



COLORADO

Department of
Higher Education

Measures to Improve Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Students with a Disability



2025

The Colorado Department of Higher Education
Report to the Education Committees of the House of Representatives and Senate of Colorado General
Assembly as Part of the State Measures for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent Government Act
Hearing

Statute: C.R.S. §23-79-102

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.



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Prepared and submitted by the Colorado Department of Higher Education
under the Executive Leadership of Dr. Angie Paccione
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Executive Summary

The *Concerning Measures to Improve Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Students with Disabilities* report was enacted under Colorado Revised Statute §23-79-102. The goal of the annual report is to provide greater clarity and transparency on the number of students enrolled at Colorado institutions of higher education (IHEs) who identify as having a disability. Statute requires the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to collect both aggregated and disaggregated (race, ethnicity, first-generation status, Federal Pell Grant eligibility and military/veteran status) data on students with disabilities (SWDs) who receive a “service, support, or accommodation related to the student’s disability,” fall-to-fall retention numbers for SWDs, graduate numbers of SWDs and the number of SWDs who receive and received services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Key findings in this report include active duty/veteran students representing the highest percentage of SWDs (12.5%) who were also the highest population to receive disability accommodation (12.1%); the highest race and ethnicity percentages reported by Colorado IHEs for SWDs were the two or more races (9.2%), white (8.7%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (8.4%) categories. Additionally, the University of Denver had twice as many SWDs by percentage (18.2%) than their peer IHEs with larger student populations, which may indicate greater student self-advocacy and/or more comprehensive student support for SWDs. The state’s IHEs have also reported an increase year-over-year of SWDs with a 0.9% increase between 2024 and 2025.

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Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that in 2022-23 more than 7.5 million, or roughly 15% of all public school students aged 3-21, received special education or a related service under the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); this number is up from the 6.4 million reported in the previous decade.¹ Students with disabilities (SWDs) graduate at lower rates than their peers without disabilities and are less likely to participate in full-time employment after graduation due to challenges. Challenges faced by SWDs, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, include a lack of awareness of reasonable accommodations available to them and the unpreparedness of students to self-advocate as necessary once at the collegiate level; as many SWDs parents advocated on behalf of the student in their K-12 schooling.² Accommodations in the K-12 system do not automatically transfer with the student as they transition into higher education. While a 504 plan protects SWDs, by focusing on accommodations that grant equal access to education by removing barriers, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) documents the student's personalized instruction plan to support their academic needs.³ Accommodation use has been found to lead to better student success outcomes; however, research indicates that disability services in postsecondary education continue to be underutilized.⁴ To better understand the usage of disability services at Colorado IHEs, the Colorado General Assembly enacted House Bill 22-1255 *Concerning Measures to Improve Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Students with a Disability*.

Under Colorado Revised Statute §23-79-102, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), was tasked with the development of the SWDs report. The annual report, as part of the State's

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, May). *Students with disabilities*. The Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>

² U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2024, April 30). *Higher education: Education could improve information on accommodations for students with disabilities*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-105614>

³ U.S. Department of Education. (2000). *A guide to the individualized education program*. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>

⁴ Blasey, J., Wang, C., & Blasey, R. (2022). Accommodation use and academic outcomes for college students with disabilities. *Psychological Reports*, 126(4), 1891-1909. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221078011>

Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act, gathers multiple measures that provide greater clarity on:

- The number of students enrolled at Colorado institutions of higher education (IHEs) who identify as having a disability;
- The number of SWDs who receive service, support, or accommodations from IHEs;
- The number of SWDs who continued enrollment at IHEs; (data available next year)
- The number of SWDs who graduated from an IHE; (data available next year)
- The number of SWDs who receive a service or support from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; and
- The number of SWDs who received a service or support from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

These measures are collected and reported at both the aggregate for the state as a whole and disaggregated by race, ethnicity, first-generation status, Federal Pell Grant eligibility and military status.

The original bill established the Postsecondary Services Advisory Committee (PSAC) for the purpose of making recommendations to IHEs and the General Assembly on necessary services and best practices to improve successful outcomes for SWDs. PSAC was charged with examining issues such as postsecondary outcomes for SWDs and whether outcomes were affected by students' demographic membership (race/ethnicity, Federal Pell Grant Eligibility, sex, gender expression or military status), the ability of IHEs to implement services and best practices that exceeded minimum requirements of federal and state laws for SWD and explore the availability of financial assistance for SWDs. The 15-member committee submitted [two reports](#) and was repealed on June 30, 2024.

Definitions, Data and Limitations

CDHE, for reporting purposes, uses the following definitions for accommodation and disability:

- **Reasonable accommodations** are modifications or adjustments to the tasks, environment or the way things are usually done that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or a job. Please note that modifications

pertain to physical or logistical adaptations to learning materials and resources. Modifications may not represent a fundamental alteration to the learning objectives or program/degree requirements.⁵

- **Disability**, as included in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), means, with respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities of such individual.⁶

Data for this report was compiled from two sources. Data was pulled from CDHE’s Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS) and through data provided directly by the IHEs not available through SURDS. As CDHE continues to enhance its SURDS data collections, CDHE will be able to match data received from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) – as most institutions are unable to report on students who receive services from DVR. Due to a cybersecurity incident in June 2023, student outcomes data is not provided in this report. CDHE plans to provide student outcomes data, including retention and completion rates, in the 2026 report.

