



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Black Students in Higher Education

### CENSUS OVERVIEW

According to the Census' American Community Survey, in 2023 [12.1%](#) of the total U.S. population identified as Black or African American.<sup>1</sup> Among Black residents aged 25 or over, [26.2%](#) had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. This rate is up from [19.3%](#) in 2013, but falls short of the national rate of [34.8%](#).

### ENROLLMENT

- In [Fall 2022](#), Black students made up 12.5% of all postsecondary enrollment.
- In 2022, 36.0% of the 18–24-year-old Black population were [enrolled](#) in college compared to 39.0% of the overall U.S. population.
- Between Fall 2012 and Fall 2022, Black student [enrollment](#) declined from 2.96 million to 2.32 million, a 22% decrease:
  - Undergraduate enrollment declined from 2.59 million to 1.95 million, a 25% decrease.
  - Despite the overall enrollment decline, graduate enrollment for Black students remained steady at 369,200.
- Black students are much more likely to [attend](#) public versus private institutions of higher education.
  - In Fall 2022, 67.5% of Black students attended public institutions:
    - 41.9% attended public four-year institutions
    - 25.6%<sup>2</sup> attended public two-year institutions
- [75.8%](#) of the Fall 2022 enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were Black students.

### FINANCIAL AID

- According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, [71%](#) of Black students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2019-20 academic year, compared to 55% of all students.
  - [60%](#) of Black students received a Pell grant, compared to 40% of all students.
  - [48%](#) of Black students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of all students.
- Among Black students who received federal Title IV aid, the [average amount](#) received was \$9,642.
  - The average Pell grant amount for Black students was \$4,172.
  - The average Federal student loan amount for Black students was \$8,641.

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<sup>1</sup> "Black" will be used for the remainder of this report to include individuals identifying as "Black" or "African American."

<sup>2</sup> Due to rounding in the Digest of Education Statistics, percent values may not completely add-up.

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- [46.0%](#) of first-time, full-time Black students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2016 graduated within six years, compared to 64.6% for all students.
- At two-year institutions, among first-time, full-time students beginning in 2019, [25.3%](#) of Black students graduated within three years, compared to 34.1% overall.
- Of the more than two million [bachelor's degrees](#) conferred in the 2021-22 academic year, 199,962 (9.9%) went to Black students.

## EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- According to the Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal 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 2022, 32.4% 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 57.0% of white children.
- [Black graduates](#) of HBCUs report greater well-being, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of support while enrolled. Institutional context and a sense of belonging play important roles in student success.

## DATA SOURCES

[American Community Survey](#) & [Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, September 2024.

[Baccalaureate & Beyond Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

[Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics, January 2025.

[National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

[Office of Civil Rights](#). Department of Education. October 2022.

[The Education Trust](#), July 2022.

[Gallup](#), October 2015.