

COLORADO

STATE SUMMARY
2025

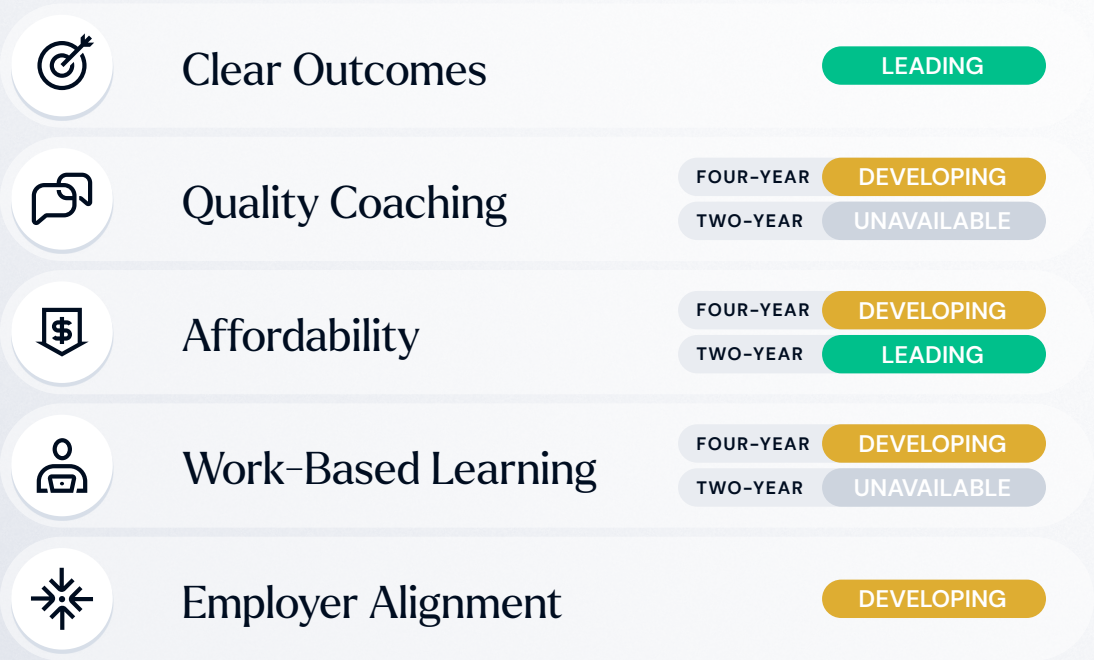
Colorado at a glance

THE STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX combines research-backed strategies for improving education-to-career outcomes with benchmarking measures to track progress for all 50 states, giving policymakers and institutions a framework for strengthening the link between education and opportunity.

For each state, the Index reports the percentage of students who experience a positive return on investment and summarizes progress in five key areas for improving success beyond completion: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. States are grouped into four categories: Leading (at the forefront, demonstrating strong progress); Advanced (substantial progress); Developing (early stages of improvement); and Foundational (just beginning their journey).

