

A Comparative Look at Utah and Colorado: Economic Opportunity

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The goal of the *Benchmarking Project* is to identify a variety of economic trends affecting working families across Utah, and then to examine those issues through a comparative lens, evaluating Utah's overall progress by using a peer state as a benchmark. Colorado was chosen for this inaugural edition, in part for its geographic proximity to Utah — and thus relatively similar regional identity — as well as for its comparable rates of economic and population growth, demographics, and policy challenges.

Many existing economic comparison studies and rankings look at the economy as a whole or at its impact on specific sectors or on employers. This project seeks to augment those very useful comparisons by focusing on how the economy is experienced by middle and lower-income families. In particular, it is these families whose children are most at risk for not achieving their potential in school and later in the workplace and in society in general. Thus, how they experience the economy is

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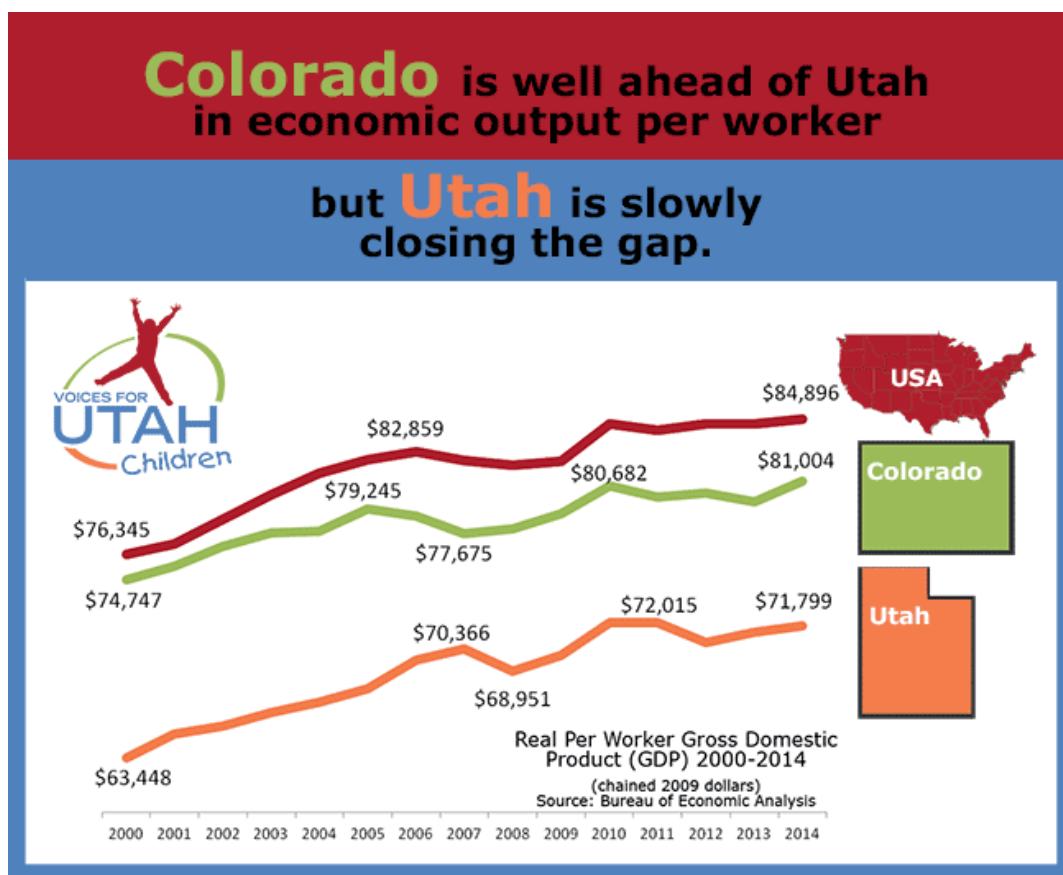
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of particular interest to Voices for Utah Children.

In Part I of the Project, we focus on economic opportunity. The dynamism, flexibility, and competitiveness of a state's economy is a major contributor to economic opportunity, so we look at this topic through a wide range of metrics, from business climate and entrepreneurship rankings to educational attainment and demographic gaps.

