

# Achieving Educational Excellence

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The following pages report on education indicators in the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The MSA is made up of El Paso County and Teller County. The data in this section represents the six largest El Paso County school districts and the one largest Teller County school district from the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Statistical Area.

El Paso County	Student Count 10-2010
Colorado Springs District 11:	29,459
Academy District 20:	23,119
Falcon District 49:	14,708
Harrison District 2:	11,147
Widefield District 3:	8,963
Fountain-Ft. Carson District 8:	7,536
Lewis-Palmer District 38:	5,977
Cheyenne Mountain District 12:	4,561

Teller County	Student Count 10-2010
Woodland Park District RE 2:	2,752
Cripple Creek/Victor District RE 1:	441

Source: Colorado Department of Education

2010-2011 is the final year the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) will be administered. The Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) will be administered in 2011-2012.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides results for the nation as a whole and for the states separately. Performance is reported by groups of students, e.g. by total, by gender, by racial and ethnic groups, and by participation in special programs such as those servicing students with special needs and limited English proficiency. Each of these assessments/studies is based on a representative sample of the student population of the state and nation and none are designed to produce individual district, school or student data.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Education: Assessment Data and Results, 2010.

## Educational Excellence: An Overview

Educational excellence encompasses the full spectrum of lifelong learning. It begins at birth, with parents and caregivers who provide a child with activities, with books, and with environments that foster emergent literacy skills. It continues with excellent K-12 schools, and on to multiple higher education venues and opportunities.

The benefits of a quality education, to both individuals and to the regions as a whole, are manifold:

- On average, the more education people have, the longer they live.
- A one-year increase in the average level of schooling in a community is associated with a 30% decrease in the murder rate. While 16% of American youth do not complete high school, nearly 75% of state inmates do not complete high school.
- A high school dropout is four times more likely to be unemployed than a college graduate.
- The median annual earning of Americans 25 and over who did not complete high school is less than \$18,500, while those who completed high school typically earn nearly \$26,000. College graduates earn \$44,000 annually, and those with graduate or professional degrees typically earn \$57,500.
- In the 2008 presidential election, 77% of those with a college degree reported voting, as opposed to 54.9% of high school graduates, and 39.9% of high school dropouts.

Education (or lack of those opportunities and successes) has a huge impact on numerous other quality of life indicators: health, crime, employment rates, earning potential, and civic engagement.

There is one factor, however, that tremendously impacts educational opportunities and attainment at every stage of life, and that is poverty.

## Poverty Impact on Education

**Education affects poverty and poverty affects education.**

“The Great Recession, which officially lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, took its toll on thousands of Coloradans, impacting families from a wide range of backgrounds, economic statuses, and communities, including families who had not previously faced significant challenges. For those already experiencing the negative impacts of Colorado’s dramatic rise in poverty since 2000, the ramifications were even more devastating.”<sup>1</sup>

As noted in the Social Wellbeing section on page 33, between 2000 and 2009, Colorado experienced the fastest growing number of children living in poverty in the nation. From 2008 to 2009 the number of children living in poverty in Colorado rose

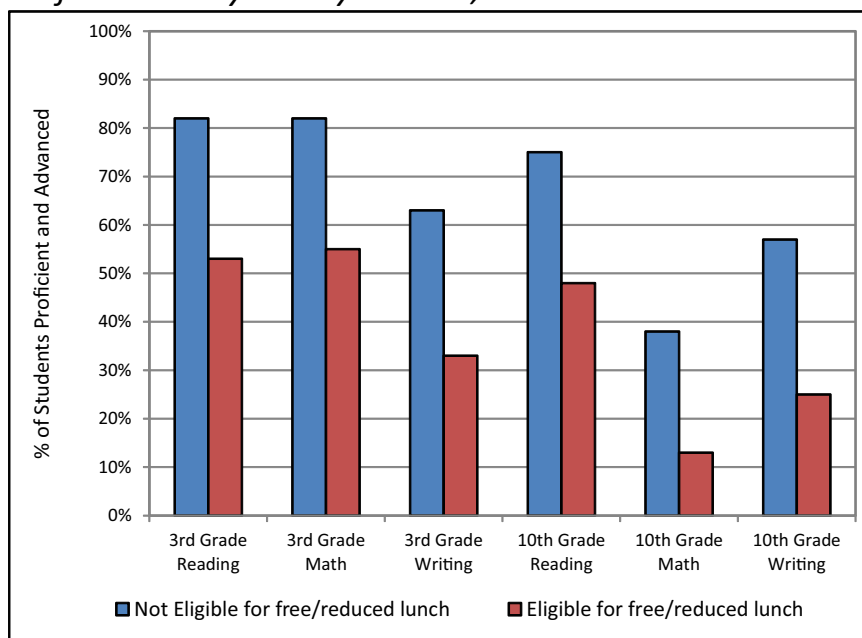
by 31,000. The percentage of children in poverty rose from 9.7% in 2000 to 15.1% in 2008, and 17.4% in 2009. In El Paso County, the percentage of all children living in poverty rose from 10.4% in 2000 to 15.7% in 2008, and 15% in 2009. In 2009, there were 26,285 children under the age of 18 living in poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Because poverty negatively influences almost every other aspect of a child’s well-being, this data has significant implications for our state’s children and our future.

Children from low-income homes start school behind higher income peers, and research shows that this achievement gap continues throughout the school years. Poverty is particularly detrimental to young children, as it impacts brain development and, subsequently, overall long-term success. Children who live in poverty, even for a short time, can suffer permanent setbacks, especially if the poverty occurs during the first 10 years of life.

Young children from low-income families score lower on tests

**Colorado Student Assessment Program:  
Performance by Family Income, 2010**



Source: Colorado Department of Education

of early reading, writing, and math, and are more likely to face social and economic problems later in life, including illiteracy, teen pregnancy, high dropout rates and unemployment. Subsequently, their children will be at risk as well.

The graph above demonstrates the standardized test results gap for children living in low-income families.

