

Building a Better Colorado

*“Engaging citizens to create a path
to a better Colorado”*

Report of 2021 Statewide Conversation

Exploring opportunities
for improving Colorado's education system.

April 27, 2022

Fellow Coloradans:

We are pleased to present this report of “Building a Better Colorado’s” recently concluded 2021-22 statewide conversation to explore opportunities for improving Colorado’s education system. Following-up on the success of BBCO’s two prior statewide conversations in 2015 and 2019 – in which BBCO observed six consensus state policy recommendations emerge through conversations with almost 3,000 civic leaders in 37 communities, and later saw five of those consensus ideas ultimately implemented by others either at the ballot box or through the legislature – BBCO engaged almost 1,400 community leaders in 36 communities in this year’s conversation.

This year’s statewide conversation focused on Colorado’s K-12 education system and engaged participants in a discussion about potential opportunities for improving teacher effectiveness, student outcomes, and the equitability of how we fund our education system. As with our previous two statewide conversations, we were pleased to observe our diverse audiences engage in constructive dialogue and reach surprising levels of agreement on both the nature of the challenge and the potential opportunities for improvement. BBCO has observed that diverse community members – regardless of their political affiliation, ZIP code, profession, gender or ethnicity – will reach unusually high levels of agreement on policy matters when they engage in constructive dialogue, view the issue through the shared lens of building a better statewide community, and are empowered to determine the outcome of their conversation.

BBCO fully recognizes that the community leaders whom we very deliberately targeted to participate in these conversations are more engaged than most community members, and are therefore not representative of the average Colorado voter. However, we believe their informed opinions are an important consideration in exploring how Colorado should move forward. As with all policy matters, the challenge in developing future state policies will be finding the intersection between what highly-informed and highly-engaged civic leaders believe is the right pathway, and what less-informed and less-engaged average voters will support.

Going forward, BBCO will continue to make itself available to engage more Coloradans in this important conversation, however, as a non-advocacy organization, BBCO leaves it up to others to pursue any changes to state policy.

BBCO greatly appreciates the efforts of everyone who has participated in this year’s statewide conversation! Additionally, I am personally grateful for the continued commitment of the institutions and individuals who support BBCO’s non-partisan work and make this constructive statewide dialogue possible. I am equally grateful to the members of our BBCO Executive Committee who have committed this portion of their lives to empowering Coloradans to chart a better pathway forward for our state, and to the team of support staff whom I have the opportunity to work with and who ultimately make all of this good work happen.

Reeves Brown, Project Manager

reeves@betterco.org

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Executive Summary

In this third statewide conversation which the non-partisan Building a Better Colorado organization hosted, we engaged almost 1400 diverse community members in 36 communities across the state in a conversation to explore opportunities for improving Colorado's K-12 education system. Although preschool and post-secondary education are also important to equipping our students with the skills to succeed, BBCO chose to focus this conversation on our K-12 education system (primary and secondary education) given the limited amount of time that we had available during our community conversations, and the complexity and breadth of the education topic.

Our goals for this year's statewide conversation were to establish among participants a shared understanding of the current K-12 education policy landscape, and to inform participants of potential strategies for improving Colorado's K-12 education system and solicit their opinion of the relative merits of each. We explored strategies in the broad areas of improving teacher effectiveness, improving student outcomes, and improving the equitability of K-12 funding.



Lamar community meeting

K-12 education in Colorado comes in many shapes and sizes, and despite the State's decades-long intent to provide equitable access to K-12 education for all students, different student groups realize very different levels of access and very different outcomes from our education system.

- Because our K-12 system is largely funded by local property taxes, students in property-wealthy school districts inherently enjoy much greater education opportunities than students in property-poor school districts. Socio-economic and racial disparities often associated with property-poor school districts compound the education and opportunity inequity for those students.
- Rural school districts realize much higher costs as a result of their smaller size (and inability to realize economies of scale) and remote access. While improved remote learning opportunities are helping to enhance classroom experiences in rural remote school districts, those districts disproportionately struggle with a variety of challenges, including long-distance bussing logistics, school infrastructure costs, and the ability to attract and retain quality teachers and faculty.
- Academic performance is widely disparate among different student groups, with students from low-income and diverse racial ethnic households disproportionately underperforming other students at a rate of 2x to 4x.
- Funding for special education students in Colorado significantly lags the national average, and these additional costs are disproportionately borne by the smallest school districts.

Studies consistently conclude that the highest-performing education systems in the world focus significant efforts to close this education gap by investing the necessary resources and employing innovative strategies to achieve better outcomes for all students. And those highest-performing education systems across the globe contribute to higher-performing economies and a higher quality of life for all.

It is clear that Colorado’s K-12 education system can do better.

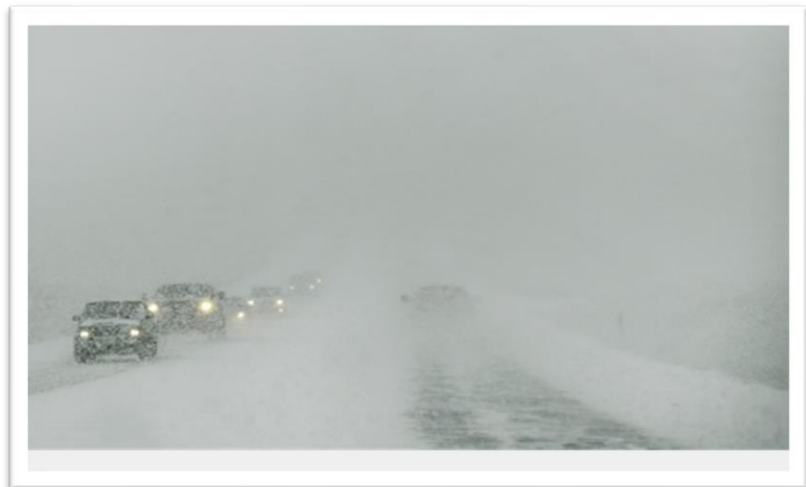


Arvada community meeting

Before asking participants to weigh-in on the potential merits of various strategies, we engaged our audiences in a discussion to ascertain what (if anything) they most valued about education and what their personal goals were insofar as K-12 outcomes. Participants expressed recognition of multiple values of education, including its contribution to both our individual and collective quality of life, sustaining our civil democracy, and supporting our economy. While multiple goals were recognized, the most broadly shared goal was to provide for an education that allows every child the opportunity to succeed.

Of the strategies considered for improving teacher effectiveness, participants indicated the most support for providing discretionary block grants to school districts to expend however they felt would best improve the attractiveness of their own teaching environment, including consideration of such strategies as increasing teacher pay, increasing teacher capacity, increasing support staff for teachers, and providing more continued professional training. The strategy of developing a more robust residency model to better prepare more teachers and the strategy of reducing the cost to be a teacher were each preferred by 22% of participants.

Of the strategies considered for improving student outcomes, the most enthusiastic support (by a considerable margin) was to provide more high school alternatives to develop employable skills without a 4-year degree. Lesser degrees of support were indicated for the strategies of placing more emphasis on developing leadership skills (soft skills), increasing funding to allow every student the opportunity to succeed, changing how we measure the performance of our education system, and investing in additional tutoring opportunities.



Sterling community meeting

(Unfortunately, a ground blizzard forced us to cancel our in-person meeting, but we still met via video-conference!)

In a high-level discussion about value considerations for funding our K-12 education system, participants voiced support for an equal shared contribution from both state and local governments, an equal effort on the part of all taxpayers to fund our K-12 system (relative to the disparate property wealth across districts), and the continued ability of local taxpayers to contribute additional funds to support their local school district. While participants expressed a strong opinion that our K-12 education system is currently underfunded, they also recognized that funding, alone, will not enable Colorado to realize the level of K-12 performance that we desire. Colorado needs to focus on what our desired outcome is from our K-12 education system, and then pursue meaningful and non-traditional strategies towards that end.

Through a series of small-group table conversations, participants offered a variety of additional opinions and organic strategy ideas, most frequently emphasizing the importance of cultivating effective leadership at all levels of our K-12 education system, increasing the opportunity for non-teacher professionals to contribute their unique and diverse experiences, and the need to minimize the presence of politics in our K-12 education experience.

Finally, participants recognized that, while there are certainly opportunities to improve on the state's current K-12 education policy framework, because of Colorado's historic local-control constitutional governance structure, most opportunities for improving K-12 outcomes lie within the authority of local leaders, including parents, school officials, and community members at large.

To fully appreciate the results of this statewide conversation about our state's K-12 education system, we encourage you to review BBCO's K-12 education white paper to better understand the complexity, disparity, and performance of our K-12 system. This white paper can be found on BBCO's website at

<https://buildingabettercolorado.org/undestanding-k12-education/>.



Denver-West community meeting

Why Building a Better Colorado?

To function effectively, our representative democracy form of government—our *republic*—depends on the active involvement of an engaged and informed electorate. However, increasingly, in this age of social media, face-to-face dialogue is being replaced with digital screens, and the overwhelming amount of information on the web challenges our ability to communicate complex public policy matters to an electorate struggling with information overload from competing sources. Additionally, the advent of “entertainment news”, which competes for ratings by cultivating specific audiences, has encouraged siloed thinking at the expense of respectful dialogue that explores different perspectives.

BBCO believes that Colorado can be better, and that the pathway to a better Colorado lies in engaging community thought-leaders across the state in an honest and constructive conversation about what they want their state to be.



Steamboat Springs community meeting

Who is Building a Better Colorado?

BBCO is a non-partisan, non-advocacy non-profit effort to engage civic leaders from across the state in a constructive conversation to explore opportunities for improving state policy. BBCO is managed by a 16-member Executive Committee which spans the political spectrum and is committed to constructive, non-partisan dialogue to improve state policy that sustains our *Colorado* quality of life. BBCO is grateful for the generous and continued support of the individuals and following Colorado institutions who, like BBCO, support constructive dialogue among Colorado community leaders to build a better future for our state:

- The Anschutz Foundation
- Bohemian Foundation
- Buell Foundation
- Gary Community Ventures
- Gates Family Foundation



Arvada community meeting

BBCO is Committed to Non-Partisan Constructive Dialogue

1. BBCO researches its policy issues from politically-neutral sources such as the offices of the State Demographer and the Legislative Council. Additionally, BBCO vets its research with subject matter experts from across the political spectrum to ensure a fair representation of the facts.
2. BBCO's leadership represents the breadth of Colorado's political spectrum, and very deliberately approximates Colorado's political demographic.
3. BBCO does NOT advocate for any specific state policies or outcomes; BBCO is only advocating for an honest conversation among Colorado community leaders about what they want their state to be. For example, after explaining each policy issue on which we're inviting discussion, the first policy option we always offer for our audience's consideration is the option of "No Change" in order to afford them the opportunity to support the status quo if that's their preferred pathway forward.
4. In an effort to ensure constructive dialogue that fairly represents the breadth of each community, and to avoid the unproductive airing of competing political ideologies and organizational agendas which sometimes dominates public meetings, BBCO doesn't host public meetings. Rather, BBCO uses a very deliberate model which engages and empowers established leaders within each community to build a guest list of constructive and diverse voices for their community's meeting. This localized "namestorming" process contributes to the community's ownership of the conversation, and helps BBCO to avoid potential criticism that we might have selected a friendly audience to arrive at some predefined outcome. While BBCO doesn't determine who will be on the guest list, we do provide our local leader hosts with demographic information about their community from the offices of the Colorado State Demographer and Secretary of State to equip them to build a guest list that fairly reflects the diversity of their community.
5. BBCO's commitment to constructive dialogue even extends to the physical set-up of our community meetings. We randomly assign guests to individual tables to discourage "group-think" among participants who arrive together, and we seat our audiences around tables of 6-8 people to provide an opportunity to build relationships and engage in meaningful small-group conversation.



Aurora community meeting

BBCO'S Community Conversations are Uniquely Empowering

Communities OWN their community meeting

BBCO tasks established community leaders to be responsible for:

1. Building their community's guest list based on individuals who they think are individually constructive and who collectively represent the diversity of their community.
2. Setting the date, time and location of their community meeting.

