

EDUCATION



"PEOPLE WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE HEALTHIER AND LIVE LONGER."

-HEALTHY PEOPLE 2030

WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS ASSESSMENT

A solid educational foundation lays the groundwork for resources and resilience to strengthen health outcomes for Mesa County residents. Good educational outcomes—those that provide health literacy as well as economic stability—depend on successful navigation of elementary and secondary education. These years of education are in turn dependent on kindergarten readiness and high quality early childhood education opportunities.

Mesa County has unique strengths and struggles in the educational arena. While several communities experience a lack of needed early childhood care, many kindergarteners enter school with high levels of readiness. Yet, by fourth grade, the majority of students have not reached proficiency targets for English Language Arts or Math. While Mesa County's high school graduation rate is significantly lower than the state of Colorado, in recent years, District 51 in particular has made notable progress toward high school graduation for students who don't fit the typical four-year model.

When students exit high school, higher education opportunities are plentiful in Mesa County. Colorado Mesa University offers programs to nearly every level of learner, and almost half of their undergraduate population comes from Colorado's Western Slope. In addition, opportunities for training through union apprenticeship programs offer pathways to secure employment that don't rely on a four-year college experience. Nonetheless, many recent high school graduates in Mesa County choose not to pursue any higher education, despite evidence that suggests members of the workforce with only a high school diploma earn less, have a higher risk of poverty, and are less likely to own a home than their peers who pursue some type of higher education.

P-12 EDUCATION



The pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education pipeline in Mesa County provides important resources to families and prepares students for successful adult lives. Along this pipeline, there are strengths and challenges.

In general, children in Mesa County enter kindergarten with similar or better readiness scores than children statewide, despite variable access to early childhood education. The overall scores mask the wide variation in readiness, with differences of nearly 80 percent between the most ready schools and the least ready schools.

Despite the overall high kindergarten readiness scores, by fourth grade, students are struggling. Mesa County fourth graders lag the state both in overall student proficiency and the number of schools with 50% proficiency. In light of the fact that Mesa County spends more per pupil than the state and two comparison communities, it begs the question of how we can better support our schools in their mission of student success.

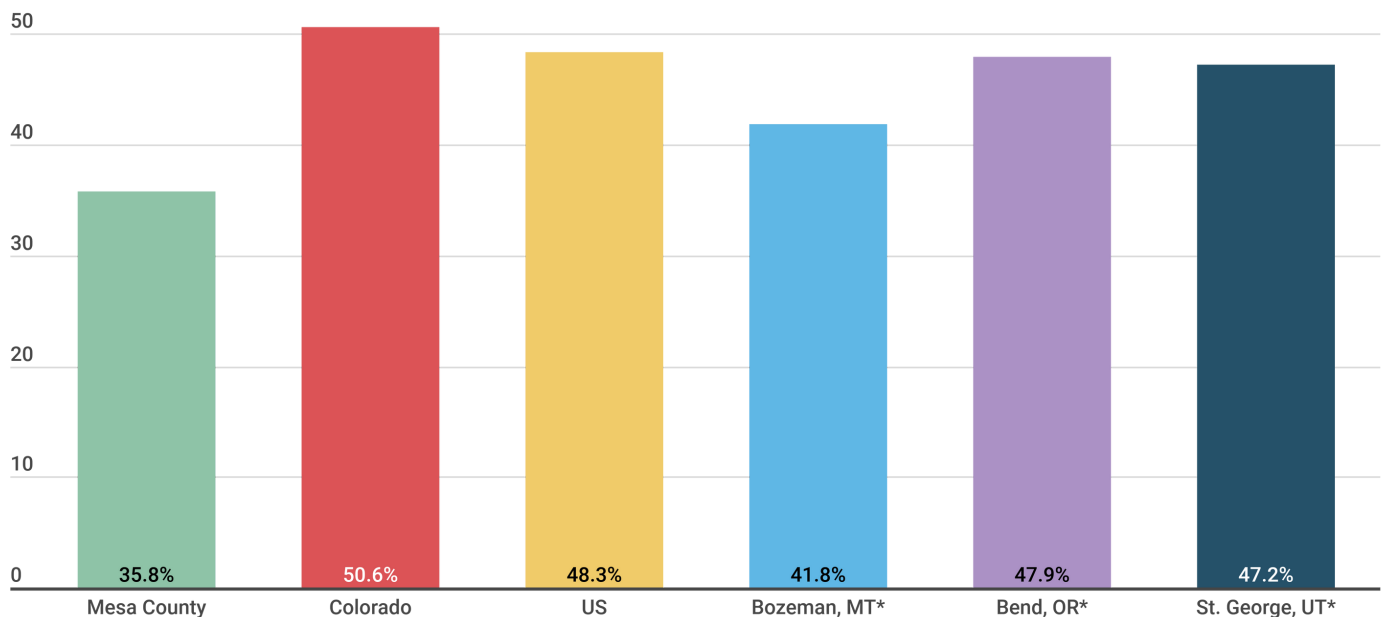
Beyond elementary achievement, District 51's commitment to performance-based learning has yielded results in the area of high school graduation and pursuit of higher education. Prioritizing meeting the varied needs of all students prepares our local population for success in job endeavors and provides the resilience that promote positive health outcomes.

Quality early childhood education gets kids ready for school, leading to successful careers later in life. Affordable, quality child care alleviates stress on families, allowing our community to grow.

PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION

In 2019, there were 3,600 children aged 3-4 years in Mesa County. Fewer children in this age group in Mesa County were enrolled in preschool programs than in Colorado or the US.

PERCENT OF CHILDREN (3-4 YEARS) ENROLLED IN PRESCHOOL IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, THE US, AND COMPARISON COMMUNITIES (2019)



*Comparison communities were measured at the county level.

●●● AREA OF ACTION

- Investigate why preschool participation is lower than the state and comparison communities, especially in light of the fact that our overall kindergarten readiness is comparable.
- Investigate preschool enrollment by key demographic and socioeconomic factors to understand where disparities exist.
- Consider opportunities to expand quality, licensed home-based care in communities with no licensed infant/toddler care options such as Loma, De Beque, and Collbran.
- Support existing child care facilities in achieving high-quality ratings.