Colorado IHEs report on the military and veteran status of all students, including non-resident students who receive in-state tuition under statutory exceptions. Once enhanced data collections from Colorado IHEs are completed, CDHE will be able to tell a more complete story of military/veteran students and SWD status.

⁵ American Psychological Association. (2012). *Reasonable accommodations explained*.
<https://www.apa.org/pi/disability/dart/toolkit-three>

⁶ U.S. Department of Justice and Civil Rights Section. (n.d.). *Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act*.
<https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>

Data

The data collected represents the academic year 2024-2025 (summer 2024, fall 2024, spring 2025). In the future, this report will transition data collection from two data sources to one. Currently, the data for this report was collected via Colorado’s Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS) and through an aggregate data collection provided by each IHE. In 2026, the data provided in that report will be collected using SURDS only. This will allow CDHE to provide data on retention, persistence, and completion for SWDs currently not available for this report.

Key Findings

- Colorado IHEs have reported an increase year-over-year of SWDs with a 0.9% increase between 2024 and 2025.
- The IHEs with the largest number of SWDs are the University of Colorado Boulder (6,712); Colorado State University Fort Collins (5,262), the University of Denver (2,574), and Metropolitan State University of Denver (2,029).
- The University of Denver had almost twice as many SWDs by percentage (18.2%) as their peer IHEs with larger student populations, which may indicate greater student self-advocacy and/or more comprehensive student support for SWDs.
- The highest race and ethnicity percentages reported for SWDs were the two or more races (9.2%), White (8.7%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (8.4%).
- Active duty or veteran students (12,258) represented the highest percentage of SWDs (12.5%) and represented the highest population who received disability accommodation (12.1%), indicating they are receiving necessary accommodations.

Table 1: Total Number of Students from All Institutions, Compared to the Total Number of Students with a Disability in Academic Years 2023, 2024, 2025

Academic Year	All Students	Students with Disclosed Disabilities	Students with Disclosed Disabilities as a Percentage of Total Students
2023	388,879	25,684	6.6%

2024	393,781	26,743	6.8%
2025	405,157	31,030	7.7%
Percentage change (2024-25)	2.9%	16.1%	0.9%

Note: Student academic year headcounts are one year lagged compared to counts for students with disabilities.

Sources: Colorado Department of Higher Education, Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS).

Table 2: Statewide Total of Students with Disabilities, Academic Year 2024-2025

Demographic	All Students	Students with Disclosed Disabilities	Students with Disclosed Disabilities (Percentage)	Students Receiving Disability Accommodations	Students with Disability Accommodations (Percentage)
Gender					
Female	223,581	19,667	8.8%	17,126	7.7%
Male	181,576	11,171	6.2%	9,498	5.2%
Unknown/Other	N/A	222	N/A	201	N/A
Race and Ethnicity					
American Indian or Alaska Native	3,533	285	8.1%	268	7.6%
Asian	17,203	987	5.7%	866	5.0%
Black or African American	19,880	1,237	6.2%	1,055	5.3%
Hispanic of any race	87,743	5,168	5.9%	4,513	5.1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	927	61	6.6%	56	6.0%
White	227,259	20,072	8.8%	17,241	7.6%
Two or more races	19,287	1,785	9.3%	1,583	8.2%
Unknown	14,450	770	5.3	630	4.4%
Additional Breakdowns					
First Generation	N/A	7,738	N/A	6,804	N/A
Pell Grant Eligible	57,195	7,47	13.1%	6,745	11.8%
Active Duty or Veteran	N/A	1,536	N/A	1,487	N/A
Number receiving service from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (if known)	N/A	37	N/A	35	N/A
U.S. Nonresident	14,875	530	3.6%	424	2.9%
Total	405,157	31,060	7.7%	26,825	6.6%

Note: Student academic year headcounts are one year lagged compared to counts for students with disabilities.

Sources: Colorado Department of Higher Education, Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS).

Data by Institution of Higher Education with Demographics

Visit the [Higher Education Services for Students with Disabilities](#) webpage to review data by institution of higher education in Colorado for previous years.

Data by Institution of Higher Education

Table 3: Institutional Breakdown of Students with Disclosed Disabilities, Academic Years 2022-23 to 2024-2025

