

To be considered a state of opportunity in the 21st century, Colorado must provide its adults—both young and old—with access to lifelong education and training. Real opportunities for further education and training must not only be available to recent high school graduates, but also to high school dropouts of all ages who are trying to get back on the Cycle of Opportunity, English language learners, and high school graduates who find their skills are no longer good enough.

In the previous section, we saw that those who do not have high school diplomas can expect annual incomes 40% lower than those who graduate. But the differential between those with only a high school diploma and those who go on to higher education is even greater. Again, while those with high school diplomas only made a median income of \$24,264, those with some college but no degree earned \$27,696, those with associate's degrees earned \$30,773, and those with bachelor's degrees or higher had a median income of \$43,683 (80% higher than those with only a high school diploma).



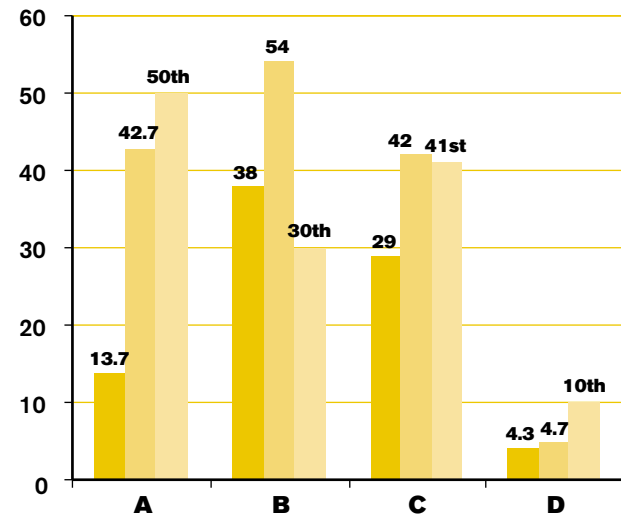


Indicators

We have chosen two indicators for this gateway: access to higher or postsecondary education and access to adult basic education (ranging from basic literacy services to GED preparation) and English as a Second Language (ESL) services. These indicators are important because:

- Education and training beyond high school qualifies one for jobs that on average pay more, provide employer-supported health care benefits, and allow for savings that can be used to buy a home and invest in the education of other family members.
- Coloradans who left high school without adequate knowledge and skills or who have immigrated to the state and seek to improve their English language skills must have access to education and training opportunities that can provide an immediate leg up in the job market and open the door to higher education and training.

Indicator 1: Access to Higher Education



- **Colorado**
- **Top States in the Nation**
- **Colorado's National Ranking**

- A** Chance for college for students from low-income families¹
- B** The percent of high school freshmen in Colorado who are enrolled in college four years later²
- C** The percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in Colorado enrolled in college³
- D** The percent of 25-to 44-year-olds in Colorado enrolled part time in some form of postsecondary education⁴

To understand the level of Colorado's commitment to providing access to higher education opportunities, one has only to look at the following data:

- Colorado ranks last in the nation on providing an opportunity for low-income students to attend college and is in the bottom half of all states on two other important indicators of access for young adults.
- The share of the total state budget that goes to higher education has dropped from 18% of the total in fiscal year 1991 to 12.6% in fiscal year 2001.⁵

Despite the accomplishments of American higher education, its benefits are unevenly and often unfairly distributed and do not reflect the distribution of talent in America. Geography, wealth, income and ethnicity still play far too great a role in determining the educational life chances of Americans.

—James B. Hunt Jr., Chair of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Indicator 2: Access to adult basic education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

There are 340,000 adults in Colorado who are out of school and do not have a high school diploma.⁶ Colorado also has a fast growing segment of its population for whom English is not their native language. Both of these groups need an “on ramp” to the Cycle of Opportunity that includes a strong education and training component.

Among Coloradans over 25 who do not have a high school diploma, only 4% are served through adult basic education and ESL programs.⁷

There are entire regions of the state where there is not a single program to help adults improve their literacy skills, learn English or earn a GED. In areas where there are programs, waiting lists are common.⁸

The fastest growing component of the adult basic education system is ESL, and Hispanics are the fastest growing group of program participants.⁹





Why is access to higher education and adult basic education important to the Cycle of Opportunity?

