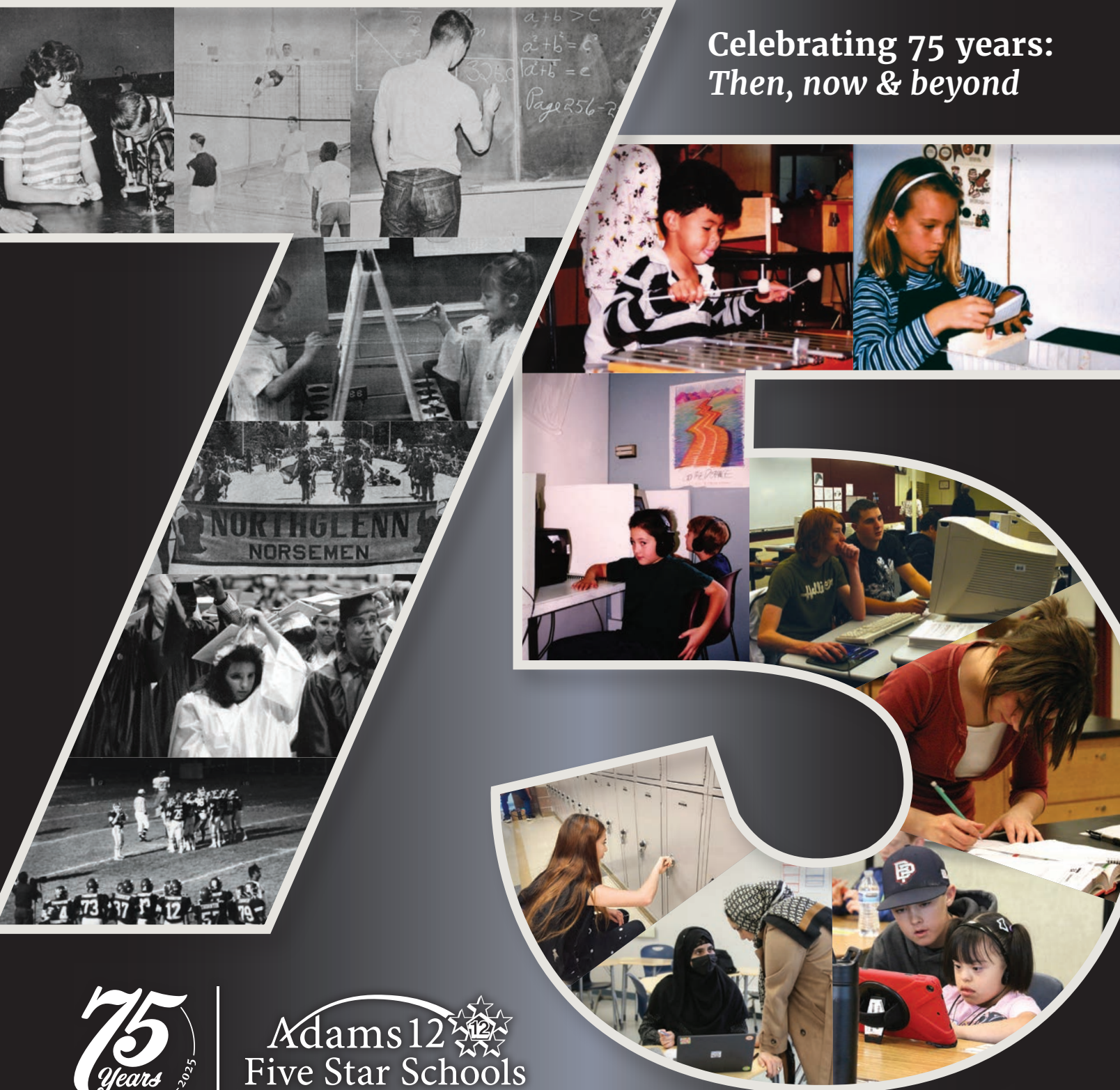


The Five Star FOCUS

2025-2026 | VOLUME 5: SPECIAL EDITION

**Celebrating 75 years:
Then, now & beyond**



75
Years
1950-2025

Adams12 
Five Star Schools

A LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



I’ve been a member of the Five Star community, in one role or another – student, resident, legal adviser and staff member – for nearly 60 of its 75 years. My student days are long in the past, but they remain some of the most vivid memories from my lifetime.

When I go back in time to my first day in kindergarten, I still remember being surprised – and a bit stressed out – that my new classmate Susan was hysterical and had a death grip on her mom’s leg at the doorway. I recall how excited our third grade class was each day when it was time for Mrs. Morris to read from “Charlotte’s Web” – and how we all cried along with her when Charlotte died. I feel the goosebumps that came with well-executed ballads performed by our junior high jazz band and the adrenaline rush that came when our ninth grade basketball team overcame a fierce rally from our opponent and was crowned District champs. And I still remember the rules of grammar, the evils of passive voice and the elements of persuasive writing that my high school English teachers taught me.

I could fill many journals with memories of my student experience here, and that’s true of so many students who have walked the halls of our schools these past 75 years. The common denominator behind those positive memories are the outstanding educators and staff, the supportive parents and the community partners who have locked arms together to support our young people in their educational journey. It’s why so many graduates choose to raise their own families here and to “pay it forward” by serving the community as a member of our staff – and why many choose to make the District their new home.

We have much to be proud of in our first 75 years, and we are eager to share more of that story with you in the pages that follow. And we look forward, in the years ahead, to building upon the strong foundation established in our first 75 years and providing our current and future generations of students with the skills necessary to thrive in our quickly changing world.

FOLLOW ALONG ON X: @SUPTGDOWSKI

The Five Star
FOCUS

2025-2026



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IN EVERY ISSUE

- 2 FIVE STAR PROUD
- 4 HOMEGROWN: ALUMNI
- 32 FIVE STAR EDUCATION FOUNDATION
- 34 INVESTMENTS UPDATE
- 36 SCHOOL DIRECTORY



FEATURES

- 10 **TIMELINE**
A glance at the district through the years
- 12 **FUELING STUDENT DREAMS THEN & NOW**
Career and technical education over time
- 18 **FROM STRIVING TO THRIVING**
No two students take the same road
- 22 **TRADITION MEETS GROWING OPPORTUNITIES**
Exploring the evolution of sports and activities
- 28 **ROOTED IN SUPPORT, GROWING IN STRENGTH**
How support for special education and multilingual learners shape our community



National Teachers Hall of Fame

Michelle Pearson, social studies teacher at Century Middle School, was one of five exceptional educators inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame Class of 2025.



SCAN TO READ MORE!



School Awards

In May 2025, seven schools were honored as top performing by the Colorado Department of Education. The following schools won state awards for the 2023 and 2024 school years: Hulstrom K-8, Thunder Vista P-8, Stargate Charter, and Arapahoe Ridge, Coyote Ridge, Meridian and Silver Creek elementaries.



Student Achievement

Reaching an all-time high, the district celebrated an on-time graduation rate of 87.3% for the Class of 2024 — more than three percentage points above the statewide average. Legacy, Pathways and Vantage Point achieved their highest graduation rates to date.



Student Accomplishment

Lauren Clark became the first female FutureForward student to pass the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT). The CPAT, a required certification for most area fire departments, consists of eight critical physical tasks that simulate actual firefighter duties.



Staff Award

Kathleen Anderson from McElwain Elementary received the Colorado Council of Teachers of Mathematics (CCTM) Elementary Teaching award. She was recognized for excellence in teaching mathematics and her commitment to CCTM's values of community, professional learning and valuing colleagues.



Home for Newcomers

For the 2024-2025 school year, the Newcomer Center received the Magna Silver Award from the National School Boards Association for innovation and creativity in solving an educational challenge. Located at Thornton High School, the Newcomer Center provides academic, social-emotional and extracurricular opportunities to recently arrived immigrant and refugee students and families. In its second year, it served 140 high school students, with 16 graduates — up from nine in its first year — all of whom moved to the United States at the start of the school year.



State Recognition

Marv Lewis, principal of FutureForward at Washington Square, was named Colorado Association for Career and Technical Education (CACTE) Administrator of the Year. He will represent the state of Colorado at the national level as a leader in the CTE field.

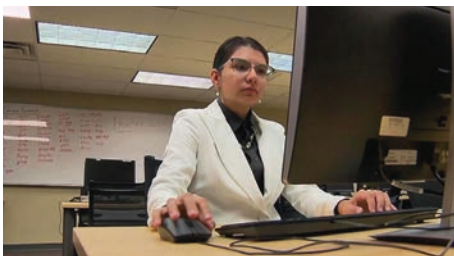


Standout Staff

Adams 12 Five Star Schools is home to many staff who go above and beyond. Each year, we honor a select group who truly live out the district's values of care, collaborate, engage, empower and focus on students.



SCAN TO READ MORE!



Tuition-Free College Credit

There are many opportunities for Five Star students to get a head start on their college careers. For the 2024-2025 school year, 2,067 students earned college credit while still in high school. Students earn Concurrent Enrollment by taking college classes offered at district high schools, FutureForward campuses or at a partner college campus.



