Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Black Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

According to the Census’ American Community Survey, in 2021 12% of the total U.S. population identified as Black or African American. Among Black residents aged 25 or over, 22.6% had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. This rate is up from 17.9% in 2010, but falls short of the national rate of 32.9%.

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2020, Black students made up 12.5% of all postsecondary enrollment.
- In 2020, 36% of the 18–24-year-old Black population were enrolled in college compared to 40% of the overall U.S. population.
- Since Fall 2010, Black student enrollment has declined from 3.04 million to 2.38 million, a 22% decrease:
  - Undergraduate enrollment declined from 2.67 million to 1.99 million, a 25% decrease
  - Despite the overall enrollment decline, graduate enrollment for Black students increased from 361,900 to 383,900, a 6% increase
- Black students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.
  - In Fall 2020, 67% of Black students attended public institutions:
    - 42% attended public four-year institutions
    - 28% attended public two-year institutions
- Nearly 76% of the Fall 2020 enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were Black students.

FINANCIAL AID

- According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, 74% of Black students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2017-18 academic year, compared to 59% of all students.
  - 63% of Black students received a Pell grant, compared to 44% of all students.
  - 54% of Black students received a federal student loan, compared to 39% of all students.
- Among Black students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount received was $9,967.
  - The average Pell grant amount for Black students was $4,026.
  - The average Federal student loan amount for Black students was $8,505.

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1 “Black” will be used for the remainder of this report to include individuals identifying as “Black” or “African American.”
2 Due to rounding in the Digest of Education Statistics, percent values may not completely add-up.
COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 45% of first-time, full-time Black students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2014 graduated within six years, compared to 64% for all students.
- At two-year institutions, among first-time, full-time students beginning in 2017, 25% of Black students graduated within three years, compared to 34% overall.
- Of the more than two million bachelor’s degrees conferred in the 2019-20 academic year, 197,444 (9.7%) went to Black students.

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- According to the Baccalaureate & Beyond study, ten years after receiving a bachelor’s degree, Black graduates who reported having an income averaged a gross income of $59,100, compared to the national average of $76,370.
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income. Ten years after graduating:
  - 47% of Black graduates reported owning a home, compared to 63% of all graduates
  - 80% of Black graduates had some form of a retirement account, compared to 87% of all graduates

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Black students carry the largest student loan debt burden, which can greatly affect mental health.
  - Compounding this issue, Black people are much less likely to receive help for mental health-related issues.
- Black students are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or college prep courses in high school.
- Black students are also less likely to have family members that have attended college.
  - In 2021, 33% of Black children under 18 years of age lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 59% of white children.
- Black graduates of HBCUs report greater wellbeing, sense of purpose, and that they felt supported while enrolled. Institutional context and sense of belonging play important roles in student success.

DATA SOURCES

The Education Trust. 2022.
Gallup. October 2015.