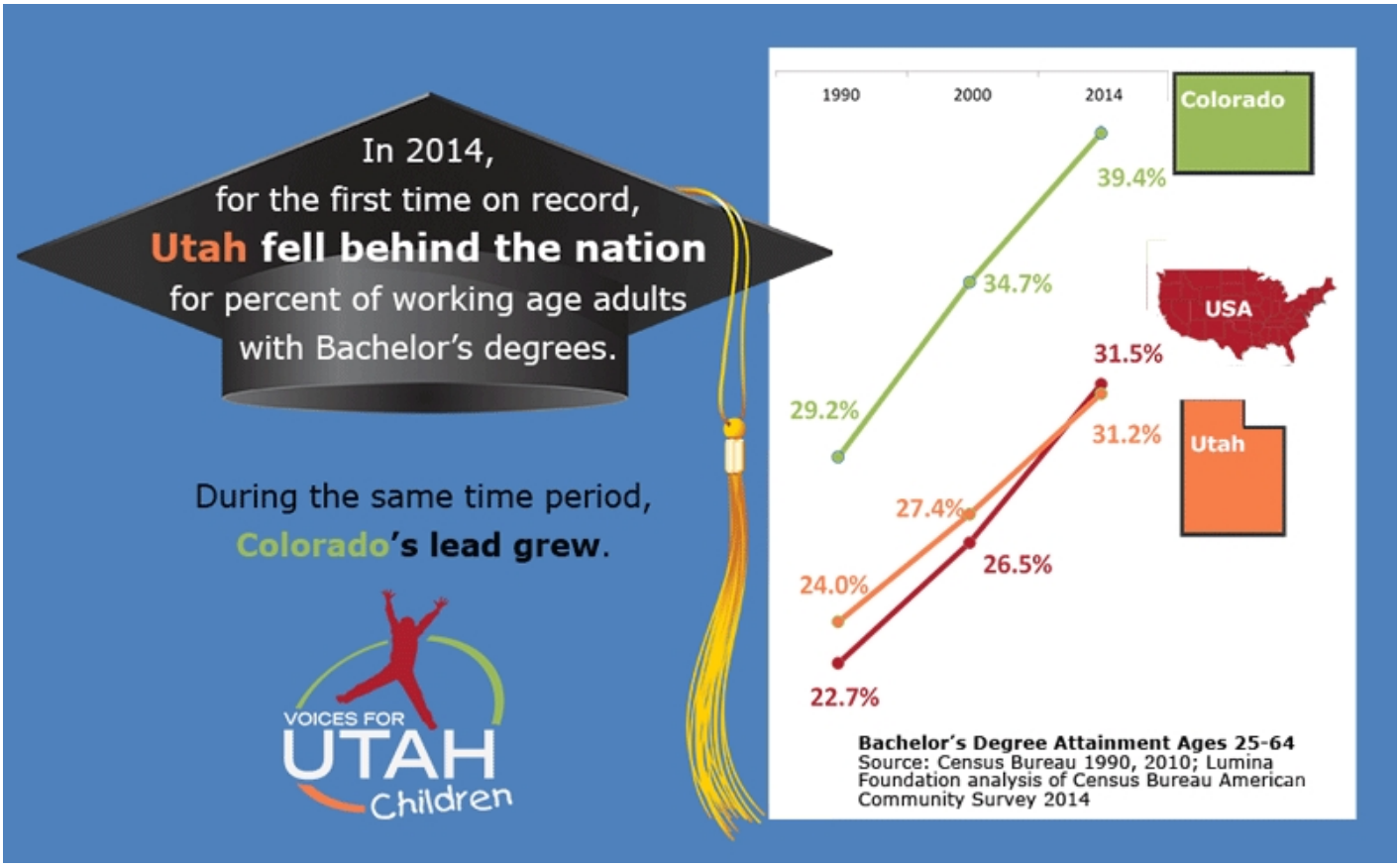
# How does Utah stack up against Colorado?