Teaching Pathway

In its first year, Pathways to Teaching (P-TEACH) is already transforming the future of education — students earned 213 college credits, completed 33 internships in 19 schools and 16 earned paraprofessional certificates. With 46% of participants identifying as BIPOC, the program is helping to build a more representative educator workforce. Notably, 87% of seniors are pursuing teaching careers, and three graduates will join the Five Star District as paid apprentices for the 2025-26 school year. P-TEACH gives high school students interested in a career in education a head start.



“Face of Magnet Education”

Faces & Places of Denver magazine featured Hulstrom K-8 as the “The Face of Magnet Education.” The article highlights Hulstrom’s unique approach to gifted education, emphasizing its rigorous academics, enrichment, social-emotional learning and strong community connections. It also proudly notes the school’s consistently high ranking in Colorado.



SCAN TO READ MORE!



Mastery in Industry

Through FutureForward, the district’s career and technical education programming, 792 high school students earned nearly 3,327 industry certifications. Industry certifications measure a student’s competency in an industry, and they validate the knowledge base and technical skills that show mastery in a particular occupation.



Alternative Pathways

Pathways Future Center’s Class of 2024 achieved the school’s all-time high on-time graduation rate of 80.2%. As an alternative education campus, Pathways offers a small and supportive learning environment that models a professional business atmosphere. Through a blended learning model, instructors and staff partner with students to develop personalized graduation plans to meet their individual goals.

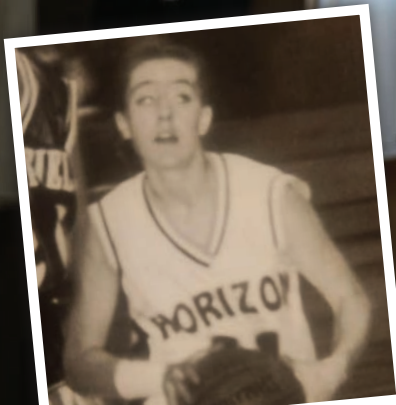


HOMEGROWN STAFF

serve the community
that shaped them

We surveyed our staff, and nearly 400 current staff members said they are Adams 12 Five Star Schools alumni.





JAMIE CAREY
 Horizon High School, Class of 1999

Jamie Carey moved to Thornton at age 2, landing in the heart of Adams 12 Five Star Schools. Here, she met mentors who shaped her journey. In elementary school, P.E. teacher Ray Schaeffer sparked her passion for basketball. That spark turned into a fire as Carey played the sport competitively throughout her K-12 career.

At Horizon High School, calculus teacher Drew Clark taught her the importance of a “winning mentality.” This helped her excel on and off the court. On the court, her team played in the Girls Basketball State Championship, and off the court she was named valedictorian.

Her talent and drive took her to Stanford University, where she received “freshman of the year” honors and broke Stanford’s single season record for three pointers with 81. She transferred to the University of Texas at Austin in 2002 where she played for three seasons, helping the team become a national championship contender.

In 2003, Carey was selected for the USA team at the Pan American Games, where they earned a silver medal. She went on to play in the WNBA with the Connecticut Sun from 2005 to 2008, helping the team reach the postseason every year, including the 2005 Finals.

After her playing career, Carey turned to coaching, starting at Legacy High School. She moved on to collegiate coaching, first with the University of Colorado, and now as the head coach at the University of Nebraska–Omaha.



“I have found that in any environment you choose to be part of, great people make the most impact and make it a great experience,” Carey said.

Her advice to current students? “Make sure to enjoy high school. There is a lot of pressure to accomplish everything all at once, but make sure to slow down and enjoy the formative experience.”



For many students, staff and community members, the Thornton High School rebuild project presents an exciting new era in the Five Star District.

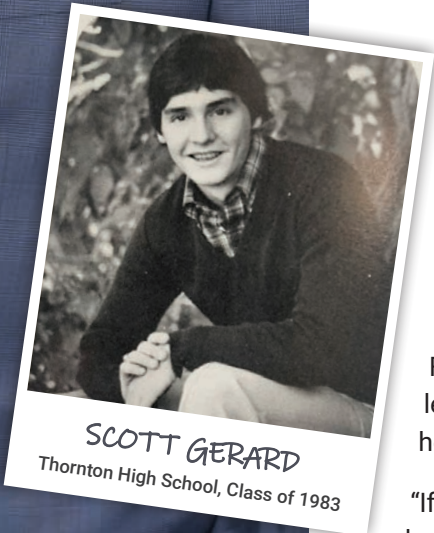
But for **Scott Gerard**, the project holds a deeper significance.

Gerard, who graduated from Thornton High and Bollman in 1983, is playing a key role in the rebuild project. As managing director and chairman of the board at ME Engineers, a Golden-based firm with a global footprint, he’ll help oversee engineering design and construction for both the Thornton High rebuild project and the FutureForward at Bollman expansion.

Decades ago, Gerard developed an interest in engineering through a drafting class he took at what was then known as the Bollman Occupational Center. That class led him to pursue a career in engineering.

Over the course of his career, he’s had opportunities to work on iconic buildings including Coors Field, Ball Arena and Dodger Stadium. But he says the Thornton High School and FutureForward at Bollman project holds a distinct appeal.

“This is an opportunity to reconnect to the community,” he said. “That’s part of why it’s so special.”



SCOTT GERARD
 Thornton High School, Class of 1983

Gerard attributes much of his professional success to the foundation set through his drafting course. His drafting instructor, Chris Barnes, was well connected in the industry and led him to ME Engineers, which was then a small business with just eight employees. Today, the firm employs over 500 individuals with offices in Europe, Asia, Australia and throughout North America.

From his earliest days running errands to his current leadership position, the entry-level drafting course helped pave the way.

“If it wasn’t for that drafting class, I wouldn’t be here,” he said.

After a career spanning more than 40 years, the Thornton High and Bollman project serves as a fitting capstone, he said.

“Those big projects are wonderful, but this is the type of project that completes the loop,” Gerard said.



Mike Manning, a proud graduate of Horizon High School, credits his years in Adams 12 Five Star Schools with laying the foundation for his success in Hollywood as an actor and producer.

Manning is most known for his roles in Disney’s snowboarding movie “Cloud 9,” on MTV’s “Teen Wolf,” as “The Manny” on NBC’s popular drama “This is Us,” and playing “Charlie Dale” on the long-running soap “Days of our Lives.”

“Growing up in the Five Star District gave me more than just an education, it helped shape who I became as an adult,” Manning said. “Middle and high school were times when I was still figuring out who I was, and having a safe, creative and welcoming environment made all the difference.”

Manning’s high school years were packed with opportunities, from athletics to clubs to theater. One of his proudest moments came senior year, when he was named Theater Student of the Year. “That recognition was huge for me,” he said. “I still had a long way to go confidence-wise, but it was a big step in the right direction.”

He also highlighted the lasting influence of educators like Steve Lash and Jay Seller. “Mr. Lash encouraged me to take on leadership roles. I went from being a shy freshman to student body vice president,” Manning said. “And Mr. Seller helped me discover my passion for theater. Without him, I don’t know where I’d be today.”

Manning remains grateful for his roots. “The Five Star District helped shape who I am,” he said. “The teachers there changed my life and the lives of so many others.”



in a career that would allow her to work immediately after graduation, Romero pivoted from medicine to linguistics before landing on journalism, a move that launched a 37-year career in broadcast news.

For **Lynette Romero**, success started with a walk to her neighborhood school. A proud graduate of Northglenn High School — home of the Mighty Norse — Romero credits her early education and community ties for shaping her career.

