



COLORADO

Department of
Higher Education

Finish What You Started

Legislative Report House Bill 21-1330



2025

The Colorado Department of Higher Education
Report to the Colorado General Assembly

Statute: 23-3.3-100

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (DHE), under its own authority and through the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), oversees and coordinates policy for 31 public institutions of higher education (including community colleges, independent local district colleges and local area technical colleges) and authorizes and regulates private colleges, universities and occupational schools.

Mission – We support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all.

Vision – All Coloradans will have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities.



Prepared and submitted by the Colorado Department of Higher Education
under the Executive Leadership of Dr. Angie Paccione
Pursuant to the statutory authority of 23-3.3-1006

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Executive Summary

The **Finish What You Started** initiative, administered by the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) within the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), is a statewide effort to reengage students who are non-completers. Funded through Federal State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) initially, FWYS provides both direct financial support and wraparound support services to help eligible Coloradans return to and complete postsecondary education. The program is scheduled to sunset June 30, 2026.

The program's legislative reporting requirements are defined in 23-3.3-1006. CDHE is required to submit an annual report to the Joint Budget Committee and to the education committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, or any successor committees. This report must summarize institutional data and include:

- Allocations and distributions
- Spending on direct financial assistance and student support services, and types of assistance and supports provided
- Eligible students who re-enrolled and credential completion data
- Any additional information deemed useful by the COSI board to assess the program's impact on enrollment, persistence, completion, and student debt reduction.
 - The COSI Board does require additional metrics.

The report highlights the resilience of Colorado students and higher education institutions, as well as their shared commitment to equity, access, and workforce development. The program continues to inform state policymakers and higher education leaders on strategies to support returning students and strengthen postsecondary attainment statewide.

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Introduction

Program Overview

The Finish What You Started (FWYS) program is led by the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI), a division of the Colorado Department of Higher Education. The Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative received \$49 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to fund the Finish What You Started program. This program provides direct and indirect support to students, with \$46.55 million allocated to institutions and \$2.45 million to COSI for program administration. The program provides funds to institutions for direct support of students through financial assistance such as scholarships, grants, and other aid. The program provides funds to institutions for indirect support to hire staff that provide essential services like academic advising and career guidance. The program prioritizes individuals who experienced an economic loss due to the pandemic, undergraduate students, and in-state students who:

- Earned some postsecondary credits from a public or private higher education institution but did not complete a credential requiring 30 credits or more before deciding not to enroll for two or more consecutive semesters, or;
- Were 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 to allocate the funds appropriated following a 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; and
- 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.

The statute also 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.

Legislative Reporting Requirements

Per 23-3.3-1006, CDHE is required to submit a legislative report to the joint budget committee and the education committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives or any successor committees by December 1. The report must summarize the reports received from the public institutions of higher education and must include:

- The amount allocated and distributed to each public institution of higher education.
- The amount each institution spent in providing direct student financial assistance to eligible students and in providing services and support to eligible students and the types of direct student financial assistance and services and support provided.
- The number of eligible students who re-enrolled in the academic years in which each institution's student assistance plan was implemented.
- The postsecondary credentials are awarded to eligible students who received assistance through each institution's student assistance plan.
- 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 (6) was successfully spent to increase eligible student enrollment, persistence, and completion, and decrease student debt.
 - The COSI board does not require additional metrics.

Program Progress

Federal State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) provided COSI with an opportunity to utilize its proven model of financial and student support services to assist Colorado public institutions and expand and create programming focused on addressing equity gaps, significant enrollment declines, high job loss rates, continuing unemployment, and addressing the disruption to the workforce caused by the pandemic. Table 1 presents the Finish What You Started participation status of each institution

in FY 2024-2025. Institutions determine the length of their programs, and in fiscal year (FY) 2023-2024, six institutions concluded their participation upon completion of their grant term on June 30, 2024. In FY 2024-2025, 24 public institutions of higher education participated in the fourth year of the program. The FWYS program is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026.