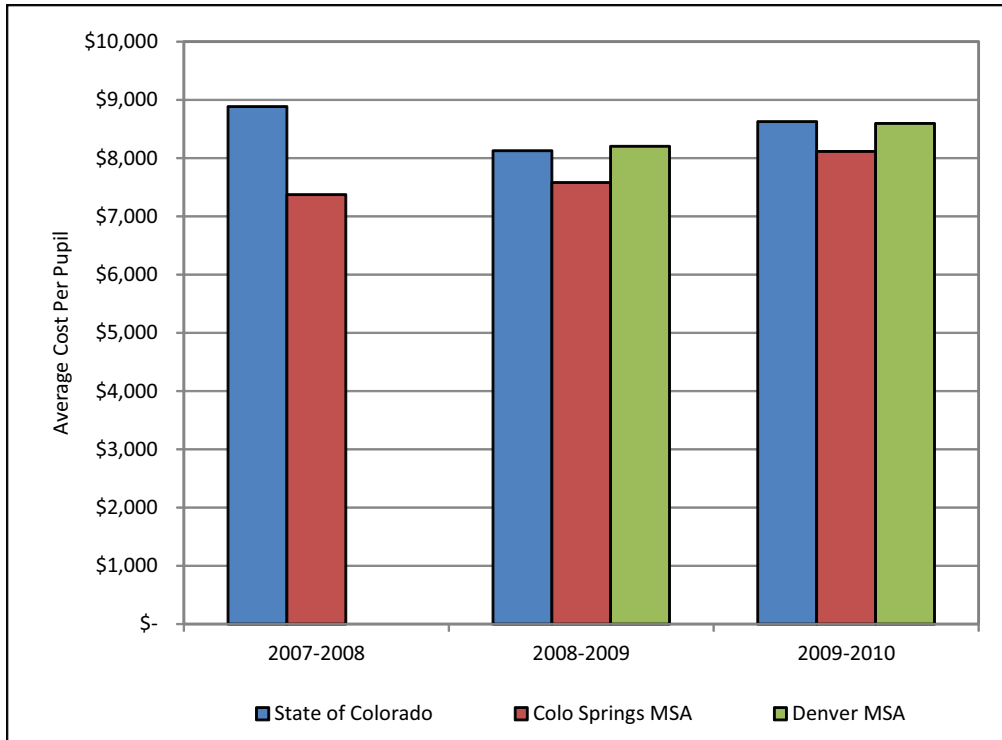
The Education Vision Council firmly believes that one path to improving academic outcomes is to identify community strategies to address poverty, particularly among children.

<sup>1</sup> Colorado Children’s Campaign, 2011 Kids Count in Colorado!, pg. 5 www.coloradokids.org

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey for 2009 for Colorado and El Paso County.

# -Educational Funding-

## School Funding Cost per Pupil General Fund Revenue\*



Source: Colorado Department of Education, Comparison of Revenues & Expenditures for Selected Funds, Column F

**This Chart** shows the annual amount of basic operating revenue per student provided by the state in the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). This funding is provided by the state of Colorado.

### Why is This Important?

With ample resources and supplies, students and teachers will find quality learning more feasible. Examining the amount of money the state provides per pupil is vital in informing our community of the importance the state places on education.

### How are We Doing?

The annual cost per student continues to increase each year, but the funding is now decreasing. Funding that comes from the state of Colorado is based on a specific formula that includes several factors.

**The base for the funding is the October student count multiplied by the total per**

**student funding, plus at-risk funding, plus online funding.** Total per student funding consists of three factors. The cost of living factor mirrors the local cost of housing, goods and services. The personnel costs factor, which includes employee salaries and benefits, varies by district based on enrollment, as does the size factor to recognize purchasing power differences among districts. These are both aspects that are distinctive to each district. At-risk funding is determined by the number of students that qualify for the federal free lunch program. If the district's number of at-risk students is above the state average (35.44%), additional funding is then provided. The online funding is for students enrolled in a certified multi-district online program. There are two local sources of revenue: property taxes (mil levy) and vehicle registration taxes.

### Complexities of Public School Funding

The system for funding school districts is necessarily complex in order to address the many diverse needs for students. While the total funding comes from three primary sources - local property taxes, local vehicle ownership taxes, and state equalization funds - the factors for determining these amounts are complex. In addition to the number of students, school districts receive funding based on the size of the district, the cost of living, and personnel costs. Probably more important than the complexity of public school funding is the inadequacy of funds. The funding formula does not provide enough resources or differentiate for our dramatically changing student demographics of increasing at-risk students, increasing minority representation, and increasing special needs students. These student populations, which have increased in the last decade, are far more expensive to serve.

In order to quantify the loss of funding in Colorado K-12 Education, Children's Voices contracted Augenblick, Palaich and Associates to calculate the resources needed to meet the standards and requirements for students, schools, school districts, and educators. The cost to implement reforms and requirements is an additional \$4 billion **above** the current funding levels. Already, Colorado is over \$2,000 **below** the national average in per-pupil funding. Some of the major differences are 10 more days in the school year for students and 5 more for teachers, a longer school day for most students, netbooks for 4th - 12th graders, full day kindergarten and preschool for at-risk 3 and 4 year olds.

