



# Path4Ward Report

Pursuant to 23-3.3-1305,  
Fourth-Year Innovation Pilot Program

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2024

Prepared and submitted by the  
Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)  
Report to the Colorado State Legislature, Colorado Department of Education,  
and Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting  
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# Introduction

Implemented by SB21-106, the Fourth-Year Innovation Pilot Program, branded as Path4Ward, is a pilot initiative that awards state funding to low-income students who graduate early from high school to pursue postsecondary education and training.

Students who graduate at least one semester early from participating high schools, and are either eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRL) at any point from grades 8 through 12, or satisfies Pell Grant income eligibility requirements. These students become eligible for scholarships applicable toward tuition and fees at eligible postsecondary program providers. Additionally, participating Local Education Providers (LEPs), defined as participating high schools or groups of high schools within a school district, receive a set amount of funding per eligible early graduate they report to CDHE by July 1 of each year.

Eligible postsecondary program providers are defined as Colorado public higher education institutions, registered Colorado private occupational schools, and workplace training programs registered with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) as eligible for funding under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). Eligible students have 18 months to commence an eligible program and submit their scholarship request to CDHE or else forfeit their scholarship amount. Scholarship requests are then confirmed by CDHE and the selected program provider. Program providers apply scholarship funds to that student's tuition and fees, with any remaining funds either retained for continued study or reimbursed to the student. Reimbursed funds can be used for external costs of attendance like equipment, books, housing, transportation, or future education.

This report includes the following statute-required data:

- Number of eligible graduates receiving state funding and the high schools they graduated from;
- The amount requested by and reimbursed to eligible graduates, the projected forfeited by eligible graduates, and the resulting projected total expenditure in FY24-25;
- Demographic data of eligible graduates receiving state funding;
- Disbursements to local education providers;
- Enrollment of eligible graduates in postsecondary programs;
- Available outcome data for participating students;
- Requested adjustments to the appropriation and recommended changes to pilot implementation or statutory language.

## Program Progress

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**Graduates in FY23-24 numbered 380**, an increase of 92% from the Year 2 final updated total of 197 and a cumulative increase of 523% from the initial class of 61. Student word-of-mouth and improved knowledge and training among district counseling staff have been highly effective in raising awareness of the Path4Ward program and attracting student interest in the prospect of early graduation.

**Students received \$170,294 in scholarships.** Students retained \$12,610 (7%) to pay for future tuition in an ongoing program. Students were reimbursed \$85,281 (50%) of their scholarships after full payment of their tuition and fees, per 23-3.3-1304 (2) (a). An average student received \$3,213, and put \$1,366 to immediate tuition, \$238 to future tuition, and received \$1,609 to pay for textbooks, equipment, transportation, housing, and/or other costs of attendance.

Until June 30, 2024, CDHE partnered with Zero Dropouts and reSchool, external nonprofits who were funded independently to support the Path4Ward program and eligible early graduates. Zero Dropouts provided navigational support and reminders to eligible students, while reSchool

managed data collection and reporting on these efforts. These partners were unable to renew funding for FY24-25 and future years. In order to manage the transition, CDHE staff worked to update contact lists and procedures with local education providers (LEP), students and families and provided updated program materials previously provided by the partner agencies. As directed by HB24-1392, CDHE also implemented a cap on adding additional high schools and added a scaling funding eligibility formula to ensure disbursements were right sized for small training programs and lighter credit loads. Finally, CDHE performed a selective review of high-volume programs which confirmed the accurate and appropriate application of statutory student eligibility requirements.

### **Postsecondary Providers Selected by Participating Students**

- Aims Community College
- Arapahoe Community College
- Aveda Institute
- Bel-Rea Institute of Animal Technology
- Cinco Brothers Barber School
- Colorado Mesa University
- Colorado State University
- Concorde Career College
- Construction Industry Training Council
- Elysian Academy of Cosmetology
- Emily Griffith Technical College
- Front Range Community College
- Institute of Business and Medical Careers
- Kaplan Real Estate Education
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- Paul Mitchell the School, Denver
- Pickens Technical College
- Pueblo Community College
- University of Colorado Boulder
- University of Colorado Colorado Springs
- University of Colorado Denver

### **Programs of Study Declared by Enrolled Students**

- A.A. Liberal Arts-Designation in Business
- A.A. Liberal Arts-Designation in Elementary Teacher Education
- A.A.S Graphic Design Major
- A.A.S Post Production
- A.A.S Pre-Nursing
- A.A.S Welding Technology
- A.A.S. Animation
- A.A.S. Marketing/Management, Business Management
- A.A.S. Master Automobile Service Technology
- A.G.S Liberal Arts
- A.A. in Criminal Justice
- A.A. in Early Childhood Teaching
- A.A.S. in Early Childhood Education
- A.S. in Psychology
- A.G.S. Mortuary Science Track

- B.A. Psychology
- B.A. Psychology and Integrative Physiology
- Occupational Barbering Program
- B.S. Business Administration
- Certificate - Medical Assistant
- Certificate - Practical Nursing
- Class A CDL
- B.A. Criminal Justice
- Certificate - Equine Training and Management
- Course in English Language Learning
- Occupational Hairstyling Program
- Occupational Nail Technician Program
- Certificate - Nurse Aide
- B.S.N. Nursing
- B.A. Psychology
- B.A. Sociology
- Certificate - Sound Engineering

### Program Data for Year 3 (Fiscal Year 2023-24)

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Program funding amounts are determined by 23-3.3-1302 (11). Students receive scholarships based on how early they graduated: \$4,113 for graduating before the start of their fourth year of high school, and \$2,468 for graduating before the start of the second semester of their fourth year. Table 1 calculates the maximum potential scholarship expenditure if all eligible students request funding within 18 months of graduation. In addition, LEPs receive \$1,371 per eligible student reported by July 1 each year, as determined by 23-3.3-1303 (3) (b) (II). Table 2 calculates district funding allocations generated by the number of eligible graduates reported by July 1, 2024. Some districts did not have any eligible early graduates and therefore did not receive funding. Table 3 includes the current number of scholarship requests received by CDHE and projects further requests and scholarship forfeits over the remainder of FY24-25.

