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Colorado high school college-going rate remains consistent, but gaps among ethnic groups linger

Nearly 56 percent of students in the 2016 high school graduating class enrolled in a postsecondary institution

DENVER – March 2, 2018: In Colorado’s high school class of 2016, nearly 56 percent, or about 56,200 students, enrolled in a postsecondary institution directly after graduation, and gaps remain in key success indicators among white and minority students, according to a [report](#) issued today by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE).

Postsecondary Enrollment

Of the college-going group, more than three-fourths chose to attend a Colorado college or university, while 23.2 percent opted for out-of-state institutions. About 9 percent more women (60.3 percent) enrolled than men (51.2 percent), continuing an eight-year trend.

Asian and white high school graduates had the highest college-going rates in 2016—75 percent and 60.7 percent, respectively—and American Indian and Alaska Native students were least likely to enroll at 41.9 percent. Data also revealed a 16.5 percentage point gap in postsecondary enrollment among white and Hispanic students, who make up the fastest-growing ethnic group in the state, and a 6.3 gap among white and African American students. Discrepancies persist among students from lower income families as well: students who received free or reduced lunch in high school enrolled in college at disproportionately lower rates than their counterparts (42. vs. 61.6 percent).

“At a time when students need more education, not less, I am concerned that only about half of our high school students are seeking a credential immediately after high school,” said Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, executive director of CDHE. “We’re simply losing too much talent in Colorado. To meet our talent and workforce needs, we must dramatically increase the number of students completing a certificate or degree programs and erase gaps in our state.”

Student Success Measures

Students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution completed more than 30 credits in their first year on average, which research suggests is a key indicator for timely graduation. More than 80 percent of students who enrolled in college directly after high school persisted to their second year.

In addition, more students successfully completed their programs. Credential completion within two and four years improved to 5.9 and 33.7 percent, respectively, continuing an upward trend.

Despite these gains, gaps remain when looking at race and ethnicity. Colorado’s American Indian and Alaskan Native, African American and Hispanic students lag behind their white and Asian peers in credit accumulation, overall retention and four-year completion rates.

The findings come as state officials reaffirmed a statewide goal of reaching 66 percent attainment by 2025 and erasing equity gaps among Coloradans of color last year.

Key Findings in the Report:

- College enrollment has remained consistent across the years reflected in this report (2009-2016).
- In the top 10 districts, more than 70 percent of students go on to enroll in college; in the bottom 10 districts, only 13 to 35 percent of students enroll in college directly out of high school.
- Equity gaps in credential completion begin with lower college enrollment rates—particularly for Hispanic and low-income populations.
- Minority students, particularly Hispanic students, and low-income populations are significantly less likely to attend an out-of-state institution than white students or students who did not receive free and reduced lunch.
- Comparing racial/ethnic populations, 7.7 percent of Hispanic students and 9.5 percent of Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders earn a credential in two years. Four years after entering college, 37 percent of white students had earned some type of certificate or degree, compared to 19 percent of African American students.
- Hispanic students have one of the highest two-year completion rates and one of the lowest four-year completion rates compared to other racial/ethnic populations.
- Women have higher credential attainment rates within two years than men, and the difference is especially pronounced within four years.

Now in its seventh iteration, the report provides both statewide information as well as district specific results aimed at strengthening efforts to improve student success and alignment between the K-12 and higher education systems. The [report](#) was submitted to the Education Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives and the State Board of Education, pursuant to 23-1-113 [9] C.R.S.

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