

Educational Attainment of Colorado Adults Declined, 1999-2002

Largest Drops for Hispanics, Women, and Adults Ages 25-44

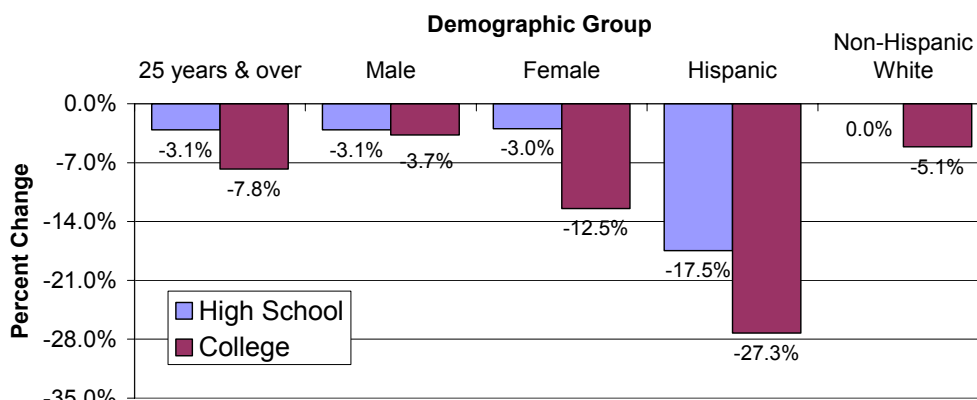
Colorado has long been identified as one of the best-educated states in the nation. To a great extent, that is still true. But, educational attainment trends over the past few years are alarming because of the direction in which they lead. Of particular concern are declines in educational attainment levels for Hispanics, women, and adults between the ages of 25 and 44.

Colorado Adults Age 25 & Over

Between 1999 and 2002, the percentage of Coloradans age 25 and over who had graduated from high school slipped from 90.4 to 87.6 percent—a drop slightly over three percent. At the same time, the percentage of that group who had graduated from college fell from 38.7 to 35.7 percent—a loss of about eight percent.

For this age group, figures available by gender and ethnicity indicate that both graduation percentages for Hispanics and the college percentage for women are plummeting in Colorado.

Chart 1. Percent Change in High School & College Graduation Levels for Coloradans Ages 25 & Over, 1999-2002



Source: Current Population Survey, March 1999, and Current Population Survey, March 2002.

Hispanics

In 1999, almost 70 percent of Hispanics were high school graduates; in 2002, fewer than 58 percent had diplomas—a decrease of 17.5 percent. Over the same period, college graduates among Hispanics slumped from over 12 percent to less than 9 percent—a plunge of more than 27 percent.

Women

Between 1999 and 2002, the percentage of women with high school diplomas edged down from 90.7 to 88.0 percent—a loss of three percent. Those high school graduation percentages and the percentage decrease were almost identical to those for men. But, at the college level, it is a different story. During that interval, the percentage of women with college degrees slid from almost 37 to barely 32 percent—a double-digit drop of almost 13 percent.