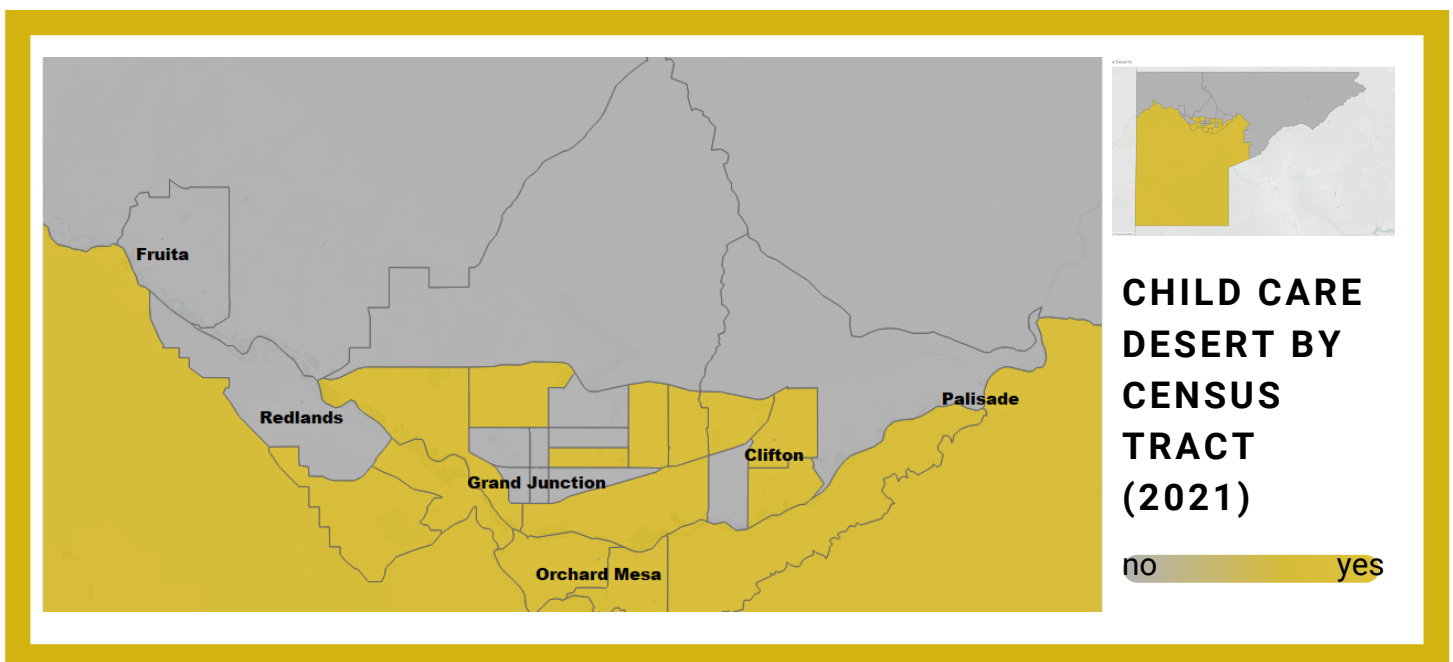
PRESCHOOL CAPACITY

An area with more than three children per available licensed child care spot is considered a child care desert. In April 2019, there were 2.6 children aged 0-4 years for every licensed child care spot in Mesa County. In October 2020, with 15.7% fewer spots available, that ratio rose to 3 children per space.

Child care resources are not distributed evenly across the county. Some areas, such as Fruita and much of central Grand Junction, have enough child care capacity to not be categorized as child care deserts. Other areas, such as most of the outlying areas of Grand Junction, Orchard Mesa, Clifton, and Palisade are child care deserts. Some rural areas appear to have adequate child care because of preschool capacity provided by the local elementary school, but these facilities cannot accommodate infants or toddlers, leaving these areas with no licensed child care options for very young children.

Because reports available about child care capacity only include licensed facilities, it is worth noting that the current Head Start program in Grand Junction has elected not to pursue licensure since they are a federally-exempt program. They contribute some additional capacity.

Licensed child care facilities are inspected for basic health and safety by Mesa County Public Health. Some facilities elect to participate in additional staff training and preparation, earning the designation “Quality” child care. Approximately 35% of child care capacity in Mesa County is “Quality” child care, and one-third of the census tracts shown on the map have no “Quality” capacity.



KINDERGARTEN READINESS

For the 2019-2020 school year, 67.0% of incoming students were ready for kindergarten (64.2% statewide).

- Individual elementary schools had readiness rates that ranged from 15.2% to 92.7%.

**“Colorado’s education accountability system is based on the belief that every student should receive an excellent education and graduate ready to succeed in careers or in college.”
-Colorado Department of Education**

On the 2019 Performance Framework Results, Mesa County Valley District 51 scored “Approaching Expectations” (52.7/100), De Beque District 49JT scored “Meets Expectations” (63.2/100), and Plateau Valley scored “Approaching Expectations” (47.1/100).

4TH GRADE READING/MATH PROFICIENCY

Fewer than half of Mesa County fourth graders are proficient in English Language Arts, and fewer than a quarter are proficient in Math. The scores in Mesa County consistently lag behind state-wide scores.

In Mesa County we do not track students in a way that allows us to correlate their elementary proficiency scores with their future outcomes. However, nationwide, 16% of children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate on time compared to only 4% of their literate peers.

Note: It is difficult to directly compare the outcomes of assessments conducted in different states. Although the states all have the same high-level goals for assessment, each state creates its own assessment and scoring system. “Met or exceeded expectations” in Mesa County and Colorado may not be measuring exactly the same level of student achievement as “proficient” in Bend and Bozeman.





●●● AREA OF ACTION

- Focus efforts to improve early childhood outcomes on children who live in the boundaries of schools with low kindergarten readiness.
- Evaluate potential needs of elementary school children based on census information for the neighborhoods that feed each school to assist schools in addressing challenges.
- Work with De Beque and Plateau Valley school districts to understand kindergarten readiness for incoming students.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFICIENCY IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, AND COMPARISON COMMUNITIES (2019)

	English Language Arts	Math
Mesa County % met or exceeded expectations	41.9%	22.9%
Colorado % met or exceeded expectations	48.0%	33.6%
Number of Mesa County Elementary Schools where less than 25% met or exceeded expectations	4/27	12/27
Number of Mesa County Elementary Schools where more than 50% met or exceeded expectations	9/27	2/27
Bend, OR % proficient*	60.0%	56.8%
Number of Bend, OR Elementary schools where more than 50% proficient*	21/27	18/27
Bozeman, MT % proficient (all grades)*	64%	56%
Number of Bozeman, MT Elementary schools where more than 50% proficient (all grades)	16/19	16/19

*Comparison communities were measured at the county level.

Fourth grade proficiency at the school level does not seem to be predicted by that school's kindergarten readiness. Although we might expect schools whose students have higher levels of kindergarten readiness to have higher elementary school proficiency, we don't see that relationship. Some schools with very low kindergarten readiness outperform schools with high readiness. Some schools with high readiness have a majority of proficient students by fourth grade, and others with high readiness have very few proficient students.



District 51 officials acknowledge the elementary proficiency issues discussed here. Funds from the 2017 mill levy override were directed toward teacher literacy training and purchasing new curriculum materials. After implementation, the district awaited the 2020 CMAS test scores to assess improvements, but CMAS testing was cancelled due to COVID-19. 2021 test scores may reflect the impact of these changes, but the effects of distance learning and classroom disruptions due to COVID-19 may also impact these scores.

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

- Consider best practices to measure the impact of teacher training and curriculum changes.
- Investigate the disconnect between kindergarten readiness and elementary school proficiency. Determine where disparities exist. Explore best practice solutions for how to better support children and families to improve overall readiness and proficiency.



HIGH SCHOOL

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

In Mesa County, approximately 4.7% of high school students are enrolled in alternative school programs (including R-5 and local students attending Grand Mesa High School). In Bend, OR (measured by enrollment in Deschutes County, OR schools), less than 2.4% of students are enrolled in alternative schools.

Alternative schools in Mesa County provide flexibility in structure for students who don't fit effectively in the traditional high school model. Some students are able to take one course at a time, completing it in three weeks and moving on to the next, instead of managing several courses at once across a semester. At Grand Mesa High School, a mix of high risk local students and those from outside of the county attend a boarding school operated by Job Corps, allowing them to achieve a high school diploma and a vocational certificate at the same time.



