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## Study reveals PSD students fit right in at CSU

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Poudre School District students who attend Colorado State University graduate at higher rates than other CSU students.

Of the 296 PSD graduates from spring 2001 who enrolled at CSU, 67 percent have graduated - a number that might increase as those who waited a year or two to enter college complete their education, according to a study by The National Student Clearinghouse.

CSU's overall graduation rate is 63 percent.

"This information is telling us that many of our students are waiting a year or two before attending college," said Manny Ortega, PSD executive director of secondary schools at Monday's Board of Education meeting. "It is also great news that the two top schools our students go to are Front Range Community College and Colorado State University."

The study looked at PSD high school graduates since spring 2001.

It found that most PSD high school graduates who choose to attend college are staying local and appear to be well prepared to complete their post-secondary education.

The study also found 56 percent of PSD students who went on to college attended Front Range Community College or Colorado State University.

Of the 20,720 undergraduates enrolled at CSU during the fall 2005, more than 7 percent were graduates of the local public school system. The high retention rate of local students is no accident, one CSU staff administrator said.

"There is a commitment from the entire CSU community to work with the local schools," said Mindy Nichols, the CSU director of counseling and visitor services who is assigned to work with all of the Fort Collins schools. "It helps that a lot of the locals have relationships with CSU staff members."

There are numerous advantages of attending college in Fort Collins for local high school graduates, one student counselor said.

"It can save them a lot of money," said Jesse Morrill, a counselor at Fort Collins High School. "For example, they don't have to pay for housing. It really depends on the student. Some kids may want to spread out. But for some that do leave, a lot of times they will end up coming back."

CSU starts working with local schools and students long before they reach graduation. Nichols said the university tries to keep local high school students well aware of education and financial aid options available to them.

"There is not really a directive from the university — it is just something that happens naturally," said Nichols about the high rate of attendance by PSD graduates at CSU. "Our financial aid office does special presentations for the local schools. And we have students who register at CSU from local high schools who get high school credits and college course credits."

Front Range provides a nice alternative for PSD graduates who may be undecided of a major or even if college is right for them, Morrill said.

“Front Range has been a popular option for students who are not sure what they want to do or can’t get into a four-year college,” Morrill said. “There is a less severe transition (at FRCC). The nice thing is the class sizes are so much smaller and in some cases there is a little more support. Really, both schools do a really good job of coming to our school and staying in contact with our kids.”

If there is one area where enrollment figures of PSD students is lagging at local colleges, it is with minority attendance. According to figures provided to PSD by the two local colleges, 7 percent of the local students who attend the schools are Hispanic — a rate that lags behind the district’s 15 percent Hispanic enrollment.

Minorities as a block represent 16 percent of the PSD graduates attending the local colleges — compared to 22 percent of the district’s overall student population.

“There are some efforts by (CSU) to attract all minority students — not just those from Poudre,” Nichols said.

Nichols said CSU hosts a combination of recruitment and outreach programs aimed at Hispanic and black students every summer.

“Ideally we would like every (minority student) to enroll at CSU, but it might not be the right fit,” she said. “Hopefully though, we will attract them to attend college somewhere.”

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