Utah ranks ahead of Colorado in:



Business

- climate rankings
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth
- Lower unemployment
- Labor force participation
- Higher education system investment
- Referring fewer minority youth to the correctional system
- Reducing inequality and increasing social mobility

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Colorado outpaces Utah in:

- Pre-K and kindergarten enrollment
- K-12 investment and performance
- Higher education attainment
- Workforce productivity
- Entrepreneurship
- The status of women in the economy

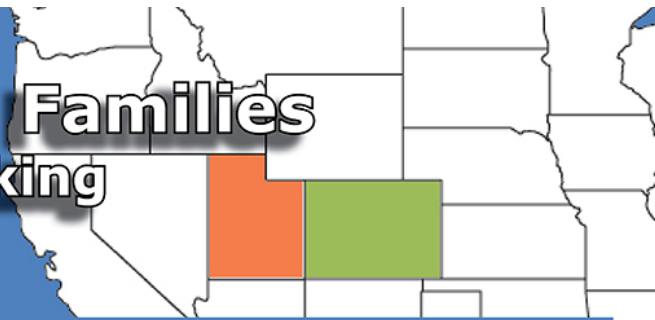
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Working Families Benchmarking Project



Economy

Utah vs. Colorado

Business Climate Average Rankings 2010-2015	3rd place	5th place
Unemployment Rate 2015 (US = 5.3%)	3.5% (5th lowest)	3.9% (10 th lowest)
Labor Force Participation Rate 2015 (US = 62.7%)	68.1% (7th place)	66.7% (14 th place)
Decline in LFPR 2007-2015 (US = 3.4 points)	3.8 points	5.5 points
Increase in Real GDP 2009-2014 (US = 10.1%)	12.5%	11.7%
Total Change in Real Per Capita GDP 2007-2014 (US = 0.6%)	-4.0%	0.5%
Productivity Per Worker 2014 (US=\$93,199)	\$79,210 (37 th place)	\$88,828 (19th place)
Entrepreneurship: Kauffman Index 2015 Rank Startup Activity by State	15 th place	4th place

Education

K-12 \$/Pupil 2013 (US=\$10,700)	\$6,555 (50 th place)	\$8,647 (40th place)
Enrollment in Full-day Kindergarten 2013 (US=77%)	13%	74%
Enrollment in Public Preschool of 4-year-olds 2014-15 (US=41%)	13% (50 th place)	37% (22nd place)
NAEP Rankings: Average Rank on 4th, 8th grade Math and Reading 2013-2015	18 th place	14th place
Higher Education State \$/Student 2016	\$7,752	\$4,754
Bachelor's Degree ages 25-64 2013 (US = 31.1% overall, Men=29.5%, Women=32.7%)	31.4% Men=32.5% Women=30.3%	38.6% Men= 37.1% Women= 40%
Bachelor's Degree ages 25-34 2013 (US = 32.3% overall, Men=28.3%, Women=36.3%)	29.8% Men=28.5% Women=31.0%	37.7% Men= 33.2% Women= 42.1%
Associate's Degree or Higher ages 25-64 2014 (US=40.4%)	41.9%	48.2%

Equity

Status of Women Average Rank	34 th place	11th place
Gender Wage Gap 2013 (US=21 cents/dollar)	30 cents/dollar (47 th place)	20 cents/dollar (18th place)
Referral Rates of Black, Latino Students to Law Enforcement	23rd most disproportionate	10 th most disproportionate
Income Inequality Rank 2014	3rd lowest	20 th lowest
Intergenerational Mobility Rank	1st (Salt Lake metro)	19 th (Denver metro)

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The gaps in educational attainment are perhaps the finding of greatest concern for Utah's long-term future.