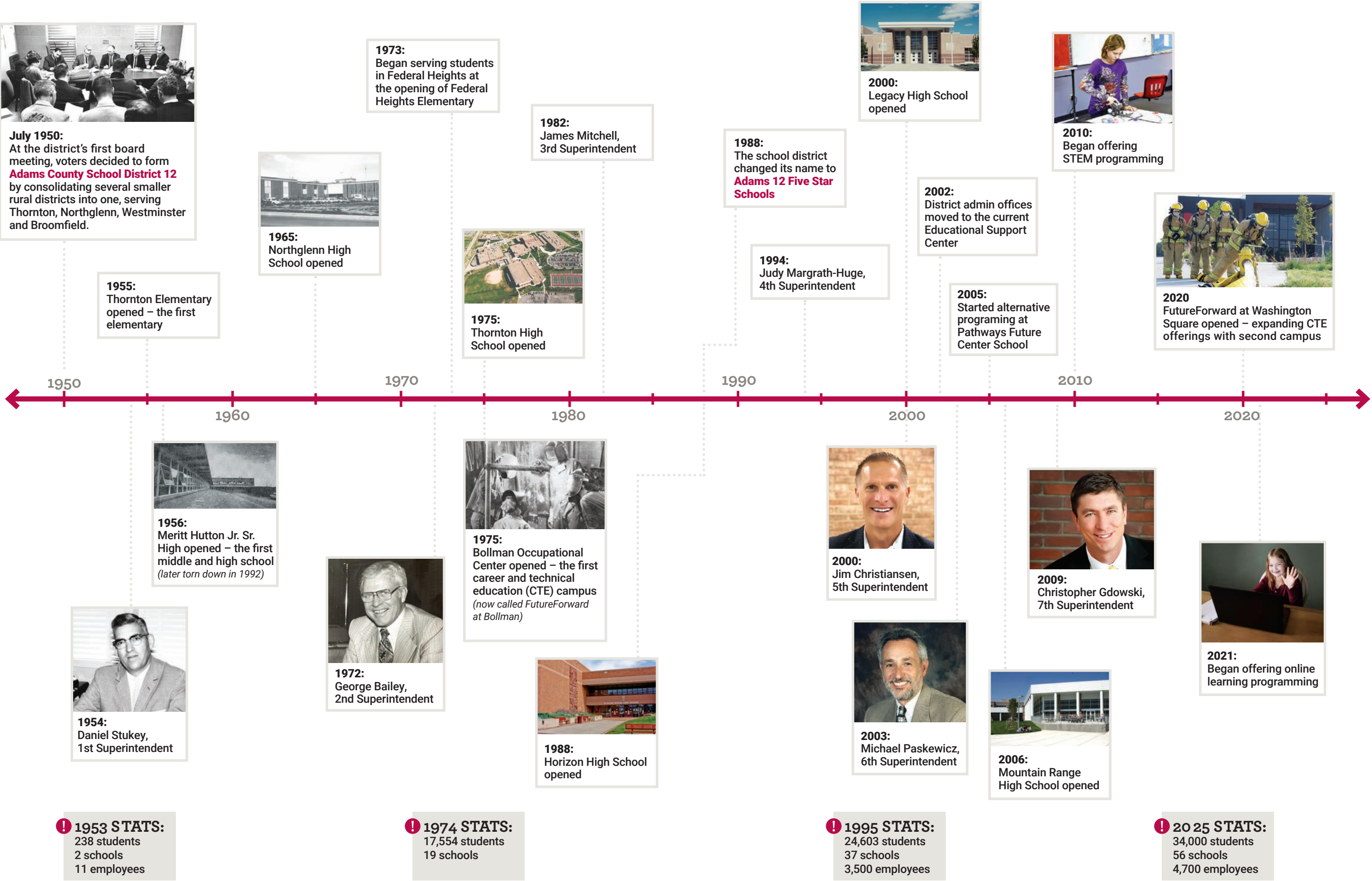
At Wyco Elementary, Romero found the joy of learning from her first grade teacher, Mrs. Able. At Northeast Jr. High, Romero found confidence in herself from being a cheerleader and a student council member. Finally at Northglenn High School, as Romero was planning for a future in medicine, a conversation with Assistant Principal Carricato planted the seed for a career in communications and redirected her future.

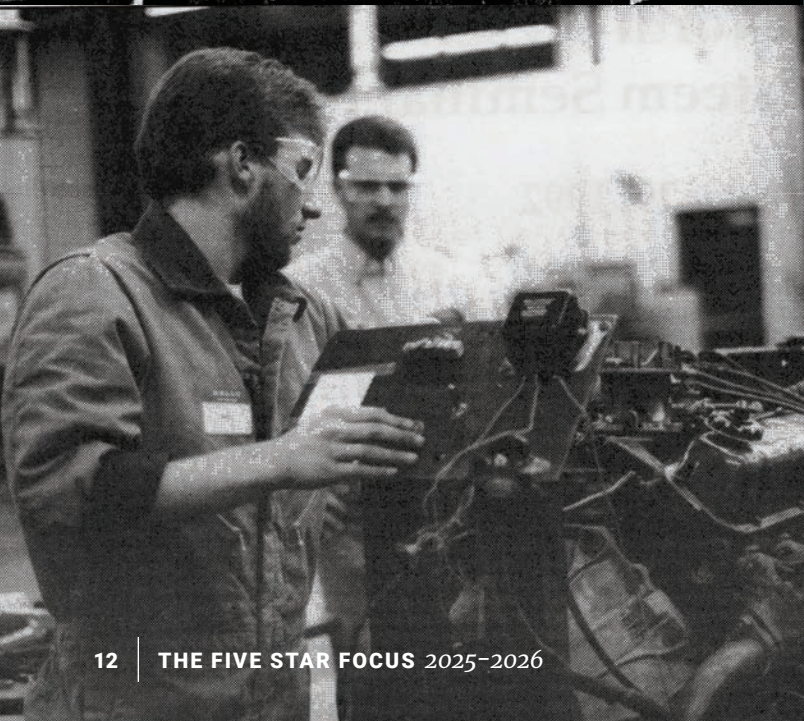
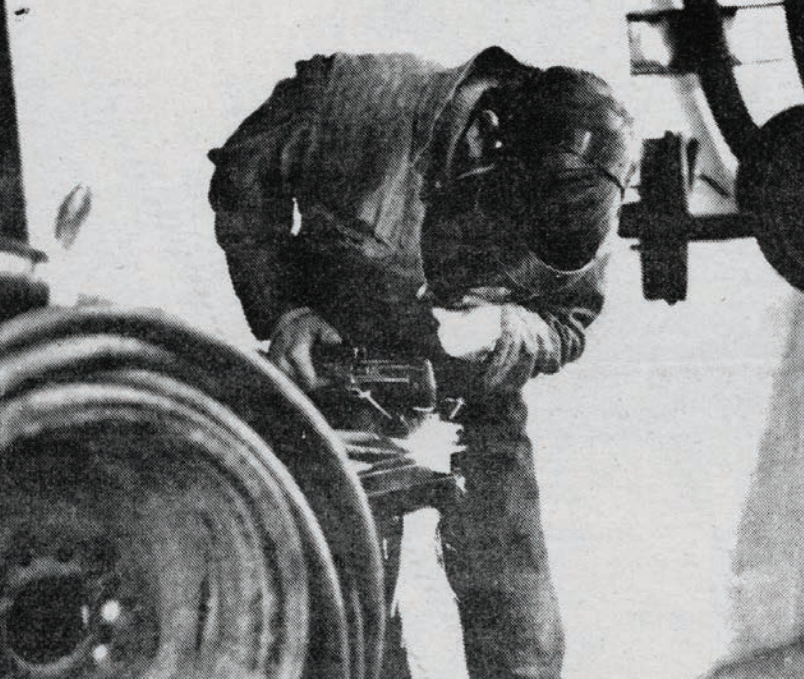
Years later, while studying pre-med at the University of Colorado Boulder, that conversation resurfaced. Interested

From her early days at Denver’s 9News to a stint in Austin, Romero ultimately landed in Los Angeles, where she co-anchors the morning newscast “Today in LA” on NBC4 Los Angeles. Romero has more than three decades of experience in broadcast, numerous awards and accolades from the community, and is a respected journalist beloved by millions of Southern California viewers.

“Neighborhood schools are a dying breed. To be part of your public school system and be part of something in your neighborhood is something very special,” Romero said.

Her advice to current students? “We’re always so ready to grow up, and we can’t wait to be an adult. I would say to enjoy the moment you’re living in right now as it really is a special thing to be present in your life!”





FUELING STUDENT DREAMS

Then & Now

Career and technical education through the years — Learning that makes students not only career-ready but life-ready

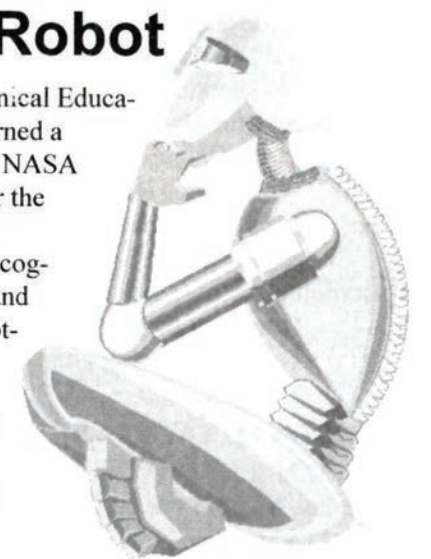
FROM THE ARCHIVES:
2004 MAGAZINE ARTICLE

Bollman Technical Education Center Builds Robot

Bollman Technical Education Center has earned a \$6,000 grant from NASA to build a robot for the 2004 FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition.

Corporate mentors from Ball Aerospace, Sun Microsystems and The Aerospace Company will team up with students and teachers to design, build and operate the robot. The team has to make it navigate on its own for the first 15 seconds. After that time, the team must use a remote control to operate the robot.

Students from Bollman will compete against teams from 10 states during the Colorado Regional on March 25-27 at the University of Denver's Ritchie Center. Judges will evaluate the effectiveness of each team's robot, the strength of the team's strategy and each team's determination.