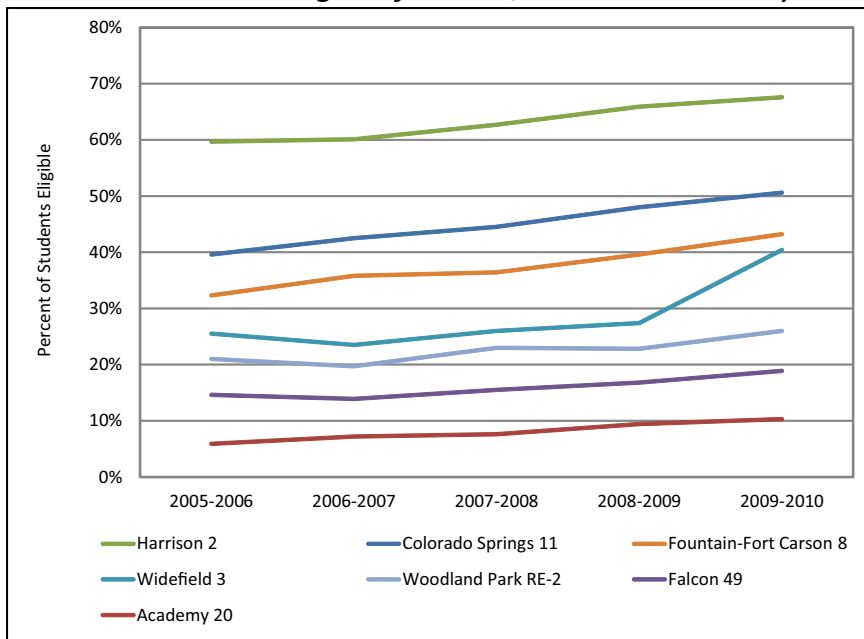
### Potential for Action

In general, our community's most vulnerable children are in our public school systems, and addressing their needs requires significant resources. The public must become educated on school funding in Colorado and the laws that govern the formulas used to fund different school districts. We must also educate ourselves on the issues that come forward through our national, state, and local governments that affect school funding in Colorado Springs.

\* Represents basic operating revenue of each district divided by the number of students

# -Students in Need-

## Pre K-12 Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch by District



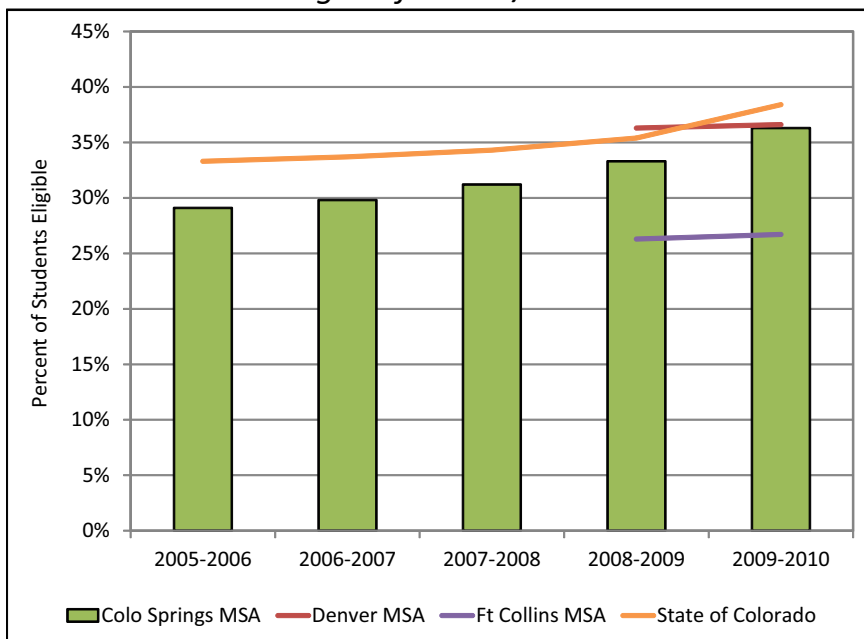
The first Chart shows the percentage of public school students (PreK through Grade 12) eligible for free or reduced lunch in El Paso County's six largest school districts and Teller County's largest school district.

The second Chart compares the Colorado Springs, Denver, and Fort Collins MSAs and the state of Colorado.

### Why is This Important?

Examining free or reduced lunch statistics in our community provides us with a snapshot of the economic status of the children attending school in our area public school districts. As noted in the introduction, family income is associated with gaps in student achievement. Students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch score lower on average on reading, math, and writing tests than those students who are not eligible. As noted on the previous page, these students are more likely to drop out of school, become teen parents, and have health, mental health, behavioral, and emotional problems.

## Pre K-12 Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch - MSA



Note: Children from families with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$28,665 for a family of four are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Children living in families with incomes above 130 percent and below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$40,793, are eligible for reduced price breakfast and lunch.<sup>1</sup>

### How are We Doing?

Every school district in the chart above has seen a steady increase over the years in free and reduced lunch percentages. However, Widefield School District 3 had a large increase of 13% in the last year. Harrison District 2 has the largest number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (67.6%), followed by Colorado Springs School District 11 with 50.6%.

### Potential for Action

As stated in the introduction, there are more children in poverty every year in Colorado. A child's ability to learn and succeed in school is based on having safe, stable, and stimulating

home and play environments, nutritious meals, and access to preventive health and dental care – all factors addressed in other sections of this report. It is imperative that we identify and implement a community effort focusing on poverty and its impact on brain development and children's long term success in order to support the children of our community.

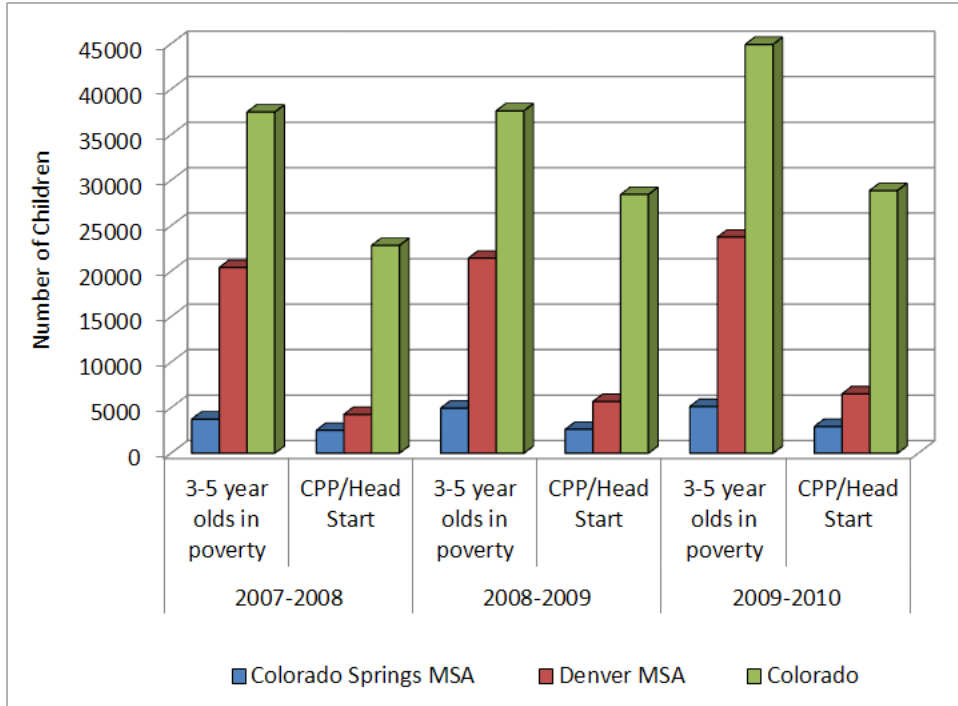
Source for both charts: Colorado Department of Education