Table 1: Finish What You Started Institution of Higher Education Participation Status FY 2024-2025

Institution	Finish What You Started Participation Status
Adams State University	Yes
Aims Community College	Yes
Arapahoe Community College	Yes
Colorado Mesa University	Yes
Colorado Mountain College	Yes
Colorado Northwestern Community College	No
Colorado State University	Yes
Colorado State University Global	Yes
Colorado State University Pueblo	Yes
Community College of Aurora	Yes
Community College of Denver	Yes
Emily Griffith Technical College	No
Fort Lewis College	Yes
Front Range Community College	Yes
Lamar Community College	Yes
Metropolitan State University of Denver	Yes
Morgan Community College	Yes
Northeastern Junior College	No
Otero College	No
Pickens Technical College	Yes
Pikes Peak State College	Yes
Pueblo Community College	Yes
Red Rocks Community College	Yes

Technical College of the Rockies	Yes
Trinidad State College	Yes
University of Colorado Boulder	Yes
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	Yes
University of Colorado Denver	Yes
University of Northern Colorado	No
Western Colorado University	Yes

Continued program progress is a testament to the perseverance and dedication of the state, CDHE, and participating institutions to effectively mobilize funds to revitalize the workforce in a post-pandemic Colorado. The Finish What You Started program has empowered individuals whose higher education journeys were most disrupted by the pandemic to reclaim postsecondary participation and achieve credential attainment.

- Through year four, more than \$35 million has been distributed to the institutions.
- Institutions spent more than \$7 million this year, with most of the funds directed towards direct financial support for students.
- Institutions reported serving nearly 1,500 students in FY 2024-2025 and more than 4,800 students since the beginning of the program.
- Institutions reported 822 credential completions in FY 2024-2025 and more than 2,500 credential completions since the beginning of the program.
- The FWYS program is scheduled to sunset June 30, 2026.

Programmatic Changes

The financial operations, criteria for student eligibility, and scope of student support services were significantly impacted by the passage of House Bill 24-1465 and House Bill 24-1466. These changes can be mainly attributed to spending projections within the SLFRF spending timelines allowed by the statute and federal government. Programmatic changes included:

- A decrease in overall program funds from \$49 million to \$39 million due to spending projections within SLFRF spending timelines.

- A shift of \$10,463,439 federal SLFRF funds to general fund allocation for the remaining two years of the program.
- Narrowed student eligibility to focus on ongoing students who currently participate in the program, and previous participants who did not complete and have re-engaged. Students must have been recruited to the program by June 30, 2024.
- No new students recruited to the program after June 30, 2024.
- Up to \$4.5 million in need-based aid to support student scholarships for ongoing program participants.

As a result, the program's fourth year saw a concentrated effort by institutions to manage changes to the program budget and scope, support eligible participants, and ensure progress towards credential attainment.

Program Data

This section contains data that meets legislative reporting requirements, detailing allocations and disbursements, spending, students served, and completions.

Total Amount Allocated and Distributed

Table 2 presents the total grant term allocations, year four (FY 2024-2025) distributions, and cumulative disbursements through four years of the Finish What You Started Program. Eighteen institutions have received 100% of their grant term allocation through FY 2024-2025.

Table 2: Finish What You Started Allocations and Distributions by Institution of Higher Education

Institution	Grant Term Allocation	Year Four Distribution (FY 2024-2025)	Total Distribution through Year Four (FY 2022-2025)
Adams State University	\$678,112.32	\$170,739.48	\$678,112.32
Aims Community College	\$1,069,415.00	\$131,348.00	\$1,069,415.00
Arapahoe Community College	\$1,099,831.18	\$100,130.99	\$1,099,831.18
Colorado Mesa University	\$2,065,747.75	\$123,606.74	\$2,065,747.75

Institution	Grant Term Allocation	Year Four Distribution (FY 2024-2025)	Total Distribution through Year Four (FY 2022-2025)
Colorado Mountain College	\$827,549.22	\$171,785.22	\$827,549.22
Colorado Northwestern Community College*	\$246,845.00	\$0.00	\$246,845.00
Colorado State University	\$3,329,803.74	\$759,131.74	\$2,897,803.74
Colorado State University Global	\$678,470.00	\$263,376.00	\$586,910.00
Colorado State University Pueblo	\$743,125.44	\$136,333.94	\$579,425.44
Community College of Aurora	\$1,020,499.48	\$241,353.00	\$1,020,499.4
Community College of Denver	\$1,912,724.74	\$367,988.74	\$1,659,902.74
Emily Griffith Technical College*	\$705,769.00	\$0.00	\$705,769.00
Fort Lewis College	\$498,399.00	\$104,059.00	\$498,399.00
Front Range Community College	\$2,115,681.50	\$472,000.00	\$2,115,681.50
Lamar Community College	\$210,299.75	\$0.00	\$210,299.75
Metropolitan State University of Denver	\$3,469,206.34	\$684,730.90	\$2,946,579.34
Morgan Community College	\$346,166.46	\$123,970.96	\$346,166.46
Northeastern Junior College*	\$353,211.00	\$0.00	\$353,211.00
Otero College*	\$422,134.00	\$0.00	\$422,134.00
Pickens Technical College	\$850,838.01	\$266,736.34	\$607,303.01
Pikes Peak State College	\$3,479,183.93	\$1,005,299.93	\$2,874,183.93
Pueblo Community College	\$1,263,001.95	\$218,421.95	\$1,038,001.95
Red Rocks Community College	\$1,235,125.69	\$240,975.69	\$1,235,125.69
Technical College of the Rockies	\$182,966.86	\$31,466.86	\$182,966.86
Trinidad State College	\$402,371.38	\$118,788.88	\$402,371.38
University of Colorado Boulder	\$3,067,510.27	\$589,987.79	\$2,455,990.27
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	\$1,911,892.00	\$429,637.00	\$1,484,892.00
University of Colorado Denver	\$2,703,992.96	\$540,338.21	\$2,478,379.96
University of Northern Colorado*	\$2,024,812.00	\$0.00	\$2,024,812.00
Western Colorado University	\$489,229.73	\$62,332.23	\$419,229.73
Total	\$39,403,915.70	\$7,054,539.59	\$35,233,538.70