Participants determine the outcome of their community meeting

BBCO believes a better Colorado can happen when we engage Coloradans in an honest, constructive conversation about what they want their state to be. While BBCO is responsible for selecting the topic for each statewide conversation, researching that topic, and presenting an unbiased explanation of that topic and related policy options to our community audiences, we empower participants to drive the outcome of the conversation and recommend what they believe is the best pathway forward for our state.



Boulder community meeting

BBCO's Unique Model Has a History of Success

Prior to our recently concluded 2021-22 statewide conversation about Colorado's education system, Building a Better Colorado hosted two prior statewide conversations in 2015 and 2019 in which we engaged 3,000 civic leaders in 37 communities across the state in discussions about Colorado's ballot initiative process, Colorado's election system, and Colorado's constitutional fiscal policies.

Through those two prior statewide conversations, BBCO observed participants reach significant agreement on 6 state policy recommendations:

1. The initiative process for amending our state constitution should require more consensus among and be more inclusive of Coloradans across the state.
2. It should be easier for Unaffiliated voters (the largest block of voters in Colorado) to vote in the primary election of their choice.
3. Colorado should reinstate a Presidential primary election to enable all voters to participate in that process.
4. Revenue from the state's Hospital Provider Fee should not count towards the state's revenue limit.

5. The state’s TABOR revenue limit should be removed – as it has been for most local governments across the state – while TABOR’s requirement that voters approve tax increases should be maintained.
6. The Gallagher Amendment to the state constitution, which was adopted in 1982 and froze the ratio of the total value of residential and non-residential property in an effort to stem the growth of residential property taxes, should be repealed in order to sustain funding for essential local services and establish more equity in the taxation of residential and non-residential property owners.

Subsequent to BBCO’s publication of these consensus policy recommendations, Colorado voters adopted four of these six policy recommendations at the ballot box and the Colorado legislature adopted another of the 6 recommendations. Perhaps, even more noteworthy, is the fact that three of these policy changes – which were implemented after being recommended through BBCO’s statewide conversations – had been previously attempted in prior years without success:



Brighton community meeting

- The state legislature had made multiple attempts to amend Colorado’s ballot initiative process since the mid-1990’s, with most of those efforts failing to ever make it out of the committee of origin. Only once did such an effort result in a ballot measure before the voters, and it failed in 2008.
- An effort to repeal the Gallagher Amendment was attempted in 2003 and failed at the ballot box by a ratio of almost 4:1.
- The state legislature failed twice to exempt the Hospital Provider Fee from the state’s revenue limit consideration before they adopted the legislation by a 3:1 margin after BBCO’s statewide audience recommended such action.

While there are likely many factors that contributed to the failed efforts to implement these policy ideas in prior years, and the success in implementing these policies AFTER they were recommended through BBCO’s state conversations, the potential positive impact of engaged civic leaders – who are empowered to make these policy recommendations through non-partisan dialogue – cannot be overlooked. Through BBCO’s empowering and non-partisan process, diverse community audiences are able to establish shared values on which to build consensus policy recommendations of which they then have some sense of ownership. After engaging with fellow community members in BBCO’s non-partisan dialogue and developing a sense of ownership in the consensus policy recommendations which grow out of that dialogue, community leaders aren’t likely to keep those ideas to themselves; rather, they share with others in their sphere of influence their support of those

policy recommendations. And this diverse audience of civic leaders within each community have a lot of influence with a lot of fellow community members.

After completing three statewide conversations thus far, and observing the ultimate implementation of five of the six consensus state policy recommendations which have grown out of those statewide conversations, it's fair to say that BBCO is a believer in the power of this non-partisan and empowering process.

- We believe in the ability of constructive and diverse community members to agree more than they disagree – regardless of their zip code, political affiliation, ethnicity, age, profession or gender – when they look at a policy matter through the shared lens of the state that we all love rather than through the lens of a competing political ideology or organizational agenda.
- And we believe in the ability of those same constructive and diverse community members to influence the opinions of other, less engaged, members of their community on matters about which they feel some sense of ownership.



Salida community meeting

BBCO's 2021 Statewide Conversation

WHAT:

Exploring opportunities to improve Colorado's K-12 education system.

Through this year's statewide conversation, BBCO had two goals:

- 1) Establish among participants a shared understanding of the current K-12 education policy landscape.
- 2) Inform participants of potential strategies for improving Colorado's K-12 education system and solicit their opinion of the relative merits of each.

Although preschool, K-12 and post-secondary education are each important aspects of the education system which we depend on to prepare students to succeed, given the limited 2-3 hour timeframe which we had available for our community meetings, and given the complexity of the K-12 structure, we chose to focus this year's conversation specifically on K-12 education. After reviewing a brief history of the evolution of Colorado's K-12 education system, how the system is funded (as the largest budget item within the state's General Fund), and sharing a variety of performance metrics related to Colorado's teaching environment, student performance, funding and comparative performance with other nations, BBCO engaged audiences in small-group conversation to evaluate the potential merits of several strategies to:

- improve teacher effectiveness
- improve student outcomes, and
- improve the equitability of funding.



Brush community meeting

In sharing this background information and engaging participants in this discussion about Colorado's K-12 education system, BBCO made clear that BBCO has no position on the adequacy of Colorado's K-12 system, nor is BBCO advocating for any particular outcome from the conversation. Rather, BBCO's goal was simply to establish a shared awareness of how our state's K-12 education works and how it's performing, and then leave it up to audience participants to decide for themselves if they thought the current performance is satisfactory, and if not, what they believed should be the priority strategies to improve that performance.

Changes in BBCO's process from prior years

In an effort to improve our level of engagement with civic leaders across the state, we made two notable changes in our outreach process in this year's statewide conversation:

1) Virtual engagement opportunity

In response to the social-distancing restrictions required as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, BBCO hosted VIRTUAL community conversations parallel with our traditional IN-PERSON conversations and invited participants to choose whichever mode of participation best suited them. Our virtual audiences had the same opportunity to hear the presentation and see the slides which were shared, participate in small-group discussions, and cast their anonymous votes on the survey questions in the same way as did our in-person audience. Approximately 40% of our statewide audience chose to participate virtually.

While we did observe a higher rate of no-shows among those who pre-registered to participate virtually (compared to those who pre-registered to participate in-person), we're confident that the virtual opportunity contributed to a larger overall statewide audience.



Colorado Springs community meeting

2) Increased efforts to engage diverse racial communities and younger community members

Despite BBCO's increased efforts to empower our local community leader hosts to build for their community's meeting a guest list that is fairly reflective of the community's diverse demographic, we have struggled in all three of our statewide conversations thus far to attract a representative level of participation from diverse racial communities and younger community members. To help address this deficiency this year, we amended our process in two ways:

- a. In addition to our established model of inviting the mayor, Chair of the Board of County Commissioners, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, School Superintendent, College President and CEO of the community foundation within each community to begin the process of building the guest list for their community's meeting, we tried to also include a young professional representative in this "1st Circle" phase of our process.

- b. For those communities in which a particular non-majority diverse racial ethnic group constituted at least 9% of the community’s population, we tried to add a representative of that ethnicity within our “1st Circle” exercise to build the guest list for those communities. This resulted in us specifically inviting representatives of those diverse racial groups to participate in the initial namestorming process in most of our communities.
- c. We published our invitation for each of our community meetings in both English and Spanish, and offered to make available a Spanish translator upon request for all community meetings.

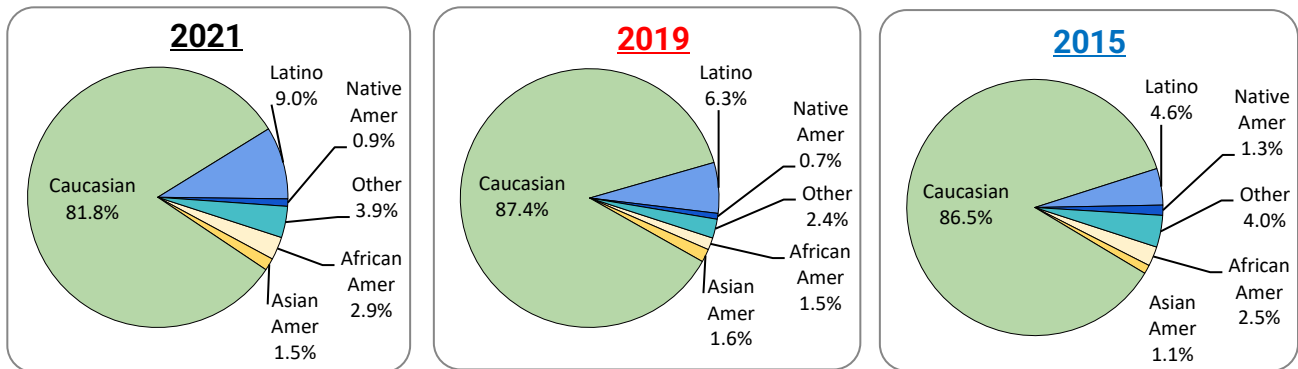
These deliberate efforts by BBCO DID result in a more proportionate representation of the diverse racial and ethnic populations on many of our communities’ guest lists, as well as an increase in their in our community meetings, but we continue to see such diverse populations under-represented at our community meetings and must therefore be diligent in continuing with this targeted outreach.

At the same time, BBCO must be careful not to over-emphasize these efforts to attract increased participation from diverse racial populations and younger community members lest we become vulnerable to criticism that we’re trying to show favor to one segment of a community’s demographic over another.



Castle Rock community meeting

While diverse racial and ethnic populations are under-represented in BBCO’s statewide conversations, their level of participation has increased over time.

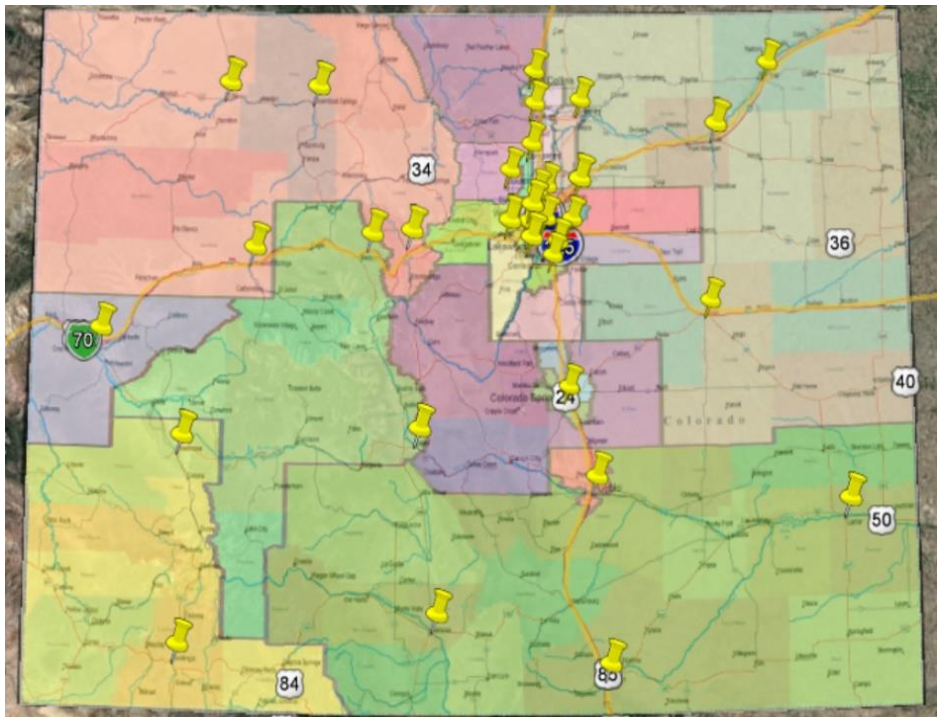


WHERE:

BBCO hosted meetings in 36 communities across Colorado in 2021.

