

READY FOR WORK AFTER COVID-19

**HOW CAN OUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
SYSTEMS PREPARE COLORADANS FOR A
POST-COVID ECONOMY?**

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CCLP
Colorado Center
on Law and Policy

ABOUT THE COLORADO CENTER ON LAW AND POLICY

A prosperous and inclusive economy is the vision of the future that guides Colorado Center on Law and Policy. Through research, education, advocacy and litigation, CCLP works with community members, policy-makers and leaders in health care, employment and human services to forge pathways from poverty and remove barriers that prevent Coloradans from meeting their basic needs and being self-sufficient. CCLP stands with diverse communities across Colorado in the fight against poverty through research, legislation and legal advocacy. We envision a Colorado where everyone has what they need to succeed.

ABOUT THE BURNES INSTITUTE FOR POVERTY RESEARCH AT CCLP

Culminating a longtime commitment to advancing racial equity and fighting poverty, Donald W. and Lynn K. Burnes gave a generous gift to CCLP, creating The Burnes Institute for Poverty Research at CCLP. Through this partnership, the Burnes will provide CCLP with funding and Don will provide his expertise to support CCLP's current research and ensure that the organization's legislative and legal advocacy work is evidence-based, while advancing a racial-equity and anti-poverty agenda. The Burnes also founded the Burnes Center at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, where they were the lead donors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic affected nearly every Coloradan in some way or another over the course of 2020 and 2021. From stay-at-home orders in March and April and mask mandates, to working from home and record numbers of Coloradans filing for unemployment insurance benefits, the past 18 months have had a profound effect on our state. Public health orders issued by federal, state, and local governments also had tremendous effects on our state's economy and job market. Thousands of jobs in restaurants, hotels, arts and entertainment, and many other industries disappeared in a matter of weeks. Unemployment was at one of the highest levels since the Great Depression. Despite lifting most of the COVID-related restrictions, our economy has still yet to return to "normal." While 2021 has seen Colorado's economy add an average of 16,150 jobs each month, our unemployment rate has remained above 6 percent since April 2020.

The aim of this report was to capture and understand how our state's economy and labor market changed as a result of the pandemic and how both might change in the future as our economy recovers. Overall, we found that:

- The sectors most impacted by pandemic-related job losses also happen to be the sectors who saw the greatest growth following the Great Recession, including health care and social services, accommodation and food services, government, and retail trade.
- The pandemic's effect on employment and unemployment varied by geography, sector, occupation, and educational attainment, among other demographic characteristics. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, rates of unemployment were higher for non-white Coloradans, Coloradans living in urban and tourism-dependent parts of the state (such as the Rural Resort region), and Coloradans who had previously worked in the accommodation and food services sector.
- Our economic recovery has largely been driven by gains in the accommodation and food services sector, despite being the sector that saw the greatest amount of jobs lost during March 2020 and April 2020. 70.9 percent of the jobs added in our state between January and June 2021 were in this sector.
- There are tremendous variations in levels of educational attainment by economic sector. Many of the sectors that saw the greatest loss of jobs were also the sectors in which there was lower shares of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher. For instance, 19.9 percent of workers in the accommodation and food services sector had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 45.0 percent of workers in the professional, technical, and scientific services sector.
- Many of the occupations that experienced a loss in employment during the early months of the pandemic were low-wage, low-skilled occupations that did not have many barriers to entering, such as requirements for a credential in a specialized skill or past work experience. While this means these jobs were a good way for Coloradans to easily enter into the labor force prior to the pandemic, it means that most of the workers who lost employment as a result of the pandemic did not have skills, education, or other experience

that would help them to easily enter into occupations that saw an increase in employment between May 2019 and May 2020, many of which required a bachelor's degree or a credential of some kind.

- Employment projections indicate that the sectors and occupations that are likely to see the greatest increase in available jobs in Colorado over the next ten years are those that, on average, require greater levels of educational attainment or a specialized credential or skill set, such as mastery of computer programming languages. This trend looks like it could accelerate even more in the coming years due to the impacts of the pandemic.

A particular focus of the report was to understand how our state's workforce development systems, operated by both private and public entities, have adapted to meet the needs of unemployed Coloradans during the pandemic, as well as how they might adapt moving forward to address emerging trends in the economy, such as remote working and a significant reliance on digital competencies. Our findings suggest:

- The focus of most state workforce agencies during the early months of the pandemic was to assist unemployed Coloradans apply for unemployment insurance.
- The need, not just for digital skills, but also access to broadband internet and computing equipment, became much more pressing during the pandemic as many work and learning opportunities transitioned to digital environments. At the same time, many government and non-profit offices were closed during the pandemic, requiring participants and services providers to move operations to a digital environment as well. This created additional challenges for those who did not have adequate access to or comfort with computers, the internet, and performing tasks online.
- There was an increased emphasis on innovative efforts to support Coloradans as they worked to increase personal comfort and confidence with using technology in daily life. Diverse training

approaches have emerged with these discoveries.

- Nearly all those interviewed felt that a larger fear among unemployed workers was transferring to another sector, as well as facing all of the unknowns involved with such a transition in the midst of a pandemic.
- Most stakeholders agreed that the new opportunities that will be available through recovery and stimulus funds, including those available to small businesses, will make a large difference in the numbers and types of jobs that will be available in all regions across the state.
- Most stakeholders reported a significant increase in the incidence of mental health challenges among both employed and unemployed Coloradans, such as anxiety and depression, that impacted work searches as well as performance.
- In addition to the need for upskilling and reskilling for many workers so as to qualify for new and more sustainable jobs, stakeholders also acknowledged that the unemployed and underemployed workers and jobseekers also need flexible scheduling that will allow them to manage personal responsibilities and professional ones more effectively.
- The demands of sustaining affordable and safe childcare, elder care, and transportation at the hours needed to accommodate workers' work schedules played a huge role during the pandemic, and will continue to be impactful during the ongoing recovery.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROJECT

After one of the longest periods of economic growth in its history, Colorado entered into a recession in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the United States reported its first case of this novel coronavirus on January 15th, Colorado did not see its first known case until March 5th. By the end of the month, Governor Polis issued a month-long stay-at-home order, effectively shutting down our state's economy except for certain essential businesses, such as grocery stores. In response to the sudden halt of much of our country's economy, the U.S. Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act into law. This legislation provided relief to individuals, corporations, small businesses, and state and local governments through a range of new or expanded programs, such as Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC),¹ stimulus payments, the Paycheck Protection Program,² as well as funds to support state and local public health responses to the pandemic.

The CARES Act provided a lifeline to Colorado's economy and workers. While it is impossible to know for certain how conditions would have been different without these survival and economic stimulus programs, the actual impact of the various state and local public health restrictions on the economy was less than initial estimates had feared. The economy quickly began adding back jobs once more stringent stay-at-home orders were lifted in Colorado and around the country, and many businesses were able to resume operations albeit with various social distancing and face

mask requirements in place. While the recovery started strong in May 2020, employment growth slowed and the unemployment rate remained high throughout the rest of the year. Based on interviews with stakeholders, many individuals who had lost employment as a result of the pandemic were scared to pursue work in new occupations or sectors or were prevented from doing so as long as their personal responsibilities, such as assisting children with schooling at home, left little time to pursue new opportunities. Another important dynamic was the impact of business closures as well as the trust of the public to use hospitality, restaurants, and other recreational and tourism-oriented services while there were so many unknowns about the level of safety one would have being in public spaces. The federal and state government passed additional stimulus measures in December 2020, followed by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in March 2021.³

Unlike in previous recessions where losses in employment happened over a period of months, the employment situation for many Coloradans changed dramatically in a matter of weeks. Over the last two weeks of March and all of April 2020, 338,811 Coloradans filed unemployment insurance claims. Our state's unemployment rate went from historic lows to historic highs in a matter of months. Because a global pandemic was the cause of this recession, sectors which were most affected by state and local public health orders also tended to see the greatest amount of job losses. This was especially true in the accommodation and food services sector and other sectors

1. Provided an additional \$600 in weekly benefits to unemployment insurance recipients. This program expired at the end of July 2020 but was reinstated as a \$300 benefit in the American Rescue Plan Act passed in March 2021.

2. A Government loan program whose aim was to allow small businesses, self-employed workers, non-profits, and other organizations to continue to pay their employees and allow them to stay on payrolls.

3. The study period for the data analysis in this report is primarily from February 2020 to February 2021. Therefore, the effects of the ARPA on the economy will not be seen in the data but were discussed during stakeholder interviews.

where face-to-face interactions with customers is required. Low-wage workers were disproportionately impacted compared to middle- and high-wage workers, who experienced initial declines in their employment rate but speedily recovered to near pre-February 2020 levels. The ability for higher wage workers to work remotely, largely due to the sectors in which they are most likely to be employed, is one major factor that explains this trend. Establishments that provided human and business services, such as medical services, that were able to create social distancing and enforce other safety protocols were also able to bring back workers more quickly than those that did not lend themselves to social distancing and mask mandates, such as restaurants.

With new CDC guidance for fully-vaccinated Americans, it appears likely that we will soon see a lifting of most, if not all, local and state restrictions on businesses. With a “return to normal” in sight, it remains to be seen how quickly our economy will also return to February 2020 levels of employment.⁴ One important consideration is the experience of unemployed Coloradans both now and during the past year. Will unemployed Coloradans want to return to the jobs and industries in which they worked prior to the pandemic? Will there be jobs in these industries for them to return to? What jobs are likely to be available in the coming months and years and how does this match up with the existing skills and qualifications of the unemployed? What types of adaptations can and should be made by different sectors and employers to make positions more appealing and responsive to the needs of workers, such as safer working conditions, more flexible scheduling, higher wages, and more comprehensive benefits? Answering these questions are fundamental for understanding how policy makers and our state’s workforce development systems can best assist unemployed Coloradans to find employment.

This report, a summary of a project by the Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) between September 2020 and May 2021, provides some answers to the questions posed above. The Educational Credit Management Corporation Foundation (ECMCF)

sponsored and funded our work. The primary goal of the project is to identify and document the impacts of COVID-19 on Colorado’s workforce, as well as the different activities and endeavors to address the extensive disruptions in work and subsequent loss of jobs. Another goal was to understand reasons for long-term unemployment and how these related to the challenges low-wage workers are still facing as they look to return to the workplace. Research efforts were focused on 9 diverse regions across Colorado. The project relied on analysis of economic and labor force data along with interviews with stakeholders from the workforce development systems in these regions. Based on our research, we were able to gather significant and responsive information looking at how COVID-19, along with multiple other factors, has affected individuals and their families, particularly those who lost employment due to the public health orders and restrictions put in place to combat the pandemic. We discovered intriguing patterns of where the effects of the pandemic were greatest and also how these effects changed and evolved over the course of 2020 and early 2021. Stakeholders had a multitude of perspectives about how the pandemic affected their participants, their staff, and overall funding streams that support their work. Many of the struggles faced by low-wage workers were not all that different from the longer-term struggles such workers face in finding and sustaining employment in higher paying jobs, such as digital skills or existing educational attainment.

Another objective of the project was to recommend strategies or changes in the way the state’s workforce development systems operate and interact with one another along with employers to better serve the needs of out-of-work Coloradans. Based on what we heard from stakeholders, observed in data, and discovered by looking at national research and analysis, our state’s economy is rapidly evolving. Changes that were happening slowly, such as a move to remote work and learning and more flexible scheduling, accelerated during the pandemic and it does not look like these changes will go away after the pandemic is over. It

4. Even at February 2020 levels of employment, our economy will still have fewer jobs than it would have if the pandemic never occurred. According to the Economic Policy Institute, Colorado will need to add 40,300 jobs on top of those lost between February 2020 and April 2020 to account for population growth that occurred between April 2020 and April 2021.

is our hope that the findings and recommendations contained in this report serve as a helpful guide for those involved in developing and managing our workforce development systems as they look to adapt to the future of work in Colorado. We believe that this pandemic, though terrible in its human and economic costs, provides Colorado with an opportunity to envision a more inclusive and equitable economy.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The idea for this project predates the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the initial proposal was quite different before the events of 2020. It originated with ECMCF contacting CCLP as part of their efforts to expand their portfolio of grant recipients in Colorado. Staff from CCLP and ECMCF met several times to brainstorm and develop ideas that would relate to and advance CCLP's work in the area of workforce, training, and credentials, while also responding to ECMCF's interests in supporting post-secondary education. As originally proposed, the project intended to look at the core causes preventing Coloradans from joining or rejoining the labor force. Because COVID-19 had a significant negative effect on hundreds of thousands of workers across the state, it made sense to shift the emphasis from those who were long-term unemployed or marginally attached to the labor force to those who were newly unemployed due to the pandemic. As part of this shift, we discovered that many of the impacts and relevant dynamics were similar to the core causes of long-term unemployment and separation from the labor force.

Economic Impacts of the Pandemic

At the outset of the pandemic, we realized there were many unanswered questions and potential issues arising from the severe economic impact of COVID-19. This was particularly true for certain crucial industries in Colorado, such as tourism, accommodations, food services, recreation, all modes of travel and their ancillary and support industries (such as maintenance/service), small businesses, service shops, casinos, and government, just to name a few. We also hypothesized that these impacts would be very different

and of varying lengths and intensities depending on the specific circumstances and dynamics at play in different sectors of the economy as well as in different regions of the state. With this foundational premise, we created a work plan whose aim was to define the underlying causes and results of these economic impacts, as well as to identify concrete actions and activities underway or planned around the state to create new training, credentials, and support needed to foster new employment activities across Colorado.

The findings of this work have been quite illuminating and have confirmed some of the hypotheses that were postulated at the outset of this project. By conducting an array of interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders and integrating their perspectives with data from a number of sources, the report offers a dynamic representation of how the pandemic has significantly influenced Colorado's economy, the related ways these economic influences have up-ended the work lives and economic security of thousands of Coloradans, and how different regions, along with state agencies, are working to begin a sustained, equitable, and responsive economic recovery.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every Coloradan differently based on a multitude of factors, including their gender, age, race/ethnicity, income, where they lived in the state, and the industry in which they worked. It would be an impossible task to document all of the ways in which the pandemic affected Coloradans, even when looking narrowly at just one topic, such as the labor market. As such, the research team proposed four main questions at the outset of the project to guide our work. Together, these questions narrowed the scope of the project and focused our research efforts on issues and populations that are central to CCLP's and ECMCF's missions and core interests. The questions were:

1. What types of jobs did those who are now unemployed most recently occupy? What jobs do they hope to find and obtain in the next six to twelve months, and what higher education credentials will be needed to obtain these jobs?

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2. What jobs are expected to be available to those who are currently unemployed during the next six to twelve months? What specific skills and prerequisite higher education credentials will be needed to obtain those jobs?
 3. What types of jobs and education and training that lead to different career pathways will be possible for:
 - i. Coloradans with histories of criminal justice involvement;
 - ii. Coloradans without access to computers, the internet, smartphones, or other information technology or with low levels of digital literacy;
 - iii. Non-native and limited English speakers and those with low-literacy and numeracy levels; and
 - iv. Coloradans living with different disabilities and also needing/wanting to work.
 4. What systemic trainings, education, supports, or new credentials are planned to assist people obtain new positions or regain former positions?

To answer these questions, the research team combined quantitative and qualitative research methods through two parallel efforts. The first consisted of collecting and analyzing secondary data from a range of government surveys and data sources. The second consisted of a series of stakeholder interviews and focus groups with state, regional, and local agencies, community-based organizations, coalitions, advocates, and Coloradans who currently are unemployed or were unemployed over the past year and a half. The research team used this mixed methodology to get a more complete picture of the changes experienced by Coloradans during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, stakeholder interviews were useful in both confirming trends seen in employment and unemployment data for different economic sectors and counties in Colorado while also providing additional context that helped the research team to better understand the trends seen in data along with factors that were influencing these trends. On the other hand, topics

or themes that were mentioned during stakeholder interviews gave direction to additional quantitative research to evaluate how widely a trend or issue raised by a stakeholder was experienced across the state.

Quantitative Research Approach

The project's quantitative research approach consisted of a review of secondary data collected through surveys and other methods by government agencies, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. These datasets primarily described the employment and labor market situation in Colorado starting in February 2020 and ending in early 2021. Due to the short timeline of the project, the quantitative analysis relied exclusively on secondary data rather than data gathered directly from Coloradans themselves. As such, there were some issues or trends we were not able to corroborate or explore with data. The data that was analyzed was used to understand how employment, unemployment, and other factors changed over the 18 or so months starting in February 2020. Where possible, data was disaggregated by demographics, geography, and economic sectors to understand how Coloradans' experiences over this period were similar or different depending on who they are, where they lived, and what their job was/is. Primary data sources used in this report include:

- **Current Employment Statistics (CES) Survey/ State and Metro Area Estimates (SAE):** The CES is a survey of approximately 143,000 businesses and government agencies representing 588,000 worksites throughout the United States. The CES is used directly for national-level estimates, but state and metropolitan area estimates are provided through the SAE program. Some things to note about the CES/SAE: the data represents establishment employment in the pay period that includes the 12th of the month; self-employed workers are not included in the data; persons are counted at their place of work rather than their place of residence; Coloradans employed by more than one employer will appear on each payroll; finally, CES data is revised annually, so the data that appears in this report may change as revisions are released. The U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics (BLS) is the primary agency responsible for this dataset.

- **Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS):**

The LAUS program is a joint federal–state effort to produce monthly estimates of employment and unemployment for states and a number of sub–state geographies, such as counties. Estimates produced by the LAUS program are derived from the Current Population Survey, and combined with data from the CES and state unemployment insurance systems. A Coloradan is considered unemployed if they are not employed during the reference week (week that includes the 12th day of the month), but was available for work and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the 4–week period ending with the reference week. This means that a worker who is not able to work or is not currently looking for work would not be considered unemployed, but out of the labor force. For this reason, it is likely that the official unemployment rates undercount who is functionally unemployed. The LAUS is published by the BLS.

- **Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW):** This survey provides quarterly counts of employment and wages reported by employers whose workers are covered by state unemployment insurance systems. Unlike other data sources, the data reported in the QCEW are not estimates. The BLS publishes the QCEW, which is available monthly and/or quarterly, depending on the geography in question. Data from the QCEW is available at the state and county level, though data from smaller counties with few employers are often suppressed due to confidentiality concerns.

- **American Community Survey (ACS):** The ACS is a large survey of households intended to replace the old “long form” portion of the decennial census. For smaller geographies, such as counties, the data is pooled over a period of 5 years to provide a reliable estimate, though 1–year estimates are available for states and larger counties. It covers a wide range of socio–economic indicators on

individuals and households. Data from 2020 was not yet available from the ACS at the time this report was written, so this data source was used primarily to understand economic conditions in Colorado prior to the pandemic.

- **Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS):** The OEWS is a semi–annual survey designed to produce estimates of employment and wages in about 800 occupations. The survey only includes nonfarm employment and does not include self–employed workers. It does include both full– and part–time jobs. The survey data is generated from a panel of 180,000 to 185,000 establishments collected over a period of three years, though reference months for the survey are in May and November. State–level data is only available for May. This data is collected and managed by the BLS.

Qualitative Research Approach

The project’s qualitative research approach consisted of over 40 interviews with an array of public agencies and community organizations operating across Colorado. Furthermore, the project team organized two focus groups to get more direct feedback on the findings and recommendations included in the report from Coloradans who had experienced unemployment during the pandemic. These were invaluable in helping us to refine the report. Our outreach and qualitative efforts were intended to engage with a group of stakeholders who represented a diverse population, including:

- Adults and young adults with justice involvement;
- Individuals experiencing mental health, chemical addiction, and behavioral health issues;
- Non–native English speakers including recent immigrants, refugees, and people representing diverse cultures;
- Individuals living with disabling conditions;
- Long–term unemployed and underemployed

Coloradans;

- Low-skilled workers and job-seekers;
- People who lost their jobs due to the significant impacts of COVID-19;
- People over the age of 55 wanting and/or needing to return to work; and
- Groups of individuals with lived experience of poverty, limited or no formal work experience, homelessness, or attending treatment programs.

To schedule and facilitate these interviews, we relied on certain data sources to determine where the greatest level of unemployment and COVID-19 cases occurred, as well as the counties where the impacts and resulting unemployment rates were lowest. These interviews were conducted online in order to maintain safe social distancing practices and typically involved two or three managers or representatives from the organization. There were some situations where we were able to talk with seven or eight staff members with a range of responsibilities and perspectives. The types of organizations and agencies who were interviewed included regional workforce development centers, SNAP Employment and Training offices in different counties, adult education programs, organizations with offices in our regions of interest, advocacy and policy organizations involved in state-wide direct services and related policy initiatives, organizations that focused on serving specific populations, employers, and discussions with different groups including those with lived experience of homelessness, long-term unemployment, or being a parent on TANF trying to enter the workforce.⁵ Many of the stakeholders who were interviewed have been partners with CCLP in numerous activities over the years, and having these relationships established helped considerably to make contact and benefit from the experience of “first-hand” knowledge of professional staff and job seekers living in different regions of the state.

Focus on Regions

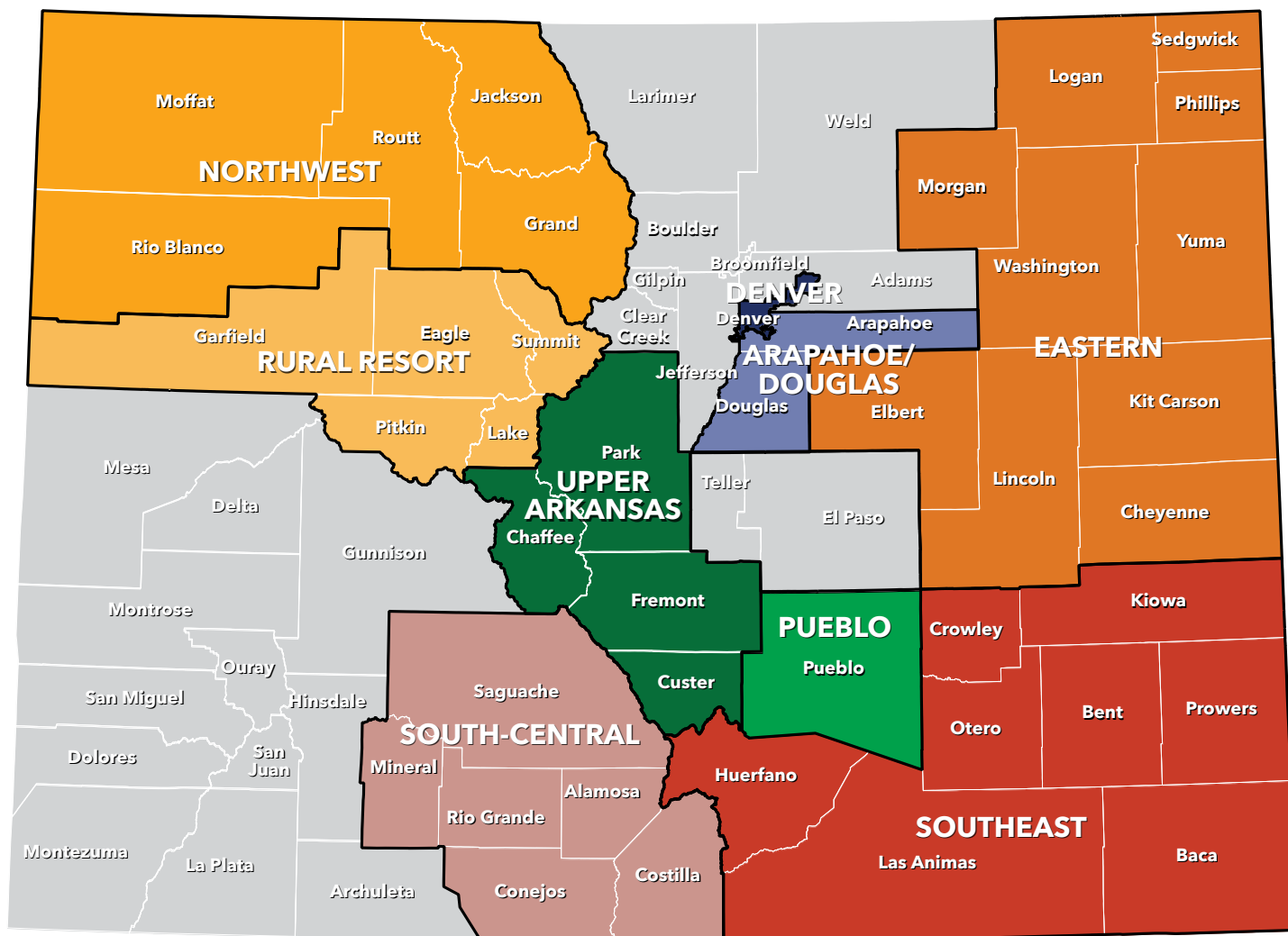
The economic effects of COVID-19 were not the same across Colorado. Regional dynamics, such as a reliance

on tourism, meant that different parts of the state experienced the pandemic differently. In order to capture these regional variations, the project team divided the state up into regions based on the state’s workforce development regions and sub-regions (in the case of the state’s Rural Consortium). Not all of the regions and sub-regions were examined. Regions were selected based on a number of factors, such as greatest and smallest April unemployment rates, greatest and smallest share of jobs lost between February 2020 and April 2020, and geographic diversity. Geographic diversity included both urban, suburban, and rural regions, as well as regions that represented different parts of the state within the rural region. The following is a list of the regions highlighted in this report, as well as the counties that make up each region:

- **Arapahoe/Douglas Region:** Arapahoe County, Douglas County
- **Denver Region:** Denver County
- **Eastern Region:** Cheyenne County, Elbert County, Kit Carson County, Lincoln County, Logan County, Morgan County, Phillips County, Sedgwick County, Washington County, Yuma County
- **Northwest Region:** Grand County, Jackson County, Moffat County, Rio Blanco County, Routt County
- **Pueblo Region:** Pueblo County
- **Rural Resort Region:** Eagle County, Garfield County, Lake County, Pitkin County, Summit County
- **South-Central Region:** Alamosa County, Conejos County, Costilla County, Mineral County, Rio Grande County, Saguache County
- **Southeast Region:** Baca County, Bent County, Crowley County, Huerfano County, Kiowa County, Las Animas County, Otero County, Prowers County
- **Upper Arkansas:** Chaffee County, Custer County,

5. See Appendix A for a complete list of stakeholders who were interviewed for this project.

Figure 1: Report's Regions
Colorado, 2021



Fremont County, Park County

These regions represent 42 of Colorado's 64 counties and accounted for 43.6 percent of all employment in the state in February 2020.

PARAMETERS & EXPECTATIONS

This project has provided CCLP with the opportunity to explore the impacts of COVID-19 in specific regions of Colorado and to determine some of the core reasons and subsequent results for these impacts. It also provided insights into ongoing efforts to assist different individuals who were not able to join the workforce even before the start of the pandemic. It also

revealed some of the potential remedies and innovations that have been developed or are in development to create new options and retraining opportunities for those who lost jobs during the past year or need new training and work-based learning opportunities to move to different sectors. Despite this, CCLP recognizes that there were significant limitations to how and what we could capture in terms of describing how different regions in our state fared during the last year and will continue to fare going forward. These include, but are not limited to:

1. **Each interview was made at a particular point in time.** We were not able to facilitate multiple interviews with the same stakeholders at different intervals to get a continuous picture

of how the responses of different agencies and organizations shifted over a longer period of time.

2. Responses to the pandemic varied by region.

The diverse and sustained variables of how policymakers, businesses and people in different regions of the state managed the multiple levels of pandemic response, including having adequate testing and vaccines available, encouraging people to perform good public health practices, and CDC guidance which influenced which jobs were safer than others, but also where job losses were greatest. At the same time, each region has had surges in different activities that resulted in having to prioritize such items as assisting with unemployment insurance applications, helping constituents to navigate the myriad of systems that would provide support and survival assistance of different types, and initiating different responses to the issue of digital equity. The availability of public transportation and trustworthy childcare of different types has been a crucial factor as well.

3. Seasonal fluctuations in employment made underlying conditions more difficult to detect. The types of seasonal jobs, including the summer of 2020 as well as the 2020–21 winter season, resulted in fluctuations in employment and unemployment in certain sectors of certain regions in our state. In particular, the mountain resort counties whose economies are oriented towards summer and winter tourism typically see spikes in unemployment during the spring and fall shoulder seasons. This was no different during the pandemic. So while some of the jobs lost in these counties over the past year and half were due to the pandemic, others were lost as a result of normal seasonal shifts in employment. However, the driving cause was often unclear.

4. Survey data experienced lower response rates. As a result of social distancing measures put in place in response to the COVID–19 pandemic, employees of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other government statistical agencies had to

suspend or modify their typical methods for collecting survey data, most notably in-person interviews. As a result, many of the surveys from which much of the data in this report was derived saw reduced response rates and sample sizes. Consequently, it is likely that the survey samples were less representative of the population as a whole over this period. While we do not question their accuracy, the data might exaggerate or under-represent certain trends or changes that occurred during the pandemic more than they would have under typical circumstances.

5. Federal and state response to the pandemic were unpredictable. There was much uncertainty throughout the project about the role the federal and state governments would play in providing relief and support to Coloradans. The infusion of federal emergency funds to the state via overall allocations as well as the receipts of emergency programs and grants created new jobs or funding sources for state and local governments. At the same time, it was unclear throughout much of the pandemic whether programs created as part of the CARES Act would be extended, or if additional stimulus measures would provide more assistance to state and local governments. In addition to federal stimulus programs, Colorado’s special legislative session in December 2020 was unexpected, leading to a \$300 million economic stimulus package consisting of 10 bills supporting access to broadband for students, temporary sales tax reduction for restaurants and bars, relief payments to small businesses, rental assistance, and utility assistance, among other COVID–19 relief measures. Finally, it is unknown as of the writing of this report how the Governor’s Recovery Plan for Colorado, along with the federal funds that will be received by state government as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), will influence our economic recovery.

6. Each region in our state is far more complex than described in this report. Our qualitative

information is based on the perspectives of staff from specific organizations and agencies in the different regions. It does not necessarily represent a comprehensive analysis as much as the insights from those working with unemployed job seekers in these regions, and state officials responsible to identify recovery strategies and activities. Similarly, in some regions we only interviewed one or two public agencies and not community organizations, so again, the type of input carries some inherent bias and local opinions. In other cases, terms used in one region meant something different in another. For example, the issue of digital equity represents so many sub-topics that varied in importance and priority depending on the region.

The report describes the interpretation and review of all information and data gathered with as much accuracy and objectivity as possible, and reflects our admiration of all that diverse stakeholders have done to innovate and develop opportunities for training, jobs, business expansion and survival and projections about new industries to emerge from the pandemic.

CORE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

While the research team engaged with 63 stakeholders, a number of organizations, agencies, and coalitions are worth mentioning as core partners in this project. These groups include:

- **Colorado Department of Labor and Employment:** CDLE is one of the main departments at the state concerned with helping unemployed Coloradans find employment, training, and career opportunities. Within CDLE, we engaged primarily with three agencies/offices:
 - **Office of the Future of Work** focuses on work opportunities and dynamics that will affect Colorado workers of all backgrounds, levels of education and training achieved, geographical region, ages, and aspirations. The range of issues that this office is tackling includes

digital equity and activities that address state-wide needs and inclusion; the needs and issues facing independent contractors and “gig” workers; identifying investments needed by the state for training and up-skilling that will meet the demands of an increasingly globalized and digital economy; and interfacing with many of the state departments regarding these. For this project, there have been ongoing meetings and collaboration focused on digital equity as well as a statewide initiative that will hopefully address the need for a coaching network that provides direct and personal coaching at all levels to job-seekers and those who are needing remote assistance. The Director of this Office is a member of the senior leadership team of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and one of our team members co-leads the Policy Workgroup of the Digital Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee led by this office. The Subcommittee reports to the Advisory Board of the State Broadband Office.

- **Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium** includes a network of ten workforce sub-areas and over twenty workforce centers found in fifty-one rural counties across the state. These sub-areas are spread across Colorado and are comprised of very small populations and remote locations along with towns of modest size and the resort counties that have concentrated populations depending on the seasons and recreational conditions. Members of this consortium were many of the stakeholders interviewed for this project. They provided ongoing updates and information related to the impacts of COVID-19 on the workforce and regional economies during the pandemic as well as the recovery activities that have been progressing over the past four to five months. The populations of these rural counties are hugely diverse and include agricultural workers and ranchers, Native Americans from various tribal backgrounds, non-native English speakers, workers in different extraction industries, refugees

from many nations, multi-generational families, among many others. The business sectors located in these counties are equally diverse, ranging from mining and oil and gas and extraction to refining of final product to sustainable energy development and extensive tourism in numerous regions. The Director of this Consortium is also a member of the senior leadership team of CDLE and a regular participant in the Skills2Compete Coalition.

– **Adult Employment Services and Workforce Areas** oversees workforce programs throughout Colorado, including the Rural Consortium and 8 additional workforce areas in western Colorado and along the Front Range. These areas also have diverse populations of all income levels and vocational aspirations and are densely populated in certain areas while still having some rural communities. These workforce areas interface and collaborate with numerous public agencies, coalitions, community organizations, libraries, public schools and community colleges, four-year universities and vocational colleges, and diverse unions, professional organizations, and businesses of all sizes. They, along with the workforce areas of the Rural Consortium, are responsible for providing programs, linkages, and training to aspiring workers across Colorado and for connecting workers with the many employers across the state.

- **Skills 2 Compete Coalition:** Skills2Compete (S2C) is the Colorado affiliate of the National Skills Coalition. Membership includes direct service providers, adult education programs, policy advocates, legislative aides, foundations, public agencies, workforce center staff, education and workforce policy advocacy organizations, child-care policy advocates, and human service managers and supervisors. S2C hosts monthly policy discussions and presentations related to skills training, adult education, workforce development and employment services, and topics that have significant impact on these such as digital equity and access to affordable childcare. The S2C

also sponsors specific bills and works closely with other coalitions, legislative staff and legislators on targeted legislation that creates and sustains opportunities for all Coloradans.

– **Support Services Committee** comprised of organizations, agencies, advocates, and interested citizens who are concerned about supportive services that lead to achievement of vocational goals. This committee has membership from around the state, and also consists of organizations that work with diverse marginalized populations including individuals living with disabilities; non-native English speakers including immigrants and refugees; individuals with justice involvement; young adults; single-parent families; those with poor work histories and limited educational backgrounds; and those who have been out of the workforce for long periods of time. The major issues this committee addresses have included a wide range of support services during training and employment activities that are needed to assist people to pursue and achieve diverse vocational goals. These include digital literacy assistance of all types.

For this project, CCLP staff also collaborated in various capacities with the Colorado Office of Higher Education, the Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Colorado Workforce Development Council. A full list of stakeholders can be found in Appendix A of this report.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter of the report contains our findings from the quantitative and qualitative research. The first two sections present the quantitative research, including data and statistics related to economic conditions and trends before and during COVID-19 as well as projections for how the economy might change as a result of the pandemic. The following sections present the results of our qualitative research—summaries of topics and themes that arose through our stakeholder interviews.

COLORADO'S ECONOMY BEFORE & DURING COVID-19

While the focus of this report is on the experience of Coloradans during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is helpful to look at economic conditions in the state prior to the pandemic in order to better understand how our state's economy changed over the course of the past year and a half. In many ways, the pandemic simply magnified existing cracks in the prevailing narrative about Colorado's economy, showing how vulnerable so many were to an unexpected economic shock. This, even after the state experienced our longest period of economic expansion since the Great Depression. As a result of the public health orders put into place to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, our economy went from record low levels of unemployment to record highs in just a matter of weeks. 375,800 nonfarm jobs were lost in March and April and overall employment declined by 13.3% from February 2020.¹ The pandemic's effect on employment was not equal and largely

depended on businesses' ability to shift their workforce into working from home. As a result, employment saw the sharpest decline in industries requiring face-to-face interactions with customers, like in the accommodation and food services sector or the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector. Colorado's counties also experienced uneven impacts from the economic effects of COVID-19. Colorado's mountain resort counties and other tourism-dependent locations experienced the greatest job losses at the outset of the pandemic while other rural counties, such as those in the eastern part of the state, saw less severe employment impacts.

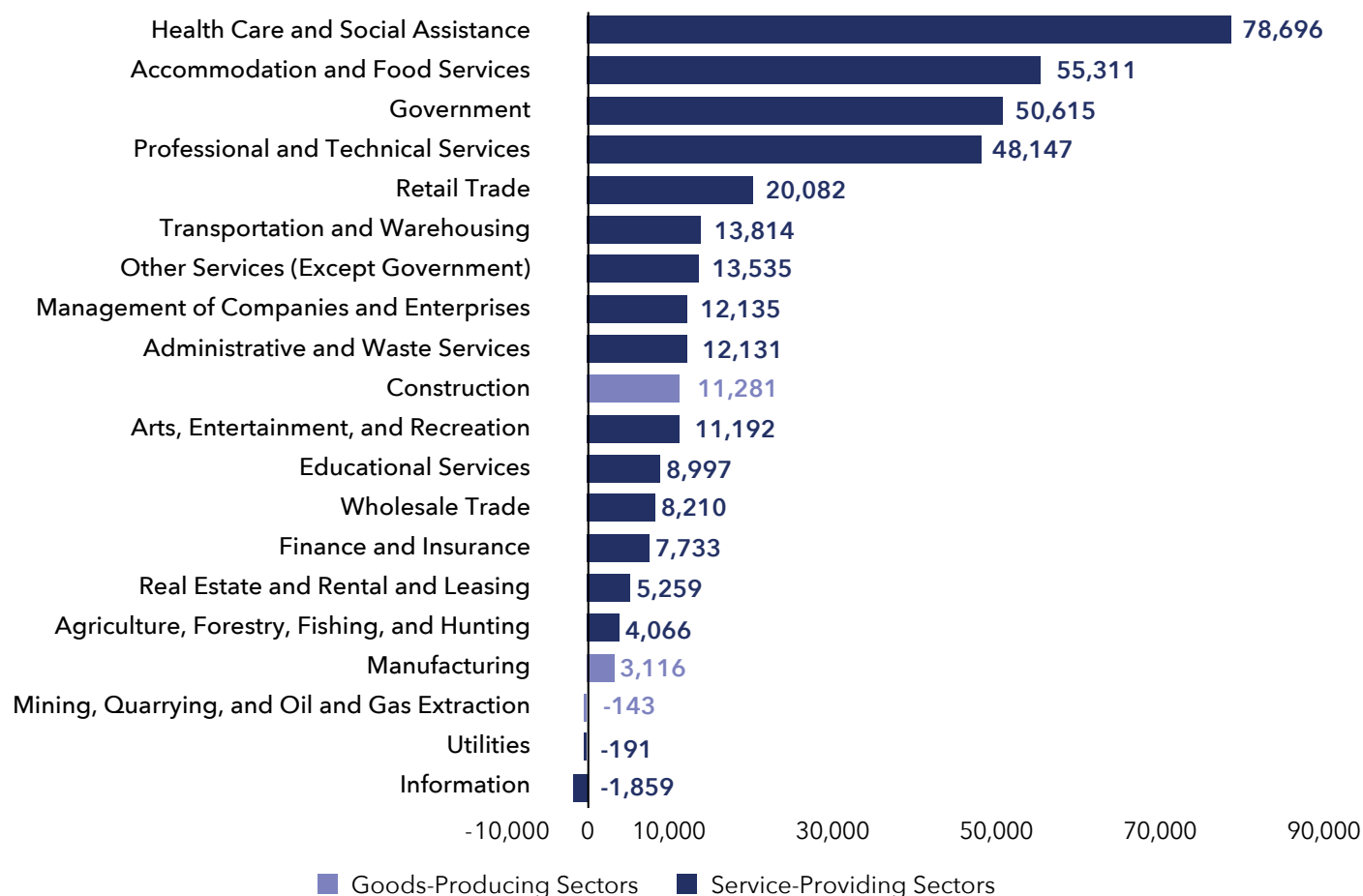
Thanks to federal and state economic stimulus programs, such as expanded weekly unemployment benefits, stimulus checks, and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), the overall economic effects of the COVID-19 public health restrictions were less than initial estimates feared. Once Colorado's stay-at-home order was lifted at the end of April, our state's economy quickly began recovering the jobs we had lost. As of April 2021, 31 of Colorado's 64 counties had more than recovered the number of jobs lost over the course of the past year. In all, the state's economy recovered 247,700 nonfarm jobs as of April 2021 and would need to recover 128,100 more jobs to return to February 2020 levels of employment.²

Despite this progress, it does not appear as though we will return to the economy that we had before the pandemic. Recent scenarios for employment projections show that Colorado's economy will likely see

1. Current Employment Statistics (CES)/State and Metro Area Estimates (SAE), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. It should be noted that the number of jobs lost does not necessarily equate to the number of Coloradans who lost their job; some of the jobs lost may have been held by the same worker.

2. Current Employment Statistics (CES)/State and Metro Area Estimates (SAE), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 2: Net Change in Employment by Sector
Colorado, 2008-2018



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

lower rates of growth in certain sectors over the next ten years, like accommodation and food services, as a result of COVID-19. At the same time, other sectors, such as information and professional, scientific, and technical services, could see higher rates of employment growth as a result of the pandemic and proliferation of remote work. As such, it is imperative that our state's workforce development systems adapt to the new economy and job opportunities that are most likely to emerge over the next five to ten years. There is a significant need for innovative and responsive approaches that offer a pathway for workers most affected by the pandemic that may include strengthening digital literacy, offering pre-apprenticeships in

non-traditional sectors such as health care and social assistance, and developing administrative skills.

