HIGH SCHOOL BENCHMARKS

September 2025

National College Progression Rates

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

This report contains college enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes of high school graduating students. The results presented in the report cover the following outcomes:
1) College enrollment in the
  - first fall after high school graduation (immediate)
  - first year after high school graduation
  - first two years after high school graduation
2) Persistence from the first year to the second year of college.
3) College completion within six years after high school graduation.

The outcomes are presented by type of college attended:
- Public and private institutions
- Two-year and four-year institutions
- In-state and out-of-state institutions.

These characteristics are defined by IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data as of 2022-23. In-state designations are defined relative to the state in which the high school is located, not the residency of individual students.

The high school dataset used for this report is based on a voluntary sample and is not a nationally representative sample of schools or of high school graduates. High school diploma data are submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse) by schools and districts that participate in the StudentTracker for High Schools (STHS) service.

This report is based on the data submitted to the Clearinghouse on graduating classes of 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. The tables below show the number of participating high schools and high school graduates included in this report compared to the total number of US high schools and high school graduates. All types of high schools, including both public and private schools, participate in the Clearinghouse STHS service.

Each edition of the High School Benchmarks report is non-comparable to prior editions, even where the same outcome is covered for the same graduating class across report years. This is due to differences in the timing of submission of high school data, which leads to variable coverage for the same high school class across different editions. Readers are discouraged from comparing findings in this year's report with those in prior editions or from using results across editions to create longer-term time trends. This is particularly important for this year's report due to a drop in high school and grade 12 coverage across graduating classes compared to prior years. The coverage decline is the result of a partial migration of the Clearinghouse's high school data to the new StudentTracker 3.0 platform. As a result, the legacy STHS data system—on which this report is based—includes fewer high schools than in previous years. Lower coverage also leads to less reliable estimates compared to prior editions. Coverage statistics by high school type (public non-charter, public charter, private) and graduating class—are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1. Number of public, non-charter high schools and graduates included in the report

Academic year[1]	No. of participating high schools	Percent of all US public non-charter high schools[2]	Percent of US grade 12 enrollment represented[3]	No. of graduates in participating high schools
2016-17	10,762	63.1%	66.6%	2,108,357
2017-18	10,965	64.1%	68.8%	2,218,227
2020-21	11,202	65.3%	69.5%	2,242,122
2021-22	11,233	64.6%	69.6%	2,232,378
2022-23	11,141	63.9%	68.2%	2,183,344
2023-24	9,554	54.7%	59.1%	1,908,433

Table 2. Number of public, charter high schools and graduates included in the report

Academic year[1]	No. of participating high schools	Percent of all US public charter high schools[2]	Percent of US grade 12 enrollment represented[3]	No. of graduates in participating high schools
2016-17	1,038	47.5%	50.8%	91,623
2017-18	1,131	49.3%	52.9%	99,419
2020-21	1,237	51.6%	51.0%	101,822
2021-22	1,281	51.5%	50.9%	105,417
2022-23	1,264	49.5%	49.8%	105,177
2023-24	1,086	41.8%	41.7%	91,104

[1]Academic year is defined as the period between September 1-August 31.
[2] The total number of schools used in the denominator of this calculation was obtained from NCES' Elementary and Secondary Information System (ELSi). The private school information is available from the Private School Survey, where data is available as recently as 2019-20. The number of private schools for intermediate years are estimates, equal to the number from the most recently available data (2019-20).

Table 3. Number of private high schools and graduates included in the report

Academic year[1]	Number of participating high schools	Percent of all US private high schools[2]	Percent of US grade 12 enrollment represented[3]	No. of graduates in participating high schools
2016-17	319	6.4%	16.8%	36,700
2017-18	358	6.6%	16.5%	40,017
2020-21	250	4.8%	11.8%	25,574
2021-22	238	4.6%	11.1%	24,175
2022-23	236	4.5%	11.1%	24,139
2023-24	215	4.1%	9.8%	21,384

[3] The numbers used in both the denominator and numerator of this calculation were obtained from NCES' Elementary and Secondary Information System (ELSi). Grade 12 enrollment information is available from the Private School Survey, where data is available as recently as 2019-20. The numbers for intermediate years are estimates, equal to the numbers from the most recently available data (2019-20).

Definitions of Public, Non-Charter High School Categories

To enable public, non-charter high schools to compare their own outcomes with those of similar high schools, the outcomes in this report are presented based on school-level characteristics: low-income and higher-income; high-minority and low-minority; and urban, suburban, or rural. Membership in these categories for each academic year is based on the Common Core of Data (CCD) for the corresponding year.

