

January 22, 2023

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## **SB23-007 Will Provide Much-Needed Resources to Colorado's Adult Education Providers**

Educational attainment is increasingly becoming a necessity for employment in a good job here in Colorado. Back in 2013, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce predicted that 74 percent of the jobs in Colorado would require a post-secondary degree by 2020, the second highest share in the nation behind Washington, D.C. (Minnesota tied with Colorado).<sup>1</sup> While the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly altered these forecasts, the [Colorado Workforce Development Council's Talent Pipeline Report for 2022](#) found that among Colorado's top jobs that year,<sup>2</sup> 91.4

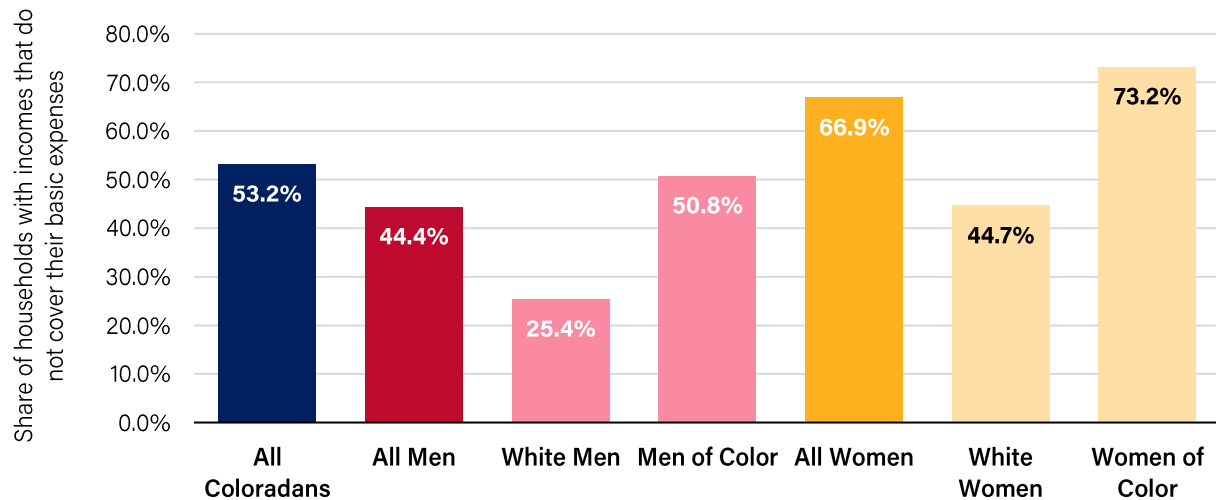
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<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl. *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020 – State Report*. Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University (2013). Accessed from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/> on 19 January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Per the Talent Pipeline report, top jobs meet three criteria: projected to have more than 40 net annual openings, above 15 percent growth rate projected for the next ten years, and a good wage. Tier 1 top jobs meet the first two criteria and pay above \$71,739.20 per year; tier 2 top jobs meet the first two criteria and pay between \$39,852.80 and the annual wage for a tier 1 top job.

percent of tier 1 top jobs and 70.4 percent of tier 2 top jobs required a postsecondary degree.<sup>3</sup> This means that, at a minimum, a large majority of those employed in a top job in Colorado in 2022 had completed their high school education in addition to some sort of degree or credential after high school.

### Income Inadequacy for Households without a High School Credential, 2019



**Note:** Income needs are based on the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado in 2019 (see <https://cclponline.org/sss/> for more on the Self-Sufficiency Standard).

Source: *Overlooked and Undercounted: Coloradans Struggling to Make Ends Meet in 2019*, Center for Women’s Welfare, University of Washington

In other words, it is difficult for Coloradans without a high school credential to find a well-paying job that allows them to support themselves and their family—something that our *Overlooked and Undercounted* report shows is a real challenge for households in our state, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Among working-age households<sup>4</sup> in Colorado in 2019, 53.2 percent of households without a high school credential did not earn enough income to meet their most basic needs.<sup>5</sup> However, with disparities that exist across racial and gender lines, the share of households who did not earn enough

<sup>3</sup> McKennie, Caitlin. *2022 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*. Colorado Workforce Development Council, State of Colorado (2022). Accessed from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Eo2NU2URi351YCA9FXexEpK3AN7UnIkA/view> on 19 January 2023.

