



**COLORADO**

Department of  
Higher Education

# Measures to Improve Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Students with a Disability:

First Data Report on Students with Disabilities  
in Colorado Institutions of Higher Education



**2024**

**Prepared and submitted by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)**

Report to the education committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Colorado General Assembly as Part of the State Measures for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent Government Act Hearing

Statute: C.R.S. §23-79-102.

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## Introduction

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In April 2022, [HB22-1255](#), “Concerning Measures to Improve Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Students with Disabilities” was signed into law by Governor Jared Polis. The act included two main requirements:

- 1) Create an **advisory committee** charged with making recommendations in the form of two reports to Colorado institutions of higher education (IHEs) and the general assembly concerning services and practices to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education. The [first report](#) was released in June 2023, and the second report will be released in June 2024.
- 2) Charged the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to begin **collecting available data** from institutions of higher education on students with disabilities in which they serve. The first report is due during the State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Act hearing in January 2024.

### The following are details regarding the data to be collected in the act:

- Collect data from all state IHEs (4-year, 2-year, and area technical colleges) as well as participating private institutions defined by 23-18-102(8) which includes Colorado Christian University, Regis University, and University of Denver;
- Included in total and disaggregated by IHE and demographics listed below;
- Number of students enrolled with disabilities;
- SWDs who receive a “service, support or accommodation related to the student’s disability”;
- Fall to fall retention numbers for SWD (not yet available);
- Graduate numbers of SWD (not yet available);
- Number of SWDs who received service from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, including graduation rates (limited availability); and
- Disaggregated by the following demographics:
  - Race and ethnicity;
  - First generation;
  - Pell Grant eligibility; and
  - Military/Veteran status.



## Definitions, Data and Limitations

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For reporting purposes, the department and the institutions of higher education used the following definitions for *disability* and *accommodation*:

- **Disability**, as included in the Act, means, with respect to an individual—a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual. (From the ADA.gov website.)
- Reasonable **accommodations** are modifications or adjustments to the tasks, environment, or the way things are usually done that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or a job (U.S. Department of Education, 2007 - From the American Psychological Association). Note: modifications pertain to physical or logistical adaptations to learning materials and resources. Modifications may not represent a fundamental alteration to the learning objectives or program/degree requirements.

This is the first statewide report to include data on SWDs. Colorado colleges and universities needed to develop processes and procedures to capture the data in a reportable fashion. To do so was a coordinated effort amongst many departments and divisions at the institutions as well as with the CDHE. As a result, conversations are ongoing as to how to best and most accurately capture the number of students with disabilities enrolled at the state’s colleges and universities.

Further, as this is the first required report and IHEs were not previously collecting these data in a reportable fashion, the “available data” requested in the act could not yet include fall to fall retention numbers as well as graduation numbers. Additionally, this first report was a pilot data collection solicited via a spreadsheet from each IHE. In the future, CDHE will include SWD in the Student Unit Record Data System (SURDS) which allows data analysis (as available) listed in the act.

Future data analysis from SURDS allows CDHE to include matching data received from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) – most institutions are not able to report on students who receive services from DVR. Also, IHEs can currently only report military and veteran status for non-resident students awarded in-state tuition classification as allowed by statutory exceptions. As such, IHEs do not report on their entire military/veteran student population to SURDS. Resultingly, there are more SWDs who are active duty and veteran than captured in this report.

Collecting data for students with disabilities is not the only challenge in Colorado. Many factors impact accurate data collection nationwide, including:

- Many students with disabilities feel stigmatized and as a result, may choose not to disclose their disability or need for an accommodation with their college/university;
- Some students transitioning from high school to college are not aware of the differences in federal law between K-12 and higher education and do not know how to self-identify to the IHE (many of the differences are explained on this U.S. Department of Education [page](#));
- Some students notify departments of their disability other than the office that provides disability services and accommodations, as a result, the information is not captured for reporting purposes; and
- Most IHEs only know if a student has a disability if they request an accommodation, so often the numbers between enrolled SWDs and SWDs receiving accommodations are the same. However, this varies by institution.

[The National Center for Educational Statistics](#) provides key findings from a data analysis they published in April 2022 regarding students who do not identify with the institution’s disability services office:

- Sixty-five percent of students who ever had a reported disability in earlier years responded that the disability was not present in college.
- Among students who responded that they did have a disability while attending college, about one-third of students (37%) informed their college.

This and subsequent reports have already been a catalyst for conversation between Colorado’s colleges and universities and CDHE as to how to best address these issues so that the state can better identify, report and support students with disabilities in higher education and enhance outcomes.

***The National Center for Educational Statistics found that only one-third of SWDs in college informed their college regarding their disability.***

# Data

The data below represents the following terms of enrollment: **summer 2022; fall 2022; and spring 2023**. As mentioned in the previous section, while the below numbers are not a complete representation of the number of SWDs enrolled at state IHEs, it is a necessary starting point to adjust processes, services and outreach to get closer to a more complete count.

## Key Findings

- Colorado IHEs reported **25,684 (6.6%)** enrolled SWDs;
- **5.5% of male**, and **7.4% of female** students were reported as having a disability; and
- University of Colorado Boulder reported the highest number of SWDs enrolled (**4,629**) and University of Denver reported having the highest percentage of SWD's enrolled (**14.5%**).