Before COVID-19

Prior to 2020, Colorado had one of the fastest growing economies in the country. Our state's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an annual rate of 3.5% in real terms since the end of the Great Recession to 2018. This was the sixth fastest rate in the country, behind North Dakota, Washington, Texas, California, and Utah.³ Between 2010 and 2018, private sector employment grew by an annual rate of 2.8%, the fifth highest rate in the country. While the construction sector experienced the fastest rate of growth of any sector in the state over this same period, the health care and social assistance

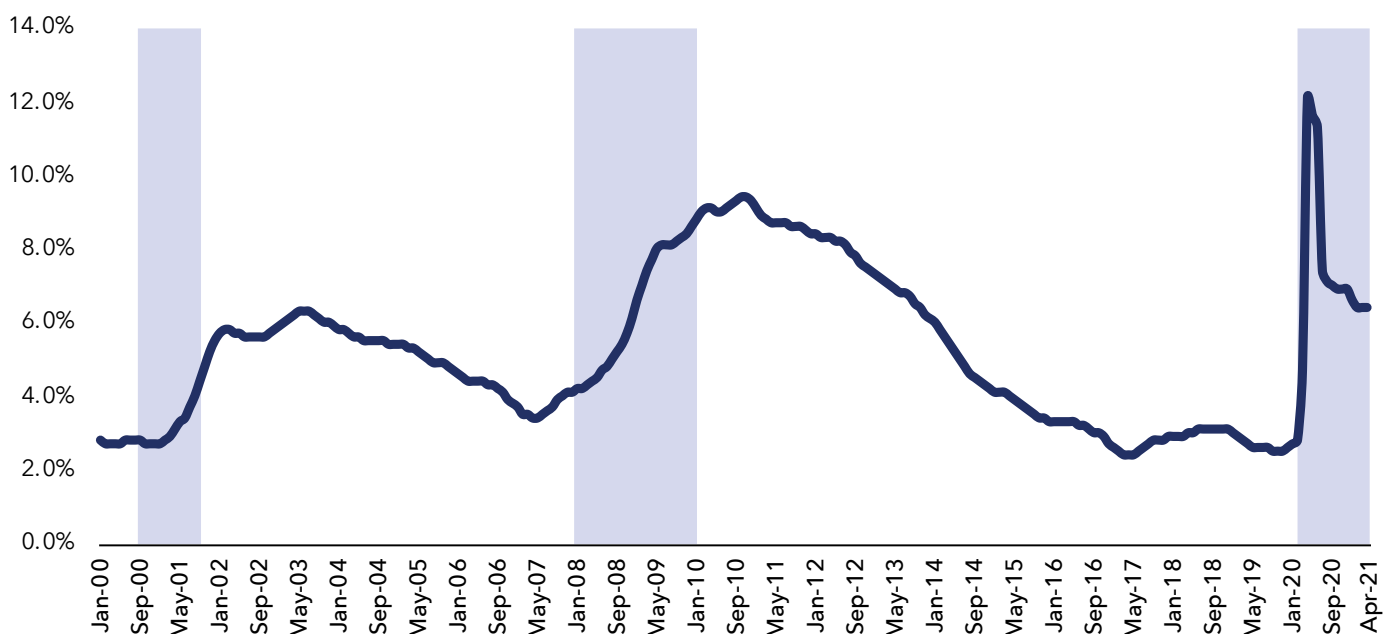
3. Brennan, Charles and Lauren Contorno. *State of Working Colorado 2020*. Colorado Center on Law and Policy (2021).

sector accounted for approximately 13.3 percent (or 78,696) of the 500,000 jobs added between 2010 and 2018. It was followed by the accommodation and food services sector, government sector, and professional and technical services.⁴ Reflecting Colorado's strong labor market, the unemployment rate in Colorado was over a percentage point lower than the national rate since 2014 with one exception during 2018, and reached historic lows just prior to the start of the pandemic. These statistics point to a vibrant and prosperous state economy. However, they mask a more nuanced picture of the state of working in Colorado during the period following the Great Recession.

While the state as a whole had recovered from the Great Recession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, certain industries and counties were still experiencing a net loss in jobs as of 2018. Twenty-one of Colorado's counties still had not recovered to pre-recession levels of gross domestic product (GDP). Wage growth for most Coloradans was meager between 2000 and 2018.

While most workers earned similar amounts in 2000 as they did in 2018, accounting for inflation, the top ten percent of earners did see increases, leading to an increase in the wage gap between the top and bottom 10 percent of earners in Colorado. At the same time, the cost of necessary household and personal expenditures, such as housing, transportation, and child care, continued to increase. In 2016, 27.4 percent of Colorado's working families did not earn enough income to cover these expenses.⁵ Many had incomes too high to qualify for social safety net programs, despite their economic need. At the same time, just 18.7 percent of jobs paid less than the self-sufficiency wage for a single adult in 2017.⁶ Besides wages, there were also varying outcomes for Coloradans based on their race/ethnicity. A recent report by Prosperity Now ranked Colorado 12th in the nation for the overall prosperity

Figure 3: Unemployment Rate
Colorado, 2000-2021 (seasonally adjusted)



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

4. [State of Working Colorado 2020](#). Colorado Center on Law and Policy (2021).

5. Pearce, Diana M. [Overlooked and Undercounted 2018: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Colorado](#). Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. Prepared for the Colorado Center on Law and Policy (2018).

6. Webster, Michelle and Claire Sheridan. [State of Working Colorado 2018](#). Colorado Center on Law and Policy (2019).

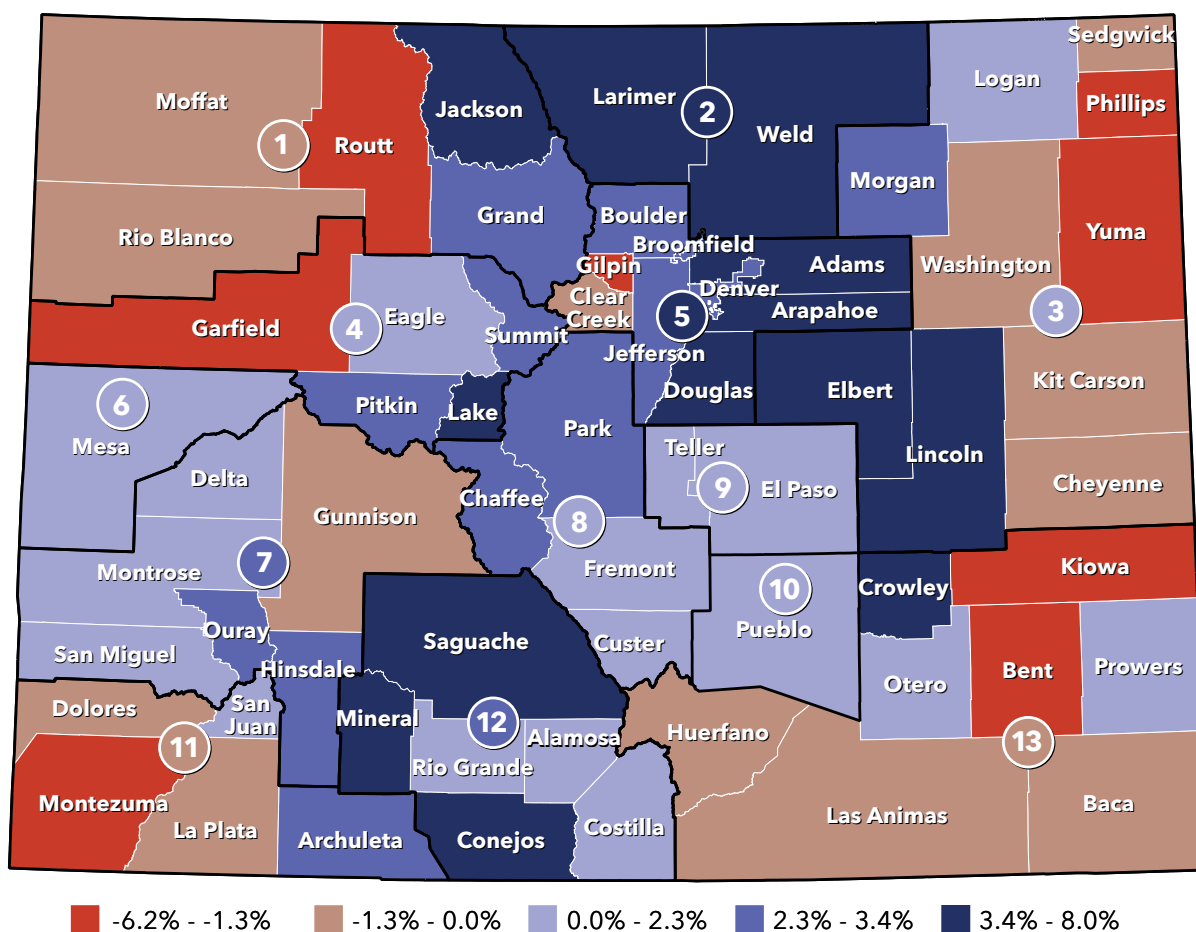
of its residents. Our state's rank dropped to 37th once racial disparities were factored in.⁷

One notable trend seen in Colorado during the recovery from the Great Recession that may help explain this “tale of two states” was a shift in employment towards low-wage industries. During the recession, job losses in lower-wage industries accounted for just 19.4 percent of the jobs lost in Colorado between 2008 and 2010. In contrast, 76.6 percent of the jobs recovered in Colorado by 2014 were in lower-wage industries.⁸ More balanced growth in employment

among lower-, mid-, and higher-wage jobs⁹ between 2014 and 2018 led to a more equal recovery, however 39.9 percent of jobs recovered in the ten years since 2008 were in lower-wage industries compared to 33.9 percent in mid-wage industries and 26.1 percent in higher-wage industries.

This trend makes sense when we think about the sectors that saw the most gains in employment over this period. Four of the five sectors that experienced the greatest net change in employment between 2008 and 2018 all had average weekly wages in 2018 below

Figure 4: Annual Rate of County GDP Growth
Colorado, 2009-19 (in 2012 chained dollars)



Regions: 1. Northwest: -0.8%; 2. North Front Range: 5.9%; 3. Eastern: 1.3%; 4. Rural Resort: 1.2%; 5. Metro Denver: 3.4%; 6. Mesa: 0.5%; 7. Western: 0.3%; 8. Upper Arkansas: 2.0%; 9. Pikes Peak: 2.1%; 10. Pueblo: 1.9%; 11. Southwest: -0.7%; 12. South-Central: 2.3%; 13. Southeast: -0.7%

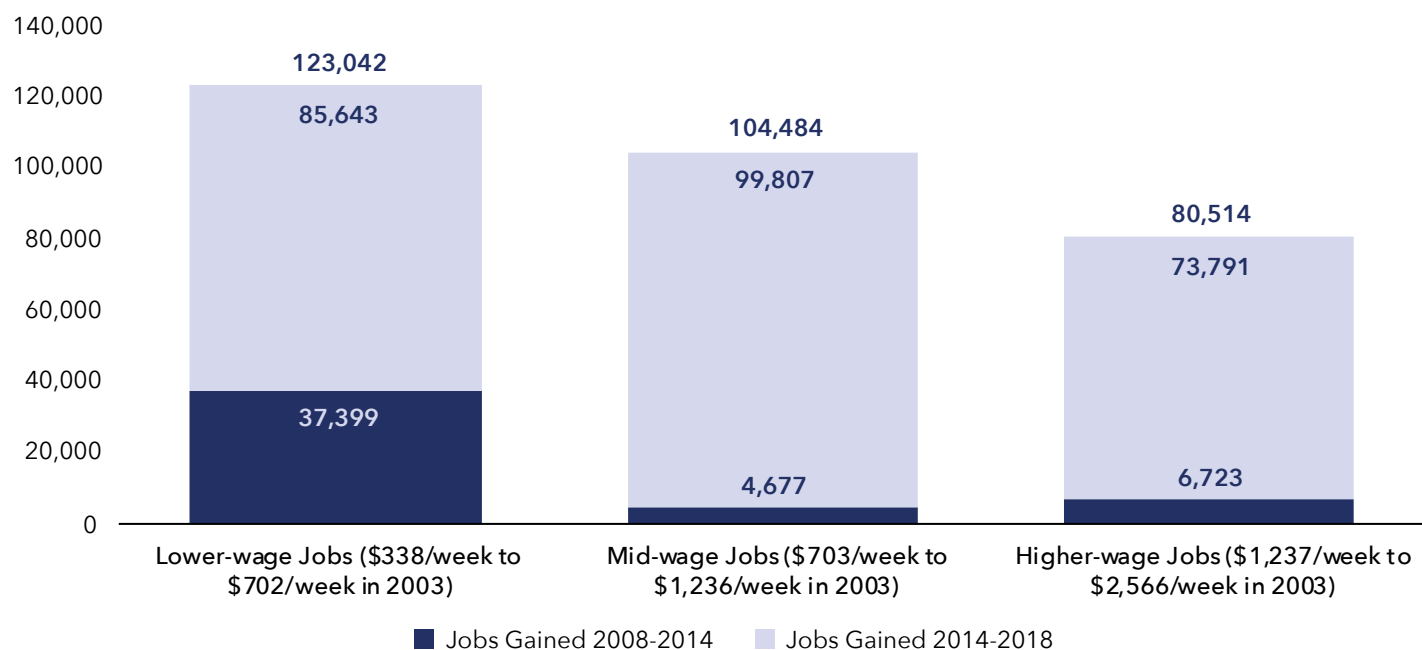
Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

7. [Prosperity Now 2020 Scorecard: Colorado](#). Prosperity Now (2020).

8. Industries with average wages of below \$1,000/week. This represents roughly the bottom third of employees ranked by weekly wage in 2003. See *State of Working Colorado 2020* for more background on this analysis.

9. Mid-wage industries are industries with average wages between \$338 per week and \$702 per week in 2003. Higher wage industries are industries with average wages above \$1,237 per week in 2003.

Figure 5: Net Jobs Gained by Wage-Level
Colorado, 2008-2018



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

the statewide average weekly wage of \$1,133. The health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and retail trade sectors all had average weekly wages below \$1,000. The average worker in the accommodation and food services sector earned just \$451 per week in 2018. In terms of overall employment, just under half of Coloradans were employed in the government, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, or the retail trade sectors in 2018.¹⁰

There is a strong connection between wages and educational attainment in Colorado. In 2018, the median wage for a worker with a high school or equivalent level of educational attainment was \$16.04 per hour compared to \$33.16 per hour for workers with a bachelor's degree or advanced degree.¹¹ In 2019, 38.9 percent of employed Coloradans 25 and over had a high school or equivalent level of educational attainment compared to 29.8 percent who had a bachelor's or advanced degree. Nearly one in three workers with a high school or equivalent level of educational attainment in Colorado were employed in the health care and

social assistance, accommodation and food services, and retail trade sectors in 2019; all sectors with some of the lowest average wages in the state. There were also distinct differences in the educational attainments of workers across different sectors of the economy. For example, 49.9 percent of workers 25 years and older in the accommodation and food services sector had a high school diploma or less while on the other hand 45.0 percent of workers employed in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector had a bachelor's or advanced degree.¹²

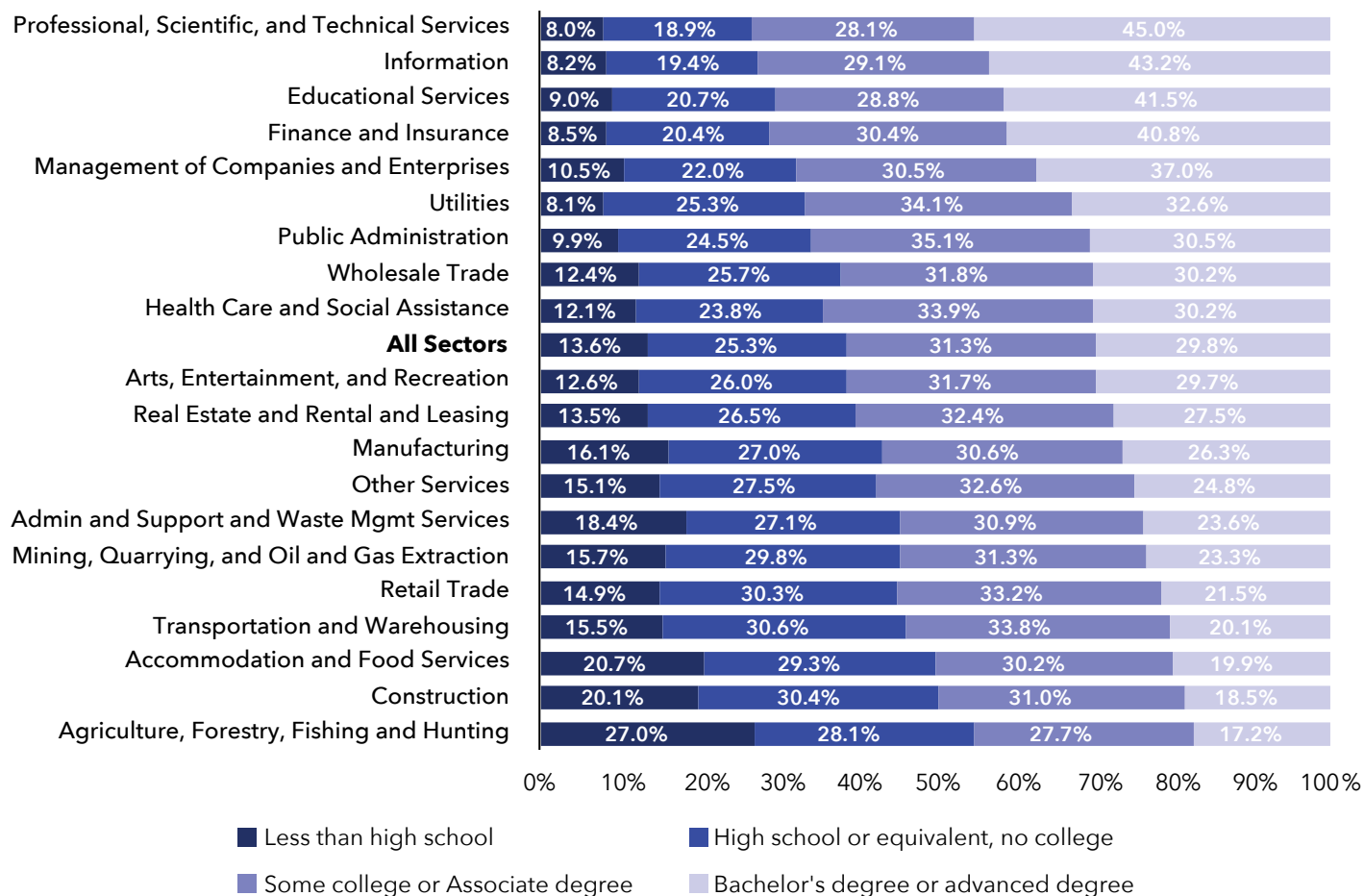
These data suggest that there was a strong link between a worker's educational attainment, the sector of the economy they were most likely to be employed in, and the wages they earned. Low-wage jobs were largely concentrated in industries where most workers did not have a bachelor's degree or an advanced degree. The growth in employment seen among health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and retail trade sectors likely resulted from the growth in low-wage, low-skill jobs in our state during the initial recovery from the Great Recession. These trends,

10. [State of Working Colorado 2020](#). Colorado Center on Law and Policy.

11. [State of Working Colorado 2020](#). Colorado Center on Law and Policy.

12. Quarterly Workforce Indicators, U.S. Census Bureau. Data represent an average of data from Q1 through Q4 of 2019.

Figure 6: Educational Attainment by Sector
Colorado, 2019 (employed workers 25 years and up)



Source: Quarterly Workforce Indicators, LEHD, U.S. Census Bureau

while it was impossible to know at the time, placed Colorado in a more vulnerable position going into the COVID-19 pandemic—all of these sectors were among those that saw the greatest loss of jobs, particularly the accommodation and food services sector.

Educational attainment is not the only indicator of the skill-level of Colorado's workforce. Literacy and numeracy, or someone's skill with reading and writing or working with numbers, can be measured using results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).¹³ The PIAAC also measures digital problem solving skills, though results are only published for the United States as a whole.

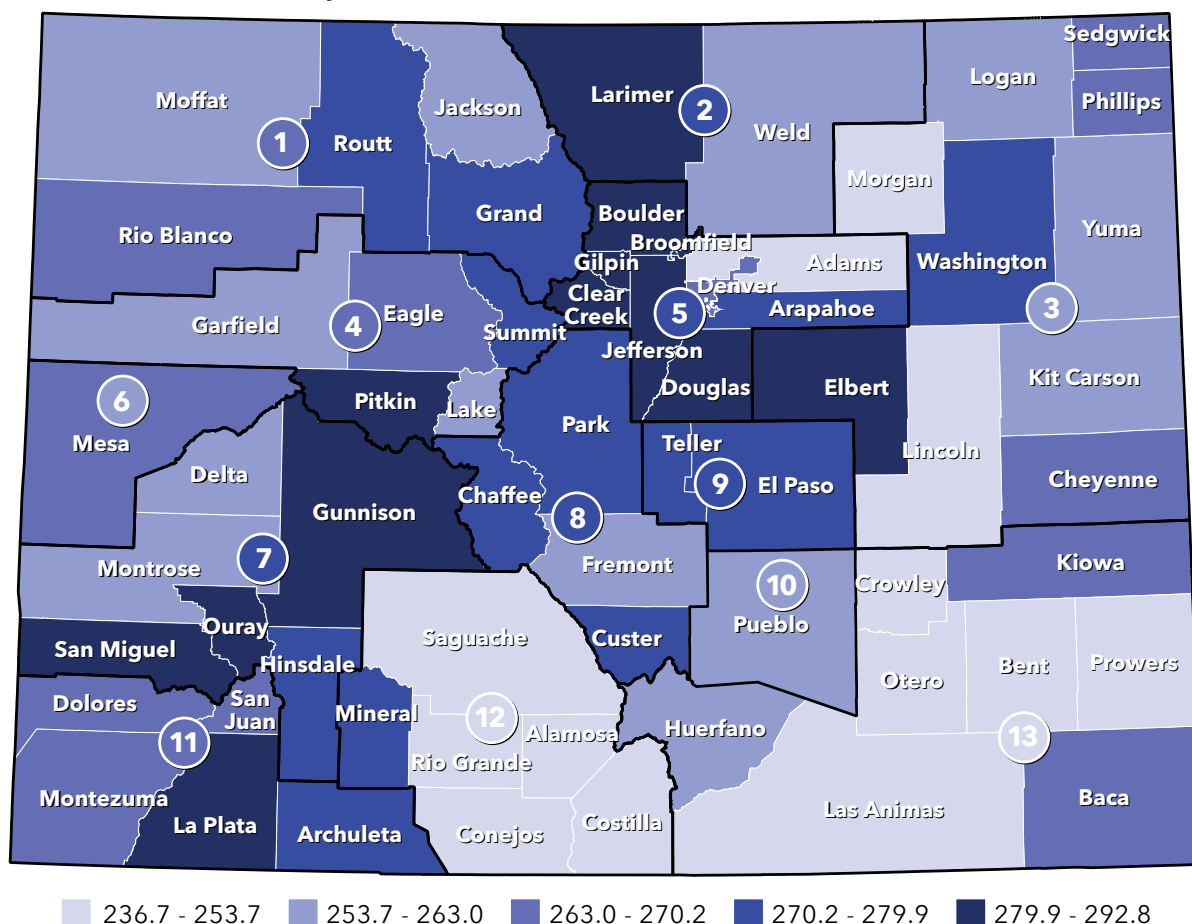
The assessment ranks participants on a scale from 0 to 500 based on their competency in each area. Overall, Coloradans performed better than Americans as a whole, but there are certain regions of Colorado that performed better than others. For example, the average literacy scores across Colorado's counties ranged from 292.8 in Douglas County to 236.7 in Bent County. This compares to a score of 272 for the state as a whole and 263.5 for the nation. Scores for numeracy were even more divergent across counties. Douglas County¹⁴ again tops the list with an average score of 284.8 compared to 216 in Bent County. Colorado on average scored 259.7 compared to 263.5 for the United States. While data from previous PIAAC assessments are not

13. The PIAAC is organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is conducted in 38 countries. Its goal is to assess and compare the basic skills and broad range of competencies of adults around the world.

14. Douglas County had the fifth highest combined average numeracy and literacy score in the United States. Only adults in Arlington County, VA; Carver County, MN; Dallas County, IA; and Delaware County, OH scored higher than Douglas County.

Figure 7: Average PIAAC Literacy Scores

Colorado, 2017 (Adults 16 to 74 years old)



Regions: 1. Northwest: 267.5; 2. North Front Range: 272.9; 3. Eastern: 261.7; 4. Rural Resort: 267.3; 5. Metro Denver: 278.4; 6. Mesa: 267.2; 7. Western: 274.5; 8. Upper Arkansas: 270.5; 9. Pikes Peak: 277.2; 10. Pueblo: 255.5; 11. Southwest: 268.8; 12. South-Central: 252.4; 13. Southeast: 253.2
Source: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

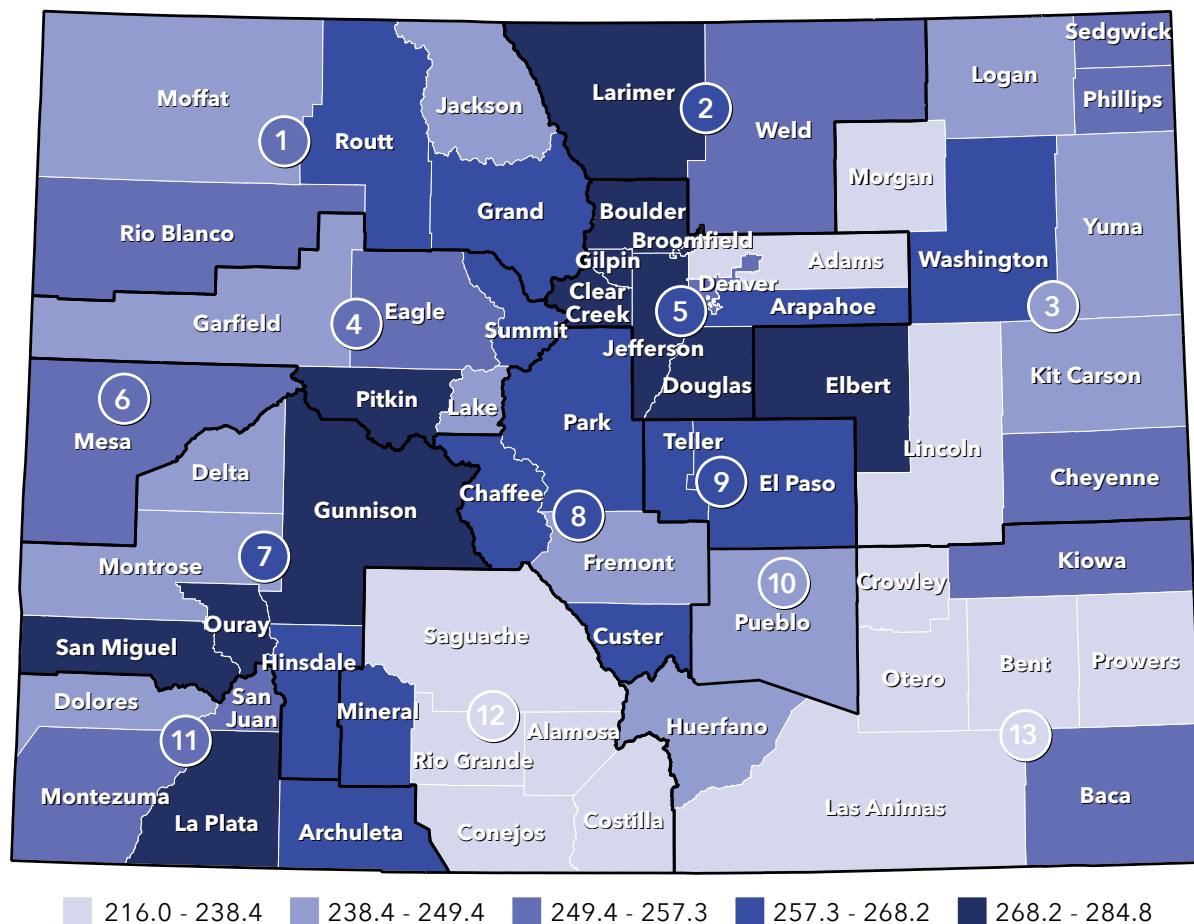
available at the state and county level, the national figures show that the average literacy and numeracy scores remain statistically unchanged between the 2012/14 and 2017 assessments.¹⁵

Results from the digital problem-solving portion of the PIAAC assessment are only available at the national level. The United States scored 274 out of 500 in 2017, unchanged from the previous assessment in 2012/14. Scores in this assessment are assigned to different levels based on general capabilities and proficiencies in digital problem solving. In 2017, 24 percent of Americans were estimated to be below Level 1, meaning they can only complete simple, straightforward tasks in a digital environment. By comparison, 38 percent of

Americans were estimated to be at Level 2 or above, meaning they are competent in using generic and specific software and can use a range of basic tools to resolve a problem in a digital environment. Even at Level 2, however, some unexpected outcomes or impasses in solving a problem may occur. As might be expected, proficiency in digital problem solving is different across age groups, with a higher share of older Americans scoring below Level 1 compared to younger Americans. There are also strong links between digital problem solving and educational attainment, as well as race/ethnicity. For example, 44 percent of Black/African Americans in 2017 scored below Level 1 proficiency compared to 20% for white, non-Hispanic/Latinx Americans. This data suggests

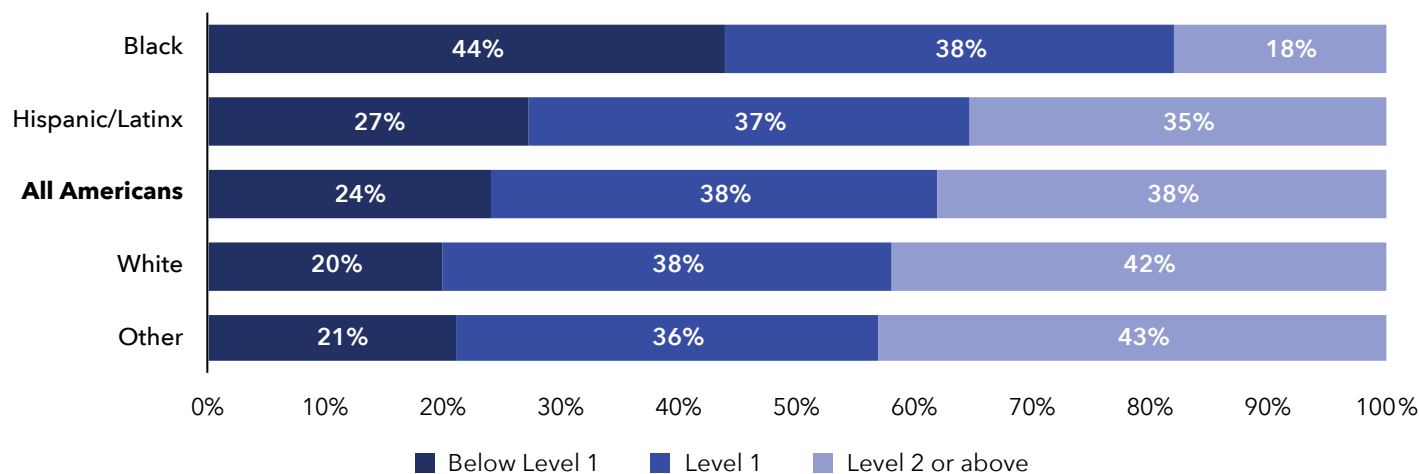
15. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 8: Average PIAAC Numeracy Scores
Colorado, 2017 (Adults 16 to 74 years old)



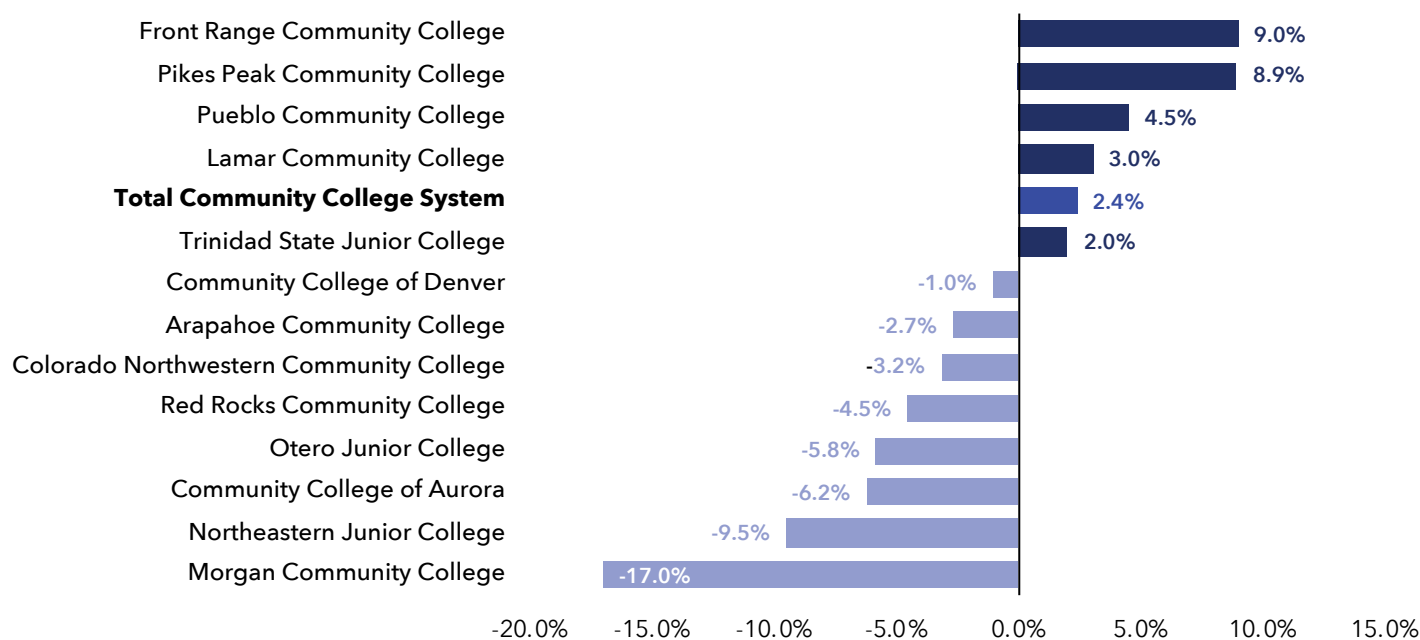
Regions: 1. Northwest: 254.1; 2. North Front Range: 260.7; 3. Eastern: 248.0; 4. Rural Resort: 254.4; 5. Metro Denver: 267.4; 6. Mesa: 253.3; 7. Western: 261.8; 8. Upper Arkansas: 257.5; 9. Pikes Peak: 265.6; 10. Pueblo: 238.5; 11. Southwest: 255.7; 12. South-Central: 235.8; 13. Southeast: 236.8
Source: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Figure 9: PIAAC Digital Problem Solving by Race/Ethnicity and Score Level
United States, 2017



Source: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education

Figure 10: Annual Average Change in Community College Credentials Awarded
Colorado, 2015/16 to 2019/20 Academic Years



Source: Colorado Community College System; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

that non-white Coloradans, particularly Black/African American Coloradans would likely be unprepared to work in a job where digital problem solving skills are required without additional training or experience.

Literacy, numeracy and digital problem solving are perhaps even more indicative of Coloradans' readiness for a future of work that involves more specialized or advanced services and that involves greater use of computers and the internet. While there are a multitude of ways for Coloradans to develop and improve their skills, attending one of the state's community colleges is a good place to start for many. Colorado's community college system is made up of 13 institutions operating from 38 locations across the state. Front Range Community College¹⁶ was the largest community college in terms of enrollment during the 2019 to 2020 academic year with just over 29,000 students. The bulk of students were enrolled in colleges serving areas along the Front Range, from Fort Collins to

Colorado Springs. Among community colleges serving rural parts of the state, Pueblo Community College had the largest enrollment during the previous academic year, with 9,688 students.¹⁷

Enrollment in Colorado's community colleges have increased in aggregate over the past five academic years, but this growth in enrollment was largely driven by colleges serving predominantly urban areas. Overall, enrollment increased at an annual rate of 0.8 percent, and the number of credentials awarded increased by 2.4 percent per year between academic year 2015/16 to 2019/20. While this is an encouraging sign that more Coloradans are enrolling in educational institutions beyond high school, this trend is not universal across all community colleges in the system. The seven community colleges that predominantly serve rural parts of Colorado¹⁸ have seen their collective enrollment decline by 0.3 percent per year over the past five years. A similar trend is seen in the number of

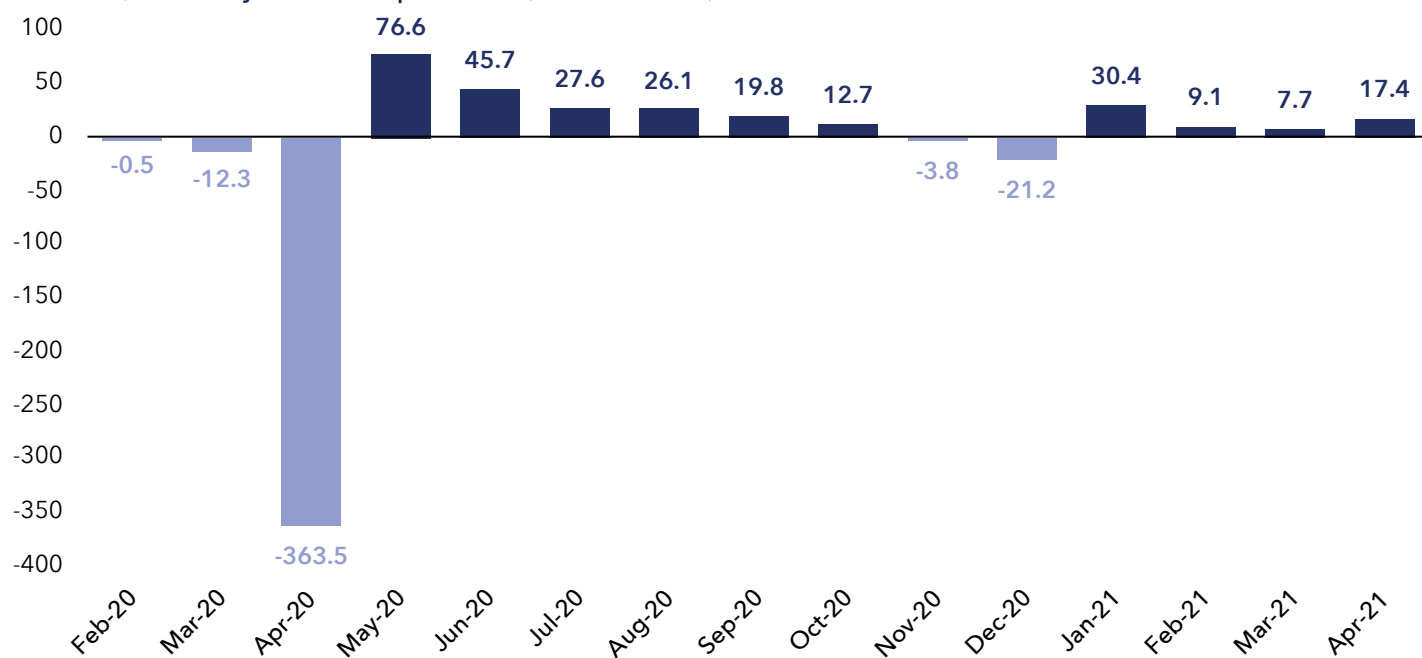
16. Front Range Community College has campuses in Westminster (Jefferson County/Adams County), Fort Collins (Larimer County), Longmont (Boulder County), and Brighton (Adams County).

17. [CCCS Data Book 2019–2020](#). Colorado Community College System.

18. These community colleges include: Colorado Northwestern Community College (Moffat County, Rio Blanco County, Routt County); Lamar Community College (Prowers County); Morgan Community College (Adams County, Lincoln County, Morgan County, Yuma County, Kit Carson County); Northeastern Community College (Logan County); Otero Junior College (Otero County); Pueblo Community College (Pueblo County, Fremont County, Montezuma County, La Plata County); and Trinidad State Junior College (Las Animas County, Alamosa County).

Figure 11: Monthly Change in Employment

Colorado, February 2020 to April 2021 (in thousands)



Source: Current Employment Statistics (CES), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

credentials awarded per academic year, which declined by 0.4 percent per year. While these declines are small, they represent fewer students graduating with new or improved skills. This is particularly important in rural parts of the state, where workers tend to have lower educational attainments and lower levels of literacy and numeracy.

Why do education and skills matter? They can be a strong predictor of Coloradans' economic security. In 2016, 58 percent of working families who had a householder¹⁹ with less than a high school level of education did not earn enough income to cover their basic expenses. On the other hand, just 14 percent of families with a householder with a bachelor's degree or more were unable to cover their family's basic needs.²⁰ Across a range of economic and labor market indicators, Coloradans with a higher level of educational attainment tended to perform better than those without. While education and skills alone are not enough to address the economic precarity of the more than one in four families who did not have enough income to meet their basic needs, they open up opportunities

for Coloradans to enter into occupations and industries that likely pay higher wages.

