

What the press says about the Bell Policy Center's 2005 Education White Papers

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Study finds big leaks in state's education pipeline

By John C. Ensslin

If you think of education in Colorado as a pipeline from kindergarten to college, then you better call the plumber.

The pipe has sprung some major leaks that result in only a relatively small percentage of students eventually getting their college degree, according to the Bell Policy Center.

The Denver-based think tank released six white papers Tuesday on various problems confronting higher education in Colorado. Among their findings were:

- Of Colorado ninth-graders, 29.4 percent do not graduate high school. Another 30.1 of those who do graduate do not go on to college.
- Of the remaining students who go to college, only half graduated from a community college within three years or earned a bachelor's degree from a college or university within six years.
- Since 1994, Colorado has lagged below the national average in terms of the percentage of students from low-income families who attend college.
- The University of Colorado at Boulder lags behind its peer institutions in the percentage of low-income students among its total student body. In 2001, Colorado ranked 46th among other flagship public universities, with a low-income student enrollment of 13 percent.
- Students at Colorado's private, for-profit schools lead the state in the percentage of students who default on their student loans, with an average default rate of 9.2. Some schools have rates as high as 23 percent.

Spiros Protopsaltis, the Bell policy analyst who authored the reports, said he was surprised at how the leakage of students from the system continues after high school.

The numbers of students who fail to graduate high school or go onto college have been widely reported, he noted. But Protopsaltis said he was most surprised to see that only 49.7 percent of students at two-year colleges eventually graduate.

"These are staggering numbers," Protopsaltis said. "It's not just about getting into college, it's about staying and finishing."

A spokesman for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education questioned the Bell study's numbers on community colleges' student retention.

Spokesman Jason Hopfer said the most recent numbers from the community colleges show a

retention rate of 61.2 percent.

But Hopfer agreed that keeping students in college is a major concern.

"I'm not sure there's anything new in this report, but we certainly agree this is an issue," he said.

To determine the level of low-income students attending college in Colorado, Protopsaltis examined the number of federal Pell Grant recipients and which schools they attended.

In 2001, Metropolitan State College of Denver had the largest number of recipients (4,603), while Trinidad State Junior College had the greatest percentage of Pell recipients, with 56 percent.

The same year, CU-Boulder ranked third statewide in the number of Pell recipients: 3,154, or about 13 percent of the overall student body. That was the same level as attended the private University of Denver, Protopsaltis said.

CU spokeswoman Pauline Hale said the university has seen improvement since then in the number of low-income students.

"It's trending up," said Hale, who said the latest figures show low-income students make up 20 percent of the total enrollment.

Hale also noted that this year, as part of a tuition increase package, CU committed to providing a debt-free education to any eligible Colorado student whose family lives at or below the poverty level.

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Achievement gap extends to college Most minorities choose two-year colleges, limiting their earning potential

By Jennifer Brown

More than half of minority college students in Colorado go to two-year colleges instead of four-year schools, hindering their earning potential and leading to a "permanent underclass," a new study says.

By 2018, almost one-third of graduating high school students will be Hispanic, and only 11.4 percent of Hispanics in Colorado are going to college at all, said Spiros Protopsaltis, an analyst with the Bell Policy Center of Denver.

"Unless we take immediate action, we are basically creating a permanent underclass with minority and low-income students," Protopsaltis said Tuesday.

The study also showed the number of minorities enrolling in private, for-profit colleges offering trade and technical training has doubled in 10 years.

That worries Protopsaltis because for-profit institutions have the highest loan default rates among students - 9 percent - compared with 6 percent for public colleges and 2 percent for private nonprofits.

Eleven for-profit colleges in Colorado had loan default rates above 10 percent, including In telliTec College in Grand Junction and Westwood College, which has schools across the country.

"The achievement gap that has attracted so much attention in the K-12 system continues throughout college," Protopsaltis said. "It's not just important to get students in college; it's important that they stay in college and graduate with a degree."

More than half of the state's minority students are concentrated at 10 public colleges, the study shows. Emily Griffith Opportunity School educates twice as many minority undergraduates as the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Metropolitan State College of Denver was second in educating minorities.

Only 20 of every 100 ninth-graders in Colorado finish high school and graduate from a community college within three years or earn a bachelor's degree within six years, the study says. That ranks the state 20th in the nation.

Many people are under the misconception Colorado is doing well at educating its students because the state is No. 2 in the nation for having adults with college degrees, said Wade Buchanan, president of the policy center. In reality, Colorado was the country's No. 2 importer of college graduates from 1989 to 2001.

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State's education system 'leaky'

By Matt Williams

Colorado's education "pipeline" is leaking, according to a newly released report from a Denver-based public policy organization.

Out of 100 Colorado high school ninth-graders, only about 20 will go on to earn a bachelor's degree, according to an analysis from The Bell Policy Center, a liberal think tank. Some are leaking out of the education system more often; underrepresented groups are struggling the most.

Students who want to go to college face "a very troubling gap that starts very early in Colorado based on income and based on race," said Wade Buchanan, The Bell Policy Center's president.

Hispanics, African Americans and Native Americans are lagging far behind their white and Asian counterparts in high school and college graduation rates, enrollment and retention.

"We're doing a pretty mediocre job of getting people out of high school and into college," Buchanan said.

The image of an education pipeline is "en vogue" as educators and advocates try to show that

educational success is tied from preschool all the way to the university level.

It is one finding among others in a series of "white papers" on higher education the center released to the public recently. The Bell Policy Center is a nonprofit organization that advocates openness and accessibility to education for all Coloradans.

Bell policy analyst Spiros Protosaltis wrote the papers over the past year using figures from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and new data sets from the U.S. Department of Education. He called the report one of the most comprehensive snapshots of Colorado higher education available.