Positive ROI

65%



State
Opportunity
Index

strada

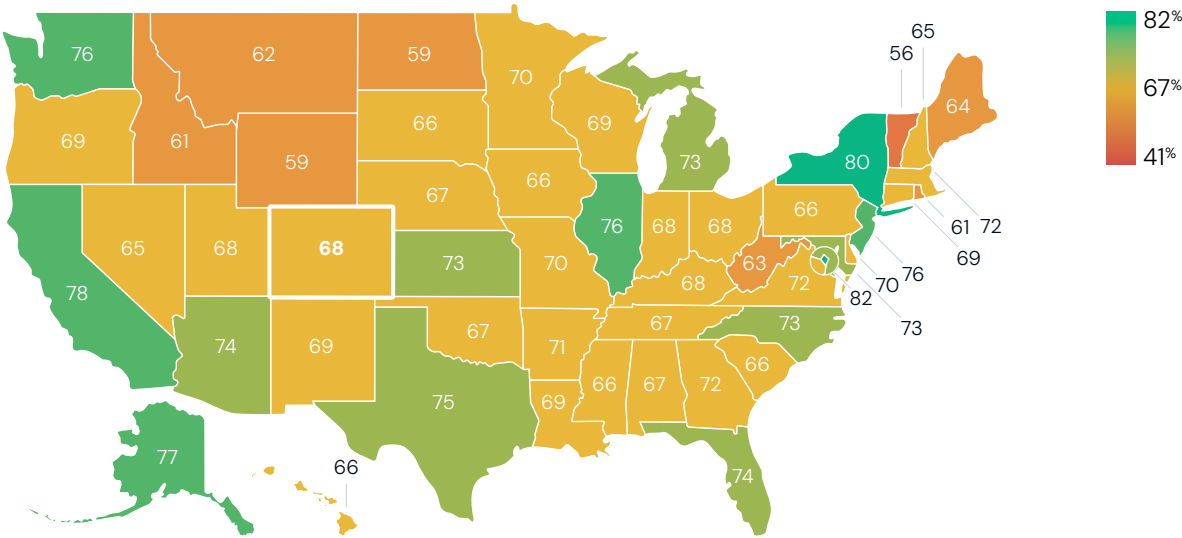
Positive ROI

Colorado

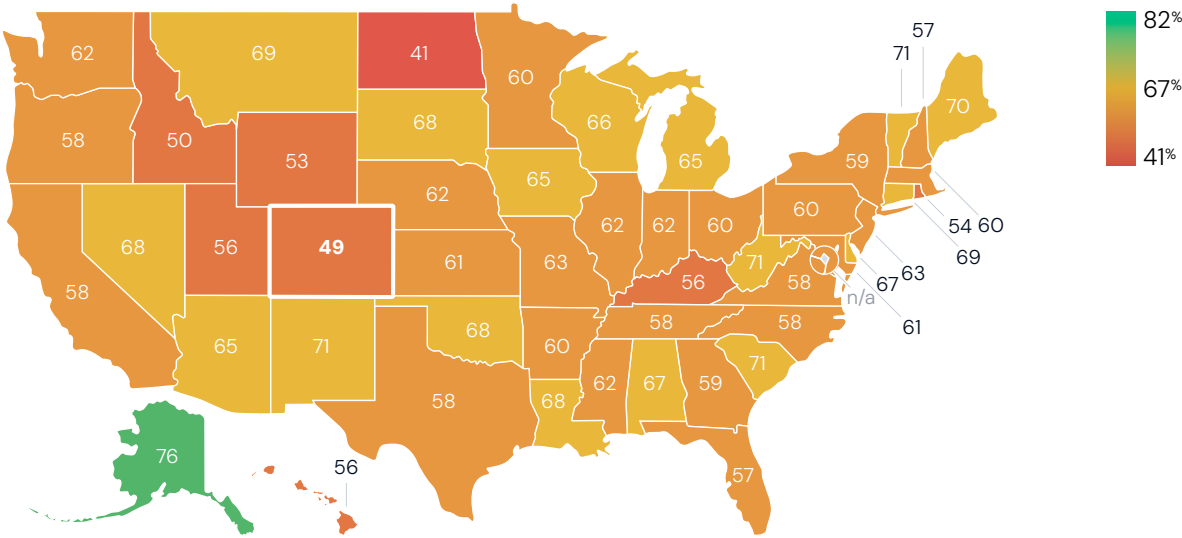
The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of public college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years.

	Colorado	U.S.
Overall	65%	70%
Bachelor's	68%	73%
Associate	49%	60%

Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – bachelor's degrees



Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – associate degrees





Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. The Clear Outcomes measure is based on 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity.

COLLECT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
1 Includes learner-level and program characteristic data for nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs	Colorado collects enrollment and credential outcome data for WIOA-eligible training providers. Colorado does not currently link nondegree and noncredit data to employment outcomes.	FOUNDATIONAL
2 Examines earnings by occupation, pay rate, and work location	Colorado collects work location but does not collect occupation or pay rate.	ADVANCED