While BBCO intended to host meetings in all 37 of the communities which we engaged in our 2019 statewide conversation, we were forced to cancel our meeting in NE Denver due to technical difficulties related to our virtual platform. BBCO's goal is to target our limited resources and balance the needs for geographic distribution, population concentration, and providing an opportunity for every Coloradan to participate in this statewide conversation.

- Alamosa
- Arvada
- Aurora
- Boulder
- Brighton
- Brush
- Castle Rock
- Colorado Springs
- Craig
- Denver - Downtown
- Denver - Southeast
- Denver - West
- Durango
- Fort Collins
- Frisco
- Glenwood Springs
- Golden
- Grand Junction
- Greeley
- Greenwood Village
- Lakewood
- Lamar
- Limon-Hugo
- Littleton
- Longmont
- Loveland
- Montrose
- Monument
- Pueblo
- Salida
- Steamboat Springs
- Sterling
- Thornton
- Trinidad
- Vail-Eagle
- Westminster



WHO:

BBCO engaged almost 1,400 community leaders in our 2021 statewide conversation.

Between October 2021 and February 2022, BBCO engaged 1,359 community leaders in our statewide conversation about Colorado’s fiscal constitutional amendments in 36 communities across the state. Our audience was smaller than the audience of 1,786 which participated in BBCO’s 2019 statewide conversation about Colorado’s constitutional fiscal policy, but larger than the audience of 1,193 which participated in BBCO’s first statewide conversation about Colorado’s ballot initiative process and election system in 2015. Although BBCO added a parallel virtual opportunity for invitees to participate in this year’s conversation to accommodate for COVID’s social-distancing precautions, the overall impact of COVID undoubtedly discouraged participation. Additionally, BBCO’s 2019 discussion topic of “education” was relatively narrower than the broader topics of “constitutional fiscal policy” (2019) and “ballot and election processes” (2015) which could have contributed to our smaller statewide audience this year.

BBCO recognizes that, by design, the audiences at our community meetings represent some of the most active and influential members of the community who most likely have an interest in public policy. As a result, neither the audiences nor their perspectives on these policies are likely reflective of an average “likely voter’s” awareness of these issues, or what they would support or oppose at the ballot box. However, BBCO also



Craig community meeting

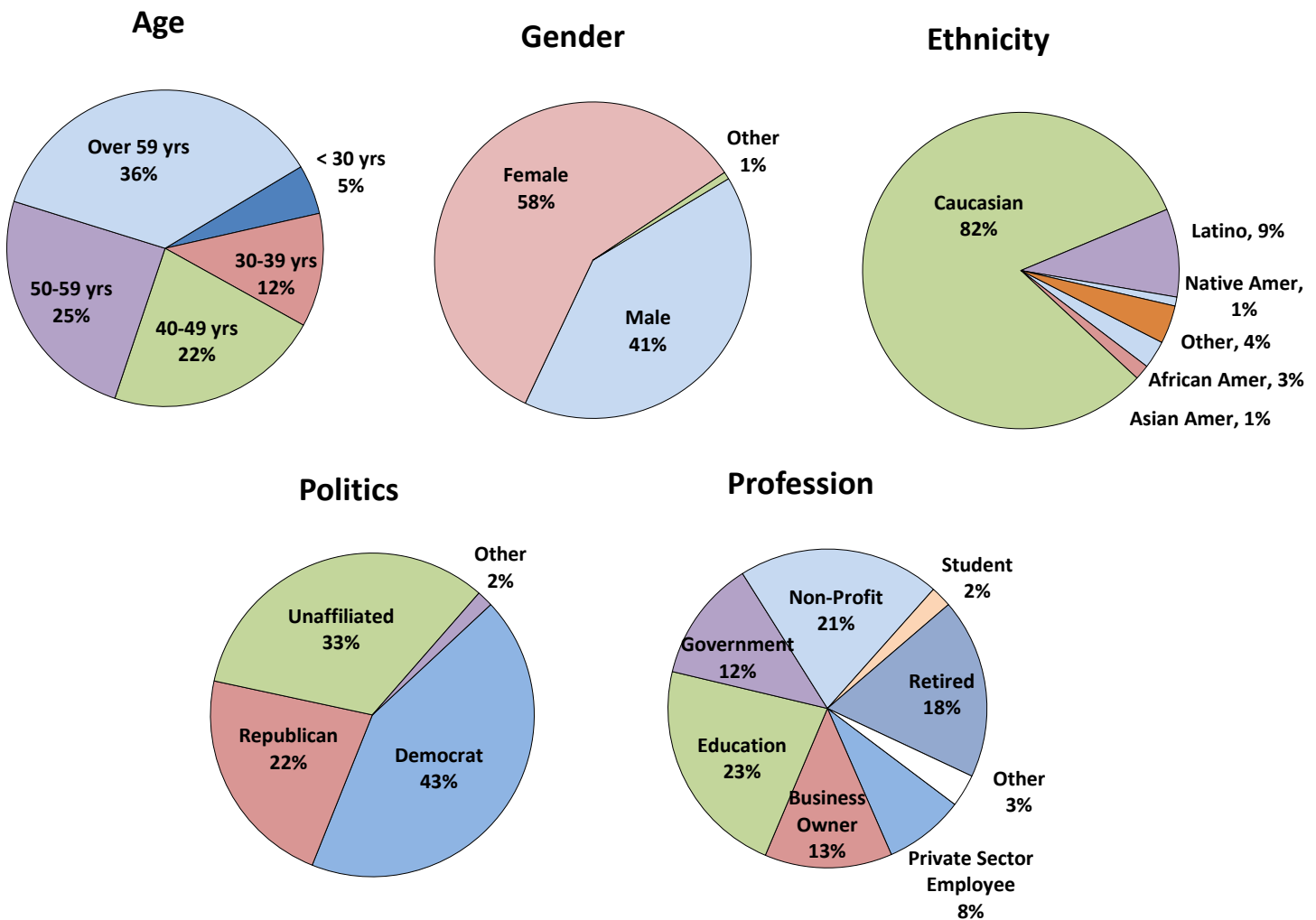


Durango community meeting

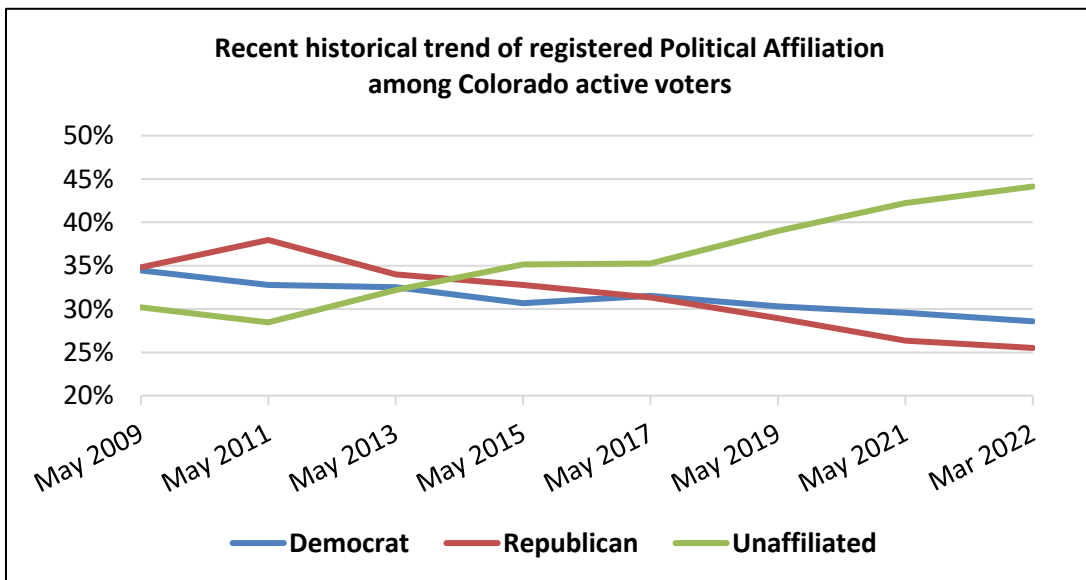
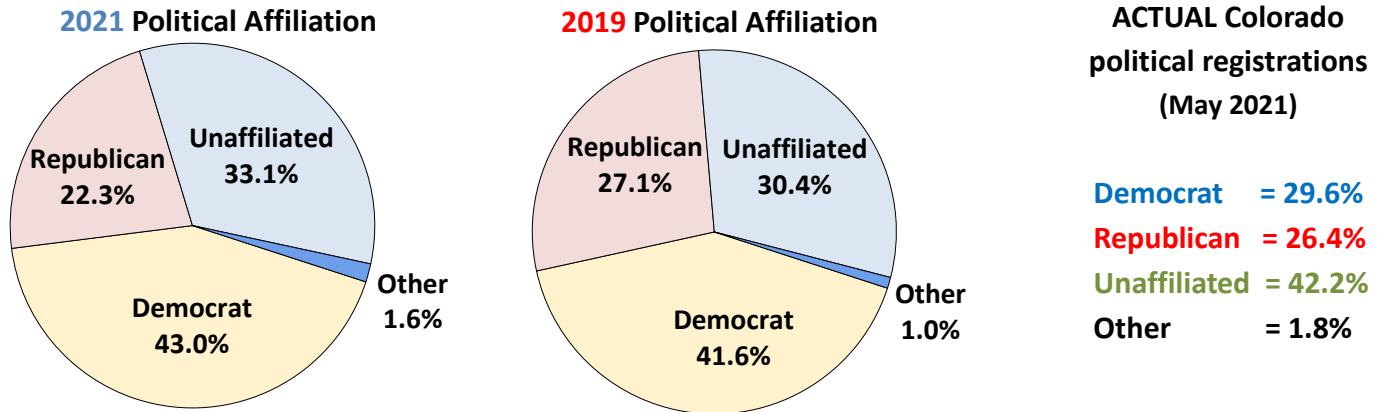
recognizes that these “grasstops” members of the community have disproportionately large influence within their community and, to the extent that they reach consensus among themselves on a policy recommendation through BBCO’s statewide conversation, they may influence the broader opinion of others within their community.

Audience Demographics

In an effort to establish a collective demographic profile of each of our audiences, we first invited participants to self-identify their own demographic profile anonymously using their voting device. The political mix of the audience, 43/22/33 (Democrat/Republican/Unaffiliated), leaned significantly more left than the actual voter registration of Colorado (30/26/42). As has been the case in BBCO's two prior statewide conversations in 2015 and 2019, the audience has been disproportionately older and Caucasian, although, due to extra outreach efforts by BBCO, the percentage of diverse racial ethnic participants increased from 13% in 2015 and 2019 to over 18% this year. Additionally, our audience was disproportionately female but did include a mix of professional affiliations.



While the percentage of those who identified as “Republican” was 5% LOWER than in 2019, the percentage who identified as “Unaffiliated” was HIGHER by 3%; this may reflect, in part, the number of Coloradans who’ve changed their party affiliation from Republican to Unaffiliated in recent years. Additionally, in all three of our statewide conversations thus far, BBCO has observed a higher rate of participation from those who affiliate as “Democrat” than those who affiliate as “Republican”.



Findings from BBCO’s 2021 Statewide Conversation:

As with our first two statewide conversations in 2015 and 2019, BBCO was pleased to see significant levels of agreement across the state regarding the value of K-12 education, the shared concern about the current status of our K-12 education system, and shared support for various strategies to improve education outcomes. Regardless of whatever differences participants demonstrated in terms of their political affiliation, zip code, skin color, gender, professional background or age, they reached surprisingly high levels of consensus when they came together as Coloradans and looked at our K-12 education system through the shared lens of this state which we all love.

