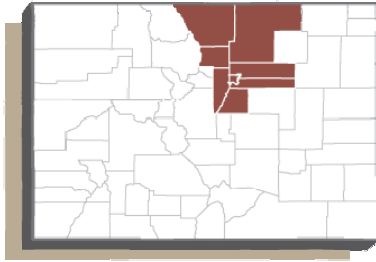


Metro Denver



The Metro Denver Story is the tale of two regions. The first is a thriving and diversified economy propelled by the growing technology sectors and containing one of the highest average education levels in the nation. The second is a pipeline into the workforce from the school systems that is increasingly “leaking,” resulting in a low percentage of Metro Denver’s students finding their way to the high skill, high wage jobs that are being created in the region. These two different regions are on a collision course, as the failure of the pipeline becomes the failure of businesses in the region, and ultimately the failure of the regional economy. The phenomenon has become known as the “Colorado Paradox” and the recognition has caused increased anxiety among business, government officials, economic developers, educators, and other community leaders.

Once driven by the mining industry, Metro Denver’s economy now supports a wide array of growth industries, particularly in high tech sectors. Major industries include software development, aerospace, life sciences, and finance. Over the past 20 years, Colorado has been a front runner in the race for achieving job growth by enticing market expansion with the promise of access to a workforce that is highly educated. The state’s economy, natural beauty, and active lifestyle have served as a magnet for attracting highly educated people with outstanding credentials from all parts of the world.

Unfortunately, Metro Denver is also a microcosm of a growing national problem – its technology companies increasingly depend upon imported skills to survive. This leaves it vulnerable to disruptions in the skills pipeline and also leaves many citizens with access only to lower-wage, lower-skill jobs. In large part this is because its students, in moving from elementary schools to higher grades and later into the workplace, have turned away from rigorous courses of study, especially math and science, which prepare them for these jobs.

In stark contrast to the past successes in attracting skills, Colorado’s high school graduation and college completion rates are abysmally low. Scores in math and science are so low that recruitment for high paying jobs is often more active beyond state lines than within Colorado. The state cannot expect to continue to rely on this model for growth. It must take responsibility for its past lack of commitment and ability to “grow its own.”

Using conservative assumptions, the failure of Colorado’s residents to finish high school is costing the state at least \$3.4 billion each year in lost earning potential. Colorado now ranks 30th nationwide in high school graduation rate. If Colorado could increase its graduation rate to 90%, this could increase annual earning power of each year’s graduating class by \$75 million a year. This is clearly a national and state crisis. The urgency for action is now widely recognized by educators, economic developers,

workforce development professionals, philanthropic leaders, and think tanks in the state. Colorado must now translate that urgency to the citizens of the state. To do that, it must find better ways to communicate among a wide variety of individual initiatives; educate about what others are doing; coordinate local efforts toward regional goals; replicate the things that are working to bring them to scale in the region; and create new initiatives to fill the gaps.

Through the resources provided by this grant, Colorado will do precisely that. Now is the time to make forward thinking decisions on the best ways to “grow its own.”

The nine counties involved in the Metro Denver Regional WIRED Partnership are Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld.

Key partners include Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, the Office of Economic Development of the City and County of Denver, Metro Denver school districts, the Small Business Development Center of Metro Denver, the Workforce Board of Metropolitan Denver, the University of Colorado at Denver, the Colorado Children’s Campaign, and many area business and associations including Colorado Bioscience Association, the Colorado Space Coalition and the Colorado Software and Internet Association.