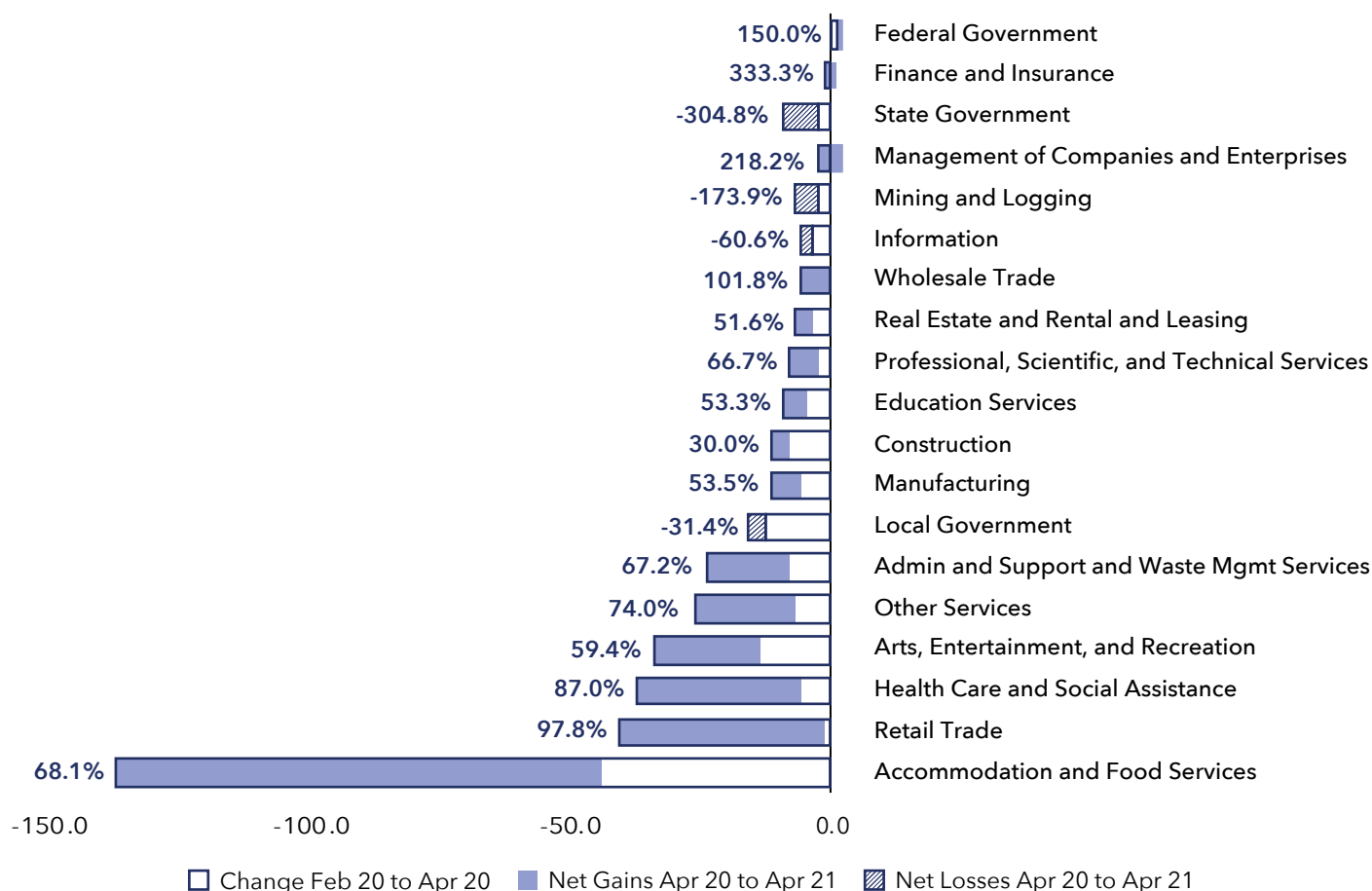
Given the historic levels of unemployment experienced in our state over the past year and a half, workers may be contemplating whether or not they want to go back to their previous job, if they are lucky enough to have a job to go back to, or pursue a new career pathway. Opportunities to attend community college, receive a credential, participate in an apprenticeship, or some other workforce development activity should be made more widely available in the state, as we detail elsewhere in this report. We learned through our interviews how innovative and mixed approaches to education and skill development—such as incorporating work-based learning, classroom training, asynchronous lessons, and practical experiences—appear to be the most effective approaches to placing lower-skilled Coloradans in new jobs. While this section focused on education and skills, we cannot forget that many of the disparities and gaps in educational attainment among Coloradans can be traced back to historic and ongoing systemic racism. As such,

19. Householder is a technical term used by the U.S. Census Bureau to denote the person who responded to the American Community Survey (in this case). Typically, this person is the one who owns or holds the lease on the home, but can be any adult member of the household.

20. [Overlooked and Undercounted 2018](#).

Figure 12: Employment Recovery by Economic Sector

Colorado, February 2020 to April 2021 (in thousands; % = share of Feb 20 to Apr 20 loss recovered)



Source: Current Employment Statistics (CES), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

it is important to look at the trends seen both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure equity is at the forefront of our recovery efforts.

During COVID-19

The recession that resulted from the public health restrictions issued to slow and prevent the spread of COVID-19 was unlike the Great Recession and 2001 Recession. During the past two recessions, Colorado experienced job losses over a period of months—this current recession saw job losses over a period of weeks. During March and April, Colorado lost 375,800 jobs. Just over one in three (36.9%) jobs lost were in the accommodation and food service sector. However, the 34,000 jobs lost in the arts, entertainment, and

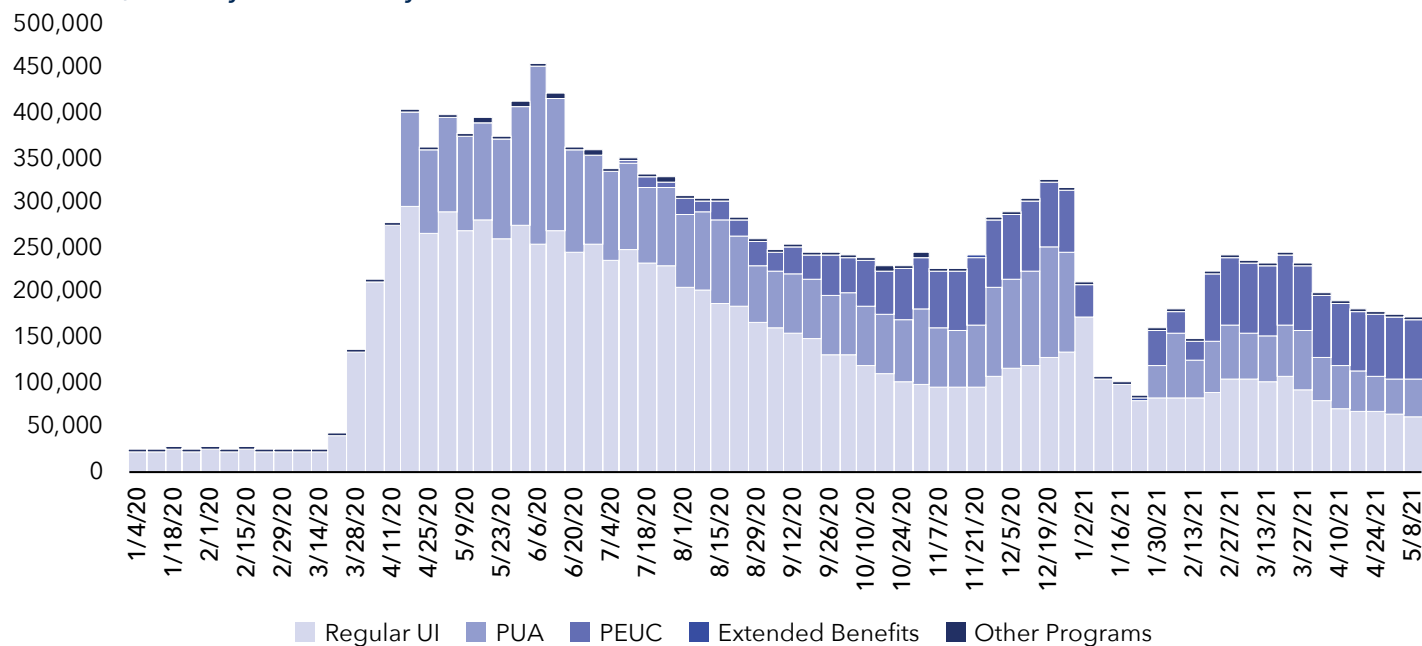
recreation sector represented 57.8% of the jobs available in that sector across the state in February 2020. Similarly, the 137,100 jobs lost in the accommodation and food service sector represented nearly half of the jobs available in that sector two months earlier. All sectors experienced job losses between February and April 2020, though for some sectors, like the finance and insurance sector, the job losses represented a very small share of the jobs available in February.²¹ If government is broken down by federal, state, and local government employment, employment by the federal government also increased over this period.

During May, stay-at-home orders in Colorado and states throughout the country were lifted, allowing Colorado's economy to reopen. Colorado's economy

21. Current Employment Statistics (CES)/State and Metro Area Estimates (SAE), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 13: Weekly Initial and Continued Unemployment Claims, by Program

Colorado, January 2020 to May 2021



Note: The decline in PUA and PEUC claims during the month of January 2021 was due to CDLE pausing the programs in order to implement various Continued Assistance Act guidance and to add anti-fraud and identity verification systems to the PUA program.

Source: U.S. Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

added 76,600 nonfarm jobs in May alone. This was a tremendous amount of job growth compared to the 4,900 jobs added to our economy on average each month in 2018 and 2019. During May 2020, the accommodation and food services sector, which accounted for 32.5% of the jobs created in the state that month, drove job growth in Colorado. The health care and social assistance sector and the retail trade sector together accounted for an additional 36.1% of the jobs created in May. Despite the strong job growth experienced at the beginning of the summer, the number of jobs added each month declined throughout the rest of the year. Our economy lost jobs during November and December 2020. However, January and February of this year saw a return to positive job growth—preliminary estimates indicate the economy added 35,600 jobs over these two months.

Job growth in the leisure and hospitality sector and the other services sector have driven Colorado's labor market recovery. Over the period of December 2020 to April 2021, Colorado's economy saw a net gain of

approximately 28,800 jobs. By contrast, the leisure and hospitality sector²² saw a net gain of 41,100 jobs—more than the economy as a whole. In other words, if not for the strong growth seen in the leisure and hospitality sector, our state's economy would be in a worse position than it is currently.²³

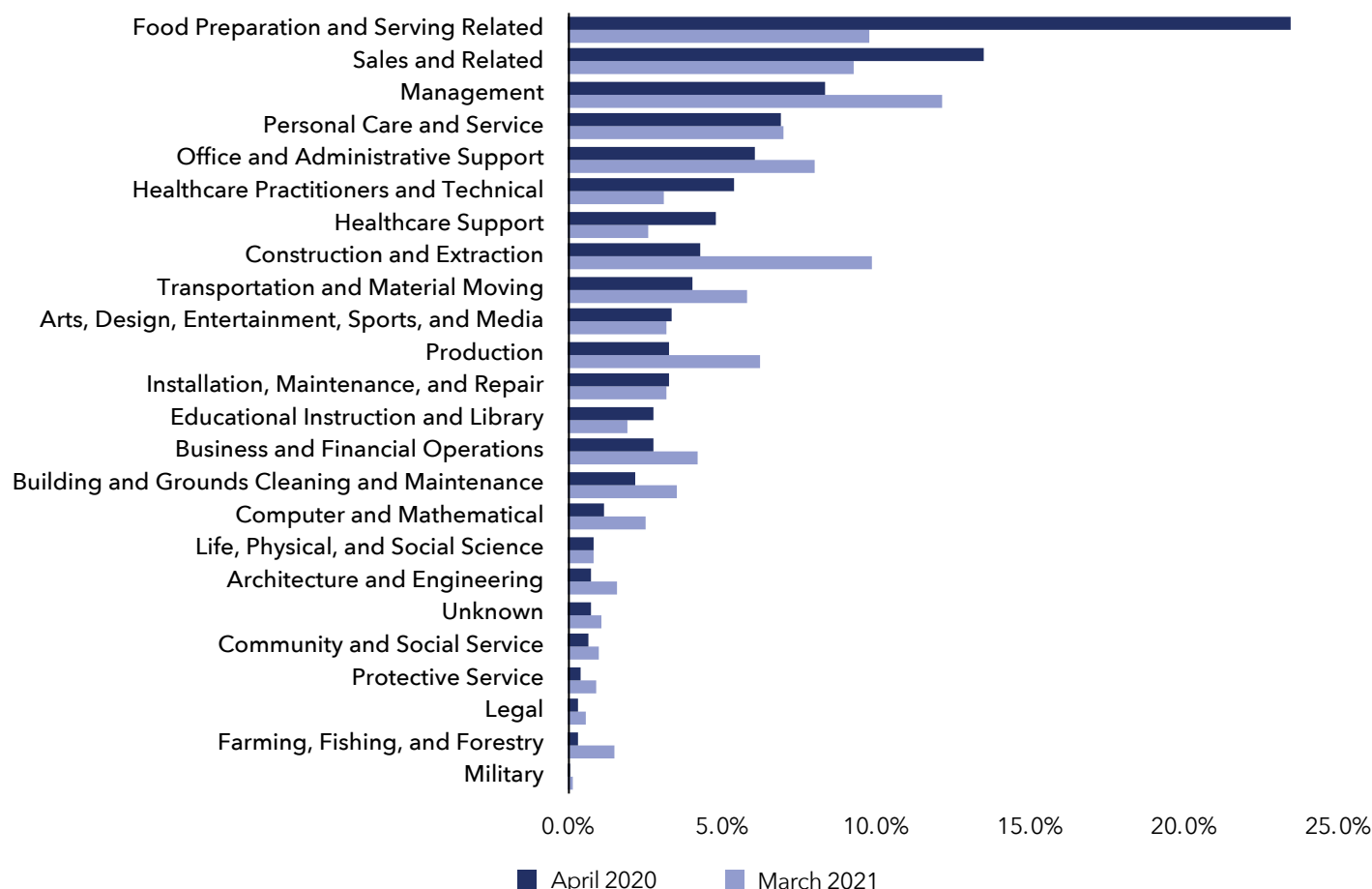
The unemployment rate in Colorado over the past year went from historically low rates of 2.7% and 2.8% in January and February, respectively, to a historically high rate of 12.1% by April 2020. Despite this high rate, it was still lower than the national unemployment rate of 14.8% that same month. While the unemployment rate dropped to 7.4% by July 2020, it has remained above 6% since. As of April 2021, Colorado had a 6.4% unemployment rate, unchanged from the previous month.²⁴ However, the unemployment rate among Black/African American Coloradans was 12.2 percent between May 2020 and April 2021, compared to 6.7 percent for white Coloradans and 10.2 percent for Hispanic/Latinx Coloradans. Disparities also exist across educational attainment. High school graduates

22. Includes the accommodation and food services sector and the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector.

23. Current Employment Statistics (CES)/State and Metro Area Estimates (SAE), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

24. Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 14: Weekly Continued Regular Unemployment Insurance Claims, by Occupation
Colorado, February 2020 to April 2021



Note: Data reflects occupations previously held by those who filed claims during the week containing the 12th of the month.

Source: *Characteristics of the Insured Unemployed*, U.S. Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

experienced an unemployment rate of 8.3 percent compared to 5.1 percent for Coloradans with a bachelor's degree or higher.²⁵

As a result of the spike in unemployment, 338,811 Coloradans filed initial unemployment insurance claims over the last two weeks of March and all of April 2020. While this spike was temporary, the number of claims filed has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. Provisions of the CARES Act provided an additional \$600 weekly benefit to unemployment insurance recipients,²⁶ extended benefits by an additional 13 weeks,²⁷ and created a new program to extend unemployment

benefits to self-employed Coloradans, independent contractors, gig workers, and other non-traditional workers.²⁸ The number of Coloradans filing initial or continued claims peaked at 457,727 during the week of May 6, 2020. During May 2021, approximately 60 percent of unemployment insurance claims were PEUC claims, meaning that the majority of Coloradans receiving unemployment benefits have exhausted their regular state benefits and would not be eligible for assistance but for pandemic-related programs.²⁹

Unemployment claims give us a glimpse at who has lost their job during the pandemic. In April 2020,

25. [Colorado Employment Situation - April 2021](#). Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (2021).

26. Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) lapsed in July and was reinstated at a reduced amount of \$300 per week as part of the American Rescue Plan Act.

27. Pandemic Extended Unemployment Compensation (PEUC).

28. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).

29. 26 weeks of unemployment insurance are available in Colorado.

22.5 percent of Coloradans receiving unemployment insurance benefits³⁰ were formerly employed in the accommodation and food services sector. A large share were also formerly employed in the retail trade sector, the health care and social assistance sector, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, and the other services sector. Together, these five sectors accounted for 55.4 percent of those who received unemployment insurance benefits that month. By March of 2021, the distribution of unemployment insurance recipients by their former industry was more evenly distributed. The construction sector led the way, accounting for 11.0 percent of claims. The share of recipients formerly employed in the accommodation and food services sector had dropped to 10.6 percent. This makes sense, as job growth in the accommodation and food services sector has contributed 37.4 percent of the jobs gained between April 2020 and March 2021. At the same time, the number of jobs in the construction industry in March 2021 was lower than in April 2020.³¹

Understanding the sectors in which unemployed Coloradans used to work is helpful for understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on employment in our state. Sectors and industries best describe the type of goods or services a business or organization provides. Occupations, on the other hand, help us to understand the role or position a worker holds within a business or organization. For example, while most waiters or waitresses work in the accommodation and food services sector, some may work a nursing or residential care facility, an industry that falls under the health care and social assistance sector. For this reason, looking at occupational data can tell us more about the skills and qualifications employers are looking for to fill positions in their organizations. That said, it should come as no surprise that 23.4 percent of Coloradans who received unemployment insurance benefits during April 2020 were formerly employed in food preparation and serving related occupations. Coloradans formerly employed in sales and related occupations made up the next largest share, followed by management occupations, office and administrative support

occupations, and personal care and service occupations. Similar to what occurred with workers from the accommodation and food services sector, the share of Coloradans filing for unemployment insurance who were formerly employed in food preparation and serving related occupations decreased to 9.7 percent in March 2021.³²

Given that not all Coloradans who were eligible may have filed an initial unemployment insurance claim and that many encountered issues when trying to sign up for benefits during the early months of the pandemic, this data gives us only a limited view into who may have lost their job as a result of the pandemic over the past year. Looking at changes in employment across different occupations in the state before and during the pandemic can help us better understand the skills and competencies of those who lost employment. While we can't track employment by occupation month-to-month, we can use annual surveys to give us an indication of how employment by occupation changed in Colorado during the first months of the pandemic. Between May 2019 and May 2020, waiters and waitresses experienced the greatest decline in employment in Colorado. Together, ten occupations accounted for 58 percent of the jobs lost during that period. Almost all of these occupations had median wages of below \$40,000 per year except for the "all other" computer occupations, which had a median annual wage of \$104,290. The wages earned by workers in the remaining occupations were below the statewide median of \$46,850.

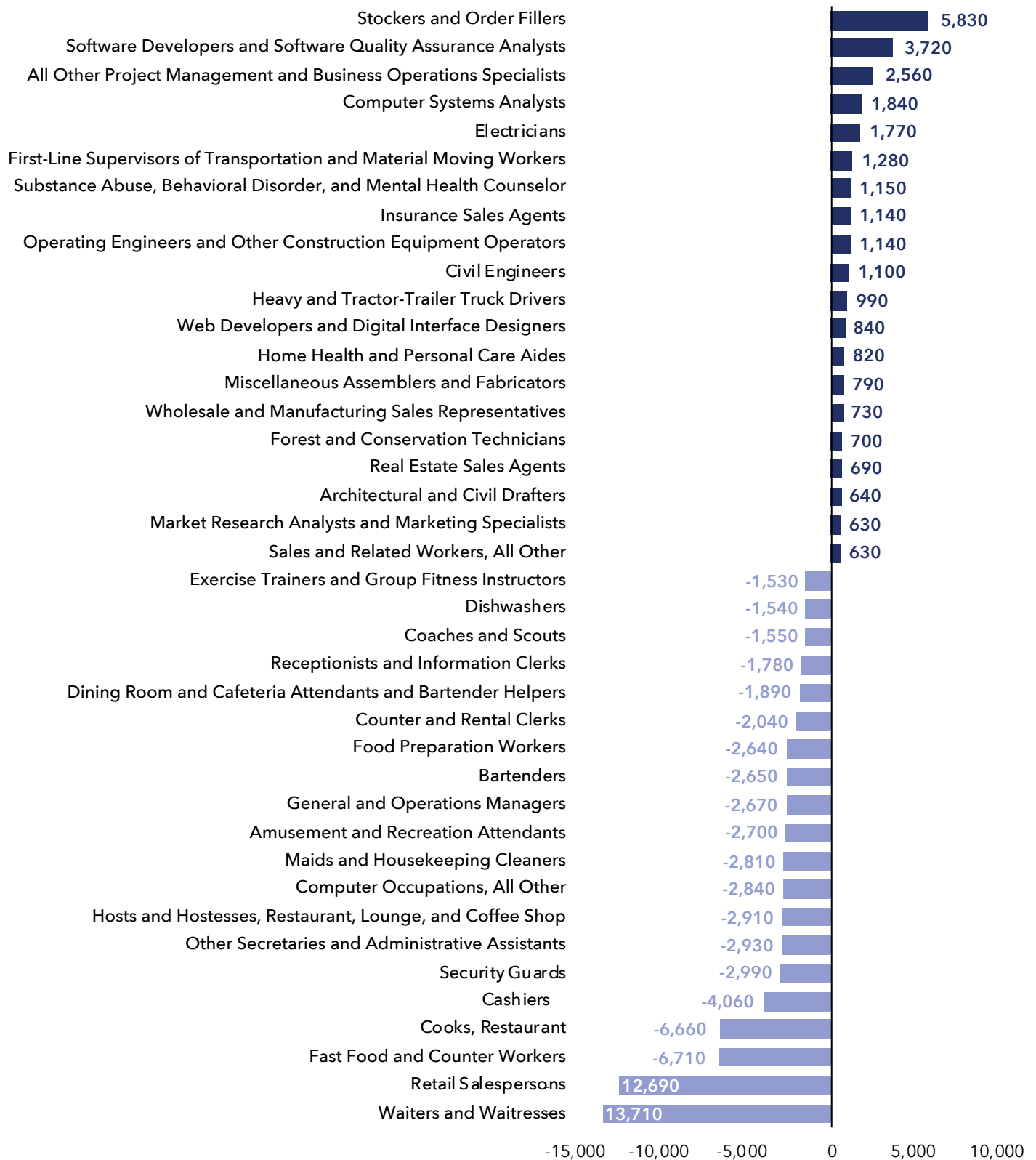
On the other hand, not every occupation lost jobs as a result of the pandemic. Between May 2019 and May 2020, employment among stockers and order fillers grew by 5,830 jobs. In contrast to the occupations that experienced the greatest declines in employment, the occupations that saw the greatest gains all had median annual wages above the statewide rate, save for stockers and order fillers. Four occupations had median annual wages in 2020 above \$80,000. In other words, while the state saw losses in low-wage occupations, many high-wage occupations experienced

30. Data does not include PUA recipients.

31. Characteristics of the Insured Unemployed, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.

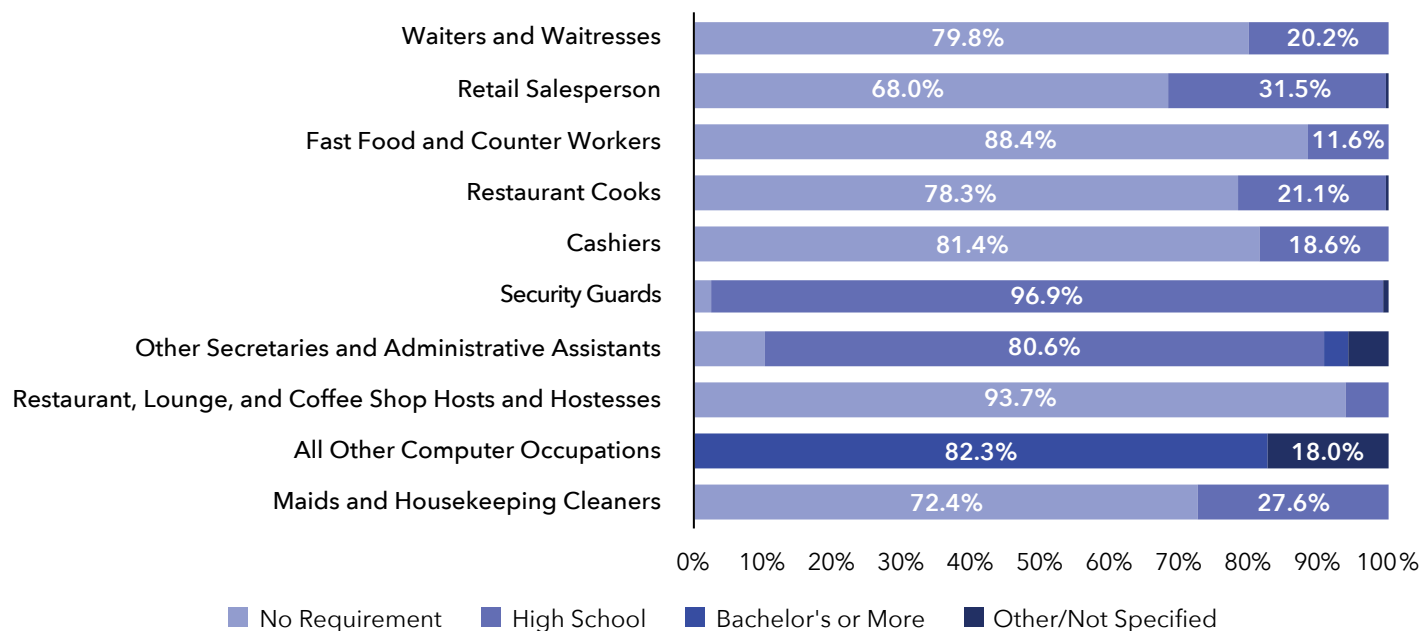
32. Characteristics of the Insured Unemployed, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.

Figure 15: Change in Employment, by Occupation
Colorado, May 2019 to May 2020



Source: Occupational Employment and Wages Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 16: Educational Requirements for Jobs in Occupations That Experienced Greatest Loss of Employment United States, 2020



Note: Occupations reflect those that saw the greatest loss of employment in Colorado between May 2019 and May 2020
Source: Occupational Requirements Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

employment growth during the early months of the pandemic.³³

National survey data shows that nearly all of the jobs in the occupations that saw the greatest decline in employment in Colorado between May 2019 and May 2020 had very minimal educational requirements. While the majority of workers in these occupations reported there was no educational requirement needed to do the job, 82.3% of the workers in all other computer occupations reported their job required at least a bachelor's degree. A similar trend is true of the credential requirements for jobs in these occupations. Except for restaurant cooks and security guards, all of these occupations had below average requirements for credentials. In contrast, the average among every occupation in the country was 47.0 percent.³⁴ State food safety and CPR/first aid certifications were most

commonly listed as required by employers looking to fill open positions in these occupations in Colorado.³⁵

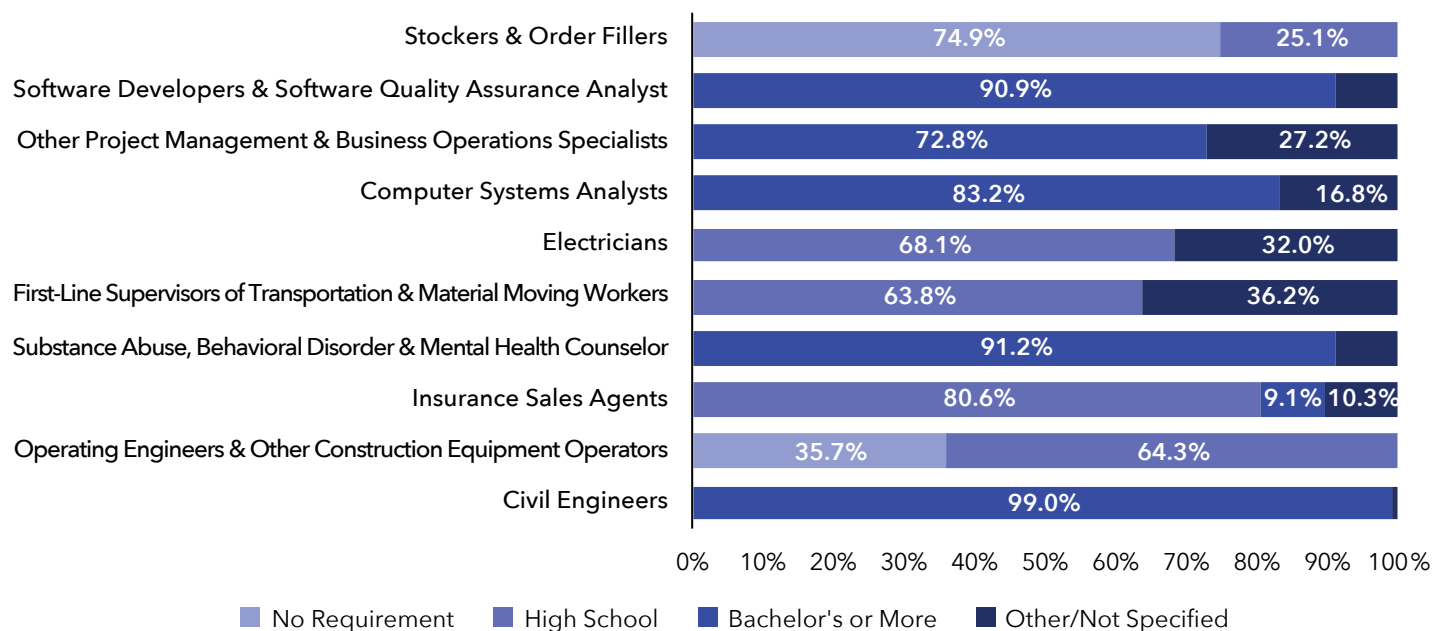
Among the occupations that saw the greatest increase in employment between May 2019 and May 2020, the majority of workers in half of these occupations were required to have a bachelor's degree or higher. However, the majority of those working as stockers and order fillers, electricians, insurance sales agents, and operating engineers and other construction equipment operators reported that at least a high school diploma or equivalent was necessary for their job. For the most part, workers in these occupations were required to have a year or more of prior work experience. Unlike for the occupations that lost employment during the early months of the pandemic, the credentials required for occupations in Colorado that gained employment were more specialized, such as for cyber

33. Occupational Employment and Wages Statistics (OEWS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

34. Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

35. Occupational Profiles, Labor Market Information Office, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

Figure 17: Educational Requirements for Jobs in Occupations That Experienced Greatest Gains in Employment United States, 2020



Note: Occupations reflect those that saw the greatest gain in employment in Colorado between May 2019 and May 2020
Source: Occupational Requirements Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

security, licensed counselors, insurance agents, and commercial driver's licenses.³⁶

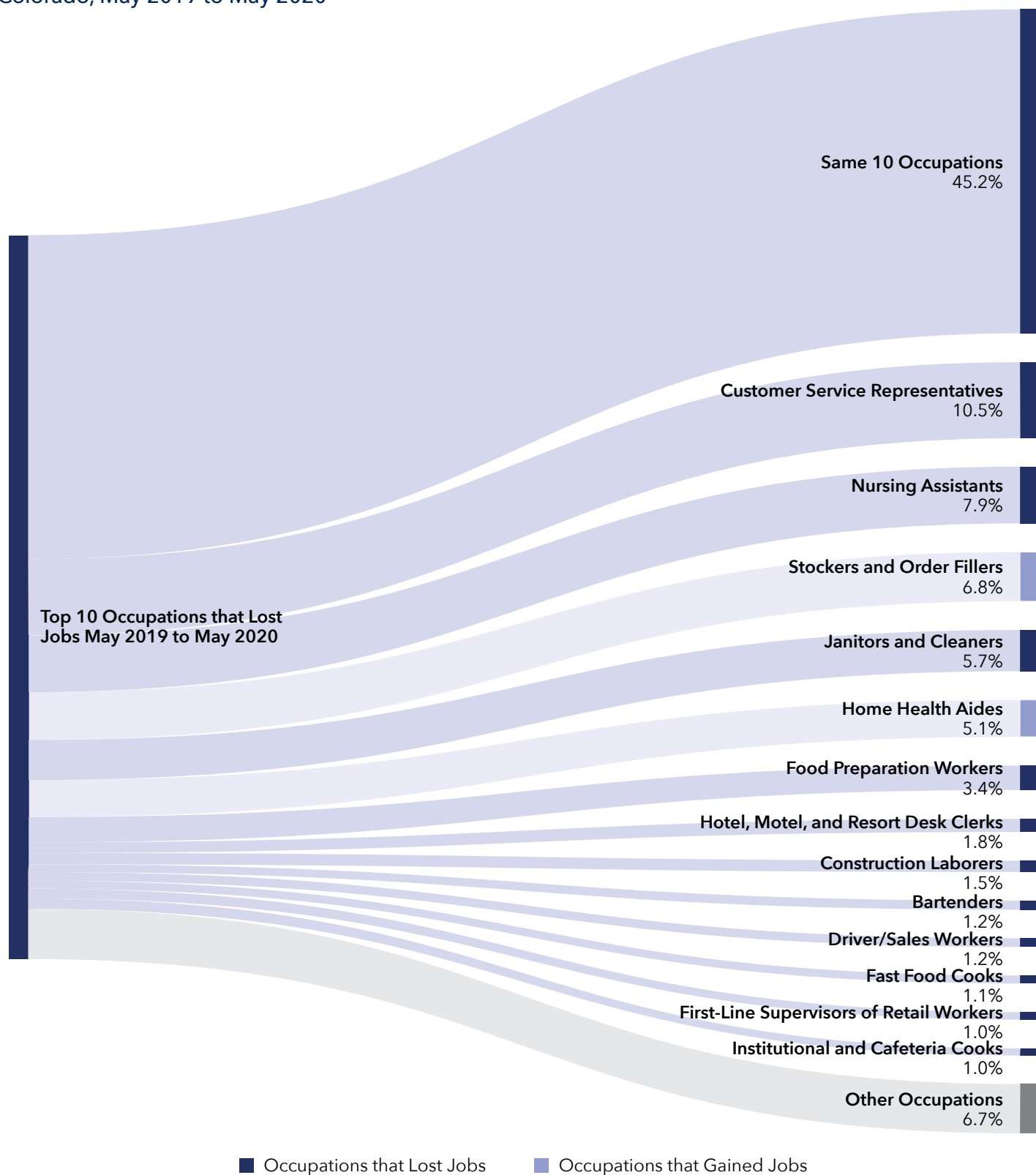
In the immediate term, how likely is it that workers employed as a waitress or a cashier were able to transition to one of the occupations that saw the greatest growth in employment between May 2019 and May 2020 in Colorado? Assuming that is what they desired to do, there are many factors that would determine someone's success in switching occupations. However, workers that already have the minimum level of skills, education, and competencies required for a job in their new occupation are more likely to be successful than those that lack the skills desired or needed by the employer. One major barrier facing workers looking to transition between these groups of occupations is education. Given most of the occupations that lost employment required a high school diploma or had no educational requirement, it is not likely that the majority of workers in these occupations would be able to transition to an occupation like a computer systems analyst without additional training. For example, the majority of waiters and waitresses in Colorado are employed in the accommodation and food services

sector. 19.9 percent of workers 25 years and older in this sector had a bachelor's degree, suggesting that the majority of waiters and waitresses who lost their jobs would not be successful in transitioning into many of the occupations seeing the greatest gains in employment without going back to college to obtain a bachelor's degree or some other advanced degree. Even among the occupations without a high minimum education requirement, like electricians or insurance sales agents, it would still be necessary for workers to be licensed or have a credential that would allow them to perform the duties and responsibilities of workers in these occupations.

To verify how uncommon it is for workers to move between occupations in these different groups, we can look at where workers in the occupations that lost employment between May 2019 and 2020 typically moved. For example, waiters and waitresses most commonly left their occupation to work as cashiers, maids and housekeeping cleaners, or food preparation and serving workers (including fast food). These occupations were also occupations that lost a significant share of employment as a result of the pandemic,

36. Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 18: Career Changes for Occupations with Greatest Loss of Employment
Colorado, May 2019 to May 2020



Note: Job movements for individuals with active resumes in the Colorado workforce system who have changed occupations in the past 5 years.
Source: Occupational Employment and Wages Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Colorado Department of Labor and Employment; Colorado Center on Law and Policy

making it unlikely that waiters and waitresses were able to move to jobs in the occupations they normally would if they lost their job prior to the pandemic. 45 percent of workers in the ten occupations that lost the most employment between May 2019 and May 2020 moved from their previous occupation into one of the other nine occupations over the past 5 years. A large share also had moved into occupations that also lost employment due to the pandemic.

While 6.8 percent of workers in these occupations moved to stockers and order fillers in the past 5 years, an occupation that saw the second greatest increase in employment between 2019 and 2020, the wages paid to stockers and order fillers in Colorado are not above the statewide average. However, the median wages paid to workers in that occupation are higher than others. Let's look at waiters and waitresses as an example. The median annual wage paid to workers in this occupation was \$24,980 in 2020, the lowest wage of any occupation in the state. Say a waitress switches to work as a stocker and order filler. The median annual wage paid to a worker in that occupation was \$31,910. This could represent a 27.7 percent increase in wages for the employee, if the median wage is close to the entry-level pay for this occupation. Despite this, the median wage for stockers and order fillers is still below the \$46,850 median wage earned by all workers in the state. It is also far below what the median worker in other high growth occupations earned in 2020.³⁷

Wages are just one consideration workers make when deciding to transition to a new occupation. Workers may decide to switch occupations based on flexible or convenient work schedules and hours, proximity to public transit, physical demands, and personal abilities. There are also many reasons why a worker may choose not to switch occupations. Workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 might have enjoyed their previous job and want to return to the same one once they are able to. Others may have to work full-time on top of other personal responsibilities and may not have time to dedicate towards acquiring new certifications or credentials. As we saw looking at the educational requirements for jobs in occupations that lost

and gained the most employment between 2019 and 2020, many of the jobs in occupations that saw growth required a bachelor's degree or higher. This could take a worker four years before they are qualified to take a job in a high-growth occupation.

As of April 2021, Colorado needed to regain 128,100 jobs to return to February 2020 levels of employment. However, this does not account for the jobs Colorado's economy might have otherwise added since February 2020 had the pandemic never occurred. While it is impossible to know how many jobs we might have gained, population growth rates over the past 14 months can help us estimate what our true jobs deficit is. Since February 2020, Colorado's population grew at a rate of 1.4 percent. To keep pace with this population growth, our economy would have needed to create 40,300 jobs. This puts our overall job deficit as of April 2021 at 168,400. If Colorado were to return to our February 2020 level of unemployment in the next three years, our economy would need to grow by 7,500 jobs each month.³⁸ By comparison, Colorado's economy added 20,642 jobs per month between April 2020 and April 2021, though it seems unlikely this pace of job growth will be sustained given the majority of the gains in employment were seen in the early months of our recovery as stay-at-home orders were lifted.

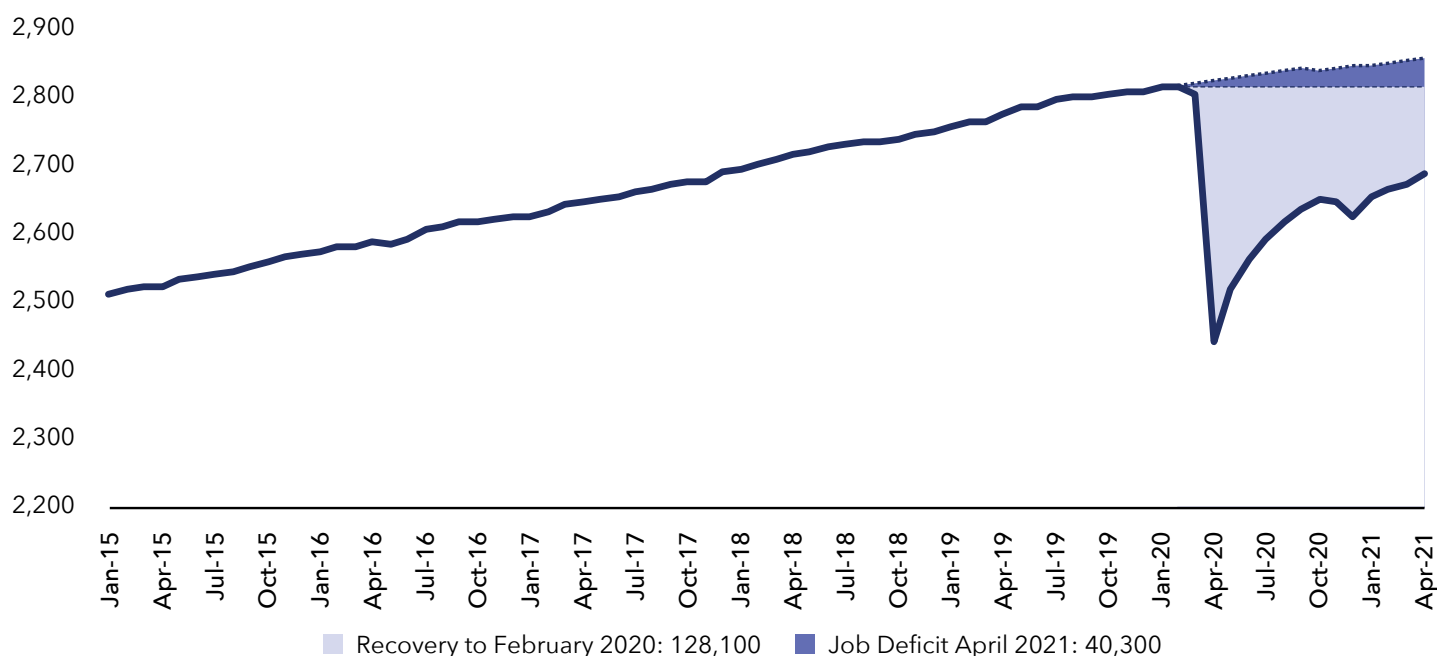
Colorado's Post-COVID Economy

While it is easy to look back on the past year to explain how the economy has changed, it is much more difficult to forecast what our economy will look like one year from now. Economic shocks can be sudden and unexpected, as the events of 2020 demonstrated. That said, economists at government agencies produce estimates for employment in different industries and occupations in the short- and long-term. While they should be interpreted as our best guess for what will happen, they can still be helpful in understanding how state agencies and community-based organizations can best prepare our current workforce for the employment opportunities of tomorrow. The Bureau of Labor Statistics is the main government agency that produces employment forecasts by both economic

37. Occupational Employment and Wages Statistics (OEWS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

38. Economic Policy Institute analysis of data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 19: Job Deficit and Employment Recovery
Colorado, April 2021 (in thousands)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Economic Policy Institute

sector and occupation. Because the most recent forecast released by the BLS covered the period from 2019 to 2029, these forecasts do not account for the impacts of COVID-19 on the labor market. However, BLS prepared two alternate scenarios to account for possible changes in their 2019 forecasts as a result of the pandemic.³⁹

The moderate scenario assumes an increased share of workers are teleworking, which will have spillover effects in the rest of the economy. Demand for office and commercial real estate will decline since fewer workers are commuting to physical workplaces. This will reduce demand for nonresidential construction as well as the need for commuting or business travel. Working from home also means that there will be a decline in worker spending at restaurants or on commuting costs. These changes are also assumed in the strong scenario, but their effects are felt more strongly. Teleworking's influence on the rest of the economy will result in an even greater shift away from in-person activities and an increased need for information technology support positions. Fewer people will be eating out or going to sporting events and fewer

in-person retail or customer service positions will be needed as these jobs are automated or as these activities move online. The BLS stresses that these scenarios are not meant to predict how many fewer jobs will be in a sector or occupation because of COVID-19, but rather to show how uncertainty about the pandemic's influence on certain sectors of the economy might lead to larger structural shifts that deviate from the previously published forecasts.

