

HIGH SCHOOL PATHWAYS

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR COLORADO

Colorado's economy demands a new approach to high school. Learners are entering a workforce that increasingly values credentials, skills, and experience more than time spent in a classroom. Yet our systems are still oriented around outdated models of education.

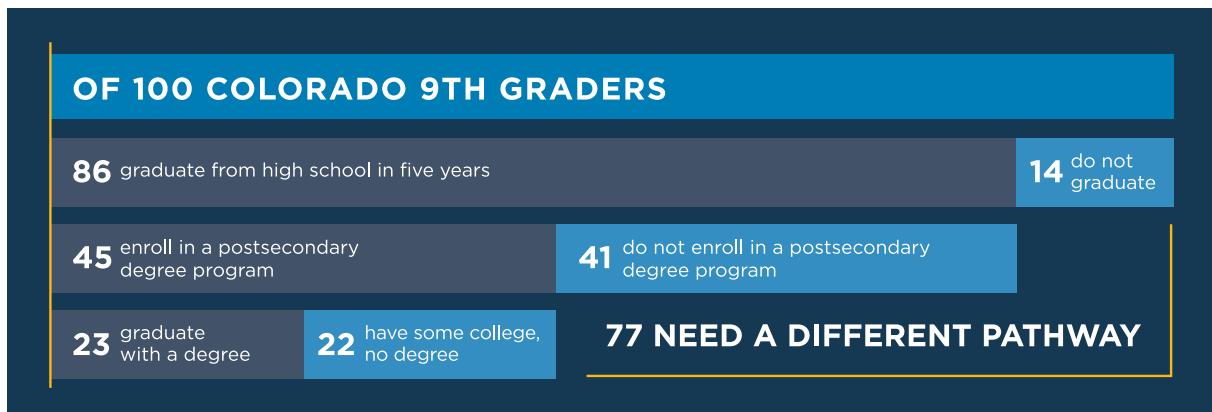
Redesigning high school around the "Big Three" postsecondary and workforce readiness experiences—college credit, work-based learning, and industry credentials—ensures every student graduates ready for success in college, career, or both.

Colorado has momentum. Through bipartisan legislation and collaborative efforts, communities across the state are showing what's possible. But statewide coherence and executive leadership are essential to scale and sustain progress.

BY THE NUMBERS

ENSURING EVERY COLORADO STUDENT HAS A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

77 out of 100 of our state's ninth graders aren't on a pathway that leads to lasting opportunity. We're working to change that.



- **88%** of dual enrollment participants enroll in college compared to **56%** of non-participants
- **\$3,000 to \$10,000** average amount saved in college tuition by students who earn college credit in high school
- **94%** of employers value industry-recognized credentials
- **40,000+** high school students participated in concurrent enrollment
- **44,000+** industry aligned credentials earned in HS since 2016 through the Career Development Incentive Program

OPPORTUNITY FOR GUBERNATORIAL LEADERSHIP

- 1** Set a bold statewide vision: Every Colorado high school student completes at least one high-quality college credit, industry credential, or work-based learning experience before graduation.
- 2** Champion a seamless education-to-employment system, where learners can transfer credits, and stack credentials—whether earned in classrooms or on the job—across K-12, higher education, and the workforce.
- 3** Incentivize districts and schools to expand access to rigorous, career-connected pathways aligned with regional and statewide labor market needs.
- 4** Support regional innovation by investing in infrastructure that enables students to access opportunities across school districts and boundaries.
- 5** Align funding, accountability, and data systems to reinforce meaningful outcomes—ensuring learners graduate with the skills, experiences, and credentials that unlock opportunity.

THE VISION

COLORADO EXPECTS EVERY HIGH SCHOOL TO BE A PLACE WHERE EVERY STUDENT GAINS PURPOSE, EXPERIENCE, AND EARLY MOMENTUM, GRADUATING WITH A CLEAR PATH INTO COLLEGE, CAREER, AND OPPORTUNITY.

Imagine a system where:

- ▶ Dual enrollment, industry credentials, and work-based learning are available in every region
- ▶ Pathways are aligned to in-demand fields and designed with employer collaboration
- ▶ Students retain credits and transition smoothly into postsecondary options
- ▶ Families and schools can see which pathways lead to strong outcomes
- ▶ All students, regardless of zip code, graduate with skills, confidence, and a clear next step

WHAT THIS UNLOCKS

- ▶ **Purposeful High School Experiences:** Students gain relevant exposure and early momentum toward postsecondary options.
- ▶ **Greater Equity in Opportunity:** All students access high-quality pathways, not just those in well-resourced districts.
- ▶ **Stronger Regional Economies:** Schools, colleges, and employers work together to prepare students for in-demand local careers.
- ▶ **Smoothen Transitions:** Clear credit transfer and aligned pathways help students maintain their progress after high school.
- ▶ **Actionable Insights:** Transparent data allows families, schools, and partners to understand which pathways deliver strong outcomes.

TWO STATE MODELS TO LEARN FROM

TENNESSEE

Tennessee's *FutureReadyTN* initiative offers a cohesive statewide vision for ensuring all students graduate high school with the skills, credentials, and experiences needed for future success. The effort is grounded in clear pillars—credentials of value, work-based learning, seamless transitions, and individualized advising—and supported by aligned state policy, funding, and accountability systems.

Key Policies and Practices

- ▶ Maintains a vetted list of credentials of value, ensuring alignment with labor market demand and consistency across districts.
- ▶ Supports employer engagement and student access to capstone experiences through structured work-based learning.
- ▶ Invested in career coaches and advisor training to personalize guidance and connect students with pathway opportunities.
- ▶ Publishes “High School Feedback Reports” to track postsecondary and workforce outcomes, helping schools continuously improve.

TEXAS

PWR and Rural Pathways

Texas connects high school, college, and career through clear, outcomes-driven pathways. The state's P-TECH and Early College High School models enable students to earn a diploma, college credit, and an industry-recognized credential while gaining hands-on experience with employers. Recent outcomes-based funding reforms reward districts and colleges for students who complete postsecondary credentials or career-ready milestones, while regional partnerships strengthen access to high-quality pathways in rural communities.

- ▶ P-TECH model integrates dual credit and industry partnerships into high school.
- ▶ Emphasis on early college and CTE pathways, especially in rural areas.
- ▶ Created outcomes-based funding that rewards districts for PWR attainment (college credit, credentials, and work-based learning).
- ▶ Uses regional intermediaries to connect schools with employers and postsecondary institutions, especially supporting rural communities.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

HOW COLORADO SUCCEEDS CAN HELP

Colorado Succeeds works at the intersection of business and education, mobilizing employers as co-creators of Colorado's talent development system. We support regional talent development across K-12, higher education, and the workforce; launched sector-based communities of practice; and helped design career-connected learning systems grounded in employer leadership. For more than a decade, we have designed, tested, and scaled PWR systems in partnership with business, education, and state leaders.

We can advise the administration on the vision, governance, and funding models needed for a statewide PWR strategy, and provide technical assistance, policy alignment, and employer engagement expertise. With business at the table as a full partner, Colorado can become the national leader in ensuring every student transitions from high school into high-quality pathways that lead to college, career, and opportunity.



CONTACT

Shannon Nicholas

Senior Vice President,
Impact

snicholas@coloradosucceeds.org