**Published: Wednesday, 20 July 2016 12:24**
**Written by: Matthew Weinstein**




*This op-ed by Voices for Utah Children State Priorities Partnership Director Matthew Weinstein first appeared in* [the Salt Lake Tribune on June 18, 2016](#)*.*

It is often said that Utah and Colorado are peer states, a pair of high-altitude economic powerhouses competing to attract the same growth-minded businesses and mobile workers in search of the best quality of life. What lessons can we learn from Colorado, and what can they learn from us?

The two states have many economic similarities — rapid growth, young populations, high household incomes, low poverty and unemployment rates, strong business climate rankings. But where do the similarities end? And which is better poised for stronger growth going forward? Our children's futures depend on being able to answer these questions and learn lessons from peer states like Colorado.


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Earlier this month, Voices for Utah Children released the first half of our two-part comparison of Utah and Colorado, comparing the two states for 21 measures of economic opportunity. The results shed light on these questions and include a lot of good news for Utah, as well as some caution signs — and at least one "red alert" warning.

Utah ranks among the very best states in the nation for our low level of income inequality and high rate of intergenerational social mobility. A child growing up in a lower-income family in Utah has a better chance than elsewhere of making it into the middle class. This is thanks to a combination of factors, including our strong commitment to equalizing educational revenue among the wealthier and poorer areas of the state, our success at preventing geographic concentration of poverty, the highest rate of two-parent families in the nation, and our strong charitable and religious institutions that do such a great job of mobilizing volunteers to help neighbors in need.

While Colorado ranks more in the middle of the pack for income inequality and social mobility, our neighbor to the east shines when it comes to educational attainment, with one of the highest rates of bachelor's degrees in the nation. In 2014, 39.4 percent of Colorado adults age 25-64 had a bachelor's degree, nearly 8 points above the national average of 31.5 percent. For historical perspective, in 1990 Colorado's lead over the nation for bachelor's degrees was only 6.5 percentage points.

By this very important metric, unfortunately, Utah's trend is in the opposite direction. In 1990 we led the nation by 1.3 percentage points for bachelor's degrees. But our lead has been steadily diminishing since then, and in 2014, for the first time on record, Utah fell behind the nation for bachelor's degrees among adults age 25-64. Moreover, data for millennials — adults age 25-34 — indicate that this trend will only worsen in the years to come.

This is the red alert warning mentioned above. Falling behind on college degrees could have grave consequences for Utah's ability to grow good jobs and compete for high-wage industries in the years to come. We already lag far behind Colorado in worker productivity — by nearly $10,000 per worker — which is the economic basis for wages and standard of living.

If there is one glimmer of hope for Utah in the college comparison, it's that, even


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after all the budget cuts and tuition hikes of the last decade, we continue to invest more than Colorado in our public universities — $7,752 per student vs. $4,754. That helps keep tuition 35 percent lower in Utah than next door, though at $6,363 on average, it is still 37 percent higher than before the Great Recession.

But the investment edge that Utah enjoys in higher ed vanishes at the early end of public education. Not only do we invest less per pupil in K-12 than any other state, including Colorado, we are weakest when it comes to pre-K and kindergarten. Only 13 percent of our 4-year-olds attend public pre-school vs. three times that in Colorado. And a similar share attend full-day kindergarten here vs. 74 percent in Colorado.

And while we find good news in the 4th and 8th grade NAEP math and reading assessments, where Utah's performance jumped sharply to 14th place in 2015 from 23rd in 2013, we remain far behind when we adjust the scores for demographic differences. Our demographically-adjusted NAEP ranking only improved from 47th place to 44th, while Colorado fell from 12th to 22nd.

As Utah builds on our many assets and grapples with our challenges in the years to come, we believe this benchmarking information can contribute to understanding why we are succeeding and how we can ensure our continued success in the years and generations to come.

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Read the complete reports here:

A Comparative Look at Utah and Colorado:

- Part 1: Economic Opportunity
- Part 2: Standard of Living

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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?**



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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 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.*






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