

COLORADO

Faced with an unprecedented set of challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, public education is at a crossroads. To be sure, much has changed since 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation, but pre-pandemic trends provide policymakers with a critical anchor for navigating post-pandemic decisions. This section provides a snapshot of Colorado's K-12 public education resources and outcomes so that policymakers are better equipped to make critical choices that will shape generations to come. Looking forward, they should use this information to ask important questions like what their goals are for students and whether resources are being deployed toward those aims.

SPENDING TRENDS

Colorado's inflation-adjusted education revenue grew from \$11,322 per student in 2002 to \$14,496 per student in 2020, a 28.0% growth rate that ranked 17th highest in the U.S. During this time, real spending on employee benefits grew by 105.5%—ranking 13th in the country—going from \$1,213 per student to \$2,493 per student. In 2020, Colorado had \$10,836,977,000 in total education debt, up \$2,425 per student in real terms since 2002.

TABLE 1: SPENDING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category (Per Student)	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Revenue	\$11,322	\$14,496	28.0%	17	26
Support Services	\$3,829	\$4,878	27.4%	27	21
Instruction	\$5,769	\$6,351	10.1%	33	36
Benefits	\$1,213	\$2,493	105.5%	13	34
Capital	\$1,517	\$2,164	42.7%	13	8
Total Debt	\$9,736	\$12,160	24.9%	28	11

FIGURE 1: REVENUE PER STUDENT BY FUNDING SOURCE (2002-2020)

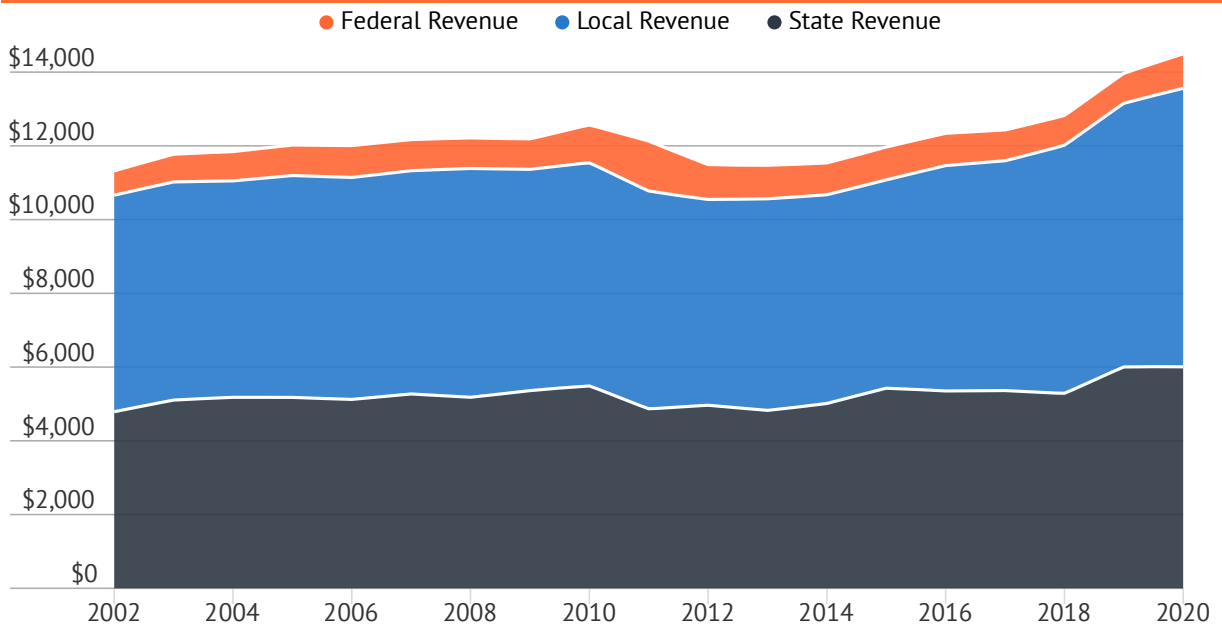
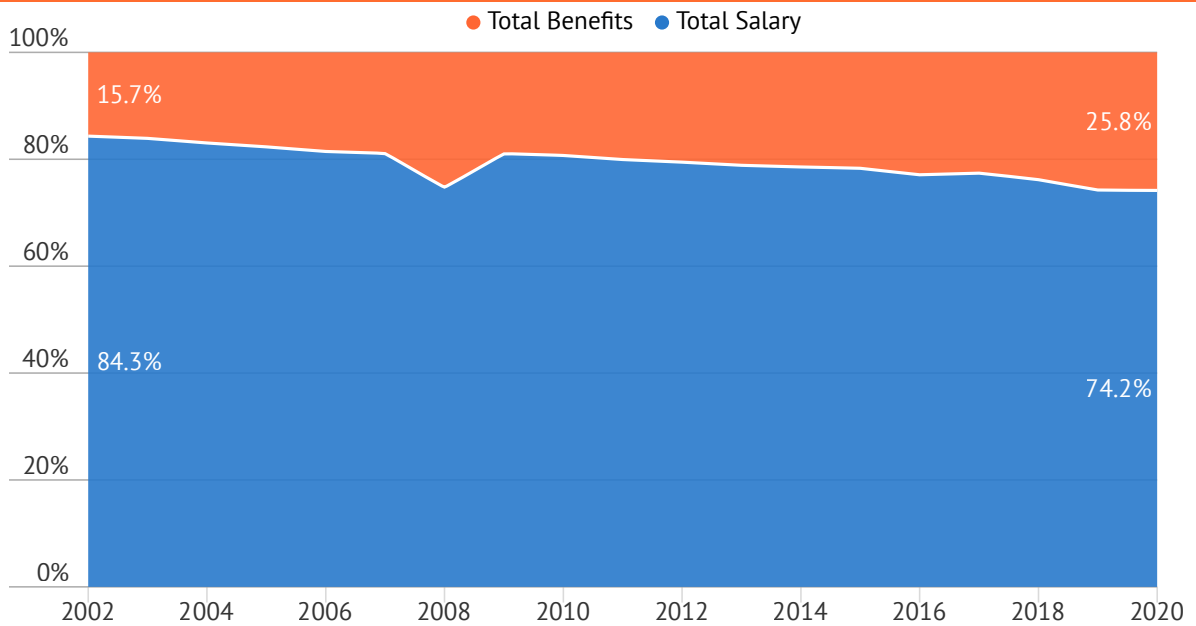


