



— The Bell Policy Center presents —

# Higher Education in Colorado

PART #1

## Colorado in Context





## Key Highlights

- While postsecondary credentials have become more important, per capita enrollment has not increased over time, especially at public two-year institutions.
- Colorado has high levels of individuals with postsecondary credentials, but this is not driven by in-state attainment, rather the migration of highly educated people to Colorado.
- There are large racial attainment gaps driven by underinvestment in communities of color and a lack of supports for these students in Colorado.
- Cost has become a significant barrier to access and completion.

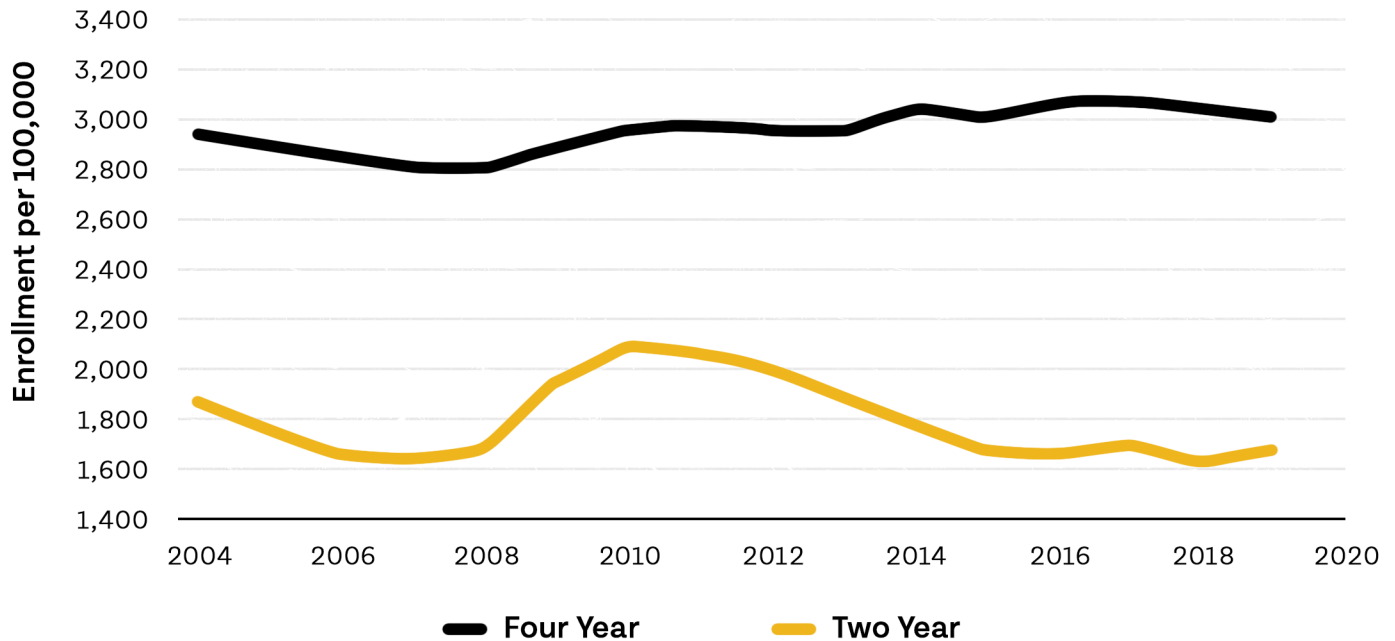
Postsecondary credentials are crucial to finding stable and high paying employment. For this reason, public higher education is an important lever for economic mobility. A well-educated workforce is vital to supply the skilled labor needed by employers. Therefore, postsecondary education a critical contributor to the economic vitality of any region. This brief goes over trends in Colorado's enrollment, completion, educational attainment and cost to students and their families. In doing so, it charts who the state's two-year and four-year public institutions have been serving and how well they have done to provide education to as many people as possible while building a more educated labor force that can contribute to Colorado's prosperity.