■ For a high school dropout, gaining access to the Cycle of Opportunity means getting a GED. Without this credential, one cannot gain admission to Colorado's public universities, and it is very difficult to attend a community college. In addition, individuals without a high school diploma or its equivalent are not eligible for postsecondary financial assistance from the state.

■ Getting a high school diploma or a GED not only creates greater opportunity to pursue further education and training, but makes one eligible for jobs that pay more and are more likely to have benefits such as health care.

■ Individuals and families who participate in higher education are more likely to have economic and social security (e.g. homeownership, health insurance coverage) and participate in civic activities such as voting. They also contribute to a stronger tax base and a better educated work force to drive economic growth.

■ The educational attainment of parents is one of the best predictors of children's educational achievement.¹⁰ It is estimated that more than 100,000 children in Colorado live with a parent who does not have a high school diploma.¹¹ Research has shown that programs which successfully increase the educational attainment of mothers have a secondary effect of increasing their children's academic achievement.¹² Expanding access to high quality adult basic education and ESL services for parents is an effective way to improve their children's early literacy development and later school success.

Level of parental education has always exhibited the same general pattern in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports: the higher the level of parental education, the higher the level of student performance.¹³

How do other gateways and barriers impact access to postsecondary and adult education?

■ Completing high school with the skills to succeed is essential to moving through the next gateway of opportunity—further education and training.

Gateway 6 | Access to Education and Training for Adults

■ As was discussed in previous sections, preparation for postsecondary education and training begins before a child enters school and is the result of learning throughout the K-12 years.

■ Because Colorado has a very weak system of adult education that could provide dropouts with a second chance to succeed, it is even more critical that young people stay in school.

What are some of the state programs designed to improve access to adult education and training?

■ Colorado has begun to improve access to postsecondary education for low-income students. Between 1998 and 2002, the state legislature increased appropriations for need-based financial aid more than 50%, from \$30.5 million to \$47.6 million.

■ As part of this increase in financial aid, the governor and state legislature created the Governor's Opportunity Scholarships. Last year, \$6 million was awarded, enabling 1,000 low-income students to attend college at no cost.

■ The Colorado Commission on Higher Education has recently changed the rules on how schools award financial assistance so that it is more focused on lower-income students and provided in amounts sufficient to allow these students to meet the cost of attendance.

Colorado is not doing enough to provide adults with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills, learn English or prepare for the GED. Those services that are available around the state are supported primarily with federal or local funds.¹⁴

What else could Colorado do to increase education and training?

■ Colorado needs to create a system of adult basic education, family literacy and ESL and provide enough funding so that high quality services are available everywhere in the state.

- The state legislature should provide \$1 million next year for the new family literacy program that was created in spring 2002.





- The governor should call for and work to enact legislation that would provide state funding at the same level as its federal grant—about \$4 million—for adult basic education and ESL services.
- The Colorado Department of Education and the Community Colleges of Colorado should agree upon a plan that establishes each agency's unique and complimentary role in providing the broadest array of adult basic education and ESL services statewide.

■ **While some steps have been taken to address the lack of access to higher education, state funding has been losing ground. To address this need, the state should take the following actions:**

- No student admitted to an institution of higher education should have to turn down that opportunity because he or she cannot afford it. Colorado has a long way to go to achieve this goal. Funding for financial assistance should be increased significantly—at least to the level of the state's effort in 1991, with the increase targeted at low-income students through the Governor's Opportunity

Scholarships and other need-based programs.

- In 2001, the governor appointed a Blue Ribbon Panel that is working with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to study the condition of higher education. That panel should make recommendations on how to increase access to higher education for low-income Coloradans that should be considered during the 2003 legislative session.

Where can I get more information about increasing access to adult education and training?

- Colorado Commission on Higher Education, www.state.co.us
- The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, www.highereducation.org
- Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, www.postsecondary.org
 - Colorado Department of Education, Adult Education and Family Literacy Program, www.cde.state.co.us
 - Colorado Literacy Research Initiative, www.coloradoliteracy.net
 - The National Institute for Literacy, www.nifl.gov