Source: 2024-2025 Finish What You Started Annual Reporting.

Note: Institutions that concluded their participation by FY 2024-2025 are marked with an asterisk.

2024-2025 Spend

Statute requires institutions to disclose the distribution of funds between direct student financial support (e.g., scholarships, educational expenses, and incentives) and indirect support (e.g., personnel, programming, and marketing). Table 3 presents this breakdown for FY 2024-2025. Due to spending projections within SLFRF spending timelines, appropriations were adjusted for several programs in HB24-1465. As a result, institutions experienced an average 9.5% decrease in their grant term allocations, and total spending in year four declined by an average of 35% compared to the previous year. Despite this, institutions continued to prioritize student needs with 74% of funds directed towards financial support. This highlights the program's core mission to reduce financial barriers for students.

Table 3: Finish What You Started Funds Spend on Financial and Student Supports (FY 2024-2025) by Institutions of Higher Education

Institution	Indirect Support (Student Supports)	Direct Support (Financial Support)	Direct Support Percentage (Financial Support)	Total Spent (FY 2024-2025)
Adams State University	\$32,798.31	\$128,375.00	80%	\$161,173.31
Aims Community College	\$53,102.49	\$98,284.51	65%	\$151,387.00
Arapahoe Community College	\$0.00	\$157,815.00	100%	\$157,815.00
Colorado Mesa University	\$37,673.02	\$151,430.98	80%	\$189,104.00
Colorado Mountain College	\$37,613.64	\$63,000.00	63%	\$100,613.64
Colorado State University	\$64,204.44	\$706,720.00	92%	\$770,924.44
Colorado State University Global	\$3,600.00	\$257,665.00	99%	\$261,265.00
Colorado State University Pueblo	\$34,025.64	\$125,781.39	79%	\$159,807.03
Community College of Aurora	\$105,994.72	\$117,105.16	52%	\$223,099.88
Community College of Denver	\$92,191.39	\$304,072.00	77%	\$396,263.39

Institution	Indirect Support (Student Supports)	Direct Support (Financial Support)	Direct Support Percentage (Financial Support)	Total Spent (FY 2024-2025)
Fort Lewis College	\$57,440.93	\$78,500.00	58%	\$135,940.93
Front Range Community College	\$139,338.21	\$186,924.00	57%	\$326,262.21
Lamar Community College	\$7,570.63	\$4,500.00	37%	\$12,070.63
Metropolitan State University of Denver	\$313,815.31	\$425,500.00	58%	\$739,315.31
Morgan Community College	\$50,633.94	\$110,147.02	69%	\$160,780.96
Pickens Technical College	\$70,298.22	\$198,800.00	74%	\$269,098.22
Pikes Peak State College	\$215,843.09	\$800,568.47	79%	\$1,016,411.56
Pueblo Community College	\$75,051.74	\$154,454.00	67%	\$229,505.74
Red Rocks Community College	\$40,190.11	\$140,024.65	78%	\$180,214.76
Technical College of the Rockies	\$13,665.93	\$16,160.97	54%	\$29,827.12
Trinidad State College	\$26,825.62	\$45,000.00	63%	\$71,825.62
University of Colorado Boulder	\$242,870.44	\$326,389.15	57%	\$569,259.59
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	\$0.00	\$630,119.00	100%	\$630,119.00
University of Colorado Denver	\$180,974.53	\$325,185.33	64%	\$506,159.86
Western Colorado University	\$0.00	\$64,988.00	100%	\$64,988.00
Total	\$1,895,722.35 Total Indirect Spent	\$5,617,509.63 Total Direct Spent	74% Direct Support Percentage	\$7,513,232.20 Total Spent

Source: 2024-2025 Finish What You Started Annual Reporting.