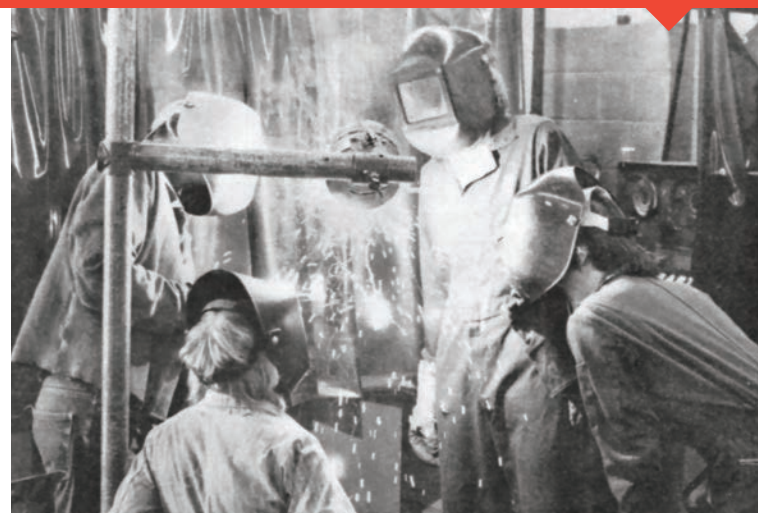
1988 - 1989

Building the Foundation

In 1975, the district's commitment to hands-on learning took shape with the founding of the Bollman Occupational Center. Initially launched as a vocational education center with programs in auto mechanics, carpentry and electronics, Bollman quickly grew into a hub of opportunity.

By 1980, the center, named for longtime school board leader Henry Bollman, offered 11 programs serving more than 750 students from across the district daily. Students explored welding, applied technology, computer-aided design (CAD) and industrial cooperative education in flexible, hands-on environments.

With instructors bringing real-world experience into the classroom and partnerships paving the way to college credit, Bollman became more than a place to gain skills and learn a trade; it was a launchpad for careers.



BOLLMAN CENTER/COMMUNITY COLLEGE AGREEMENT

Students who take welding at the Bollman Occupational Center may now receive 30 semester hours of credit applicable toward an Associate in Applied Science Degree at Front Range Community College. Instead of two years of study after high school, Bollman Center students with advanced placement status can complete their Associate Degree in one year, or slightly more.

Plans are also in place for similar prior enrollment credit in electronics, while arrangements for drafting credit should be complete before the beginning of the 1985-86 school year.



BROOKE MCKAIG

GRAPHIC DESIGN INSTRUCTOR
FutureForward at Bollman



"My CTE experience was life-changing — after taking every art class offered at Northglenn, I was looking for something new. I had never heard of Bollman but took a chance to explore and learn more. I knew right away I found where I was supposed to be. I discovered my place and realized my potential in my first class. That's why I'm passionate about teaching today, because career and technical education classes give students the chance to explore real skills and career paths.

My advice to current and prospective CTE students is this: It's just as important to know what you don't want to do as what you do want to do.

Take advantage of the opportunity to try different pathways, earn college credit and build employability skills while still in high school. It will help you find the career that fits you best."



BROOKE MCKAIG

Northglenn High School, Class of 1993

Expanding Access, Elevating Opportunity

Today, the district's CTE landscape is thriving. With over 5,900 students enrolled annually, both the Bollman and Washington Square campuses are bustling.

Interest in career pathways has never been stronger, attracting students from every corner of a comprehensive high school.

Medical sciences, including certified nursing assistant (CNA) prep, attract diverse students — many of them newcomers — drawn by proximity to their home high school, a sense of belonging and opportunity. The behavioral health program, now in its fifth year, is one of just two high school programs of its kind in Colorado.

Trades are surging in popularity once again, and the district's engineering and STEM programs are designed to offer opportunities to students seeking immediate career options, as well as those planning to pursue college. To meet student needs, extended-day options are available for high-demand classes offered into the late afternoon.

But the draw to the CTE campuses goes beyond how it prepares students for their future.

"The connection students feel here is powerful," said Janet Renden, longtime principal at FutureForward at Bollman. "We're an alternative school but not an alternative learning environment. This is where students come to find their people — where they wear their school jackets and feel like they belong."

As the national career cluster framework has evolved, so has the district's approach. Offering 25 pathways spanning every career sector, Adams 12 Five Star Schools' program is among the most competitive in the metro area relative to student enrollment.

Since 2016, the district has expanded its CTE offerings by 50%, growing from 18 to 27 unique programs. Enrollment among students of color and those qualifying for free and reduced lunch has steadily increased. The number of students earning industry certifications has grown exponentially — from 167 in 2016 to 792 in 2025 — while total certifications earned rose from 180 to nearly 3,330.



ELLEN GUTIERREZ

DIESEL INSTRUCTOR
FutureForward at Washington Square

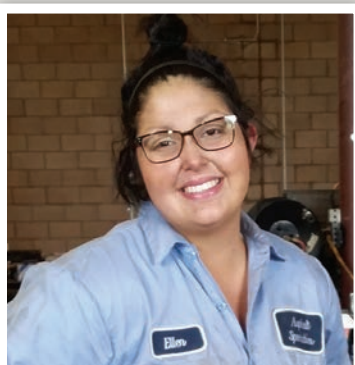


“CTE didn’t just teach me about engines — it changed the direction of my life. I walked into that first class at Bollman with zero experience, but I found a place where I truly fit in.

The hands-on learning came naturally, and for the first time, school made sense. That class uncovered a passion I didn’t know I had, gave me skills I could take anywhere, and — most importantly — gave me confidence in my abilities and in the idea that I could build something real with my own two hands.

After 10 years in the diesel and construction industry, I never imagined I’d return as a teacher. But now, helping students build their skills and watching that “light bulb” moment when it all clicks — that’s one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.

To any student considering CTE: Take full advantage of what you’re learning — it truly has the power to change your life.”



ELLEN GUTIERREZ
Legacy High School, Class of 2014

Earlier Access, New Possibilities

The future of CTE in the district is not just about more programs — it’s about bolstering our programs and providing earlier, deeper and more meaningful access.

By fall 2026, all middle school students will be able to explore pathways like culinary arts, business entrepreneurship and digital technologies, building career awareness in their own school. Research shows students who explore careers earlier are more likely to stay engaged and on track in high school.

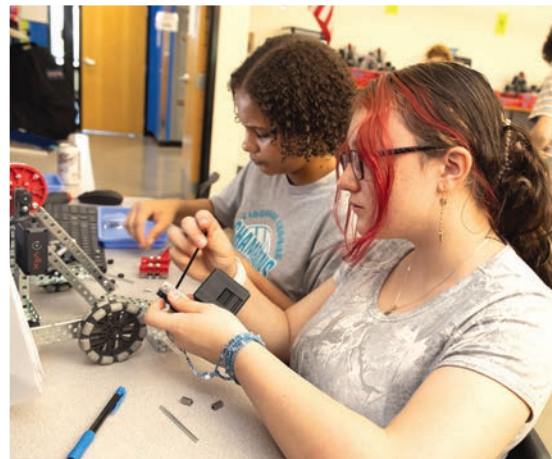
“These programs don’t just spark interest,” said Kristi Weaver, director of career and technical education and postsecondary readiness. “They help students discover what they want to do and, just as importantly, what they don’t.”

High school programs are expanding too, with new offerings in aviation, dental assisting, cosmetology/barbering, real estate and artificial intelligence (AI) on the horizon. Every new program is carefully selected through a lens of relevance and opportunity.

When the newly rebuilt Thornton High opens its doors in 2029, it will be a fully integrated CTE-pathway school. By embedding core academics within six hands-on career pathways — Advanced Manufacturing; Media Arts and Entertainment; Computer Science and Digital Technology; Culinary and Consumer Science; Business and Entrepreneurship; Interpretation and Translation Services — Thornton High students will graduate with more than a diploma; they will graduate with hands-on experience and lifelong skills.

Whether it’s through industry certifications, college credit or simply discovering what they don’t want to do, students are seeing their future in a new way.

By constantly reviewing and realigning offerings, the district ensures that CTE remains a launchpad to both college and career success. This evolution is intentional. Our approach is rooted in listening to students, tracking workforce trends and investing in high-demand pathways that prepare students for a successful future.



EXPANDING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

FUTURE**FORWARD**



EMPOWERING THE FUTURE OF CTE

In 2013, “Girls Day In” launched at Bollman Tech to encourage more girls to explore diesel, welding and automotive programs — fields where women were underrepresented. Just 30 students attended that first year, mostly listening to panels of women in the trades. But it sparked something. By year two, there was a waitlist.

Today, the event has grown into EmpWR Day — a hands-on, inclusive experience open to all underrepresented students in grades 8-11, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Now held at both Bollman and Washington Square campuses, EmpWR Day features workshops led by industry professionals and student ambassadors, giving participants real experience in welding, coding and more.

In 2025, 350 students registered, mostly eighth and ninth graders energized by tours of the campuses and the hands-on experiences. Attendance at the event is just the start, nearly 90% of those who attend go on to register for a FutureForward class.

The impact is clear: Women make up just 5% of firefighters and 13% of law enforcement nationally, but at FutureForward, they represent 35% and 60% of those programs, respectively.

From 30 girls to hundreds of future-ready students, EmpWR Day is building a workforce that reflects the world.