The CCD is the Department of Education's primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the United States. We used CCD data on all regular public schools with a 12th grade to categorize the income, poverty, minority status and locale (urbanicity) of public, non-charter high schools in this report.

Income-based Metrics
Low-income schools are defined as schools where at least 50% of the entire student population (not just graduating seniors) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In addition to results for schools in low-income and higher-income categories, the report also presents postsecondary outcomes for graduates from a subset of low-income schools defined as high-poverty schools and a subset of higher-income schools defined as low-poverty schools. High-poverty schools are defined as those where at least 75% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Low-poverty schools are defined as those where less than 25% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

NOTE: In 2020, the USDA allowed schools to provide free lunches to students through the Summer Food Service Program rather than the National Student Lunch Program (NSLP). As a result, fewer lunches were provided to students through the NSLP, and thus fewer students were reported as qualifying for a free or reduced lunch through the NSLP. Due to this shift in how students were reported, the number of high schools classified as low income and high poverty

dropped for the 2021 and 2022 high school graduating classes nationally and in the high schools analyzed for this report (see Table 4). This policy was not renewed for the 2022-2023 school year and some schools returned to reporting students qualifying for free and reduced lunch under the NSLP. This led to another shift in the number of high schools classified as low income, increasing the 2023 numbers and bringing them in line with pre-pandemic levels. This shift in income classification has continued for the 2023-24 academic year. Due to this fluctuation over time, please use caution when interpreting income-related year-over-year changes for high school graduating classes between 2020 and 2024. This is discussed in more detail in Tab 5 in the report dashboard.

Minority-based Metrics
High-minority schools are defined as schools where at least 40% of the Grade 12-enrolled students are either Black or Hispanic.

Locale-Based Metrics (Urbanicity)
Locale (urbanicity) is defined by the NCES urban-centric locale code. Schools with a code from 11 to 13 are defined as urban. Schools with a code from 21 to 23 are defined as suburban. And those with a code 31 to 43, covering both town and rural areas, are defined as rural.

Combinations of these characteristics—including the additional income-based analyses based on poverty status—result in nine groups of high schools. Thus, the outcomes are presented for the following categories of high schools:
- Low-income schools
- Higher-income schools
- Low-poverty schools
- High-poverty schools
- Low-minority schools
- High-minority schools
- Urban schools
- Suburban schools
- Rural schools

Table 4. Number of public, non-charter high schools and public, non-charter high school graduates included in the report by category of high schools

Characteristic	Academic year	Number of participating high schools	Percent of US grade 12 enrollment represented[4]	Number of states represented	Total N (No. of graduates in sample)
Low-income Schools	2016-17	3,717	60.1%	44	698,961
	2017-18	3,890	62.6%	44	758,814
	2020-21	3,444	63.9%	42	682,362
	2021-22	3,187	63.4%	40	656,464
	2022-23	4,257	62.5%	45	822,545
	2023-24	3,987	55.9%	41	774,388
Higher-income Schools	2016-17	7,045	70.3%	51	1,409,396
	2017-18	7,075	72.6%	51	1,459,413
	2020-21	7,758	72.2%	48	1,559,760
	2021-22	8,046	72.5%	49	1,575,914
	2022-23	6,884	72.2%	48	1,360,799
	2023-24	5,567	61.6%	49	1,134,045
High-minority Schools	2016-17	2,479	60.2%	42	718,446
	2017-18	2,657	64.1%	41	803,737
	2020-21	2,862	66.2%	42	856,760
	2021-22	2,900	66.2%	45	863,241
	2022-23	3,006	63.3%	45	860,204
	2023-24	2,877	57.5%	44	820,629
Low-minority Schools	2016-17	8,283	70.4%	51	1,389,911
	2017-18	8,308	71.8%	51	1,414,490
	2020-21	8,340	71.7%	50	1,385,362
	2021-22	8,333	71.8%	50	1,369,137
	2022-23	8,135	71.8%	49	1,323,140
	2023-24	6,677	60.5%	49	1,087,804
Urban Schools	2016-17	2,044	69.4%	46	592,454
	2017-18	2,087	70.7%	46	613,403
	2020-21	2,127	71.3%	48	629,249
	2021-22	2,129	72.2%	48	629,007
	2022-23	2,120	70.3%	47	608,134
	2023-24	2,031	64.6%	46	588,115
Suburban Schools	2016-17	2,742	70.0%	47	911,123
	2017-18	2,865	73.8%	47	979,373
	2020-21	2,882	74.3%	47	977,275
	2021-22	2,910	74.0%	46	970,551
	2022-23	2,904	73.4%	47	953,605
	2023-24	2,325	61.5%	46	801,344
Rural Schools	2016-17	5,976	59.8%	47	604,780
	2017-18	6,013	60.8%	48	625,451
	2020-21	6,193	61.8%	47	635,598
	2021-22	6,194	61.7%	46	632,820
	2022-23	6,117	60.1%	47	621,605
	2023-24	5,198	51.2%	47	518,974

[4] The numbers used in both the denominator and numerator of this calculation were obtained from the NCES Elementary and Secondary Information System (ELSi). The denominator is the number of grade 12 enrollments for all schools in a particular category of high schools. The numerator is the number of grade 12 enrollments for participating public high schools in the category. Grade 12 enrollment information is available from the Common Core of Data through 2023-24.

