

Chaffee County Economic Development Corporation

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Public Policy Committee Pillar Position Statement

Date: August, 2022

Issue: Education and Talent Pipeline

Background:

A strong education system is critical to educating Colorado's own – from early childhood through higher education and technical and apprenticeship pathways – and is vital to building the future workforce for Chaffee County employers.

According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Centennial State boasts the second most highly educated workforce in the country, but we import the majority of our talent. If Colorado aspires to grow our own workforce talent, or simply ensure an educated citizenry, we must improve educational outcomes inclusive of high school graduation rates and the completion of an advanced degree or certificate/apprenticeship program.

Based on statistics provided by Public School Review, Chaffee County's high school graduation rate is above both the state and national average. For the 2022 school year:

- Chaffee County is home to 4 public high schools serving a total of 706 students. The top ranked public high schools are Buena Vista High School, Salida High School, Horizons Exploratory Academy.
- Chaffee County public high schools have an average math proficiency score of 48% (versus the Colorado public high school average of 36%), and a reading proficiency score of 71% (versus the 54% statewide average). High schools in Chaffee County have an average ranking of 10/10, which is in the top 10% of Colorado public high schools.
- Chaffee County public high schools have a Graduation Rate of 82%, which is more than the Colorado average of 81%.
- The school with the highest graduation rate is Buena Vista High School with 90-94% graduation rate.
- Minority enrollment is 19% of the student body (majority Hispanic), which is less than the Colorado public high school average of 45% (majority Hispanic).

Public funding, across the educational spectrum – from early childhood through higher education degrees and certificate/apprenticeship programs – remains a

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challenge. Further, the cost for individuals seeking post-secondary education can be prohibitive, limiting options for many.

- In 2021 Colorado voters approved Proposition EE which is designed to provide universal preschool. This requires action by the Colorado General Assembly regarding fund allocation.
- The Education Data Initiative states that 2020 K-12 funding in Colorado is 33rd out of 50 states.
- According to U.S. News & World Report, Colorado ranks 48th in public support of higher education.

With regard to post-secondary opportunities, Chaffee County is home to Colorado Mountain College - Salida which offers certificate, associate and bachelor level classes.

Any previous action/intersection with issue for Chaffee County EDC:

The Chaffee County EDC was one of the lead organizations that advocated for Colorado Mountain College's mill levy investment in Salida. The organization remains committed to seeing that community investment "pay off" in terms of CMS's role in supporting workforce development. Further, the EDC has assisted CMC, the Salida School District (SSD) and Buena Vista School District (BVSD) with employer engagement in their respective Work-Based Learning Programs (internships, apprenticeships, and industry sponsored programs).

Position:

The EDC encourages efforts affirming a commitment to educational excellence and advancing Chaffee County's ability to grow/support local workforce talent. We encourage public policy that helps to better align the output of local educational institutions with the needs of industry, with particular focus on work-based learning activities inclusive of reskilling and upskilling.

Rationale for Position:

A strong, highly functioning educational system, at all levels, that delivers prepared workforce talent, is critical for the long-term sustainability of Chaffee County's economy. Companies that wish to expand, or choose to locate in Chaffee County will consider the educational system and its outcomes as a critical component of their decision making process. Further, from a quality of life standpoint, lifelong learning options are of benefit for residents.