ROBERT BLACKBURN

AUTO TECHNOLOGY INSTRUCTOR
FutureForward at Bollman



“Rebuilding the engine on my 1975 Chevy Monza as a senior at Bollman — with the support and guidance of instructors who truly cared — cemented what I wanted to do with my life. Those hands-on experiences didn’t just teach me automotive skills; they shaped my work ethic and set me up for a successful 15-year career in the industry. Coming full circle to now teach in the same program where it all started is a privilege. I’ve seen firsthand how this industry evolves and how unprepared some newcomers are. That’s why I’m here — to pass along what I’ve learned and give students the same foundation I was lucky to have.

To any student considering CTE: This path isn’t easy, but if you take it seriously, it can lead to a rewarding career. Your knowledge and perseverance will give you a sense of accomplishment that’s hard to beat.”



ROBERT BLACKBURN
Thornton High School, Class of 1991

FROM STRIVING TO THRIVING

No two students take the same road – and that’s the point

When Superintendent Chris Gdowski handed out the final high school diploma of 2024, Adams 12 Five Star Schools made history. More than 87% of seniors graduated on time, 3.1% higher than the state and an all-time high for the district.

Even as course offerings have become more advanced over the years, more Five Star students than ever are earning their diplomas and continuing to outpace their peers around the state. High school is no longer a one-size-fits-all journey. Today’s students are graduating through pathways that honor their unique strengths, passions and needs, and entering life after high school with the tools they need to succeed in whatever future they choose.

NUMBER OF GRADUATES THROUGH THE YEARS



FOR THE TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

For **Danny Khang**, a 2025 graduate from Northglenn High School, the future snapped into focus when he started taking U.S. History with Mr. Croteau his junior year.

Before then, Khang “didn’t have much of a career dream,” and in some ways, felt a little lost. But in Mr. Croteau’s class, he saw how much of a difference a great teacher can make.

“Having connections with students makes a good teacher,” he said. “You want to hype up the class. You want to make the class a hands-on learning environment and turn learning into something fun. That inspired me, and now, I just want to become a teacher.”

Once his path forward became clear, Khang enrolled in P-TEACH, a district program designed to give prospective teachers a head start on their education. Students can start as early as their sophomore year. In addition to their



DANNY

education-focused coursework, students spend about half of their time working in classrooms under the guidance of seasoned educators. By the time they graduate, they’ve had the opportunity to earn 30 college credits, the equivalent of about two semesters.

“It’s really about trying it out and letting students get a feel for teaching so when they make a decision about college, they’re committed and know they want to be a teacher,” said P-TEACH Director Bianca Porter.

This classroom teaching experience was a game changer for Khang, who especially enjoyed helping with P.E. at Thornton Elementary.

“They talk to me, and having that bond makes my day better,” he said. “Working in schools brightens my mood.”

FOR THE WELL-ROUNDED STUDENT

MACEY



It's probably easier to list the things that **Macey Biggins** *didn't* do than to tick off the things she *did*.

The 2025 graduate from Horizon High School played soccer and ran for the track and field team. She took AP World History, AP U.S. History, AP Calculus, AP Statistics, two college classes for marketing and consumer behaviors, entrepreneurship, and a handful of college prep courses. She was also a commissioner of the school's S.O.A.R. Honors Program, an academic program that provides structure and support for high-achieving students to prepare for college and post-secondary success.

"There's a place for every student to find fulfillment and joy beyond the academic classroom at our comprehensive high schools," Principal Erica Fleeman said, adding that high schools continue to become more responsive to students' needs and passions by asking them what they need at school. "Our clubs, activities and sports offerings have evolved as students come to us with more experiences and passions, such as club sports, youth theater and music ensembles."

While Biggins certainly stood out as a star pupil and student leader, her time at Horizon was also about learning balance. She felt seen by her teachers, and knew that they valued her as both a person and a student. Her calculus teacher, Ms. Ingram, in particular, helped Biggins shift her outlook on school.

"She really helped me not let my grades define me," Biggins said. "It was a really big goal for me to get an A, and I didn't get there my first semester, but she helped me realize it's a hard class, and it's OK not to get it and to strive for it in the future."

After high school, Biggins plans to start a nursing program at Culver-Stockton College, where she'll also be playing soccer.

"THERE'S A PLACE FOR EVERY STUDENT TO FIND FULFILLMENT AND JOY BEYOND THE ACADEMIC CLASSROOM AT OUR COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS."

ERICA FLEEMAN, PRINCIPAL

FOR STUDENTS WHO NEED A SECOND CHANCE

Sometimes it takes a few tries to find the right path.

That was certainly the case for **Jenny Toribio Arellano**, who decided to attend Pathways, an alternative high school, after dropping out of school in another district. At the time, she was working full-time overnight shifts at Walmart, and the idea of returning to school was daunting.

"I wanted to make a career for myself and be able to get a job and not worry about getting a diploma," she said.

At Pathways, she earned her competency diploma, which is a good option for students who find themselves severely behind on credits. Competency diplomas focus on workforce readiness and are accepted by most employers, two-year colleges and the military. Students take social studies classes including civics and personal finance, as well as work skills classes, and they must pass ACT WorkKeys exams.

"You can see the glint in their eyes," said Matt Schmidt, executive director of secondary options and innovative programming, describing the moment in which students learn about this possible path to graduation. "They realize they can still salvage this thing. When they start to see that there's still a path forward, it's a huge momentum builder."

At Pathways, Toribio Arellano found friendly faces and trusted adults who wanted to make sure she succeeded. Whether it was her math teacher taking extra time to go over concepts she found especially challenging or her counselor checking



JENNY

in to see how she was doing, she had the support she needed to earn her previously elusive diploma. And now, she's moved on to her next big dream: A career where she can support herself. Following graduation, Toribio Arellano started a tuition-free electrician apprenticeship program, something that seemed impossible just a short year ago.

"I got myself where I wanted to be," she said.

TRADITION MEETS GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

Exploring the evolution of student sports and activities — from rivalries and records to inclusion and expanding opportunities.

From Friday Night Lights to livestreamed e-sports, student athletics and activities in the Five Star District have evolved in powerful ways. What started with classic rivalries now includes unified teams, expanded girls' programs, and new opportunities for students to find their individual passion and potential outside of the classroom.

UNIFIED SPORTS:

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER IN FRIENDSHIP AND UNDERSTANDING

Unified Sports, which connects people with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and without intellectual disabilities (Unified partners), was inspired by a simple principle: "Training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding."

"The Unified Sports program has done so much for our school culture," said Marty Tonjes, Horizon High School athletic director. "Friendships have been developed between our students with and without disabilities, and student interactions take place in our hallways that probably wouldn't happen if it wasn't for our unified programs."

Adams 12 Five Star Schools first started participating in Unified Sports in 2014. The district partnered with Special Olympics Colorado to create Unified

Basketball teams at each of the district's five comprehensive high schools. Unified opportunities have since expanded into football, cheer, poms and the fall of 2024 brought the inaugural season of Unified Bowling with teams competing at the state championships.

"I liked being able to play sports at Horizon, wearing the uniform, riding the bus and being part of a team," said Sarah Huitron-Felker, a Unified Sports athlete from Horizon. "I felt encouragement and support. It meant that I could play sports."

"It meant she could cheer for her team, compete alongside her teammates and against other schools," said Kelli Huitron, Sarah's mom. "It meant Sarah could be herself! It meant Sarah was a Hawk! Our family is grateful and appreciative."

Briley Huffman started as a Unified partner during her sophomore year at Horizon and has participated in Unified poms, basketball and bowling.

"It has meant the absolute world to me," Huffman said. "Not only did it lead me to finding my future career path, it has given me friends and bonds I would have never thought I would have."



Mountain Range High Unified basketball players



Sarah Huitron-Felker, Unified Sports athlete

With so much success, Unified is expanding into the classroom.

"Over the years, Horizon has started to add classes such as Positive P.E., Positive Art and Positive Music," Tonjes said.

The classes integrate students with special needs (athletes, artists and musicians) with general ed peers (coaches) in a cooperative, positive and enthusiastic learning environment.



Legacy High Unified basketball players



I-25 BOWL: AN ENDURING TRADITION



1987

The year 1966 marks the beginning of a rivalry that remains alive and well nearly 60 years later. Every fall, the I-25 Bowl pits the Northglenn Norse against the Thornton Trojans on the gridiron.

"9News Game of the Week two of the last three years when we play them, and it's just become a pretty special thing," said JP Sampson, Northglenn High School athletic director and alumnus. "You don't see a lot of rivalries like this in the metro area that have lasted so long. And I think it's just cool that the community has embraced it."

The schools are just a couple miles apart, Northglenn to the west of I-25 and Thornton to the east; hence, the I-25 Bowl.

"You know, that week, you see kids wearing red and gold, you see red and gold in the stands, and it's almost like that small town high school football rally feeling, which we don't get at any other games, even Homecoming," Sampson said.

One of the most memorable games was in 1984. Northglenn won the 4A state football championship beating Arvada, but



SCAN TO
LEARN MORE
ABOUT THE
TROPHY'S
HISTORY

EST. 1966

on the road to that championship, Thornton beat them 28-14 during the regular season. Sampson recently heard stories from members of that championship team recalling that game.

"We just never beat Thornton that year," Sampson remembers them saying. "And it stuck with them."