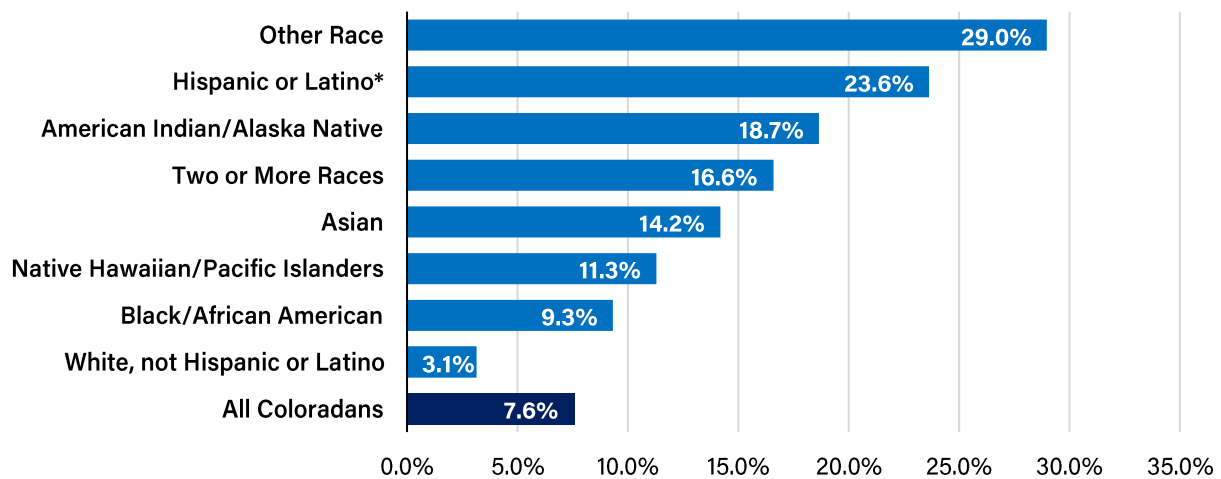
<sup>4</sup> Working-age households are defined as households that included at least one adult between the ages of 18 and 64 who did not have a work-limiting disability, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>5</sup> Kucklik, Annie and Lisa Manzer. *Overlooked and Undercounted: Coloradans Struggling to Make Ends Meet in 2019*. Center for Women’s Welfare, University of Washington (2022). Accessed from [https://cclponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CO2019\\_Demo\\_Web.pdf](https://cclponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CO2019_Demo_Web.pdf) on 20 January 2023.

income to cover their basic needs was even higher for women, and women of color in particular. 73.2 percent of households led by women of color without a high school credential did not have the income needed to cover their families' expenses.

In addition to the challenges facing job seekers without a high school credential, this data suggests that households led by women and people of color, particularly women of color, face even greater barriers to achieving economic security. While still a sizeable share, the rate of income inadequacy for households with a high school diploma or equivalent dropped from 53.2 percent to 37.0 percent in 2019. This data shows just how important having a high school credential is for the economic security of Coloradans and their families. However, we know that, due to historic and ongoing systemic oppression of women and people of color, not all Coloradans have equal access to educational opportunities, either as children or as adults, resulting in disparities in the share of working-age adults who do not have a high school credential.