Institution	Academic Year 2023			Academic Year 2024			Academic Year 2025			Percent Change Students with Disclosed Disabilities (2024 to 2025)
	All Students	Students with Disclosed Disabilities	Students with Disclosed Disabilities (Percentage)	All Students	Students with Disclosed Disabilities	Students with Disclosed Disabilities (Percentage)	All Students	Students with Disclosed Disabilities	Students with Disclosed Disabilities (Percentage)	
Adams State University	3,833	112	2.9%	3,715	99	2.7%	3,852	175	4.5%	76.8%
Aims Community College	9,037	265	2.9%	9,643	305	3.2%	10,056	395	3.9%	29.5%
Arapahoe Community College	15,853	1,266	8.0%	18,458	873	4.7%	18,447	917	5.0%	5.0%
Colorado Christian University	15,662	558	3.6%	16,658	477	2.9%	17,187	452	26%	-5.2%
Colorado Mesa University	10,038	682	6.8%	10,133	682	6.7%	10,157	913	9.0%	33.9%
Colorado Mountain College	7,424	225	3.0%	7,235	316	4.4%	7,821	389	5.0%	23.1%
Colorado Northwester	1,533	22	1.4%	1,501	27	1.8%	1,672	37	2.2%	37.0%

n										
Community College										
Colorado School of Mines	7,789	775	9.9%	7,872	769	9.8%	8,103	764	9.4%	-0.7%
Colorado State University Fort Collins	36,664	3,521	9.6%	36,856	4,104	11.1%	37,218	5,262	14.1%	28.2%
Colorado State University Global	16,053	289	1.8%	14,535	170	1.2%	15,502	721	4.7%	324.1%
Colorado State University Pueblo	12,257	221	1.8%	11,857	262	2.2%	11,999	226	1.9%	-13.7%
Community College of Aurora	10,701	234	2.2%	11,031	231	2.1%	11,910	313	2.6%	35.5%
Community College of Denver	10,392	358	3.4%	10,907	387	3.5%	11,317	395	3.5%	2.1%
Emily Griffith Technical College	5,854	39	0.7%	6,240	26	0.4%	6,785	51	0.8%	96.2%
Fort Lewis College	3,983	516	13.0%	3,835	542	14.1%	3,783	338	8.9%	-37.6%
Front Range Community College	27,228	1,348	5.0%	28,805	1,738	6.0%	31,536	1,930	6.1%	11.0%

Lamar Community College	844	36	4.3%	814	21	2.6%	848	<10	<10%	<10%
Metropolitan State University of Denver	21,698	1,586	7.3%	21,129	1,772	8.4%	21,767	2,029	9.3%	14.5%
Morgan Community College	1,730	14	0.8%	1,863	22	1.2%	1,934	37	1.9%	68.2%
Northeastern College	1,814	61	3.4%	1,826	65	3.6%	1,931	71	3.7%	9.2%
Otero College	1,451	42	2.9%	1,248	37	3.0%	1,228	13	1.1%	-64.9%
Pickens Technical College	1,049	81	7.7%	983	21	2.1%	1,090	62	5.7%	195.2%
Pikes Peak State College	15,030	769	5.1%	15,754	752	4.8%	16,177	1,044	6.5%	38.8%
Pueblo Community College	8,074	239	3.0%	8,548	162	1.9%	9,185	297	3.2%	83.3%
Red Rocks Community College	9,917	502	5.1%	10,989	588	5.4%	12,139	670	5.5%	13.9%
Regis University	6,676	272	4.1%	5,878	288	4.9%	5,677	301	5.3%	4.5%
Technical College of the Rockies	308	13	4.2%	370	17	4.6%	333	19	5.7%	11.8%
Trinidad State College	2,185	23	1.1%	2,284	39	1.7%	2,381	16	0.7%	-59.0%

University of Colorado Boulder	43,746	4,629	10.6%	44,787	6,050	13.5%	46,985	6,712	14.3%	10.9%
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	15,264	1,654	10.8%	14,894	1,345	9.0%	14,704	1,460	9.9%	8.6%
University of Colorado Denver & Anschutz*	29,833	1,768	5.9%	29,702	1,336	4.5%	29,066	1,279	4.4%	-4.3%
University of Denver	17,202	2,492	14.5%	16,672	2,041	12.2%	16,004	2,574	16.1%	26.1%
University of Northern Colorado	12,017	761	6.3%	10,992	882	8.0%	10,404	876	8.4%	-0.7%
Western Colorado University	5,740	311	5.4%	5,767	297	5.1%	5,959	317	5.3%	6.7%
Total	388,879	25,684	6.6%	393,781	26,743	6.8%	405,157	31,055	7.7%	16.1%

Note: Includes all students who disclosed a disability (including those who did not receive accommodation). Student academic year headcounts are one year lagged compared to the counts for students with disabilities.

* Data for the University of Colorado Denver & Anschutz is undercounted, updated data received after completion of the report.

Sources: Colorado Department of Higher Education, Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS).

Conclusion

Since this report's inception, Colorado has seen a consistent year-over-year increase in students with disabilities (SWDs). This growth may be linked to greater awareness of disability services and improved communication about available accommodation. The institutions reporting the highest numbers of SWDs include the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado State University Fort Collins, University of Denver, and Metropolitan State University of Denver—some of the state's largest campuses. Active duty/veteran students were the most represented in SWDs numbers and were the highest population who received disability accommodations.

Beginning in 2026, this report will streamline data collection by moving from three separate sources to a single, unified source (the Student Unit Record Data System, SURDS). This transition will enable CDHE to include retention, persistence, and completion data for students with disabilities—metrics not previously available. Using SURDS will also accelerate data delivery, providing deeper insights into the needs of both students and the institutions that support them.