When Horizon High School opened in the late 80s, the rivalry took a slight dip since the Hawks became Northglenn's main rival. But over the last couple decades, the rivalry and the I-25 Bowl have gotten a boost.

"It draws the most fans, the most ticket sales," Sampson said. "Whether they're a 4A school or a 5A school based on enrollment, I mean, it's set in stone every year; really the same weekend in September."

As the Five Star community continues to grow and change, Sampson sees the I-25 Bowl standing the test of time.

"I think if anything, it's going to increase in popularity," he said. "We have an eighth grade night. Kids come in, talk to the football coach, and they talk about the Thornton game, that potentially if they join the football team will play in."





E-SPORTS: THIS IS NO PICK-UP VIDEO GAME

Most people are aware of the common football maneuver called a “juke,” a deceptive move used by a ball carrier to evade a tackler. But what about “ganking”? Ganking is a surprise attack, and one of many types of maneuvers in the e-sports game League of Legends.

E-sports is a form of competition using video games. It takes recreational gaming among friends to a new level.

“It is all about building teams that can work and function together in a competitive environment,” said Logan Janes, Mountain Range High School e-sports coach. “Because the games

will change, you’ve got to have the players who know how to communicate and work together. Like League of Legends, you’re constantly doing math and running timers in your head, so you know when your next abilities are available. In Rocket League, you’re always communicating with your other teammates either over the headset or non-verbally to make sure you’re in the right position on the field.”

Janes started the district’s first e-sports team at Mountain Range in 2019. In recent years, the team has cracked the top 10 at the state championships. But the rewards extend beyond the competitions.



“They get put on a team, and then I start seeing that team hanging out during passing periods,” Janes said. “And I start seeing them hanging out in the later years. And what I’m seeing is a growing peer group among a lot of these kids.”

Students have the opportunity to get involved with e-sports even before high school. Computer Science Teacher Molly Andresky started an e-sports club at Thornton Middle School in 2025.

“I think computer science and e-sports align really well,” she said. “The games and e-sports, they’re literally solving a puzzle every single time they play. And then just developing that sense of belonging; this is a place they can come to and they belong here.”

Ramiro Perez enjoys competing and mentoring younger classmates.

“Being a part of this club, I learned that inclusion, camaraderie and just participation can really make a change in your perspective,” he said.



GAME ON: GIRLS EMPOWERED THROUGH GROWING ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES

Horizon High flag football players



Thornton High vs. Northglenn High flag football game



1966 GIRLS SOCCER TEAM



Jody Welch, Legacy High girls basketball coach

Sports mean everything to Jody Welch.

“I was kind of a shy kid and I wasn’t as secure off the court, but then when I had that belief and they (coaches) believed in me and they saw something in me, it just made me blossom on and off the court, and it was just this life changing thing for me,” she said.

Welch has been a physical education and health teacher since 1995 and at Legacy High School since 2001. She currently coaches girls basketball. After graduating from Northglenn High School, Welch went to Brigham Young University where she played basketball and soccer.

She’s seen a lot of change over the years in terms of opportunities for female athletes.

“A big one was when they moved ninth grade into high school,” she said. “If you’re giving those girls now an opportunity in ninth grade to play at the high school level, play at that elite competition for four years, that was a big deal.

“My sophomore year is when they made the smaller basketball for girls. My senior year is when they added the three point line. My senior year is

when softball was added as a sport in the district.”

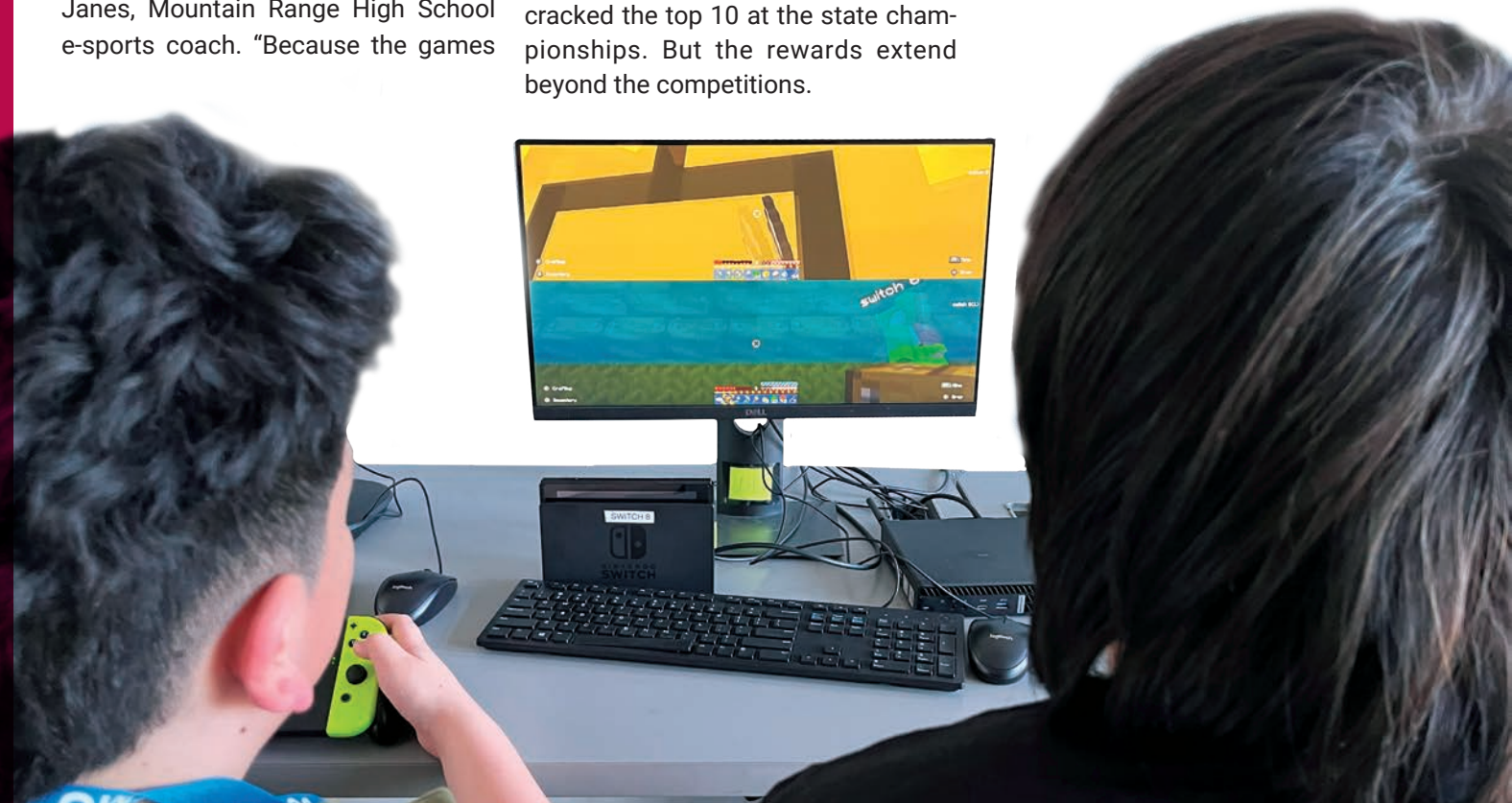
The Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) has continued to increase the number of girls sanctioned sports in recent years with the addition of girls flag football (2024) and girls wrestling (2021).

“Just the opportunity for girls to play now is so much more than it used to be,” Welch said. “You’ll see in these students who normally wouldn’t be doing something, ‘You know what, I’m going to give that a try.’ They may not stick with that but at least they’re putting their foot in the door.

“If they’re playing athletics, I think that just breeds leadership, and I would hope that it would build more opportunities for females in society to be in more of a leadership role; where maybe before that wasn’t an opportunity for girls, but now it is, because we’re seeing girls can compete and they can do good things and be bosses and leaders.”



JODY WELCH
Northglenn High School, Class of 1985



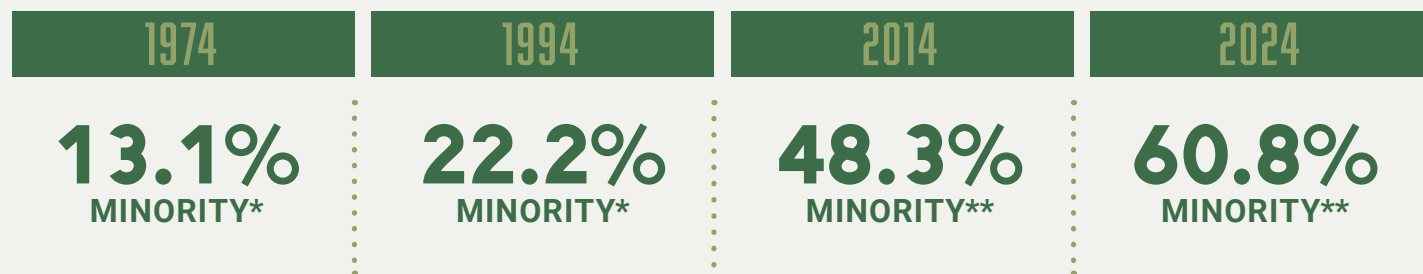
Thornton Middle e-sports club members

ROOTED IN SUPPORT, GROWING IN STRENGTH

A look at how dedicated support for special education and multilingual learners meets our students where they are and helps shape our community's future.