1 Colorado Children's Campaign, 2011 Kids Count in Colorado, p. 23, www.coloradokids.org.

# -Early Learning-

## Early Childhood Education

### Enrollment of Children in Poverty in Preschool Programs in El Paso County



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**This Chart** shows the change from 2007-08 school year to the 2009-10 school year in the percentage of 3- to 5-year old children in the Colorado Springs MSA, the Denver MSA, and the State of Colorado who are living below the Federal Poverty Level and have the potential to be enrolled in principally publicly-funded preschool programs (Head Start and the Colorado Preschool Program), as compared to the number of available slots for those children to enroll.

#### Why is This Important?

According to the Colorado Children's Campaign's *2011 Kids Count* publication, attending a high-quality preschool helps children build the skills so that they are ready for elementary school success. It also helps prepare children for a lifetime of successful learning. Research shows that preschool participants are less likely to require special education or be retained a grade, and more likely to become proficient readers and graduate

from high school and college.<sup>1</sup> It is particularly important for minority and low-income students to enroll in preschool before age four, as both groups are more likely to enter school not prepared to learn. Research also tells us that students who begin school behind have a tendency to remain behind throughout their academic careers.<sup>2</sup>

#### How are We Doing?

As noted in the Social Wellbeing Section on page 33, the number of children under the age of 18 living in poverty in Colorado has more than doubled since 2000. While poverty is growing, particularly among children under the age of 5, the number of publicly-funded preschool slots available to our state's and region's lowest income families is not keeping pace. In the Colorado Springs MSA over the past three years, some school districts have been successful in receiving additional slots in the Colorado Preschool Program since 2007, and Community Partnership for Child Development (the Head Start grantee in El Paso County) expanded its Head Start slots by 57 in 2009 (from 977 to 1,034). Even with those extra investments, only 57% of the 3-5 year olds living in poverty had access to a free early childhood education during the 2009-2010 school year. Additionally, according to the Colorado Children's Campaign, the federal government defines children to be at risk for education failure because of poverty if their family earns less than 200% of the federal poverty level. In the Colorado Springs MSA, that percentage is 37% of all 3 to 5 year olds (almost 7,100 children).

#### Potential for Action

National and regional studies have shown that for every \$1 invested in high quality early care and education for children living in low income homes, the return on investment for a community is between \$7 and \$17 in reduced high school drop-out rates, lower teen pregnancy and crime rates, less reliance on public assistance, and an increased emphasis on preventive health practices.<sup>3</sup> As a community, our goal is to serve all children who need, but can't afford, an early learning program. Based on data from the American Communities Survey (2009), the Colorado Preschool Program Legislative Report 2011 and the Head Start grantees in the Colorado Springs MSA, at least 2,200 additional slots are needed to enroll children in early learning programs who are at 100% of the Federal Poverty Level, and an additional 2,000 slots are needed to enroll those at 200% of the FPL.

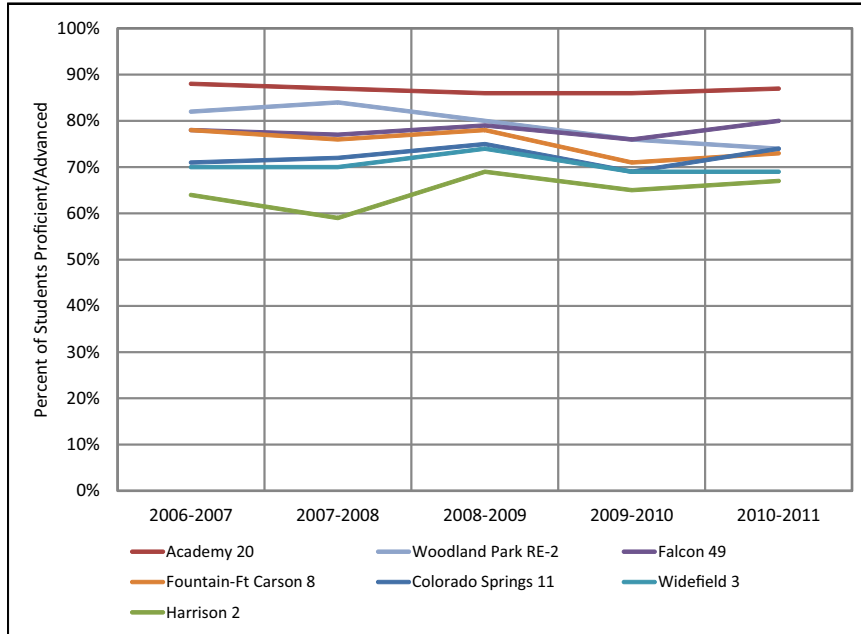
1 Preschool California. Benefits of Preschool. [http://www.preschoolcalifornia.org/benefits\\_of\\_preschool](http://www.preschoolcalifornia.org/benefits_of_preschool)

2 Heckman, Dr. James J. (May 2008). Schools, Skills and Synapses. University of Chicago, American Bar Foundation, University College Dublin and IZA.

3 Rolnick, Art and Rob Grunewald. (March 2003). Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.; and Heckman, Schools, Skills and Synapses (2008), pg. 91.

# -Student Achievement-

## Third Grade Reading Skills District Comparison



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**These Charts** report the outcomes for third grade students by District and MSA. The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) was the evaluation tool used to assess reading skills. The data show the percentage of students who scored at proficient or advanced (the top two of four levels of proficiency performance).