## Enrollment Trends

**Total Enrollment:** Overall, Colorado has seen more students enroll at the state's public two-year and four-year institutions over the last 15 years. Total enrollment increased by 22 percent between 2004 and 2019. During the same period, enrollment at four-year institutions increased by 28 percent while enrollment at two-year institutions increased by 12 percent. However, per 100,000 people, enrollment at four-year institutions increased by 2 percent, while it fell by 10.7 percent at four-year institutions. The Great Recession led to a significant increase in enrollment at both two-year and four-year institutions in Colorado. After the recession, the rate of increase of enrollment fell at four-year institutions, although the positive trend continued. Enrollment fell sharply at two-year institutions and by 2019, students at two-year institutions comprised an even smaller share of the population than in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, enrollment at four-year schools increased by 38 percent, outpacing Colorado's enrollment growth at similar institutions, while enrollment at two-year institutions fell by 10 percent.<sup>2</sup>

### Enrollment at Two-Year & Four-Year Public Postsecondary Institutions (per 100,000 of state population) from 2004 to 2019



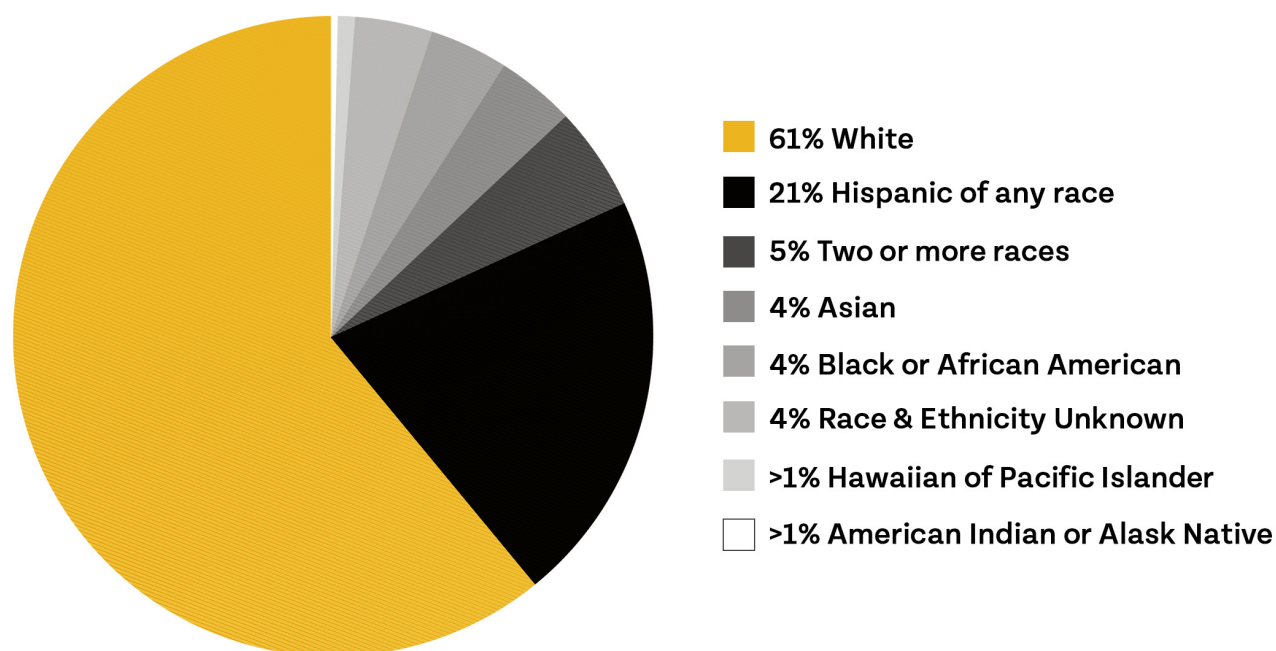
Source: Colorado Department of Higher Education

**Enrollment by Gender:** More women are enrolled at Colorado's postsecondary institutions, however total enrollment for men increased more between 2004 and 2019 than for women (26 percent vs. 19 percent). Enrollment increased by 30 percent for men and 27 percent for women at four-year institutions, leading to a composition of 52 percent women and 48 percent men. At two-year institutions, women's enrollment increased by 8 percent while men's enrollment increased by 18 percent. However, these enrollment trends didn't impact the overall composition of postsecondary institutions by gender. In 2004, women made up 55 percent of all enrolled students at two- and four-year public institutions in Colorado while men made up 45 percent. In 2019, the composition was 54 percent women vs. 46 percent men.<sup>3</sup>