The scenarios were modeled on the United States' economy as a whole, but we can apply them to state employment projections to see how the different levels of uncertainty embedded into each scenario might affect Colorado's economy. Keep in mind that these scenarios do not reflect the exact relationship between different sectors in our state's economy, which may differ from their relationships in the national economy. It is also worth noting that these scenarios were published in February 2021 and do not reflect recent changes in public health restrictions and their continued influence on trends like teleworking and in-person events. Since these scenarios are not meant to be exact predictions, they still provide us with a look at

39. Ice, Lindsey, et al. "Employment projections in a pandemic environment." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). Accessed from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/article/employment-projections-in-a-pandemic-environment.htm>

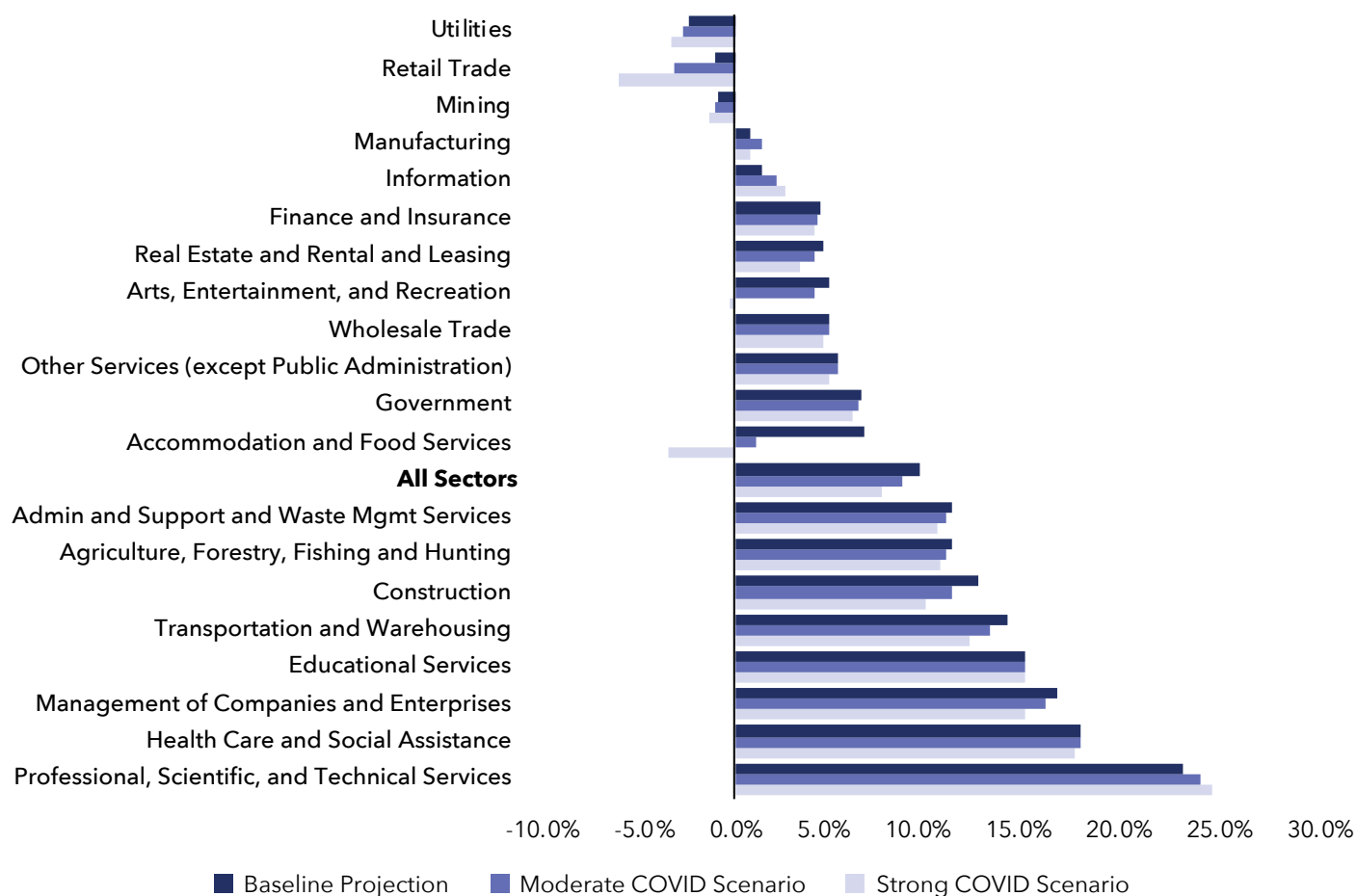
which sectors and occupations may be most vulnerable to an increase in teleworking and automation in the future. While it seems unlikely that the share of the workforce working from home will remain as high as it was in March 2020, there are signs that a larger share of our workforce will work remotely or have the option to work remotely in the future.

In their 10-year projections the BLS estimates that between 2019 and 2029, employment in all sectors would grow by 9.6 percent in Colorado. The fastest growing sector was estimated to be the professional, scientific, and technical services sector with a growth rate of 23.1 percent over the next ten years. Other top growth sectors include the health care and social assistance sector, the management of companies and enterprises sector, and the educational services sector.

On the other hand, the utilities sector is expected to see employment decline by 2.3 percent. Other sectors projected to see negative rates of employment growth include the retail trade sector and the mining sector. Applying the BLS COVID-19 scenarios to the projections indicates that Colorado would see a reduced rate of employment growth over this period, with much lower rates of growth under the strong scenario than the moderate scenario. This suggests that the trends assumed in both scenarios will have a negative effect on employment growth in the future. However, this is not the case across all sectors of the economy.

Under both scenarios, the professional, scientific, and technical services sector would see increased rates of employment growth, as would the information sector. The manufacturing sector would see an increased rate

Figure 20: Long-Term Sector Employment Projections with COVID-19 Scenarios
Colorado, 2019 to 2029



Note: Scenario projections should be interpreted as each sector's relative sensitivity to the factors modeled in each scenario. They are not actual projections for what employment will be in ten years.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado Center on Law and Policy

of employment growth under the moderate scenario, but a lower rate of growth than the baseline projection under the strong scenario. This likely reflects increased social distancing and decrease in in-person interactions under the strong scenario which would be difficult to accommodate in manufacturing businesses, plants, and workshops. While the scenarios and trends they model would have a positive impact on employment in these sectors, this is not the case for many sectors. Nearly all remaining sectors would see lower rates of employment growth over the next two years under the two scenarios. The most notable effect of these scenarios is on employment in the accommodation and food services sector. This is not surprising given the tremendous loss of employment in this sector during the outset of the pandemic. In the moderate scenario, growth in this sector declines substantially but still predicts some employment growth. Under the strong scenario, this sector could actually lose employment over the next ten years. A similar trend is likely in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector, although the magnitude of jobs lost under the strong scenario is less than in the accommodation and food services sector. The mining, retail trade, and utilities sectors would all see increased rates of jobs loss under both the moderate and strong scenarios.

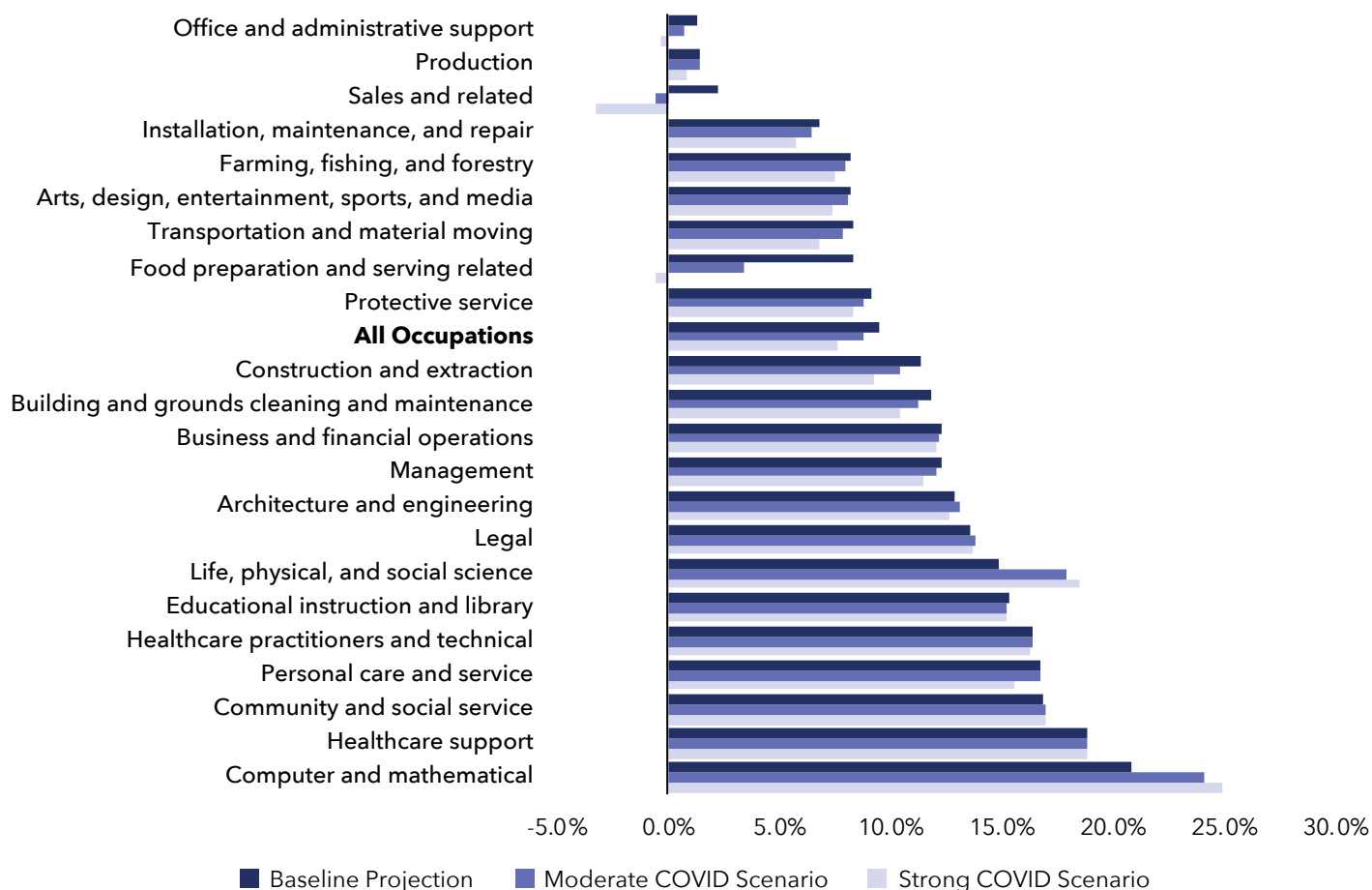
Projections and COVID-19 scenarios for employment by occupation shows similar trends to sector employment. Under the baseline projection, the fastest rate of employment growth will be found among computer and mathematical occupations, which are expected to grow by 20.8 percent over the next ten years. The next fastest growing occupational groups include healthcare support occupations, community and social service occupations, and personal care and service occupations. On the other hand, employment in office and administrative support occupations is projected to grow by 1.3 percent over this period, slightly lower than the rate of growth projected for production occupations and sales and related occupations. When the scenarios are applied to these growth rates, computer and mathematical occupations and life, physical, and social science occupations could both potentially see much faster rates of growth over the next ten years than in the baseline projection. This makes sense

considering many of those in these occupations are employed in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector. As with the manufacturing sector, production occupations could see increased growth under the moderate scenario but would see lower rates of growth under the strong scenario. A similar trend would occur among architecture and engineering occupations. Aside from these four, all other occupational groups are expected to see decreased rates of job growth as a result of the trends modeled in the moderate and strong scenarios. The largest magnitude of change is likely to be in food preparation and serving related occupations. Like we saw for the accommodation and food services sector, this occupational group will likely see employment losses under the more severe changes assumed in the strong scenario. Office and administrative support occupations will likewise see lower rates of growth under the moderate scenario and job losses under the strong scenario. Under both scenarios, employment in sales and related occupations is expected to decline.

Again, these scenarios are not meant to be exact predictors of how employment will change in different sectors and occupations over the next ten years. However, they allow us to see how trends that accelerated during the pandemic could impact the employment prospects of Coloradans in the future. Given that job growth in the accommodation and food services sector is largely driving our recovery, it seems unlikely that the predictions of the strong scenario will come to pass. But given we are still not back to levels of employment in the most affected sectors it does seem likely that growth rates will be lower than initially predicted by the BLS over the next ten years. If the trends we've seen in employment during the pandemic continue, it would mean that we would not be able to count on the same sectors and occupations, such as accommodation and food services and retail trade sectors and related occupations, being drivers of employment growth as they have been in the past. Indeed, these two sectors are the third and fourth largest in our state by employment, respectively; something that could change over the next ten to twenty years.

How likely is it that the trends seen during the pandemic will continue into the future? One of the

Figure 21: Long-Term Occupation Employment Projections with COVID-19 Scenarios
Colorado, 2019 to 2029



Note: Scenario projections should be interpreted as each occupation’s relative sensitivity to the factors modeled in each scenario. They are not actual projections for what employment will be in ten years.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado Center on Law and Policy

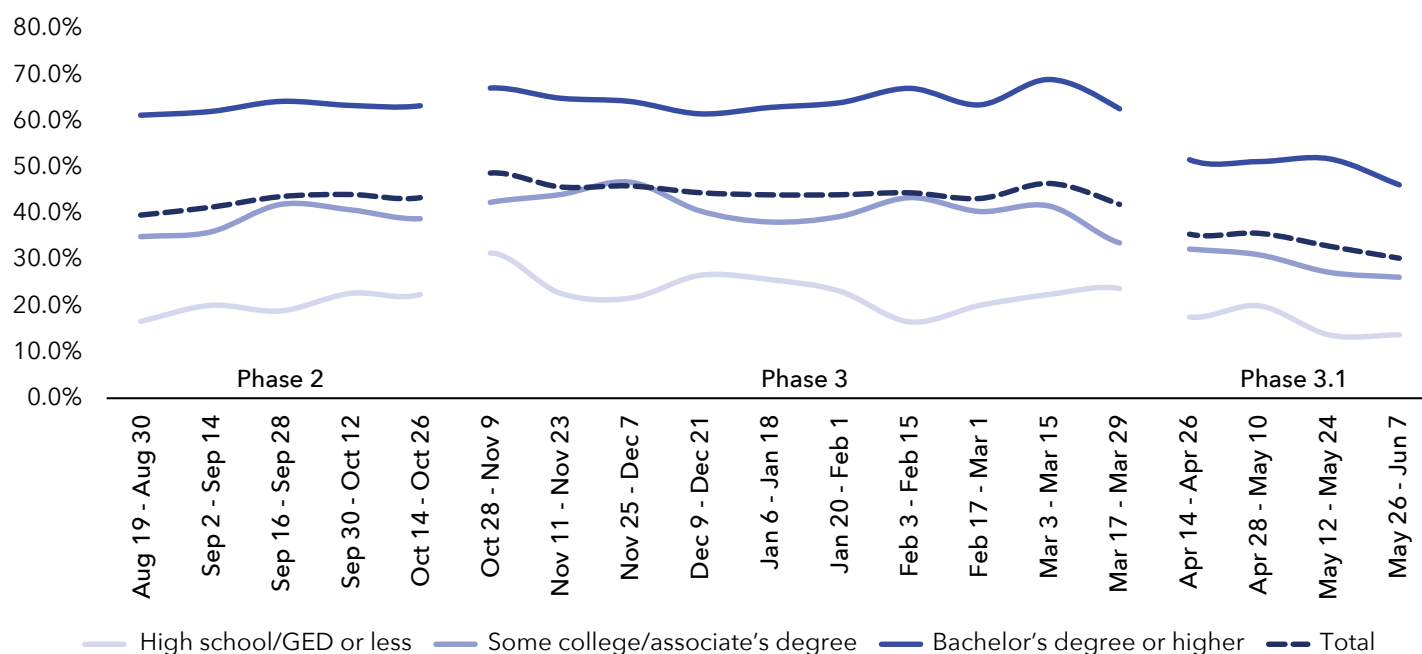
major features of both scenarios is the move towards more workers teleworking, working from home, and working remotely. The U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey (HPS) provides a glimpse into how the share of Coloradans who are working remotely changed over the course of the pandemic. The HPS did not start asking about teleworking until the 13th week of the survey (August 19 to August 30, 2020) so we cannot easily assess how this data compares to before or during the beginning weeks of the pandemic. That said, 39.9 percent of Coloradans 18 and over reported that someone in their household substituted some or all of their typical in-person work for telework because of the pandemic during the period between August 19 to August 30, 2020. This peaked at 48.9 percent during

the period between October 28 and November 9 and stayed above 40 percent throughout the rest of 2020 and the start of 2021. Following the week of March 3 to March 15, 2021, the share of Coloradans teleworking began to decline, dropping to 30.7 percent during the week of May 26 to June 7, 2021.⁴⁰

Over the duration when the HPS included questions related to teleworking there were significant differences in the ability of workers of different educational attainments to work remotely. For the majority of the series, the share of Coloradans with a bachelor’s degree or more reporting they or someone in their household teleworked remained above 60 percent. Even after seeing a decline starting in March, the most

40. Transportation Table 1: “Teleworking during the Coronavirus Pandemic, by Select Characteristics,” Household Pulse Survey, U.S. Census Bureau. Data covers week 13 to week 31 of the survey.

Figure 22: Share of Coloradans 18 and up Who Teleworked or Lived with Someone Who Teleworked
Colorado, August 2020 to June 2021



Note: Data collection for the Household Pulse Survey was conducted in phases beginning in April 23, 2020.

Source: Household Pulse Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

recent HPS indicates that 46.3% of Coloradans in this group were teleworking or lived with someone who was teleworking. By comparison, the share of Coloradans with a high school diploma/GED or less who teleworked or lived with someone who teleworked remained below 30 percent, and was 14.2 percent in the week of May 26 to June 7, 2021. The types of jobs most commonly held by workers of different educational attainments largely explains this variation. For instance, according to a national survey from the Pew Research Center,⁴¹ just 17 percent of respondents with a high school diploma or less said the responsibilities of their job could be done from home compared to 58 percent of workers with a bachelor's degree and 68 percent of workers with a postgraduate degree. Among workers who were working from home, the survey found that 89 percent said they were working from home because they preferred to work from home, compared to 79 percent who said they were working from home for fear of being exposed to the coronavirus. It should be no surprise then that 54 percent of workers who were able to work from home said they would

want to work from home all of the time or most of the time even after the pandemic is over. Why might this be? According to the Pew survey, 40 percent of those working from home all or most of the time reported they had greater flexibility to choose their hours and 29 percent found it easier to balance work and family responsibilities. However, more than half also reported they felt less connected to their co-workers—a factor with the potential to reduce the adoption of remote working after the pandemic is over. So while it does not seem as though the share of workers working from home will remain as high as it was during the peak of the pandemic, it does not appear to be a trend that will go away moving forward.

Given teleworking, one of the major drivers of employment changes in the BLS scenarios, does not look like it will be returning to pre-pandemic levels, where would workers employed in the sectors and occupations that will be most affected work in the future? As we know from the previous section of this report, workers in the occupational groups that make up the

41. Parker, Kim et al. "How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has – and Hasn't – Changed the Way Americans Work." Pew Research Center (December 9, 2020). Accessed from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/how-the-coronavirus-outbreak-has-and-hasnt-changed-the-way-americans-work/>.

bulk of employment in food preparation and serving related occupations and sales and related occupations do not have education, skills, or experience that are readily transferable to the occupations most likely to see increased growth under the COVID scenarios. It will be essential that our state's workforce development systems take these trends into consideration and begin to create formal or informal pathways for workers in these occupations who wish to transition to new occupations with growth potential. This includes developing educational and experiential learning opportunities that increase the ability of workers from diverse backgrounds to ultimately pursue training and education that result in achieving a credential or a degree.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that there are many workers who do not want to or are unable to transition to a new occupation. Even under the strong COVID scenario, employment in most sectors and occupations with low-wage, low-skill jobs will grow over the next ten years. It is essential that our pandemic recovery efforts also focus on the wages, benefits, and working conditions of these workers. No job in Colorado should be considered a "bad" job and we cannot assume that workers who do not like their working conditions can easily switch to a better one. As the pandemic has shown us, low-skill, low-wage workers are essential to our everyday life and are no less deserving of a safe, fulfilling, and well-compensated job than higher-skilled workers.

REGIONAL PROFILES

While the previous section gave a statewide overview of the changes we've experienced since February 2020, we know that the experiences of COVID-19 were not the same in all parts of Colorado. The following profiles provide an overview of a range of economic and demographic indicators for each region before COVID-19 as well as during the pandemic.⁴² Each profile also includes a summary of what we heard from stakeholders in each region.

42. Sources for infographics: Workforce Demographics - 2019 5-Year ACS; Employment by Sector - 2019 QWI; Unemployment Rate - LAUS; Literacy and Numeracy - PIAAC and 2019 5-Year ACS; Digital Access by Households - 2019 5-Year ACS; Jobs Lost by Sector - 2020 QWI; Decline in Employment - LAUS; Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020 - LAUS; Monthly Unemployment Rate - LAUS; Change in Unemployment Insurance - Colorado Department of Labor and Employment



ARAPAHOE/DOUGLAS REGION

Arapahoe • Douglas

Workforce Demographics

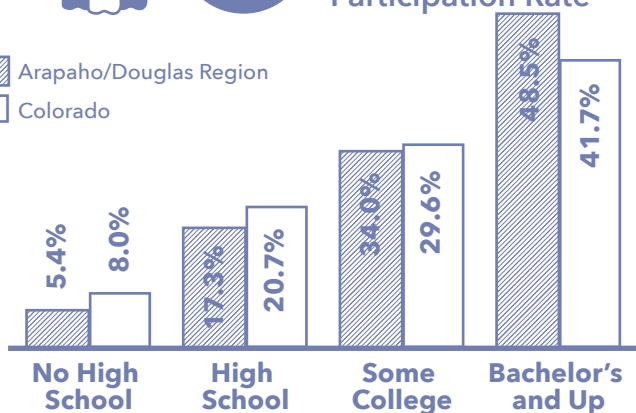


42.7%
Population
25 to 54 years old

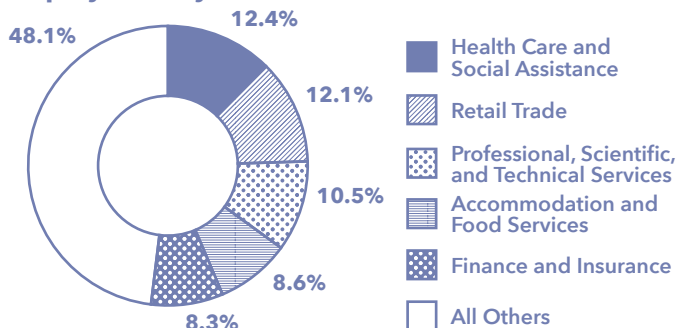


72.1%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

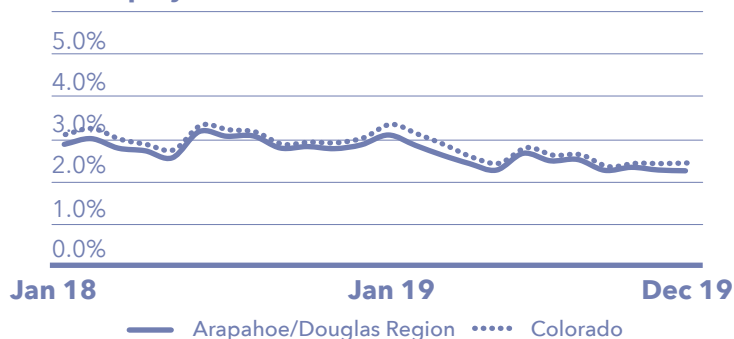
Arapaho/Douglas Region
 Colorado



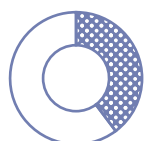
Employment by Sector



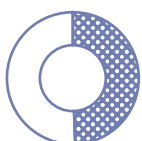
Unemployment Rate



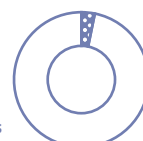
Literacy and Numeracy



39.8%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

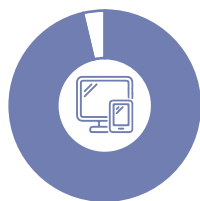


49.4%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



3.2%
Households with limited English language proficiency

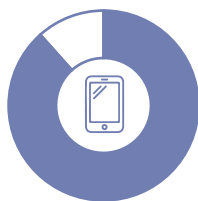
Digital Access, by Households



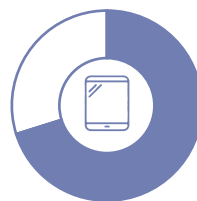
96.3%
One or More
Computing Device



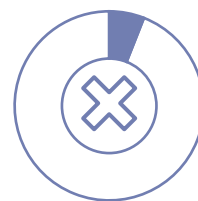
89.7%
Desktop or Laptop



88.4%
Smartphone



70.2%
Tablet or Portable
Device



6.1%
No Computer



92.2%
An Internet
Subscription



0.3%
Dial-up Alone



76.3%
Cell Data Plan



82.2%
Broadband



6.5%
Satellite



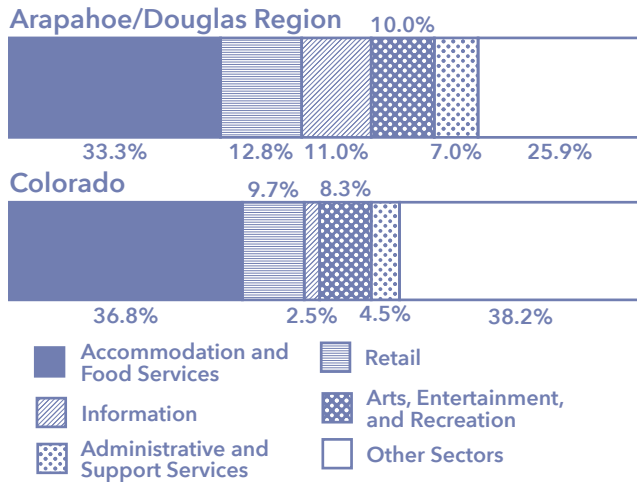
7.8%
No Internet



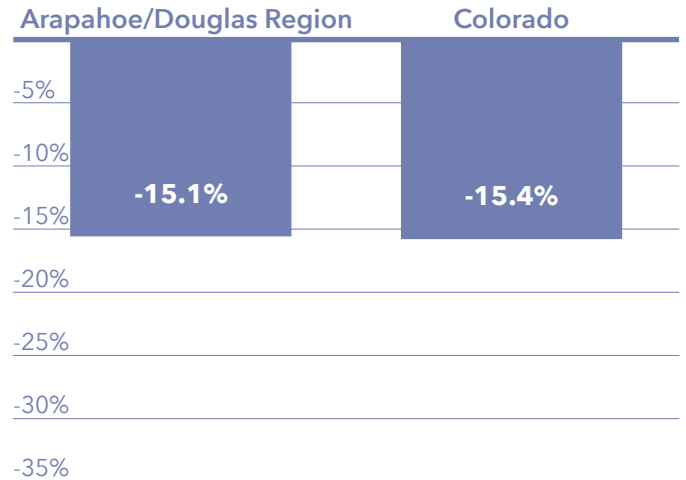
ARAPAHOE/DOUGLAS REGION

Arapahoe • Douglas

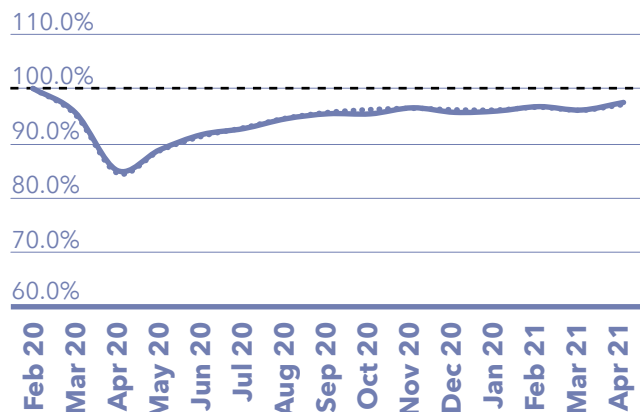
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



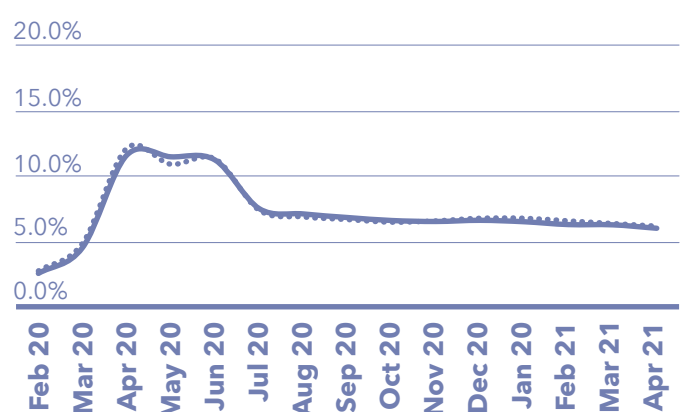
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



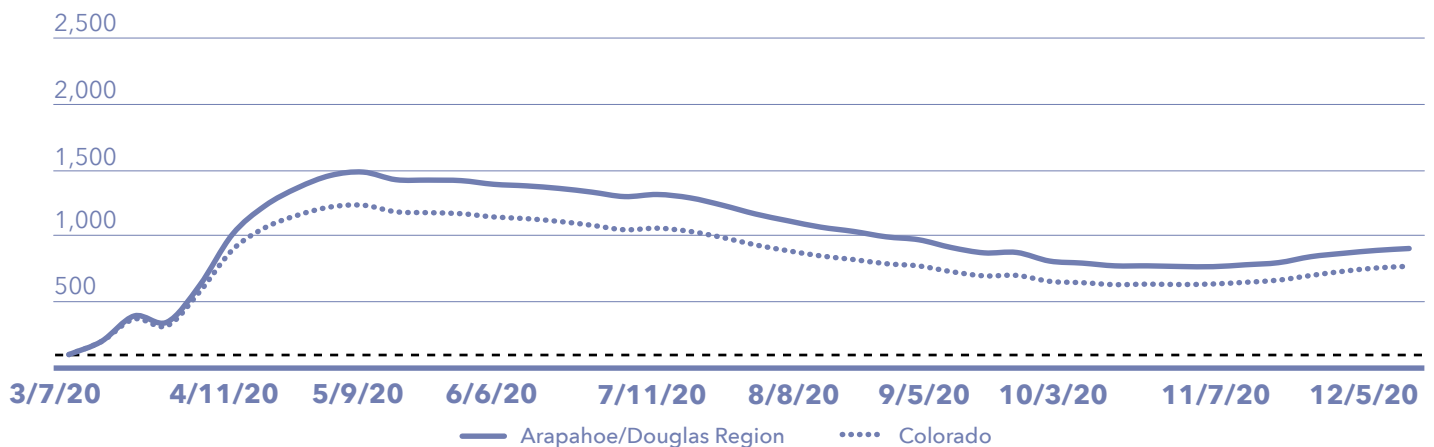
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Arapahoe/Douglas Interview Notes

Interview Date: November 30, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- Opportunities as truck drivers of all types continued throughout COVID-19
- Warehouses, fulfillment centers and other manufacturing facilities continued to expand hiring as demand for shipped products expanded
- Jobs in the areas of shipping and delivery continued to be available but were also considered to be unsafe due to the pandemic by many individuals – these included restaurant food delivery staff along with FedEx, UPS and other types of delivery employees

Dynamics of the Region

- The region includes diverse populations living in urban, suburban and rural communities
- The region includes several cities and towns that have their own governance structures, and two counties, that each have County Commissioners with specific priorities and authorities
- The County Commissioners have worked out agreements to determine how decisions are made related to specific workforce and training activities and programs
- The workforce area (AD Works) has a variety of working agreements with Arapahoe and Aurora Community Colleges
- The workforce area has established a strong ability to raise diverse types of funds that can be leveraged to provide various supports and

opportunities to individual participants

- The region has a variety of businesses and organizations as well as government offices that offer different employment opportunities
- The region has diverse populations representing different socio-economic backgrounds, cultural origins, primary languages, large and small industries, and core anchor institutions such as hospitals, community colleges, and large warehouse and storage businesses
- Key service agencies for the residents of the public housing authority are co-located which provides the chance for better coordination
- The region faces diverse challenges related to digital equity in the core areas of access to broadband and high-speed internet; affordable connectivity into the home; high performing equipment, including security programs; skills for using all types of technology and conferencing platforms; and trust as well as motivation to learn about these different aspects of technology

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- The workforce center has procured special grants to support digital skill building for individuals at all levels
- As the COVID restrictions have been reduced, participants have been able to access new work-based learning opportunities in diverse locations. Some new ones that are of primary interest include working for a couple of the local chamber of commerce offices as well as some of their members; different local businesses in the area; and community organizations. A significant positive note is that the opportunities at the chambers of commerce do not restrict individuals with justice involvement from applying and participating
- New partnerships and collaborations have been developed with Arapahoe Community College in such areas as computer skills and some sector partnership credentials in some health services

areas including radiology, dental assistance and hygienist, medical tech assistance, medical coding and pharmacy technician

- There are new opportunities developing in the energy and digital sector including installing cables and broadband; expanding the power grid, and addressing technical assistance needs for cable TV, computers and cell phones
- There are additional opportunities related to COVID vaccinations, ongoing testing and contact tracing that may be good job matches and career pathways for participants
- The region continues to have opportunities in the constructions trades
- The region has been successful in developing new apprenticeships that extend into addition business sectors beyond construction

office space, retail space, etc.

