

TRANSITIONS INTO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Increasingly, new jobs and jobs with high growth potential require at least some postsecondary education. This includes not only traditional baccalaureate and graduate degrees, but also associate's degrees and certificates from a variety of institutions. In addition, fast-paced technological change, global competition, and the increased tendency to change jobs and careers will mean that virtually every employee will require additional education and training along the way.

For these reasons, Colorado seeks to double the number of certificates and degrees awarded by Colorado's postsecondary institutions. This issue brief discusses current opportunities for and barriers to reaching that goal.

Making Postsecondary Education Accessible for All Students

There are many pathways to public and private postsecondary education and training in Colorado:

- Apprenticeships
- Technical colleges and occupational schools
- Community colleges
- Four-year colleges and universities

40% -- the chance that a Colorado 9th grader will be in college by age 19

34% -- the percentage of Colorado's 18-24 year-olds who are enrolled in college

Source: Measuring Up 2006

An important access point to postsecondary education for many students is concurrent or dual enrollment, which allows high school students to earn both high school and college credit for certain college-level courses they successfully complete while in high school. Colorado currently has a number of concurrent enrollment options, see box on page 4.

Current challenges to accessibility include:

- limited availability of incentives and information for high school students to encourage them to continue to postsecondary education;
- lack of uniform access to concurrent enrollment options, often dependent on school district decisions and geographic location;
- deterrence of innovative programs resulting from the separate funding streams for K-12 and postsecondary education;
- confusion over the variety of concurrent enrollment options and their various funding mechanisms;
- student-to-counselor ratios that are much higher than the national average; and,
- residency requirement for concurrent enrollment options funded by the College Opportunity Fund (COF).

Making Postsecondary Education Attainable for All Students

Students must be prepared for success in their postsecondary education experience. In 2006, 29.8% of all first-time degree-seeking students entering Colorado's public colleges and universities required remedial education in reading, math, and/or writing. This included 20% of all students entering four-year colleges and 56% of all students entering two-year programs. Less than half (45%) of first-year community college students return for their second year, while 52% of full-time students at four-year institutions will complete a degree within six years.

Several recent policy initiatives have sought to increase the quality and rigor of K-12 education. For example, students seeking to enter Colorado's four-year institutions must take a rigorous high school course load under the new Higher Education Admission Requirements. Task forces have been set up to address issues of online education and teacher quality. HB 1118 requires the State Board of Education to recommend guidelines for high school graduation requirements. The work of all of these groups will be important in ensuring that students are prepared for success in postsecondary education.

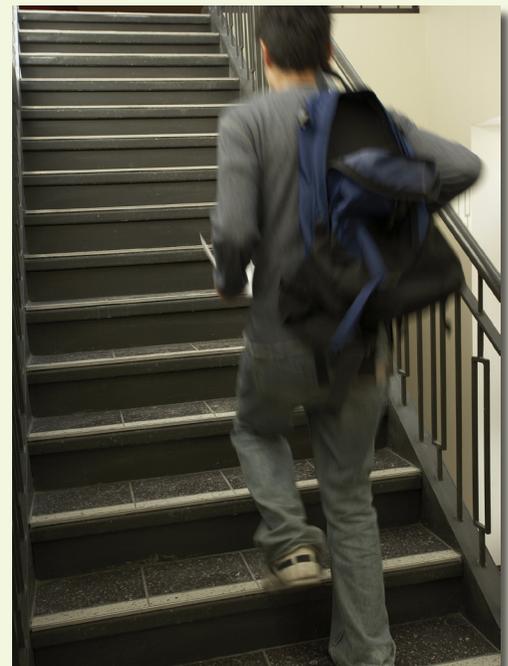
Challenges to attainability include:

- lack of alignment between K-12 and higher education content and assessments;
- lack of access to rigorous coursework in some rural and less affluent school districts;
- failure to plan for postsecondary education by taking appropriate coursework;
- high school graduation requirements that vary widely among districts;
- lack of consistent policies regarding basic skills and remediation;
- lack of understanding of the relevance of academic proficiency to workforce preparation; and,
- inconsistent approaches to/support for post-secondary preparation.

Making Postsecondary Education Affordable for All Students

Many students do not attend postsecondary education because they perceive that they cannot afford it. Historically, Colorado has ranked low in the percentage of low-income students moving on to postsecondary education. Colorado recently enacted the College Opportunity Fund (COF), representing the state subsidy for higher education available to every student.

The challenges to affordability are both perceived and real. Even with the COF, the cost of postsecondary studies is seen by many as prohibitive. Information about financial aid and scholarships can be limited. In some cases, conflicting concurrent enrollment policies lead to students not getting credit for higher education courses taken in high school. Some community colleges are reporting that Colorado students are choosing to attend postsecondary education in neighboring states due to cost issues.



Issues to Consider:

- Should the state integrate high school and postsecondary education? How might such a system be designed and funded?
- How can Colorado ensure that all high school students have access to concurrent enrollment options? Should current concurrent enrollment options be consolidated? Should current funding streams and responsibilities be reconsidered in order to maximize participation?
- Should Colorado create a statewide diploma awarded to students completing a rigorous high school curriculum (in addition to the diplomas awarded by their districts)? What benefits could flow from such a diploma?
- How can Colorado incentivize innovative school district/regional partnerships leading to postsecondary degrees and certificates?
- What role should career and technical education play in planning for transition to postsecondary education? How can the state incentivize quality career and technical education (CTE) partnerships? Should there be a statewide diploma for a rigorous CTE curriculum? What changes might need to be made to the Colorado Vocational Act?
- How can Colorado assist its districts in providing a rigorous high school curriculum aligned with appropriate assessments and transitions to post-secondary studies?
- How can Colorado ensure that students and their families in all districts receive timely information and assistance in preparing for postsecondary education? How can parental engagement be maximized?
- How can the state encourage the use of relevant assessments in secondary schools that provide information about potential success in postsecondary education?
- How should Colorado address the gaps in post-secondary guidance occasioned by a counselor work-load that is double the nationally recommended rate?
- How should Colorado approach the challenges of lack of parental engagement?
- How can Colorado address the post-secondary educational needs of undocumented students?



CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT OPTIONS IN COLORADO

Name of Program	Eligibility	Who Pays	# of Courses Allowed	Oversight
Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)	Juniors and seniors who are ready for college work in one or more areas	School district, if the student earns a C or better in the course	Two per semester, although the district may agree to pay for more. Does not apply to summer courses	CDE
Fast Track program	Seniors who have completed their high school graduation requirements	School district	Unlimited	CDE
Institutional Extended Studies programs (e.g., CU Succeeds)	Varies by institutions	Students, at discounted tuition rates	Varies	CCHE
Special Non-Degree-Seeking Student Enrollment	Any high school student age 16 or older who meets applicable academic prerequisites and placement tests	Student	Unlimited	CCHE
Early College and Middle College programs	Students enrolled in high schools with early/middle college programs	Early and Middle Colleges	May be limited by school districts	CDE
Fast College Fast Jobs	9th grade students enrolled in “target high schools” may receive a high school diploma and an associates degree or CTE certificate within 5 years	District receives 100% PPOR for each student enrolled in less than 12 higher education hours; 85% for each student enrolled in 12 or more higher education hours. Districts and IHEs negotiate payment.	Negotiated	CDE
AP/IB Courses	Students taking AP or IB courses in high school who earn specified test scores; test scores earning credit determined by institutions	School district provides courses/Student may be required pay for tests (absent waivers)	Unlimited	College Board/IB work with individual schools



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