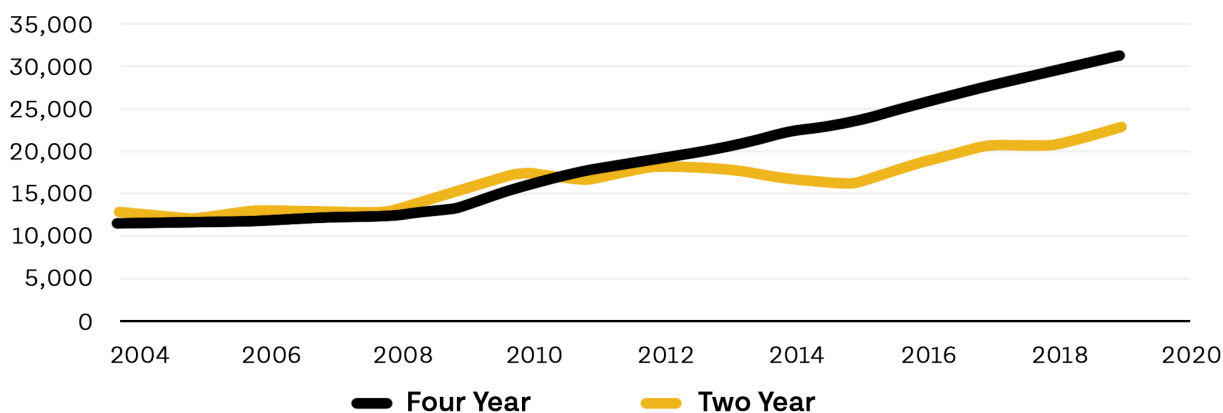
Nationally, enrollment at four-year schools increased by 38 percent, outpacing Colorado's enrollment growth at similar institutions, while enrollment at two-year institutions fell by 10 percent.

**Enrollment by Race:** Colorado's trend of growing enrollment has been driven by increased enrollment from students of color. White student enrollment fell by 1.8 percent between 2004 and 2019. Black student enrollment increased by 34 percent, Hispanic enrollment by 128 percent, Asian enrollment by 25 percent, while Native American student enrollment fell by 28 percent.<sup>4</sup> The drastic increase in Hispanic student enrollment can be accounted for by rising high school graduation rates and an increase in the college-going rate.<sup>5,6</sup> We see most of the increase in Hispanic student enrollment over the period between 2008 and 2019, driven by enrollment to four-year institutions. Between 2009 and 2018, postsecondary enrollment among Hispanic high school graduates increased by 6 percentage points. Consequently, students of color make up a growing share of those enrolled at Colorado's two- and four-year institutions.

## Colorado Student Demographics



## Hispanic Student Enrollment (2004-2019)



Source: CDHE Database

**Enrollment by Residency:** In 2019, 77 percent of students at four-year public institutions were Colorado residents, while 23 percent came from outside the state. This is the culmination of out-of-state enrollment increasing at a faster rate than in-state enrollment over the previous 15 years. In 2004, 84 percent of students at these institutions were Colorado residents. Meanwhile, at two-year institutions, the proportion of in-state to out-of-state students largely remained the same. At two-year institutions, 94 percent of students were in-state residents in 2004 and 6 percent of students were from out-of-state. In 2019, the student composition was nearly the same, at 93 percent to 7 percent.<sup>7</sup> However, these largely positive enrollment trends do not necessarily translate to higher rates of completion.

## Colorado's Educational Attainment

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Sixty-one percent of those who live in Colorado hold a postsecondary credential, outpacing the national average of 51.9 percent. According to Lumina Foundation's A Stronger Nation report, Colorado's rate of credential attainment (referring to the share of the population having a postsecondary credential) has grown by 15.7 percent since 2008.<sup>8</sup> In the 10 years between 2008 and 2018, Colorado managed to increase the proportion of working-age adults with bachelor's degrees, while reducing the share without a high school diploma. In 2009 37 percent of Colorado residents between the ages of 18 and 64 had a bachelor's degree and 10 percent had no high school diploma. In 2018, the share of those holding bachelor's degrees was 44 percent and those without a high school diploma was 7 percent.