INTEGRATE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
3 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after postsecondary education and training completion, and over time	Colorado has extensive integration of postsecondary education and training and employment data but limited public reporting of disaggregated employment outcomes. The state's integration and publication include: (i) public four-year institutions to employment, (ii) private four-year institutions to employment, (iii) community colleges to employment, and (iv) WIOA-eligible training providers to employment. Integrated data for public four-year institutions, private four-year institutions, and community colleges are available as a downloadable dataset and a public interactive reporting tool through the Colorado Department of Higher Education's annual Return on Investment report and Postsecondary Degree Earnings Outcomes Tool. These employment outcomes are all disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, family income or economically disadvantaged status in state systems but disaggregated data are not publicly available. WIOA-eligible training providers to employment data are integrated for federal reporting and disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender in state systems but not publicly reported.	LEADING
4 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after high school completion and over time	Colorado has some linkages between high school and earnings and employment data through data sharing between the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. Colorado continues to develop its SLDS connecting data across the education, training, and workforce continuum. State agencies have worked collaboratively to set governance policies, identify use cases, and chart a course forward under the leadership of the state's Office of Information Technology. Via the Colorado SLDS, state agencies hope to lean into data connections across the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce spaces.	ADVANCED
5 Partners with national and multi-state initiatives to assess education-to-opportunity outcomes for graduates and non-graduates of postsecondary education and training programs who relocate or work outside the state	Colorado partners with PSEO (50-75% graduate coverage), Multi-State Data Collaborative, and State Wage Interchange System.	LEADING

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.



Leading
Fully present



Advanced
Partially present



Developing
In development



Foundational
Not in development



PROVIDE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
6 Provides comprehensive and timely open data files containing anonymized education-to-opportunity statistics that anyone can access, download, and otherwise use	Colorado has customizable open data files containing various education-to-opportunity statistics such as enrollment, completion, and median earnings for (i) public four-year institutions; (ii) private four-year institutions; (iii) community colleges; (iv) WIOA-eligible training providers; and (v) high schools, with disaggregation by race/ethnicity, gender, and age.	LEADING
7 Publishes robust, timely, and easily understandable interactive resources informing education-to-opportunity decision-making by learners, families, and institutions	Colorado has multiple dashboards containing various education-to-opportunity metrics such as earnings, enrollment, and completion for (i) public four-year institutions; (ii) private four-year institutions; (iii) community colleges; (iv) WIOA-eligible training providers; and (v) high schools. Disaggregation by demographics is available for earnings but not available for enrollment and completion metrics.	LEADING
8 Gives researchers access to individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets	The Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC) provides de-identified education-to-opportunity data to researchers upon request , and LINC describes the request and review process. Summaries of approved projects are publicly available.	LEADING

(...) IMPACT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
9 Enables learners and earners to access and utilize their own verified data, unlocking opportunities for college and career advancement	Colorado is advancing a skills-first approach to boost economic mobility by connecting high school, college, career training, and employment in a more seamless system. Through the Colorado Workforce Development Council, the state is leading the ColoradoFWD initiative, which uses LERs to make workers' skills more visible and better match them with job opportunities. A key focus of this effort is addressing workforce shortages in behavioral health and direct care by issuing the Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant microcredential. These microcredentials include verified skills data and qualify earners to serve on Medicaid-reimbursed care teams. In collaboration with 24 statewide partners, ColoradoFWD also supports policy development, stackable credentialing, and the creation of a unified credential registry to help learners compare programs based on demand and outcomes. The initiative has published research on the use of LERs for health care employers and plans to expand its strategies to other industries. Additional efforts include legislative action to integrate short-term credentials with degree programs, reports such as the Talent Pipeline and ROI reports to inform decision-making, and the deployment of LERs to address educator shortages. Collectively, these initiatives aim to build a responsive, skills-based talent ecosystem. Additionally, the University of Colorado Boulder received an LER Accelerator grant to implement LERs for 200 custodial staff to document validated technical and transferable skills, enabling career advancement.	LEADING
10 Designates a unit with responsibility and dedicated, full-time capacity for generating education-to-employment insights to inform state policymaking and resource allocation decision-making	The Colorado Department of Higher Education's (CDHE) Data, Research, and Policy (DRP) team generates the annual Return on Investment report and other reporting related to the WIOA-eligible training providers. CDHE also works collaboratively with other state agencies to provide more connection points between all types of education, training, and workforce data via data sharing initiatives (outlined in CDHE's report on Colorado's longitudinal data landscape). The DRP team has evidence of dedicated staff and partnerships with E2E stakeholders.	ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.

- **Leading**
Fully present
- **Advanced**
Partially present
- **Developing**
In development
- **Foundational**
Not in development



FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

UNAVAILABLE

Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, chart a path, and navigate challenges. Graduates who receive such guidance are more likely to land a job that requires a degree and feel satisfied with their career trajectory. The Quality Coaching measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported receiving personalized guidance, timely labor market information, and support to create a plan and overcome barriers.

