***The Economic Imperative***

**Today, nearly every good job requires some postsecondary education and/or training (e.g., an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, certificate, or apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training). All students need to be academically prepared to compete for good jobs in the global economy.**

In 1950, 60% of jobs were classified as unskilled, attainable by young people with high school diplomas or less. Today, less than 20% jobs are considered to be unskilled.[[1]](#endnote-1)

* ***80%*** of Colorado jobs are middle or high skills (i.e., require some postsecondary education or training).
* ***Yet only 46%*** of Colorado’s adults have some postsecondary degree (associate’s or higher).[[2]](#endnote-2)

More education is associated with higher earnings and higher rates of employment in Colorado.[[3]](#endnote-3)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Mean Income*** | ***Education Level*** | ***Unemployment*** |
| $11,666 | HS Dropout | 27% |
| $27,325 | HS Graduate | 12% |
| $31,862 | Some College | 8% |
| $62,609 | Bachelors & Above | 5% |

***The Equity Imperative***

**Far too many students drop out or graduate from high school unprepared for success, closing doors and limiting their options and opportunities – in particular minority and low-income students.**

Colorado’s achievement gaps begin in the earliest grades and extend through college enrollment and admissions.[[4]](#endnote-4)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***All*** | ***White*** | ***Black*** | ***Hispanic*** | ***Low SES*** |
| *4th Grade Math Proficiency* | 47% | 60% | 21% | 26% | 28% |
| *8th Grade Reading Proficiency[[5]](#endnote-5)* | 40% | 49% | 22% | 22% | 20% |
| *HS Graduation Rate[[6]](#endnote-6)* | 76% | 82% | 63% | 59% | N/A |
| *College Completion Rate[[7]](#endnote-7)* | 53% | 56% | 41% | 42% | N/A |

***The Expectations Gap***

**The bar has been set too low for too long, keeping students from reaching their full potential. If we want students to achieve more, we need to expect more.**

* ***53%*** of Colorado’s students in two-year colleges and ***20%*** of Colorado’s students in four-year colleges require remediation.[[8]](#endnote-8)
* About half (***53%***) of students who enter public colleges in Colorado earn their degrees.
* ***34%*** of employers deem the preparation of newly hired employees with only a high school diploma as “deficient,” (and only 16% find their preparation “excellent.”) [[9]](#endnote-9)
* ***49%*** of employers surveyed noted they anticipate requiring higher levels of education for most jobs – and another ***60%*** noted more specific technical skills will be required – in the next 3-5 years.[[10]](#endnote-10)

All too often, students regret not working harder once they leave high school. [[11]](#endnote-11)

***The College- and Career-Ready Agenda***

Over the past five years, states have driven the college- and career-ready agenda – a policy agenda that seeks to ensure all students graduate high school, and graduate ready for their next steps.

Colorado is among the states that have made college and career readiness a priority for all students.[[12]](#endnote-12)

* In May 2010, Colorado adopted the Common Core State Standards.
* As part of the state's assessment system, Colorado administers the ACT to all 11th-grade students.

*Colorado is 18 states with high school tests used by higher education for admissions/placement decisions letting students know if they are ready for college-level coursework while still in high school and giving them time to address any readiness gaps.*

* Colorado is a governing state in Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a group of states working to develop a common assessment system using Race to the Top Common Assessment funds.
* Colorado has met six of the ten State Actions identified by the Data Quality Campaign, providing a foundation for strong and sound student-level data collection and use.

*Colorado is one of 26 states with a P-20 longitudinal data system that regularly matches student-level K-12 and postsecondary data.*

* Colorado tracks three indicators of college and career readiness but still needs to expand its use of indicators to get a more complete picture of how their students are faring in K-12 and beyond.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **College- and Career-Ready Indicator** | **Publicly Reported** | **State Set Goal** | **Incentive to Improve** | **Account-ability Formula** |
| CCR Diploma |  |  |  |  |
| CCR Assessment |  |  |  |  |
| Postsecondary Remediation | **YES** |  |  |  |
| Exceeding CCR | **YES** |  |  |  |

***How Colorado Can Further Advance***

***the College- and Career-Ready Agenda***

* …Fully realize the promise of the college- and career-ready standards by implementing them fully and successfully, taking into account the related curricular, professional development, and policy changes.
* …Adopt college- and career-ready graduation requirements, aligned to the Common Core State Standards, to ensure all students are prepared, and eligible, for entry into college and skilled careers.
* …Remain committed to the goals of PARCC and developing and administering a next-generation, computer-based assessment system anchored by college- and career-ready tests in high school that will let students know if they are ready for college-level coursework and measure the full range of the CCSS.
* …Continue to make progress on the state’s data collection efforts, particularly around making student data available to relevant stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and counselors.
* …Re-examine the state’s K-12 accountability system to determine how it can reward measures of college and career readiness.

1. Carnevale, Anthony P. and Donna Desrochers (2003). *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-12 Reform,* Education Testing Services. [www.learndoearn.org/For-Educators/Standards-for-What.pdf](http://www.learndoearn.org/For-Educators/Standards-for-What.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Skills to Compete <http://www.skills2compete.org> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. U.S. Census Bureau (2011). *Current Population Survey*. Figures are based on the total persons in the civilian labor force. [www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps\_table\_creator.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps_table_creator.html) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Kids Count Data Center. 2010, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Analysis of NAEP data downloaded from nationsreportcard.gov [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Education Week (2009). *Graduation in the United States*. [www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2012/06/07/](http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2012/06/07/) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. NCES. *IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey,* analyzed by National Center for Management of Higher Education Systems. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Remedial/FY2009/2009_Remedial_relfeb10.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Corporate Voices for Working Families & Civic Enterprises (2011). *Across the Great Divide: Perspectives of CEOs and College Presidents on America’s Higher Education & Skills Gap.* [www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/across-the-great-divide.pdf](http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/across-the-great-divide.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Achieve/SHRM [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. College Board (2011). *One Year Out: Findings From A National Survey Among Members Of The High School Graduating Class Of 2010.* [www.collegeboard.org/OneYearOut](http://www.collegeboard.org/OneYearOut) [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Achieve (2012). *Closing the Expectations Gap 2012: 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Careers.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-12)