### Why is This Important?

Reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development. Until 4th grade, students learn to read. During and after 4th grade, students should be reading to learn, using their skills to gain more information, to solve problems, to think critically about what they are learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them. Research shows 75% of students who are poor readers in 3rd grade will remain poor readers in high school. Low achievement in reading has long-term consequences in terms of earning potential, global competitiveness, and general productivity.<sup>1</sup>

### How are We Doing?

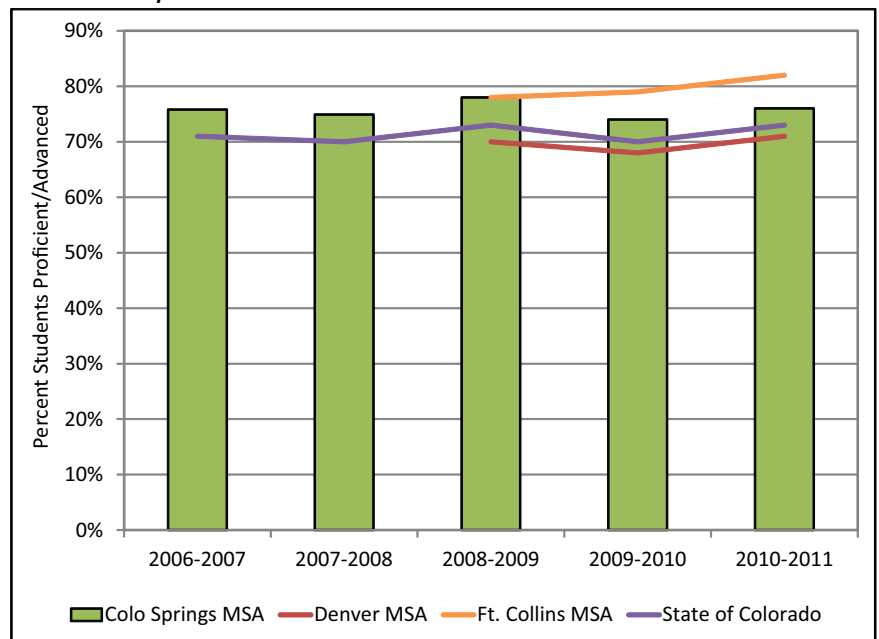
Five of the seven reported districts improved their scores, while one stayed the same and one dropped. The trend does not demonstrate significant improvement and sustainability with 3rd grade reading scores.

3rd grade reading levels increased overall for Colorado Springs MSA, Denver and Ft. Collins. In addition, the Colorado Springs MSA 3rd grade reading levels are higher than the state of Colorado, but there is still need for reading interventions and remediation programs.

### Potential for Action

The Education Vision Council recommends future reading data be collected from the NAEP, a growth data assessment. The National Assessment of Education Progress, a.k.a. "the Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in different subject areas. Its two major goals are to measure student achievement and to report change in performance over time.

## MSA Comparison



Source: Colorado Department of Education

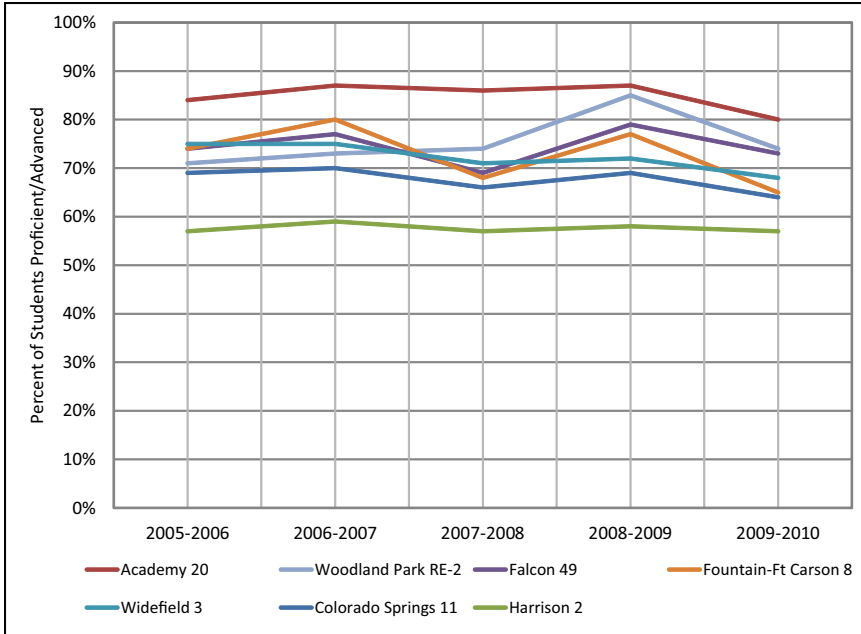
This is the right time to take on the challenge of dramatically increasing the number of children, especially from low-income families, who read proficiently. We encourage you and our community to act. Read, read to family members, read to neighbors, and volunteer in schools and other organizations committed to student achievement.

Please contact Pikes Peak United Way (719 955-0746) or your local school district to volunteer or offer resources.

1 Annie E Casey Foundation: Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, 2010.

# Tenth Grade Reading Skills

## District Comparison



**These Charts** show the percentage of public school tenth graders in the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Statistical Area (see page 76) who achieve at the top two levels on the CSAP in reading and the corresponding percentages for tenth graders in Denver’s seven largest school districts, all of Ft. Collins’s districts, and the entire state of Colorado.

### Why is This Important?

If we expect students to survive in the 21st century, it is essential that they are able to read. Although the world is increasingly using icons and video, reading is still the most important skill for future success. In fact, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills states that “high school and college graduates need to master basic academic skills” and the percentage of employers hiring only high school graduates is falling. Even those who decry the connection of education solely to future careers understand the importance of reading to a good life. Most importantly, please note the connection between poor outcomes in 3rd grade reading and poor results in 10th grade upon which we elaborate on the 3rd-Grade Reading Skills page.