- Upgrading schools will be a priority – this will create jobs in numerous construction trades, including ventilation/heating, insulation, etc.
- Funding for apprenticeships and more training of diverse types is included – this is substantial in this region that has been a leader in establishing new types of apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities
- Ongoing jobs related to COVID testing, contact tracing and distributing vaccines may lead to greater opportunities in diverse health care positions and careers
- Financial assistance to small-business owners including restaurants, bars and coffee shops will provide restored and new options to job-seekers

Labor Force Participation

- It seemed that the labor force participation rate vacillated considerably during the pandemic, and has increased notably over the past two-three months.
- A significant impact on this was the inability for job-seekers who lost their jobs due to COVID, including in numerous service-sector positions, to access work-based learning opportunities as a way of exploring new job sectors
- Small businesses in different parts of the region were severely impacted by the pandemic and forced to close down completely or reduce the number of employees – this had a significant impact on labor force participation as well

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- The potential impact of rescue funds will be significant, including in such areas as building, renovating, and re-purposing property for new uses including housing, childcare centers and schools. This may depend considerably on how the different commercial and public spaces in the region are leased for designed purposes, such as



DENVER REGION

Denver

Workforce Demographics

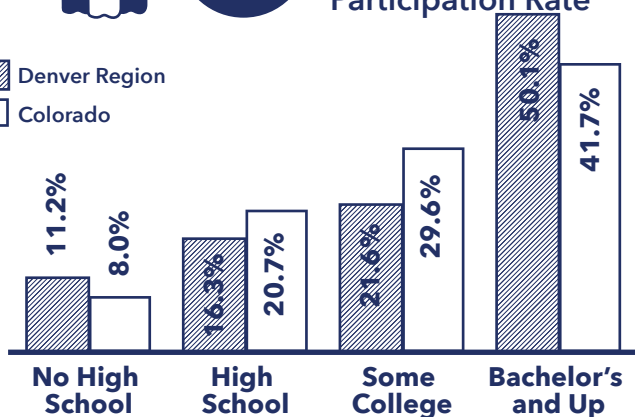


50.5%
Population
25 to 54 years old

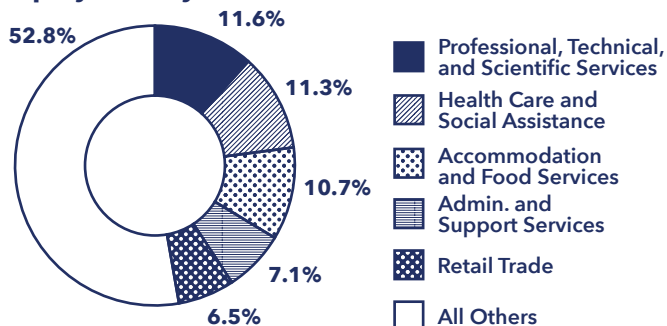


72.3%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

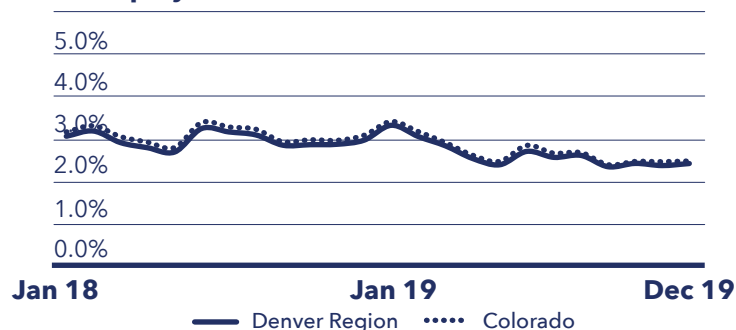
Denver Region
 Colorado



Employment by Sector



Unemployment Rate



Literacy and Numeracy



46.3%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

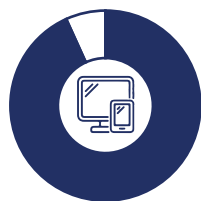


55.8%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas

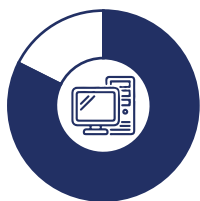


4.6%
Households with limited English language proficiency

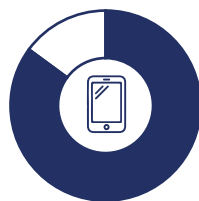
Digital Access, by Household



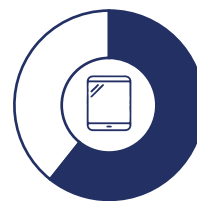
93.2%
One or More Computing Device



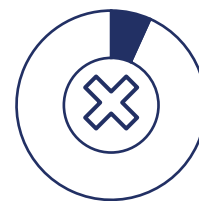
82.4%
Desktop or Laptop



85.1%
Smartphone



60.7%
Tablet or Portable Device



6.8%
No Computer



86.9%
An Internet Subscription



0.3%
Dial-up Alone



73.9%
Cell Data Plan



76.2%
Broadband



4.3%
Satellite



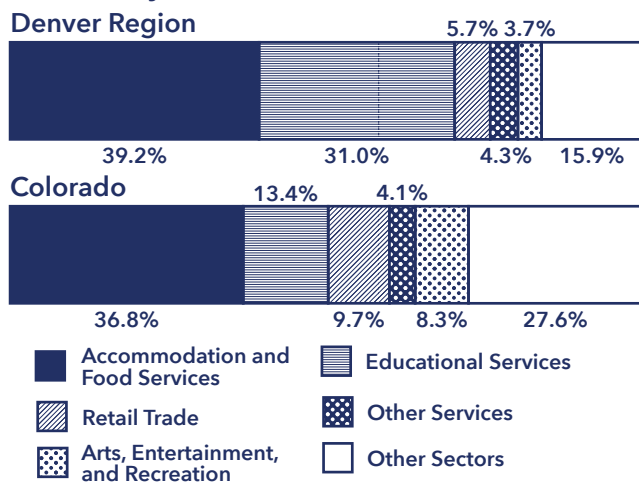
13.1%
No Internet



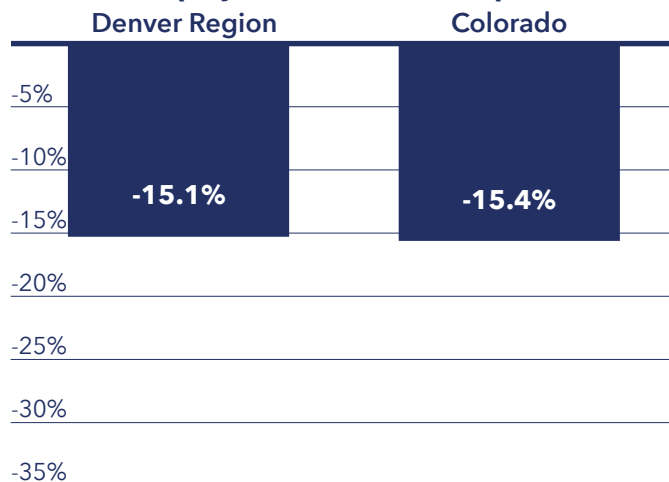
DENVER REGION

Denver

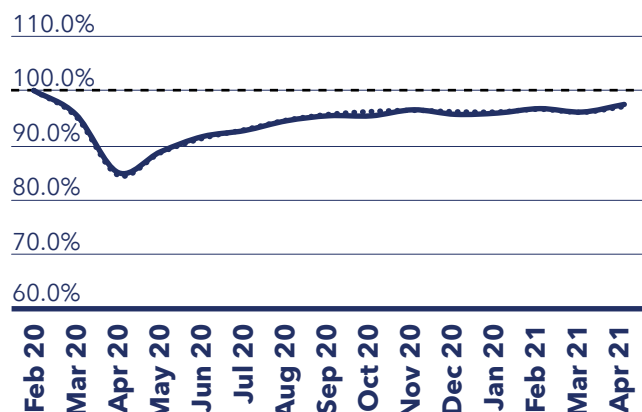
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



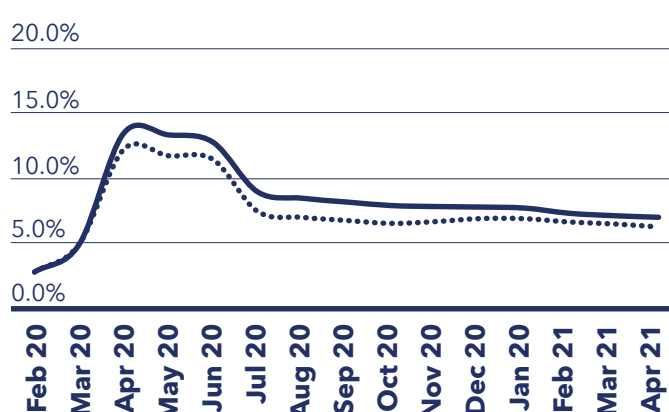
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



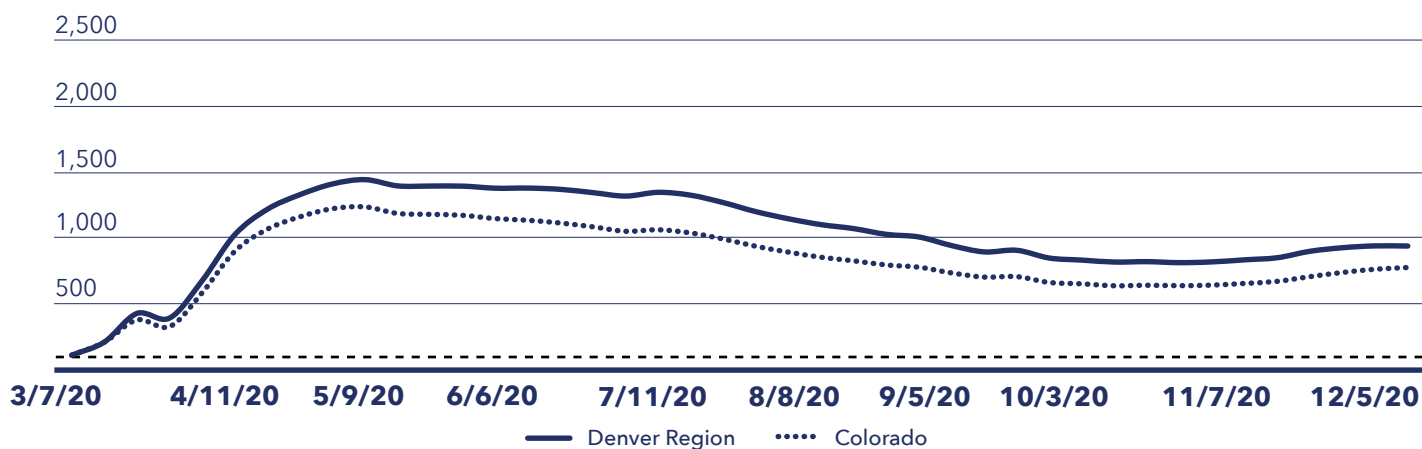
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Denver Interview Notes

Interview Dates: November 2020 through March 2021

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- Furloughed jobs in such industries as warehouses, construction trades, government jobs and the travel industry (jobs connected to operating the airport, airline workers of all types, bus drivers, RTD staff, AMTRAK and rail line staff, interstate bus line staff, etc.) banking and financial staff with client-facing responsibilities, non-essential retail workers and non-classroom school staff were worst during the full shut-down, and began being restored beginning in late April and May through the summer and fall, with a regression in the later fall
- The different elements of the travel industry began restoring workers in May and June as greater numbers of people began traveling again, especially by car, and also began venturing to other states, national parks, campgrounds, and recreational areas. All of these jobs were restored with new safety practices in place, including reduced capacity of all visitors and increased requirements related to having people gathered in public spaces, including outdoors
- Restaurants and hotels have begun hiring at a greater pace and scaling up for fuller capacity service levels – these jobs seem to be similar as those that existed prior to the pandemic, with additional training required to address the many safety practices that are required and expected at these worksites
- Other recreation and amusement-oriented jobs (sporting and music events, festivals, zoos, movie

theaters, etc.) have begun hiring new staff

- Middle and higher-skilled jobs were less impacted during the pandemic since most workers were able to work remotely and continue general production

Dynamics of the Region

- Different neighborhoods and cities around Metro Denver were impacted in very unique ways economically, health-wise, and work-wise during the pandemic depending on the overall culture of the community
- Performing outreach into different communities has increased the awareness of workforce center staff on the importance of community engagement
- It has been challenging to get individuals into different training and credential programs during the pandemic for different reasons – safety fears, worries of losing unemployment benefits if a job doesn't work out, limited confidence or reluctance to learn new skills and change fields
- Reductions in safe public transportation options have had a large impact on the region and its workers
- Challenges with childcare for families and the diverse and extensive responsibilities for supporting at home school learning have been significant and impactful
- Dramatic and extensive closure and reduced capacity of all hospitality and accommodation businesses, restaurants and bars, amusement and sporting events have greatly reduced the availability of jobs for those not able to work remotely from home
- Issues related to digital equity have had significant impact. This includes access to equipment, good connectivity and high-speed internet, ongoing support and coaching to use technology once it is accessible, and the motivation and confidence to learn new digital skills
- Over time, the desire grew for many families to

find work that could be done from home so that childcare and transportation challenges were limited

- The isolation created by the pandemic had serious impact on unemployed and underemployed workers, as did the daily fear for essential workers of contracting COVID-19 at the workplace
- Warehouses and manufacturing facilities are often located close to each other, but tend to be clustered away from the town centers and from accessible public transportation options
- Denver as a city is spread out geographically which impact how workers find and keep work – this was magnified during the pandemic due to transportation and also ongoing safety and scheduling challenges. Having children at home and learning remotely complicated the issues as well

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- Growth continuing in diverse types of tech jobs – tech companies and most other companies as well
- The state is creating its own Apprenticeship Office which will give much greater flexibility for local apprenticeships in diverse sectors – examples include working with state agencies and chambers of commerce; installing and maintaining broadband systems and equipment; banking functions of all types; and different health technicians
- The workforce area in Denver has applied for a technology grant from the US Department of Labor to address digital skill issues of all levels – there is discussion to make these learning opportunities mobile and based in community hubs as the preferable way to support marginalized populations

Labor Force Participation

- Labor force participation is increasing gradually as restrictions from the Governor and Mayor are being reduced
- In the Denver area it has tended to be stronger

than other parts of the state over the last 6 months

- In certain sectors such as accommodation and restaurants, the levels of employment are still low but gradually increasing. Hiring for these sectors has been challenging, perhaps due to previous workers finding other employment with greater job stability and other benefits

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- The potential impact of rescue funds will be significant, including in such areas as building, renovating and repurposing property for new uses including housing, childcare centers, and schools
- Upgrading schools will be a priority – this will create jobs in numerous construction trades, including ventilation/heating, insulation, etc.
- Funding for apprenticeships and more training of diverse types is included
- Ongoing jobs related to COVID testing, contact tracing and distributing vaccines may lead to greater opportunities in diverse health care positions and careers



EASTERN REGION

Cheyenne • Elbert • Kit Carson • Lincoln • Logan • Morgan • Phillips • Sedgwick • Washington • Yuma

Workforce Demographics

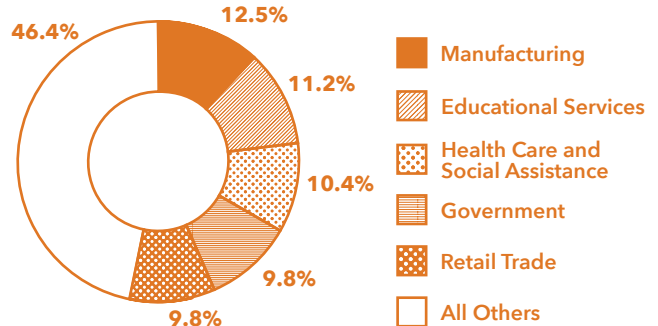


37.0%
Population
25 to 54 years old

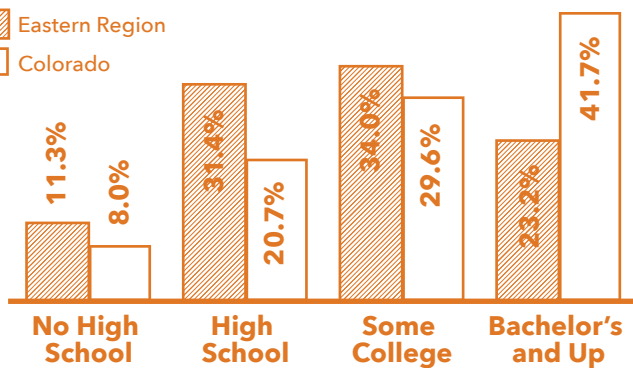


63.2%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

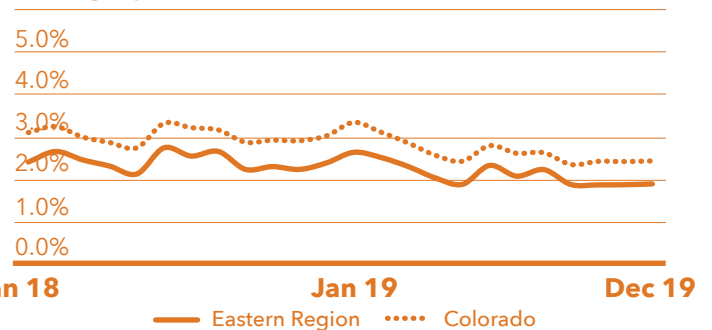
Employment by Sector



■ Eastern Region
□ Colorado



Unemployment Rate



Literacy and Numeracy



56.5%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

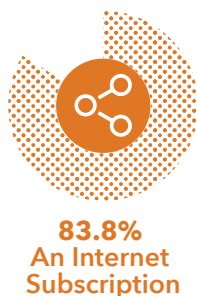
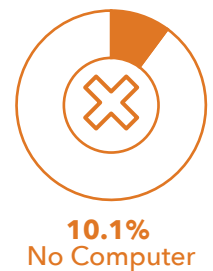
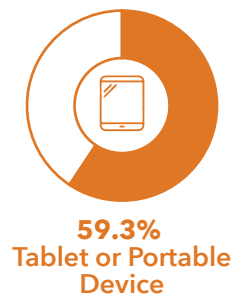
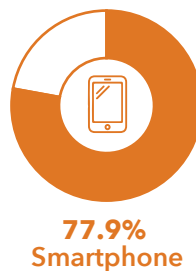
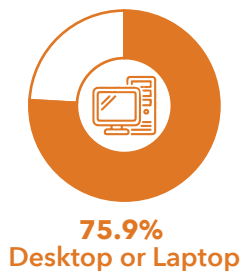
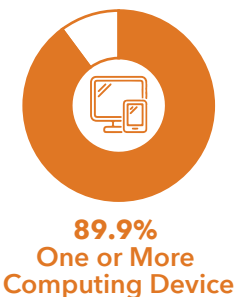


66.4%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



2.9%
Households with limited English language proficiency

Digital Access, by Household

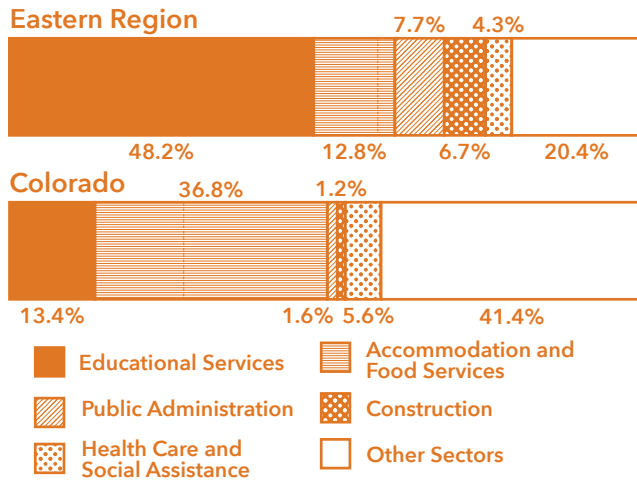




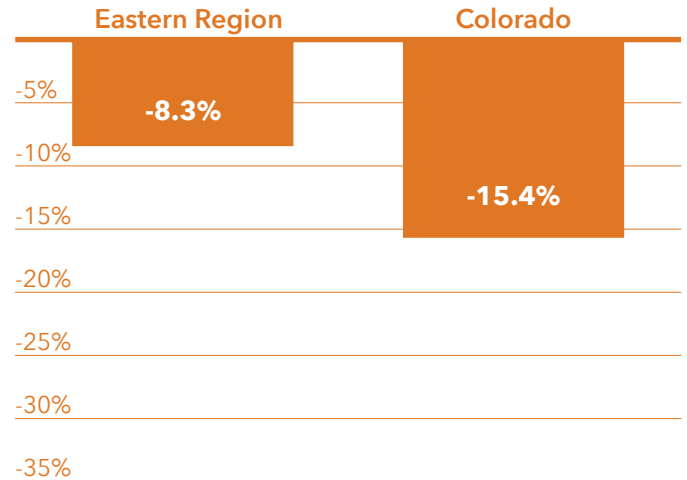
EASTERN REGION

Cheyenne • Elbert • Kit Carson • Lincoln • Logan • Morgan • Phillips • Sedgwick • Washington • Yuma

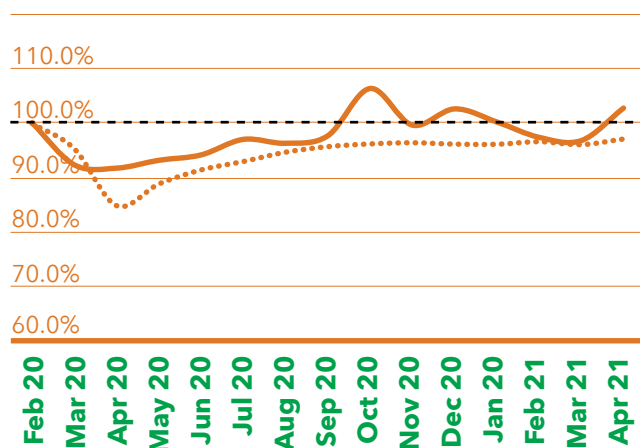
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



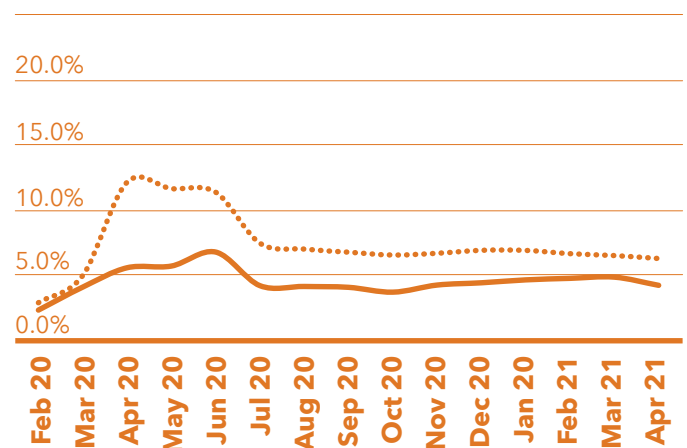
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



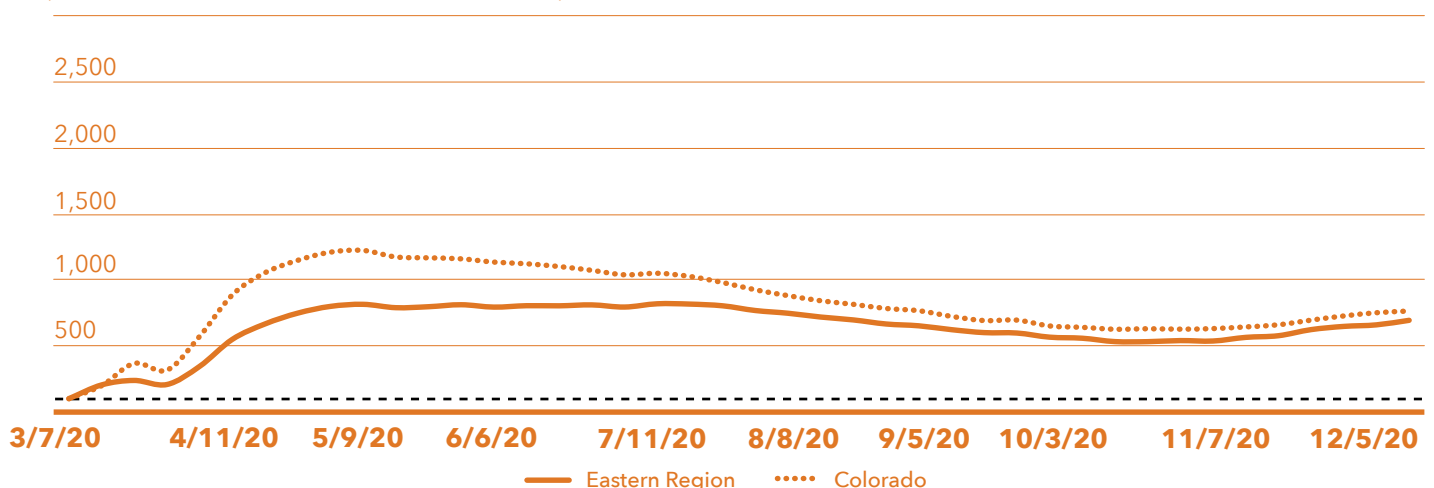
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Eastern Interview Notes

Interview Date: October 26, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning Jobs/Recovering Industries

- Health services field, retail and local businesses, warehouses, hospitals, some restaurants and fast food restaurants

Dynamics of the Region

- Agricultural and ranching – related jobs are big (John Deere, feed and supply stores) along with direct farming positions
- Some work in prisons and other facilities
- Poor digital connectivity overall in regions – prohibits people from working remotely
- Youth and younger adults often leave the area for more urban communities with greater job and career options
- Strong connection between community college in Ft. Morgan and workforce area – community college courses available, including credentials – no four-year college in the region

New Opportunities – Economic Development and Training

- Statewide broadband initiative will benefit region – connectivity and also jobs related to the comprehensive digital industry
- Training related to broadband installation and repair will be new opportunities at community college
- Apprenticeships related to broadband installation

will also bring new opportunities

- New funding from the Governor's Colorado Recovery Plan could add funding for more apprenticeships, work-based learning and employment services to different workforce areas across the state.
- If the legislative bill passes creating a State Apprenticeship Office, this will provide greater freedom and shorter time frames for introducing and approving new apprenticeships at the state level.

Labor Force Participation

- Labor force participation has decreased during COVID due to less job opportunities, increased incidents of illness and greater fear about working in unsafe conditions

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- Rescue funds are projected to extend UI, give relief funds directly to residents and provide some relief to businesses
- Rescue funds will create new training and apprenticeship opportunities
- Rescue funds will help to sustain distribution of vaccines to underserved communities



NORTHWEST REGION

Grand • Jackson • Moffat • Rio Blanco • Routt

Workforce Demographics

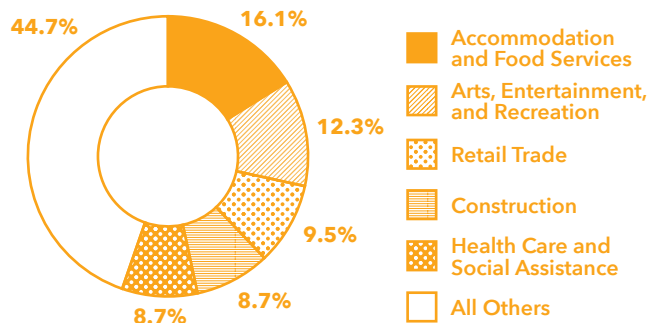


40.8%
Population
25 to 54 years old

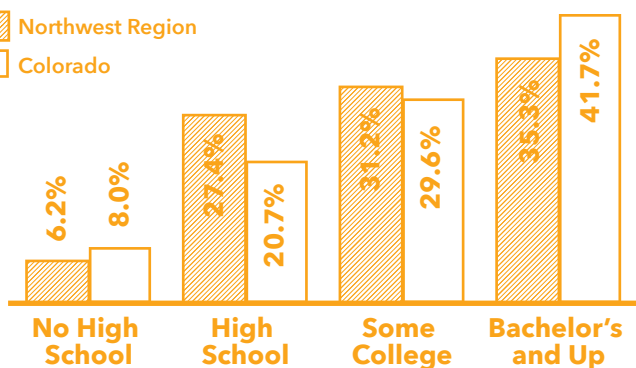


67.8%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

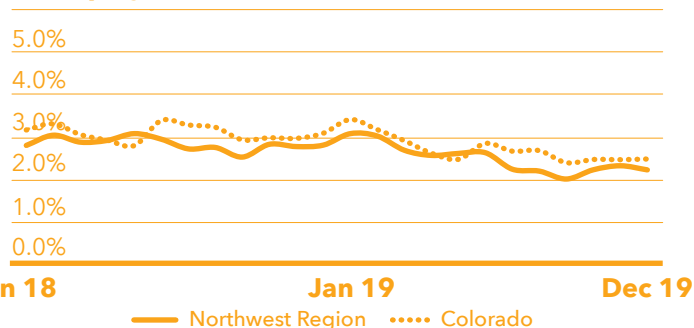
Employment by Sector



Northwest Region
Colorado



Unemployment Rate



Literacy and Numeracy



48.3%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

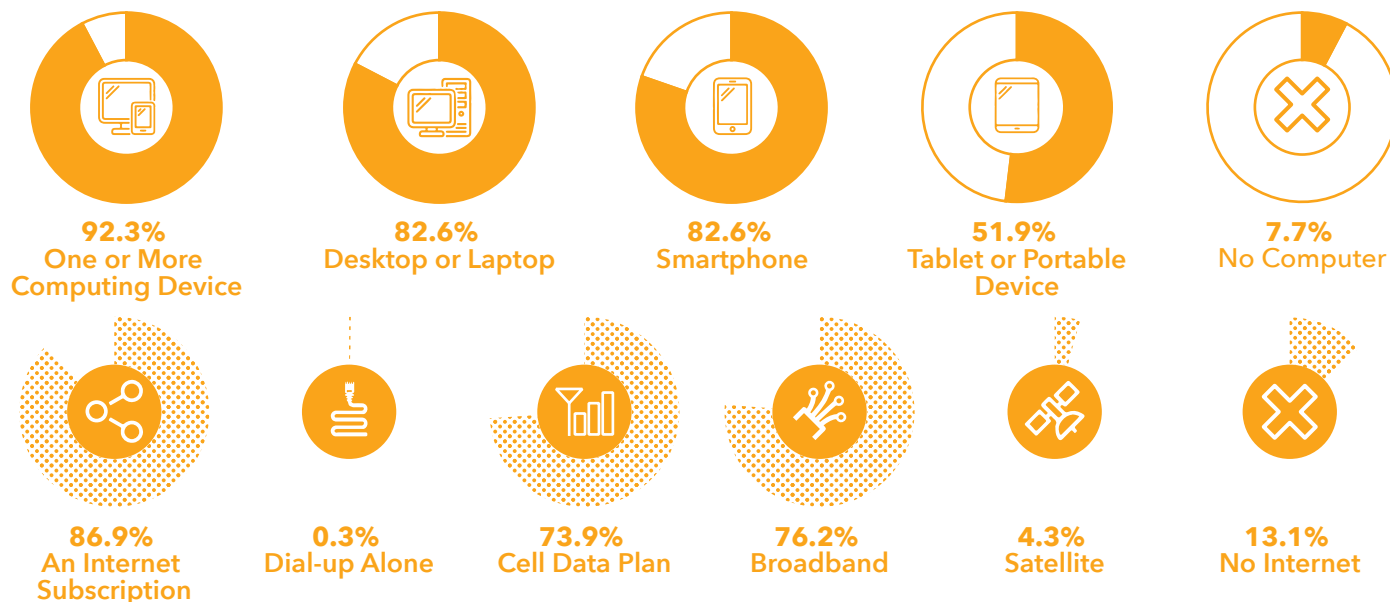


60.0%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



1.2%
Households with limited English language proficiency

Digital Access, by Household

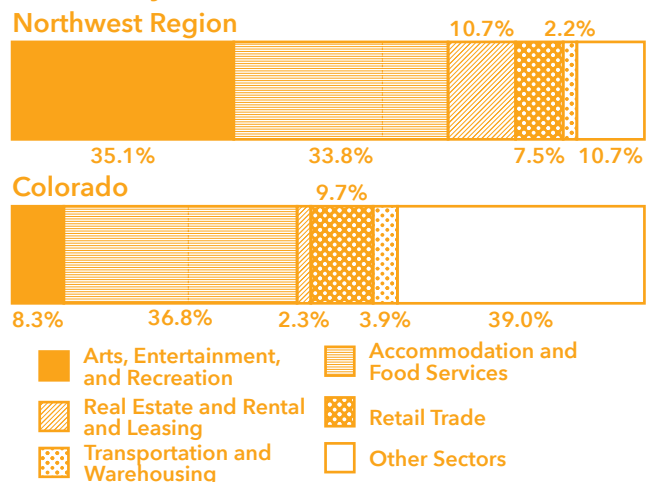




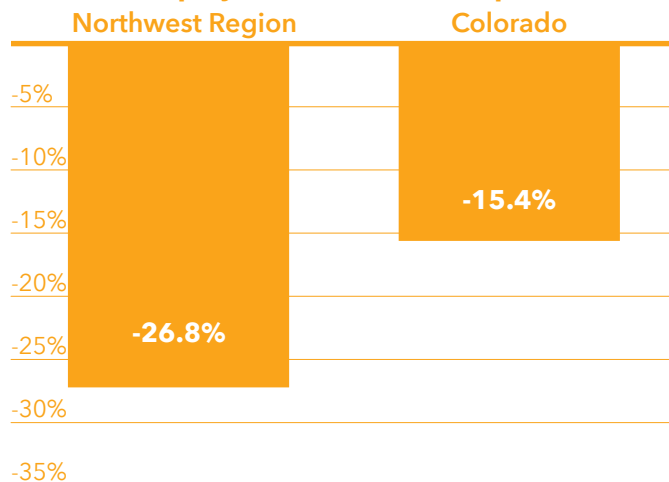
NORTHWEST REGION

Grand • Jackson • Moffat • Rio Blanco • Routt

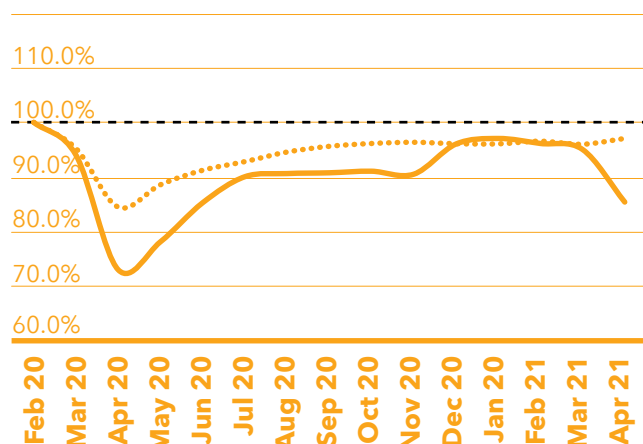
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



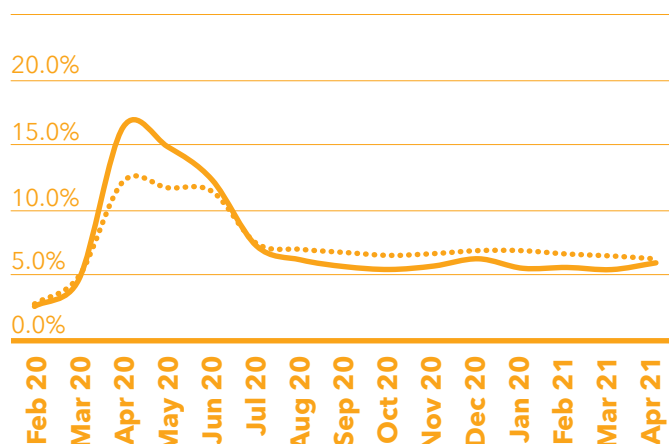
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



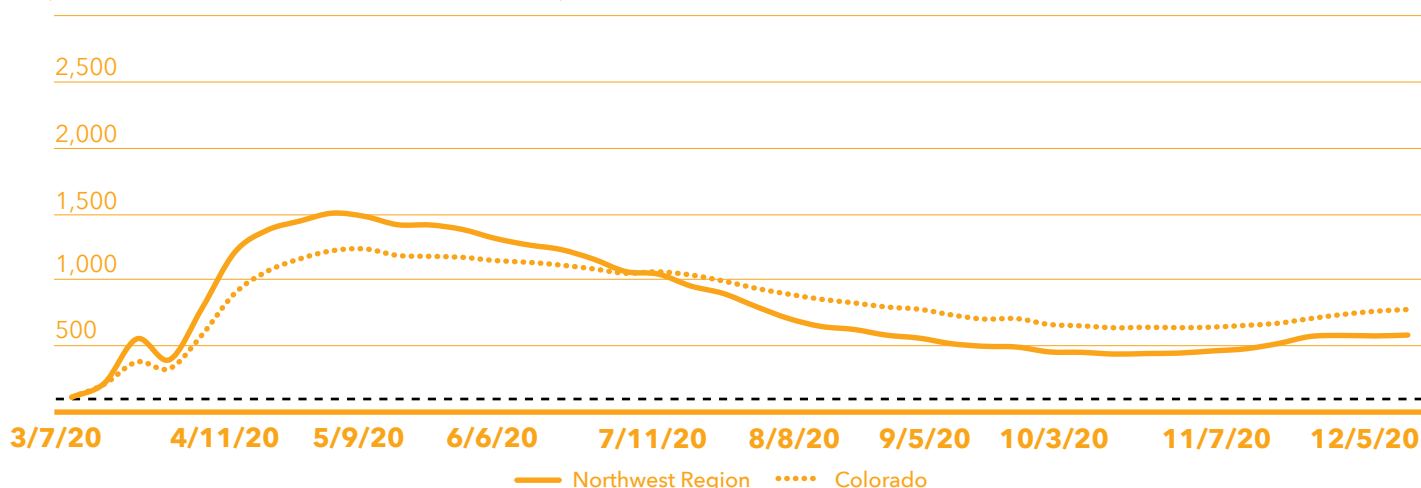
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Northwest Interview Notes

Interview Date: November 2, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- Opportunities as truck drivers of all types continued throughout COVID 19
- Warehouses, fulfillment centers and other manufacturing facilities continued to expand hiring as demand for shipped products expanded
- Jobs in the areas of shipping and delivery continued to be available but were also considered to be unsafe due to the pandemic by many individuals – these included restaurant food delivery staff along with FedEx, UPS and other types of delivery employees.

Dynamics of the Region

- The region includes diverse populations living in urban, suburban and rural communities
- The region includes several cities and towns that have their own governance structures, and two counties, that each have County Commissioners with specific priorities and authorities
- The County Commissioners have worked out agreements to determine how decisions are made related to specific workforce and training activities and programs
- The workforce area (AD Works) has a variety of working agreements with Arapahoe and Aurora Community Colleges
- The workforce area has established a strong ability to raise diverse types of funds that can be leveraged to provide various supports and

opportunities to individual participants

- The region has a variety of businesses and organizations as well as government offices that offer different employment opportunities
- The region has diverse populations representing different socio-economic backgrounds, cultural origins, primary languages, large and small industries, and core anchor institutions such as hospitals, community colleges, and large warehouse and storage businesses
- Key service agencies for the residents are co-located which provides the chance for better coordination
- The region faces diverse challenges related to digital equity in the core areas of access to Broadband and high-speed internet; affordable connectivity into the home; high performing equipment, including security programs; skills for using all types of technology and conferencing platforms; and trust as well as motivation to learn about these different aspects of technology

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- The workforce center has procured special grants to support digital skill building for individuals at all levels
- As the COVID restrictions have been reduced, participants have been able to access new work-based learning" opportunities in diverse locations. Some new ones that are of primary interest include working for a couple of the local Chamber of Commerce Offices as well as some of their members; different local businesses in the area; and community organizations. A significant positive note is that the opportunities at the Chambers of Commerce do not restrict individuals with justice involvement from applying and participating.
- New partnerships and collaborations have been developed with Arapahoe Community College and the in such areas as computer skills and some sector partnership credentials in some health

services areas including radiology, dental assistance and hygienist, medical tech assistance, medical coding and pharmacy technician.

- There are new opportunities developing in the energy and digital sector including installing cables and Broadband; expanding the power grid, and addressing tech assistance needs for cable TV, computers and cell phones.
- There are additional opportunities related to COVID vaccinations, ongoing testing and contact tracing that may be good job matches and career pathways for participants
- The region continues to have opportunities in the construction trades
- The region has been successful in developing new apprenticeships that extend into additional business sectors beyond construction

office space, retail space, etc.

- Upgrading schools will be a priority – this will create jobs in numerous construction trades, including ventilation/heating, insulation, etc.
- Funding for apprenticeships and more training of diverse types is included – this is substantial in this region that has been a leader in establishing new types of apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities
- Ongoing jobs related to COVID testing, contact tracing and distributing vaccines may lead to greater opportunities in diverse health care positions and careers
- Financial assistance to small-business owners including restaurants, bars and coffee shops will provide restored and new options to job-seekers

Labor Force Participation

- It seemed that the labor force participation rate vacillated considerably during the pandemic, and has increased notably over the past two-three months.
- A significant impact on this was the inability for job-seekers who lost their jobs due to COVID, including in numerous service-sector positions were unable to access work-based learning opportunities as a way of exploring new job sectors
- Small businesses in different parts of the region were severely impacted by the pandemic and forced to close down completely or reduce the number of employees – this had a significant impact on labor force participation as well

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- The potential impact of rescue funds will be significant, including in such areas as building, renovating and re-purposing property for new uses including housing, childcare centers and schools. This may depend considerably on how the different commercial and public spaces in the region are leased for designed purposes, such as



PUEBLO REGION

Pueblo

Workforce Demographics

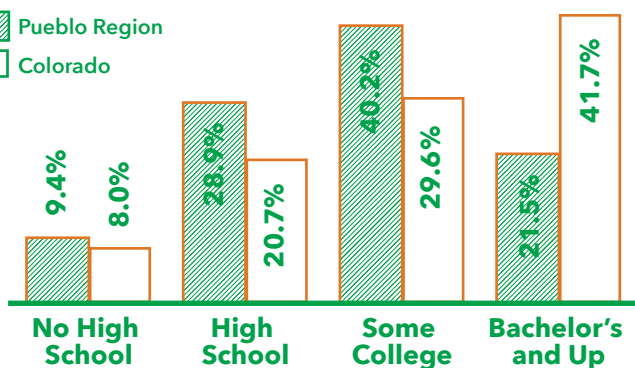


36.7%
Population
25 to 54 years old

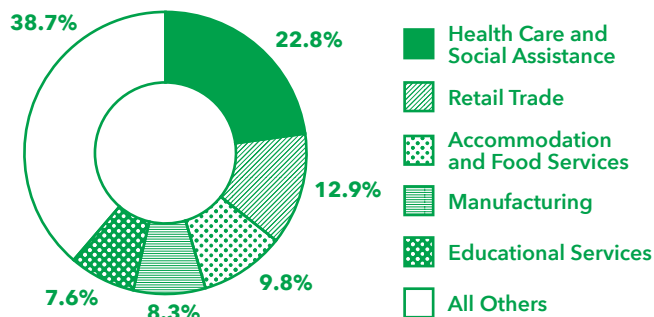


56.1%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

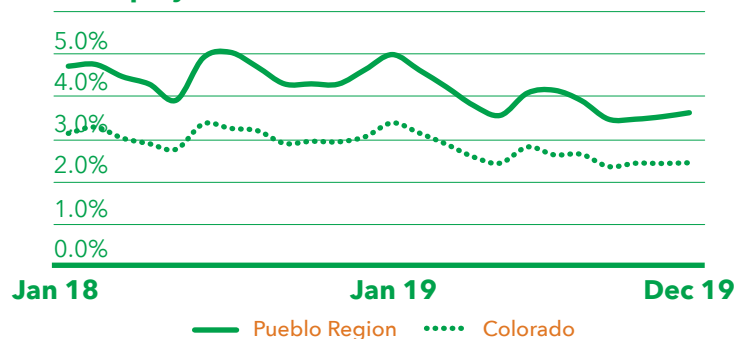
Pueblo Region
 Colorado



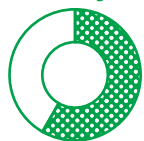
Employment by Sector



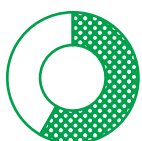
Unemployment Rate



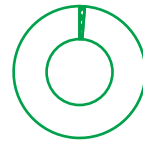
Literacy and Numeracy



58.3%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

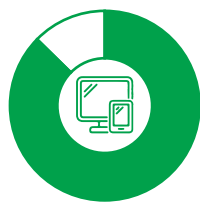


68.6%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



1.3%
Households with limited English language proficiency

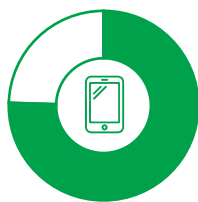
Digital Access, by Household



87.3%
One or More
Computing Device



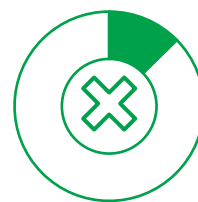
70.9%
Desktop or Laptop



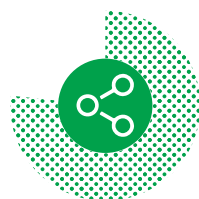
75.5%
Smartphone



53.0%
Tablet or Portable
Device



12.7%
No Computer



76.7%
An Internet
Subscription



0.5%
Dial-up Alone



60.5%
Cell Data Plan



62.1%
Broadband



7.4%
Satellite



23.3%
No Internet



PUEBLO REGION

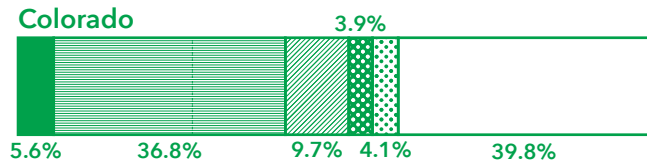
Pueblo

Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020

Pueblo Region

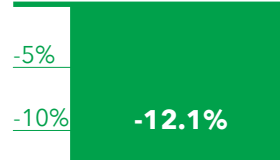


Colorado



Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020

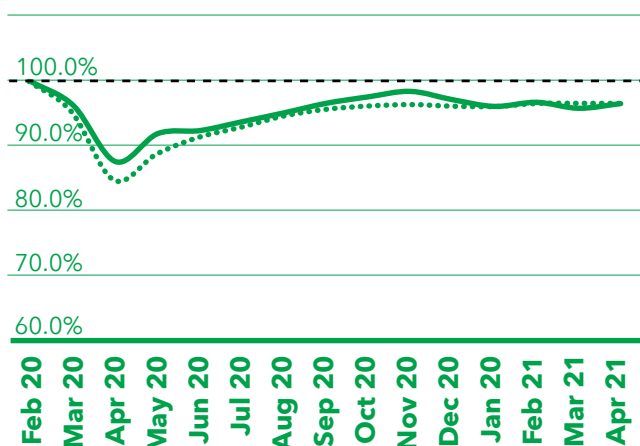
Pueblo Region



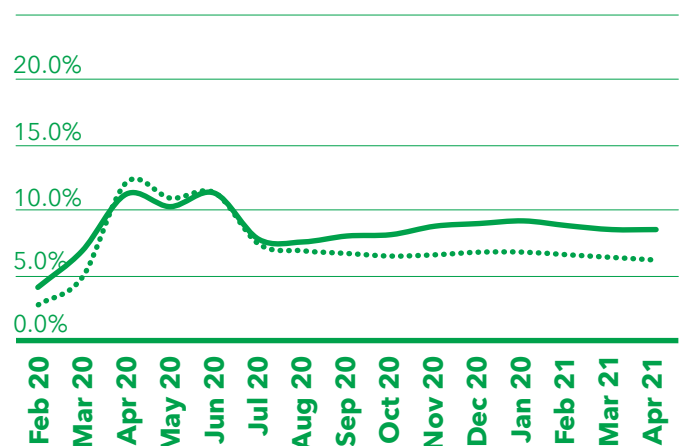
Colorado



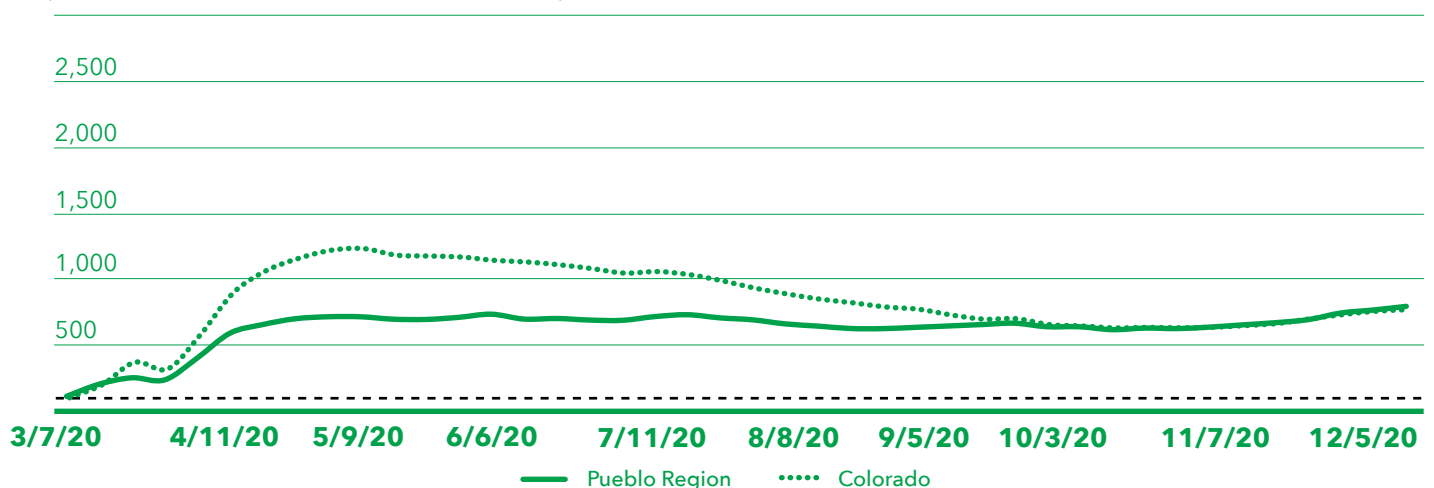
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Pueblo Interview Notes

Interview Date: November 6, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- Jobs in building and road construction were restored during the late spring and summer of 2020
- Medical and health service jobs needed to keep offices open on an appointment-basis were restored at the end of the full quarantine in May, 2020.
- Hiring of essential workers continued throughout 2020 and into the first quarter of 2021
- A small portion of restaurant and coffee shop jobs were maintained or restored in order to handle take-out and curbside orders throughout the pandemic.

