

Administrative Growth in Colorado's Public School System

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Introduction

Outside of a brief decline between 2020 and 2021, Colorado's public schools have seen a steady influx of administrative positions over the past decade outpacing both teacher and student population growth. While administrative roles have rapidly increased, the share of Colorado's educational budget spent on teacher salaries has consistently declined.

Over the past four years this trend has accelerated. Between 2021 and 2024, Colorado's student population declined while the number of administrative staff grew nearly 13%. High school student performance during this period has declined for each grade level in both math and reading & writing.

Key Findings

- Since 2021, the number of public-school administrators has grown 12.5%, while Colorado's student population has declined by 0.2%.
- The gap between student and administrative growth was more pronounced in some of Colorado's largest school districts since 2021.
 - Denver County 1 increased its student population by 2% while administrative growth was 24%.
 - Cherry Creek 5 lost over 5% of its students yet the number of administrators grew by 16%.
 - St. Vrain Valley had the largest administrative growth, 30%, among 8 of the state's largest districts. Their student body grew by just 3%.
- Since 2021, the share of 9th, 10th, & 11th grade students who are proficient in math and reading & writing declined for each grade level.
- Teacher salaries as a share of total educational spending in Colorado has consistently declined from 30.2% in 2013 to 25.3% in 2023, as administrative positions continue to grow.

Overview of Administrative Growth in Public Schools

The rate of growth in administrative staffing in Colorado's public school system has remained elevated above both student and teacher growth over the past 10 years. At its peak in 2019, the number of administrators had grown by 48% relative to 2009 while the numbers of students and teachers rose by just 11% and 9%, respectively. Prior to 2014, growth among these groups was more closely aligned as shown in Figure 1.

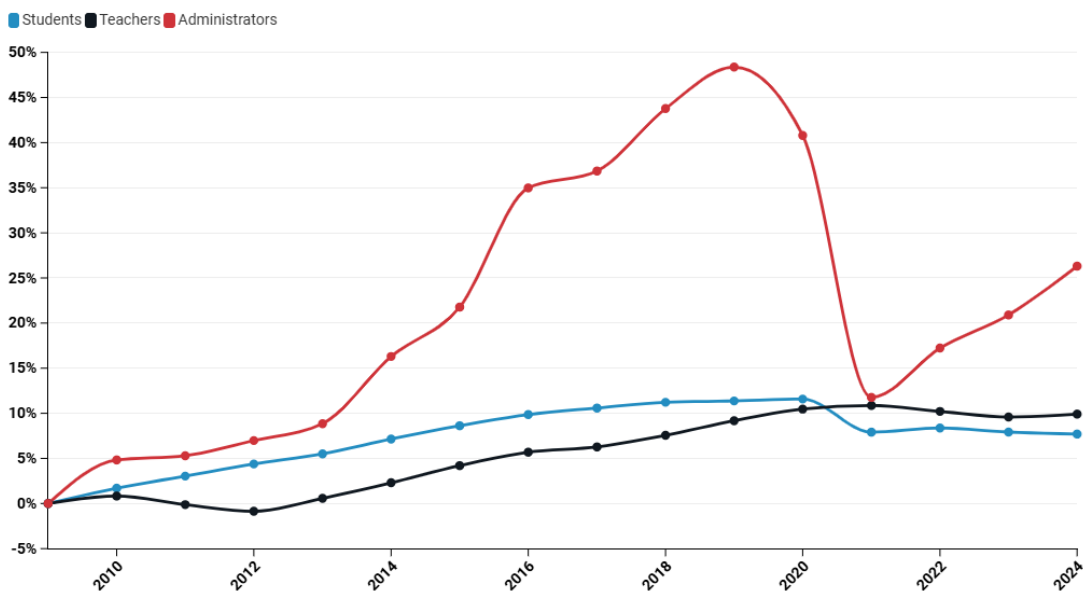
Administrative positions in Colorado are separated into four levels which cumulatively make up “administration”.ⁱ These positions are defined below:

1. Superintendent
2. Assistant/Deputy/Associate Superintendent, Senior Executive, Executive Director, Director of Special Education
3. Non-Instructional Manager, Director, Supervisor
4. Instructional Manager, Director, Assistant Director of Special Education, Supervisor

Figure 1

Administrator, Teacher, and Student Growth in Colorado's School System Since 2009

The number of administrators declined by over 20% due to Covid between 2020-21 but has since increased nearly 12.5% while Colorado's student population has declined by 0.2%.