For several reasons, this year’s topic of “education” was more challenging for BBCO to address than previous topics such as Colorado’s “ballot initiative process” or our state’s “constitutional fiscal policy”:



Fort Collins community meeting

- Colorado’s K-12 education system is multi-faceted and complex. It’s influenced by Colorado’s strong local-control governance, the state’s overarching education policy framework, and also federal policy priorities.
- Everyone has a personal experience in K-12 education and, therefore, everyone has an opinion about how our education system should be administered based on their own unique experience as a child, a parent, a professional and a member of the community. Because our education system influences everything from our individual value system to our perspectives about economics, government and society in general, it can be an emotional topic for conversation.
- As the largest item in the state General Fund budget, our education system is a real pocketbook issue for most Coloradans. It is as expensive as it is valuable, and effecting change in it may likely impact each of us financially.
- Unlike BBCO’s previous topics for statewide conversation, which included a range of competing policy alternatives, the strategies for improving our K-12 education system are NOT mutually-exclusive for the most part, and therefore the question isn’t simply “What strategies do we most prefer?”, but rather “How much change can we afford to consider?”

It’s important to acknowledge that the merits of the findings of BBCO’s statewide conversation are largely dependent upon the participants’ knowledge of our K-12 education system and the potential strategies related

to it. In order to bolster this level of individual understanding, prior to each community conversation, BBCO provided our participants with a comprehensive whitepaper on Colorado’s K-12 education system which provided an overview of the history of the evolution of Colorado’s K-12 education system, how the system is funded, and a variety of performance metrics related to Colorado’s teaching environment, student performance, funding and comparative performance with other nations. BBCO engaged audiences in small-group conversation to discuss the potential merits of various strategies before inviting their opinion in that regard.

Thus, while the participants’ knowledge of this complex education topic may have been limited, this experience likely prepared them to offer an informed opinion far beyond the ability of most voters.

On the following pages, we present a summary of the outcomes of BBCO’s 2021 statewide conversation about Colorado K-12 education system. To review the individual results of each of the 36 community meetings, visit BBCO online at <https://buildingabettercolorado.org/undestanding-k12-education/>.



Glenwood Springs community meeting

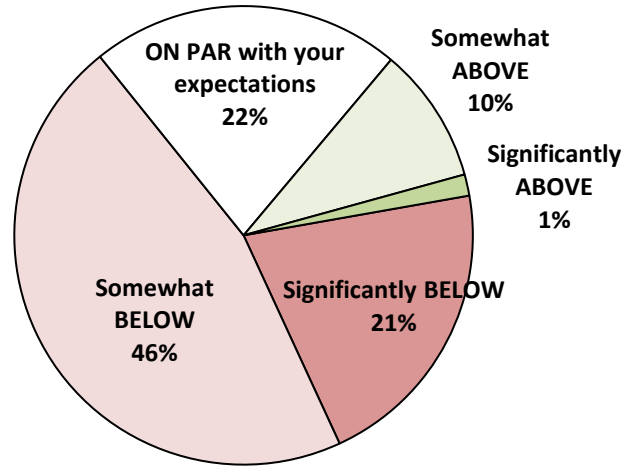


Grand Junction community meeting

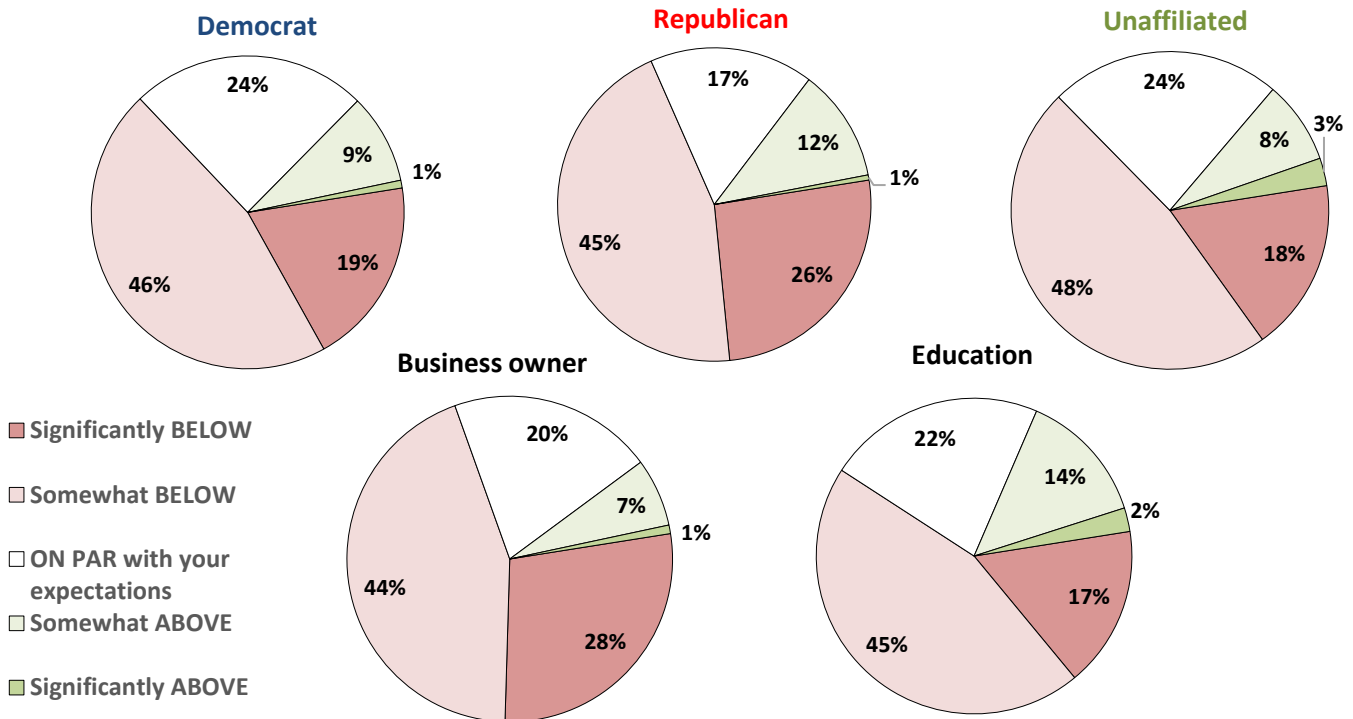
Assessing inherent biases regarding performance and funding

At the beginning of each community meeting, in an effort to assess what inherent bias participants brought to the discussion, BBCO asked two questions:

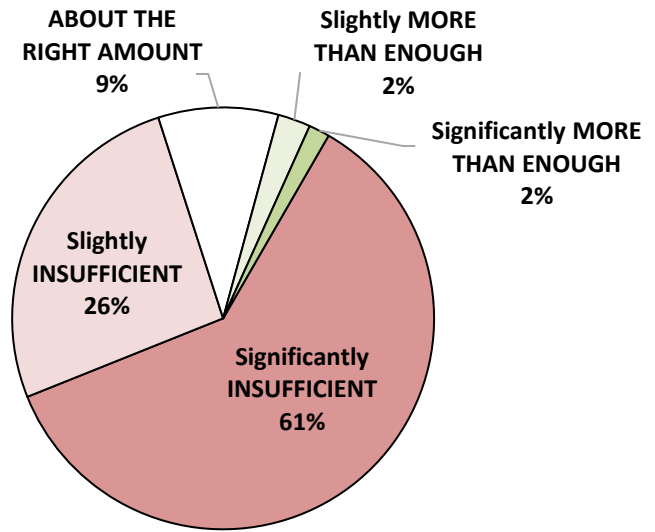
“How well would you say our K-12 system is performing relative to your expectations?”



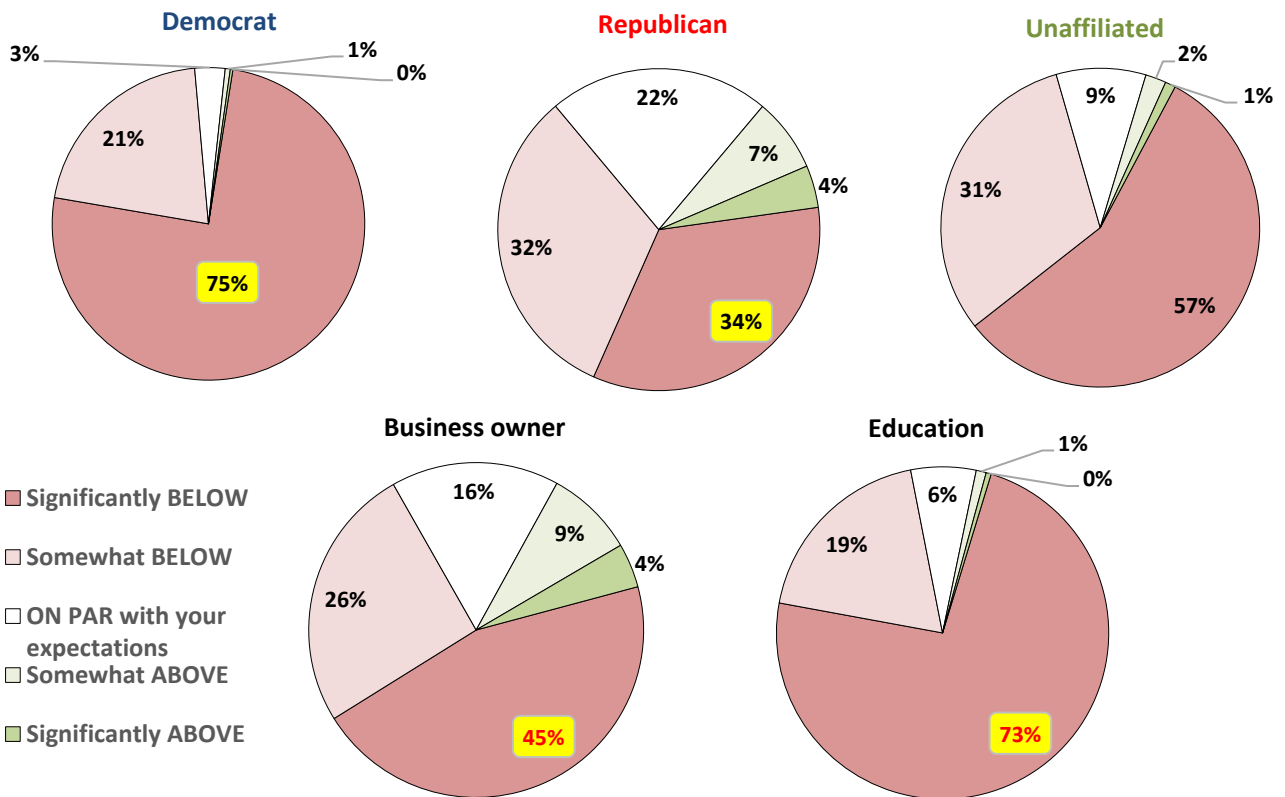
While it is notable that fully 2/3rds of our statewide audience felt that Colorado’s K-12 system is performing BELOW their expectations, it is even more striking that this concern is almost equally shared across political and business affiliations...



“How well would you say that we are currently FUNDING our K-12 system?”

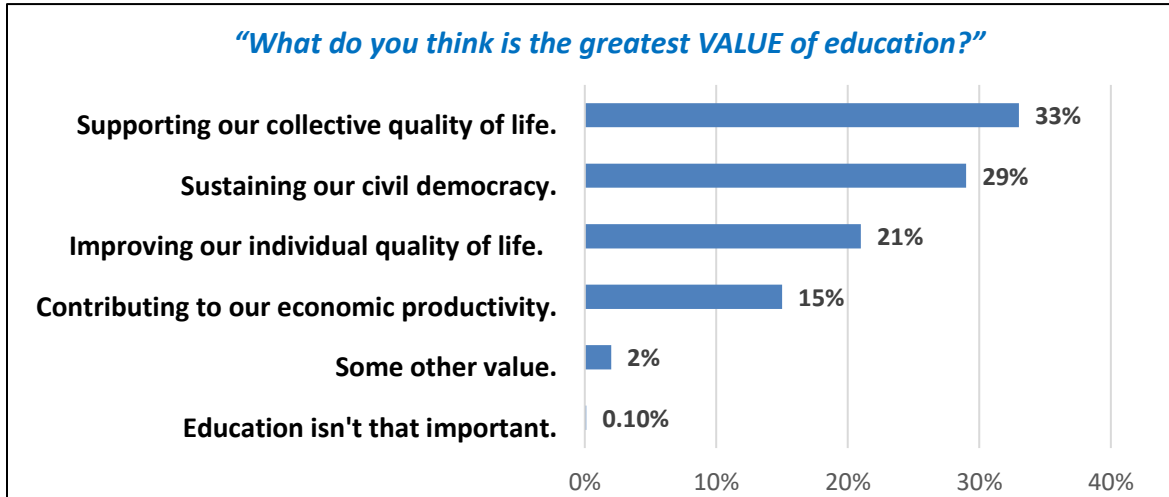


Although BBCO observed a significantly stronger response regarding perceived adequacy of funding – with almost 90% of participants expressing the opinion that Colorado is insufficiently funding our K-12 education system – there was an equally significant amount of disparity in how strongly participants felt in this regard based on their political and business affiliations...

