

K-12 EDUCATION

School Finance: Adequate education spending ensures kids and families have access to important learning resources such as targeted interventions, teachers with competitive salaries, and critical support services at school.



A large body of research finds that school funding is strongly linked to student performance and academic outcomes. Yet Colorado lags behind the nation (48th out of 50 states) in dollars spent per pupil, and the amount of dollars invested in Colorado's students varies significantly between districts due to the state's school funding formula, and the role played by local property wealth and voters' ability to invest more in education.

We can reimagine the potential of our education system and our children by transforming our school finance system. Targeted investments in our students and communities living in poverty and experiencing the most barriers to opportunity are especially important.



SOME RESEARCH FINDS THAT STUDENTS FACING POVERTY REQUIRE 2.5 TIMES THE FUNDING THEIR HIGHER-INCOME PEERS RECEIVE—YET IN COLORADO, THE REVENUES PER STUDENT DIFFER ONLY SLIGHTLY BETWEEN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST POVERTY DISTRICTS.

STATE AND LOCAL REVENUES PER COLORADO STUDENT, HIGHEST AND LOWEST POVERTY QUANTILES



Source: The Education Trust.

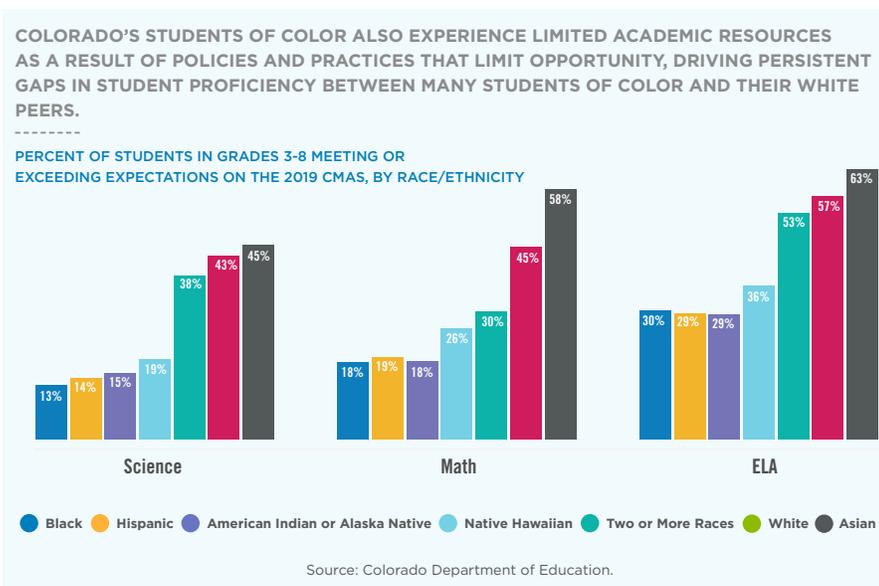
- Colorado's 26-year-old school funding formula sends a dramatically disproportionate amount of funding to high cost-of-living districts, approximately three times what we spend to support students living in poverty and more than six times what we spend on special education.
- The latest estimates project that the number of students eligible for free lunch in Colorado is expected to increase by 50,000 next year as a result of the COVID pandemic. These are the students and families that we know will be struggling even more in this crisis.

Student Achievement: Colorado's standards-based assessments are one important way to measure students' knowledge and abilities.

Student achievement has inched up in recent years, but still fewer than half of Colorado students meet expectations in critical subjects. Our failure to make targeted investments in the things that research and best practice have shown to make a difference for kids is reflected in the achievement disparities we see across a number of indicators. Students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, for example, are 30 percentage points less likely to meet expectations across all subjects due to the harmful effects of poverty.

With the cancellation of statewide assessments in the spring of 2020, and significant student learning loss likely as a result of the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be more important than ever to understand what kids know to inform instruction and meet the needs of students who had dramatically different experiences while schools were closed.

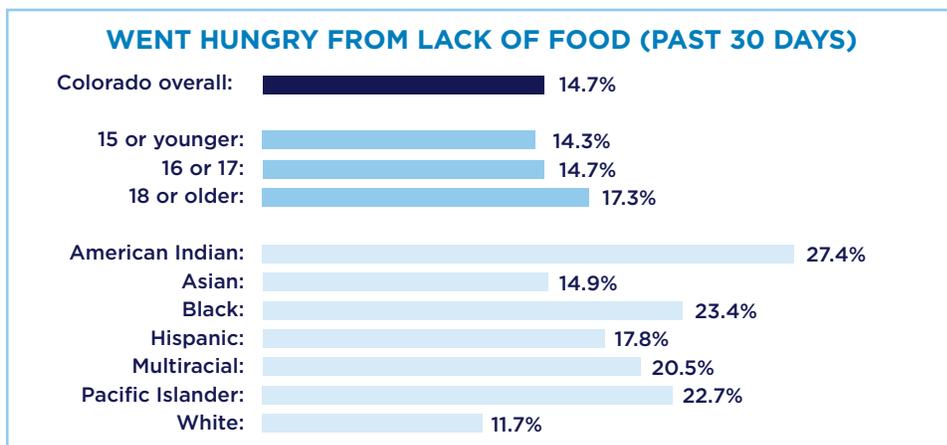
- In the spring of 2020, a needs assessment of Colorado districts estimated that about 55,000 students did not have access to a Wi-Fi-enabled device and about 64,000 students did not have access to the internet. Students of color are more likely to lack internet access and therefore to lack access to remote education.
- When all impacts of the pandemic are taken into account, the average student could fall seven months behind academically, while Black and Hispanic students could experience even greater learning losses, equivalent to 10 months for black children and nine months for Latinos.



Nutrition at School: Healthy school meals are an important source of nutrition for kids

Students who eat healthy meals at school are better able to learn. Nearly 15 percent of youth in 2019 reported that they went hungry because there wasn't enough food at home.

We can ensure kids receive the nutrition they need by supporting important investments in school breakfast and lunch.



- 148,000 children across the state experienced food insecurity between 2015 and 2017.
- Going hungry affects kids' physical development and can harm their mental well-being, too. A recent study found that adolescents in families who reported they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat were significantly more likely to have experienced depression and to have attempted suicide—even after controlling for family income.



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