FIGURE 2: K-12 TOTAL SALARY & BENEFITS (2002-2020)



ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2020, Colorado’s student population grew by 23.1%. At the same time, the number of total public education staff grew by 34.4%, with teachers increasing by 22.0% and non-teachers increasing by 47.0%. The average inflation-adjusted teacher salary in the state went from \$58,712 in 2002 to \$57,706 in 2020, a -1.7% growth rate that ranked 28th in the U.S.

TABLE 2: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Enrollment	742,145	913,223	23.1%	6	18
Total Staff	87,582	117,692	34.4%	5	19
Teachers	44,182	53,901	22.0%	8	21
Non-Teachers	43,400	63,791	47.0%	5	16
Average Teacher Salary	\$58,712	\$57,706	-1.7%	28	24

FIGURE 3: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

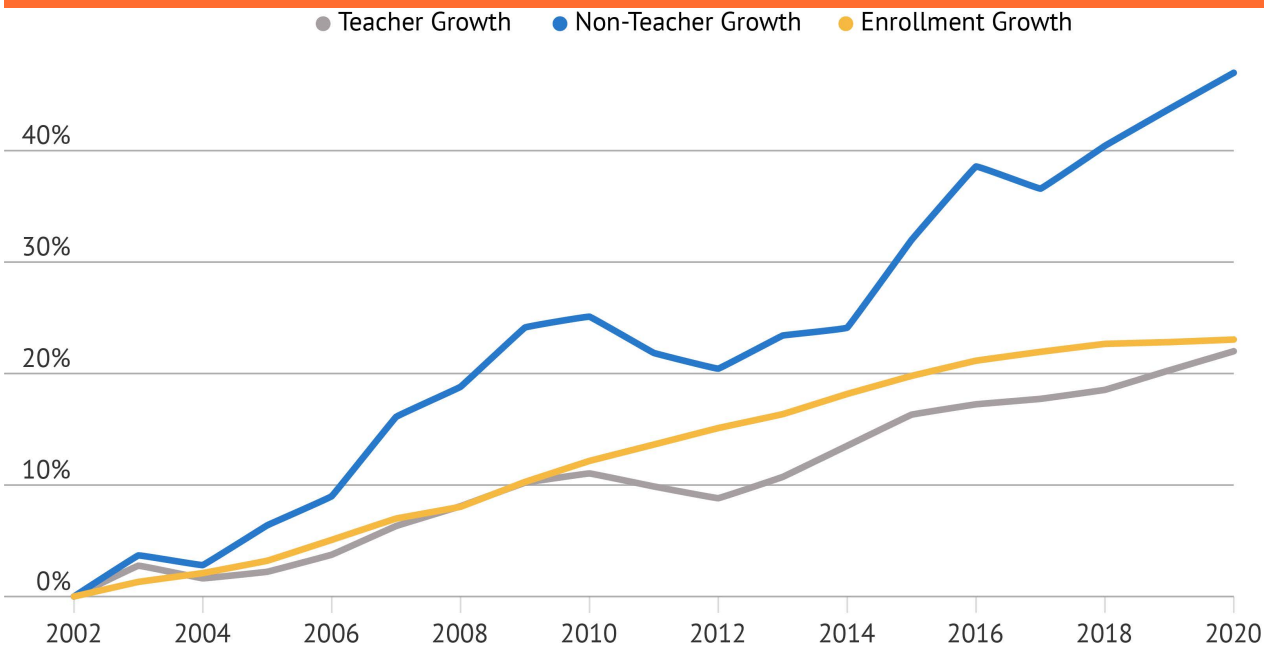
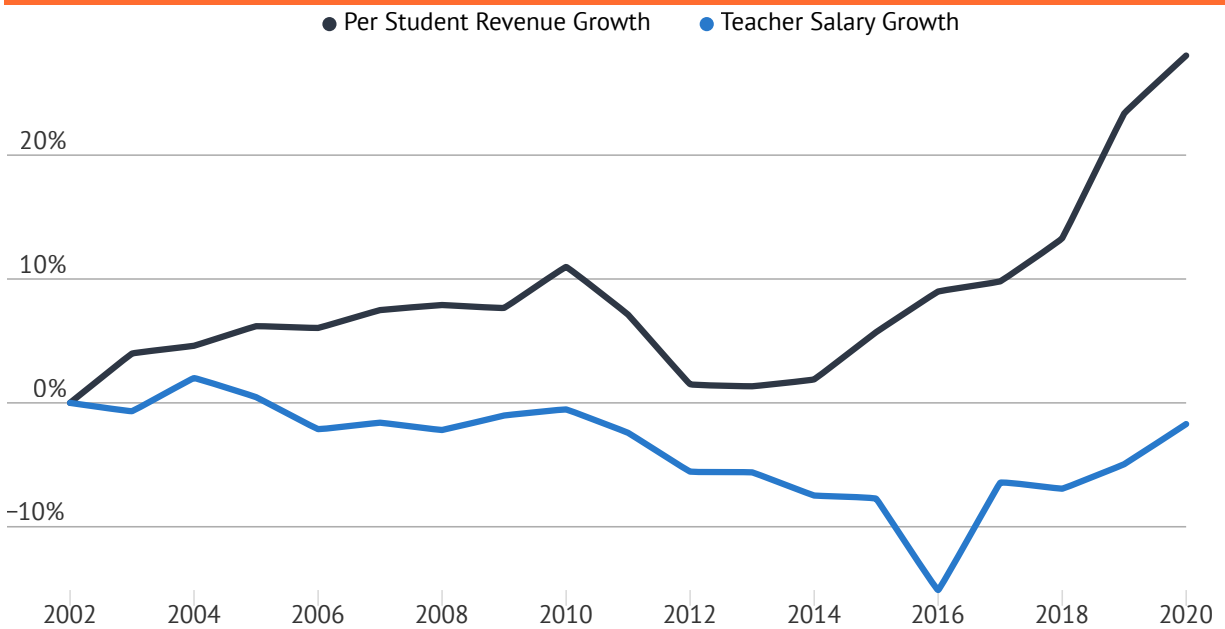


