

## Colorado High School Graduation and Completion Rates Connections to Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Strategic Priorities

*All students will graduate ready for college and careers, and prepared to be productive citizens of Colorado, is the vision of the Colorado Department of Education.*

It is widely accepted that completing high school is a significant milestone in a student's life. High school graduates are more likely to be successful in college and careers and become productive and engaged citizens. There are lifelong negative impacts for students who do not complete their high school education, as they struggle with high rates of unemployment, poverty and delinquency.

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) annually reports disaggregated data at the school, district and state level on the percent of students who complete high school. CDE publically reports graduation, completion and still-enrolled rates to provide a detailed picture of high school credential attainment in the state.

**Graduation Rate:** This rate indicates the percent of students who graduate with a high school diploma by meeting the graduation requirements of their local school district. Those who graduate within four years of entering ninth grade are counted in the 4-year graduation rate. Students who need more time to successfully graduate are counted in extended-year graduation rates. The state's 5-year, 6-year and 7-year graduation rates, respectively represent the number of students who graduate from high school within five, six or seven years of entering ninth grade. Colorado is one of 29 states that provides a free public education for students up to 21 years of age.

**Completion Rate:** This rate is determined by combining all graduates with those who receive a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED). There are three approved [high school equivalency tests](#) in Colorado: GED, Hi-SET and TASC. The completion rate is always higher than the graduation rate because it includes both high school graduates and high school equivalency completers.

**Still-Enrolled Rate:** A portion of students who do not finish high school within four years will remain enrolled and are given more time to complete their high school education. These students are counted in the still-enrolled rate.

**Class of 2017:** In the Class of 2017, 80.8 percent completed high school; 10.1 percent of the class remained enrolled in school and still have the opportunity to complete high school; and 9.1 percent dropped out or had other outcomes. Calculations for graduation, completion and still-enrolled rates for the Class of 2017 are outlined in the table below.

	High School 4-Year Graduation Rate	High School 4-Year Completion Rate	High School Still-Enrolled Rate
<b>Time Period</b>	Class of 2017 (4-year cohort)	Class of 2017 (4-year cohort)	Class of 2017 (4-year cohort)
<b>Numerator (graduates/ completers/students)</b>	Number of students receiving a high school diploma within four years of entering 9th grade	Number of high school graduates plus those receiving a high school equivalency diploma within four years of entering 9th grade	Number of students still-enrolled in high school within four years of completing 8th grade.
<b>Denominator (membership base)</b>	Number of students entering 9th grade four years earlier + transfers in and minus verified transfers out	Number of students entering 9th grade four years earlier + transfers in and minus verified transfers out	Number of students completing 8th grade four years earlier + transfers in – verified transfers out
<b>Statewide Class 2017 Rates</b>	79.0% 50,700 graduates / 64,140 membership base	80.8% 51,798 completers / 64,140 membership base	10.1% 6,489 still-enrolled students/ 64,140 membership base

## NATIONAL AND COLORADO DATA

### National

The most current graduation rates published by the U.S. Department of Education show that in school year 2015-16, the cohort graduation rate for public high school students rose to 84.1 percent. This is the highest rate since the measure was first collected in 2010–11. The cohort graduation rate for the Class of 2011 was 79 percent. The following table compares national and Colorado graduation rates, by race/ethnicity and student group. Colorado trails the national 4-year graduation rates. However, when Colorado students are given an extra year to successfully graduate, the state’s 5-year graduation rate rises to 84.1 percent.

High School Graduation Rates for Class of 2016 by Race/Ethnicity and Student Group	National	Colorado
• 4-year graduation rate:	84.1 percent	78.9 percent
• 5-Year graduation rate:	Not reported	84.1 percent
• Asian	90.8 percent	86.0 percent
• White	88.3 percent	84.4 percent
• Latino/Hispanic	79.3 percent	69.9 percent
• Black	76.4 percent	71.8 percent
• American Indian/ Alaska Native	71.9 percent	62.0 percent
• Economically Disadvantaged	77.6 percent	67.8 percent
• English Learner	66.9 percent	61.4 percent
• Students with Disabilities	65.5 percent	57.2 percent
Source: <a href="#">US Department of Education/National Center for Education Statistics</a> and <a href="#">Colorado Department of Education</a>		
Note: For information on rates by cohort (year of graduation) disaggregated by school, district, gender, race/ethnicity and student group, visit the <a href="#">CDE Education Statistics webpage</a> .		

### Colorado Highlights

- 905,019 students attended public school in Colorado in 2016-17. Enrollment has grown every year since 1988, when the state’s total pupil enrollment was 560,081.
- 84.8 percent of local education agencies (e.g., school districts and BOCES) achieve a graduation rate of 85 percent when the 4-year and extended-year rates are considered.
- 79.0 percent of students in the Class of 2017 cohort met the graduation requirement of their local school district and received a high school diploma.
- 84.1 percent marks the 5-year graduation rate for the Class of 2016. This rate is at an all-time high for the 5-year graduation rate. It accounts for the students who graduated within five years of entering ninth grade.
- 11,552 more Colorado students graduated when given two more years in high school to attain their diploma, based on 6-year graduation rates for years 2013-2015.
- 38,519 high school students participated in concurrent enrollment or dual enrollment programs in the 2015-16 academic year, representing more than 30 percent of all 11th and 12th graders. Students enrolled in these programs may attend a fifth year of high school while attending higher education courses, which may lead to attaining both a high school diploma and postsecondary credential.