Source: Colorado Department of Education

In response to the disruption spurred by COVID-19, administrative staff totals declined by over 20% between 2020 and 2021 despite schooling continuing during this time. However, since 2021, administrator growth has once again vastly outpaced both teacher and student growth. Specifically, between 2021 and 2024, the number of administrators grew by 12.5% while the state’s student population fell by 0.2%.

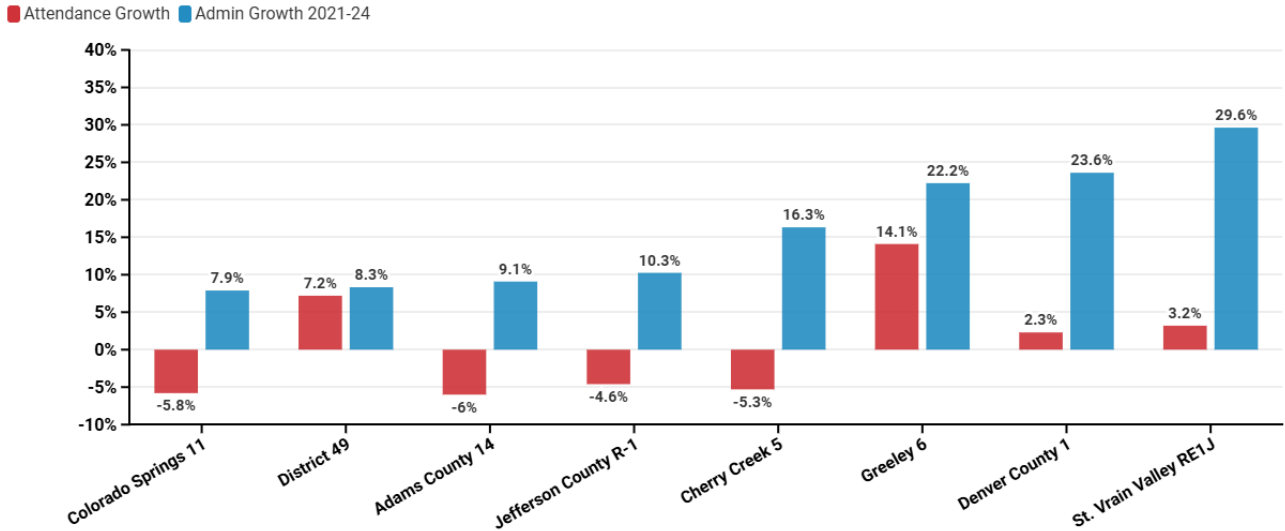
Figure 2 shows the change in student population and administrative staff among Colorado’s largest school districts from 2021-24. St. Vrain, Denver, and Greeley 6 all added over 22% more administrators over the last three years. Other districts such as Colorado Springs 11, District 49, and Adams County 14 have kept their growth under 10%.

Half of the districts shown saw their student population decline yet all of them increased their administrative staff numbers. Cherry Creek 5’s student population fell by over 5%, however the number of administrators increased by over 16%.

Figure 2

Change in Student Population & Administrative Staffing Amongst Colorado's Largest School Districts, 2021-24

Between 2021 and 2024, student populations have declined in half of the districts shown despite all districts increasing their administrative staff.



The ability for Colorado’s public schools to continue operating after cutting over 20% of their administrative positions warrants further investigation. Figure 3 shows that during the latest rapid expansion of Colorado’s administrative staff in public schools, student performance in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades declined universally across math and reading & writing categories.