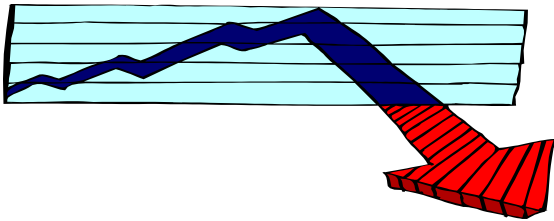


Table 1. Percentages of Colorado Adults With High School Diplomas, 1999-2002

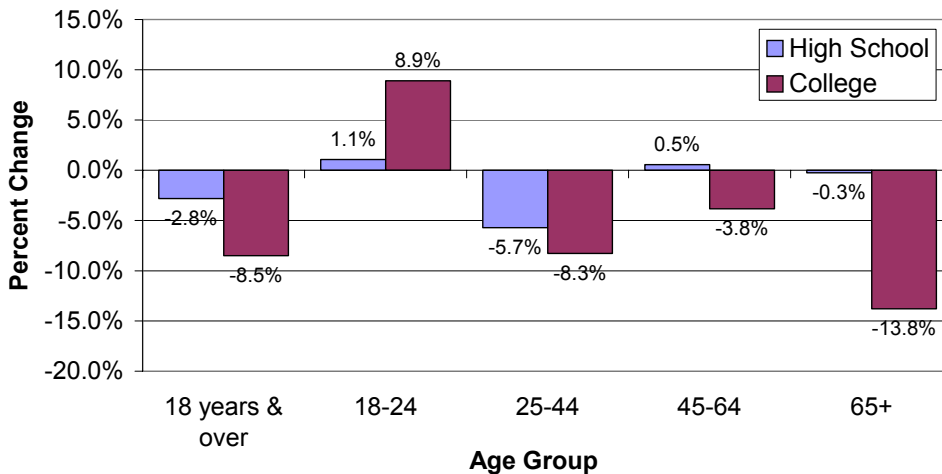
Characteristic	1999	2002	Percent Change
18 years & over	88.5%	86.0%	-2.8%
18-24	74.5%	75.3%	1.1%
25-44	92.7%	87.4%	-5.7%
45-64	91.1%	91.6%	0.5%
65+	79.6%	79.4%	-0.3%
25 years & over	90.4%	87.6%	-3.1%
Male	90.1%	87.3%	-3.1%
Female	90.7%	88.0%	-3.0%
Hispanic	69.9%	57.7%	-17.5%
Non-Hispanic White	93.6%	93.6%	0.0%

Source: Current Population Survey, March 1999, and Current Population Survey, March 2002.

Colorado Adults Age 18 & Over

Between 1999 and 2000, the percentage of Coloradans age 18 & over who had graduated from high school dipped from 88.5 to 86.0 percent—a decrease of almost three percent. At the same time, the percentage of that group who had graduated from college slumped from 35.3 to 32.3 percent—a loss of almost nine percent. For those age 18 and over, figures available by age group indicate a very mixed picture.

Chart 2. Percent Change in High School & College Graduation Levels for Coloradans Ages 18 & Over, 1999-2002



Source: Current Population Survey, March 1999, and Current Population Survey, March 2002.

Age Groups

The only age group for which graduation percentages actually improved significantly was the 18 to 24 age group. While the increase in high school graduates—from 74.5 to 75.3 percent—barely exceeded one percent, the percentage of them who had graduated from college rose from 10.1 to 11.0 percent—an improvement of almost nine percent.

The 25-44 age group lost a significant proportion of high school graduates, falling from 92.7 to 87.4 percent—a decline of almost six percent. This age group lost even more college graduates, plunging from 41.1 to 37.7 percent—a decrease of more than eight percent.

The only other noteworthy age group is those age 65 and over. While there was almost no change in this group's proportion of high school graduates, its percentages of college graduates fell from 28.3 to 24.4 percent—a plummet of almost 14 percent.

Issues

These statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys raise many questions:

1. Why has Colorado experienced a decline in the educational attainment of its population in recent years?
2. Why were three specific groups—Hispanics, women, and adults who were in their mid-twenties to mid-forties in 2002—less likely than their 1999 counterparts to have graduated from high school and college?
3. What, if any, role has been played by the economic downturn of the past few years in this historic downturn in Colorado's levels of educational attainment?
4. And, finally, what can be done to reverse these trends, especially for the groups hardest hit by this educational "recession?"

Table 2. Percentages of Colorado Adults With College Degrees, 1999-2002

Characteristic	1999	2002	Percent change
18 years and over	35.3%	32.3%	-8.5%
18-24	10.1%	11.0%	8.9%
25-44	41.1%	37.7%	-8.3%
45-64	39.1%	37.6%	-3.8%
65+	28.3%	24.4%	-13.8%
25 years and over	38.7%	35.7%	-7.8%
Male	40.5%	39.0%	-3.7%
Female	36.9%	32.3%	-12.5%
Hispanic	12.1%	8.8%	-27.3%
Non-Hispanic White	43.1%	40.9%	-5.1%

Source: Current Population Survey, March 1999, and Current Population Survey, March 2002.



SOURCES

- U.S. Census Bureau, **Current Population Surveys, March 1999-2002**. Data tables available at: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html>.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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