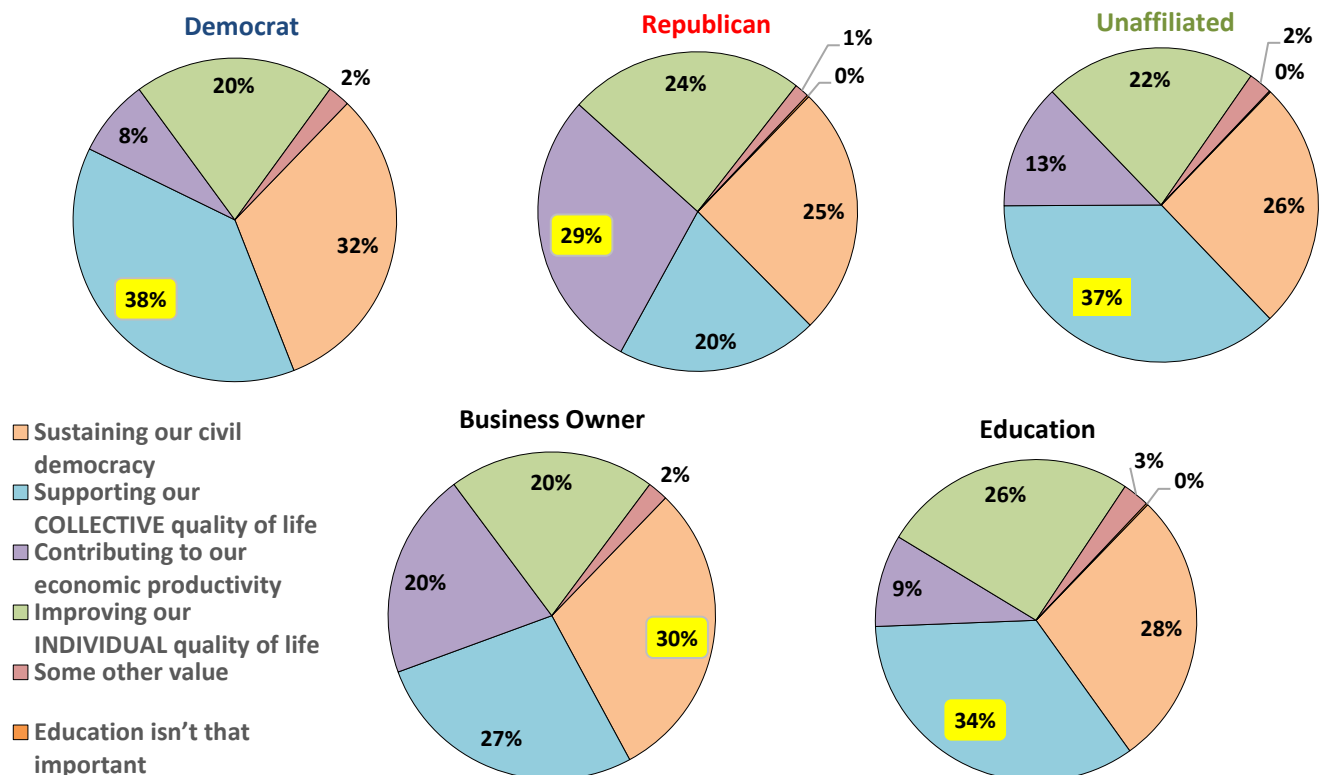


What is the value and end goal of education?

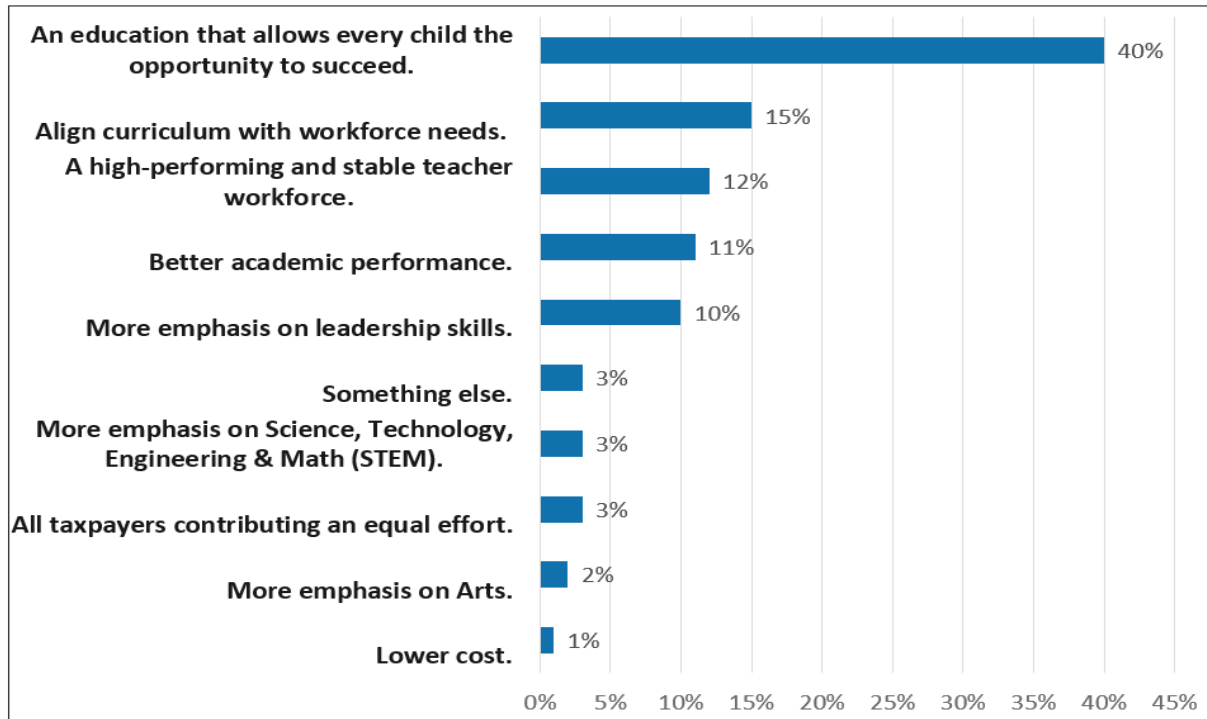
At the outset of our discussion, BBCO engaged audiences in small-group conversation to determine what value they saw in education and what their goals were for Colorado’s K-12 education system. This exercise was intended to encourage participants to think broadly about Colorado’s education system so that they might start with the end in mind and view potential pathways forward through these foundational lenses.



While most participants indicated that their most important values of education were “*supporting our collective quality of life*” and “*sustaining our civil democracy*”, those who identified as Republican indicated that “*contributing to our economic productivity*” was their most important value.

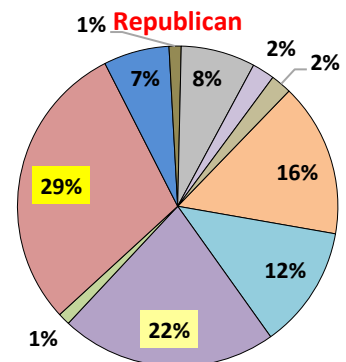
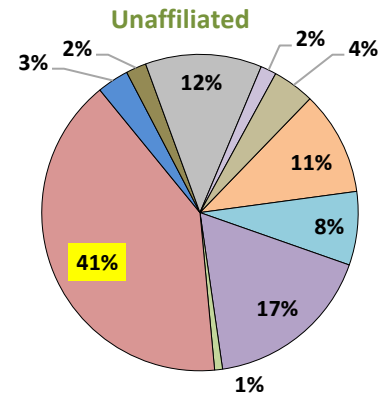
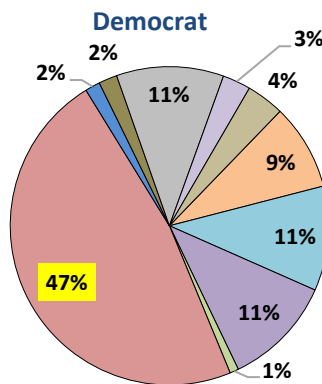


“What do you WANT from Colorado’s K-12 education system?”



While most participants indicated that their most important education goal was “providing an education that allows every child the opportunity to succeed”, those who identified as Republican indicated almost as much support for the goal of “aligning curriculum with workforce needs”.

- Better academic performance
- High-performing teachers
- Align curriculum w/ workforce needs
- Lower cost
- An education that allows every child the opportunity to succeed
- More emphasis on STEM
- More emphasis on Arts
- More emphasis on leadership skills
- All taxpayers contributing equal effort
- Something else

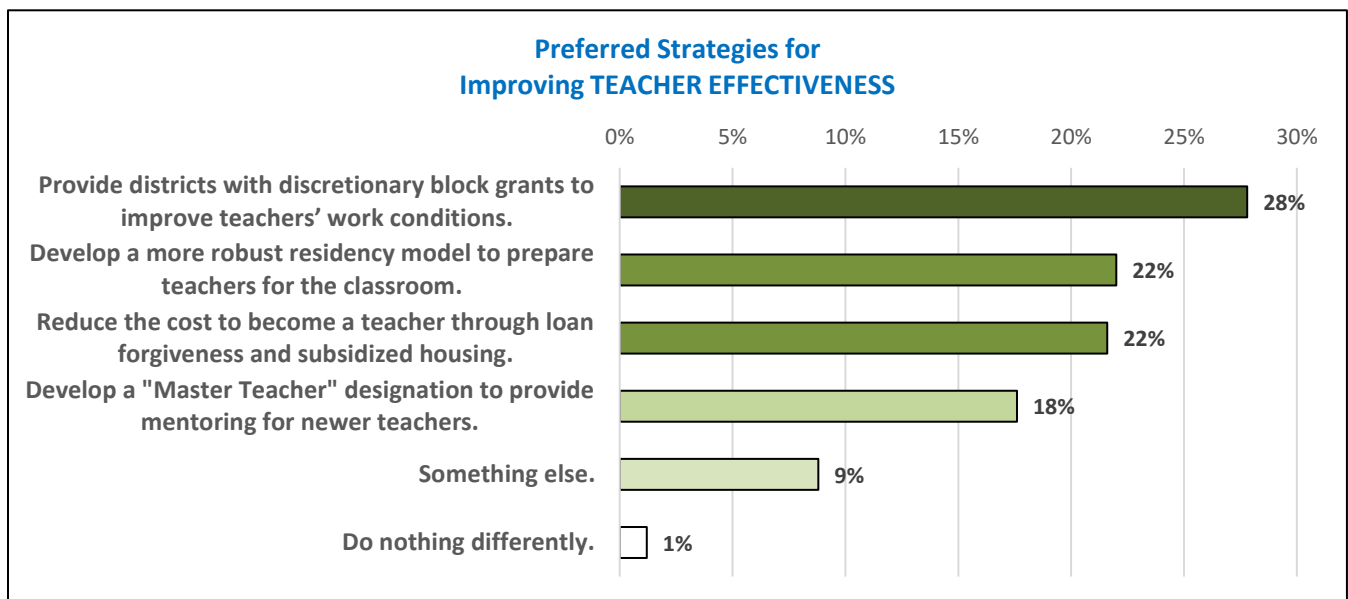


Preferred Strategies

BBCO engaged participants in small-group discussion to evaluate the potential merits of several strategies for improving teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Because the various strategies which were presented were NOT mutually exclusive, BBCO asked participants to RANK them against each other to discern which were more appealing than others. Additionally, BBCO engaged participants in small-group discussion about the basic elements of how Colorado funds K-12 education and invited their opinion on several foundational questions in that regard. Lastly, in an effort to assess the relative will of participants to pursue change in any of these areas, BBCO asked participants how much they would personally be willing to contribute in additional taxes, if any, to implement change.