**Share of adults ages 25 and up without a high school credential, 2021**

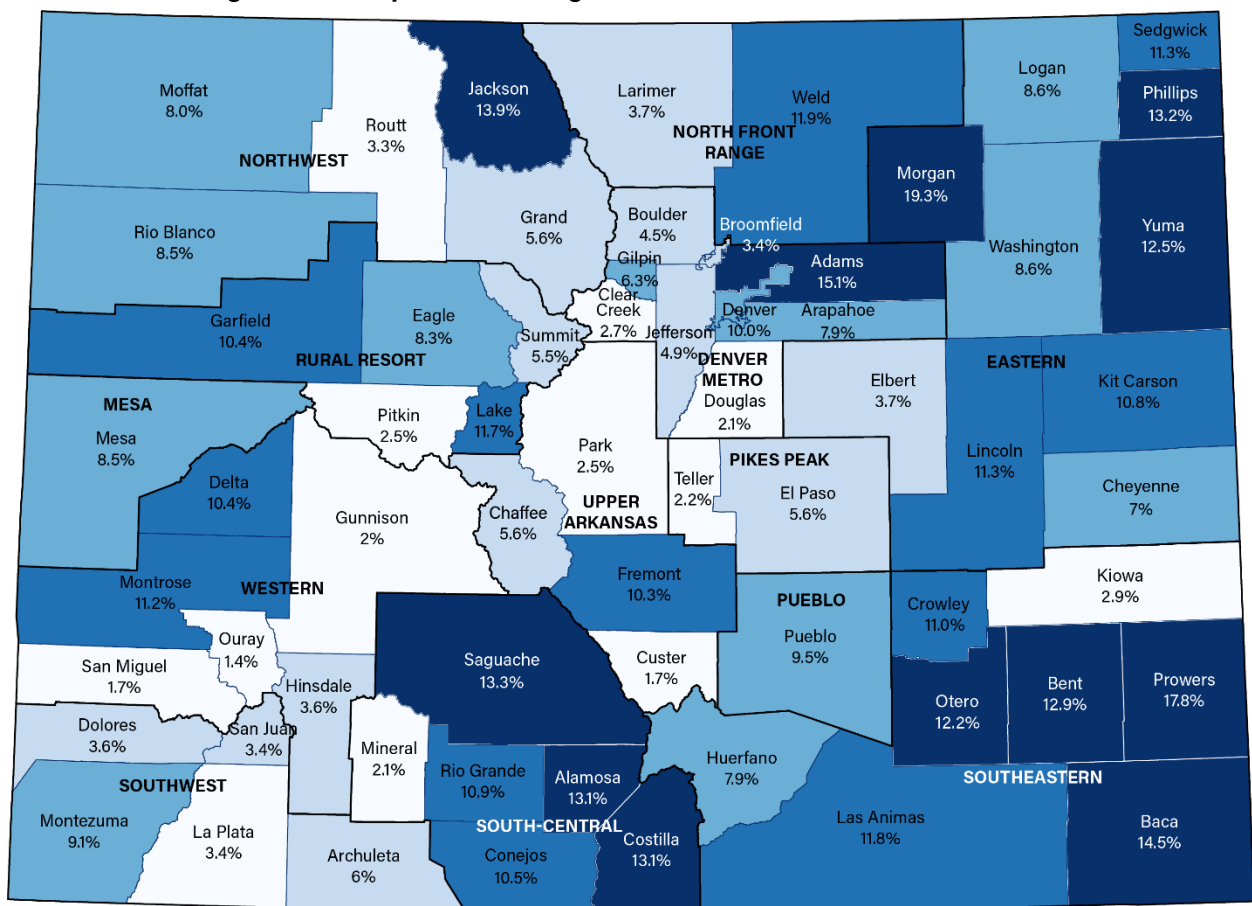


**Note:** Values for all races, except white Coloradans, include individuals who may also identify as Hispanic or Latino/a. Similarly, the data for Hispanic or Latino/a Coloradans includes individuals who may also identify with any other racial category, except for white.

Source: 2021 1-Year American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 7.6 percent of Coloradans ages 25 and older did not have a high school credential in 2021.<sup>6</sup> Of these 300,000 or so individuals, 44.1 percent left school without completing 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The share of adults who have not received a high school credential varied across demographic groups and by county that year. For example, 23.6 percent of Hispanic or Latino/a adults in Colorado did not have a high school credential, compared to 3.1 percent of white Coloradans, the only racial or ethnic group in the state to have a high school credential non-attainment rate lower than that for the state as a whole.