Dynamics of the Region

- Diverse populations who lost jobs and were impacted by pandemic, including many Latinx individuals and families, live in this region
- Hospitals and medical facilities in the region were dramatically impacted as well
- This region was impacted significantly with large levels of UI applications as the pandemic progressed
- The workforce area and local community college have created substantial partnerships to create career pathways for high-school students in the area who want to pursue different credentials in such business sectors as health service fields; technological careers; medical technology and research and development; infrastructure

expansion in the energy, digital and telecommunications sectors; construction apprenticeships; and advanced manufacturing.

- There have been significant losses of jobs in mining, oil and gas and other extraction industries and related refineries
- There has been an influx of emphasis on developing the overall digital skills of youth and young adults that can lead to higher income jobs
- The region has diverse populations including non-native English speakers; different cultures, multi-generational families living together; multigenerational families who have lived there and owned small businesses (restaurants, retail shops, repair businesses, mechanical and other services businesses who have been significantly impacted during the pandemic) – this same dynamic has impacted rural agricultural businesses (including farmers and ranchers) in the region as well. The region also has numerous retired people moving into the area.

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- There is an increased commitment to expanding digital tech training of diverse types, especially for high school and early college-age youth
- There will be expanded opportunities in the energy sector and Broadband, ranging from installation, maintenance and replacement of cable, fiber, cell towers, water systems and electrical lines.
- Improvement of schools, hospitals and other public facilities will require expanded numbers of construction workers in all trades, engineers, architects, and business staff familiar with construction and road repair financial services of many types.
- There will be an expansion of health services positions including semi-professional technicians including radiology, dental and medical

services, and medical coding.

Labor force participation

- It seems the labor force participation rate has varied considerably during the course of the pandemic
- Workers in marginalized sectors have been challenged to find new work opportunities if they lost previous job

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- It is anticipated that the region will experience positive impact from some of the state and Federal rescue funds related to increasing vaccination and testing capacity in the health system; rental and mortgage assistance targeted at saving residents' housing; targeted funds to assist local small businesses including restaurants and bars; and funds focused on immediate cash assistance.
- Investment in Broadband and related, required activities that are described previously will have a positive impact on the region now and in the future. This includes training and jobs connected to installing, maintaining and repairing Broadband; expanding coaching and skills training opportunities related to developing digital skills; and identifying strategies for expanding access to adequate equipment.
- Increased funding for training, apprenticeships, work-based learning and retraining will have positive impact on the region
- Funding to improve the physical structures, space design, ventilation and heating systems, and other elements needed to modernize all public schools
- Expansion and improvement of childcare facilities that increase safety and allow parents to return to the workforce



RURAL RESORT REGION

Eagle • Garfield • Lake • Pitkin • Summit

Workforce Demographics

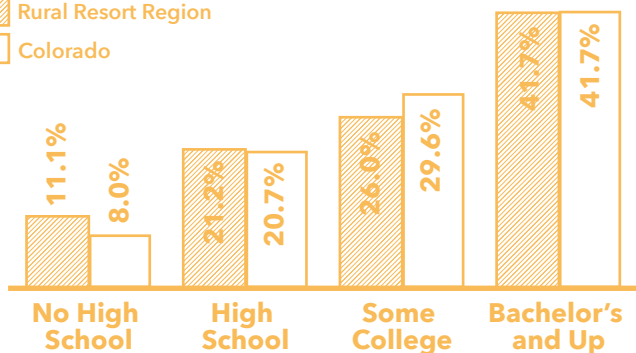


45.0%
Population
25 to 54 years old

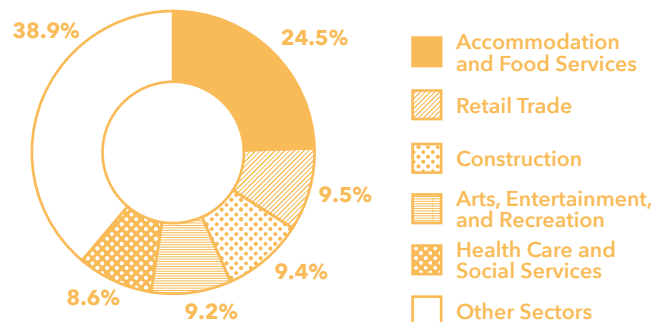


76.2%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

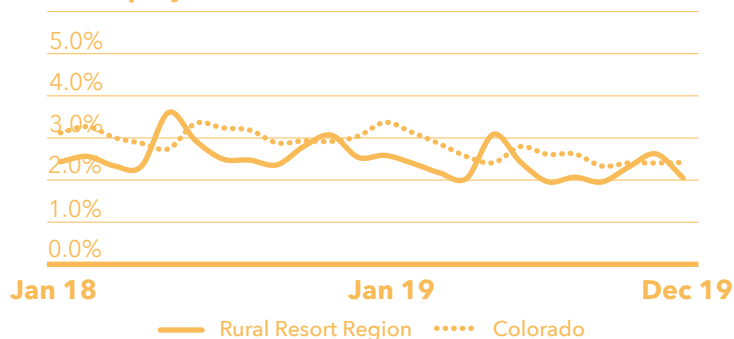
Rural Resort Region
 Colorado



Employment by Sector



Unemployment Rate



Literacy and Numeracy



49.4%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

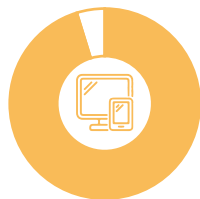


60.1%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



5.0%
Households with limited English language proficiency

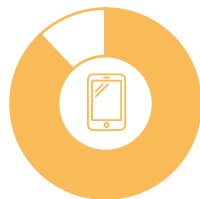
Digital Access



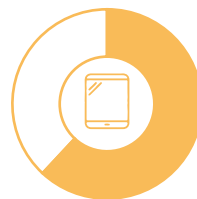
95.2%
One or More
Computing Device



80.0%
Desktop or Laptop



87.9%
Smartphone



61.9%
Tablet or Portable
Device



4.8%
No Computer



87.8%
An Internet
Subscription



0.4%
Dial-up Alone



66.6%
Cell Data Plan



63.0%
Broadband



9.4%
Satellite



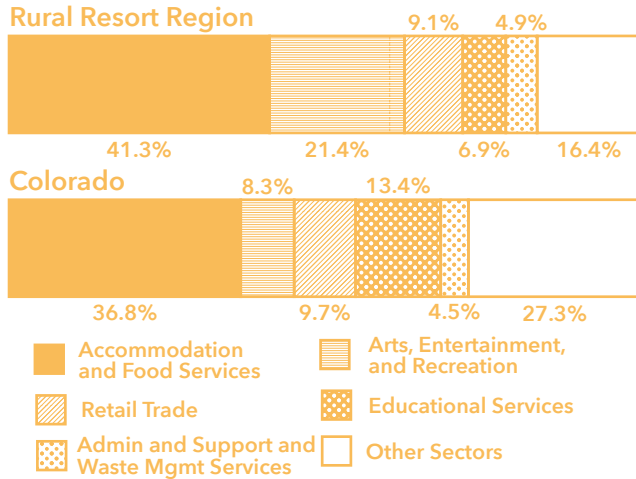
12.2%
No Internet



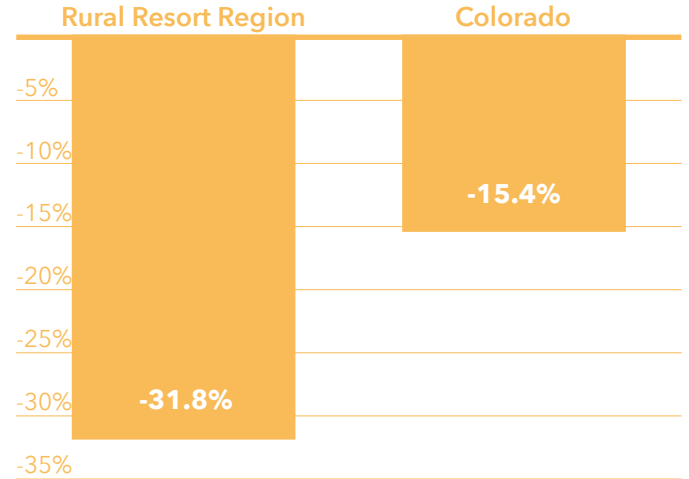
RURAL RESORT REGION

Eagle • Garfield • Lake • Pitkin • Summit

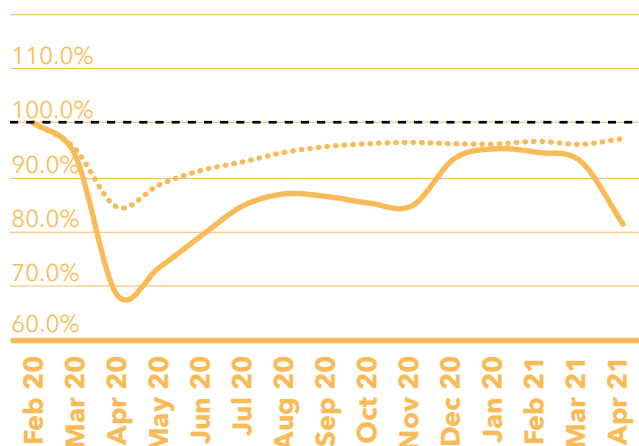
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



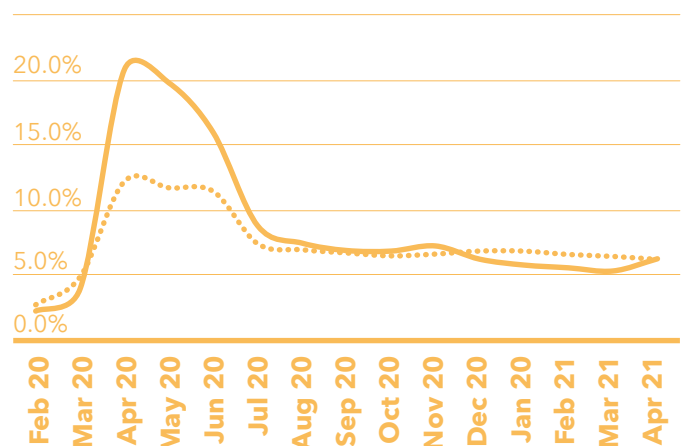
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



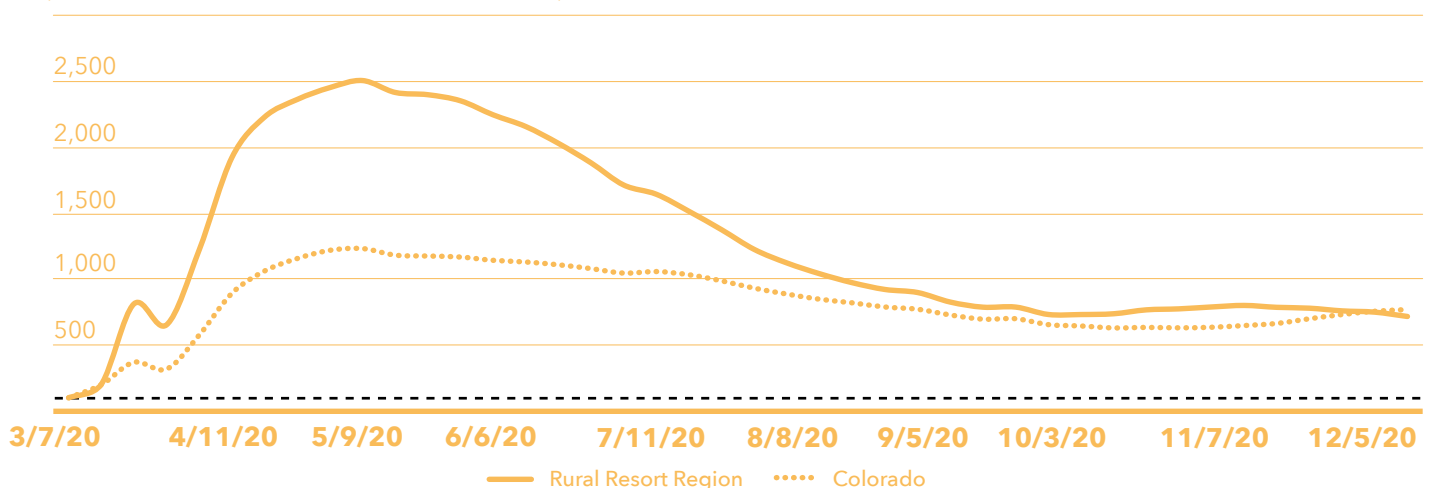
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Rural Resort Interview Notes

Interview Date: November 2, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- From March 2020 – June 2020 there was a significant decline of jobs across the entire area due to the full quarantine, ski areas closing down, and the related support businesses being required to close as well.
- The job market improved dramatically between late May and August as there were more visitors to the area than had been expected. A big reason for job increase was due to different resort communities providing innovative ways for restaurants, bars and other eateries to create outdoor dining spaces
- Other local businesses closed (i.e. office supply stores, restaurants, etc.) permanently due to the severe reduction in out-of-town visitors and reduced capacity requirements
- The number of jobs declined again during the fall with COVID spikes and increased incidence of illness
- Overall rates of applications in this region for UI were among the largest in the state
- The high incidence of severe fires in Grand Co and fears related to fires across the state impacted job availability further since visitors to certain areas were limited, camping was restricted and capacity reduced, and those working remotely in the counties with fires lost jobs and their livelihoods as their homes were destroyed. Further impact occurred since many lodging and restaurant sites

were impacted by the fires as well.

- Number of available jobs has improved since Jan 2021

Dynamics of the Region

- The retraining needs of this region differ from other regions because many workers have college educations and are in the area to enjoy the recreational opportunities without an expectation of obtaining a career-based job. Thus the idea of retraining has been different from other regions.
- Across the region it seems that nearly all jobs are connected to resorts, recreational activities, food and beverage spots, retail and local businesses to support the visitors and local residents – all are very interdependent
- Similarly government jobs rely heavily on serving a large visitor base, and on the related taxes paid by the resort businesses to support government jobs and functions
- This region is spread out over several counties, so it covers a significant geographical area.
- Due to the strong reliance of this regional economy on recreational activities, vacillations in these including weather, draughts, severe periods of hot or extremely cold temperatures have immediate impact on the economy
- The point above includes extreme events that have significant ripple effects such as large forest and wild fires, blizzards that impact the entire regions, avalanches, unexpected road closures and other similar situations

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- During the pandemic, there were very few new economic development activities that were available – a couple that did develop were from Federal Emergency grants which offered work-based, paid internships to do outreach related to contact tracing and testing, and later to vaccination

availability

- It seems that discussions are occurring to expand the regional capacity to maintain forests and wildland areas and offer more accessible training to individuals pursuing a career in firefighting, forest management and other related activities
- Some government jobs and related training have been created to deal with the multiple dimensions of managing the pandemic and its aftermath, including providing assistance to residents in the areas of accessing housing, emergency food as needed, responsive medical care and mental health support
- The influx of Broadband installation, maintenance and operation and related activities (training for these activities as well as overall training of digital skills) will create new long-term opportunities

Labor Force Participation

- Labor force participation was impacted dramatically during the height of the pandemic in 2020
- As a result the region experienced extensive migration of workers who left the area later last spring, over the summer or during the fall
- Despite a strong ski and summer recreation season, the reduced capacity for using all areas and facilities reduced the number of people working considerably and thus impacted the level of labor force participation

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- The resort areas are in need of increased broadband access and overall connectivity, although some of the actual resorts and surrounding areas have invested in having strong access as a crucial condition of serving its customer base. As an example the town of Vail has strong connectivity overall but the outlying residential areas and nearby towns have unreliable internet connections.
- In addition to Broadband, the priority of improving digital equity across the state will create new

job and learning opportunities in the areas of expanding overall connectivity, creating more training opportunities of all levels of digital “users”, and outreach related to all of these activities

- Rescue funds will hopefully impact the accessibility of health and medical services, and thus expand the training and job opportunities available in such fields as sports medicine and various tech positions; radiology, medical and dental technology; expansion of affordable housing options; and increase positions connected to the provision of vaccinations.



SOUTH-CENTRAL REGION

Alamosa • Conejo • Costilla • Mineral • Rio Grande • Saguache

Workforce Demographics

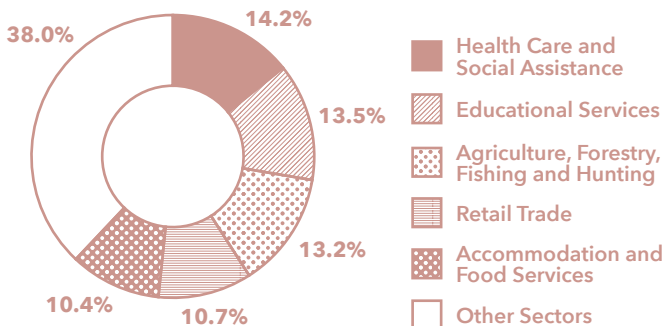


33.4%
Population
25 to 54 years old

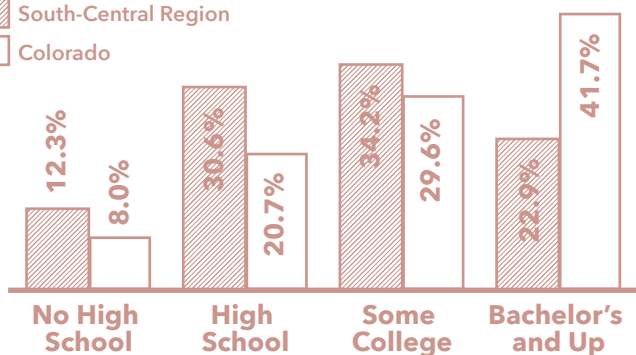


56.5%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

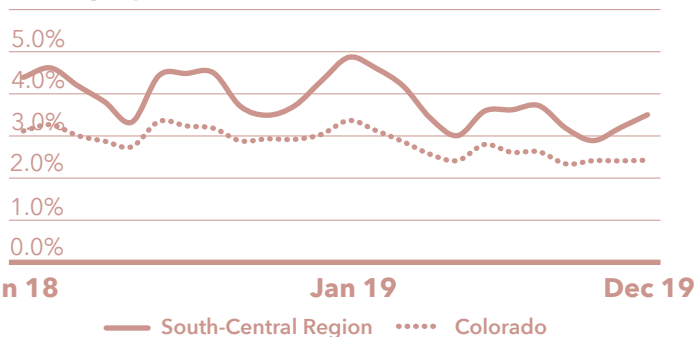
Employment by Sector



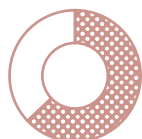
■ South-Central Region
□ Colorado



Unemployment Rate



Literacy and Numeracy



62.9%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

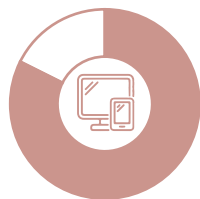


71.8%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



5.8%
Households with limited English language proficiency

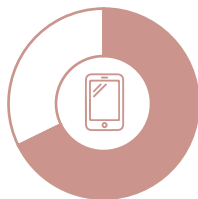
Digital Access, by Household



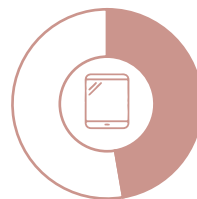
82.4%
One or More
Computing Device



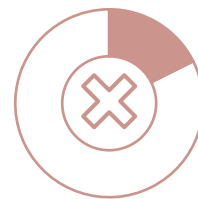
65.9%
Desktop or Laptop



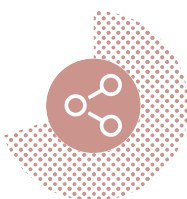
67.7%
Smartphone



47.3%
Tablet or Portable
Device



6.1%
No Computer



69.9%
An Internet
Subscription



0.6%
Dial-up Alone



47.7%
Cell Data Plan



44.4%
Broadband



14.1%
Satellite



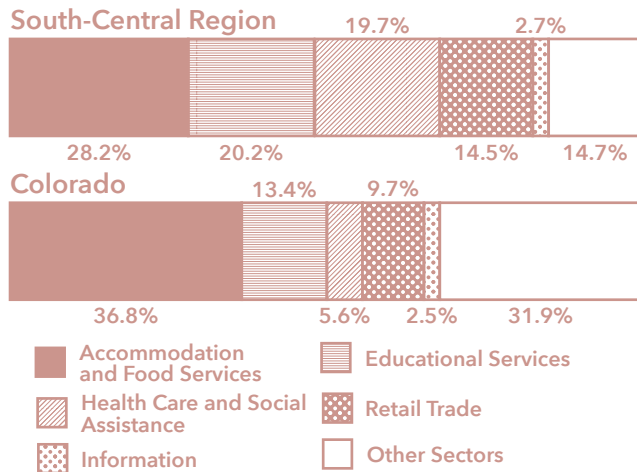
30.1%
No Internet



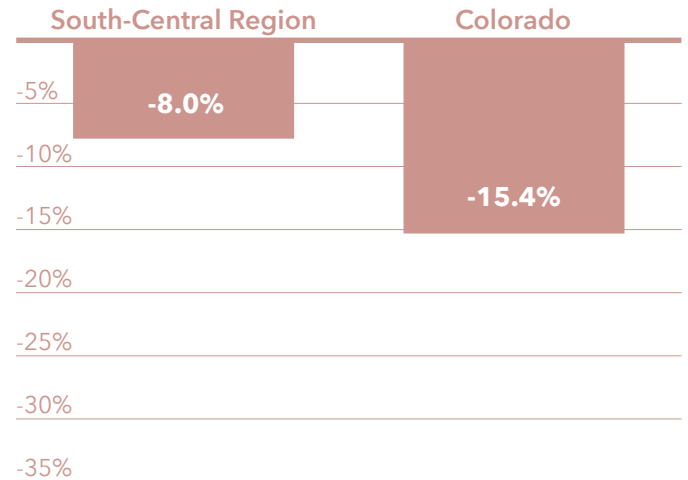
SOUTH-CENTRAL REGION

Alamosa • Conejo • Costilla • Mineral • Rio Grande • Saguache

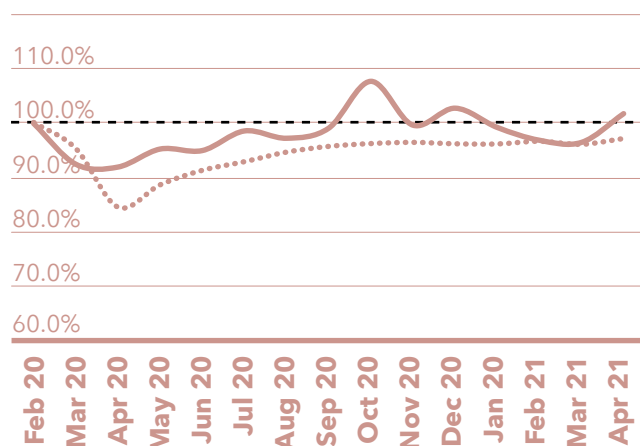
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



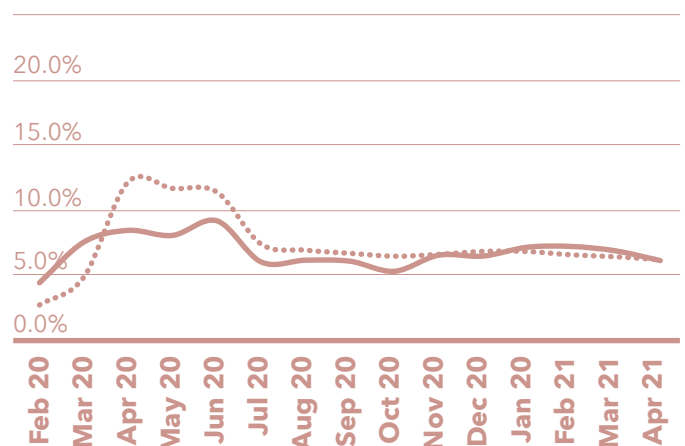
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



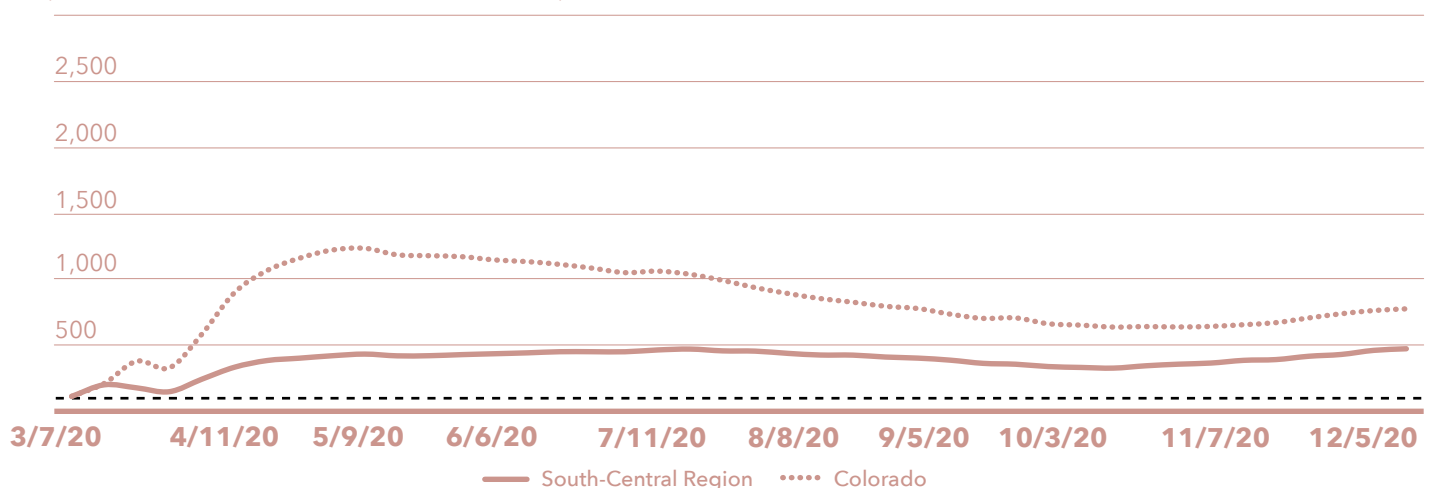
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)





SOUTHEAST REGION

Baca • Bent • Crowley • Huerfano • Kiowa • Las Animas • Otero • Prowers

Workforce Demographics

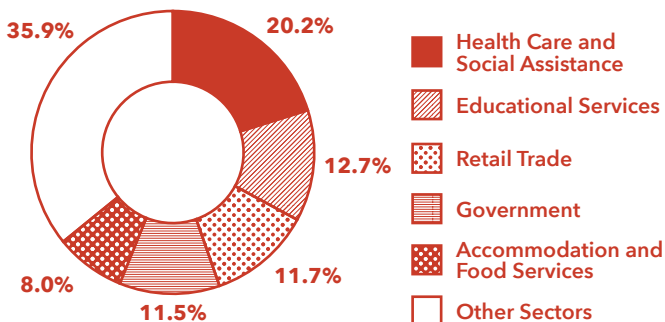


34.8%
Population
25 to 54 years old

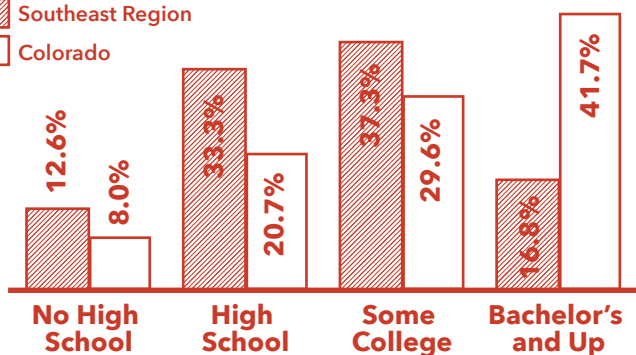


51.3%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

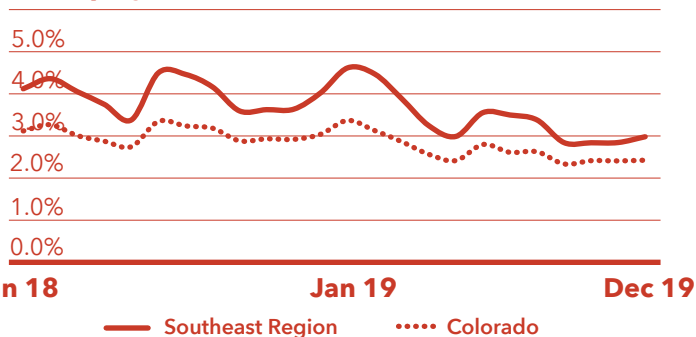
Employment by Sector



■ Southeast Region
□ Colorado



Unemployment Rate



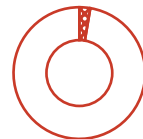
Literacy and Numeracy



62.3%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

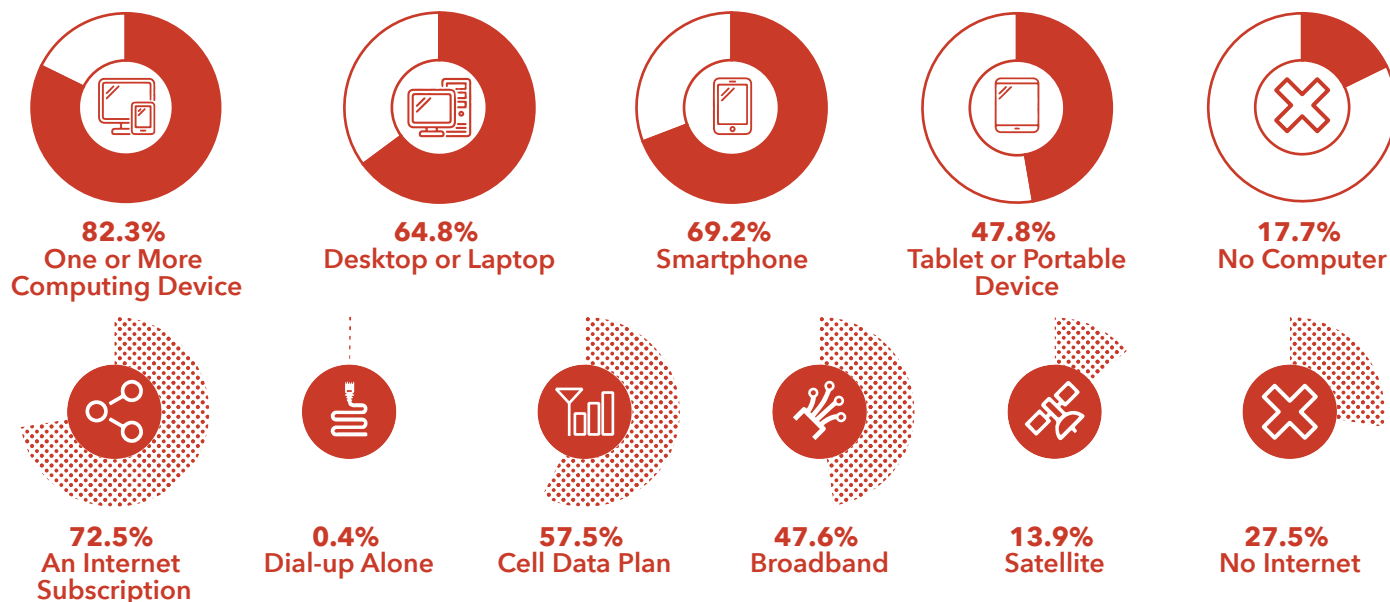


71.9%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



2.7%
Households with limited English language proficiency

Digital Access, by Household

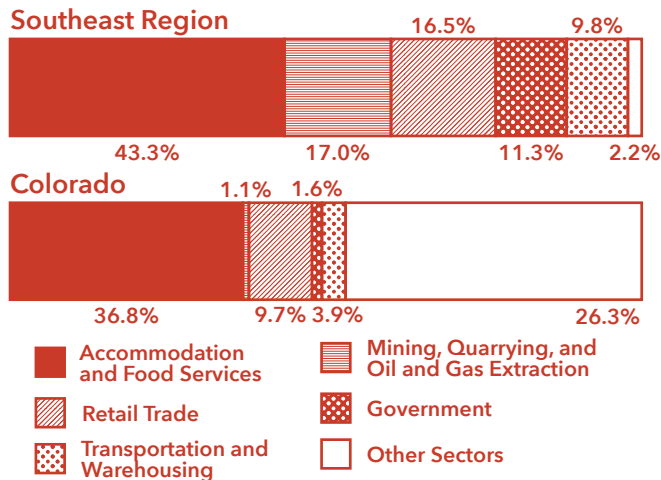




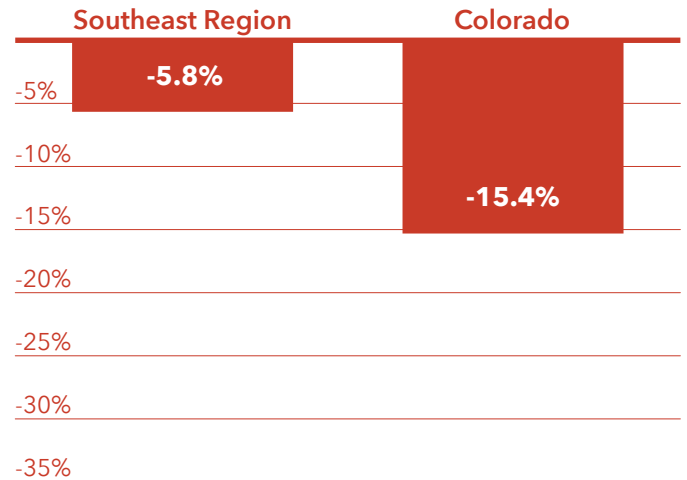
SOUTHEAST REGION

Baca • Bent • Crowley • Huerfano • Kiowa • Las Animas • Otero • Prowers

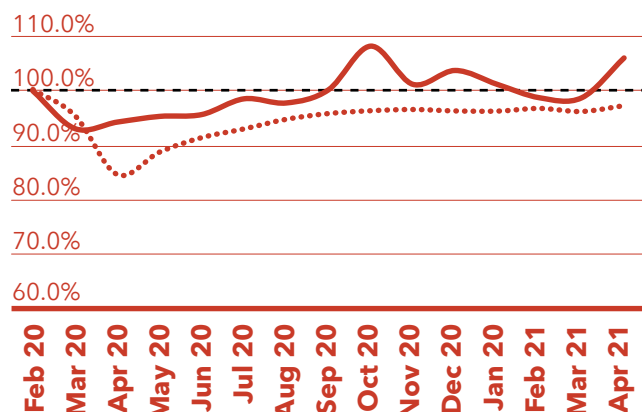
Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020



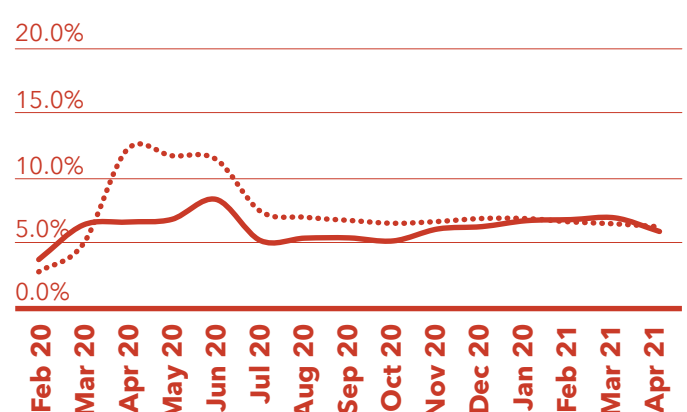
Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020



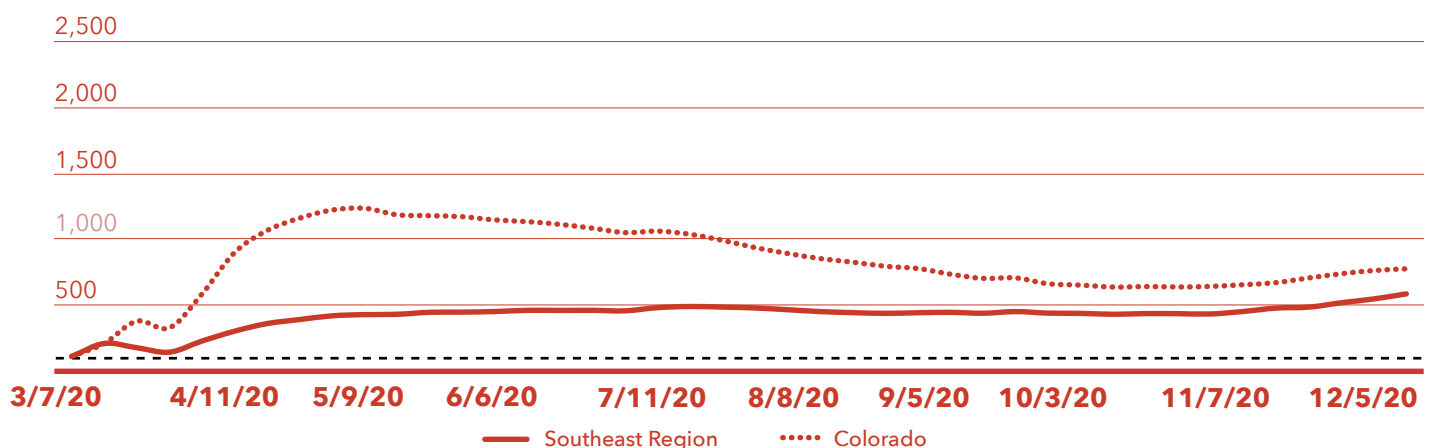
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



South-Centra/Southeast Interview Notes

Interview Date: December 30, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- The types of jobs impacted during COVID 19 were in diverse sectors including restaurants and accommodations; medical offices; local businesses; public schools and community colleges; agriculture and agricultural industry jobs; and ranching businesses.
- Health and medical service jobs were amongst the most common ones to be restored early in 2021, and workforce staff reported significant difficulties filling these jobs due to ongoing safety fears related to the pandemic since many of those who lost their jobs are older workers
- There is a demand for remote workers in some industries, and workers are limited in their abilities to apply for and successfully perform these jobs due to inadequate digital access in areas of connectivity and equipment as well as skills and comfort using technology.
- Jobs in agriculture and ranching are often not filled as young workers in this region often leave the area for more opportunities available in urban areas
- There are different training opportunities leading to credentials at Lamar and Trinidad Community Colleges. There are active efforts to recruit youth in local schools for these types of career options
- There is a general regional concern about the aging workforce, the loss of younger workers, and the minimal influx of new economic activity into

the area

- There are also proposed closures of one or two privately operated prisons due to the state working to not support these institutions and ongoing political concerns related to funding private prisons with public funds

Dynamics of the Region

- 11 counties each with County Commissioners so creating continuity and consistency of training, education and workforce opportunities is challenging
- The region covers a large geographical area that includes many diverse communities, attitudes, needs and priorities, and income levels
- There are few economic development activities planned for this region to bring new job opportunities, revenues and new residents, and to encourage the newer generations of the region to stay and build new businesses
- Core amenities needed by every region to adequately support the residents are long distances from each other and hard to access by the residents. Examples include full service hospitals, medical clinics, vaccination sites, libraries, childcare centers, eldercare facilities and youth leadership programs (plus many others). These dynamics have a significant influence on how local residents plan their time and make important choices and decisions accordingly.
- This region has significant challenges with Broadband and internet access, unreliable cell phone coverage, and numerous residents who do not have adequate equipment, digital skills and trust of the technology.

