



Colorado's P-12 Academic Standards Will Bolster Its Future Success

High standards and relevant assessments will help make young Coloradans workforce-ready, military-eligible and crime-free

What happens in our classrooms today will determine Colorado's future success. But some signs are troubling: Only 37 percent of Colorado 8th graders are proficient in math and 38 percent are proficient in reading.¹ Further, 23 percent of Colorado high school students do not graduate within four years.² If our young people are not well-educated, they will not be ready for college or careers, including careers in the military. There is also a link between inadequate education and crime.³

Colorado's strong academic standards and aligned assessments can help ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education, so all students are prepared for success in postsecondary education, the civilian workforce, or the military, if they choose to serve.

“Colorado is not producing enough employees with the right skills or education to match the needs of industry. Industry will struggle to remain competitive, as will Colorado as a state, if that trend doesn't change.

Jeff Wasden

President
Colorado Business Roundtable



Colorado needs well-educated youth

In all of Colorado, 83 percent of the fastest growing jobs with above average wages will require an associate's degree or higher.⁴ Moreover, 47 percent of our state's jobs are middle-skill, requiring more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree, yet only 36 percent of Colorado's workforce has the educational credentials to fill these positions.⁵ If this situation persists, our state could face a pressing skills gap in the years to come, with an insufficient number of qualified applicants to fill open jobs. The U.S. military faces a similar problem: Poor educational achievement is one of the biggest reasons why an estimated 70 percent of young Coloradans are unable to join the military.⁶ Twenty-three percent of our students do not graduate high school on time and even among those who graduate from high school, nearly 18 percent cannot enlist because of low scores on the military's entrance exam for math, literacy and problem solving.⁷

Inadequate education also has implications for crime and law enforcement: Key research shows that long-term changes in wages and employment opportunities among non-college educated men may explain as much as half of property and violent crime rates.⁸ And there is no disputing that less educated individuals are more likely to be incarcerated: A national analysis showed that almost 7 in 10 inmates in state prisons failed to graduate from high school, compared to fewer than 3 in 10 of the general population.⁸

High education standards and relevant assessments will help Colorado develop the well-prepared youth we need

Colorado's P-12 Academic Standards are also aligned with the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines for preschool through third grade.¹⁰ The guidelines address approaches to learning that create positive early childhood experiences.

Colorado's P-12 Academic Standards establish the skills and knowledge children must possess at each grade level, but they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under local control.¹¹ The Colorado P-12 Academic Standards were developed by stakeholders statewide to provide guidance in teaching and creating aligned assessments. The year-long process focused on updating the academic standards in mathematics and 9 other subjects and culminated with the State Board of Education adopting the Colorado Academic Standards in 2009, and then adopting the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math, the following year.¹² Once the Common Core Standards were adopted,



the Colorado Academic Standards were revised to better align with the Common Core. The revised Standards reflect Colorado's commitment to college and career readiness, and to its educators who originally developed the Colorado Academic Standards. Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) requires a review of the Colorado Academic Standards by July 2018 and every six years thereafter. That review is currently underway.¹⁴

To have an impact on student outcomes, there must also be accountability. Standards must be accompanied by assessments aligned to the standards, and a system for reporting results so everyone will know how students are really faring across schools, districts, and states and what approaches are delivering the best results. Recognizing this, the Colorado Department of Education

measures students' progress through the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS), an annual state assessment in English language arts, math, science and social studies.¹⁵ Student performance on the CMAS has improved over time. Scores have improved in both English language arts and math, across the majority of districts.¹⁶

Conclusion

Colorado's P-12 Academic Standards, along with aligned assessments, are the clearest way to demonstrate our state's commitment to a world-class education and show measurable results.

We will be well-served by staying on this path to preparing the next generation of workforce-ready, military-eligible and crime-free Coloradans to contribute to the future success of our state.

Endnotes

- 1 Nation's Report Card (2015). Colorado profile. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/CO?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=2&sub=MAT&sj=CO&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2015R3&sg=Gender%3A+Male+v s.+Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single+Year&tss=2015R3-2015R3&sfj=NP&selectedJurisdiction=CO
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- 3 Harlow, C.W. (2003, January). Education and correctional populations. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 195670. Washington, DC: Department of Justice. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>
- 4 Chmura Economics & Analytics. (August 2017). Education and occupation analysis for ReadyNation Colorado and Denver County.
- 5 National Skills Coalition. (N.D.) Preparing for the Future: Closing Colorado's Middle-Skills Gap.
- 6 Department of Defense. 2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA). Acquired through personal communication with the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at DoD in July 2014.
- 7 National Center for Education Statistics (2017). The condition of education 2017. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_coi.pdf; Theokas, C. (2010). Shut out of the military: Today's high school education doesn't mean you're ready for today's Army. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/resource/shut-out-of-the-military-todays-high-school-education-doesnt-mean-youre-ready-for-todays-army/>
- 8 See, for example: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/003465302317331919>
- 9 Harlow, C.W. (2003, January). Education and correctional populations. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 195670. Washington, DC: Department of Justice. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>
- 10 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/eldgs>
- 11 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Colorado Academic Standards Fact Sheets and FAQs. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/factsheetsandfaqs>
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Common Core State Standard Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org>; Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Colorado Academic Standards Fact Sheets and FAQs. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/factsheetsandfaqs>
- 14 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Standards Revision Cycle Background Information. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards-revision-cycle>
- 15 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Colorado Academic Standards Fact Sheets and FAQs. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/factsheetsandfaqs>
- 16 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). CMAS - Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies Data and Results. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmas-dataandresults>

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