Personalized guidance		Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who report receiving personalized coaching or guidance to help select the education that will help prepare them for a successful career.		35% DEVELOPING	UNAVAILABLE
Timely labor market information		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive timely labor market information, across the various types below, before enrolling or during their first year.		21% FOUNDATIONAL	UNAVAILABLE
Education-to-career paths that might be a good fit for student's strengths and interests		26%	
Job opportunities that a particular education program could lead to		25%	
Potential earnings in different careers related to student's education program		17%	
Career outcomes of students from their own institution		16%	
Support		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive at least some support in setting goals and in overcoming obstacles.		70% ADVANCED	UNAVAILABLE
Setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve these goals		68%	
Identifying and overcoming barriers		72%	
CATEGORY KEY			
When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.			
● Leading ≥75%		● Advanced 50% to <75%	● Developing 25% to <50%
			● Foundational <25%
National results		Four-year	Two-year
Personalized guidance		34%	45%
Timely labor market information		21%	33%
Support		71%	74%



Affordability

Colorado

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

LEADING

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. The Affordability measure is based on how many hours a week the average student would need to work to cover the in-state net price (total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships), how many hours a student from a low-income family would need to work to cover their typical in-state net price, and the percentage of students that complete their degree on time – a critical factor in the cost of a degree.

Student hours of work needed	Four-year	Two-year		
Average student hours of work needed	FOUNDATIONAL 34 hours per week Average annual net price, four-year institutions: \$17,716	ADVANCED 13 hours per week Average annual net price, two-year institutions: \$10,023		
Low-income student hours of work needed	ADVANCED 19 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, four-year institutions: \$11,964	LEADING 8 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, two-year institutions: \$8,049		
CATEGORY KEY	● Leading <10 hrs	● Advanced 10 to <20 hrs	● Developing 20 to <30 hrs	● Foundational ≥30 hrs

On-time completion rate		Four-year		
On-time completion rate	DEVELOPING			
	42%			
CATEGORY KEY	Leading ≥65%	Advanced 50% to <65%	Developing 35% to <50%	Foundational <35%



Work-Based Learning

Colorado

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

UNAVAILABLE

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that are linked to higher earnings, greater job satisfaction, and lower underemployment. The Work-Based Learning measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported participating in at least one of the following types of paid experiences: paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op, paid practicum, or paid undergraduate research experience.

Quality Work-Based Learning	Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who participated in at least one of five types of quality paid work-based learning experiences	38% DEVELOPING Paid internship participation: 29% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 69%	UNAVAILABLE

CATEGORY KEY

When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.

Leading
≥75%

Advanced
50% to <75%

Developing
25% to <50%

Foundational
<25%

National results	Four-year	Two-year
Any quality paid work-based learning experience	43%	17%
Paid internship	37%	14%
Any work-based learning experience (paid or unpaid)	72%	33%



In addition to student self-reporting of apprenticeship participation, states have other sources of information on participation in registered apprenticeships via the U.S. Department of Labor. In Colorado, **0.25 percent** of the state labor force is made up of active apprentices, for a total of **8,036 apprentices**. Across the country, this number ranges from 0.9 percent (Hawaii) to 0.12 percent (Oklahoma). In countries with leading apprenticeship systems, such as Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and England, apprentices constitute about 2.5–3.0 percent of the labor force, so all states in the U.S. have substantial room for improvement.



Employer Alignment

DEVELOPING

Colorado

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. The Employer Alignment measure is based on the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 25–34 employed in a college-level job as well as the supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state.

College-level employment

The percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who are employed in college-level positions

ADVANCED

Supply/demand ratio

The overall ratio: the average of the entry-level supply/demand ratios for these nine opportunity occupational groups

FOUNDATIONAL

Information technology and business

Data analytics

DEVELOPING

Finance and accounting professionals

FOUNDATIONAL

Finance and accounting support

FOUNDATIONAL

Information and cybersecurity

DEVELOPING

Software development and engineering

LEADING

Health care

Health care technicians and technologists

FOUNDATIONAL

Nursing

FOUNDATIONAL

Manufacturing and engineering

Engineering

ADVANCED

Manufacturing/Trades technicians and technologists

DEVELOPING

CATEGORY KEY

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
60% to <75%

● **Developing**
50% to <60%

● **Foundational**
<50%