New Opportunities - Economic Development and Training

- There are few new economic development projects planned in the context of new manufacturing or storage facilities; expanded construction projects or the building of new hospitalities and other

institutions (prisons, etc.)

- It is anticipated that funding from the CARES Act, the Colorado Recovery Plan and eventually the Rescue Act will be invested into expanding and improving the electrical and energy grid; Broadband and cell towers and powerlines; road and bridge repairs; and basic infrastructure maintenance that is already planned. Each of these are expected to generate new work opportunities.
- Despite declining numbers of individuals in the workforce, jobs in the health services, retail, accommodation, recreation, restaurants and bars, and residential facilities are restoring jobs and hiring new employees.

Labor Force Participation

- During our research we discovered that the rate of unemployment was lower in the Southeast region than many of the other rural regions. Further review revealed that the region was less impacted during the pandemic with business closures, loss of jobs, and UI applications, and thus sustained a more consistent Labor Participation Rate.
- One influence on the labor participation rate is the age demographics of the region. As the overall population is growing older, the younger residents are leaving the region for multiple reasons. During the pandemic, the impact of health and safety concerns has magnified the reluctance of older workers to return to jobs or find new employment, and this has an overall influence on the region.

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- The region will receive formulaic funds depending on how the funds are allocated. For sure there will be funds available to address expansion of Broadband and digital needs as described above, and some funds to provide increased and responsive access to vaccinations for the pandemic.
- It is anticipated there will be rescue funds available to assist restaurants and their workers due to the many hardships they have faced during the

last 14 months.

- Additional funds may be available to assist renters and homeowners who have been negatively impacted during the pandemic.
- Rescue funds may also be available to the region to expand numbers of healthcare workers who are able to provide ongoing vaccinations who are isolated where they live
- Many of the decisions related to distribution of funds are still being determined



UPPER ARKANSAS

Chaffee • Custer • Fremont • Park

Workforce Demographics

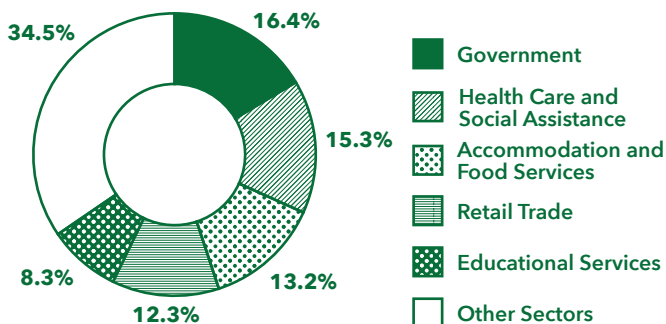


38.8%
Population
25 to 54 years old

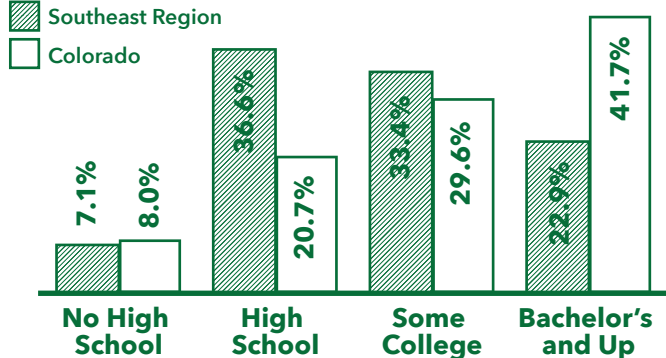


45.4%
Labor Force
Participation Rate

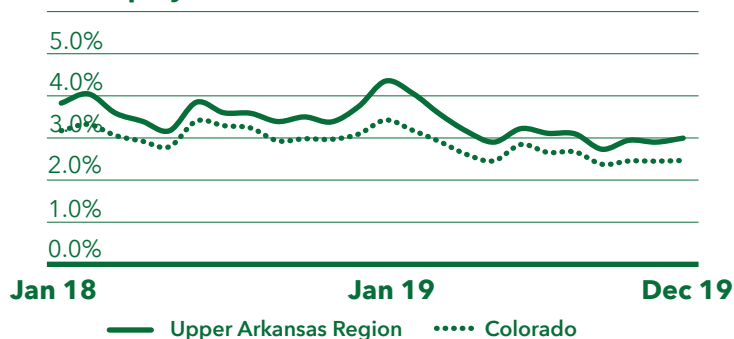
Employment by Sector



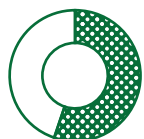
■ Southeast Region
□ Colorado



Unemployment Rate



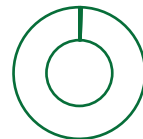
Literacy and Numeracy



55.2%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with information and ideas in text

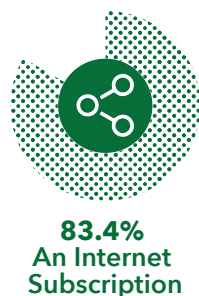
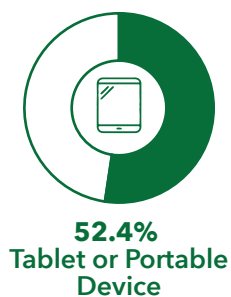
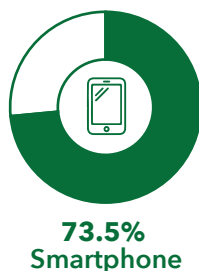
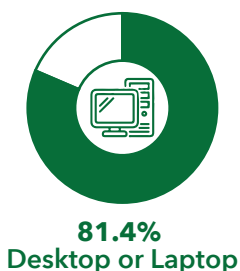


66.3%
Share of adults not proficient or approaching proficiency with working with mathematical information and ideas



0.5%
Households with limited English language proficiency

Digital Access, by Household



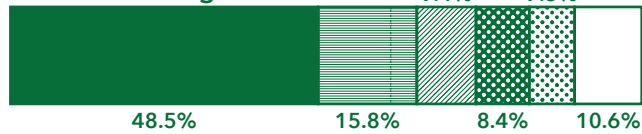


UPPER ARKANSAS

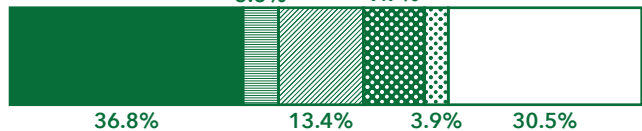
Chaffee • Custer • Fremont • Park

Jobs Lost by Sector, Q1 to Q2 2020

Rural Resort Region

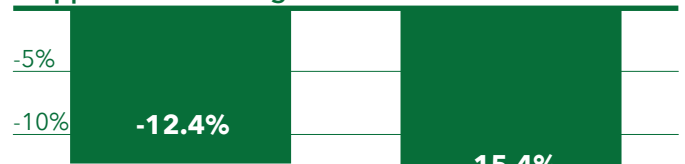


Colorado

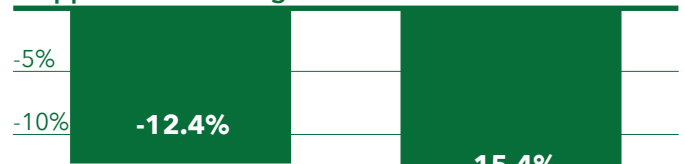


Decline in Employment Feb 2020 to Apr 2020

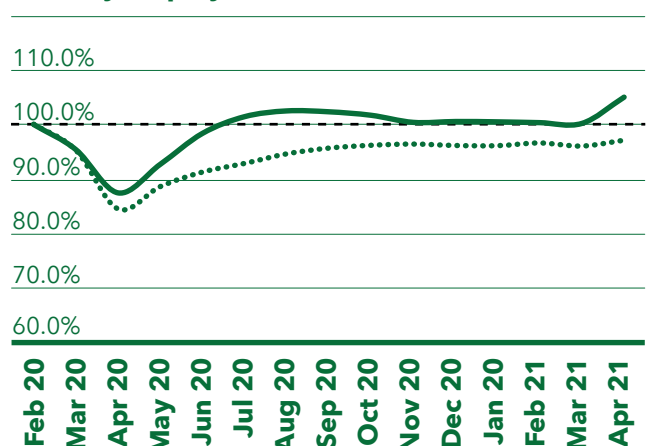
Upper Arkansas Region



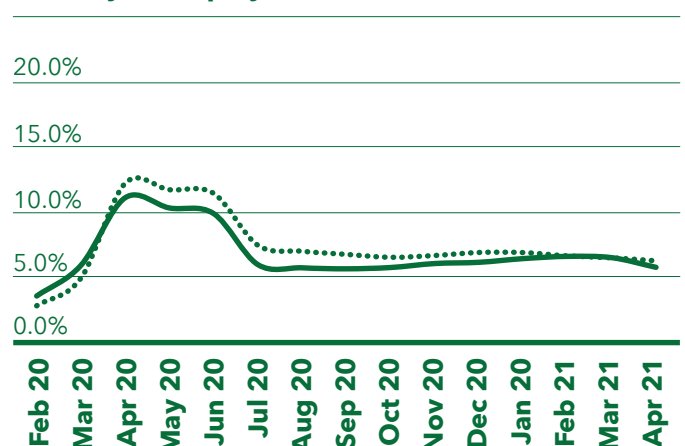
Colorado



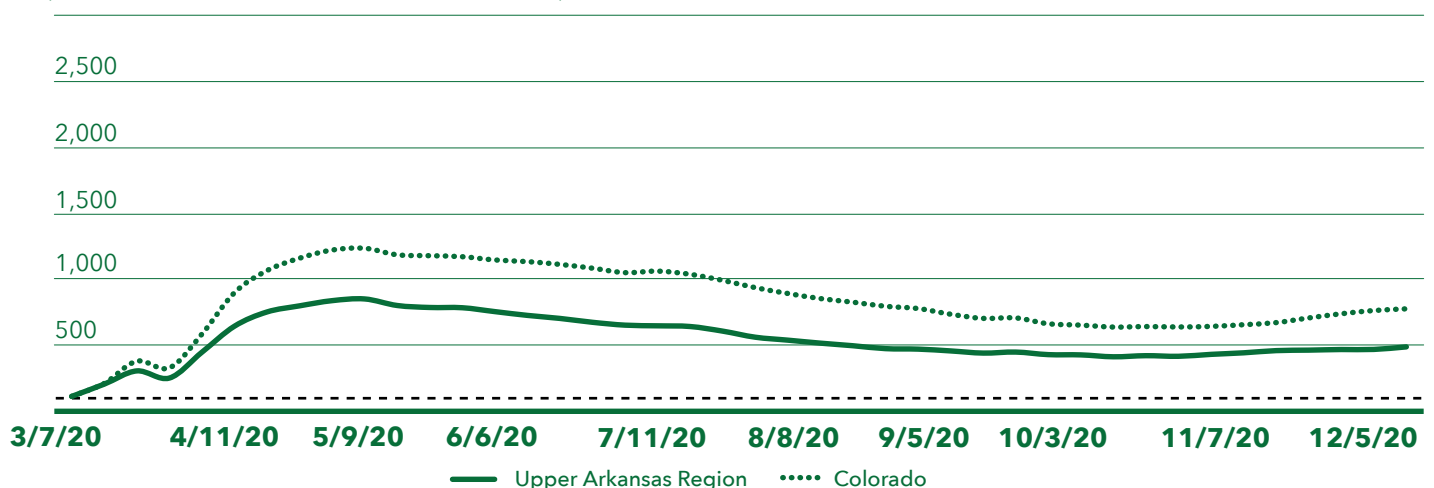
Monthly Employment as Share of Feb 2020



Monthly Unemployment Rate



Change in Unemployment Insurance Continued Claims Filed from Week of March 7, 2020 (100 = continued claims filed in 3/7/20)



Upper Arkansas Interview Notes

Interview Date: November 6, 2020

The following bullets summarize key points that were raised during our interviews with stakeholders in this region about the conditions and trends they've experienced during the pandemic. In many cases, these key points were not corroborated by other stakeholders or verified by data. As such, these are not intended to represent a comprehensive description of the region's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Returning/Restored Jobs

- There are different partnerships that have been developed with the local community college for youth and young adults in different apprenticeships and internships – these have created access to paid jobs for youth who are graduating from high school
- Jobs in the local business community were less impacted in this region than some others across the state, so these jobs have continued to be available, at a reduced number due to statewide capacity limits
- Health service positions have continued to need employees
- Due to the number of prison facilities in the area, there are continuous jobs of diverse types available
- Jobs in the construction field have continued to be available, and for non-native English speakers many of the hiring opportunities tend to be with bilingual contractors

Dynamics of the Region

- Having a significant number of state and federal prisons impacts the economy of the region on a regular basis. This is true for who comes to and visits the region, and for the types of jobs that are sought by people moving to the region, and in some cases the individuals who have finished serving their time and are now seeking employment. There is also some controversy with the

debate over publicly run prisons versus prisons operated by the government and how this issue will be addressed in the future. The outcome of this debate could impact considerable numbers of jobs

- The region encompasses diverse geography and communities, including different groups of Latinx families and ones from other cultural backgrounds
- Inconsistent or non-existent access to Broadband and internet services have a significant negative impact on Coloradans in this region – local residents and business-people have been pursuing better Broadband access for many years
- Other jobs in the region include some focused on tourism and recreational visitors

New Opportunities – Economic Development and Training

- There is a significant influx of digital equity activities, many of which are based at a tech campus in the town of Fremont. At this campus numerous activities have begun in partnership with the local high schools to create career pathways for students before graduating that continue into college courses. This has included a partnership with Pueblo Community College as well.
- The focus on possible tech careers include remote employment as well as learning tech skills needed in advanced construction, agricultural and government careers.
- New state and Federal investment in Broadband and related digital equity resources will have a positive impact on this region, including its early digital development activities

Labor Force Participation

- Based on the interview with local workforce staff, it did not seem that local labor force participation rate was impacted as significantly as other regions in 2020. However, the levels of unemployment and UI applications increased

dramatically in late 2020 and early 2021.

New Opportunities - Federal Rescue Funds

- It is anticipated that the region will experience positive impact from some of the state and Federal rescue funds related to increasing vaccination and testing capacity in the health system; rental and mortgage assistance targeted at saving residents' housing; targeted funds to assist local small businesses including restaurants and bars; and funds focused on immediate cash assistance.
- Investment in Broadband and related, required activities that are described previously will have a positive impact on the region now and in the future

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES AND OBSERVATIONS DURING COVID-19

The project team interviewed over 60 stakeholders working around the state in order to get a better picture of how conditions changed as a result of COVID-19. While the quantitative data gave us a good start, our goal was to provide additional context to the numbers through stories and anecdotes gathered from those working closely with unemployed Coloradans. The general topics of this section include: Statewide and regional themes, digital equity and inclusion, types and duration of disruption from the pandemic, regional economic development opportunities, current training and growth opportunities, potential of apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities, and changes in demographics and priorities of jobseekers.

Statewide and Regional Themes

Throughout the interviews and in reviewing early data sets, certain themes emerged that were revealing and indicative of some of the statewide influences as well as the more regional ones. These themes included statewide themes, rural themes, and urban/suburban themes.

Statewide Themes

- The staff of most workforce centers, especially ones in rural workforce areas, spent the majority of their time between April and August 2020 assisting individuals to apply for unemployment insurance benefits and problem-solving related issues. Out of necessity, this meant less time to assist with job development and placement, along with identifying new work opportunities due to the impacts of the pandemic.
- Training opportunities have primarily been in areas of work readiness, computer skills advancement, and job search basics in the new economy of COVID-19.
- There have been limited numbers of individuals who lost jobs during the pandemic who have entered formal credential or degree programs due to many reasons including not meeting eligibility criteria or not qualifying for financial assistance, limited remote access and comfort with online training, and poor knowledge of available resources. The one exception was acquiring a truck driving credential and commercial driver's license.
- Digital equity and literacy issues included access to broadband and other “into the home” connectivity, comfort with and trust of technology on numerous levels, lack of skills to use technology ranging from how to turn on and log into a device to being able to join different conference platforms or perform work activities from home, and limited access to coaching and other assistance with using different types of technology due to stay at home orders and social distancing guidelines.
- Limited ability to place unemployed workers into “work-based learning” opportunities has had a significant impact on many, including those with lower formal skills.
- Different stakeholders observed the fear of losing unemployment insurance benefits and not making as much while working was a factor in people choosing to return to work.
- Nearly all those interviewed felt that a larger fear among unemployed workers was transferring to another sector, as well as facing all of the unknowns involved with such a transition in the midst of a pandemic.
- Most stakeholders agreed that the new opportunities that will be available through recovery and stimulus funds, including those available to small businesses, will make a large difference in the numbers and types of jobs that will be available in all regions across the state.
- Most stakeholders reported a significant increase in the incidence of mental health challenges among both employed and unemployed Coloradans, such as anxiety and depression, that

impacted work searches as well as performance.

Rural Themes

- Each rural region reported limited new business and economic development activities between April 2020 and February 2021. Some minimal activities have begun with the stimulus funds distributed to each county. There are numerous discussions in rural counties about investing locally in broadband which would create new job opportunities.
- Mountain resort areas had a better than expected summer season during 2020, but those jobs decreased during the fall and ski season had reduced opportunities due to strict guidelines from the state and CDC related to COVID-19.
- Other rural regions have been able to place people into local jobs in retail and small businesses, and in some cases different health care positions. Rural regions have experienced migrating workforce members leaving to pursue better work opportunities, thus leaving a number of aging jobseekers.
- Digital issues are huge in all rural communities ranging from access to broadband, affordable connectivity to the home, public access to high-speed and reliable internet services, and the opportunity to obtain equipment and skills needed for daily access to services as well as applying for employment or enrolling in different types of training. These issues intensified greatly as a result of the pandemic, which highlighted the need for immediate attention and solutions.

Urban and Suburban Themes

- Replacing lost numbers of jobs from the accommodation and food services sector has been an ongoing challenge for the urban areas along the Front Range. This includes training new workers on how to perform their duties in a way that complies with new expectations related to safety and strong hygienic practices.
- Identifying new job opportunities for these

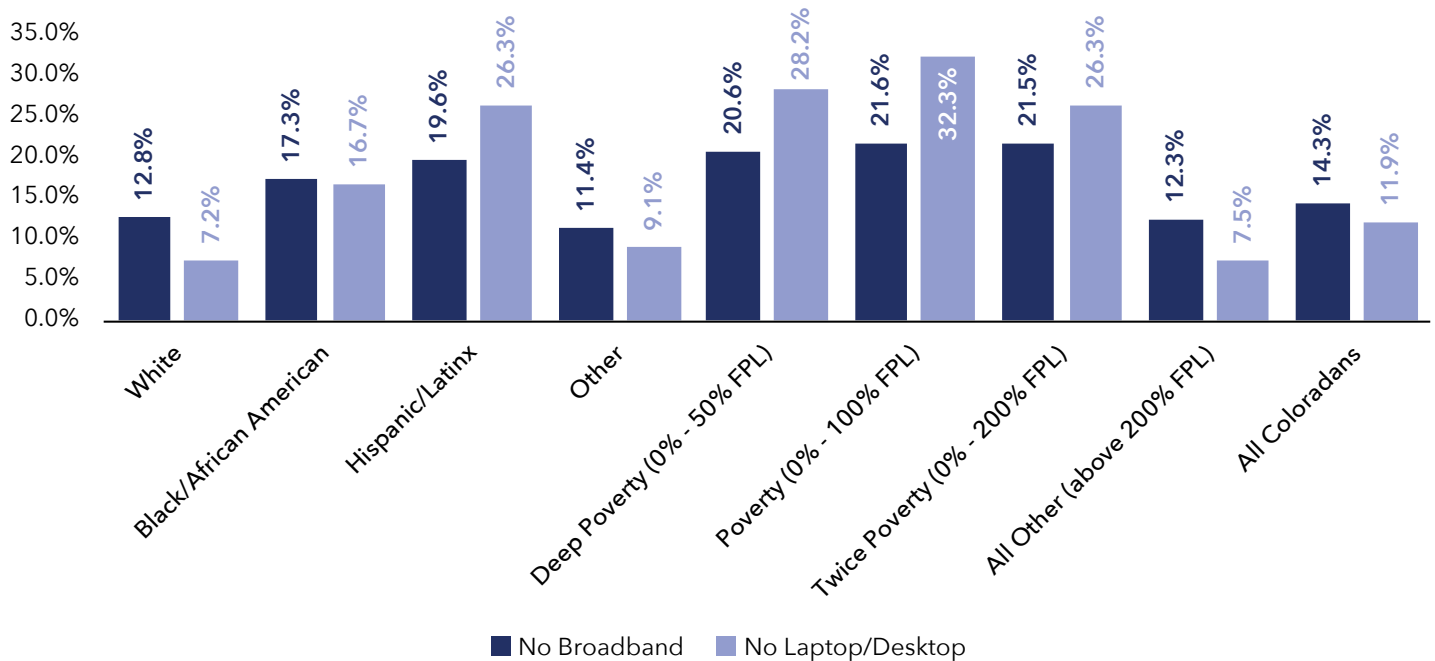
displaced workers has been very challenging as well due to diverse factors including ongoing restrictions due to the pandemic.

- Summer jobs in general were reduced greatly in 2020 due to heat, drought, record-setting wild-fires and surges of COVID-19.
- New job possibilities are being planned with an increased emphasis on ongoing safety practices, especially in the areas of health care services, all aspects of the travel and tourism industry, accommodation and food services jobs, and potentially more public gatherings for sports, the performing arts, and other arts and entertainment events.
- Impacts on non-native English speakers have been serious and sustained, with them often being the last applicants at essential jobs to be hired due to language proficiency
- Lack of work-based learning options has had significant impact on preventing unemployed workers from trying new job options to see if it's a good match for the worker. Reinstating and expanding these options as well as implementing diverse apprenticeship opportunities has created a sense of optimism in many local areas.

Digital Equity, Competency, and Literacy

It is difficult to emphasize enough the impact that digital literacy and competency issues have had in all regions of Colorado since the pandemic began, and these will continue as communities gradually re-open after the long periods of being closed at various levels. As the statewide quarantine began last spring, people in all communities realized that most transactions in life would rely heavily on having digital access. These transactions included most aspects of daily life: communicating with colleagues, loved ones and friends; applying for any types of assistance from government agencies and community organizations; interacting with health professionals; getting information for where and how to get tested for COVID-19; learning where possible job options might be during

Figure 23: Coloradans without Access to Broadband or Computers
Colorado, 2019 (by race/ethnicity and poverty status)



Note: "Other" race includes: Native American/Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, Asians, Other Race, and Two or More Races
Source: Colorado Center on Law and Policy analysis of 2019 1-Year ACS data; U.S. Census Bureau

the pandemic; assisting children and youth to join remote school each day; accessing news of all types including daily updates impacting personal lives (weather, school operation schedules and other information, communication from employers, health alerts, etc.) and numerous other examples.

In every interview that we had, the significance of digital issues of all types were a major factor in determining how individuals and families navigated the immense challenges of the past year. In rural communities where the presence of broadband as well as "into the home" connectivity is inconsistent and frequently not affordable, the pandemic has been incredibly stressful and caused new challenges. This issue has received substantial attention because of the critical needs of school-age children being able to attend classes and study "remotely" over the past year along with the need to access most emergency resources online, including unemployment insurance and SNAP. In our conversations, the serious pressure that was felt by the families of school children to provide adequate coaching, support and guidance to the children while also trying to sustain work at home, or to give up a current job in order to stay at home was hard

to describe in its magnitude. As one of many examples, parents of school-age children were tasked with providing support to access online learning portals, to navigate the different elements of the technology as well as the actual material, to help with absorbing the material, and to ensure that the equipment and connectivity for providing this education to their families were adequate and functional—all while trying to support their children through the incredible frustration and isolation that was felt by many young Coloradans during this time.

A core message for this project is the complexity of the digital equity issues for residents of all ages, and the extensive needs that exist for adults, especially ones living in marginalized communities and neighborhoods. Digital equity issues have been moderately addressed in normal times for residents who could not get good access at home through community resources including public libraries, workforce centers, community and recreation centers, public schools, coffee shops, and other public places with free access to wireless internet. During the pandemic, access to many of these places was totally limited or substantially restricted, leaving those with poor access

to computers and/or the internet without any other options. The reasons for limited access varied between regions of the state, but the end result was the same: individuals and families were unable to access the resources, opportunities, and important information they needed to survive and thrive.

The majority of our stakeholders reported how the diverse digital challenges facing many adults and parents in Colorado, include basic digital connectivity, equipment and security provisions, knowledge about how computers and cell phones work, trusting online or digital portals for sharing personal and sensitive information, daily use of different websites and platforms to meet basic needs, using computers to advance personal and work skills, and ultimately using computers and different software programs as an integral part of many jobs was totally overwhelming to a significant numbers of Coloradans. The ability of all residents to not only access and use technology effectively but to do so comfortably and with a sense of confidence varies. Another important distinction is that digital equity includes the ability to use technology for daily purposes such as sending communications, creating spreadsheets and documents, or collecting data, all important requirements of many jobs; and also requires people to increase and refine skills on a regular basis as employers “update” the technology and programs they use and ask their teams to keep pace with these. Additionally, a significant expectation that emerged during the pandemic and that was reported by each stakeholder was the ability of employees, individuals seeking health services, applicants for diverse benefits, and customers of all types to navigate complex, unique, and customized websites, portals and social conferencing sites. As a case in point, most employees who use a site such as Zoom, Teams or Google Meets experience daily challenges with having “stress or problem-free” meetings.

Digital issues are huge in all rural communities ranging from access to broadband, affordable connectivity to the home, public access to high-speed and reliable internet services and the opportunity to obtain equipment and skills needed for daily access to services as well as applying for employment or enrolling in different types of training. A significant amount of the input

we heard from rural workforce centers was the frustration of not having reliable broadband infrastructure or affordable fiber optic connectivity into homes, along with high quality service providers. Digital issues in urban and suburban communities are also significant and impactful on all parts of life for individuals who need to access information and resources, make contact with family and friends, pursue educational and training opportunities (asynchronous and classroom opportunities), submit applications to most types of jobs, have online interviews, and perform numerous job responsibilities online or digitally once employed.

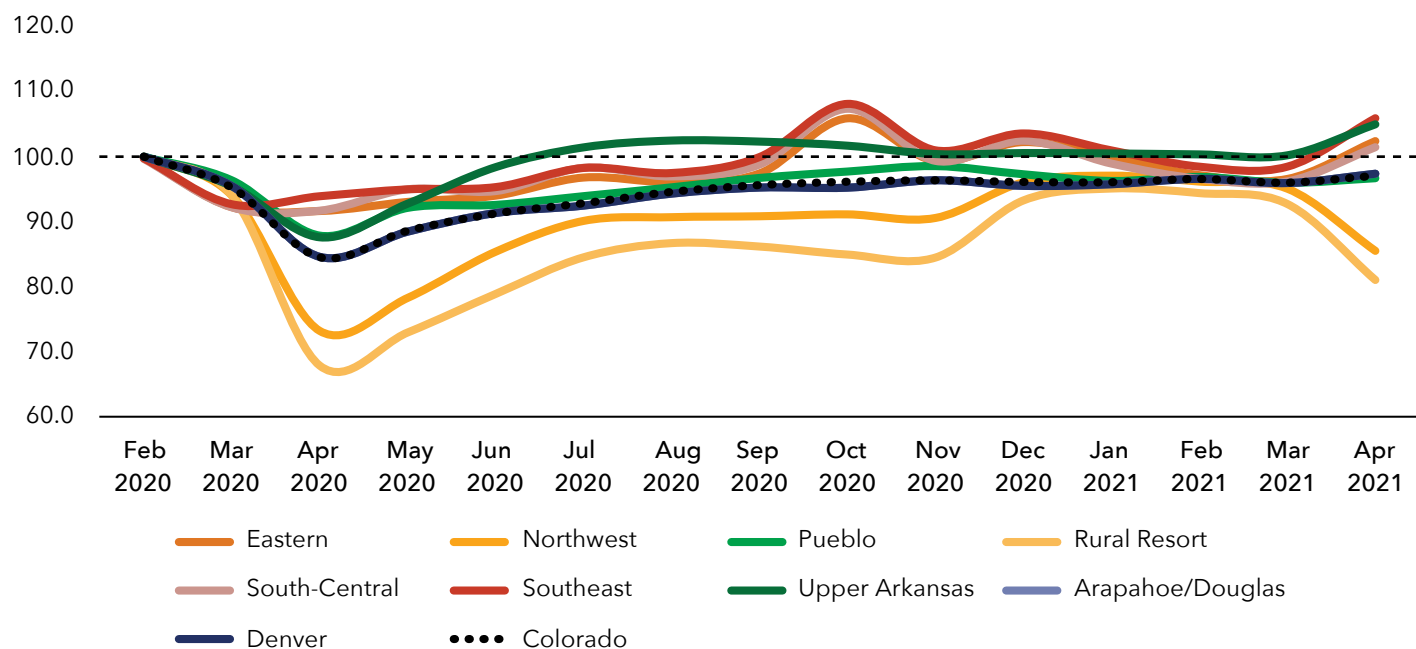
Types and Duration of Disruptions During the Pandemic

Throughout our interviews with the different regions we discovered that the impact and disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic has varied considerably. This depended on factors including local approaches to public health precautions such as face masking and social distancing; density of population that affected the rate of infection in different communities; types of primary businesses in each area; and the sorts of positions that were impacted temporarily or for the longer term.

In the Eastern region, the length of disruption was consistent with what was dictated by the state leadership but many stores and retail businesses began reopening when they were first allowed and generally earlier than in other parts of the state. In places such as Denver, Arapahoe, and Douglas counties, the level of disruption was significant and long-lasting for walk-in businesses and store fronts as well as restaurants and hotels, despite some relaxing of the restrictions during the summer months of 2020. However, businesses that were able to support employees working at home some or part of the times, and large retail and manufacturing sites implemented restrictions for the numbers of customers or hours of business, and generally operated at reduced levels for several months. Medical and health sites of many types seemed to reopen sooner than other businesses by implementing a combination of in-person and telehealth visits as well as rigorous safety and cleaning

Figure 24: Regional Employment Recovery

Colorado, February 2020 to April 2021



Note: Employment trends for the Denver and Arapahoe/Douglas regions mirror one another almost exactly

Source: LAUS, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

standards. The net result of the various practices has been that most regions were able to restore essential jobs and businesses by June of 2020 at a reduced rate and this process continued to increase through September, then began decreasing again with the onset of colder weather, holidays that induced surges of COVID-19, and smaller numbers of visitors to the state.

An interesting dynamic that CCLP discovered regarding the severity and duration of disruption was the intricate types of influences that impacted different regions. In addition to the ones described above, the demographics of a region including age and levels of education as well as digital access played a significant role, as did the overall approach that businesses took to survive. Businesses that were able to pivot to a stronger online presence or cultivate more options for take-out food were able to stay operational, sustain jobs for its employees, and in some cases cultivate a more diverse customer base. A favorite example of this is Santiagos, a burrito establishment with locations across Metro Denver, that was able to sustain a very strong “take out” business (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and expand its presence as a vendor to many

outlets. Between June 2020 and March 2021 each of the five sites visited reported sales that were consistent with pre-COVID levels. Another example is a number of local breweries and distilleries who began making hand sanitizer during the pandemic in order to retain some of their workforce.

Regional Economic Development

The economic forecasts of each region varied, and one major factor was the level of development and investment that was underway prior to the onset of the pandemic. An example of this was the number of new construction sites that were planned or begun prior to March 2020, and that were mostly restarted once the most extreme restrictions were relaxed. A majority of these were in the Metro Denver area or along the I-25 and I-70 corridors, and once they started operating again jobs in the construction trades were some of the first ones to be reinstated and brought back to the work site from a furlough status. Similarly, interviews with the Denver and Arapahoe-Douglas regions indicated that sectors that had been growing prior to COVID-19 and were directly serving the public were tending to reopen and hiring new workers more quickly. In rural

regions including the Southeast and South-Central regions, local businesses were reopening in order to serve the immediate community, but were not aware of new economic development activities and projects that were in planning for the region. According to the Office of the Future of Work, the two most common types of job postings listed through CDLE from May 2020 to April 2021 were for truck driving and nursing positions.

It is anticipated that the new state funds that will be available for different regions across Colorado with the potential adoption and implementation of the Governor's Recovery Plan and federal funds that will be received from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 will have an impact on all regions. One anticipated area of impact will be a substantial investment in broadband across Colorado, including new training and job opportunities for individuals who will be tasked with expanding this important element of the state's infrastructure.

Because of the magnitude of the statewide shutdown, it has been difficult to glean what types of economic growth and forecasting may be emerging in the last couple of months. The previously mentioned funds that will be available for supporting and stimulating the economy will hopefully have a positive impact on most regions in Colorado, and will probably initially provide an economic boost to such sectors as construction and its ancillary industries, the expansion of broadband and other aspects of increasing digital access to Colorado residents, and an ongoing increase of diverse positions and opportunities in the health and medical sector.

Training and Growth Opportunities

Throughout the interviews with diverse stakeholders, the potential training and growth opportunities evolved and changed over time based on the current status of the pandemic and the level of job openings available in specific businesses and work sites at a given time. The dynamics of available training opportunities were impacted by the current level of restrictions due to COVID, and also access to the training

itself in terms of how the courses were structured and delivered.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed by the team shared the discomfort numerous participants had with attending training remotely, and most of these participants were waiting to pursue specific skills course and potential credentials until they are able to attend class in person. This seemed to be true in many special populations, such as ones that had existing mental and behavioral health conditions, limited English speakers, and older job seekers and ones with different disabilities where digital challenges added more difficulties to the possibility of pursuing online training.

In rural regions the ability of unemployed individuals to pursue new training options for alternative careers was dampened by digital access to learn remotely, resistance to remote learning as described above, poor access to transportation for commuting to in-person classes, limited options for safe and affordable child care, and increased responsibilities at home with children and family elders.

For those in rural and urban communities who were already in training or academic classes, provisions were available to resume training remotely until access was less restricted. Some of the types of training that seemed to be in demand or may be in the future included medical technical specialists of various types (medical and dental assistants, phlebotomists, x-ray techs), forest service preservation, and fire prevention. One of the most popular and accessible training opportunities that was requested and obtained during the pandemic was truck driving (open road and local) as the demand for shipping and delivery exploded.

The preferred types of training for many individuals had frequently included having opportunities for work-based learning, often integrated with in-class lessons for the best overall experience. Work-based learning was elevated as a core training opportunity in the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act in 2014 (WIOA), and had been an important approach for supporting low-skilled workers and those needing to change careers for various reasons by receiving active experience at work sites requiring new skills. Two key elements of work-based learning include

providing individuals the opportunity to work at an operating worksite with on-site supervision; and recruiting employers who like to offer this opportunity to job-seekers, are able and willing to provide on-site skills training, and understand the value of seeing someone's work potential during the training period. This process also creates stronger relationships between workforce center staff and the employer, or in many cases the staff of community-based organizations.

As restrictions and closures occurred beginning in March of 2020 and continued for many business sectors over the following 9 to 10 months, one of many repercussions was the decline of work-based learning opportunities. This lack of access to active training opportunities had significant impact on the ability of unemployed workers to try new work positions and gain different skills, and thus delayed the return to work for many individuals.

It has been reported in April and May 2021 that these opportunities have begun to reappear as businesses are hiring more workers, opening their services to the public, and expressing more interest in hosting work-based learning opportunities. At the same time, there have been ongoing conversations and efforts between policy-makers at the state, and there is new resolve for the integration of classroom learning with work-based learning that can lead to new skill attainment and potentially different credentials, especially for workers with limited or restricted work experience. For many individuals who have been displaced from jobs during the pandemic, these new training possibilities will hope to provide additional meaningful and relevant opportunities.

Apprenticeships

A major source of opportunities for paid training that were experiencing growth prior to the pandemic and continues to recruit new students were apprenticeships related to the construction trades, including ones that were needed in diverse warehouse settings. These opportunities were especially present in the Metro Denver area, where there were numerous construction sites (including highways, overpasses and bridges) that were halted for the early part of the pandemic, but

resumed operations last spring through the summer, fall, and winter months. Several of the stakeholders that were interviewed reported individuals who were reentering the community after being incarcerated were able to pursue apprenticeships in sheet metal, drywall, carpentry and roofing, and also obtained certifications in forklift driving as an interim skill. In addition to individuals with justice involvement who found positive training and employment options in the construction trades, different youth and young adult programs continued and expanded opportunities for high school and post-secondary students to move directly into a variety of the trades, including ones requiring longer periods of training but leading to greater wage levels such as welding, steel workers, electricians and high-rise glaziers.

In addition to the construction trades, new apprenticeships in areas such as different advanced manufacturing positions and handling hazardous material had been approved in Colorado. During the early phases of the pandemic, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment applied for and received emergency assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor and the funds were made available through the various workforce regions to support new apprenticeship opportunities as contact tracers and outreach workers that could lead to new opportunities in the health field.

Throughout the interviews with Workforce Area staff the popularity and relevance of work-based learning as well as more formal apprenticeships emerged as a major focus that workforce areas are using to assist young adults and adults to enter and re-enter the workforce. In the urban areas that were researched, the creation of work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities has been increasing since the launching of the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act in 2014 and the appreciation of the value of these types of training experiences increased during the pandemic when they were not available due to health restrictions.

As the regions of Colorado are reopening the reliance on these "earn as you learn" opportunities has expanded, especially in the urban regions as the types of apprenticeships have grown, and the interest of employers and sectors in sponsoring formal apprenticeships and

more rigorous work-based learning has intensified. As a reflection on this expanded interest in apprenticeships, the state legislature passed a bill creating a Colorado Apprenticeship Office that will be located in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and will have greater ability to approve and certify apprenticeships that relate most directly to the labor demands of local economies. Some innovative examples of new apprenticeships which have been formally certified or are in the process include Early Childhood Development, Clerical and Administrative Assistants, Financial Analysts, Home Health Aide, Case Manager, and several banking positions. Expanded work-based learning opportunities are also being developed in partnership with public agency offices, community organizations, chambers of commerce and their members, child-care and senior centers, and different types of health service facilities that offer immediate employment as well as diverse career pathways. Discussions regarding how to integrate and link work-based learning opportunities with diverse credentials that are offered through the community colleges and other adult education partners are also occurring at the regional and local level as well as between CDLE and the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE).

The increased interest and investment in work-based learning and diverse apprenticeship opportunities is being advanced due to the emergency and recovery funds that have come to Colorado or are coming in the near future and the intent at the state level to invest considerably in workforce training, apprenticeships and overall employment services. Other future opportunities that are being developed as potential apprenticeships include different career tracks in digital technology, ranging from data entry and interpretation to sound engineering (including technology used for film and voice over production); diverse infrastructure positions including installation of broadband and other electrical systems that bring basic utilities to Colorado residents in all regions; human and civil service work performing different functions of government; and different elements of banking.

Ultimately, the diversification of apprenticeships as paid “learning while earning” opportunities will offer

several positive benefits to jobseekers, employers, and communities as a whole as Colorado emerges from the extreme impacts of the pandemic. It can also provide positive options to potential workers in the future. An emphasis of apprenticeships is the importance of paying workers while they learn and also offering benefits along with strong supervision and training.

Personal Experience of Workers Impacted by Pandemic

The impact of COVID 19 required individuals who lost their jobs to identify emergency and intermediate plans for surviving such a difficult and critical experience. Individuals and families were forced to make abrupt changes in their daily lives and pursue new approaches for surviving: researching and accessing emergency resources such as SNAP, housing assistance, food from food banks and community programs, and other cash assistance as available; identifying personal eligibility for unemployment insurance and seeking support for submitting applications; negotiating with landlords and banks to try and preserve housing as income and resources disappeared; finding ways to make money in any possible way such as doing chores for neighbors, or obtaining interim jobs such as driving for Uber or delivering for Door Dash; accessing assistance and opportunities available through public agencies including workforce centers and SNAP Employment and Training programs; requesting support of all types from community organizations, including transitional and temporary employment, food and transportation assistance, crisis counseling and mental health support, and eviction prevention resources; and learning to navigate digital technology and its overwhelming complexities including needs for accessible equipment and connectivity, adequate skills and related coaching to meet minimal needs (including finding public resources that helped with digital access) and learning ways to overcome fears about technology in order to support children learning remotely and to pursue many resources needed for survival (location and hours of food banks, etc.). The majority of stakeholders interviewed acknowledged a significant rise in participants (and colleagues) reporting an increased need for mental and behavioral health support due to the onset of depression, anxiety,

stress, substance abuse, and other behaviors tied to overall wellness, or lack thereof.