Table 5. Number of public, non-charter high schools and public, non-charter high school graduates in high-poverty and low-poverty schools included in the report by category

Characteristic	Academic year	Number of participating high schools	Percent of US grade 12 enrollment represented[5]	Number of states represented	Total N (No. of graduates in sample)
High-poverty Schools	2016-17	1,429	63.3%	40	263,391
	2017-18	1,533	63.8%	41	285,195
	2020-21	1,437	60.7%	37	280,331
	2021-22	1,368	60.9%	35	270,990
	2022-23	1,785	61.8%	41	328,616
	2023-24	1,641	54.2%	38	305,316
Low-poverty Schools	2016-17	2,142	75.3%	43	568,385
	2017-18	2,158	77.5%	44	584,527
	2020-21	1,777	72.4%	38	468,677
	2021-22	2,207	71.8%	39	556,498
	2022-23	1,820	75.9%	40	463,114
	2023-24	1,298	65.2%	38	345,669

[5] The numbers used in both the denominator and numerator of this calculation were obtained from the NCES Elementary and Secondary Information System (ELSi). The denominator is the number of grade 12 enrollments for all schools in a particular category of high schools. The numerator is the number of grade 12 enrollments for participating public high schools in the category. Grade 12 enrollment information is available from the Common Core of Data through 2023-24.

Postsecondary Data

College enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes are determined by matching the graduate files received from high schools each year, to the postsecondary enrollment data held by the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse is a unique and trusted source for higher education enrollment and degree verification. Currently, Clearinghouse data include 3,600 postsecondary institutions and 97 percent of US postsecondary enrollments. Because the database is comprised of student-level data, researchers can use it to link concurrent as well as consecutive enrollments of individual students at multiple institutions—a capability that distinguishes the Clearinghouse data from national databases built with institution-level data.

To preserve comparability to the reports that schools and districts receive on their graduates' college access, persistence, and completion rates through the Clearinghouse's StudentTracker service, results have not been adjusted to account for a student's outcomes not being captured due to noncoverage by Clearinghouse data.

Definitions of Postsecondary Outcomes

College Enrollment:
- First fall after high school graduation: Percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four- year postsecondary institution in the fall semester immediately following graduation. The fall semester immediately following graduation is defined as any enrollment that occurs between August 15 and October 31.

- First year after high school graduation: Percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution in the academic year immediately following graduation. This includes any enrollment that occurs between August 15 of the graduation year and August 14 of the following year.

- First two years after high school graduation: Percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution in the first two years following graduation. This includes any enrollment that occurs between August 15 of the graduation year and August 14 of the second year after high school graduation.

Persistence
Persistence from the first to second year of college: Percentage of high school graduates who enrolled at any time in the first year after high school graduation and who remained enrolled in postsecondary education at any time in the second year following high school graduation. This is the percentage of students who re-enrolled at any postsecondary institution, not necessarily the same one they started in. Thus, it is different from the typical measure of retention at the same institution.

Completion
College completion within six years after high school graduation: Percentage of high school graduates who attained a degree in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution in the six academic years immediately following graduation. Students are included in this outcome regardless of whether they have enrolled in postsecondary education or not. Only associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees are counted in these rates. Certificates are not included.

STEM College Completions

Analysis is based on degree records that were awarded to students within six years of high school graduation. Only associate, bachelor's, and advanced degrees are considered. Certificates are not included. The field of study, whenever reported by the postsecondary institution, is mapped to the NCES' Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code. NCES classifies instructional programs by a six-digit CIP code at the most granular level and organizes them into CIP families by their two-digit prefix.

The definition of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) used in this analysis is based on a listing of six-digit CIP codes used by the National Science Foundation, and it includes the following disciplines:
- Biological and Agricultural Sciences
- Computer Sciences
- Earth, Atmospheric, and Ocean Sciences
- Engineering
- Mathematics
- Physical Sciences
- Psychology
- Social Sciences

If a student is awarded more than one degree and at least one of them is in a STEM discipline, the earliest STEM degree is considered for this analysis.

Suggested Citation

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