Protosaltis said what struck him about CU-Boulder in particular is that only 13 percent of its undergraduates received a federal, need-based Pell Grant as of the most recent comparative data, in 2001.

CU-Boulder ranked third among Colorado public institutions with 3,154 Pell recipients in 2001 - trailing Colorado State University and Metro State. Protosaltis said the figure is misleading because CU ranks in the bottom five among every state's flagship campus for Pell Grant numbers as a fraction of total enrollment.

"Low-income students have a very, very poor access record (statewide)," Protosaltis said.

CU-Boulder spokesperson Pauline Hale said The Bell Policy Center's data might be outdated because 20 percent of resident undergraduates received Pell Grants in 2004.

The University is starting a new program for 2005-2006 called "CU Compact" that guarantees money for tuition, fees and books for students below the poverty line who agree to work for it.

CU is eager to woo underrepresented groups, but the competition among universities and colleges is tremendous, said Kevin MacLennan, CU-Boulder interim admissions director.

"Students in our home state, minority students in our home state are critical to us here and very important to the campus," MacLennan said.

About 75 percent of CU-Boulder freshmen diversity comes from the state of Colorado, he said.

The admissions office has a full-time team that recruits students of color.

"It becomes very competitive as each campus tries to demonstrate to these students that they care about them both from a program perspective but also a scholarship perspective, too," MacLennan said.

According to CU-Boulder's annual diversity report, minorities represent 14 percent of 2004-2005 total enrollment and 13 percent of faculty members identify themselves as minorities. Both percentages are similar to the five-year average. About 17 percent of total state undergraduates were minorities in 2001.

CU President Hank Brown announced three weeks ago he will form a blue ribbon commission of civic leaders to study diversity issues of the CU system.

Jason Hopfer, government relations director for CCHE, said he isn't sure what's new about The Bell Policy Center's new report.

"While it's certainly an important issue to raise, it's one we have certainly acknowledged and have been working on for quite some time," Hopfer said.

CCHE was using the leaky pipeline analogy years ago, he said.

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<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2005/08/29/editorial1.html>

Editor's Notebook

Grim lesson: Education de-valued in Colorado

By Neil Westergaard

Colorado has more college graduates as a percentage of the population than almost any other state in the union.

We are highly educated, with lots of people holding advanced degrees.

Our educational achievement is one of the things we tout when the state goes looking for new businesses to set up shop here.

And yet, we're pretty mediocre when it comes to the number of homegrown college graduates.

People move here after they've gotten their degrees, but their kids -- in raw numbers, anyway -- are less likely to stay in high school, graduate, go on to college and finish than in most other states.

It's just another one of those Colorado idiosyncrasies that makes the rest of the world think we're strange, I guess. We have all this education, spectacular environment and human potential but we still, apparently, don't get it.

We say we value education -- but we don't.

Or at least that's what the numbers suggest in an exhaustive study made public this week by the Bell Policy Center.

If you're in business and you care about where the state might be headed (because your business depends on its success), you might think about getting your hands on a copy (www.thebell.org).

But I'll warn you: It's pretty depressing reading.

The center, which has done most of the heavy lifting in studying the effects of the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, wanted to put some numbers to a problem most educators are aware of but can't get their arms around.

Center President Wade Buchanan argues the numbers "paint a clear and troubling picture of the educational challenges we face in Colorado."

Combing through the data, it's clear that it's not just money, it's attitude.

Somehow, big chunks of our population have come to believe that getting into college is either hopeless or not worth it.

Less than 20 percent of Colorado high school kids who go on to college actually finish with a

degree from a two- or four-year post-secondary school. The rest drop out, get bored or have to get jobs because they can't afford the tuition.

That's a little better than the national average but behind the curve compared to the states we compete with for jobs. Even the best states graduate closer to 30 percent of college enrollees -- which is still pathetic.

Many more never even get that far. For every 100 ninth-graders, about 71 graduate, compared to more than 90 in New Jersey, 85 in Minnesota and 84 in North Dakota, for example.

And for minorities and low-income people, the numbers are terribly grim. It's already been well-documented that a high percentage of minorities don't graduate from high school. And those who stick it out are even less likely to graduate from a two- or four-year college.

Even when the economy was cooking around here, from 1992 to 2001, Colorado ranked 37th in the nation in the percentage of minority kids getting into college.

We can debate all the reasons why this is so. Surely, there are cultural factors, economic considerations and social pressures at play that probably influence educational achievement.

Some kids get off on the wrong foot before they enter elementary school, still others figure college is a financial impossibility, and many have to quit their education to earn a living and support families.

But the rest of society pays a price for all that.

"[It] means the achievement gap becomes an opportunity gap that continues throughout life," Buchanan said. "We are in danger of creating a permanent underclass among the very groups in our society that are growing the fastest. This is a serious threat to our families and kids -- and to the economic prosperity of our state."

The study doesn't attempt to answer some basic questions. For example:

How does a state whose people apparently value a college education for themselves let so many of its kids decide that it isn't worth it?

And if so many people have college degrees, why do so many apparently believe it's OK to dismantle higher education in the name of having the lowest taxes in the nation?

Since 2003, no state in the union has cut support for colleges and universities more than Colorado. We rank 48th in the amount of state tax funds devoted to higher education per \$1,000 of personal income -- the lowest level of state investment in colleges and universities in 40 years.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting real tired of seeing the state I love ranked 37th, 40th, 45th, 48th in key infrastructure investment.

There's a two-part intelligence test on the November ballot. It's titled Referendum C and Referendum D.

The test asks if Colorado -- which already has one of the lowest tax rates in the nation -- should set aside more of the money raised by that low tax rate for education, health care and roads instead of rebating it back to the taxpayers.

Highly educated people should have no trouble figuring it out.

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