Yet these national data belie the true state of attainment rates at public postsecondary institutions since Colorado's high attainment can largely be attributed to importing talent due to in-migration.<sup>9</sup> Colorado Department of Higher Education data shows a 55 percent attainment rate for adult Coloradans, with large gaps by race and ethnicity. Only 29 percent of Latinx Coloradans, for example, have any postsecondary credentials.<sup>10</sup>

These rates have driven efforts in the state to incentivize greater credential completion for Coloradans that are living and growing up in the state and attending Colorado's public institutions.

Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center show Coloradans are completing four-year college degrees at a higher rate than in the early 2010s. The cohort that entered college in 2013 had a completion rate of 59 percent, which is six percentage points higher than the cohort that entered in 2009. However, that completion rate is lower than the national average of 60 percent. Colorado does slightly outpace the national average for completion at two-year public institutions. Colorado had a completion rate of 42 percent, higher than the national average of 40 percent.

Critically, beyond the attainment gaps between those growing up in the state versus those that migrate here as adults, there are also attainment gaps across racial lines. Black, Latinx, and Native American Coloradans lag far behind white and Asian residents.



Colorado's trend of growing enrollment has been driven by increased enrollment from students of color.

#### Educational Attainment Rates by Race

Race	Colorado Attainment (%)	National Attainment (%)
White	59.2	48.5
Black	37.9	32.4
Asian & Pacific Islander	64.1	64.7
Native American	30.9	25.1
Latinx	25.1	25.5

Source: Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Nation, 2021

#### Completion Rates by Race at Four-Year Public Institutions (2014 Cohort)

State	Race & Ethnicity	Total Completion Rate
<b>U.S. Overall</b>	Asian	79.75%
	Black	49.78%
	Hispanic	58.7%
	White	73.38%
<b>Colorado</b>	Asian	70.12%
	Black	49.33%
	Hispanic	52.78%
	White	70.17%

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Completing College State Report 2020

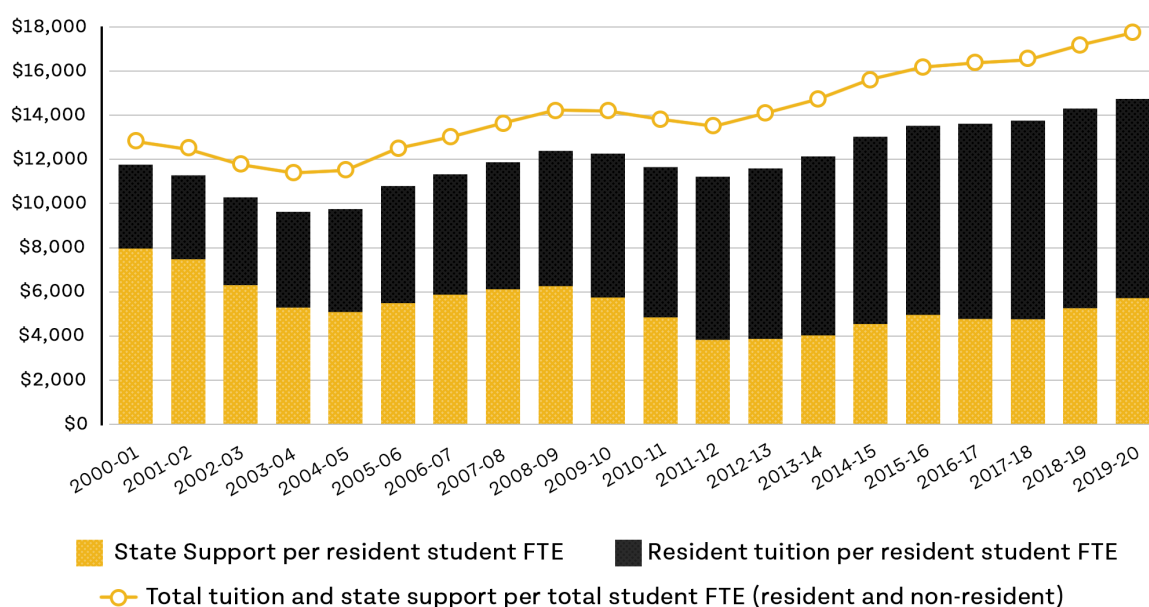
In addition to lagging behind the national rate, completion rates vary among different racial groups. Black and Hispanic students complete their degrees at four-year institutions around 20 percent less than their white and Asian counterparts. This gap indicates the need for solutions to ensure that more students are completing credentials since the benefits of a postsecondary degree do not accrue without completion. This is especially true as we consider the growing costs to students over time. (To find out more about how educational attainment impacts workforce outcomes read our next brief in the series, The Value of Higher Education.)