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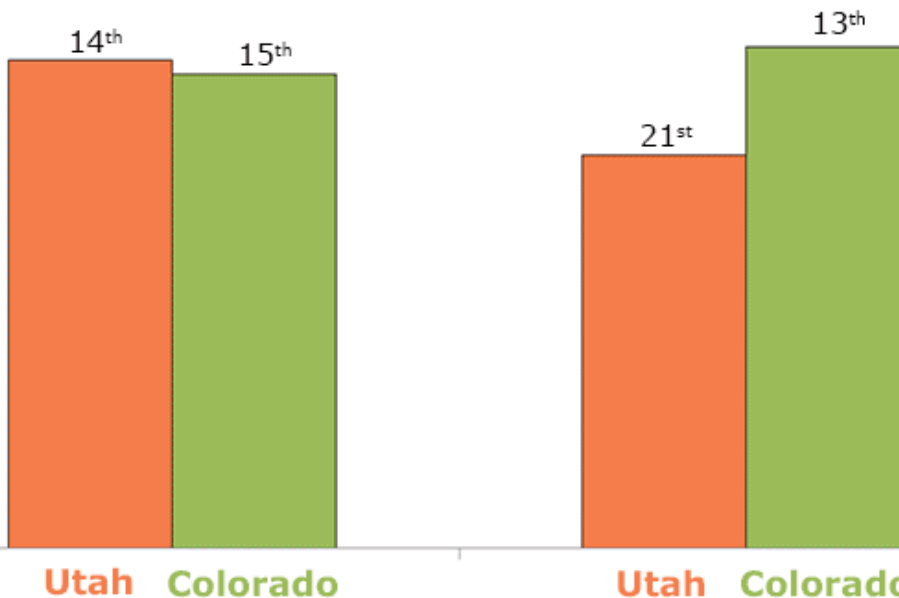
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Utah kids
used to rank higher on
national tests than kids in
Colorado
but now the opposite is true.

1990's

2010's



Rankings presented are the average of 4th and 8th grade reading and math rankings reported during that decade.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
Lessons from our Neighbor: Looking at Colorado's
Educational Success, The Utah Foundation

To help Utah kids succeed:

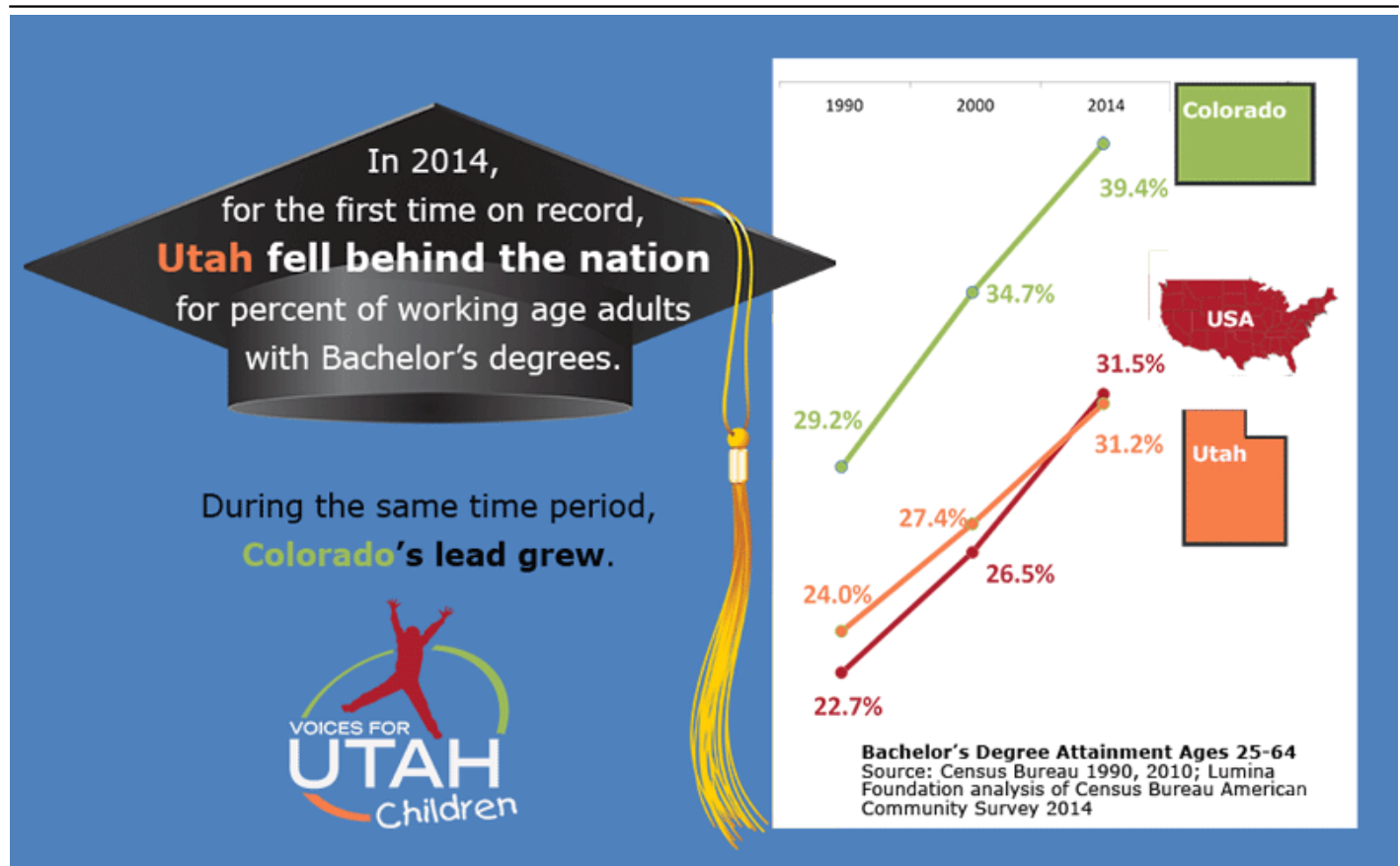
- Increase access to preschool
- Offer optional enhanced kindergarten
- Get Utah out of last place for per pupil K-12 education funding



