



COLORADO

Department of
Higher Education

2023 SMART ACT Report

In 2023, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) and Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) released a new statewide plan focused on advancing the economic mobility of Colorado's learners and earners by aligning postsecondary talent development with industry and statewide needs. [*Building Skills in an Evolving Economy*](#) sets a bold vision to increase the number of learners not being served by our postsecondary ecosystem by offering those students a path forward. The plan prioritizes educational pathways that are economically viable –those that lower costs for students, invest in proven learner support programs, and increase collaboration with employers.



Three strategic pillars underpin the goal and the opportunities available to institutions, policymakers, and others that affect change.

Strategic Pillar #1:

Identify and improve pathways with a negative return on investment

Strategic Pillar #2:

Focus on equity and enable more learners to succeed

Strategic Pillar #3:

Catalyze increased postsecondary/workforce collaboration, alignment, and co-creation of new pathways that offer a positive return on investment

The plan also calls out promising practices by Colorado's colleges and universities aligned to each of the strategic pillars. The Commission will lead the development and future iterations of Colorado-specific measures of value through the engagement of a technical working group, which will convene shortly after this plan is released. CDHE will continue to develop a more robust data system to accompany the plan.

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New measures of postsecondary success

CCHE and CDHE have begun work to reimagine the ways in which data are used to elevate student experiences and show the value of higher education. The updated Strategic Plan and [HB22-1349](#) directs CCHE and CDHE to accomplish a variety of tasks related to better use of data to support student postsecondary and workforce success. CCHE has convened a Technical Working Group of local stakeholders and national experts to determine and define:

- Colorado-specific measures of postsecondary value, including a “minimum economic viability threshold” focused on ensuring that Colorado learners, at a minimum, can count on their investment in postsecondary education enabling an increase in their lifetime earnings (over what they would have made had they not pursued postsecondary education) to exceed their cost of attendance (inclusive of the opportunity cost of foregone wages). (CCHE Strategic Plan)
- “Student success measures that measure the progression of students through postsecondary education and the impact of postsecondary pathways on a student’s career opportunities and success. The student success measures must include postsecondary success measures and workforce success measures.” (HB 22-1349)

CDHE has received important feedback and direction from the Technical Working Group on how best to calculate measures of value related to postsecondary education. CDHE will begin an iterative process to implement these recommendations using the best data available along with visualizations to display measures to various stakeholders.

Previous measures of postsecondary success



While new measures of postsecondary student success, new data systems, and new visualizations are being developed, CDHE is required to report on various measures outlined in the previous Strategic Plan (pursuant to CRS 23-1-108 (1.5)). These measures include annual credential completions for all undergraduate students, credential completions for African American or Black, Hispanic or Latinx, and American Indian or Alaska Native and Pell undergraduate students, and overall retention rates. These data can be viewed via [CDHE’s Strategic Plan dashboard](#). This dashboard is designed to meet reporting requirements, support governing boards in setting goals and provide data in a publicly accessible way. This dashboard will be enhanced as data systems are developed, new measures are set, and updates to statute are made.

As a result of [CDHE’s data incident](#) in Summer 2023, data from Academic Year 2022-2023 are not available, limiting CDHE’s ability to update our Strategic Plan dashboard (pursuant to CRS 23-1-108 (1.5) outlining reporting requirements for CDHE’s “master plan”). CDHE’s work to repair data systems will continue into 2024. As data systems are repaired and newer data related to postsecondary student success measures are available, CDHE will provide updates via an updated Strategic Plan dashboard as well as other visualizations and reports.