Figure 3

Reading & Writing Overall - Percent of Students that Met Expectations					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	Percentage Point Change '21-'24
PSAT Grade 9	53%	51.3%	50.1%	50.3%	-2.7
PSAT Grade 10	54.6%	52.6%	50.4%	51.5%	-3.1
SAT Grade 11	46.5%	45.6%	46.4%	45.1%	-1.4
Mathematics Overall - Percent of Students that Met Expectations					
PSAT Grade 9	31.8%	31%	36.1%	29.2%	-2.6
PSAT Grade 10	31.9%	32.3%	31.9%	23.3%	-8.6
SAT Grade 11	28.5%	28.1%	28%	24.4%	-4.1

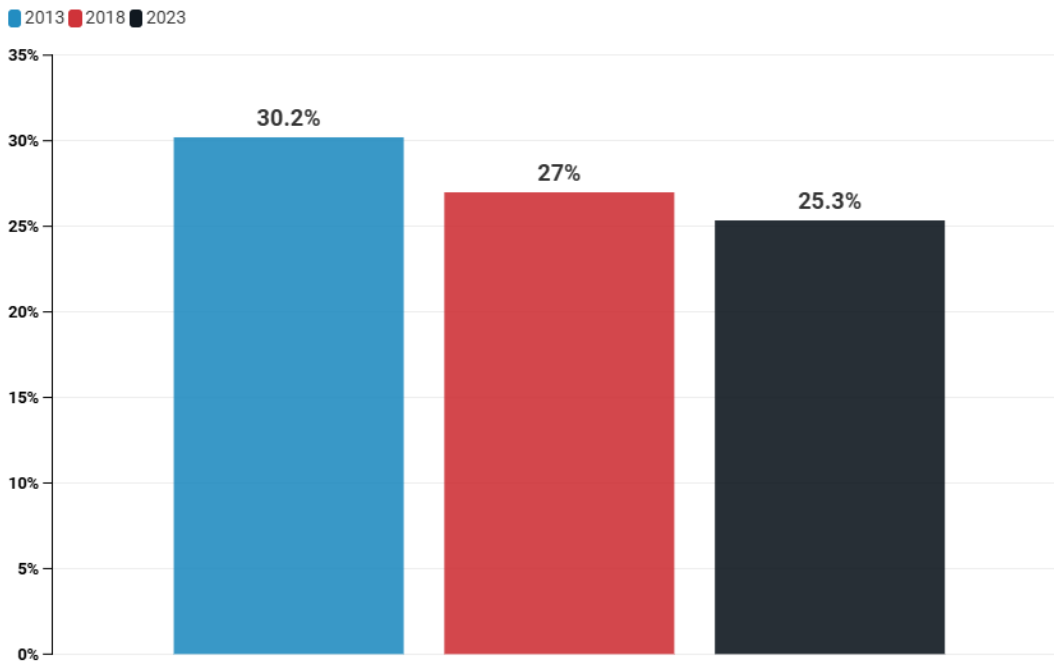
Source: CDE PSAT & SAT Scores

As student performance declined, educators’ share of total spending continued to fall. Despite a relatively consistent number of teachers, the number of administrative positions in the state's public school system has continued to grow as though shielded from budgetary concerns. Over

each five-year period shown in Figure 4, teacher pay has declined as a proportion of educational spending.

Figure 4

Teacher Salaries as a Share of Total Educational Spending Statewide



Bottom Line

The growth of administrative jobs in the state’s school system has not correlated with rising performance in Colorado’s schools; in fact, outcomes continue to decline even as more administrative positions are added. In recent years, some districts have added administrative positions despite losing students.

Throughout the last decade, Colorado teachers have continued to receive smaller portions of the state’s educational budget despite flagging student performance and a rapid increase in administrative roles within our education system.

Future growth in administrative positions should be carefully examined, and investments should be made to reverse this trend to help ensure that teachers are properly compensated and incentivized to create and foster effective learning environments for our state’s children.

ⁱ <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/staffcurrent>