Our community is constantly evolving, and so is our district's commitment to meeting its changing needs. By expanding support for special education students and multilingual learners, we're creating pathways for every student to succeed. These stories show how adapting with intention and care helps build a stronger future for all.

HOW WE'VE GROWN:



*American Indian, Asian American, Black American, Hispanic

**Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Two or more ethnicities, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander)

From Transition to Transformation: Evolving Support for Multilingual Learners

As demographics rapidly shift and global events reshape communities, school districts must adapt to meet the evolving needs of their students. In Adams 12 Five Star Schools, the rise in newly arrived multilingual learners has sparked a transformative approach to culturally linguistic and diverse language instruction. Through innovative programs like the Newcomer Center at Thornton High School, the district is honoring its past, responding to the present and boldly preparing for the future.

As recently as 2018, multilingual learners in the Five Star District came primarily from familiar communities. Many were born in the United States or had roots in neighboring Mexico. In 2018, 40% of newcomers were born in the U.S., returning after spending significant time in their country of origin and the district's approach to language support reflected a steady, traditional model of English Language Development (ELD). Yet, as global migration shifted in recent years, so did the needs of our students.

Now, a new story is unfolding.

By 2023, only 8% of newcomers were born in the United States, with 31% arriving from Afghanistan and 10% from Venezuela. The newcomer population has completely changed to include new languages and cultures. This dramatic shift spurred a bold response from the district. First by hiring classroom assistants and community navigators that reflect the new student population and, in fall 2023, launching the Newcomer Center at Thornton High School.



What does "newcomer" mean?

A newcomer student is a child in kindergarten through 12th grade who has arrived in the United States in the past three years and is still learning English.



This center provides comprehensive, centralized programming for high school students new to the country — many of whom arrive with limited English and interrupted formal education. The goal is to accelerate language acquisition and academic achievement without sacrificing connection or community. Students take newcomer-specific courses in all core subjects while also joining general education classes to build confidence and belonging. Meanwhile, families receive wraparound support from counselors, youth advocates and others, in one welcoming hub.

And this is just the beginning. Moving forward, district educators and leaders plan to continue building on this work, finding even more ways to better serve all students. With an emphasis on trust-building during enrollment and expanded newcomer English classes at comprehensive high schools, the Five Star District is laying the groundwork to create an environment where every multilingual learner thrives.

“We’re getting laser-focused on what all kids deserve. Cotton Creek shows what’s possible when we believe in every child and work together to lift every learner.”

HEATHER GREICIUS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS



Every Student, Every Day: Building a Community Where Everyone Belongs

Special education has blossomed into a model of inclusion and collaboration, where teachers value and support every student. A model that was once based on separate classrooms has evolved into more inclusive settings, allowing all students to learn and grow together.

Cotton Creek Elementary exemplifies this commitment to bringing students together for the best possible learning environment.

“Cotton Creek is just a place where all kids are served as students first in every situation,” said Theresa Gilbreath, executive director of schools.

Creating a sensory-friendly environment

Here, general and special educators work together to meet diverse needs. Students have access to sensory supports like self-directed hallway and outdoor paths and a school-wide sensory room. These provide structured movement breaks and sensory stimulation that help students regulate emotions, improve focus and develop gross motor skills. Specialized programs serve students with significant needs, while many students with autism thrive in general education classrooms with tailored support. All students participate fully and successfully in school-wide events.

Student leaders

When teachers noticed how eager older students were to connect with their special education peers, they created the Peer Helpers Club. In this club, fifth grade students support classmates with disabilities during arrival, dismissal and throughout the day.



This year, it became a formal club. Students interviewed and applied to be peer helpers, receiving training on basic strategies for inclusion, like how to respond to certain behaviors in a safe, supportive way.

Some of these peer helpers have disabilities themselves, finding empowerment in helping others and showcasing their own strengths.

“It’s giving them a connection to feel empowered to help other students and show their skills and talents in other ways,” said Alizabeth Gooding, principal at Cotton Creek Elementary. The club fosters genuine connection and empathy, creating a culture where leadership and compassion grow hand in hand.

Looking ahead, the district is investing in deeper inclusion through initiatives like the Aspire tuition reimbursement program, helping staff gain special education credentials. Revised academic continuum services and expanded mental health supports are laying the groundwork for even stronger inclusive practices.

“We’re getting laser-focused on what all kids deserve,” said Heather Greicius, executive director of special populations. “Cotton Creek shows what’s possible when we believe in every child and work together to lift every learner.”



Making dreams come true

Through the gifts of giving, the Five Star Education Foundation has been supporting students, teachers and the community for 40 years.

In September 1985, 10 passionate people came together with a bold vision to empower innovation and excellence in Adams 12 Five Star Schools through direct community support.

With a \$30,000 loan and a big dream, the Five Star Education Foundation (then called the School District 12 Education Foundation) was born. With a team of doers, just one year later, the Foundation awarded its first Teacher Innovation Grants, bringing creative, resourceful ideas to life beyond what district funding could provide.

Forty years later, that same spirit of community-driven impact still fuels our mission of investing in student success. As the 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner, we are focused on learning and career readiness for all students. We communicate needs to the community, rally support, provide vital connections and resources, and coordinate crisis support to the Five Star community. In fact, our community raised over \$100,000 in individual contributions during the first few months of COVID-19, and \$45,000 in the first 48 hours of our emergency Marshall Fire Fund for the immediate needs of our students and staff.

The power and passion of the community for education enable the Foundation and district to do amazing things that go above and beyond the public school education budget. One example is partnering with the Food Bank of the Rockies and distributing over 80,000 pounds of food and thousands of boxes of fresh summer produce in 2024. Through the Five Star Resource Network, our cornerstone initiative, ensuring students and families have the essentials needed for learning, we had over 112,000 service interactions with the Five Star community in 2024 alone. Last year, we also provided bias training for all resource network managers, summer school grants, and funded employee wellness initiatives.



Under our “I See Me” initiative, we prioritize students’ career discovery, exploration and training. We partner with the district’s FutureForward programs by funding the Tiny House Project (a program where construction students build tiny homes for young people aging out of foster care), the Career Pathways Fund, mentoring, college and career field trips, and our Five Star Trail website, ultimately supporting our community’s workforce development and our future leaders of tomorrow. Today, the Five Star Education Foundation is stronger and more impactful than ever, prioritizing learning readiness, career readiness and teacher grants with an investment of over \$2 million in support to the Five Star District annually for the past three years.

Forty years later, the Five Star Education Foundation continues to stand as passionate and purpose-driven as ever, built by the community, for the community.



Foundation funding ensures students have access to real-world protective equipment and tools, such as providing a \$9,000 fire prop and fire extinguisher for training, and a \$14,000 drone with thermal and topographic imaging, used by local search and rescue teams. This collaboration across construction, fire/EMT, CSI and law enforcement programs gives students hands-on experience with cutting-edge technology.



“With the Foundation’s help, my classroom is now filled with engaging, manipulative literacy resources that are having a huge impact on my students, especially my newcomers. From the first time materials were received, faces were beaming and eyes were shining with wonder.”

MS. NICHOLS,
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY

This work is made possible by the support of grantors, corporate sponsors and compassionate individuals within our Five Star community.

Learn more at www.5starfoundation.org



2024 Bond Program: Early progress, thoughtful planning and next steps

In the months since the community approved an \$830 million bond in November 2024, the district has been hard at work to carry out construction and critical improvements in all corners of the community. With projects planned through 2030, the bond is well underway. Without raising taxes, the bond allows the district to make critical investments in schools and facilities — from repairing and replacing aging infrastructure to expanding college and career readiness and improving nutrition services.

Expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE)

At the heart of the bond is a major expansion of CTE programming. In the past decade, the district has seen huge growth in participation and interest in CTE programs across grade levels. Once reserved for high school students, CTE is now being rolled out to middle school and K-8 students. The district is investing in new and upgraded spaces designed to allow students to explore interests including robotics, business entrepreneurship, design, 3-D printing and more.

Rebuilding Thornton High School

At more than 50 years old, Thornton High School is no longer equipped to serve the evolving needs of its students

and community. The building is configured with outdated classrooms, limited ADA accessibility, and a layout that creates daily obstacles for both learning and day-to-day operations. Replacing the school is a key priority of the 2024 bond program.

The new Thornton High School will be built around six educational pathways designed to accommodate a wide range of student interests. These pathways (Advanced Manufacturing; Media Arts and Entertainment; Computer Science and Digital Technology; Culinary and Consumer Science; Business and Entrepreneurship; Interpretation and Translation Services) include options for those seeking to prepare to enter college, as well as students interested in entering the workforce immediately after graduation.

Revamped Nutrition Services

For thousands of Five Star students, the free meals they eat at school serve as a primary source of daily nutrition. Through the bond, the district plans to expand its nutrition services by building a central kitchen and warehouse. This facility will allow the district to offer a greater variety of healthy food and increased ingredient and allergen control through scratch-made menu items.