Improving Teacher Effectiveness

Of the strategies considered for improving teacher effectiveness, 28% of participants indicated the most support for providing discretionary block grants to school districts to expend however they felt would best improve the attractiveness of their own teaching environment, including consideration of such strategies as increasing teacher pay, increasing teacher capacity, increasing support staff for teachers, and providing more continued professional training. The strategy of developing a more robust residency model to better prepare more teachers and the strategy of reducing the cost to be a teacher were each preferred by 22% of participants.



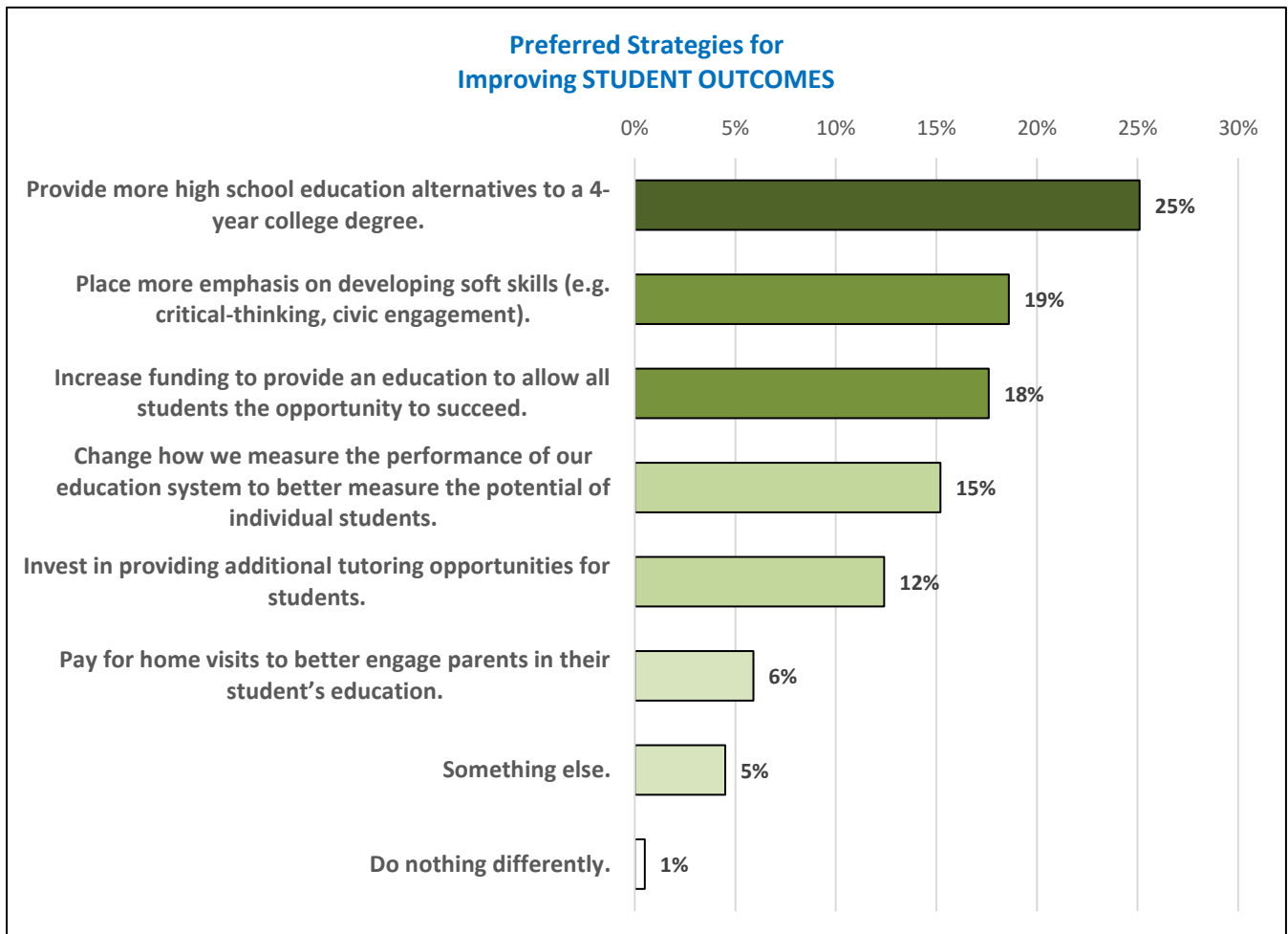
Additional strategies which were organically offered by participants to improve teacher effectiveness included:

- Reduce requirements/cost for non-teaching professionals to become licensed teachers in order to more easily allow retirees, military and other skilled professionals to become teachers.
- Align the highest compensation with the most challenging classroom/school environments, so that the most disadvantaged students have the best teachers.
- Don't allow teachers who have been found to be incompetent to be reassigned to other classrooms/schools (which ultimately passes them to the lowest performing schools).

- Pay market-based differential compensation to provide more competitive salaries for teachers who are more skilled and reward/incentivize performance and accountability.
- Offer a K-12 leadership training program for community members, parents and prospective school board members to increase shared awareness of education funding, governance and education strategies.

Improving Student Outcomes

Of the strategies considered for improving student outcomes, the most enthusiastic support (by a considerable margin) was to provide more high school alternatives to develop employable skills without a 4-year degree. Lesser degrees of support were indicated for the strategies of placing more emphasis on developing leadership skills (soft skills), increasing funding to allow every student the opportunity to succeed, changing how we measure the performance of our education system, and investing in additional tutoring opportunities.



Additional strategies which were organically offered by participants to improve student outcomes included:

- Advance students at their own rate, but conditional upon their mastery of the subject matter.
- Utilize a 4-day school week (instead of 5-day) to allow teachers more planning and prep time.
Work with community groups to organize out-of-classroom enrichment experiences for students on each 5th day.
- Adopt a year-round school year to promote continuity of education.
- Provide mandatory parenting and life-skill classes to STUDENTS.



Greeley community meeting



Greenwood Village community meeting

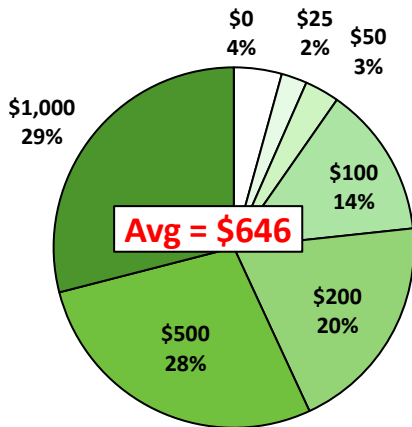


Lakewood community meeting

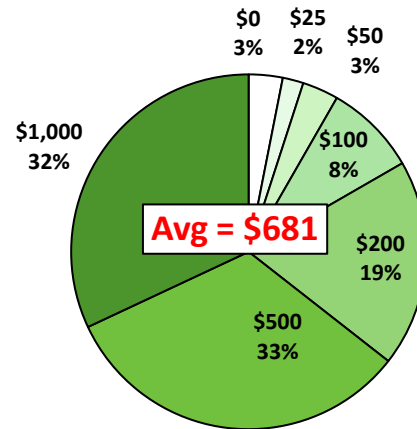
To further assess the relative value of various priorities and the audience’s willingness to actually pursue such priorities, BBCO asked participants the following four value questions...

“How much more annual tax would you be willing to pay to...

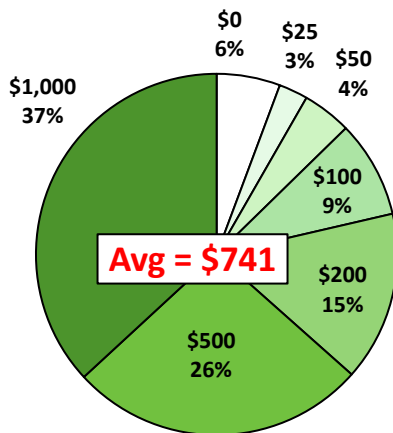
...improve TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS?



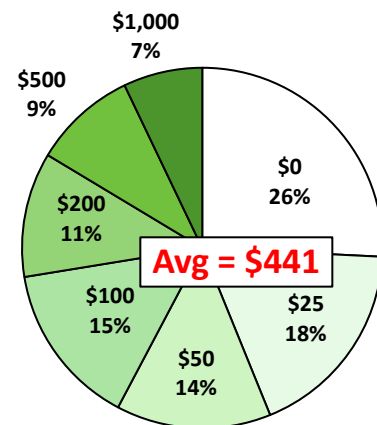
...improve STUDENT OUTCOMES?



...provide all kids in Colorado equal access to a K-12 education that allows them the opportunity to succeed?



...provide more information to taxpayers about how their current investment in K-12 is spent?



While the actual validity of these individual values is questionable, this exercise does provide an indication of which areas participants viewed as being relatively more valuable to invest in.

Improving the Equitability of Funding

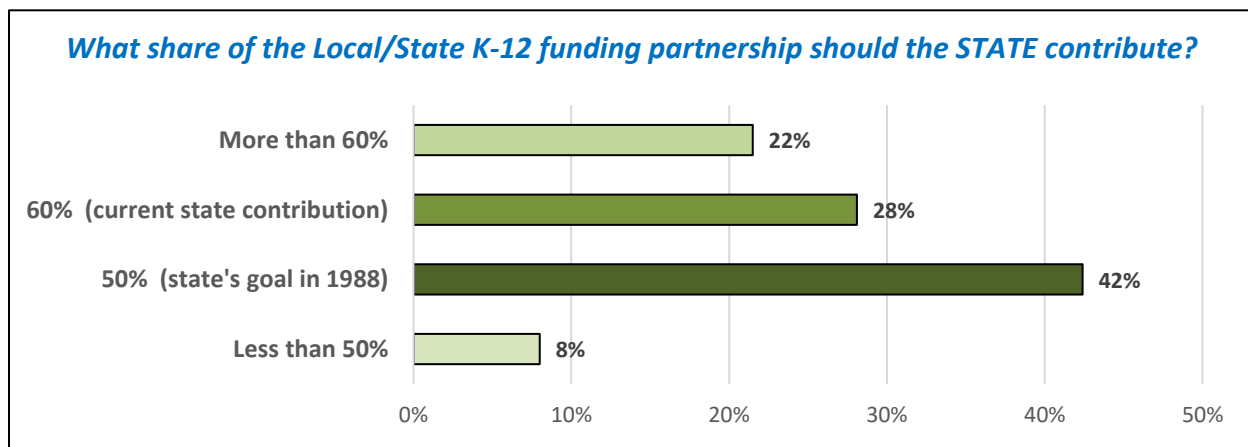
In addition to considering specific strategies for improving both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes, participants also discussed and weighed-in on broader foundational questions regarding the funding of Colorado’s K-12 education system. It’s important to recognize that – as essential as adequate funding is to sustaining Colorado’s K-12 education system – funding shouldn’t be viewed as a “goal”, but rather as a MEANS to help achieve our education outcome goals. Funding only contributes to better education outcomes to the extent that it is invested in effective strategies to that end.

While the AMOUNT of funding to support our K-12 education system is certainly an important consideration, it is perhaps equally important to consider the appropriate DISTRIBUTION of that funding to provide equitable access to education for all students. This ideal of providing equitable access for all students has been a central goal of both state and federal education policies since at least the 1960’s, but it has often proven difficult to define and even more difficult to achieve. For example, to the extent that the state allows additional local investment in school districts, it likely creates the opportunity for a better education experience in some districts more than others, thus unintentionally exacerbating the inequities in education access.