## Cost to Students

Postsecondary education has become increasingly expensive for students. However, much of the cost burden being placed on students is driven by lower public support for postsecondary education, rather than the shifting price of tuition alone. Colorado's average price per student at four-year public institutions was \$11,408 for the 2019-2020 academic year for in-state students. Average in-district tuition and fees at public two-year institutions were \$4,750 for Colorado during the 2019-20 academic year. Nationally, the average tuition for a public four-year institution for an in-state student is \$10,560 and the average for public two-year tuition is \$3,770.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, average state grant aid in Colorado, through need-based programs like the Colorado Student Grant, was \$600 per student for the 2018-2019 academic year.<sup>12</sup> The national average was \$910 in the same year.<sup>13</sup>

Colorado has mirrored national trends over the last 15 years by shifting a greater share of the cost of attendance to students and their families, as shown in the figure below. However, Colorado also has some of the lowest state support for higher education in the country. According to Illinois State University's Center for the Study of Education Policy, Colorado ranks 45th in the nation for state spending on higher education per capita, meaning it is one of the most reliant on tuition revenue in its public higher education system. (Learn more about the factors driving spending for postsecondary education by reading a subsequent brief in this series, Colorado's Higher Education System's Business Model.)

**Colorado Residents Paying Higher Share of Tuition**



Source: Bell Policy Center analysis of JBC data

## Conclusion

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This survey of enrollment, completion, and costs illustrates that not enough progress has been made in the state to help support its residents attain a postsecondary credential. Colorado lags behind the rest of the country in how much funding it provides its two- and four-year public higher education institutions. The state intends to increase its attainment rate to 66 percent by 2025. In order to meet this goal, the state must address affordability concerns and ensure that institutions have the resources to better serve students of color and other historically underserved groups.

It is crucial that Colorado invests in closing gaps in attainment to ensure the higher education system serves all residents well. Funding is crucial to ensure access to postsecondary education, especially for low-income students. The next briefs in this series dive deeper into how to ensure that a postsecondary education provides a worthwhile investment, how the funding model incentivizes institutions to support different student populations, and possible policy solutions to create a postsecondary system that serves all Coloradans better.



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## Endnotes

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- 1** Colorado Department of Higher Education (2020). Enrollment Data [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://highered.colorado.gov/Data/Colleges/Default.aspx>.
- 2** National Center for Education Statistics (2019). Table 303.70: Total undergraduate fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, sex of student, and control and level of institution: Selected years, 1970 through 2029 [Data File]. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_303.70.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_303.70.asp).
- 3** Colorado Department of Higher Education (2020). Enrollment Data [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://highered.colorado.gov/Data/Colleges/Default.aspx>.
- 4** Colorado Department of Higher Education (2020). Enrollment Data [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://highered.colorado.gov/Data/Colleges/Default.aspx>.
- 5** <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/gradcurrenthistory>
- 6** Colorado Department of Higher Education (n.d.). Pathways to Prosperity: Postsecondary Access and Success For Colorado's High School Graduates. Retrieved April 13, 2021 from <https://highered.colorado.gov/pathways-to-prosperity-postsecondary-access-and-success-for-colorados-high-school-graduates>.
- 7** Colorado Department of Higher Education (2020). Enrollment Data [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://highered.colorado.gov/Data/Colleges/Default.aspx>.
- 8** Lumina Foundation (2021). A Stronger Nation. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#state/CO>.
- 9** Colorado Department of Local Affairs (2018). Characteristics of Colorado in-Migrants and Out-Migrants. Retrieved from <http://hermes.cde.state.co.us/drupal/islandora/object/co:28718/datastream/OBJ/view>.
- 10** Colorado Department of Higher Education. (2019) “The Colorado Goal: 66% Statewide Attainment.” <http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/the-colorado-goal-66-percent-statewide-attainment/>
- 11** College Board (2020). Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing>.
- 12** Colorado Department of Higher Education (n.d.). Financial Aid for Students. Retrieved April 13, 2021 from <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/students/preparing-for-college/financial-aid-for-students>.
- 13** College Board (2020). Trends in in Student Aid [Data File]. Retrieved from <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/student-aid>.