



2026 Performance Report

In alignment with requirements in CRS 2-7-205, this report summarizes CDHE's performance plan, recent performance results, and the progress Colorado's colleges and universities are making toward the goals outlined in the CCHE and CDHE Strategic Plan, [Building Skills in an Evolving Economy](#).

Elevating the Value of Postsecondary Education

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education's (CCHE) Strategic Plan sets a bold vision to increase the number of learners served by our postsecondary ecosystem. The plan prioritizes educational pathways that have a positive return on investment, proven learner support programs, and postsecondary-workforce collaboration. Complementary to the goals of the Strategic Plan, CDHE publishes an annual Return on Investment (ROI) report on undergraduate degree programs and certificate programs offered at each state institution of higher education. The report summarizes various measures of ROI including the average time to completion, average cost for completion, average loan debt, and median 1-, 5-, and 10-year earnings outcomes for Colorado postsecondary completers at public institutions. CDHE annually updates and publishes data on wage outcomes for Colorado public postsecondary programs (and some private institutions) in its [interactive online tool](#), and [2026 ROI Report](#) with updated data on those measures (and more). To help better define and measure the value of higher education in Colorado (and meet requirements in CRS 23-1-140 and the Commission's policy (V)(D) on measurement of student success), CDHE and CCHE developed (with input from a diverse working group of stakeholders) the Minimum Value Threshold (MVT), a model that estimates the financial return of earning a postsecondary credential.

Minimum Value Threshold = Incremental Earnings – Costs Specific to Higher Education

Incremental earnings represent the additional income students earn after completing college, compared with what they could have earned with only a high school diploma, including wages forgone while enrolled (when applicable). Higher education costs include net tuition and fees, books, and supplies. Learn more about the MVT methodology in the [summary document](#) and [technical documentation](#).

Measures of Postsecondary Success

As part of CCHE’s [student success policy](#), CDHE developed dashboards to help students, families, and policymakers better understand postsecondary outcomes. These dashboards provide data on [enrollment](#), [completion](#), [financial aid](#), [dual/Concurrent Enrollment](#), [time and credits to degree](#), [student debt](#), and [wage outcomes](#). CDHE also publishes data on the [progress and success of Colorado high school graduates](#) through postsecondary education. When possible and while protecting student privacy, data can be viewed by institution, race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, and income level. Enrollment at Colorado public institutions of higher education reached **273,705 students in Fall 2024, the highest level ever** (thanks to significant growth in dual/Concurrent Enrollment) and an increase of more than eight thousand from last year. Completions at Colorado public institutions of higher education reached **74,833 in academic year (AY) 2024-2025**, also its highest level ever and more than 3,500 from last year. Aligned to CDHE’s Wildly Important Goals (WIGs), credential completions for students of color and low-income students also reached all-time highs in AY 2024-25. Table 1 summarizes completion counts for the past several years.

Table 1: Credentials Completed at Colorado Public Institutions of Higher Education, Academic Years 2020-21 to 2024-25

Academic Year	Students of Color	Low-income Students	Total Completions
2020-21	21,575	16,340	70,375
2021-22	21,351	15,280	68,763
2022-23	22,907	15,198	69,388
2023-24	24,598	16,289	71,191
2024-25	26,499	19,879*	74,833

Source: Colorado Department of Higher Education, Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS), derived from the [Completions dashboard](#) as of October 2026. Count of degrees completed, which may include multiple completions by one individual in the academic year. Includes all degree types. Students of color include American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Two or More races. Low-income includes students who were Pell eligible.

*New methodology used to calculate Pell eligibility based on federal changes through the FAFSA Simplification Act.

Aligned to CDHE’s WIG to further enhance workforce development initiatives, CDHE continues to measure the percent of postsecondary programs that require a work-based learning component. New survey responses from Colorado institutions of higher education have led to a more complete picture of the landscape, but reflected lower overall numbers compared to other responses thereby reducing the

statewide average. CDHE continues to further embed work-based learning experiences in postsecondary education programs through efforts like implementation of [HB25-1186](#) (Work-Based Learning Consortium). Funded through gifts, grants, and donations, this initiative aligns the interests of institutions of higher education, employers, and students by **integrating experiential learning opportunities into college curricula**. [CDHE received philanthropic support totaling \\$5.7 million](#) to launch [CO-WIL](#) (CO-Work-Integrated Learning), a pilot project enabling five institutions across rural Colorado to serve students who may not otherwise have access to more traditional work-based learning opportunities to build capacity in students’ career pathways. The five institutions included in CO-WIL are: Adams State University, Colorado Mountain College, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Fort Lewis College, and Lamar Community College.

As shown in the [ROI Report](#), the percent of Colorado resident students completing postsecondary education (from the state’s public institutions) with debt continues to be on a steady downward trend. **In AY 2024-25, 41.4% of resident students graduating with degree accrued student loan debt, compared to 47.9% with debt in 2020-21.** Table 2 summarizes the percent of postsecondary completers with debt for the past several years. While the percentage of undergraduates with student loan debt continues to decline, the average amount of debt that those students incur has increased slightly over the past couple of years (more details can be found in CDHE’s [ROI report](#)). CDHE will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to increase affordability for students through various strategies such as increased [FAFSA/CASFA completion](#) and adoption of Open Educational Resources ([OER](#)).

Table 2: Share of Colorado Public Institution Undergraduate Degree Completers with Debt, Academic Years 2020-21 to 2024-25

Academic Year	Associate Degree	Bachelor’s Degree	Total
2020-21	35.6%	52.9%	47.9%
2021-22	34.2%	50.0%	45.3%
2022-23	32.8%	49.4%	44.5%
2023-24	29.8%	49.2%	43.0%
2024-25	27.0%	48.0%	41.4%

Source: Colorado Department of Higher Education, Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS), derived from the CDHE [ROI report](#) as of October 2026.

CDHE's Wildly Important Goals

CDHE has several Wildly Important Goals (WIGs) for FY 2026-27. Additional details and a visual representation of the Department's WIG progress are available on the [Governor's Dashboard](#).

WIG 1: Closing attainment equity gaps

- Increase the number of credential completions by low-income students from 16,289 to 17,120 by June 30, 2027.
- Increase the number of credential completions by students of color from 24,598 to 26,000 by June 30, 2027.

WIG 2: Workforce development initiatives

- Increase the percentage of public postsecondary programs that require a work-based learning component from 70% to 83% by June 30, 2027.

WIG 3: Increase postsecondary attainment of high school graduates

- Increase the proportion of Colorado high school students who attempted college credits or credentials while in high school from 44.7% to 52% by June 30, 2027.

WIG 4: Cost containment and affordability for learners

- Decrease the share of students graduating with debt from 41.4% to 33% by June 30, 2027.
- Decrease the average amount of debt per graduating student from \$23,000 to \$18,000 by June 30, 2027.

Conclusion

Colorado's postsecondary education system continues to make meaningful progress toward the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan and our Wildly Important Goals. Record enrollment and credential completion levels, rising success rates for students of color and low-income students, expanded work-based learning opportunities, and fewer students having debt when completing postsecondary education all demonstrate positive momentum. CDHE will continue efforts to decrease the amount students are having to borrow, develop and expand work-based learning programs, and to even more ambitiously support the completion of credits and credentials by high school students. Through ongoing collaboration with institutions, employers, policymakers, and learners, CDHE remains committed to increasing educational attainment, improving affordability, strengthening workforce connections, and ensuring all Coloradans have access to high-value postsecondary opportunities.