**Share of adults ages 25 and up without a high school credential, 2021**



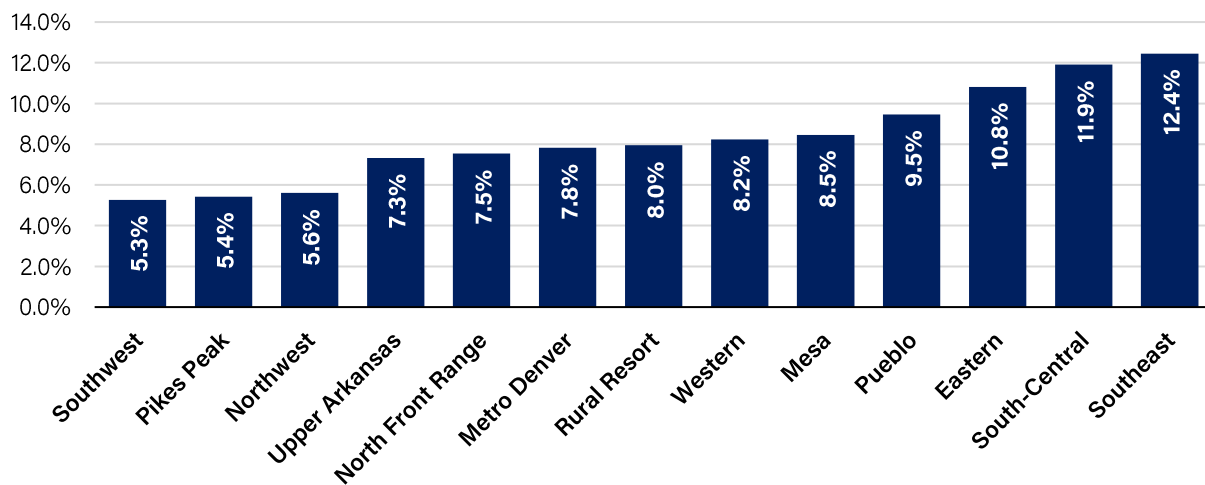
Source: 2021 1-Year American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

There are also noticeable geographic differences in the rate of Coloradans without a high school credential. In 2021, approximately 8.7 percent of adults ages 25 and up

<sup>6</sup> Table S1501: Educational Attainment, 2021 1-Year American Community Survey (ACS). U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. Accessed from <https://data.census.gov/> on 19 January 2023.

living in a rural county did not have a high school diploma, compared to 7.5 percent of this population living in an urban county.<sup>7</sup> Nearly one in five Coloradans 25 years and older living in Morgan County lacked a high school credential that same year, the highest rate of any county in the state. Looking at the state’s counties grouped into regions, every region of our state except for the Southwest, Pikes Peak, Northwest, Upper Arkansas, and North Front Range regions<sup>8</sup> had a higher share of adults without a high school credential than the 7.6 percent statewide share that year. This includes the Metro Denver region, where 7.8 percent of adults did not have a high school diploma or equivalent.

**Share of adults ages 25 and older without a high school credential, 2021**



Source: 2017-21 5-Year American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>7</sup> Colorado Center on Law and Policy analysis of 2017-21 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data using 2020 U.S. Office of Management and Budget delineations of metropolitan statistical areas.

<sup>8</sup> Regions used in this analysis, based on those used by the Colorado Workforce Development Council, are defined as follow: Eastern – Cheyenne, Elbert, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma; Mesa – Mesa County; Metro Denver – Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Clear Creek, Denver Douglas, Gilpin, and Jefferson; North Front Range – Larimer and Weld; Northwest – Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt; Pikes Peak – El Paso and Teller; Pueblo – Pueblo; Rural Resort – Eagle, Garfield, Lake, Pitkin, and Summit; South-Central – Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, Saguache; Southeast – Baca, Bent, Crowley, Huerfano, Kiowa, Las Animas, Otero, Prowers; Southwest – Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan; Upper Arkansas – Chaffee, Custer, Fremont, Park; Western – Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel.

