



New census earnings data points to the value of higher education

By Debra DeMuth

When it comes to investing, you've heard about stocks, bonds and real estate. But have you considered the value of investing in your or your child's education?

According to recently released data from the U.S. Census Bureau, students and their families paying for higher education can expect strong returns on this investment.

The report from the Census Bureau titled *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2006* indicates that U.S. adults with an advanced degree earn four times more than those with less than a high school diploma.

That difference really can add up over time. Adults with advanced degrees had a median income of \$79,946 while adults with less than a high school diploma earned an average of \$19,915.

With numbers like these, tuition, fees and all the hours of studying and attending classes start looking like a good investment by any standard.

In today's increasingly competitive world economy, a college education has become more valuable than ever.

According to the latest Census Bureau data, Colorado ranks third in the nation, behind the District of Columbia and Massachusetts, with more than 36 percent of adults 25 and older holding a bachelors degree or higher. That well-educated workforce helps draw employers and quality jobs to the state.

But Colorado historically has been more successful at attracting well-educated adults to move here than ensuring that its own kids take advantage of higher education opportunities. As a result, too many Coloradans are missing out on the opportunities that exist right here in our own state.

For Colorado students and families warily watching the costs of college tuition, the latest Census Bureau data illustrating the value of higher education should serve as motivation to plan for college. Luckily, Colorado families have excellent resources available to help them do that.

CollegeInColorado.org is a free website offered by the Colorado Department of Higher Education to help students and their parents plan, apply and pay for college. Visitors to

the site can explore careers (including what different jobs pay), plan academically for college, search scholarships, review financial aid, compare colleges and apply online.

CollegeInvest is a not-for-profit division of the Colorado Department of Higher Education that focuses specifically on helping families pay for college. It combines expert advice with tax advantaged 529 college savings plans, low-cost student and parent loans, and over \$400,000 in scholarships to help eliminate financial barriers to higher education. You can access those by going to www.collegeinvest.org or calling 1-888-900-COLLEGE.

Though many people are hesitant to take on debt, a student loan can be a good investment in the future.

Over the past four decades, the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) has helped 50 million Americans pursue their college dreams. During the same period, the percentage of U.S. adults with a bachelor's degree has tripled. That's a critically important statistic as we race to maintain our competitive edge in the global economy.

Through FFELP lenders like CollegeInvest, students and families get low rates and assistance planning for college, managing debt and avoiding default to ensure that, when it comes to higher education, their dollars go as far as possible.

Like all investments, it pays to do some research before you jump into paying for college. But with organizations like CollegeInvest and CollegeInColorado.org, Coloradans have reliable and comprehensive resources close to home.

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