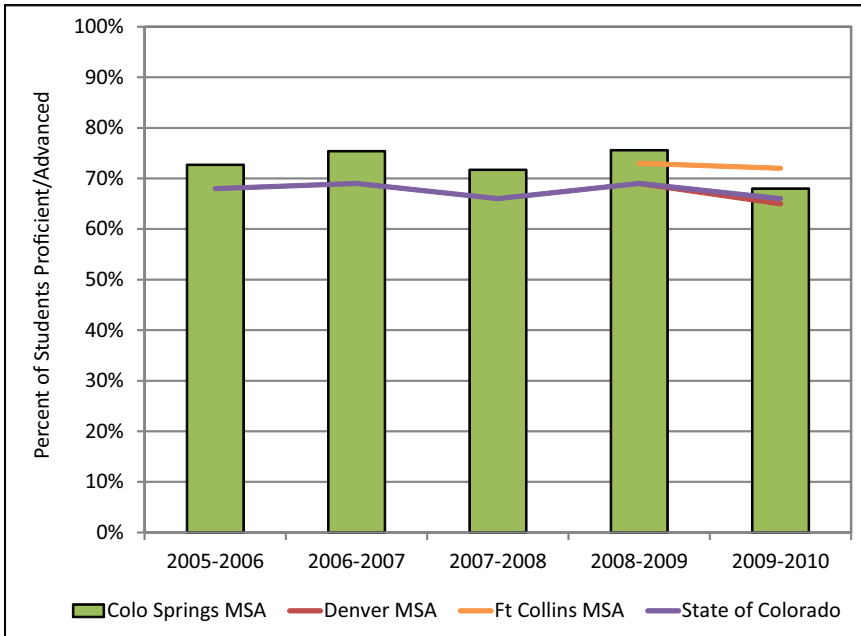
### How are We Doing?

Unfortunately, although students are scoring above their peers in Denver, Ft. Collins, and statewide, there are significant numbers of students not meeting the CSAP standards. Having 89% of Colorado Springs students score in the top two quartiles of the CSAP tests simply means that this group of kids scored above 50% of all students. Even worse, the CSAP standards are some of the lowest in the nation and have fallen over the last few years (The Proficiency Illusion, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October, 2007). Colorado students at the 8th grade level have to score at 14% of the national norm to be above average in Colorado.

### Potential for Action

Citizens of Colorado Springs should demand that their schools adjust their standards to the highest standards possible. Then we will know the true nature of our students’ competence,

## MSA Comparison

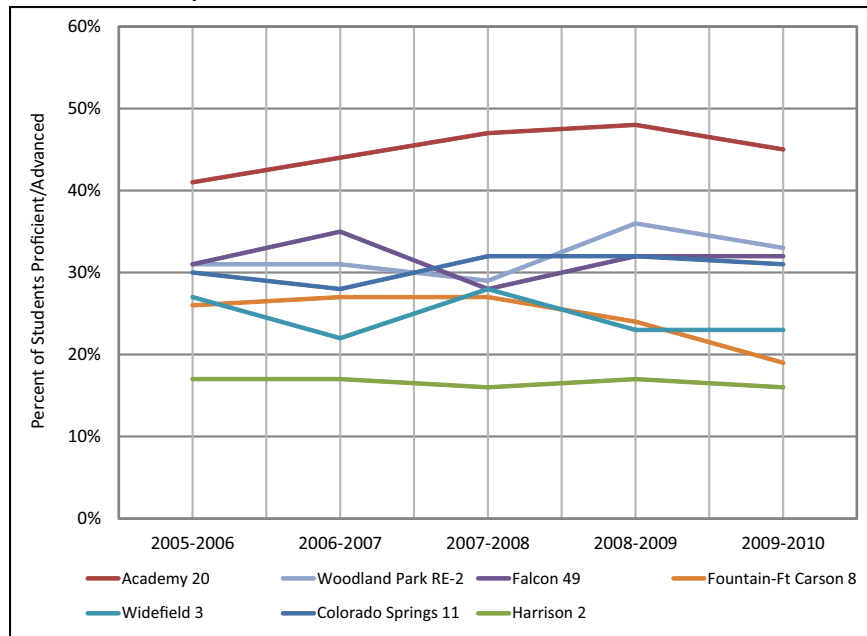


Source for both charts: Colorado Department of Education

instead of being disillusioned about great achievements. There is a Common State Standards movement that would be a good first start. Also, the Education Vision Council recommends collecting future reading data from the NAEP, a growth data assessment, especially as Colorado is dropping the CSAP test and creating another state-based evaluation system. The full explanation for this can be found on pages 76 and 81.

# Tenth Grade Math Skills

## District Comparison



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**These Charts** show the percentage of public school tenth graders in the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Statistical Area (see page 76) who achieve at the top two levels on the CSAP in math and the corresponding percentages for tenth graders in Denver’s seven largest school districts, all of Ft. Collins’s districts, and the entire state of Colorado.

### Why is This Important?

If we expect students to survive in the work world of the 21st century, it is essential that they are able to perform mathematics. Colorado, although boasting one of the best educated citizenry in the U.S., must import its talent. While this is likely to continue, Colorado could easily boost its productivity by applying more rigorous standards and working with its students to achieve much higher levels.

### How are We Doing?

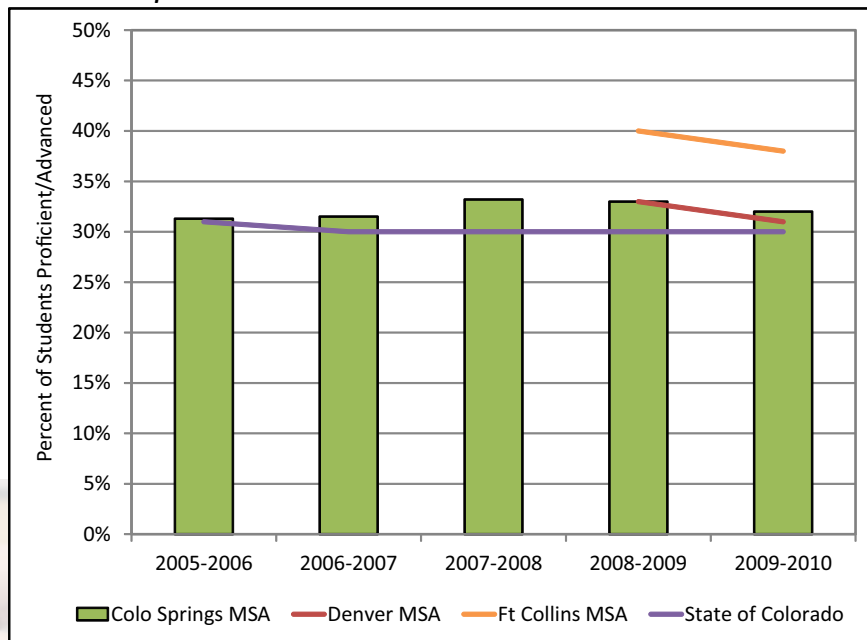
We are doing terribly. Not one district scored above 50%. This abysmal performance makes comparisons to other districts meaningless. Although a few districts have improved, over