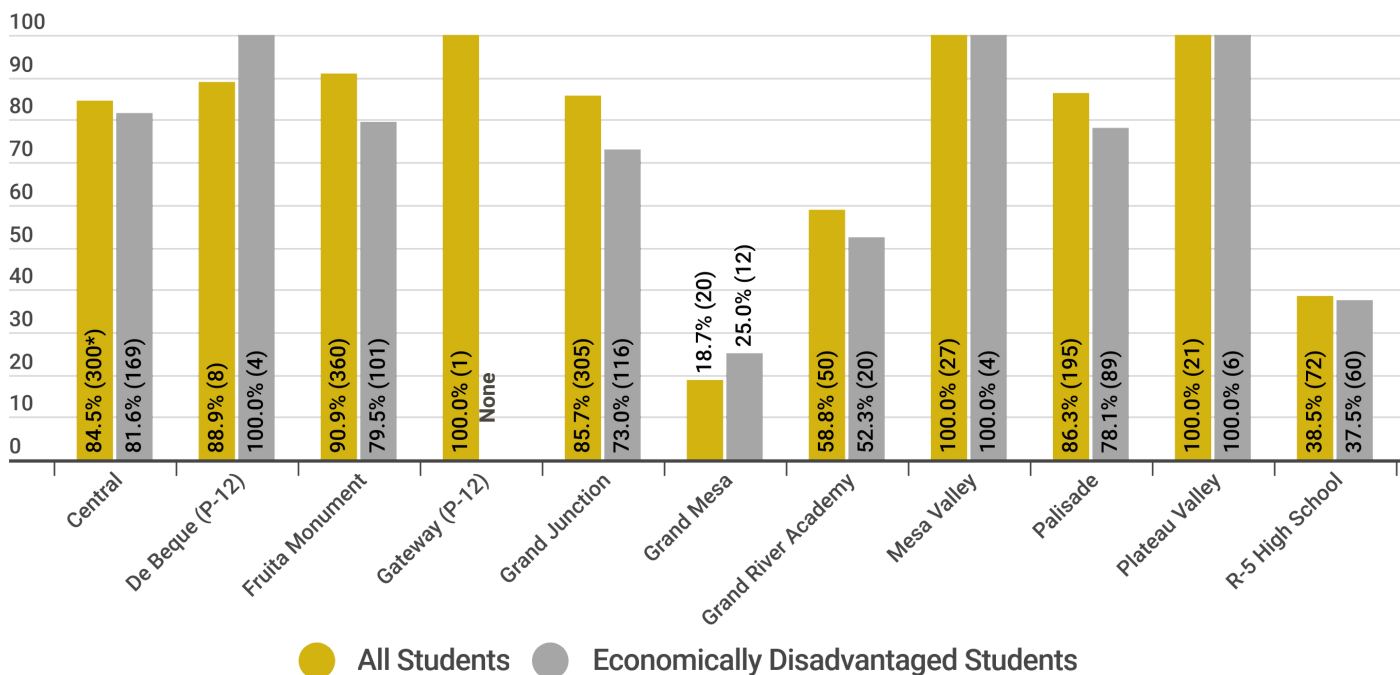
Due to the individual struggles of students attending alternative schools, dropout rates are much higher than traditional high schools. However, some students find great success at alternative high schools. Anecdotally, administrators point to attention disorders as the greatest challenge of alternative high school students.

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

- Identify and intervene with high-risk students before academic failure pushes them into alternative schools. Strengthen the role of alternative schools as offering flexible options to meet varied needs of students and reduce the role as a catch-all for students with behavioral and academic issues.

GRADUATION RATES

RATES OF FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION AT HIGH SCHOOLS IN MESA COUNTY (2020)



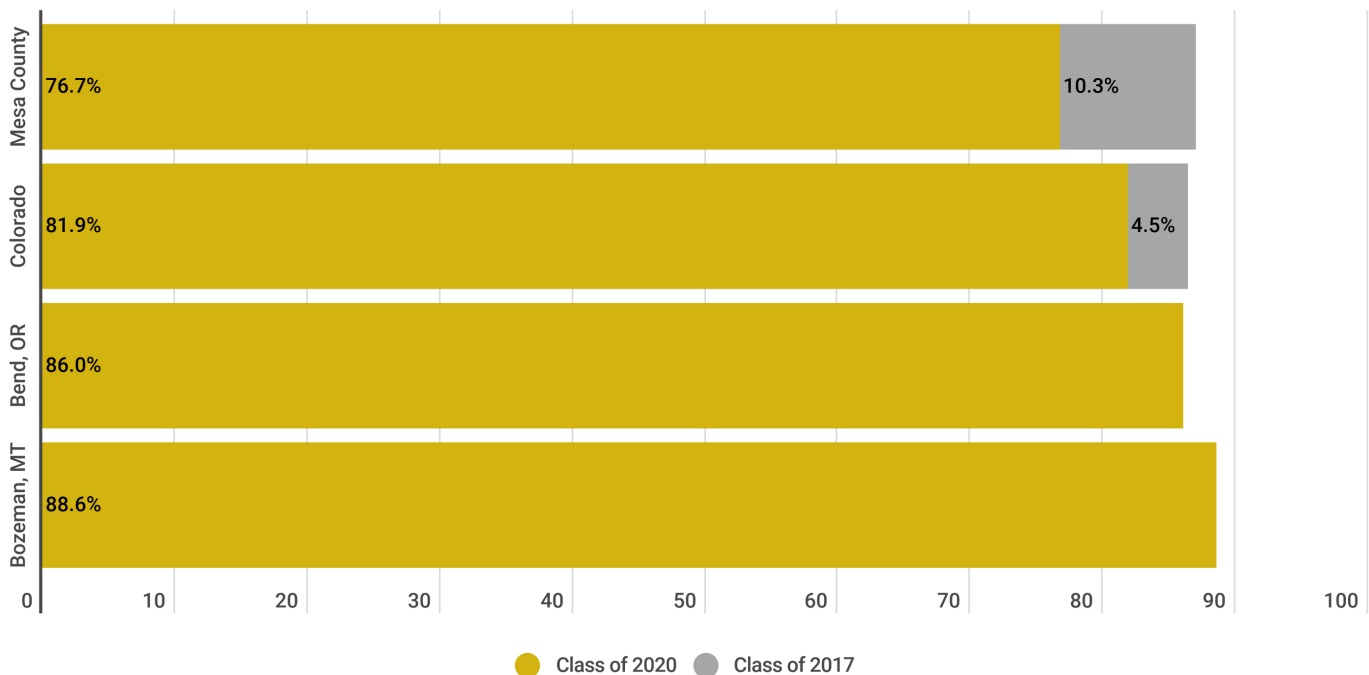
*number of graduates

By June 2020, across all three school districts in Mesa County, 76.7% of the class of 2020 had graduated, compared to 81.9% in Colorado. 87.0% of the class of 2017 had graduated (indicating graduation in 7 years), compared to 86.4% in Colorado.

While more than one in five Mesa County students do not graduate in four years, about one-third of those students do go on to graduate in six years. In 2012, only one-sixth of students who hadn't graduated in four years had done so by year six.

Students who previously fell through the cracks after failing to finish in four years are now twice as likely to go on to graduate.

RATE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION IN MESA COUNTY, AND COMPARISON COMMUNITIES (2020)



STUDENTS DO NOT GRADUATE IN FOUR YEARS

ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THOSE GO ON TO GRADUATE IN SIX YEARS.

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

- Consider how to encourage four-year completion and continue to support students who do not finish in four years so they eventually achieve graduation.
- Focus retention efforts on populations with higher dropout rates. Consider risk factors that make these populations more vulnerable to dropout and address risk factors through best practice interventions.

In 2019, **2.0%** of all Mesa County students dropped out of school programs, compared to **1.8%** of Colorado students. Some groups, such as males, Hispanic/Latino students, and Title 1 (a federal aid program) students, were more likely to drop out than the general population.

SAT SCORES

Across Colorado, all Juniors in high school are administered the SAT free of charge. This not only reduces potential barriers to higher education among low-income students who might have difficulty paying for the test or demonstrating need for a fee waiver, it also provides a unified benchmark to compare student performance across the state.

In Spring 2021, many universities are choosing to make SAT scores an optional piece of the application package.

2019 MEAN SAT SCORES

scale of 400-1600

- **MESA COUNTY: 970**
- **COLORADO: 1,001**



Alternative high schools have average scores of 792-831, compared to 934-1016 among traditional schools.

HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT

High School Seniors graduating from School District 51 in 2019 reported on a survey that 61.1% intended to pursue a four-year degree, and 74.0% intended to pursue some type of higher education through apprenticeship, two-year degree or technical certificate, or four-year degree. 86.8% said they had been encouraged to explore various career options that helped them arrive at that plan.

60.0% of students preparing to graduate at the four main high schools in 2019 communicated to their Career and College Advisor that they intended to enroll in some type of higher education.

The National Student Clearinghouse report indicates that 53.3% of 2019 graduates from the main four high schools and 45.4% of all 2019 graduates from District 51 were “found in college” the fall semester after graduation. This number underestimates enrollment because it does not count private universities or occupational schools such as Salon Professional Academy in Grand Junction. It does count public colleges and universities like Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College and technical schools like Technical College of the Rockies.