Issues of Job Equity

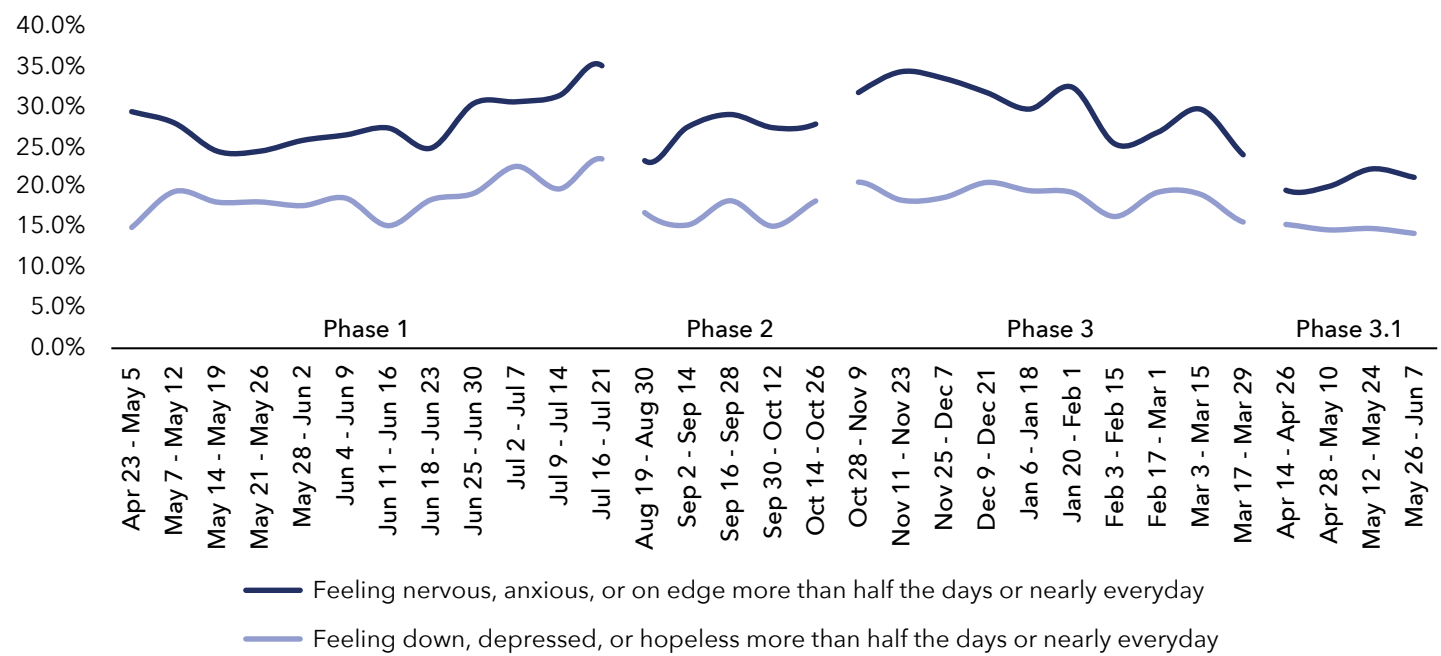
A real and difficult dynamic throughout the past year that was reported consistently from all stakeholders was the inherent issues of inequity that were present as individuals lost their jobs for reasons addressed throughout this report, and that became increasingly present as individuals tried to find new jobs or were fighting to be reinstated in jobs as they were restored at different businesses. Workers who had been eligible for different positions and hired favorably prior to the pandemic were often the first to be furloughed or laid off, and then last to be reinstated if jobs were restored.

Organizations with specialized services told very consistent stories about the diverse difficulties their participants were facing during the pandemic overall. Safe jobs that paid a living wage were hard to come by. Stakeholders described how some of the challenges are due to personal concerns related to safety in work environments due to the potential exposure to COVID and the need for all employers to develop and enforce

rigorous safety compliance. Participants are nervous about competing for jobs, having health insurance if they begin working, experiencing a “cliff effect” that could leave them without adequate support and income when they return to work, and the stress of remote applications, learning how to do online interviews and hiring, and feeling that they are at a disadvantage due to their specific challenges.

Some employers and the jobs they are hiring for have also perpetuated inequities and these have been exacerbated during the pandemic as jobseekers are required to access digital technology to initiate most job applications. Since more than 15.5 percent of Colorado households do not have a desktop or laptop computer, and 12.0 percent lack reliable internet connectivity of any kind (including cellular data plans), applying for jobs has been much more problematic than prior to COVID. Individuals with limited English skills or lower literacy have had less access to different jobs and opportunities to demonstrate skills through internships or work-based learning and have also been judged based on these limitations rather than on ability to perform the specific job. The social impacts of COVID including reduced

Figure 25: Share of Coloradans Reporting Poor Mental Health
Colorado, April 23, 2020 to June 7, 2021 (Coloradans 18 years and up)



Note: Data collection for the Household Pulse Survey was conducted in phases beginning in April 23, 2020.
Source: Household Pulse Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

public transportation, limited access to general public health, reduced childcare possibilities, the need for parents to be at home with children as they attend school remotely, and the huge inequities presented through digital equity issues have all had a significant impact on the ability of diverse jobseekers to obtain and retain employment. The pervasive concern about exposure to COVID-19 in so many essential jobs and most positions that had contact with the public has been more impactful than may be known at this time. Work support issues, including availability and affordability of reliable and safe childcare, accessible public transit, and the rise in gasoline prices are also having an effect. It was reported by all stakeholders how much that factor has been influential to how jobseekers proceed in their job search, and how employers have raised wages, potential benefit packages and added additional incentives to increase their access to eligible and available workers.

Migration of the Workforce

We heard from several rural communities how they are witnessing young adults and their families moving to more urban areas (Metro Denver and cities such as Grand Junction and Ft. Collins) which is resulting in the workforce of the rural regions being older and aging. This has had a “ripple” effect as older workers in these regions have been hesitant to pursue jobs in sectors such as health services of all types due to fears related to safety. The migration of the workforce has also existed in rural resort areas where many educated workers had located there to enjoy the rewards of the diverse recreational opportunities available and were able to support themselves by working in the accommodation and food/beverage sectors. As these sectors have been hit significantly over the last year in many ways, these workers have been forced to find different job options, and have frequently had to move even temporarily to survive.

Changes in Job Availability

Job availability during the past year has vacillated regularly, and has been consistently impacted by the incidence of COVID 19. This was due to the different levels of restrictions that existed in each region,

along with the economic stability of each business and their ability to hire new employees or support staff who were still employed. Nearly all businesses, agencies, and organizations were faced with significant economic challenges to review the status of their economic stability and their subsequent ability to sustain current workforce levels. Numerous businesses relied heavily on receiving support from the different relief and recovery funds made available from legislation at the state and federal levels. Their ability to sustain their workforce combined with the ongoing presence of a customer base dictated the availability of different jobs. An intriguing example of how this evolved was the emergence of many jobs in community organizations, especially those providing emergency and recovery-related services due to the funds that were distributed to each state, to the different state regions, and to individual organizations. A different example is the growth of self-employment as an increasing number of workers have decided they want to work for themselves and have started their own businesses including landscaping, cleaning and sanitizing services.

During the last six to nine months diverse organizations in the 9 regions studied in this project reported increasing their staff by 15–20% due to the many new or expanded programs that were in place to address the tremendous needs of each community during this time of true duress. These organizations are continuing to experience growth due to the ongoing need for assistance and support of all types during these challenging times.

The Role of Unemployment Insurance

The role of unemployment insurance (UI) in this pandemic has been pervasive and complex. Throughout the interviews with stakeholders, the importance of UI to workers losing their jobs because of COVID or who were unemployed and still eligible for the increased federal UI amount had a significant impact on how individuals weathered the pandemic. For those who qualified for UI provided during the pandemic, and were able to apply for and begin receiving it in a timely way, UI provided an acceptable safety net for surviving the challenges of not having work for

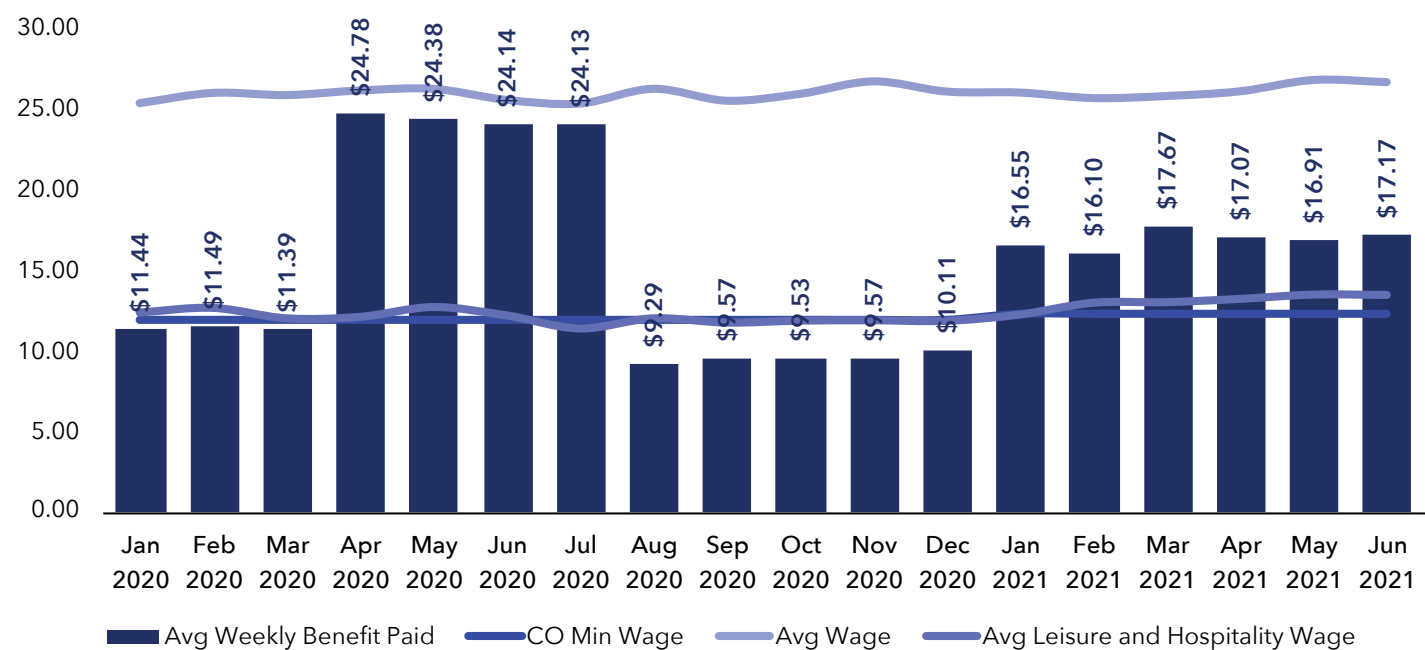
many months. However, there were many people, especially those displaced from jobs due to COVID 19 who had ongoing problems and barriers with the UI website, providing ID, navigating other requirements of submitting applications, and problem-solving if there were glitches, and thus receipt of benefits was sometimes delayed for months or never occurred. Due to the political influences circling UI and the ongoing debates that ensued about the continuation of the expanded benefit in 2020 and 2021, many marginalized communities also experienced disruptions in these benefits. Some of the interviewed stakeholders observed that having the UI benefits influenced individuals in different regions as to how and when they pursued new work opportunities. The fear of losing benefits when taking a job that may pay less or have limited security was significant, especially when so many jobs were unstable during the pandemic.

Issues related to UI consumed a significant amount of time and energy of workforce staff in each region. For the period between late March to early June 2020, each stakeholder acknowledged that staff was primarily involved with assisting diverse residents of their region to apply for UI, navigate the website with its numerous

sections, helping residents to problem-solve delays with obtaining benefits, and supporting participants to link with other resources needed during this time. All of the regions reported how difficult this time was, not only because of the immense struggles faced by so many Coloradans, and also because working with UI is not a skill set that is typically held by workforce staff. Workforce and job placement services did not resume to semi-normal levels until midway through the summer of 2020.

Unemployment insurance also exposed some of the negative inequities that exist in the wages paid to workers in Colorado. In Denver, the minimum wage is \$14.77 per hour while the minimum wage elsewhere in the state is \$12.32 per hour. Some of the ongoing controversy of people allegedly not returning to work because of receiving more through unemployment insurance could be addressed by generally having higher wages, benefits, and flexible scheduling that

Figure 26: Estimated Unemployment Insurance Benefits
Colorado, January 2020 to June 2021 (shown as an hourly wage)



Note: Wages assume 40 hour work weeks; unemployment insurance benefits include PUC.
Source: U.S. Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

is not only attractive to workers but allows them to balance work and their personal responsibilities.

Recruitment and Engagement

During the interviews with stakeholders, we heard different approaches to how employers and businesses were hiring potential workers. There was a significant increase in the hosting of virtual job fairs where several employers were hosted by workforce centers or community organizations using online portals and social networking spaces, and jobseekers across different regions were asked to participate. Outreach for these job fairs was typically performed via online outreach to diverse organizations and agencies including employment service provider networks (Denver's Road Home Employment Subcommittee; Skillful Community of Practice, Metro Denver Homeless Initiative Employment Subcommittee; employment service provider networks in each region sponsored by Workforce Areas) who then encouraged jobseekers to attend. Recruitment was also done extensively, through well-established online employment platforms such as Indeed and Linked-In.

Job Site Challenges related to COVID

The challenges faced by each type of job site varied considerably. For the job sites that had the ability to have employees perform daily tasks remotely, the challenges were based significantly on creating an effective and responsive communication and digital systems that could support all types of work required by various team members. In job sites that were closed except for emergencies but then opened fairly soon to serve different members of the public (medical and financial offices, banks, etc.) the employers began with addressing the primary safety requirements put forth by the respective regions, the state, and the federal government, generally guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This required implementation of setting appointments for most customers, keeping people at a safe distance from each other (waiting rooms and lobbies), requiring masks and good hand hygiene, temperature checking, checking other symptoms, and rigorous cleaning and sanitizing standards of all services, equipment and

furniture. This resulted in a smaller number of people receiving services each day, but greater assurance that those who had appointments were coming to a safe and sanitized environment. In order to complement these practices, many medical, health, and financial services increased the use of telehealth and other conferencing portals to perform as many appointments and ongoing communication as possible.

In the case of offices, schools, libraries, other public offices (DMV, other licensing offices, courts) and other similar facilities where there was a need for ongoing access to the site and staff at the site, the guidelines were adjusted so that a certain number of people were accessing the site at a given time, and close attention was paid to keeping people at a safe distance from each other. The net result of employers addressing these challenges was a stronger protection for the workers at these sites, a smaller capacity of customers of all types who could be served throughout a day, and the use of a blended approach to access where certain numbers of customers, students and others could access a site on certain days and others would be served remotely.

Worksites that provided essential services throughout the pandemic (grocery stores, appliance and home supply stores, pharmacies, fulfillment centers, manufacturing facilities, storage facilities for food, community organizations and public agencies providing emergency services, etc.) needed to implement rigorous guidelines including social distancing for workers (not always followed) and customers. They limited the number of individuals allowed in a given space, strongly encouraging (or requiring) the wearing of masks when working around other individuals, increased requirements related to cleaning and sanitizing all surfaces (including the frequency this is done) in a worksite, and redesigning offices and related guidelines to ensure that safety was highlighted. It was well documented how different worksites were able to execute these guidelines or not, and this ability ultimately reflected on how safe workers felt throughout the different phases of the pandemic.

For all employers and businesses, the ability to continue providing the specific services of the business or organization and to survive the pandemic relied on their ability to be agile in their response, to find

creative and innovative ways to perform functions, to embrace the need for new approaches to operations, to respond to the needs of their workforce in the context of facing the health challenges of the pandemic including the mental health needs created by the severe demands and isolation, and their creativity in sustaining business operations financially and in innovative ways.

Job-Seeking Challenges during COVID-19

In each of the regions the impact on job seekers was significant and impactful, but varied depending on how businesses were responding according to the specific guidelines imposed in the region. As an example public-facing businesses in eastern and northeastern Colorado began opening up earlier than other regions since the level of exposure and infection related to COVID-19 were generally lower. Businesses with essential workers including manufacturing plants and warehouses continued hiring as needed throughout the pandemic, and in these circumstances job seekers were required to follow the specific guidelines of specific employers.

Job seekers were challenged in every region because most applications for jobs required going online and access to technology was problematic for so many households. Applying in person was typically not an option because of safety concerns related to COVID, and this added challenges for the job-seekers and employers alike.

Because so many businesses reduced or shut-down hiring for months, and those that continued to hire often had jobs that were potentially higher risk since they required ongoing exposure to the public and COVID 19, job-seekers were constantly faced with complex and difficult situations. For those job-seekers who were able to pursue employment working remotely, the potential options contained different challenges, including the demands of learning diverse digital skills, knowing how to perform most levels of

work via technology, and having the ability at home to set up miniature offices.

The most significant challenge facing job-seekers during COVID and now that the different communities are emerging from the worst impacts of the pandemic has been the need to acquire new and diverse skills required to perform the jobs that are most available at this time. For those job-seekers who hope to return to positions in hospitality, accommodation and the food and beverage industries, there are some positions that are now open, but there are also far fewer than before the pandemic. Job-seekers are consistently being encouraged to pursue new training opportunities that offer skills needed to pursue alternate career pathways, and to acknowledge the importance of acquiring different abilities that will lead to higher-paying employment and greater job security.

Evolving Perspectives of Employers

The perspective, priorities, and required actions of different employers during the pandemic were an amazing challenge and required constant agility and responsiveness to the safety guidelines of the specific county of the business, the state, and the CDC. During the early months of this project, the stakeholders reported that employers with employees that could work remotely had been minimally impact and the main adaptations and challenges had been to determine effective strategies for managing a comprehensive remote workforce. This included public agencies, community organizations and service providers, medical service offices, health clinics, and other offices of all types. An important aspect of this was the expectation and requirement on all remote employers to set up complex and comprehensive communication and information storage systems that had capacity to support each employee and his/her related responsibilities, and to facilitate adequate training of all employees so that business could continue effectively. It also required employers to identify how it would support its staff to set up adequate and responsive home offices needed to perform business functions.

Employers with diverse essential workers who were in direct contact with other people had a very different challenge with an emphasis on keeping all workers, the

worksite, and customers safe, which required constant attention on the health guidelines recommended by the CDC and responsiveness to the public. For essential workers in warehouses, factories, manufacturing plants, and fulfillment centers, the employers had the important responsibility to sustain and increase production to meet the needs of the community, to maintain a safe working environment that protected the workers and products, and to continue hiring qualified workers throughout the pandemic. In many cases, the challenges of sustaining ongoing safety and hiring new workers were significant since many workers were fearful of getting sick and exposing family members. The net result was that even though essential workers continued to work and have opportunities throughout the pandemic, the employers faced diverse hazards to sustain a qualified workforce.

Those employers that were forced to close down and stop services because of the pandemic (restaurants, hotels, recreational facilities, sporting events and facilities, for example), faced the most severe challenges and outcomes. All of these businesses were forced to furlough and lay-off workers, and in numerous cases were unable to bring these workers back, and had to close down their businesses. Some of these employers have been able to restore their businesses to reduced levels by using Paycheck Protection Program or other stimulus programs, if available, operating at reduced capacity and using alternative approaches (outdoor dining, socially distant seating at sporting events, etc.) for attracting customers and visitors. As the different regions of Colorado are opening up in terms of businesses and restoring some of the lost jobs, employers who plan to resume business using new models of safety practices are beginning to hire or rehire workers. This is evidenced in the increase of available positions at restaurants, hotels, sports complexes as the weather is warmer and the CDC restrictions across the United States are being relaxed.

As the economy is now more fully open and is struggling to fill open jobs, employers are having to confront their own adaptations that may lead to work places changing permanently. Examples of this include creating more flexible scheduling options for all employees, implementing new opportunities to learn skills while

being paid, offering the chance to do some or all job responsibilities at home, subsidizing transportation costs more fully than before, increasing paid parking options, and other incentives that directly honor the importance of workers.

New Priorities of Job Seekers

Based on our key stakeholder interviews and focus groups, it became clear that there was a shift in what workers were looking for in their job. Many of these were driven by the pandemic and the shift to remote working, but most importantly the shift to remote schooling, which forced parents—mostly female parents—to drop out of the workforce to care for children. Additional shifts were driven by local labor force dynamics at play prior to the pandemic, as well as shifts towards increased automation and/or use of online platforms to reduce or eliminate the need for face-to-face interactions. While not exhaustive of all of the changing priorities of the workforce, we heard that:

- Parents with children at home are increasingly wanting and pursuing jobs that can be performed from home, saving on child care and transportation expenses (Interview with CWEE staff).
- Most stakeholders reported that the majority of participants and other workers of all levels are increasingly wanting flexibility in their work schedule so they can balance their work and personal responsibilities more efficiently and effectively.
- Many business sectors are moving to incorporate new outreach strategies for remote and isolated communities, requiring the need to go to where people live or congregate more than waiting for them to come to a service. These include social and medical services, some educational opportunities, potentially digital technology assistance, and the delivery of necessary items, including groceries and pet-care resources. Thus job seekers and businesses are interested in participating in these types of positions
- There are ongoing opportunities for health

professionals in most regions across Colorado (Interviews with Southeast and Rural Resort subregions)

- In some rural regions, filling different jobs has become more difficult. In the Southeast and South Central regions, the workforce is growing older since many of the younger people move to other places to pursue new opportunities or check out other locations. At the same time older workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic have changed their priorities on the type of work they want to do, and want to be closer to home for a multitude of reasons.
- In many business sectors, the need for employees to work remotely demonstrated new ways that productivity and accountability could be improved for numerous workplaces. This is resulting in the re-evaluation by most businesses on how to operate the business and workplace going forward. This process is especially important in work spaces that do not serve the public or ongoing clients.

Overlaps with the Talent Equity Agenda

The research of this project including the data and qualitative interviews and discussions highlighted some topics and priorities that are consistent with those identified in the Talent Equity Agenda that was published by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) in 2020. Some of the most prevalent topics that emerged from our research and are priorities in the Agenda are highlighted below.

Career Navigation and Advancement

Because the Colorado Center on Law and Policy made a decision to prioritize policy related to adults, our research focused on this component of the workforce and those who lost their jobs during the pandemic. However, it is important to acknowledge that many of the stakeholders with whom we talked mentioned different impacts that have occurred to youth and young adults over the past 18 months, and also expressed optimism about different initiatives that

are being launched to create innovative and effective opportunities for this population.

For adults of all ages, the research and related findings of this project as well as the Agenda focused significantly on the importance of identifying new and innovative initiatives and efforts that will support adults to acquire different skills related to business sectors or to “up-skill” their current skill-set in these industries (such as hospitality, food and beverage service, and overall tourism). That will lead to them re-entering these industries able to perform the new expectations and demands of the jobs based on what was learned about public safety during the pandemic.

Adults who are able, willing and interested in changing business sectors, due to the desire to earn higher wages, have a work schedule that supports their personal needs better, or addresses the fact that the job they had previously is no longer available, need new ways to acquire these new skills. Based on our interviews with stakeholders, the opportunity to “earn as they learn” through work-based learning, internships, apprenticeships and transitional employment opportunities were identified as effective and desired ways to achieve new skills along with confidence to perform the expected responsibilities, and the opportunity to demonstrate other personal qualities such as reliability, the desire to learn and perform well, self-initiative, and strong teamwork skills as they return to work. Both CCLP’s interviews and CDLE’s Talent Equity Agenda highlighted that it is particularly important it is for those who are lower-skilled or have been displaced from previous jobs and sectors due to the pandemic have access to these chances to earn an income while being trained to perform new jobs since they do not have other sources of income.

Addressing Digital Equity and Inclusion

CCLP staff have been working with the Future of Work Office on digital inclusion, jointly developing a matrix of digital competencies regarding infrastructure, connectivity, devices, literacy, and attitudes. This participation has accelerated as CCLP has learned more about The digital equity and inclusion concept that is one of the most prominent and pervasive challenges facing Colorado residents as well as

people across the nation and around the world. It is described in detail in the Agenda and was a topic that was mentioned by all stakeholders across the state and all populations. Comments by stakeholders tended to vary depending on geographical location (access to broadband and overall connectivity), ability to obtain and/or use affordable reliable and up-to-date hardware, software, security protection (in all areas), the need for someone to help participants navigate and use all types of digital programs and platforms, and an overall feeling of being overwhelmed and frustrated with using digital technology. Each of these types of challenges are described in more detail in this document as well as the Agenda, and need to be addressed by all public agencies, statewide and regional, as well as businesses, employers, schools, other institutions of learning, individuals and families.

Post-Secondary Credential Attainment and Related Support Services

Individuals who have lost work or have been unemployed for long periods of time are often in need of more training, greater work experience, and more opportunities to demonstrate their proficiency in a specific work area. There is a significant emphasis on the importance of individuals pursuing and obtaining post-secondary credentials in job sectors that are growing and projecting more growth and expansion in the future.

We also learned through this project the importance of the different steps and opportunities that may be needed to support individuals to pursue these credentials. These include access to basic adult education classes that are accessible and flexible so that people can learn math, language or other general skills that they may need for different future credentials; access to ESL and work readiness courses (including learning how to study effectively); opportunities to “earn and learn” simultaneously; the ability to learn in different ways that embrace diverse learning styles; and having these different options available in an affordable and flexible way. The input from stakeholders emphasized repeatedly that many of the people impacted by the pandemic are not prepared or ready to pursue credentials if some of the issues described above are

not available. Adults usually have numerous responsibilities that require immediate income, and this dynamic plays an important role in someone being able to pursue a credential while also supporting his/her personal life (including families).

In addition to these elements described above, each stakeholder emphasized how important it is to have access to diverse support services to assist job-seekers to pursue immediate employment along with longer-term training, credentials and degrees. Some of the support services mentioned most frequently included: computers and WiFi hotspots; tools and equipment for different jobs that require having your own (building trades, some medical positions, culinary positions); sustained transportation and childcare assistance during the training time; emergency and longer-term housing assistance; and wellness care from time to time.

CHAPTER 3

PROMISING PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

As the previous chapter details, Coloradans experienced a myriad of challenges since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of which are still pressing despite the progress our state economy has made towards recovery. The aim of this report was not only to identify the most pressing trends and issues facing Colorado's workers as they seek to re-enter the workforce, but to also offer solutions. Throughout our interviews, we were told about ongoing or planned-for responses to the pandemic and the changes to the labor market. Where relevant, we sought to highlight these and raise them up as potential solutions to state-wide or region-specific issues. In addition, this report includes a number of recommendations that the project team has put forward as potential responses the state's workforce development systems could adopt or adapt to meet their needs and the needs of their participants.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Promising practices features practices that the state or other actors in workforce development are implementing or preparing to implement that the project team feels are noteworthy and potentially applicable across multiple regions or local communities in the state (in the case of regional and local promising practices). Recommendations feature new programs or actions that state and other could undertake to respond to challenges and barriers that were discovered through the course of our research. Items listed in both sections are intended to spur further discussion where these ideas may be developed in greater detail or tailored to meet the unique needs of different regions of Colorado. The actions listed here are not inclusive of all of the creative and innovative responses being taken by the agencies

and organizations involved in workforce development across the state.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Promising practices represent new ideas, initiatives, programs, and opportunities that are underway or planned-for in the state that we believe will have a meaningful impact on assisting out-of-work Coloradans rejoin the workforce as our economy continues to recover from the pandemic. Practices are divided into statewide, regional, and local categories based on the scale at which they are being implemented.

Statewide

- Creating state Apprenticeship Office that can authorize diverse types of formal learning opportunities
- Approaching the issue of digital equity and inclusion as a statewide initiative that has full investment of the Governor and Agency Directors and timelines for assignments distributed to each agency for their area of authority and responsibility
- Creating a statewide Digital Inclusion Committee with working groups that will make recommendations to the Governor and legislators over the next 18 months
- Creating state-level positions dedicated to building capacity of small regions to procure public, private, and more flexible sources of funding
- Investing significant state funds in training, work-based learning, higher and adult education, and

apprenticeships that can offer new pathways to employment for adults as well as youth and young adults

- Creating a New Americans Office at the state to coordinate the multitude of issues and actions needed to positively address the training, education and workforce aspirations of the diverse Colorado residents who are not native born
- Using the diverse functions of state government agencies as potential training, work-based learning and apprenticeship locations that can become viable career pathways for diverse populations
- Prioritizing efforts to foster greater coordination and data sharing among all the state departments and agencies involved in workforce issues, including the Department of Corrections

Regional

- Encouraging and coordinating counties across the state to create a municipal broadband system with fiber service for every home that takes into consideration the related activities of neighboring counties
- Establishing partnerships of workforce boards and their staff and chambers of commerce to create apprenticeships in different emerging business sectors including administrative, financial and clerical services, and digital training
- Establishing a “Pathway to the Pathway” series of apprenticeships and credentials that invite workers of diverse levels and aspirations to pursue new fields and positions, such as banking and financial services, human services, health and medical technicians, and early childhood development
- Creating regional networks that are part of larger state-wide digital coaching system—establish fieldwork opportunities with community colleges and universities to add capacity along with youth ambassadors who are able to represent specific communities and neighborhoods
- Establishing and operating career pathways for

justice involved individuals in diverse types of tech and construction sectors

Local

- Establishing and supporting new training/work opportunities in human services sector through diverse workforce funding streams
- Creating new positions and training credentials for jobs that are emerging from the pandemic (e.g., culturally responsive health care workers)
- Replicating educational and work-based learning models created for youth in high school in post-secondary educational and training opportunities for adults of all ages that can also benefit from this continuum of learning and skill-building while also providing opportunities to earn an income at the same time.
- Creating cooperative networks and agreements between region-wide entities that can support each other (e.g., region-wide libraries providing different elements of digital training to maximize the use of limited capacity; identifying ways to deliver diverse resources to communities using existing programs – such as taking a trained digital navigator on a book mobile tour or health outreach team)
- Several organizations that work with justice involved participants are creating different training opportunities in the area of technology because of the large array of jobs that require these skills, with the sense that they are more open than in other sectors

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations respond to the challenges and barriers we believe are most important to overcome in order to assist Coloradans to prepare for a post-COVID economy. These recommendations, while not exhaustive of all possible steps the state and other organizations could take, are based on the issues identified through our data analysis and stakeholder interviews. It is our hope they are relevant and useful to the

wide range of actors involved in our state's workforce development systems.

Broadband Access/Digital Equity

- Prioritize and invest in the importance/significance of digital equity in all parts of the state
- Prioritize broadband and connectivity to each home (affordable and high speed), equipment and security programs, and access to a flexible and responsive coaching/navigation program
- Incentivize counties to invest in local broadband that allows for true connectivity to the majority of homes in remote counties as well as ones that are highly populated
- Incorporate services and strategies into a state-wide digital equity initiative that addresses individual needs of Coloradans to become comfortable with and confident using digital equipment for daily and work-based purposes
- Incorporate the cost of digital and other literacy skills acquisition into all new workforce and training initiatives
- Invest in a statewide and sustainable program that subsidizes broadband access for all low-income residents to support daily survival and access to resources
- Encourage collaboration between the Broadband Office, the new Apprenticeship Office, CDLE, and CDHE to create career pathways specifically related to the statewide Digital Equity Initiative currently led by the Future of Work Office in CDLE
- Create time frames, guidelines and requirements for all state agencies to upgrade and review effectiveness of their technology, communication, resource and data collection platforms at least every 5 - 7 years. This should include websites, social media and other platforms that are used to disperse resources to those who are eligible. Make this distribution as simple, respectful, fast and

understandable as possible

Workforce Training and Skill Development

- Identify specific pre-apprenticeship options in rural and urban regions to develop and fund as new work pathways for workers impacted by COVID-19
- Identify opportunities to create new career pathways from low-wage occupations to high-wage occupations. The effects that a trend like remote working or automation may have on the future employment outlook for high-wage occupations in the state should be considered when identifying new pathways
- Explore ways to expand support services to workers who are pursuing training or educational opportunities, particularly those who may be going to school part-time while also working and/or caring for loved ones
- Amend occupational licensing and credentialing policies so that they recognize foreign training, education, and experience, as well as the skills and experience of workers gained through relevant work history
- Incorporate new funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into targeted opportunities for displaced workers with lower skills, including pre-apprenticeships that prepare them for the prerequisites of different apprenticeships and similar opportunities in other work-based learning experiences. Another way of stating this is to create a "Pathway to the Pathway" or an "on ramp" to the skills needed to qualify for different apprenticeship opportunities
- Expand and support pre-apprenticeship opportunities in diverse sectors, including access to different remedial classes if that is the requisite starting place for certain job seekers
- Identify and implement diverse skill development opportunities for adults similar to those that are being created for youth and young adults.

Examples could be having defined career pathways that support adults of all ages to learn ESL while also earning a livable wage, then having flexible opportunities to pursue credentials (ideally while being paid to support family and self) and other types of formal training (including work-based learning or apprenticeships) that lead to new and long-term career options. The large number of Coloradans who lost jobs during the pandemic but even prior to it were working more than one job to survive revealed the ongoing need for adults to have reasonable opportunities to up-skill while also earning an income

- Expand and support stackable credential pathway that begins with completing high school equivalency, if needed, and embraces the need for ongoing support of adults pursuing career changes.
- Identify and implement innovative learning opportunities for adults such as those that: incorporate multiple learning styles and methods; incorporate opportunities to learn and be trained while doing different skills; give Coloradans the option of learning in smaller time increments depending on personal circumstances; and, provide instruction in comfortable and non-threatening learning environments that are different from a traditional classroom experience. An example might be to offer individuals who have cultivated high-level digital skills in the area of playing video games a non-traditional opportunity to learn additional digital skills that can be applied to in-demand occupations such as gaming machine technicians, software developers, or using these baseline digital skills and overall comfort with technology to become digital coaches or assistants in numerous work environments of all types
- Ensure that equitable accessibility to all training, education and workforce opportunities is offered to all populations using appropriate, innovative, respectful and responsive approaches

to all regions and communities using different methods to let residents know about resources, opportunities and where they can get assistance of different types

- Support workforce regions in implementing or adopting new state programs or efforts, such as the 2020 Colorado Talent Equity Agenda
- Incorporate concrete measurements of efforts made in different regions to respond to the emerging training and learning needs of diverse adult communities and populations across the state.
- Create a position at the state (perhaps CDLE) that assists workforce regions, especially those in rural regions to identify, apply for and obtain diverse funding streams
- Work with employers to sustain innovative and responsive workplaces that include living wage pay, benefits, and predictable schedules that allow workers to plan other responsibilities and activities outside of work
- Encourage employers to adopt skills-based hiring practices that will reduce the potential for bias in hiring processes while focusing on the skills needed to perform the job
- Create metrics that measure equity in the workforce system to ensure new programs and initiatives are not unintentionally excluding certain groups

State Workforce Development Efforts

- Increase effective messaging and communication

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The months following February 2020 were filled with anxiety and uncertainty as our state, nation, and world grappled with the effects of a global pandemic. Thanks to the quick adoption of COVID-19 vaccines, nearly all of the public health orders issued to combat the spread of the virus have been lifted as of the publishing of this report. Although we are not free from COVID-19, which has seen a resurgence in parts of the state where vaccination rates are low, it finally seems like our economic recovery from the pandemic can truly begin. With a large infusion of federal stimulus dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act, our state is in a good position to begin planning for Colorado's post-COVID economy. We hope that the findings and recommendations of this report are informative and useful to current and future discussions about our state's workforce development systems.

The approaches used in this project of interviewing diverse stakeholders and also identifying significant data sets related to employment options and setbacks over the last 18 months offered some important insights about the impacts of the pandemic on all workers. These insights and discoveries revealed how the importance of all jobs being viewed as potentially "good jobs" resonated with the staff at CCLP because Coloradans have diverse interests, aspirations and abilities, and these lead people to desire all types of jobs depending on a multitude of factors. Many working individuals value

livable wages and good benefits, which is very understandable.

The concept of supporting people to find, prepare for and obtain a "good job" was defined in one of our earlier interviews, and included these five elements:

1. Pays livable wages or wages that allow workers to cover their basic needs
2. Includes benefits like health care, retirement contributions, or maternity leave
3. Has clear opportunities for advancement and growth
4. Offers flexible and predictable scheduling so that worker can address personal priorities when necessary
5. Is located in an area that is accessible to the worker, and offers a safe working environment.

With these criteria as guidelines, the different workforce centers, other public offices and community organizations that are focused on supporting people to obtain meaningful employment have a strong structure to use when determining the potential that different jobs will provide to job seekers.

What we also realized throughout this project is that many of the jobs that were lost during the pandemic, particularly in the accommodation and food services sector as well as other tourism-related industries, are still desired by different types of workers, and are also required by residents and tourists alike as a core part of life and the regional economies of Colorado. Colorado as a state relies heavily on these business sectors and despite their challenges during the pandemic or

other economic recessions, the need for and importance of these jobs continues. This reality was voiced consistently in different regions of the state, and thus indicated two major considerations that are integral for the future of work in Colorado. These two considerations are:

1. The interest in retraining or up-skilling for different industries often exists, but the numerous details required for this to occur are often too challenging. The most prevalent challenge is the need to earn an income and when up-skilling is not part of the job, it will be postponed indefinitely.
2. The data indicates that there should be increased pressure on employers as well as consumers to commit to the idea of making the majority of jobs in all sectors “good jobs”. This includes ensuring that wages are “living wages” and truly support workers’ costs of living, providing adequate health and transportation benefits to all workers, offering transparent and well defined opportunities for growth and up-skilling in a specific work site or sector (including making training and mentorship opportunities available at each work site), and offering a work environment that is safe on all levels and offers flexible scheduling to accommodate the demands of life. The ability of different types of employers to offer adequate wages requires the production of goods and services of high quality, which in turn will cost more for the consumer. This dynamic has been in place for many decades and continues to be important if the economy of Colorado is going to recover and thrive post-pandemic.

Another pervasive theme integral to this project is the need to continuously emphasize racial and cultural equity in all aspects of work and training. This includes ensuring equitable access to opportunities that are culturally and linguistically responsive; providing innovative and alternative methods for learning about and pursuing available opportunities along with a multitude of supports; and retaining continuing attention to the diversity of needs amongst different populations as well as geographical regions in Colorado.

The need for advanced learning and up-skilling is extensive, but it should be offered in diverse settings and using different ways of learning.

The final theme that extended throughout the data and each interview was the influence and impact that digital skills and access to online resources and remote working have and will continue to have on the overall economic future of Colorado. Finding the answers to creating digital equity in the areas of broadband infrastructure and overall connectivity; overall trust of technology and understanding why it is important for individual survival and success; increasing personal digital skills so that training and work opportunities are accessible and available; and providing innovative support and technical assistance to all digital learners who need it will be instrumental to the ultimate economic and workforce recovery.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) opens up opportunities to reshape workforce development systems across the state and provide support for new and innovative approaches. We strongly feel that these funds would be best used by creating sustained and ongoing improvements to Colorado’s workforce development systems that can be sustained after the ARPA funds are no longer available. While much of this funding must be used over the next few years, it is our hope that funds are used to make long-term investments in our workforce development systems rather than for programs that will end as ARPA funds are used up. While our state as a whole may recover COVID-19 recession in the next few years, as we saw during our recovery from the Great Recession, statewide indicators do not reflect the economic conditions in all parts of our state. Some regions may not recover in the short-term, and indeed, many were still recovering from the Great Recession when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Sustained efforts and investments over the long-term will be required to meet the needs of our workforce in all parts of Colorado. We must not squander this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform our workforce systems to equitably meet the needs of our workforce.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS

National Organizations

- Heartland Alliance
- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- National Skills Coalition

State Agencies and Departments

- Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) – Future of Work Office
- CDLE – Adult Employment Services
- CDLE – Rural Consortium
- CDLE – Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC)
- Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) – Employment First
- CDHS – ReHire
- Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) – Policy Unit

Regional and County Agencies

- Arapahoe-Douglas Workforce Center – AD Works – 2 counties
- Boulder Co. SNAP E&T
- Denver SNAP for Success
- Denver Workforce Department – Denver Economic Development
- Eastern/Northeastern Rural Workforce

Sub-Area – 11 counties

- Larimer Co. SNAP E&T
- Northwest Workforce Sub Area – 6 counties
- Pueblo Sub Area – 1 county
- Rural Resorts Workforce Sub Area – 5 counties
- South Central Workforce Sub Area – 5 counties
- Southeast Workforce Sub-Area – 8 counties
- Upper Arkansas Workforce Sub-Area – 4 counties

Community Organizations

- Attention Homes – Boulder Co.
- Aurora Mental Health Center – Arapahoe Co.
- Back on My Feet/Salvation Army – Denver Co.
- Bayaud Enterprises – multiple sites and counties
- Bell Policy Center – statewide
- Bridge House – Boulder and Aurora (Boulder and Arapahoe counties)
- Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) – state-wide
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (multiple sites and counties)
- Community Works (Denver Co.)
- Center for Work Education Employment (CWEE)

– multiple counties

- Denver Public Library – Denver Co.
- Emily Griffith – multiple counties
- Empowerment Program – Denver Co.
- Financial Health Institute – statewide
- Goodwill Colorado – statewide
- Jewish Family Services – Denver Co.
- Justice Reskill – statewide
- Mental Health Center of Denver – Denver Co.
- Mental Health Partners – Boulder Co.
- Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (7 Metro Denver counties)
- Metro State University – Adult Education Program in Adams Co.
- Mi Casa – multiple sites and counties
- Mile High United Way Employment Services – multiple sites and counties
- Rocky Mountain Partnership – Adams and Broomfield counties
- Samaritan House (Catholic Charities) – Veterans Program
- Servicios dela Raza – multiple sites and counties
- Skillful – statewide
- Skills2Compete Coalition – statewide
- Southwest Center of Independent Living – multiple counties
- Spring Institute for Multicultural Studies – multiple sites and counties
- Toward Justice – statewide
- Urban Peak – multiple sites and counties
- Volunteers of America – Irving St. Women’s Residence – Denver Co.
- Volunteers of America – Veterans Program

– multiple sites and counties

- Women’s Foundation of Colorado – statewide

Impacted Individuals Focus Group

- Participant Focus Group – Bayaud Enterprises
- Participant Focus Group – Back on My Feet and Salvation Army

Employers

- Crawford Hotel/Oxford Hotel/Union Station – Sage Hospitality
- Good Business Colorado – multiple counties
- Home Depot
- S&P International

THANK YOU!

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