District-Wide Investments

Beyond the major bond projects, the district is also funding a wide range of critical updates at all schools, including investments in roofing, HVAC, plumbing, IT infrastructure, security, playgrounds and more.

Strong public education is the foundation for economic growth, and the district firmly believes that by investing in student success, we’re investing in community well-being.

With the Bond underway, the district **still has critical needs in staffing and programming** that are unmet. In November 2025, Adams 12 Five Star Schools will likely ask voters to approve funding for staffing and programming investments prioritized by the community. Investments fall into the following three areas:

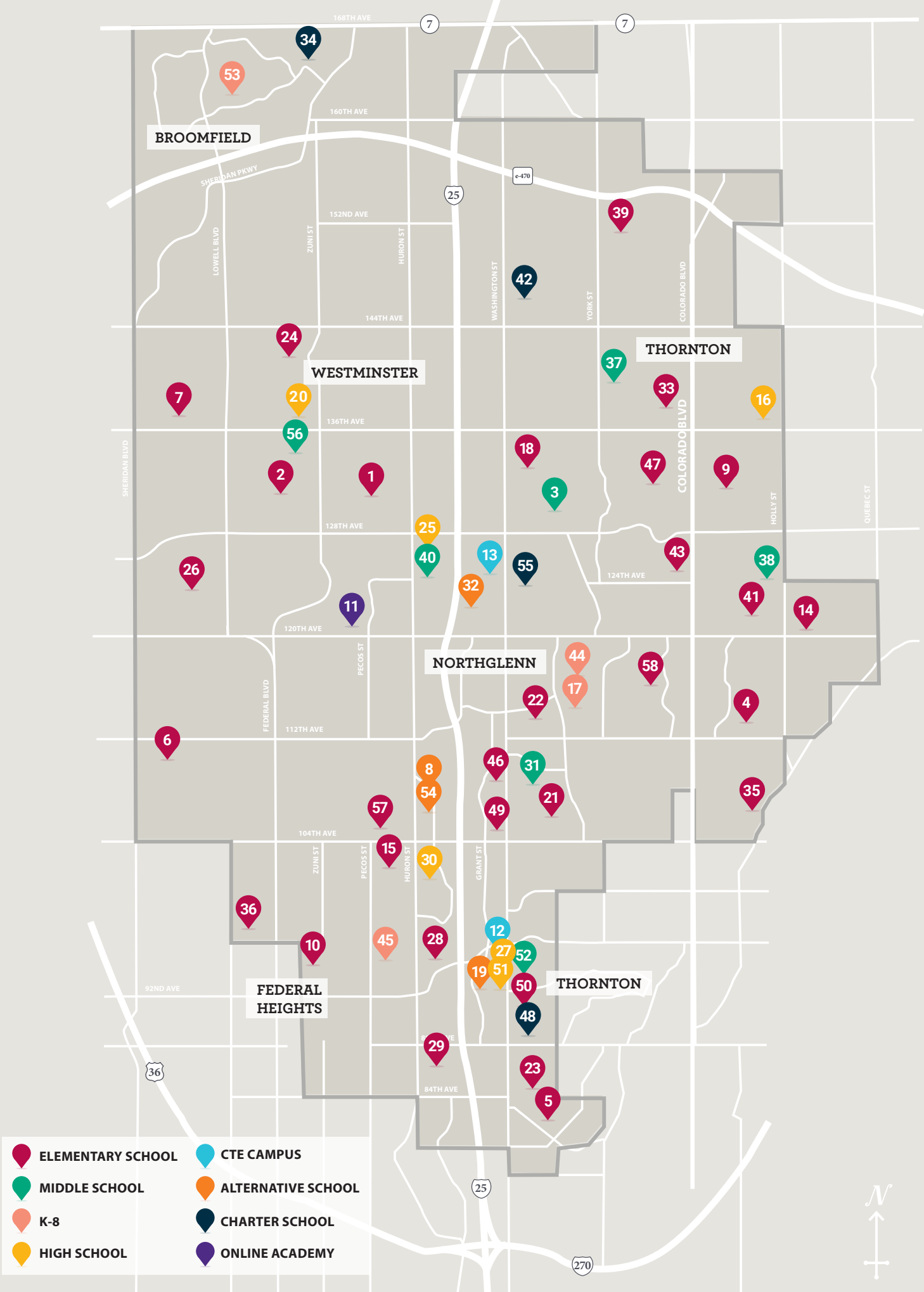
- 1. Enhancing School Safety and Security and Student Mental Health
- 2. Recruit, Retain and Remain Competitive for World Class Staff
- 3. Diverse, Relevant and Personalized Learning Opportunities



Taking ELEVATE to the Next Level

ELEVATE, the district’s strategic plan, reflects the values and priorities of the more than 7,000 parents, community members, students and staff who helped develop it into six focus areas. (1) 21st century learners (2) diverse learning (3) outside the classroom learning (4) safe schools (5) social emotional learning (6) world class staff.

Learn more at adams12.org/elevate



- 1

Arapahoe Ridge Elementary*
arapahoe.adams12.org
- 2

Centennial Elementary*
centennial.adams12.org
- 3

Century Middle
century.adams12.org
- 4

Cherry Drive Elementary*
cherry.adams12.org
- 5

Coronado Hills Elementary*
coronado.adams12.org
- 6

Cotton Creek Elementary
cotton.adams12.org
- 7

Coyote Ridge Elementary
coyote.adams12.org
- 8

Crossroads Middle
crossroads.adams12.org
Alternative Education Campus
- 9

Eagleview Elementary
eagleview.adams12.org
- 10

Federal Heights Elementary*
federal.adams12.org
- 11

Five Star Online Academy
fivestaronline.adams12.org
- 12

FutureForward at Bollman
futureforward.adams12.org
Career and Technical Education Campus
- 13

FutureForward at Washington Square
futureforward.adams12.org
Career and Technical Education Campus
- 14

Glacier Peak Elementary
glacier.adams12.org
- 15

Hillcrest Elementary
hillcrest.adams12.org
- 16

Horizon High School
horizon.adams12.org
SOAR Program
- 17

Hulstrom K-8
hulstrom.adams12.org
Gifted and Talented School
- 18

Hunters Glen Elementary*
hunters.adams12.org
- 19

Independence Academy
adams12.org/independenceacademy
Alternative Education Campus
- 20

Legacy High School
legacy.adams12.org
Legacy 2000 Program
- 21

Leroy Elementary
leroy.adams12.org
- 22

Malley Drive Elementary*
malley.adams12.org
- 23

McElwain Elementary
mcelwain.adams12.org
- 24

Meridian Elementary
meridian.adams12.org
- 25

Mountain Range High School
mountainrange.adams12.org
High School of Business
- 26

Mountain View Elementary*
mountain.adams12.org
Unique Regional Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program
- 27

Newcomer Center
thorntonh.adams12.org/newcomer-center
- 28

North Mor Elementary*
northmor.adams12.org
- 29

North Star Elementary*
northstar.adams12.org
- 30

Northglenn High School
northglennh.adams12.org
STEM programming
- 31

Northglenn Middle
northglennm.adams12.org
- 32

Pathways Future Center School
pathways.adams12.org
Alternative Education Campus
- 33

Prairie Hills Elementary
prairie.adams12.org
- 34

Prospect Ridge Academy
www.prospectridgeacademy.org
Charter School
- 35

Riverdale Elementary*
riverdale.adams12.org
- 36

Rocky Mountain Elementary
rocky.adams12.org
- 37

Rocky Top Middle
rockytop.adams12.org
- 38

Shadow Ridge Middle
shadowridge.adams12.org
- 39

Silver Creek Elementary
silvercreek.adams12.org
- 40

Silver Hills Middle
silverhills.adams12.org
- 41

Skyview Elementary
skyview.adams12.org
- 42

Stargate School
stargateschool.org
Charter School
- 43

Stellar Elementary
stellar.adams12.org
- 44

STEM Lab*
stem.adams12.org
STEM programming
- 45

STEM Launch
stemlaunch.adams12.org
STEM programming
- 46

Stukey Elementary
stukey.adams12.org
- 47

Tarver Elementary*
tarver.adams12.org
- 48

The New America School
www.newamericaschool.org
Charter School
- 49

The Studio School
studioschool.adams12.org
Arts-integrated School
- 50

Thornton Elementary*
thorntone.adams12.org
- 51

Thornton High School
thorntonh.adams12.org
IB Diploma Programme
- 52

Thornton Middle
thorntonn.adams12.org
- 53

Thunder Vista P-8*
thundervista.adams12.org
- 54

Vantage Point High School
vantage.adams12.org
Alternative Education Campus
- 55

Westgate Community School
westgateschool.org
Charter School
- 56

Westlake Middle
westlake.adams12.org
- 57

Westview Elementary*
westview.adams12.org
- 58

Woodglen Elementary*
woodglen.adams12.org

*PRESCHOOL AVAILABLE

Be part of our Five Star Family

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HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS LOCATED IN
Broomfield, Federal Heights, Northglenn, Thornton and Westminster
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