus on closing equity gaps in educational attainment. COSI requires institutions to detail in the student assistance plans the strategies/programming to prioritize and support more students of color.



Statute does not require an economic threshold or financial criteria to participate, although the federal requirement does state that the participant must have been economically impacted due to the pandemic. Therefore, this program may serve a wider net of students compared to other COSI programs.



The average direct student financial amount issued across 31 institutions is \$1,344.00 per student. This graph only accounts for federal funds; some institutions utilized other funding sources (such as Higher Education Recovery Funds or HERF and /or institutional funds) to supplement and support their program implementation. This allowed the institution to maximize other time-sensitive funds during year one and strategically allocate COSI federal funds to support additional years of programming and direct financial support.



Conclusion

The first year of programming was not without challenges, and it was also a testament to the commitment of the State, CDHE, and institutions in supporting underserved populations and those most impacted by the pandemic to pursue higher education and receive credentials that will enhance opportunities for career paths. As the program moves into the second year and the first full year of programming, COSI anticipates that programs will be fully implemented with state and federal guidelines solidified. With the continued support of institutions, the program will continue to grow, increasing the number of students impacted by the program and the spending of funds.