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Megan McDermott, Director of Communications, College In Colorado
Office: 303-974-2495, Megan.McDermott@cic.state.co.us

Colorado high school students continue upward trend in college enrollment, academic success

In the 2015 high school graduating class, nearly 57 percent enrolled in a postsecondary institution

DENVER – March 3, 2017: Up more than half a percentage point from last year, nearly 57 percent of Colorado's high school class of 2015 enrolled in a postsecondary institution, according to a report issued this morning by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). About three-fourths of these 30,000 graduates chose to attend a Colorado college or university.

Colorado's college-going population is also getting more diverse: almost every ethnic group saw higher enrollment numbers in 2015. As in recent years, more female high school graduates (61 percent) enrolled in college than male graduates (52 percent).

Students are maintaining momentum once they arrive on campus, too. The mean grade point average for college freshman (2.79) climbed for a sixth straight year, and credential attainment within four years increased by more than two percent. Persistence rates—the likelihood a first-year student will remain in their program—were also above national averages for students at four-year institutions (87 percent) and two-year colleges (60 percent).

"We are encouraged to see an increase in the college-going and success rates of our Colorado high schoolers, but we still have much work ahead of us," said Acting Executive Director Dr. Kim Hunter Reed. "To reach our goal of 66 percent of Coloradans earning a credential by 2025, we must see better results when it comes to recruiting, supporting and graduating students. I look forward to working with our campus leaders as we focus on addressing equity gaps and accelerating student success."

While nearly every metric improved or stayed constant, discrepancies among ethnic and income groups continue to impact Colorado students. Hispanic, African-American, American Indian/Native Alaskan students and students of two or more races are still less likely to enroll in college and earn a credential than their White and Asian counterparts.

Key findings in the report:

- At 56.5 percent, the college-going rate is up more than half a percentage point from last year but is still over two percentage points lower than its peak in 2009.
- More female high school graduates (61 percent) enrolled in college than male graduates (52 percent).
- Consistent with historic trends, Hispanic students are the most likely to enroll at a two-year college, while Asian students are the most likely to enroll at a four-year institution.
- Nearly 33 percent of first-year college students received a Federal Pell Grant in 2015.

- At the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, the mean cumulative grade point average for first-year college students in Colorado was 2.79, continuing an upward trend since 2009.
- Of the 2015 high school graduates who enrolled in college immediately, approximately 75 percent had completed at least 18.5 credit hours by the end of their first year (spring 2015). The average completion was 29.5 credit hours. About 25 percent of students had completed at least 36 credit hours.
- The first-year persistence rate for 2014 high schools graduates was 87 percent at four-year institutions and 60 percent at two-year colleges. The second-year persistence rate for 2013 high school graduates pursuing a bachelor's degree was just over 90 percent. These retention rates are better than national retention rate averages.

Now in its sixth iteration, the report provides information that helps align the K-12 and higher education systems. The public can view this data using the CDHE District at a Glance tool, available here: http://highered.colorado.gov/Data/DistrictHSSummary.aspx.

This report was prepared by CDHE and was submitted to the Education Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives and the State Board of Education pursuant to 23-1-113 [9] C.R.S. Read the complete report.

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