**TABLE 1:** Eligible Early Graduates, FY23-24

Local Education Partner	Number of 3-Year Graduates	Number of 3.5-Year Graduates	Total Eligible Students
Adams 12 Five Star Schools*	26	35	61
Aurora Public Schools	<10**	40	45-50**
Cañon City Schools	<10**	10	10-15**
Clear Creek School District	0	0	0
Colorado Early Colleges	45	<10**	45-50**
Cotopaxi School District	0	0	0
East Grand School District	0	0	0
Greeley-Evans School District 6	83	126	209
Harrison School District	0	0	0
Montezuma-Cortez School District	0	0	0
West Grand School District	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>380</b>
<b>Potential Funding Awards***</b>	<b>\$678,708</b>	<b>\$407,225</b>	<b>\$1,085,933</b>

\*One additional eligible graduate was reported after the July 1 deadline.

\*\*Data suppressed to protect student privacy.

**TABLE 2:** LEP Funding Actuals, FY23-24

Local Education Partner	Number of Early Graduates	Funding Allocated
Adams 12 Five Star Schools*	60	\$82,268
Aurora Public Schools	46	\$63,072
Cañon City School District	15	\$20,567
Clear Creek School District	0	-
Colorado Early Colleges	49	\$67,185
Cotopaxi School District	0	-
East Grand School District	0	-
Greeley-Evans School District 6	209	\$286,566
Harrison School District	0	-
Montezuma-Cortez School District	0	-
West Grand School District	0	-
<b>Total*</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>\$519,658</b>

\*Number of early graduates reported by LEPs prior to the July 1 deadline.

**TABLE 3:** Student Funding Actuals and Projections, FY24-25

Scholarship Type	Requests Received (% of Total)	Requests Remaining*	Projected Forfeit Number**	Projected Forfeit Total**	Projected Requests Total***
3-Year Funds	28 (17%)	137	114	\$468,925	\$209,782
3.5-Year Funds	55 (26%)	160	132	\$325,780	\$204,846
<b>Total Scholarships Awarded</b>	<b>83 (22%)</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>\$794,705</b>	<b>\$414,629</b>

\*Requests remaining is the count of eligible students who have not submitted a scholarship request.

\*\*Projected forfeit number is calculated as the number of students who have selected ineligible postsecondary programs plus 80% of students who had not submitted scholarship request as of November 1. We continue to estimate an 80% forfeit rate for students who did not submit requests by November 1 due to limitations in our ability to provide students with individual navigational support.

\*\*\*Projected requests total is the amount of scholarship funding expenditure expected in FY24-25.

### Demographics and Outcomes of Participating Students, FY23-24

CDHE collected demographics and progress data of participating students from postsecondary program providers after the close of FY23-24. CDHE has retained information allowing for further Path4Ward student outcomes data, including completion rates, earnings, and employment to be generated from existing departmental data collections when student-level data from postsecondary institutions for these students becomes available in late 2025. These data will be included and analyzed as part of the final program evaluation.

**TABLE 4: Race/Ethnicity of Funded Students**

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Asian	4%
Black or African American	2%
Hispanic or Latinx	58%
White	28%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2%
Two or More Races	6%

**TABLE 5: Completion Status of Funded Students**

Status	Percentage
<b>Completed</b>	4%
<b>Ongoing</b> (student remains enrolled in program)	57%
<b>Transferred</b> (to alternate postsecondary program)	0%
<b>Incomplete</b> (student stopped-out or otherwise exited program without completing)	30%
<b>Other</b> (student paused program or otherwise on hiatus)	9%



# Conclusion

LEP's experience with Path4Ward over the past year reflects the popularity of the program and the effects of calculating district funding share based on the number of eligible graduates reported. LEPs report a positive experience with the program and a commitment to the flexibility it grants students, a sentiment broadly shared between districts which have large numbers of eligible early graduates and those which have few or none. Some districts have been able to utilize Path4Ward as a dropout prevention tool, a subject which CDHE plans to investigate in more detail in the final evaluation. Larger districts have made great strides in training counseling staff on Path4Ward to effectively identify and inform potential eligible early graduates about the opportunities the program creates, the program's role in the context of other post-graduation transition options, and possible degree and/or credential pathways. High-participation districts therefore receive additional Path4Ward funding which they may use for increased staff support.

However, smaller districts, particularly rural districts where a small graduating class means there may or may not be Path4Ward graduates each year, are unable to dedicate resources toward Path4Ward implementation. Regardless of available funding to dedicate to the program, rural districts struggle with student recruitment in the program. CDHE is working with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to develop supports tailored to rural districts with fewer students and administrative resources. As an example, Cañon City Schools has applied processes developed for the Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT) program to engage students in Path4Ward.

CDHE recognizes that low student utilization rates have continued into FY23-24. Current experience indicates that these students are primarily entering the workforce directly, pursuing out-of-state options, or opting-out of reminder communications. We plan to investigate

student choices more comprehensively as part of the final program evaluation, coming November 1, 2026.

Program goals for the coming year are to further engage rural districts, build out more comprehensive program guides, and ensure all districts are prepared for the 2026 final program evaluation reporting requirements. The program will continue for LEPs until June 30, 2026 and for remaining early graduates and postsecondary programs until December 31, 2027.