That all noted, the highest-performing education systems in the world share the characteristic that they appropriately invest in strategies to provide equitable access for all students, recognizing that raising the performance of the most challenged students results in raising the performance for the entire system. And, as was noted in BBCO’s statewide conversation, Colorado’s diverse racial ethnic student populations and low-income student populations disproportionately underperform academically by a factor of 2-4 times compared to other student populations.

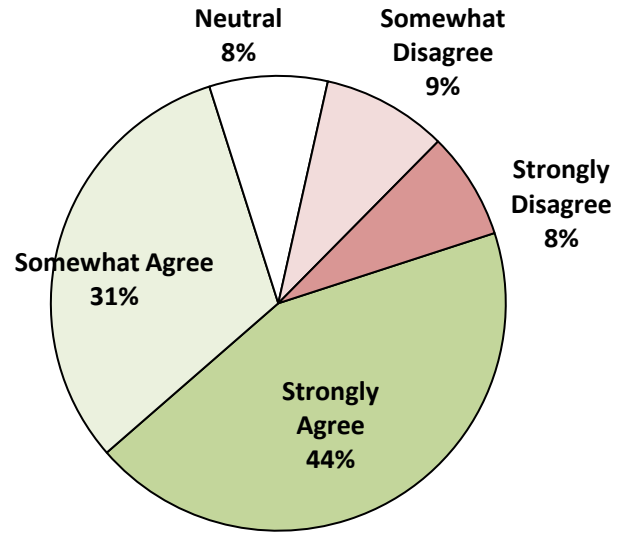
State versus Local share of funding K-12 education

Although funding for K-12 education was almost exclusively provided by local governments for the first 50 years of Colorado’s statehood, the state has gradually increased its contribution since the 1930’s to the point, today, that the state now contributes about 60% of the cost of our K-12 education system. The state’s share of this funding partnership is largely formula-driven today as a result of the fiscal amendments that Coloradans have embedded into their state constitution, specifically, the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights and the Amendment 23 K-12 funding mandate. As part of BBCO’s statewide conversation, participants were asked...

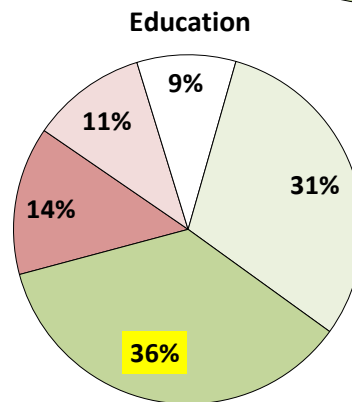
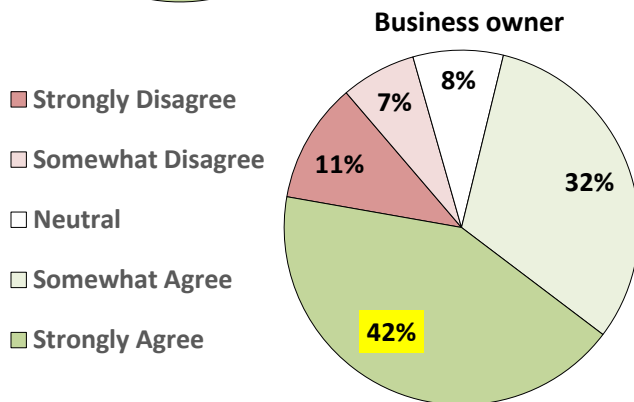
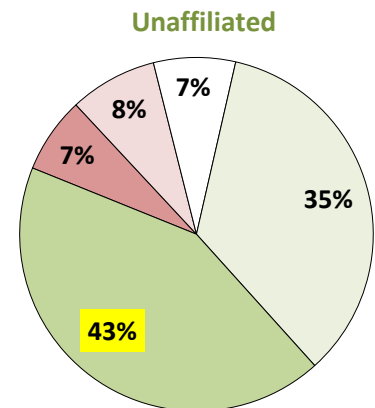
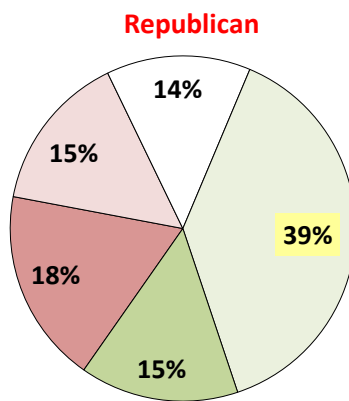
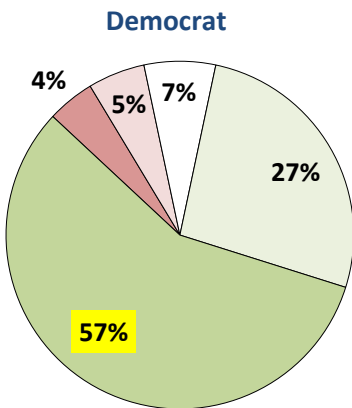


How much do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statement?

“All Colorado taxpayers should contribute an equal effort to fund our K-12 education system relative to their own property values, even if this means that districts with MORE property wealth wind up subsidizing the education cost for districts with LESS property wealth?”



While most participants “Strongly Agreed” with this statement, those who identified as Republican were notably less supportive, although even a slight majority of them still indicated some level of agreement with it.

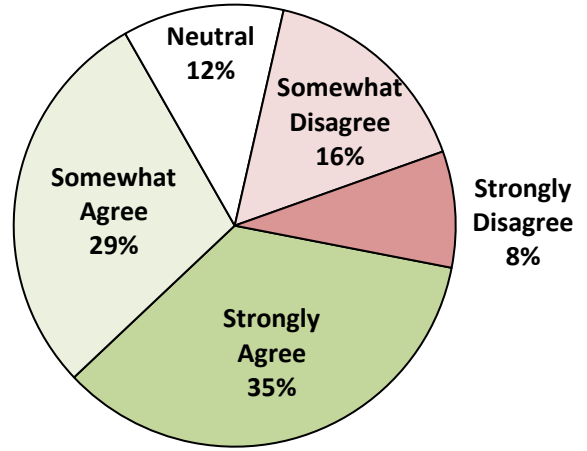


- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

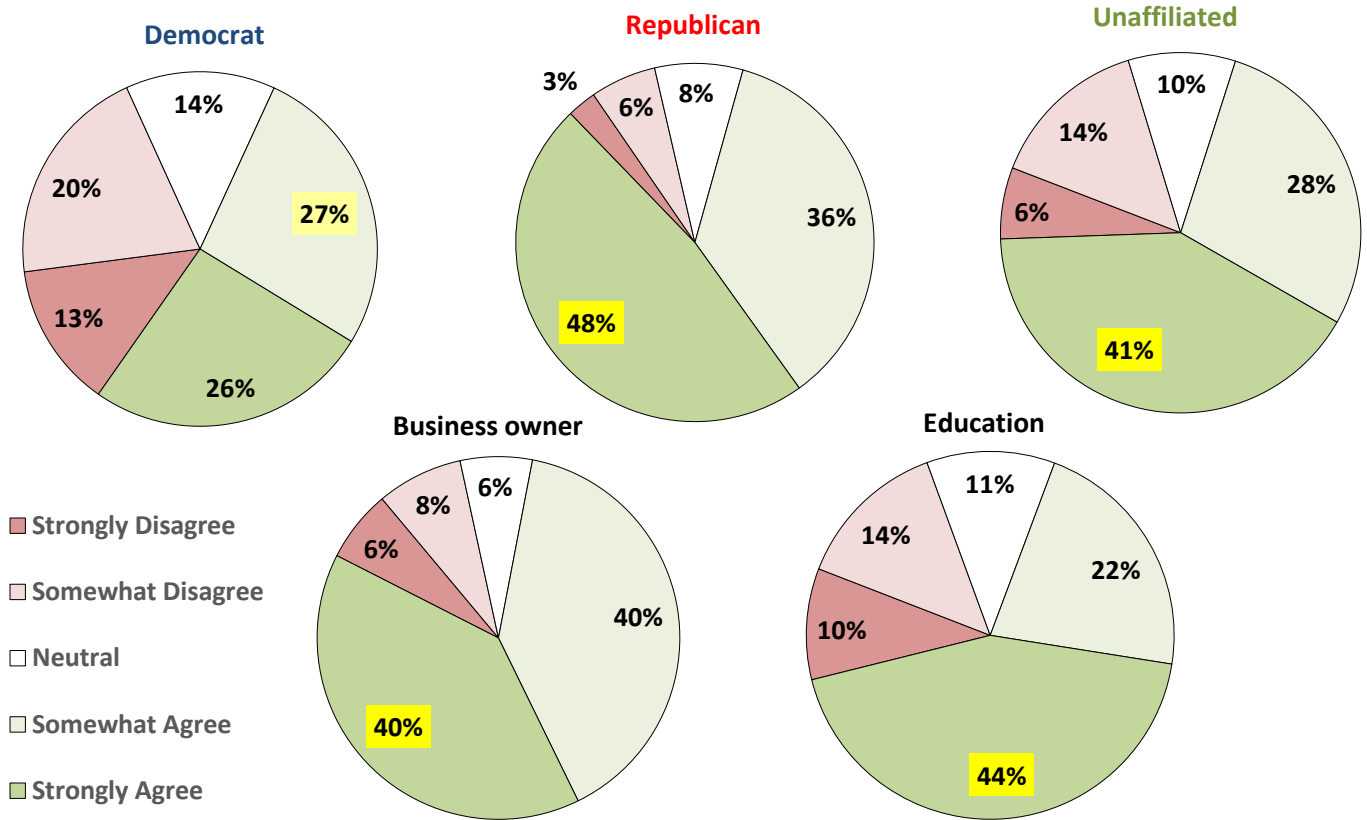
How much do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statement?

“Local taxpayers should be allowed to invest additional local funds into their school district – beyond what’s required to provide a basic quality K-12 education – to create for their students a better, and therefore unequal, education opportunity.”

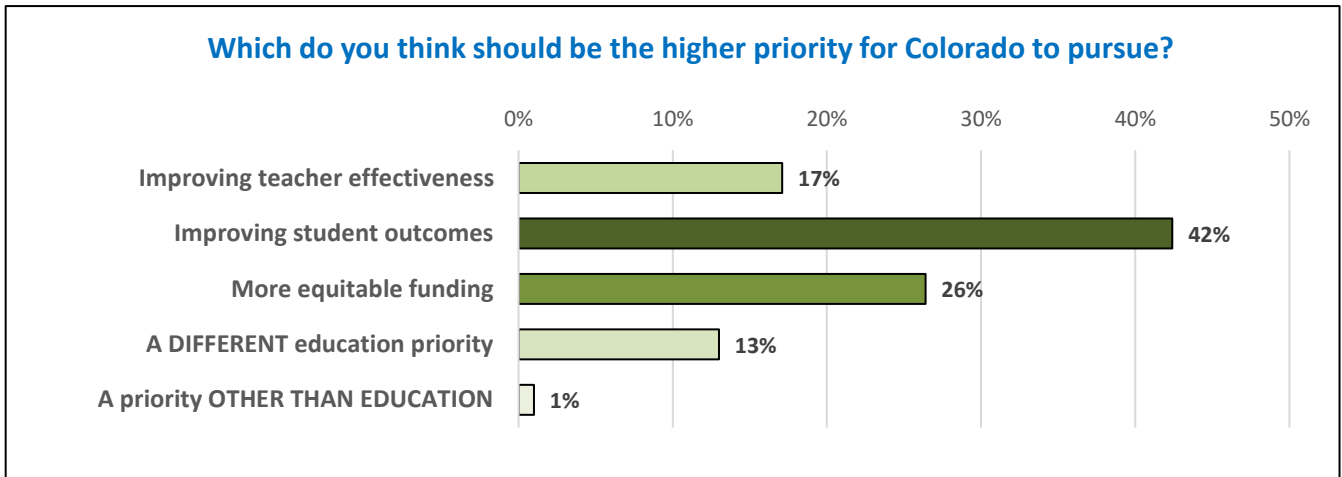
(NOTE: Colorado allows for this opportunity to a limited degree through the use of locally-approved mill levy overrides.)