Educational attainment is not the only indicator we can look to for understanding the educational needs of adult learners in Colorado. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) created the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) to measure, analyze, and compare adults' basic literacy<sup>9</sup>, numeracy<sup>10</sup>, and digital problem-solving<sup>11</sup> skills across countries that participate in the OECD. Adults' skill levels in each of these three areas are determined based on their demonstrated mastery of certain skills or activities using written text, numbers, or in a digital environment. For example, a Level 1 competency in literacy means that the adult had knowledge and skill in recognizing basic vocabulary, determining the meaning of sentences, and reading paragraphs of text, but struggled to draw inferences or combine multiple sources of text into a single idea.<sup>12</sup> Those below Level 1 competency would struggle with these tasks and could be functionally illiterate, according to PIAAC.

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<sup>9</sup> Per PIAAC: "Literacy is understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." See <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp> for more details on how PIAAC defines literacy.

<sup>10</sup> Per PIAAC: "Numeracy is the ability to assess, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life." See <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp> for more details on how PIAAC defines numeracy.

<sup>11</sup> Per PIAAC: "Problem solving in technology-rich environments using digital technology, communication tools, and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others and perform practical tasks." See <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp> for more details on how PIAAC defines digital problem solving.

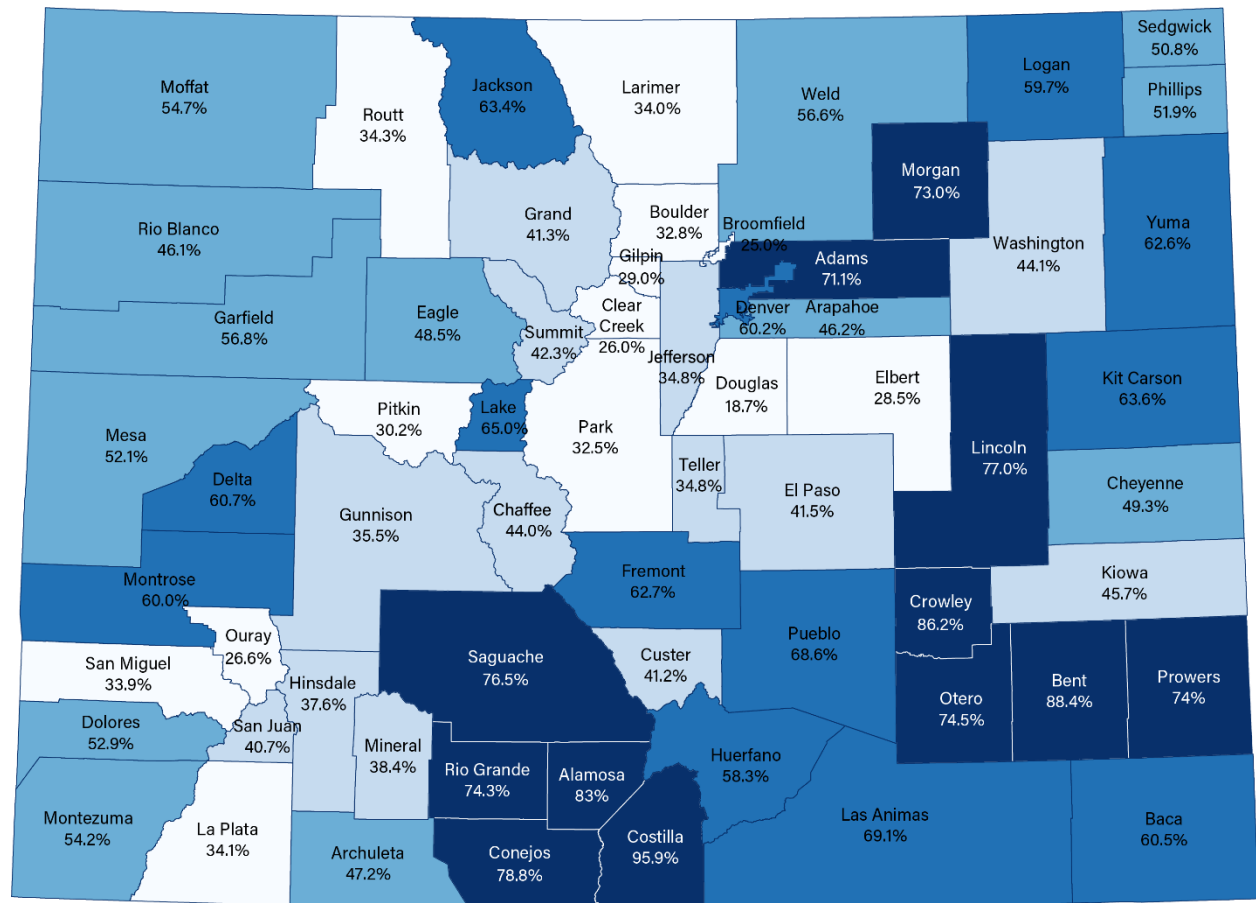
<sup>12</sup> Per PIAAC, scoring at or below Level 1 in literacy indicates that: "Adults at this level can be considered at risk for difficulties using or comprehending print materials. Adults at the upper end of this level can read short texts, in print or online, and understand the meaning well enough to perform simple tasks, such as filing out a short form, but drawing inferences or combining multiple sources of text may be too difficult. Adults who are below Level 1 may only be able to understand very basic vocabulary or find very specific information on a familiar topic. Some adults below Level 1 may struggle even to do this and may be functionally illiterate."