## CHALLENGES

An analysis of K-12 education statistics indicates there are challenges in the following areas, which impact the level at which students finish high school:

### Lack of Education Stability

- High levels of school mobility and low school attendance rates among students experiencing homelessness, migrant students and students in foster care can negatively impact course completion and progression toward a high school diploma.
- A Colorado study by the University of Northern Colorado shows that students in foster care experience an average of three school moves in high school. With an average of three school moves, the odds of graduating are smaller than exiting without a high school credential (e.g., high school diploma or high school equivalency).
- In 2016-17 the average rate of mobility among Colorado school districts was 18.5 percent, which means approximately one out of five students changed school districts within the school year. The average mobility rate among homeless and migrant students respectively reached 32 percent and 22 percent. In addition, the dropout rate among Colorado students experiencing homelessness is 5.9 percent. This rate is more than twice the state's rate of 2.3 percent.

### Persistent Achievement Gaps

- In Colorado, students from historically underserved backgrounds – specifically those from economically challenged communities, racial minority groups and students with disabilities – continue to fall short of their academic potential and are missing the skill sets to successfully compete.
- Although the graduation gap between minority students and white students has narrowed for six consecutive years, a startling disparity continues to exist. The state's graduation gap between racial minority students and white students for the Class of 2017 stands at 10.8 percentage points.
- A closer look at the 6-year graduation rate for the Class of 2015, shows that minority male students experience the lowest rate of graduation (76 percent) among their peers, and white female students attain the highest graduation rate (91 percent). This represents a graduation gap of 15 percentage points. The 4-year graduation gap between these student groups was 18 percentage points.

### Need to Accelerate Student Re-engagement

- Approximately 7.5 percent of each graduating class are classified as “unrecovered dropouts”. This means approximately 5,000 high school students per graduating class disengage from their education and leave school without finishing their high school education.
- There is an economic imperative to re-engage these youth in their education to ensure that they are postsecondary and workforce ready.
- The annual dropout rate among students who attend alternative high schools is 18 percent. Alternative schools represent five percent of the 7th-12th grade pupil count, however, they disproportionately account for 41 percent of the student dropout count.
- The high school dropout recidivism rate in Colorado is 10.6 percent. This means approximately one in 10 students who re-enroll in high school after dropping out in the previous school year, will again exit school without finishing.

## Overall Systems Gap

- There is an economic imperative that all students finish high school ready for college and/or living wage jobs. With higher levels of educational attainment, there tends to be a higher rate of participation in the labor force, as well as a higher earnings potential.
- Nearly all Colorado jobs in the higher earning tier require formal education or training beyond high school.
- By 2020, three out of four jobs in Colorado will require education or training beyond high school. However, only 85 percent of Colorado students are graduating within six years of entering ninth grade and 2,500 students are attaining an industry credential while still in high school.

## PRIORITIES

*The following priorities have been identified in CDE's strategic plan for 2017-2021:*

- **Expand High School Options to Ensure All Students are Ready for College and/or Living-Wage Jobs**
  - *Students who graduate and work in Colorado need in-demand skills that meet business, industry and higher education standards.*
  - *In partnership with the Colorado Department of Higher Education and Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, CDE has set goals that by 2021, the number of Colorado high school students attaining an industry credential will increase by 100 percent and 50 percent of Colorado students will earn college credit while in high school.*
- **Expand Access and Opportunity for Historically Underserved Students**
  - *Empower schools and districts in their efforts to increase access and opportunity and ultimately reduce the pervasive influence that systemic inequities have on student outcomes.*
- **Develop a Strong Pipeline of High-Quality Teachers and Principals**
  - *Research shows that teachers have a bigger impact on student performance than any other school-based factor. Ensure that every classroom has an effective educator and all students are prepared for college, career and life.*

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The following solutions are in response to state challenges and priorities to accelerate progress in state graduation and completion rates:

- **Increase awareness and availability of public school choice options designed to support students who are at risk of not graduating.**
  - Support community implementation strategies and expansion of options, such as apprenticeships and industry credentials.
  - Foster expansion of innovative models and promising practices that are making a difference and bring innovative practices to scale for the benefit of more students statewide.
  - Identify noteworthy gains in high school completion as well as college- and workforce-readiness outcomes for students.

- **Promote Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP) as a tool to help students complete high school and plan for their futures.**
  - Leverage the ICAP process to increase students’ awareness of seamless pathways and opportunities beyond high school.
  - Equip all educators to have meaningful career conversations with students.
- **Engage community partners as a resource for getting students to the finish line and planning for their futures.**
  - Expand work-based learning opportunities to help students prepare for living-wage, in-demand jobs.
  - Assist educators in building effective partnerships with business, based on existing infrastructures.
  - Collaborate with other state agencies, libraries, area workforce development boards and community partners to meet students’ needs, including participating in Two- Generation programs that meet the workforce training needs of students and their caregivers simultaneously.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This report was prepared by the CDE Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement. Contact: Judith Martinez, Martinez\_j@cde.state.co.us.

## Resources

- [CDE Strategic Plan and Colorado Education Facts and Figures](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/aboutcde) - [www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/aboutcde](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/aboutcde)
- [Colorado Education Statistics](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval) - [www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval)
- [Colorado Department of Higher Education](https://higher.ed.colorado.gov) - <https://higher.ed.colorado.gov>
- [Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement](http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention) - [www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention](http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention)
- [Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Pathways](http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary) - [www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary](http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary)
- [Talent Found Report by Colorado Workforce Development Council](http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc) - [www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc](http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc)
- [U.S. Department of Education/What Works Clearinghouse](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc) - <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>