FIGURE 4: TEACHER SALARY GROWTH VS. REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (2002-2020)



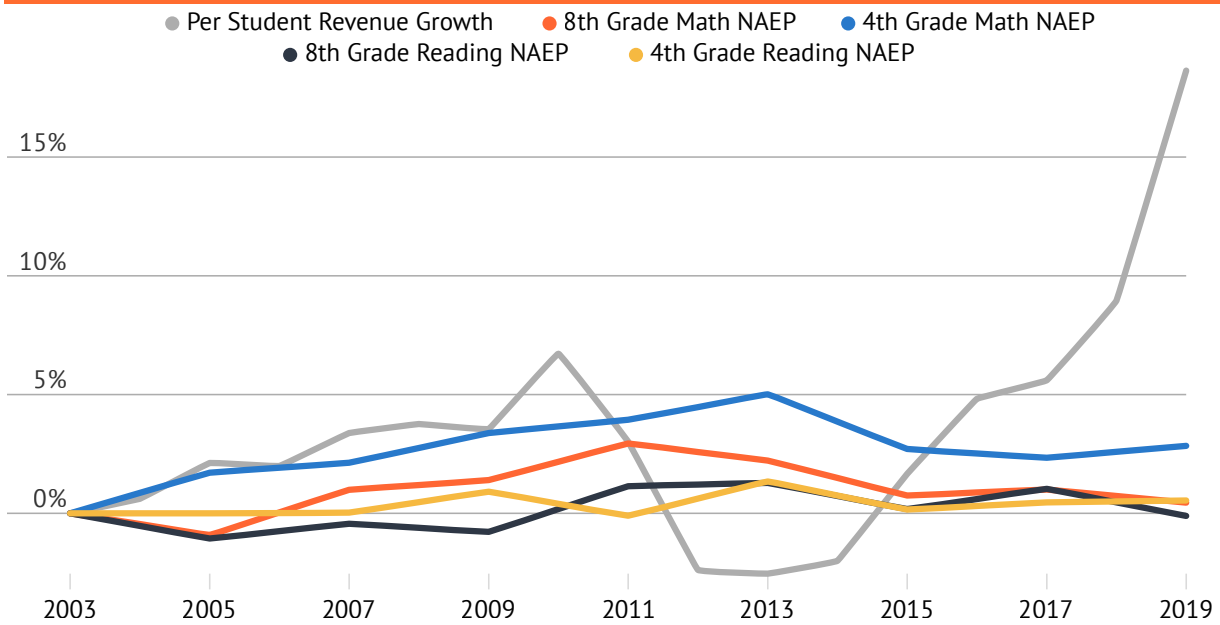
NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Colorado's 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by one point (+0.5%), ranking 26th in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by seven points (+2.8%), ranking 20th. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores decreased by zero points (-0.1%), ranking 27th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by one point (+0.4%), ranking 37th.

TABLE 3: NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	1	26	5	0	27	8
Math	7	20	16	1	37	19

FIGURE 5: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH¹



LOW-INCOME NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Colorado’s low-income 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by two points (+0.7%), ranking 32nd in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by six points (+2.9%), ranking 23rd. During this time, the state’s 8th grade reading scores increased by zero points (+0.0%), ranking 31st in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by three points (+1.3%), ranking 30th.

TABLE 4: LOW-INCOME NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	2	32	14	0	31	27
Math	6	23	43	3	30	33

¹ It should be noted that NAEP scores and revenue are inherently different in their potential for growth and shouldn't be expected to move in perfect unison (e.g. a 10% increase in funding shouldn't be expected to result in a 10% improvement in NAEP).

FIGURE 6: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (LOW-INCOME STUDENTS)¹