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Coloradans with scores below Level 1 on literacy or numeracy assessments was even higher among those without a high school diploma. On literacy, 48.5 percent of adults without a high school credential had below a Level 1 proficiency; 47.1 percent of these adults scored below Level 1 on the numeracy assessment.<sup>15</sup> The digital problem-solving scores are not available at the state or county level, but those with lower levels of educational attainment also tended to score lower on their assessment for this competency in the United States.

**Share at or below Level 1 on PIAAC numeracy assessment, no high school credential 2017**



**Note:** Only includes Coloradans between 16 and 74

Source: National Center for Education Statistics at the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education

<sup>15</sup> While this higher rate could be attributable to the fact that the population includes Coloradans who were still in high school, we would hope that all high school students in the state had at least a Level 1 mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. This is particularly true given that those below a Level 1 proficiency may be functionally illiterate or innumerate.



Taken together, these statistics demonstrate why adult education, or programs that provide basic education leading to a high school diploma or equivalent credential for adult learners, are fundamental to the economic health of our state and our workforce. Without investments in adult education, workers will not have the opportunities they need to complete their high school education—a fundamental first step required for most credentials or post-secondary degrees available in the state. Furthermore, the results of the PIAAC assessment of literacy and numeracy skills among Coloradans between the ages of 16 and 74 suggest that even having a high school credential does not guarantee an individual has the skills needed to complete even the most basic tasks involving reading and writing or numbers. Such adults may find themselves struggling to complete postsecondary education or credential programs despite having a high school diploma.

Compared to states of similar sizes and budgets in 2020, Colorado ranked above only Louisiana and Nevada in terms of percent of funding for federal adult education programs, all of which came from federal or local funding sources.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Oregon contributed over \$36 million of state funds to its federal adult education programs in 2020—Colorado contributed zero state dollars that same year. Compared to K-12 educational funding, where the state spends \$9,500 per student,<sup>17</sup> Colorado provides only \$1,000 per student for adult education.<sup>18</sup> This despite the barriers most adults already face in pursuing adult education.

SB23-007 would take an important step in addressing this disparity in education funding in Colorado. The bill would allocate \$2 million from the General Fund to the Adult Education Grant Program, administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). This grant program provides funding to adult education providers in

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<sup>16</sup> [U.S. Dept. of Education memo on estimated adult education state award amounts for FY20 \(March 2020\)](#); supplemented by research through Spring Institute’s summer 2022 Urban Leaders Fellowship

<sup>17</sup> Meltzer, Erica. “Fully fund K-12 schools? Colorado lawmakers say maybe next year.” Chalkbeat Colorado (2022). Accessed from <https://co.chalkbeat.org/2022/5/3/23055738/colorado-school-funding-budget-inflation-property-tax-cap> on 20 January 2023.