Students Served

Table 4 presents the number of students served in FY 2024-2025 and the cumulative number of students served by the program. Students served in FY 2024-2025 fulfilled the eligibility criteria as outlined by HB24-1465, which required them to be one of the following: an ongoing participant, a previous participant that did not complete and had re-engaged, or a new student recruited by June 30,

2024. In year four, 1,497 students participated, reflecting strong retention and reengagement efforts by institutions. More than 4,800 students have been impacted by program efforts by the end of FY 2024-2025, an indicator of sustained institutional commitment and the program’s long-term value to Colorado students.

Table 4: Finish What You Started Students Served (FY 2022-2025) by Institutions of Higher Education

Institutions	Students Served (FY 2024-2025)	Cumulative Students Served (FY 2022-2025)
Adams State University	28	114
Aims Community College	41	171
Arapahoe Community College	32	145
Colorado Mesa University	35	219
Colorado Mountain College	11	120
Colorado Northwestern Community College*	0	12
Colorado State University	104	259
Colorado State University Global	46	77
Colorado State University Pueblo	82	125
Community College of Aurora	36	143
Community College of Denver	119	388
Emily Griffith Technical College*	0	128
Fort Lewis College	25	53
Front Range Community College	76	437
Lamar Community College	<10	36
Metropolitan State University of Denver	218	418
Morgan Community College	25	62
Northeastern Junior College*	0	75
Otero College*	0	76
Pickens Technical College	60	234
Pikes Peak State College	148	369
Pueblo Community College	65	202

Institutions	Students Served (FY 2024-2025)	Cumulative Students Served (FY 2022-2025)
Red Rocks Community College	40	120
Technical College of the Rockies	<10	51
Trinidad State College	<10	62
University of Colorado Boulder	115	185
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	77	162
University of Colorado Denver	59	207
University of Northern Colorado*	0	113
Western Colorado University	36	53
Total	1497	4816

Source: 2024-2025 Finish What You Started Annual Reporting.

Note: Institutions that concluded their participation by FY 2024-2025 are marked with an asterisk.

Note: Student counts of less than 10 are suppressed to protect student privacy.

Credential Completions

Table 5 represents the number of credential completions reported in FY 2024-2025 and the cumulative number of completions throughout the program. In FY 2024-2025, 822 completions were reported, a slight decrease from FY 2023-2024. However, cumulative completions rose sharply to 2,528 credentials, indicating the program's continued success in supporting credential attainment. This sustained result, despite discontinued recruitment, highlights the effectiveness of institutional support and persistence of participating students.

Table 5: Finish What You Started Credential Completions by Institutions of Higher Education, FY 2022-2025

Institutions	Credential Completions (FY 2024-2025)	Cumulative Credential Completions (FY 2022-2025)
Adams State University	16	46
Aims Community College	52	115
Arapahoe Community College	26	48
Colorado Mesa University	28	187

Institutions	Credential Completions (FY 2024-2025)	Cumulative Credential Completions (FY 2022-2025)
Colorado Mountain College	<10	55
Colorado Northwestern Community College*	0	<10
Colorado State University	33	106
Colorado State University Global	26	29
Colorado State University Pueblo	<10	24
Community College of Aurora	21	62
Community College of Denver	51	114
Emily Griffith Technical College	0	88
Fort Lewis College	19	43
Front Range Community College	83	248
Lamar Community College	<10	<10
Metropolitan State University of Denver	74	141
Morgan Community College	13	23
Northeastern Junior College*	0	41
Otero College*	0	46
Pickens Technical College	50	199
Pikes Peak State College	85	185
Pueblo Community College	60	189
Red Rocks Community College	39	84
Technical College of the Rockies	<10	43
Trinidad State College	<10	41
University of Colorado Boulder	35	105
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	38	49
University of Colorado Denver	27	98
University of Northern Colorado*	0	87
Western Colorado University	15	20
Total	822	2528

Source: 2024-2025 Finish What You Started Annual Reporting.

Note: Institutions that concluded their participation by FY 2024-2025 are marked with an asterisk.
Note: Student counts of less than 10 are suppressed to protect student privacy.

Cost per Student

Table 6 presents the cost per student served by each institution in FY 2024-2025. This metric provides insights into how institutions utilize program funds to support individual participants with consideration of program scale, student need, and service delivery models. The average cost per student, including both direct financial assistance and indirect wraparound support, was \$5,019.