●●● AREA OF ACTION

- Consider measures of college readiness in addition to SAT scores to best track whether Mesa County students who desire a four-year degree are adequately prepared to succeed.
- Consider methods to investigate the paths of students who indicated interest in higher education but did not pursue it, that still protects students’ rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Evaluate the role community partners can have in supporting students to be successful in pursuing their higher education plans after graduation.



HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Higher education completion, including two-year college, technical or professional certificate programs, four-year college, and graduate or professional degree programs are an area where Mesa County consistently lags behind the state of Colorado.

According to Healthy People 2020, “Graduation from college has a positive impact on employment options. Higher education helps people secure better-paying jobs with fewer safety hazards, [and] income from these employment opportunities may improve health by increasing people’s ability to accrue material resources, such as higher-quality housing, as well as psychosocial resources,” such as strong community ties.

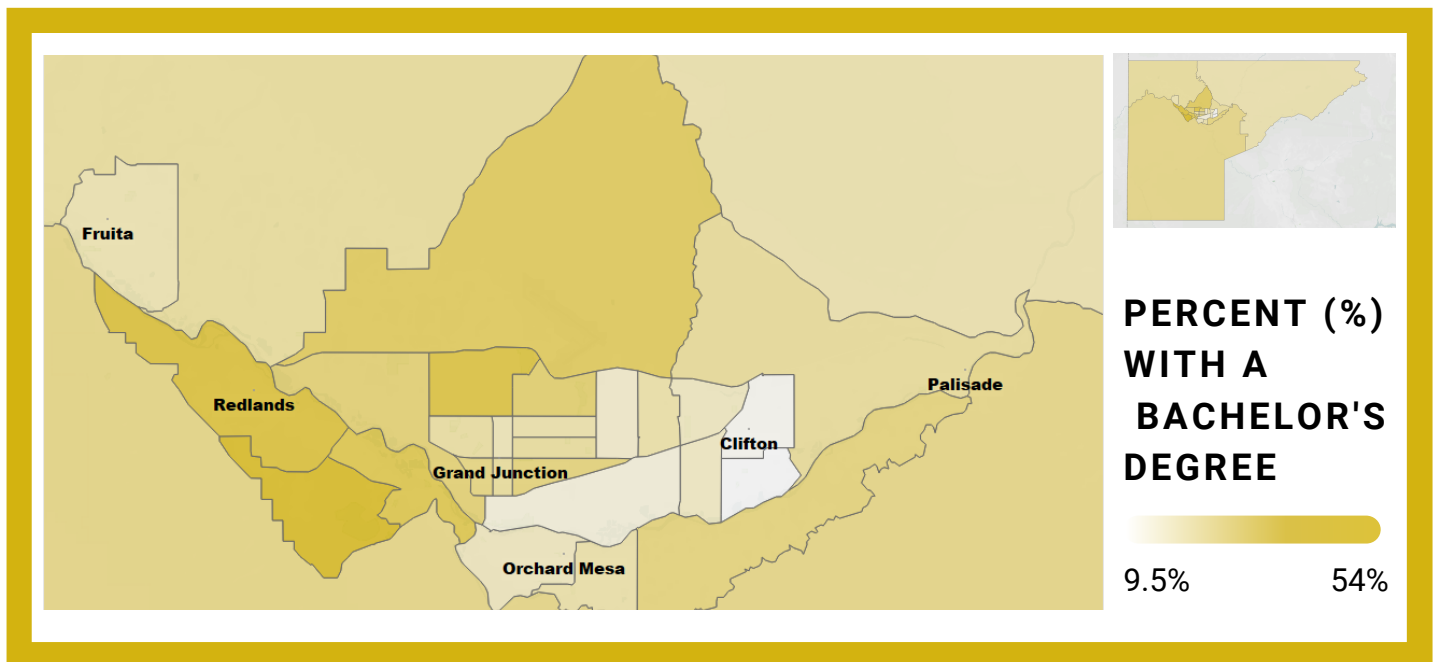
We recognize that access to higher education and the decision to enroll depend on a number of factors and there is no single best path for everyone. Mesa County has a strong foundation of higher education resources aimed at meeting the needs of a diverse population with varying goals.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Mesa County has significantly lower rates of residents 25 years and older who have completed any higher education when compared to Colorado and comparison communities. Within Mesa County, as the level of education increases, rates of homeownership and median household earnings increase and rates of poverty, unemployment, and uninsurance decrease.

Within Mesa County, rates of bachelor's degree or higher vary widely in different census tracts—from 9.5% in Clifton, to 53.9% in the Redlands. While there are many educational paths that lead to economic stability and resilience besides bachelor's degrees, it's important to examine potential barriers for students who do desire to pursue this level of education and ensure that our education system is effectively equipping students to meet this goal.

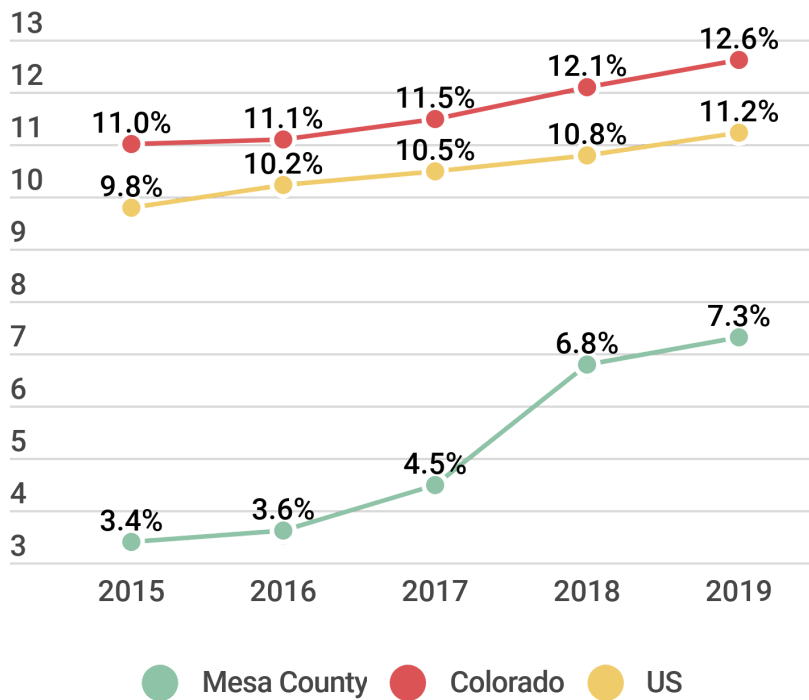
PERCENT OF ADULTS (25+ YEARS) WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER BY CENSUS TRACT IN MESA COUNTY (2015-2019)



Between 2015 and 2019, the number of people under 25 with a bachelor's degree more than doubled in Mesa County, from 3.4% to 7.3%.

This suggests that recent interventions, such as the placement of CMU guidance counselors at District 51 high schools, are successfully impacting the educational trajectories of recent graduates.

PERCENT OF YOUNG ADULTS (18-24 YEARS) WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, AND THE US (2015-2019)



BETWEEN 2015-2019, THE PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG ADULTS EARNING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE MORE THAN DOUBLED.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG ADULTS (25+ YEARS) IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, AND COMPARISON COMMUNITIES (2019)

	Mesa County	Colorado	Bozeman, MT*	Bend, OR*	St. George, UT*
Less Than High School Graduate	8.9%	7.6%	2.2%	6.8%	6.3%
High School Graduate	27.5%	21.0%	18.0%	18.9%	21.9%
Associate's Degree	8.2%	8.4%	6.8%	11.1%	13.5%
Some College, No Degree	25.7%	20.3%	20.3%	24.4%	31.0%
Bachelor's Degree	19.7%	26.6%	35.2%	23.6%	16.8%
Graduate or Professional Degree	10.1%	16.0%	17.5%	15.1%	10.5%

*Comparison communities were measured at the county level.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT'S EFFECT ON OUTCOMES

Generally, higher levels of education increase rates of homeownership and household earnings, and reduce the risk of poverty. People with higher levels of education are more resilient to unemployment, and more likely to be insured. One limitation of this data is that it groups together people who set an educational goal other than a bachelor's degree and attained it (e.g. an associate's degree or a technical certificate) with people who pursued an educational goal and did not attain it, thereby shouldering the cost of education without the benefits.



● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

- Investigate earning potential for associate's degree and technical certificate holders separately from those who began, but did not complete, any higher education goal. If earnings are similar to high school graduate earnings, consider ways to increase earning potential to incentivize enrollment and completion.
- Support students who will be the first in their families to pursue higher education through effective career planning and transitioning into higher education opportunities.

In addition to outcomes for the individual who pursues higher education, there are effects on the educational outcomes for the next generation. A 2018 study found that 33% of students whose parents had no higher education had left their higher education institution without a degree compared to only 14% of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree.

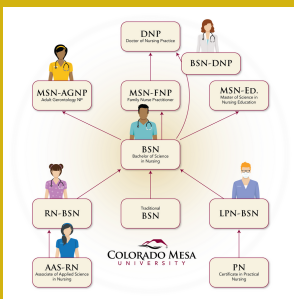
We do not have clear data on the educational attainment of the parents of Mesa County students, but the educational attainment of the population in general suggests that many current students who choose to pursue higher education will be the first in their families to do so.

34.2%
OF MESA COUNTY
RESIDENTS
WITHOUT A HIGH
SCHOOL DIPLOMA
ARE UNINSURED.

ECONOMIC STABILITY MEASURES BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN MESA COUNTY (2019)

	Home Owners	Median household earnings*	Poverty rate in population 25 years and older	Unemployment rate, 2015-2019	Uninsured (18-64)
Less Than High School Graduate	55.2%	\$26,838	17.7%	9.7%	34.2%
High School Graduate	70.0%	\$31,877	11.2%	7.3%	17.3%
Some College/Associate's Degree	63.4%	\$32,138	7.1%	5.4%	13.3%
Bachelor's Degree (or higher)	77.1%	\$43,457	4.2%	3.6%	5.5%

*Median household earnings is lower than median income because it only includes wage-type income, not social security or retirement pensions.



MESA COUNTY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PRIORITIZE MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS DRAWN FROM THE WESTERN SLOPE AND CREATING PROGRAMS THAT ALLOW STUDENTS TO CLIMB A LADDER OF CERTIFICATION AND DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH EASE.

HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The educational institutions in Mesa County recognize that higher education should not be a one-size-fits-all system, while also recognizing that research indicates that higher education leads to better health outcomes and employment options.

Despite a variety of local options, Mesa County's rate of enrollment in higher education lags behind Colorado and the US.

Percent of young adults (18-19 years) enrolled in school:

- Mesa County: 67.8%
- Colorado: 72.8%
- US: 75.4%

Note: "Enrolled in school" counts students completing any type of coursework (including community college vocational classes), but does not include students participating in industry apprenticeship programs that don't have a formal classroom component.

TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES AND ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES

Examinations of the impact of higher education often focus on bachelor's degrees as a benchmark goal. In Mesa County, however, the population is best supported by an education system that allows many entry points and varying goals.

Technical and Professional Certificates as well as Associate's Degrees offer a faster and less expensive educational training than four-year degrees, and often directly prepare students for success in the workforce. As shown earlier, adding some college or a non-degree certificate to a high school diploma increases median earnings and builds resiliency.

COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY BEGAN AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND GREW INTO AN INSTITUTION THAT OFFERS FOUR-YEAR DEGREES PROVIDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS.



D51 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE A VARIETY OF COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES AT NO COST THROUGH P-TECH, WESTERN COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE (WCCC), AND COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY (CMU).

HIGH SCHOOL TRAINING PROGRAMS

In 2019, Western Colorado Community College (WCCC), District 51 (D51), and five community business partners established the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program at Central High School. Students are transported to a WCCC workshop to take Manufacturing Technology Cluster courses at no cost. In the spring of 2021, there were 63 students enrolled in this program. In the fall of 2021, Grand Junction High School students will be able to join new P-TECH programs with medical and internet technology courses. All D51 high school students will also be able to take P-TECH courses in construction through the Career Center campus.

Most students enter the P-TECH manufacturing program because they know they want to enter the field and recognize that education credentials such as technical certificates or an associate's degree will earn them better pay and more opportunities for advancement. The classes and training these students complete during high school give them a no-cost head start toward achieving their goals within the field they've selected.

In addition to P-TECH programs, approximately 450 D51 high school students are transported to WCCC to take courses at the main campus at no cost to the student. Many of these students have entered a career pathway through the Career Center and are ready for more advanced coursework in fields like health care and manufacturing. Some students enroll to begin fulfilling requirements for an associate's or bachelor's degree at no cost with the intention of immediately continuing toward the degree after graduation.

D51 students also have the option to take college courses through CMU at no cost, and some high schools have college-level offerings taught by qualified high school instructors. These courses will transfer to any university in Colorado, and many universities across the country.

All of these programs allow students to explore higher education options at no cost to their families. Some students using these programs may have intense pressure to enter the workforce right after high school because their financial contributions will have a big impact on their family's financial stability. Attending classes through P-TECH, WCCC, or CMU for free while still in high school gives these students the opportunity to weigh options for their future at low risk—they have demonstrated to themselves and their parents that they can be successful in this environment, or have already narrowed possible career pathways to opportunities that are actually a good fit for them.

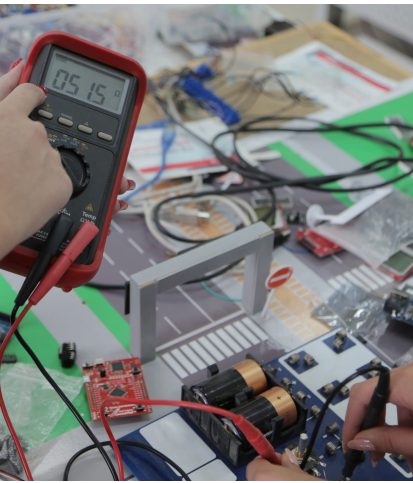
District administrators indicate that there are three main barriers to enrolling students in these programs. First, some students and families simply may not understand that these opportunities exist for any student who is prepared to enroll. Second, some families have concerns about their high school student spending time on a college campus without an adult chaperone. Third, while the courses are free, the district asks parents to commit to paying a portion of the cost if their student fails to attend class regularly as an incentive for families to actively motivate their student. This potential financial burden is sometimes more risk than families are willing or able to bear, and they choose not to participate.



●●● AREA OF ACTION

- Support D51, WCCC, and CMU in expanding student engagement in concurrent enrollment opportunities by increasing awareness, addressing parent concerns, and identifying strategies to motivate parent engagement without presenting a potential financial burden.

TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF THE ROCKIES (TCR) OFFERS COMPLEMENTARY COURSES TO WCCC AND AIMS TO INTEGRATE TCR TECHNICAL CERTIFICATES AS STEPPING STONES TO WCCC ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES IN THE FUTURE.



TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF THE ROCKIES

Technical College of the Rockies (TCR) in Delta, Colorado, serves Western Slope students who are seeking a technical certificate. Because of the convenient access to technical certificates at Western Colorado Community College (WCCC), Mesa County students primarily enroll in TCR programs that are impacted or only offered by private institutions in Mesa County. In the spring of 2021, there were 16 Mesa County students enrolled in the TCR cosmetology program, seven in health care programs, and five in law enforcement.

In the future, TCR plans to offer a Respiratory Therapy training program to the Delta campus (not currently available in Mesa County). In addition, TCR and WCCC are working on an agreement to allow students to apply TCR certificate credits toward a WCCC associate's degree, further supporting a model of higher education with multiple entry and completion points that best suits Colorado's Western Slope.