<sup>18</sup> “Adult Education Program Fact Sheet – Colorado”. Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) (2020). Accessed from [https://drive.google.com/file/d/18J7pYaOvTohn\\_Ji0Uj5Jl2ImdK8QzSKm/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18J7pYaOvTohn_Ji0Uj5Jl2ImdK8QzSKm/view) on 20 January 2023.



Colorado to offer basic adult education in literacy, digital literacy, and numeracy that leads to a postsecondary credential, employment, or additional skills.

Importantly, the bill will allow community colleges, local district colleges, and area technical colleges to develop minimum graduation requirements and award high school diplomas, expanding the opportunities for adults who may be lacking a high school credential to attain one. It also adds digital literacy to the skills that adult education providers must offer, providing additional resources to the state’s wider digital equity efforts that will also play an important role in preparing Coloradans to be proficient in not only using technology and accessing the internet, but in having the skills and expertise necessary to be proficient and effective in digital environments.

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy supports SB23-007 and we hope to see this bill pass during this legislative session. Not only will it increase the relatively small amount of funding our state allocates to adult education, the bill’s provisions to expand the types of educational institutions that are able to grant a high school degree should provide greater access to adult education programs that result in a high school credential for those who currently lack this level of educational attainment in our state. As we continue our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is fundamental that we ensure our state’s workforce has the skills, training, and education necessary to fill good, well-paying jobs. Adult education plays a critical role in preparing our workforce for the demands of the future, and it time for the amount of funding we provide to these programs to reflect this importance.

## Appendix A: County Data Tables

**Table 1: Share of adults 25 years and older without a high school credential**

County	Share of Adults
Adams	15.1%
Alamosa	13.1%
Arapahoe	7.9%
Archuleta	6.0%
Baca	14.5%
Bent	12.9%
Boulder	4.5%
Broomfield	3.4%



Chaffee	5.6%
Cheyenne	7.0%
Clear Creek	2.7%
Conejos	10.5%
Costilla	13.1%
Crowley	11.0%
Custer	1.7%
Delta	10.4%
Denver	10.0%
Dolores	3.6%
Douglas	2.1%
Eagle	8.3%
Elbert	3.7%
El Paso	5.6%
Fremont	10.3%
Garfield	10.4%
Gilpin	6.3%
Grand	5.6%
Gunnison	2.0%
Hinsdale	3.6%
Huerfano	7.9%
Jackson	13.9%
Jefferson	4.9%
Kiowa	2.9%
Kit Carson	10.8%
Lake	11.7%
La Plata	3.4%
Larimer	3.7%
Las Animas	11.8%
Lincoln	11.3%
Logan	8.6%
Mesa	8.5%
Mineral	2.1%
Moffat	8.0%
Montezuma	9.1%
Montrose	11.2%
Morgan	19.3%
Otero	12.2%
Ouray	1.4%
Park	2.5%
Phillips	13.2%
Pitkin	2.5%
Prowers	17.8%
Pueblo	9.5%
Rio Blanco	8.5%
Rio Grande	10.9%
Routt	3.3%



Saguache	13.3%
San Juan	3.4%
San Miguel	1.7%
Sedgwick	11.3%
Summit	5.5%
Teller	2.2%
Washington	8.6%
Weld	11.9%
Yuma	12.5%

Source: 2017-21 5-Year American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau



**Table 2: PIAAC Literacy and Numeracy Results, 2017**

County	Literacy Results		Numeracy Results	
	Share Lvl 1 and Below	Share Lvl 1 and Below, No High School	Share Lvl 1 and Below	Share Lvl 1 and Below, No High School
Adams	27.6%	80.6%	37.3%	71.1%
Alamosa	31.4%	91.8%	43.6%	83.0%
Arapahoe	15.8%	46.2%	24.3%	46.2%
Archuleta	16.1%	46.9%	24.8%	47.2%
Baca	21.1%	61.7%	31.8%	60.5%
Bent	30.4%	88.7%	46.4%	88.4%
Boulder	11.2%	32.6%	17.3%	32.8%
Broomfield	8.4%	24.4%	13.1%	25.0%
Chaffee	14.1%	41.2%	23.1%	44.0%
Cheyenne	15.9%	46.5%	25.9%	49.3%
Clear Creek	6.9%	20.0%	13.6%	26.0%
Conejos	30.0%	87.6%	41.4%	78.8%
Costilla	38.4%	100.0%	50.4%	95.9%
Crowley	30.1%	87.9%	45.3%	86.2%
Custer	12.4%	36.1%	21.7%	41.2%
Delta	19.8%	57.9%	31.9%	60.7%
Denver	22.9%	66.7%	31.6%	60.2%
Dolores	16.4%	48.0%	27.8%	52.9%
Douglas	5.6%	16.4%	9.8%	18.7%
Eagle	17.8%	52.0%	25.5%	48.5%
Elbert	8.2%	23.9%	15.0%	28.5%
El Paso	13.9%	40.5%	21.8%	41.5%
Fremont	20.3%	59.2%	32.9%	62.7%
Garfield	20.3%	59.2%	29.9%	56.8%
Gilpin	8.0%	23.2%	15.2%	29.0%
Grand	11.4%	33.2%	21.7%	41.3%
Gunnison	10.4%	30.5%	18.6%	35.5%
Hinsdale	12.0%	34.9%	19.8%	37.6%
Huerfano	20.9%	60.9%	30.6%	58.3%
Jackson	23.2%	67.7%	33.3%	63.4%
Jefferson	11.6%	33.9%	18.3%	34.8%
Kiowa	12.6%	36.9%	24.0%	45.7%
Kit Carson	21.7%	63.5%	33.4%	63.6%
Lake	23.4%	68.4%	34.2%	65.0%
La Plata	10.6%	31.0%	17.9%	34.1%
Larimer	10.5%	30.6%	17.9%	34.0%
Las Animas	25.9%	75.5%	36.3%	69.1%
Lincoln	25.7%	75.1%	40.5%	77.0%
Logan	20.2%	59.1%	31.4%	59.7%
Mesa	17.3%	50.5%	27.4%	52.1%
Mineral	11.8%	34.6%	20.2%	38.4%
Moffat	17.5%	51.0%	28.7%	54.7%



Montezuma	17.5%	51.0%	28.5%	54.2%
Montrose	20.1%	58.7%	31.5%	60.0%
Morgan	28.8%	84.1%	38.3%	73.0%
Otero	28.0%	81.6%	39.2%	74.5%
Ouray	6.9%	20.1%	14.0%	26.6%
Park	9.0%	26.2%	17.1%	32.5%
Phillips	17.8%	52.1%	27.3%	51.9%
Pitkin	9.3%	27.1%	15.9%	30.2%
Prowers	28.7%	83.9%	38.9%	74.0%
Pueblo	25.4%	74.1%	36.1%	68.6%
Rio Blanco	14.4%	42.0%	24.2%	46.1%
Rio Grande	28.7%	83.7%	39.0%	74.3%
Routt	10.0%	29.1%	18.0%	34.3%
Saguache	29.1%	84.9%	40.2%	76.5%
San Juan	11.5%	33.5%	21.4%	40.7%
San Miguel	11.1%	32.5%	17.8%	33.9%
Sedgwick	16.5%	48.2%	26.7%	50.8%
Summit	13.0%	37.8%	22.2%	42.3%
Teller	10.2%	29.8%	18.3%	34.8%
Washington	13.8%	40.4%	23.2%	44.1%
Weld	21.1%	61.5%	29.7%	56.6%
Yuma	22.5%	65.7%	32.9%	62.6%

**Note:** Only includes Coloradans between 16 and 74

*Source: National Center for Education Statistics at the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education*