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Since education is the foundation of opportunity and prosperity in a modern economy, Colorado's success in educating its population and attracting highly educated migrants from other states may well hold lessons for Utah. Utah is wise to invest more than Colorado in higher education to attempt to make up this gap and should apply a similar lesson in the area of pre-K-12 funding.

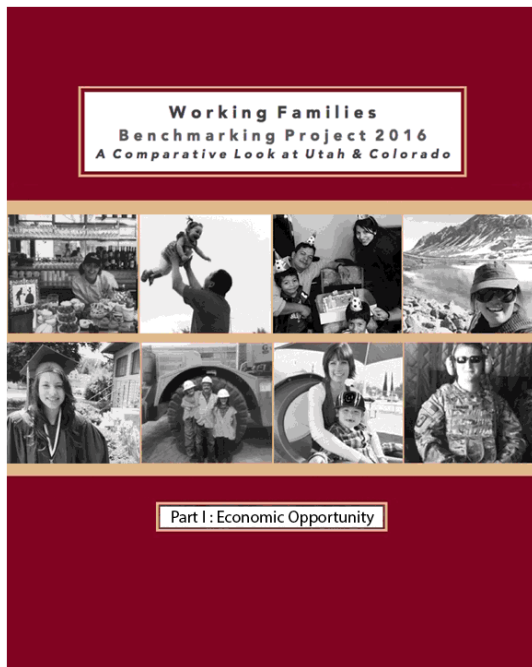
As Utah builds on its many assets and grapples with its challenges in the years to come, we hope that this benchmarking project may contribute in a constructive way to the broader economic policy conversation among experts, policymakers, and the general public.

For more detailed information, see the complete printer-friendly report:

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[Working Families Benchmarking Project Part One: Economic Opportunity](#)

These measures of economic opportunity also relate directly to the questions we address in [Part 2: Standard of Living](#).

For 30 years now, Voices for Utah Children has called on our state, federal and local leaders to put children's needs first. But the work is not done. The children of 30 years ago now have children of their own. Too many of these children are growing up in poverty, without access to healthcare or quality educational opportunities.

How can you be involved?

[Make a tax-deductible donation](#) to Voices for Utah Children—or [join our Network](#) with a monthly donation of \$20 or more. Network membership includes complimentary admission to Network events with food, socializing, and opportunity to meet child

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advocacy experts. And don't forget to [join our listserv](#) to stay informed!

We look forward to the future of Voices for Utah Children and we hope you will be a part of our next 30 years.

Special thanks to American Express for sponsoring our 30th Anniversary Year.