WESTERN COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Western Colorado Community College (WCCC) offers technical certificates and associate's degrees. Students attend with various educational goals in mind:

- Earn a technical certificate,
- earn a vocational associate's degree,
- or earn a liberal arts associate's degree with the intention to transfer to a 4-year institution.

In the past five years, WCCC has continued to add to program offerings with certificates like Gerontology and degrees like Digital Filmmaking.

86.3% OF THE 1,317 FALL 2020 WCCC STUDENTS CAME FROM MESA, MONTROSE, DELTA, OR GARFIELD COUNTIES.

15.9%

Technical
Certificates

37.4%

Associate's degree with
intention to transfer to
4-year institution



46.6%

Vocational Associate's
Degree Programs (AAS)

WCCC STUDENTS CAN OFTEN STACK THE REQUIREMENTS OF A LOWER-LEVEL TECHNICAL CERTIFICATE TOWARD COMPLETION OF A HIGHER-LEVEL CERTIFICATE OR AAS DEGREE.

Every course required for the Entry-Level Machining, Manufacturing Technology Technical Certificate can be applied to a Machining Technology, Manufacturing Technology AAS. Completing the entry-level certificate opens new immediate career opportunities as well as progressing a student toward an even higher education target.



BACHELOR'S DEGREES AND HIGHER

Nearly every benefit conferred by engaging in some college or a non-degree certificate program is amplified at the bachelor's degree level. Bachelor's degree programs are expensive and require a large time commitment, which often impacts access and success for students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or socio-economic levels.

However, as the main four-year degree institution in Mesa County, Colorado Mesa University strives to "successfully prepare students from diverse backgrounds for lives of career and service anywhere in the world."

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

- Investigate higher education enrollment statistics by additional demographic factors such as race and age.



COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY, WESTERN COLORADO'S PREMIER HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION, IS COMMITTED TO OFFERING "AN ADAPTABLE, FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO LEARNING THAT ALLOWS STUDENTS TO CHOOSE FROM MULTIPLE AND POTENTIALLY INTEGRATED PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE CERTIFICATION, ASSOCIATES, BACHELORS, AND GRADUATE DEGREES."

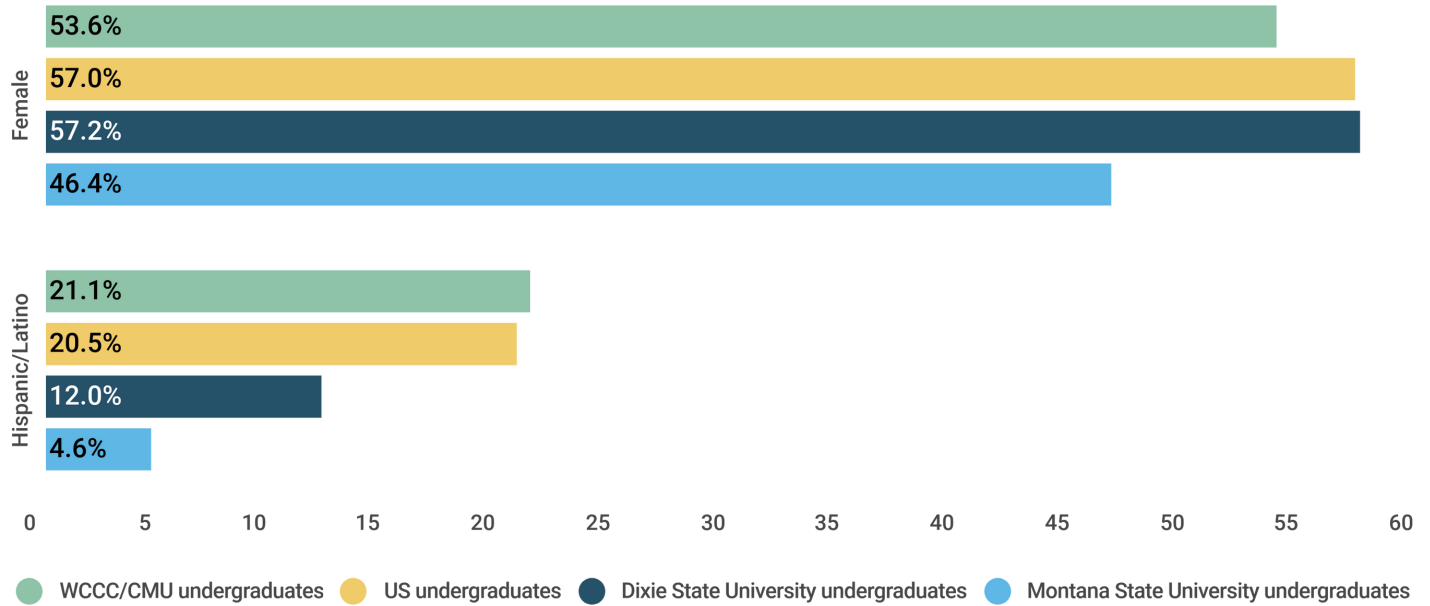
-CMU VISION AND VALUES

COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY

Colorado Mesa University (CMU) is a public university with 114 academic programs in Grand Junction with a regional campus in Montrose. The growing campus has the third lowest tuition in the state of Colorado.

In 2020, approximately one in three CMU students pursuing a bachelor's degree came from Mesa County, and nearly half came from Western Colorado.

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS BY DEMOGRAPHIC FOR MESA COUNTY, THE US, AND COMPARISON COMMUNITIES* (2020)



*Dixie State University is located in St. George, UT, and Montana State University is located in Bozeman, MT.

CMU offers bachelor's degrees and professional certificates to undergraduates. In the fall of 2020, undergraduate enrollment was 6,436. The Addictions Counseling Certificate was the most popular professional certificate, and Business Administration and Exercise Science were the most popular bachelor's degrees. CMU continues to add undergraduate offerings such as a Bachelor of Science in Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies with 21 students enrolled in the fall of 2020.

At the graduate level, 163 students are enrolled in 15 programs, more than half of which have been initiated in the last five years. Popular programs include Master of Physician Assistant Studies and Master of Business Administration. When considering the addition of graduate degrees, CMU prioritizes programs that allow current bachelor's degree students to continue their education. In keeping with this practice, CMU will offer a Master of Occupational Therapy degree starting in the fall of 2022, and they hope to offer a Master of Physical Therapy degree starting in the fall of 2023.

The CMU experience is rated well by students. In a 2019 survey, 87% of first year CMU students and 84% of CMU seniors indicated that if they could start over, they would probably or definitely choose to come to CMU again. 87% of first year students and 88% of seniors rated their entire educational experience at CMU as "good" or "excellent".

Community partners are interested in seeing CMU students graduate with practical experience to prepare them for the workforce. 52% of first year students and 38% of seniors indicated that they had never done a community-based project for a class.

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

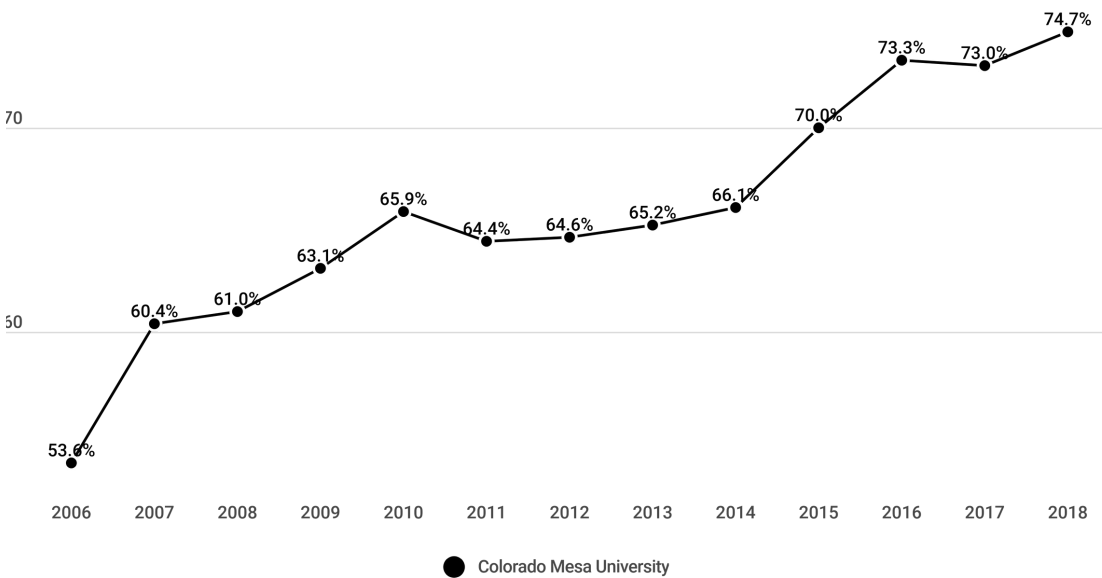
- Investigate whether Mesa County students enrolled at CMU in four-year degree programs are successful. Identify strategies to support local students and ensure they are well prepared.