five years the percentages don’t indicate great improvement. Even worse, the CSAP standards are some of the lowest in the nation and have fallen over the last few years.<sup>1</sup> Colorado students at the 8th grade level only have to score at 25% of the national norm to be above average in Colorado.

### Potential for Action

School districts should look at potentially adjusting their standards to the highest possible levels. This will give us a better gauge on the level of competency of our students.

## MSA Comparison



Source: Colorado Department of Education

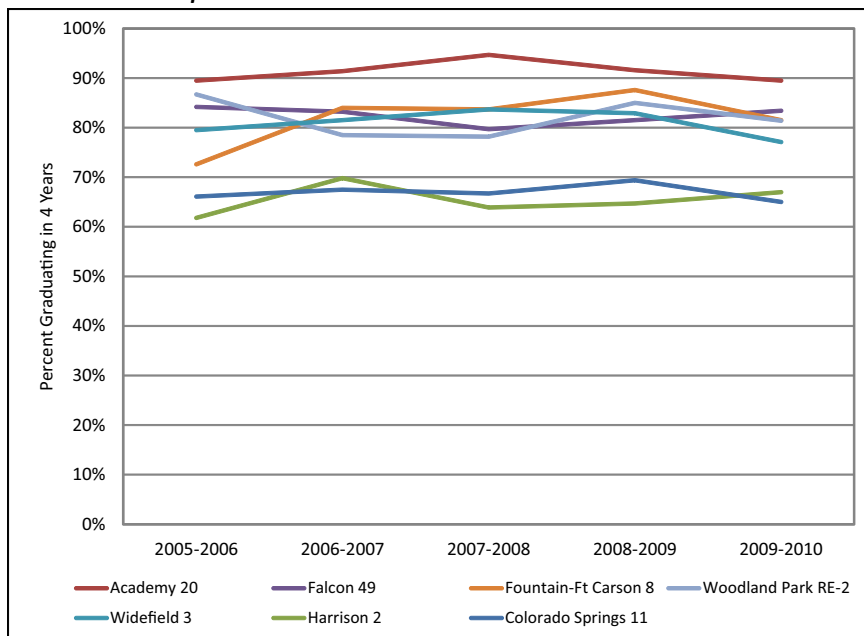
1 The Proficiency Illusion, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October, 2007.

Photograph by ARENA Creative

# -Student Graduation-

## High School Graduation Rate

### District Comparison

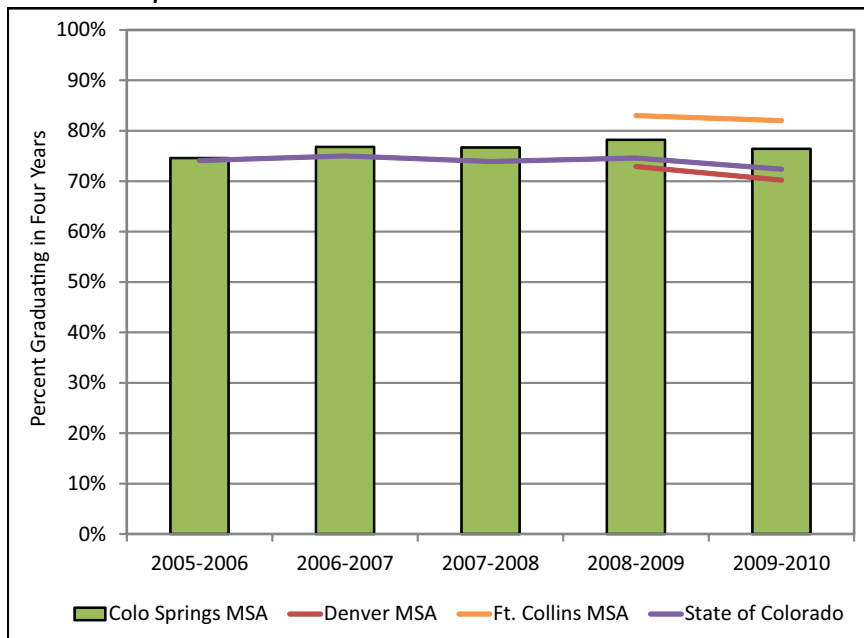


**These Charts** show the percentage of students who graduate from public high school utilizing the 4-year Completion formula in the Colorado Springs MSA. Four year completion includes students who obtain a General Education Degree (GED) or certificate of completion other than a high school diploma, late graduates who interrupt their coursework, and early graduates receiving a diploma in fewer than four years.

If a student is reported to have moved to another district and does not show up and cannot be located, the state assumes that student is a drop out.

Colorado currently uses two calculations for graduation rates "4-Year On-time" and "4-Year Completion". The Colorado Department of Education reported that by year end 2011, Colorado will report a 4-Year On-time graduation rate. This formula yields a rate that cannot be compared directly with prior year data.<sup>1</sup>

### MSA Comparison



#### Why is This Important?

Youth who drop out of school significantly diminish the quality of life for residents in their communities. Dropouts are less likely to be community volunteers, vote in elections, or accumulate wealth, and these factors impact living conditions, educational opportunities, and job opportunities. They pay fewer taxes, are more likely to collect welfare, and more likely to engage in criminal activity. 63% of Colorado's inmates do not have a high school diploma or GED and 22% of inmates are functionally illiterate.<sup>2</sup> A major driver of lower graduation rates is poverty.