Table 6: Finish What You Started Cost Per Student (FY 2024-2025) by Institution of Higher Education

Institution	Total Spent (2024-2025)	Students Served (FY2024-2025)	Cost Per Student (2024-2025)
Adams State University	\$161,173.31	28	\$5,756.19
Aims Community College	\$151,387.00	41	\$3,692.37
Arapahoe Community College	\$157,815.00	32	\$4,931.72
Colorado Mesa University	\$189,104.00	35	\$5,402.97
Colorado Mountain College	\$100,613.64	11	\$9,146.69
Colorado State University	\$770,924.44	104	\$7,412.74
Colorado State University Global	\$261,265.00	46	\$5,679.67
Colorado State University Pueblo	\$159,807.03	82	\$1,948.87
Community College of Aurora	\$223,099.88	36	\$6,197.22
Community College of Denver	\$396,263.39	119	\$3,329.94
Fort Lewis College	\$135,940.93	25	\$5,437.64
Front Range Community College	\$326,262.21	76	\$4,292.92
Lamar Community College	\$12,070.63	<10	\$4,023.54
Metropolitan State University of Denver	\$739,315.31	218	\$3,391.35
Morgan Community College	\$160,780.96	25	\$6,431.24
Pickens Technical College	\$269,098.22	60	\$4,484.97
Pikes Peak State College	\$1,016,411.56	148	\$6,867.65
Pueblo Community College	\$229,505.74	65	\$3,530.86
Red Rocks Community College	\$180,214.76	40	\$4,505.37

Institution	Total Spent (2024-2025)	Students Served (FY2024-2025)	Cost Per Student (2024-2025)
Technical College of the Rockies	\$29,827.12	<10	\$3,728.39
Trinidad State College	\$71,825.62	<10	\$8,978.20
University of Colorado Boulder	\$569,259.59	115	\$4,950.08
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	\$630,119.00	77	\$8,183.36
University of Colorado Denver	\$506,159.86	59	\$8,578.98
Western Colorado University	\$64,988.00	36	\$1,805.22
Total	\$7,513,232.20	1515	\$5,018.86

Source: 2024-2025 Finish What You Started Annual Reporting.

Note: Student counts of less than 10 are suppressed to protect student privacy.

Conclusion

The federal funding provided to COSI has been a powerful catalyst for change, empowering Colorado's public institutions and their students. To date, 4,816 new students and students returning after a stop-out have received support through FWYS. Together, they have earned a cumulative total of 2,528 credentials. With one year of programming remaining (2025–2026), it is expected that completion numbers will continue to grow as the initiative moves toward its conclusion. The program has significantly improved student success through strategic funding allocation and innovative support services. The program's fourth year saw continued success, with 24 participating institutions, over \$7 million in distributed funds, and 822 degree or credential completions. By providing direct financial aid and comprehensive support, the program has helped students overcome obstacles and secure brighter futures.

Key Achievements

Key achievements of the program include:

- **Effective Change Management:** COSI and partnership institutions successfully navigated significant legislative changes. This required a strategic pivot to focus resources on supporting

existing participants, which ensured program continuity and maximized student outcomes despite evolving circumstances.

- **Student Support Services:** The program hires student support staff (indirect support) to provide critical support services, which have been essential in helping students navigate the challenges of higher education and increase enrollment and completion.
- **Retention of Program Participants:** The program retained and served a similar number of students in FY 2024-2025 as it recruited in FY 2023-2024. This is a strong indicator of program value, student commitment, and overall sustained momentum towards program goals.
- **Increased Credential Attainment:** The program has supported more students in completing their degrees or certificates, with technical and community colleges having significant contributions. This accomplishment is particularly notable given the legislative changes that discontinued new-student recruitment. The direct financial support alongside wraparound support services was comprehensive in delivery, helping students overcome barriers to completion.
- **Completing Closeout Process:** Twelve public institutions have reached the closeout phase of their program upon completion of their participation on June 30, 2025. Closeout activities assess the overall impact of the grant and confirm that all applicable programmatic, administrative, and financial tasks have been completed. While every part of the grant life cycle is important, the closeout phase is essential to a successful program end and ensuring future funding opportunities.

While the program has faced challenges due to statutory changes, it has demonstrated its resilience and effectiveness. As the program enters its final year, it is crucial to maintain its focus on supporting students and institutions, particularly those serving underserved populations. By doing so, Colorado can ensure a skilled workforce and a brighter future for all its citizens.