Across the country, completion rates for bachelor's degree programs vary largely based on the selectivity of the institution. At programs with an open admissions policy (anyone who qualifies can attend), 34% of students who began in 2012 had earned a degree by 2018. At programs with the most selective admissions policies, where fewer than 25% of students who apply are accepted, 90% of students who began in 2012 had earned a degree by 2018.

Because of the structure of CMU and WCCC as an integrated undergraduate institution, some students enter under conditions similar to open admission, and others enter under policies more similar to selective admission. This makes it difficult to directly compare completion rates with other seemingly-comparable programs.

What's clear is that CMU has successfully increased completion rates dramatically since 2005, going from 24.9% to 43.1% between 2005 and 2019. Some of this successful effort was driven by reducing first year to second year attrition rates—in 2005 just 53.6% of first year students returned for a second year. In 2019, 74.6% of first year students returned.

FIRST-YEAR RETENTION RATE FOR BACHELOR'S-SEEKING STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2005 THROUGH FALL 2017 AT COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY

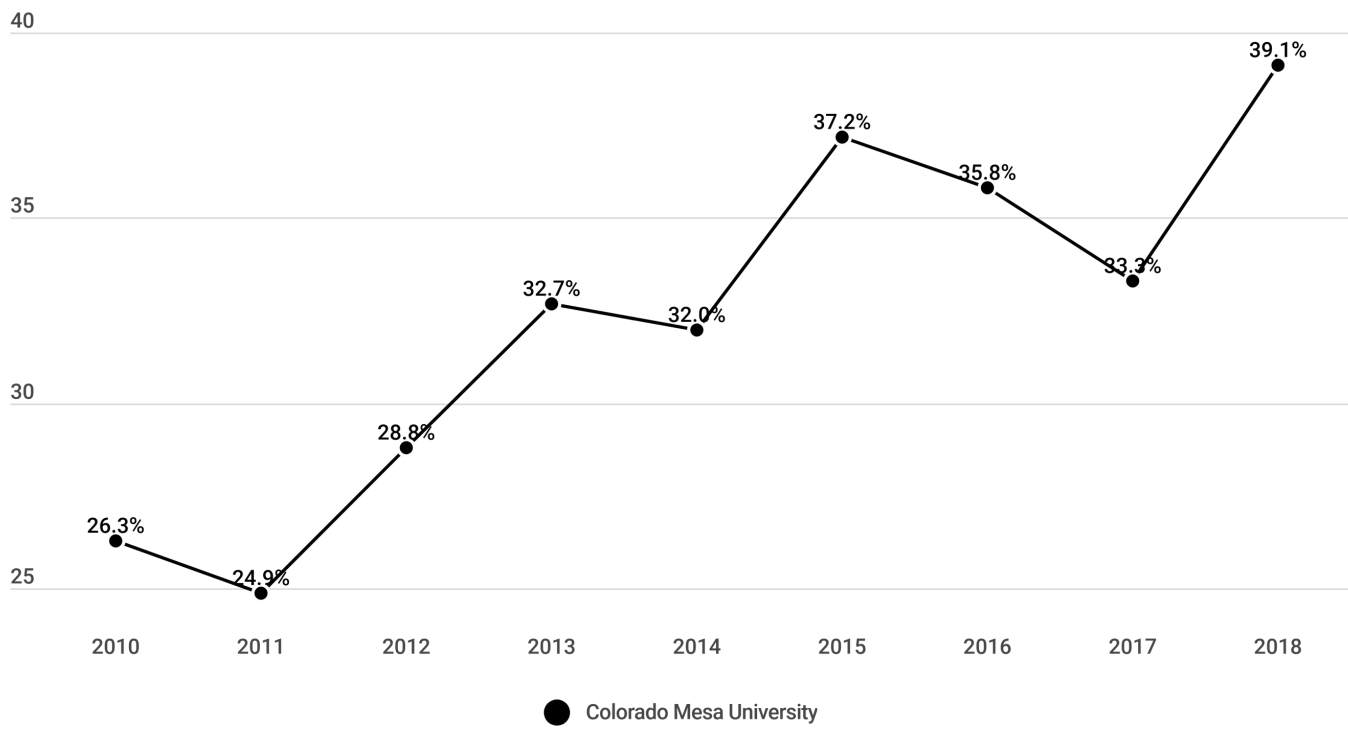


STUDENTS WHO QUALIFY FOR NEED-BASED FINANCIAL AID ARE LESS LIKELY TO COMPLETE THEIR DEGREE THAN STUDENTS WHO DO NOT.

AREA OF ACTION

- Expand programs with current demand while identifying strategies to overcome cost barriers to desired programs.
- Identify opportunities for community partners to inform the offerings at our higher education institutions and engage employers in the process to help drive demand toward programs that align with their workforce needs.
- Work with employers to provide internships and practical experiences for students. Consider having employers offer “special projects” to departments so that professors and students have access to “real world” problems and can ensure that learning and training match the job skills needed.

SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE FOR BACHELOR'S-SEEKING STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2004 THROUGH FALL 2012 AT COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY



One opportunity for improvement, however, is the completion rate for students with demonstrated financial need. Approximately 30% of CMU and WCCC students are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. Only 34.9% of students who started in 2013 and qualify for need-based aid like a Pell grant or subsidized Stafford loan had graduated by 2019. Among students who did not qualify, 50.6% had graduated by 2019.

●●● AREA OF ACTION

- Investigate the main barrier to completion for low-income students—is the financial burden too large or are they less prepared for CMU’s programs? Determine what proportion of Mesa County students qualify for need-based financial aid and identify strategies to support higher education completion.