While most participants “Strongly Agreed” with this statement, those who identified as Democrat were notably less supportive, although even a slight majority of them still indicated some level of agreement with it.



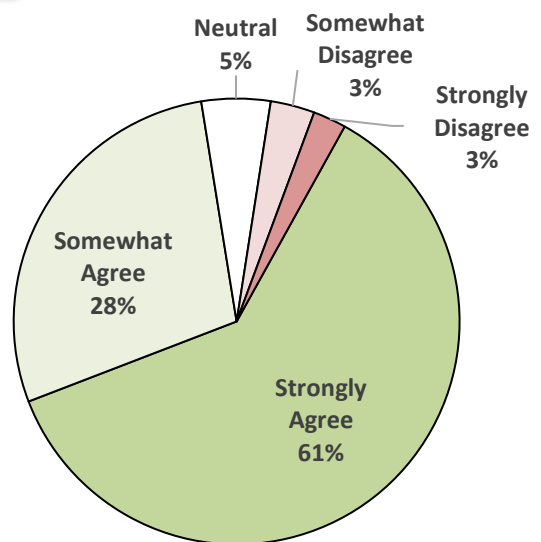
Lastly, after weighing-in on the various strategies to improve teacher effectiveness, student outcomes and the equitability of funding, participants were asked more broadly how important they thought it was for Colorado to pursue changes in Colorado’s K-12 education system.



Limon-Hugo community meeting

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

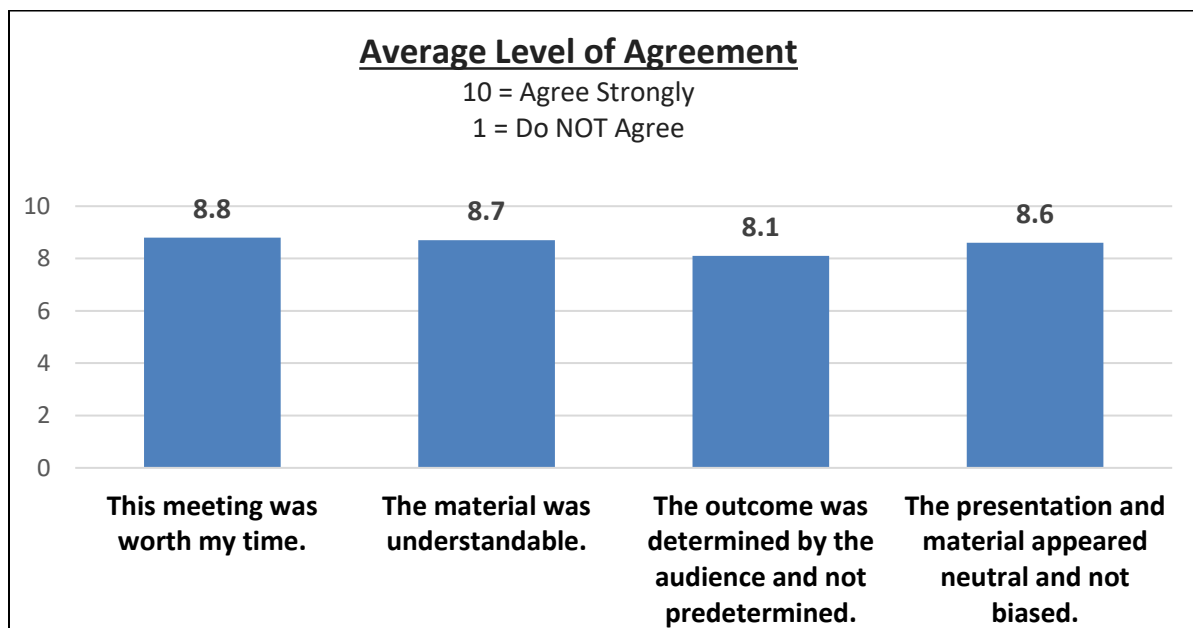
“Colorado should pursue major systemic changes in our state’s education system to improve teacher effectiveness, student outcomes, and equitable funding”?



Participant Feedback

BBCO made clear at the beginning of every community meeting that our goal was NOT to build consensus, and our measurement of success for these community conversations was not whether participants reached agreement on any policy recommendations. Instead, BBCO's goal was to raise a shared awareness of how Colorado's K-12 education system operates, and engage participants in a constructive fact-based conversation which empowered them to provide informed feedback on what they thought was the appropriate pathway forward for Colorado.

At the conclusion of each community meeting, BBCO requested that participants complete a brief online survey to give their opinion on the merits of this statewide conversation. Over 400 participants provided their feedback through this anonymous post-meeting evaluation.



Littleton community meeting



Loveland community meeting

Most of the feedback that we received was very positive...

- *“Great work. That was a wealth of info in 2.5 hrs!”*
- *“It was the best presentation I have ever had on education funding here in Colorado.”*
- *“Thank you! Love this process.”*
- *“This is the best community engagement/meeting I have participated in.”*
- *“Pleased this non-partisan work is being done in such a divided time.”*

... but there was also legitimate criticism that the material was dense, the presentation was rushed, and there was not enough time for participants to engage in small-group conversation as much as they would have liked. Additionally, as with BBCO’s prior two statewide conversations, some participants felt that BBCO demonstrated a bias in our presentation of the material.

Inasmuch as BBCO tried our best to make this an unbiased conversation, the very fact that BBCO hosted a conversation on this topic of education implies that we think there is a problem to be addressed. That acknowledged, BBCO is committed to continuing to try and improve our process to ensure accuracy, transparency and genuine empowerment of our audiences to determine the outcome.



Montrose community meeting



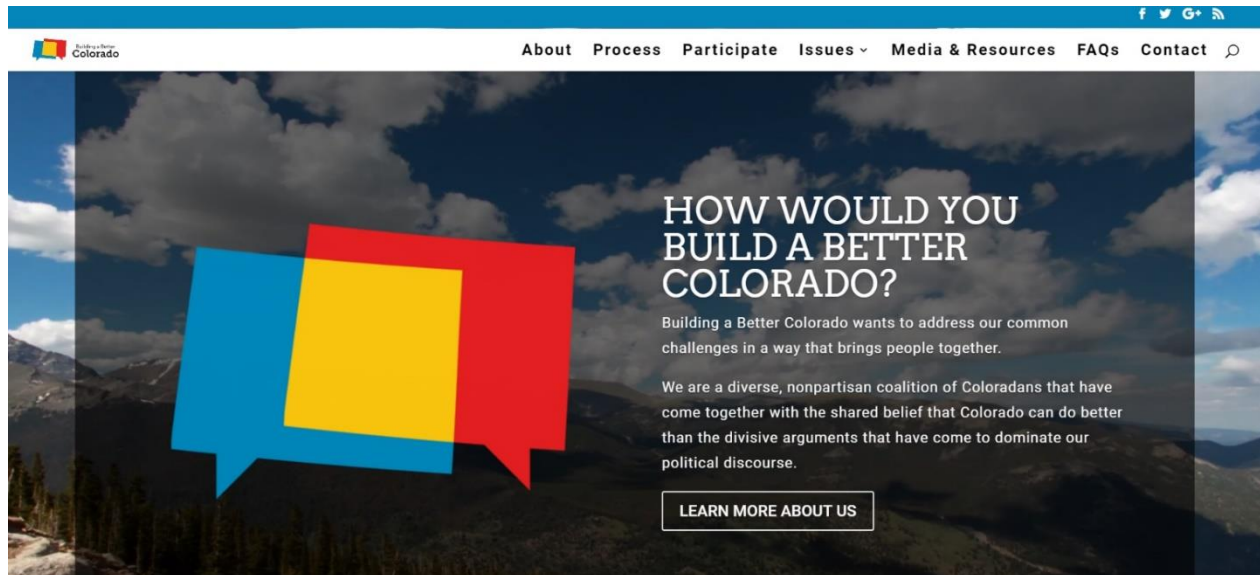
Monument community meeting

Additional Outreach

In addition to engaging almost 1400 community members in this statewide conversation, BBCO also communicated this information to others across the state.

- We shared our education white paper with over 13,000 other community members who were invited but declined to participate in this year's statewide conversation.
- We made our white paper available on our website (<https://buildingabettercolorado.org/undestanding-k12-education/>).
- We presented this information to over 500 additional Coloradans in response to invitations by individual organizations.

BBCO will continue to make our white paper and this Final Report available on our website and embrace future opportunities to present to groups as we might be invited.



(screenshot of Building a Better Colorado's website home page)

Conclusions

It is clear from BBCO’s statewide conversation that Coloradans from across the state – regardless of demographic, geographic or political differences – appreciate the multitude of values which we realize from an effective K-12 education system, and they share significant concern about the performance of our current system. It is equally clear that Coloradans recognize the value of providing equitable access to our K-12 education system in order to equip every child with the opportunity to succeed, and that our entire society benefits – economically, socially and civilly – when such access is afforded.

There is a strong opinion that our K-12 education system is currently underfunded, but also a recognition that funding, alone, will not enable Colorado to realize the level of K-12 performance that we desire. Colorado needs to focus on what our desired outcome is from our K-12 education system, and then pursue meaningful and non-traditional strategies towards that end. This will require both innovative thinking and the courage to embrace change. While such change is necessary to achieve our education goals, this change may also potentially threaten traditional processes, power structures and even some institutions.

Leadership at all levels is key to quality education outcomes. This leadership starts locally with the vision of what outcomes elected school board members expect from their district’s K-12 education system, and includes effective administrative leadership at both the district and school levels to attract, retain and inspire effective teachers, and teachers who are committed to similarly inspiring their students to realize their full potential. The state can also play a leadership role in crafting a shared vision that inspires local K-12 leadership and maintaining a statewide policy framework that supports those locally-inspired K-12 outcomes.



Pueblo community meeting

Because the foundation of Colorado’s governance structure (perhaps more than any other state) is based on local control, most opportunity for improving K-12 processes (and outcomes) lies within the authority of local community members, parents, and school officials. However, the flipside of this reality is equally true: the opportunity for hindering the effectiveness of K-12 education processes and outcomes ALSO lies within the authority of local community members, parents and school officials.

If, as local community members, we choose to focus on working together to establish a shared vision for what we want from our local K-12 education system, then we largely have the ability to realize that vision and improve the education outcomes for our children.

Conversely, if we choose to marginalize the value of our local K-12 education system, or worse, view our local school district as a battlefield for promoting competing individual values, then we stand in the way of our own education goals and we likely will collectively suffer the shared consequences of an underperforming education system.

As with all things in life, we're not going to realize change by pursuing the same strategies. If we truly want CHANGE in our education outcomes, then WE have to be willing to embrace such change and contribute actively to being part of that change. Perhaps we should each ask ourselves: *"Is what I'm doing contributing to positive change in our education system, or contributing to preserving a status quo with which I'm perhaps more comfortably familiar, or not contribute anything at all?"*



Eagle-Vail community meeting



Westminster community meeting

Building a Better Colorado hopes this statewide conversation continues and expands to engage more fellow Coloradans both within communities and across our great state. BBCO is available on request to share these findings and/or engage additional Coloradans in this empowering conversation. If your community group would like to arrange for a presentation, please visit the BBCO website at <http://buildingabettercolorado.org/request-a-presentation> and fill out a request form.

BBCO genuinely appreciates the interest and involvement of community members across the state in our non-partisan statewide conversations.

Together, we ARE building a better Colorado.



Trinidad community meeting

BBCO Leadership Team



Building a Better
Colorado

Executive Committee

Denise Burgess
Mario Carrera
Don Childears
Stanton Dodge
Tim Foster
Tom Gougeon
Steve Halstedt
Ted Harms

John Ikard
Gail Klapper
Dan Ritchie
Lee White
Al Yates
Dave Younggren
Joe Zimlich

Project Manager: Reeves Brown

Operations Manager: Kyler Brown

Community Engagement Team:

Cheryl Fleetwood
Michele McKinney
Dusti Reimer

Cathy Shull
Sue Unkenholz
Mark Zamora

Website Support / Data Analysis: Keaton Brown



Thornton community meeting