## Statewide Data

Name of Institution of Higher Education:	All Students (IPEDS)	Students with Disabilities		Students Receiving Accommodation	
	Count	Count	Percentage of All Students	Count	Percentage of All Students
<b>Total</b>	<b>388,879</b>	<b>25,684</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>23,082</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
<b>Gender data</b>					
Male	171,513	9,393	5.5%	8,401	4.9%
Female	217,366	16,127	7.4%	14,525	6.7%
Sex unknown/other	N/A	169	N/A	162	N/A
<b>Race and Ethnicity Breakdown</b>					
U.S. Nonresident	12,468	381	3.1%	338	2.7%
Hispanic of any race	78,994	4,191	5.3%	3,854	4.9%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3,476	259	7.5%	185	5.3%
Asian	15,993	750	4.7%	694	4.3%
Black or African American	18,163	1,001	5.5%	895	4.9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	820	42	5.1%	37	4.5%
White	226,570	17,021	7.5%	15,223	6.7%
Two or more races	17,584	1,529	8.7%	1,397	7.9%
Unknown race/ethnicity	14,811	616	4.2%	542	3.7%
<b>Additional Breakdowns</b>					
First Generation	N/A	6,222	N/A	5,721	N/A
Pell Grant Eligible	57,297	6,176	10.8%	5,745	10.0%
Active Duty or Veteran	N/A	1,260	N/A	1,182	N/A
Number receiving service from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (if known)	N/A	25	N/A	25	N/A

**Note:** Student academic year headcount for academic year 2021-22 from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Data are one year lagged compared to the counts for students with disabilities.

## Data by Institution of Higher Education

Name of Institution of Higher Education:	All Students (IPEDS)	Students with Disabilities Data		Students Receiving Accommodation	
	Count	Count	Percentage of All Students	Count	Percentage of All Students
<b>Total</b>	<b>388,879</b>	<b>25,684</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>23,082</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
Adams State	3,833	112	2.9%	112	2.9%
Aims Community College	9,037	265	2.9%	263	2.9%
Arapahoe Comm College	15,853	1,266	8.0%	1,266	8.0%
Colorado Christian	15,662	558	3.6%	453	2.9%
Colorado Mesa	10,038	682	6.8%	682	6.8%
Colorado Mt College	7,424	225	3.0%	224	3.0%
Colorado Northwestern Comm College	1,533	22	1.4%	17	1.1%
CO School of Mines	7,789	775	9.9%	775	9.9%
Colorado State U	36,664	3,521	9.6%	3,271	8.9%
Colorado State U - Global	16,053	289	1.8%	156	1.0%
Colorado State U - Pueblo	12,257	221	1.8%	183	1.5%
Community College of Aurora	10,701	234	2.2%	234	2.2%
Community College of Denver	10,392	358	3.4%	253	2.4%
Emily Griffith Tech	5,854	39	0.7%	39	0.7%
Fort Lewis	3,983	516	13.0%	245	6.2%
Front Range CC	27,228	1,348	5.0%	1,348	5.0%
Lamar Community College	844	36	4.3%	36	4.3%
Metro State U Denver	21,698	1,586	7.3%	1,586	7.3%
Morgan Comm College	1,730	14	0.8%	14	0.8%
Northeastern College	1,814	61	3.4%	61	3.4%
Otero College	1,451	42	2.9%	39	2.7%
Pickens Tech	1,049	81	7.7%	81	7.7%
Pikes Peak State College	15,030	769	5.1%	769	5.1%
Pueblo Comm College	8,074	239	3.0%	239	3.0%
Red Rocks College	9,917	502	5.1%	502	5.1%
Regis	6,676	272	4.1%	272	4.1%
Tech College of Rockies	308	13	4.2%	13	4.2%
Trinidad State College	2,185	23	1.1%	22	1.0%
Univ of Colorado Boulder	43,746	4,629	10.6%	4,460	10.2%
Univ of Colorado Colorado Springs	15,264	1,654	10.8%	1,654	10.8%
University of Colorado Denver & Anschutz	29,833	1,768	5.9%	1,768	5.9%
Univ of Denver	17,202	2,492	14.5%	973	5.7%
Univ of Northern Colorado	12,017	761	6.3%	761	6.3%
Western Col Univ	5,740	311	5.4%	311	5.4%

**Note:** Student academic year headcount for academic year 2021-22 from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Data are one year lagged compared to the counts for students with disabilities.

## Data by Institution of Higher Education with Demographics

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Visit this [web page](#) to review data by institution of higher education in Colorado.

## Next Steps

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### The following work is in progress for future reports:

- When the data is collected via SURDS, the department will be able to match to DVR data and provide a more complete data set of students receiving services through that division;
- As time progresses, fall to fall retention and graduation data will be available for this report;
- Conversations have already begun through this data collection process as well as through the Disability Services Advisory Committee as to how to improve outreach and services to and more complete reporting of SWDs; and
- While the SWD data is not a complete representation of the total number of SWDs in Colorado's IHEs, it has inspired conversations that would likely not have happened otherwise as to how to improve services and build a more inclusive culture for SWDs on college campuses.