#### How are We Doing?

With the exception of Harrison School District 2 and Falcon School District 49, 4-Year Completion graduation rates have dropped within the Colorado Springs MSA, Denver MSA, and the State of Colorado.

#### Potential for Action

Support from trained and dedicated adults working as tutors, mentors, attendance

monitors and problem solvers helps students and schools succeed. Programs that support parents as the "most important teacher", family literacy programs, parents that value education and pass that value on to their children, and parents involved with school are critical to improving graduation rates.

Source for both charts: Colorado Department of Education

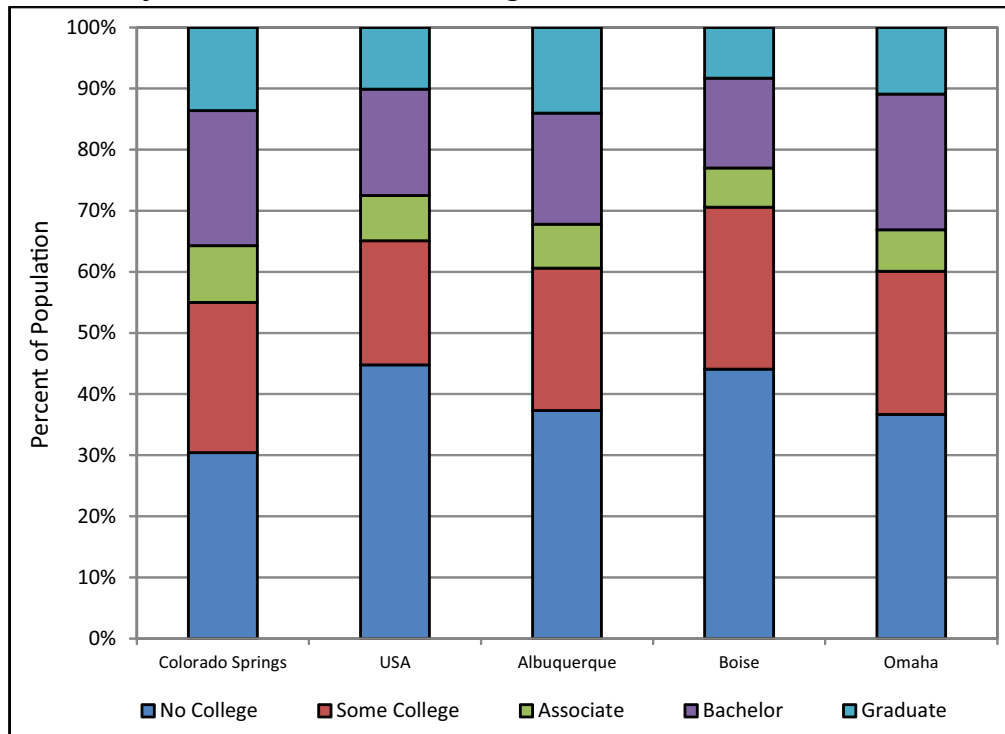
<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Education, New Federal Formula Figures Four-Year "On-Time" Graduation Rate for Colorado, February 9, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Department of Corrections, Statistical Report: Fiscal Year 2010.

# -Higher Education-

## ★ Educational Attainment

Percent of Residents Over 25 - Degrees Earned, 2005-2009



Source: American Communities Survey, US Census 2005-2007, El Paso County, Colorado

**This Chart** shows the percentage of adults age 25 and older who have gained some level of education in 2005-2009 in the Colorado Springs MSA as well as in Omaha, Boise, Albuquerque, and the USA.

### Why is This Important?

Education is the single most important factor in the determination of a person's poverty status. An adult without a high school education is two times more likely to live in poverty than one with a high school diploma and seven times more likely than a college graduate.

Many people are looking at returning to college as a way to make themselves more marketable; thus, it is important to look at the breakdown of college degrees to compare the educational level attained by our citizens.

It is noteworthy that accredited postsecondary institutions<sup>1</sup> in the Colorado Springs MSA offer a variety of degrees. Eleven of those institutions offer associate degrees, eleven offer baccalaureate degrees, seven offer masters degrees, and three offer doctoral degrees.

### How are We Doing?

In comparison to benchmark cities such as Omaha, Boise, and Albuquerque, El Paso County residents are attaining high levels of education and earning more degrees. The effort to learn a new trade or skill should provide benefits to the region in increased productivity. However, the data does not indicate whether students are choosing degrees which will guarantee them jobs. The offering of graduate degrees indicates an expected increase in productivity. Also, the percentage of residents with college degrees is above the country as a whole. Below are some examples of how our colleges are doing:

Colorado Technical University was recognized by the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency as a Center of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Education. CTU received the Diversity and Inclusion Award from the Colorado Springs Diversity Forum and CTU received the Foothills Award under Colorado Performance Excellence (CPEx), a stepping stone toward the National Baldrige Quality Award.

*US News & World Report* named UCCS as one of America's Best Colleges, seventh among Western regional public universities, seventh nationally for public undergraduate engineering, in the top one-third nationally for undergraduate business, and top-ranked graduate programs in nursing and public affairs. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) named UCCS one of two national leaders in community engagement efforts.

Colorado College, established as a coeducational educational institution in 1874, now employs a block plan for course work where students take one course in a three and a half week block, and is recognized by *US News & World Report* as the 26th best liberal arts college in the entire country.

*US News & World Report* ranks the United States Air Force Academy as the best (#1) College in the West and the 8th best in electrical/electronics/communications in the entire country.

<sup>1</sup> Accredited institutions of higher education included in the data set are: College America-Colorado Springs, Colorado College, Colorado School of Professional Psychology, Colorado Technical University, Colorado Technical University Online, Everest College-Colorado Springs, Intellitec College-Colorado Springs, Intellitec Medical Institute, National American University-Colorado Springs, Nazarene Bible College, Pikes Peak Community College, Remington College-Colorado Springs Campus, United States Air Force Academy, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of Phoenix-Southern Colorado Campus.