



COLORADO

**Department of
Higher Education**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Megan McDermott, Director of Communications

Office: 303-974-2495, Cell: 720-394-3205, Megan.McDermott@dhe.state.co.us

Going to college or technical school remains a rewarding investment for Coloradans

Inaugural return on investment report helps students and families weigh the value of earning a degree or certificate

DENVER –July 30, 2019: Earning a college degree or certificate remains a rewarding investment for Colorado adults despite the cost of tuition, according to a report released today by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). Colorado graduates see consistent wage gains within the decade after completing a credential with the highest return in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

[*Colorado Rises: Maximizing Value for Students and Our State*](#) breaks down median earnings after one, five and 10 years for Coloradans who have earned a postsecondary credential in seven program groups, including STEM, business and health. A decade out, graduates earn a median income of \$50,000, \$54,000 and \$60,000 for certificate, associate and bachelor’s degrees respectively. In some sectors, such as industry trades, a one-year certificate program yields greater return than a four-year education.

“We know going to college or technical school is a weighty decision for students and families,” said Governor Jared Polis. “The robust data shows that it’s worth it! Knowing how much you are likely to earn helps Coloradans choose the right education pathway that harnesses their unique talent and aptitudes. It also helps us hold ourselves accountable as we look to reduce costs and increase the value of higher education.”

To inform lawmakers, taxpayers and students on the value of postsecondary education in Colorado, [H.B. 18-1226](#) directed CDHE to publish an annual return on investment report. In addition to wage data, the inaugural volume explores how tuition prices, debt, choice and value affect a student’s overall trajectory.

Although average tuition has increased since the recession, close to 90 percent of students at Colorado two-year colleges and 72 percent at four-year universities receive a mix of federal, state and institutional aid that enables those from low and middle-income families to attend for low cost or even tuition-free. The proportion of Colorado undergraduate students who take on debt, as well as the average amount, has leveled off at four-year colleges and declined at two-years schools.

“Our institutions have found creative ways to save students money on tuition and boost the value of their education,” said Dr. Angie Paccione, executive director of CDHE. “From Colorado Mountain College’s innovative income-share agreement to CU Boulder’s elimination of student fees, we’re working hard to knock down barriers so all can reap the benefits of earning a postsecondary credential.”

Improving access to education and training is especially urgent for Colorado’s economy, which boasts some of the most advanced workforce needs in the country. About 75 percent of all Colorado jobs and 97 percent of top ones—those that pay a living wage and have high growth rates—require a postsecondary credential. To help meet these industry demands, CDHE aims to reach 66 percent educational attainment by 2025, up from 56.9 percent currently.

Beyond economic gains, postsecondary education benefits individuals and society broadly. Research suggests that people who hold a degree or certificate have more social mobility, better health outcomes and greater life expectancy. They are significantly less likely to interact with the criminal justice system and more likely to volunteer. College graduates contribute more tax dollars to the local and state economy and rely on fewer government assistance programs.

About the report

The first iteration of the report provides statewide and credential-level median earnings for certificate, associate and bachelor's degree graduates. The [report](#) was submitted to the Education Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives, pursuant to 23-1-135 C.R.S.

About the Colorado Department of Higher Education

Working with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, we advocate, develop policies and support students to maximize higher education opportunities for all. The Department believes every Coloradan should have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities. Read the CDHE master plan [Colorado Rises](#).

###