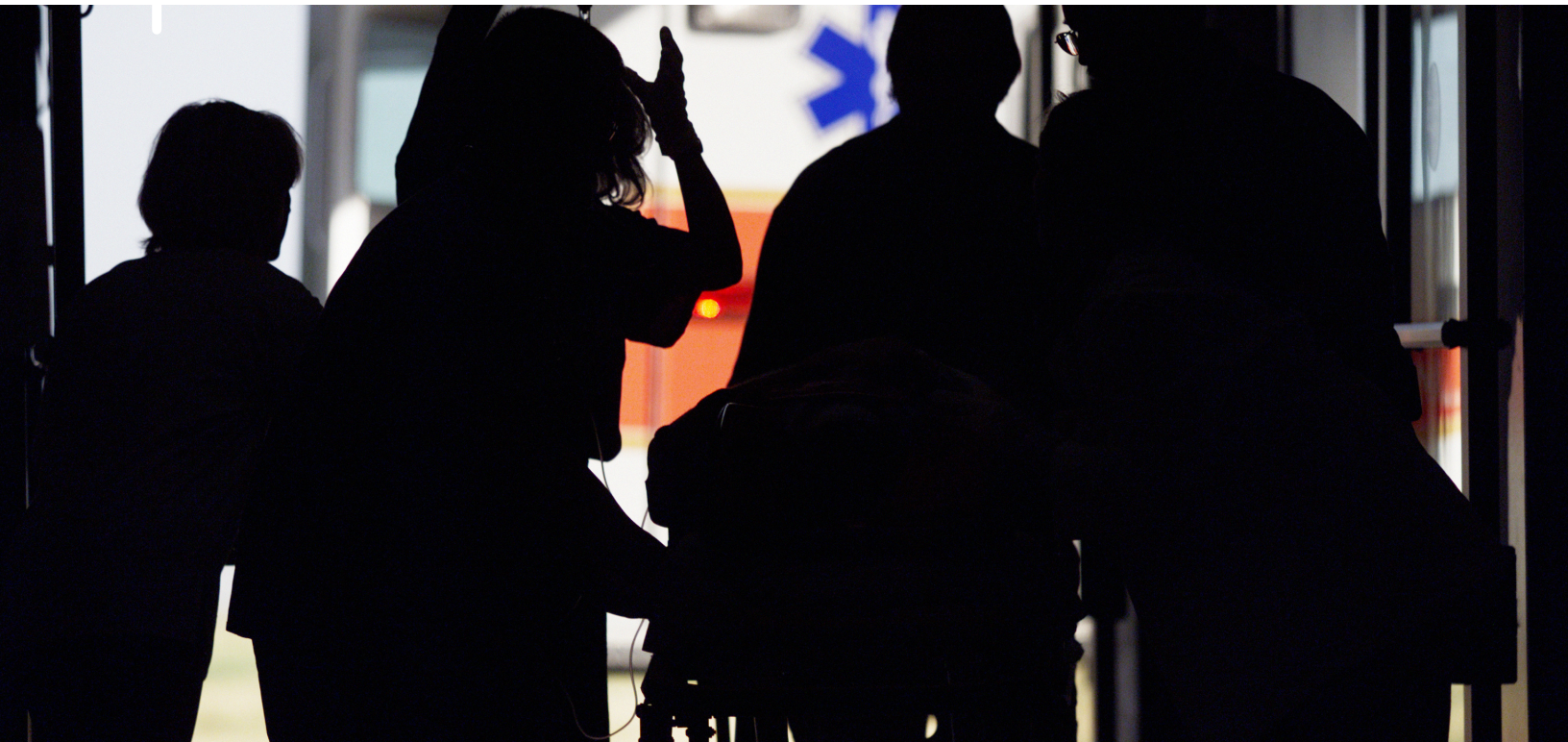
Additionally, CMU administrators have identified former bachelor's degree seeking students who did not complete their degree as a demographic that could be better served by the institution. Often these potential students are parents with full-time jobs who are interested in completing their degree. Many cannot attend day time classes and may rely on online or hybrid courses to balance their class load with their other responsibilities. Currently, these students tend to turn to private for-profit online universities which have high costs and low completion rates. CMU is exploring opportunities to best support this group by expanding online and hybrid offerings at a similar cost to in-person classes.

RATE OF SUCCESS ON PROFESSIONAL EXAMS

CMU prepares graduating students for success—graduates score higher on professional exams than the average student in Colorado or the US.

RATE OF SUCCESS ON PROFESSIONAL EXAMS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, AND THE US (2019)

	Mesa County	Colorado	US
Accounting: Financial Accounting	52.4%	51.1%	45.6%
Accounting: Auditing and Attestation	47.6%	52.1%	45.9%
Accounting: Regulation	65.0%	55.5%	48.4%
Accounting: Business Environment & Concepts	77.8%	64.5%	55.4%
Nursing (BSN) - NCLEX	95.6%	90.4%	84.6%
American Registry of Radiologic Technologists Exam (first attempt)	100%	71.4%	87.2%
Teacher Education (initial licensure) - PRAXIS II	99%	N/A	N/A



EMT and Paramedic students also have exceptional exam pass rates—program administrators report that among students who choose to sit for the exam, 93-100% of students in recent cohorts have passed on their first try. Some students enroll in EMS courses because the training is beneficial for another field, but choose not to sit for the exam because they are not pursuing a career as an EMT or paramedic.

THE MAJORITY OF HIGH-PAYING OCCUPATIONS IN INDUSTRIES OF INTEREST REQUIRE CANDIDATES TO SEEK TRAINING OUTSIDE OF MESA COUNTY.

TRAINING PATHWAYS FOR DESIRABLE INCOME JOBS

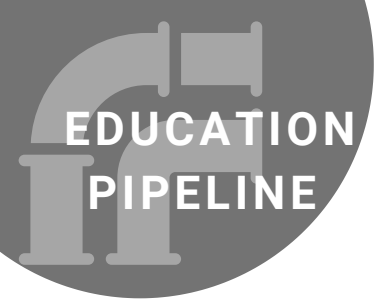
While higher education has many goals and offers many enrichments to students, many students engage with the intention of improving job opportunities. To that end, local educational opportunities must align with current industries and the economic forecast in Mesa County. Below we profile the educational pipelines for four industries targeted for growth in Mesa County to assess the potential for local workers to train for jobs with *desirable incomes*, which we define as \$50,000 or more per year (see page 42 for more information on *desirable income jobs*).

Three of the four industries lack local pathways for the majority of *desirable income* occupations, although Mesa County offers educational opportunities for some *desirable income* occupations in all four industries. This means that as these industries expand, qualified workers will need to be brought in from out of the area, or local workers would need to leave for training and return.

● ● ● AREA OF ACTION

Strengthen community partnerships with educational institutions to align priorities and direct resources toward closing the gap in educational outcomes with particular focus on early childhood education, elementary proficiency, and the pursuit of higher education and training.





TRAINING PATHWAYS FOR DESIRABLE INCOME JOBS IN
FOUR INDUSTRIES OF INTEREST



How many occupations earn the *desirable income*?

27 occupations earn a *desirable income*.

5 occupations earn a *desirable income*.

How many people are employed in desirable income occupations?

3,650

1,200

Are there pathways that don't require formal education?

NO.

YES, and WCCC offers related technical certificates.

Is the required training available in Mesa County?

YES, for 6 of the occupations.

YES, for all of the jobs that rely on education.

Are there current training gaps in Mesa County?

Cannot provide training for **21** of the **27** occupations.

NO. All occupations have training pathways.

Takeaways

Some pathways can be completed in Mesa County, but students must often leave the area if they desire advanced training. Among available programs, the Bachelor's of Science in Nursing is the most popular.

All training for desirable income occupations is available in Mesa County, including necessary union apprenticeships, although some opportunities may have more demand than supply.



PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES

31 occupations
earn a *desirable*
income.

1,370

YES, and WCCC
offers related
technical
certificates.

YES, for 7 of the
occupations.

Cannot provide training
for **22** of the **31**
occupations.

Some pathways can be
completed in Mesa County,
but students must often
leave the area for advanced
training, especially for
graduate professional
degrees.



MANUFACTURING

19 occupations
earn a *desirable*
income.

610

YES, and WCCC
offers related
technical
certificates.

YES, for 3 of the
occupations.

Cannot provide training
for **10** of the **19**
occupations.

Some pathways can be
completed in Mesa County, but
students must often leave the
area if they desire advanced
training, especially in specialty
engineering fields.

EDUCATION PIPELINE



CONCLUSION

Strong educational outcomes lead to better opportunities and experiences with the Social Determinants of Health, directly impacting health behaviors and outcomes for Mesa County residents.

Some elements of the current education system in Mesa County serve our community well—educational institutions and community partners have worked to offer tremendous opportunities that meet every person where they are in their educational journey. Nonetheless, other measures of success are troubling—low fourth grade proficiency, a high school graduation rate lower than the state and comparison communities, and low engagement with higher education resources require our attention and intervention to support the educational institutions who are striving their best to set our students up for success.

Mesa County's education systems have a history of embracing changes to better meet the needs of the community. With the adoption of performance-based learning by D51 and CMU's expansion of community college offerings into four-year degrees, education leaders recognized the importance of partnering with community stakeholders to shape and support the innovations being made.



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