

## Improving education in Colorado High schools in trouble

*By Jared Polis, Pat Hayes  
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Graduating from high school in Colorado is about as likely as "winning a coin toss," according to a new study from the Colorado Children's Campaign.

According to the report, less than two-thirds of ninth-graders across the state graduate from high school in four years. Alarming, the statistics are worse for African-Americans and Hispanics. Across Colorado, less than half of our minority students graduate from high school; in some districts, it is fewer than one in four.

Each year, thousands of kids of every race and economic background drop out of high school throughout Colorado, hurting their futures and our future. Consider that the difference in the lifetime earnings between a dropout and a person who finishes college is over \$1 million.

This chronic under-achievement has compounding repercussions on our society: Later, these students' own children will face barriers to educational success; our state's economy will be hampered because of a less skilled workforce; and our communities will face higher crime risks and greater need to provide expensive social services.

For our own good and for the good of the next generation, we must make reforms now that will improve our shared future.

Colorado has led the nation in many aspects of education reform, like strengthening accountability. However, when it comes to preparing our young people to complete high school and succeed in college, we lag far behind. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's most recent Kids-Count study, Colorado ranks 48th in dropout rates.

As concerned state leaders, we cannot stand by and watch as children's hopes and opportunities fade. That is why we have come together to lead a new statewide, bipartisan high school commission - to examine the reasons for failure and take concrete measures to make changes for the better.

The Colorado Commission for High School Improvement will seek solutions - in a nonpartisan way - by exploring and recommending approaches that support student success in high school. The commission includes leaders from across the state and from many perspectives: state and local policymakers, education leaders from kindergarten through grade 12, and higher education, business leaders, researchers, advocates, federal officials and parents.

We pledge to focus on actions that have proven to work. Some of these strategies we already know about, and we will learn more about others. Participants will emphasize improvements in high school student achievement, graduation success, preparation for college, transitions to work and higher education, and effectively expanding the range of choices available to young people.

We encourage all citizens to join us in asking, "What is happening to our young people and how can we help them improve their lives?" We invite your input in this effort to make Colorado a place where high school students thrive.

Democrat Jared Polis is chairman of the Colorado State Board of Education. Republican Pat Hayes is a member of the University of Colorado Board of Regents and former chair of the State Board of Education. Together, they are co-chairs of the Colorado Commission for High School Improvement.