



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Black Students in Higher Education

### CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2024, 12.1% of the total U.S. population identified as Black or African American.\*<sup>1</sup> Among Black residents aged 25 or over, 26.9% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>1</sup> This rate is up from 19.7% in 2014, but falls short of the national rate of 36.8%.<sup>1</sup>

### ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2023, Black students made up 12.7% of all postsecondary enrollment.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
  - Despite the overall enrollment decline, graduate enrollment for Black students remained steady at 369,200.<sup>3</sup>
- Black students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.<sup>3</sup>
  - In Fall 2023, 67.1% of Black students attended public institutions:
    - 42.0% attended public four-year institutions.<sup>3</sup>
    - 25.1% attended public two-year institutions.<sup>3</sup>
- 75.8% of the Fall 2022 enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were Black students.<sup>3</sup>

### FINANCIAL AID

- In the 2019-20 academic year, 71% of Black students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid, compared to 55% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
  - 60% of Black students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
  - 48% of Black students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
- Among Black students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount received was \$9,642.<sup>5</sup>
  - The average Pell Grant amount for Black students was \$4,172.<sup>5</sup>
  - The average Federal student loan amount for Black students was \$8,641.<sup>5</sup>

\* "Black" will be used for the remainder of this report to include individuals identifying as "Black" or "African American."

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 45.4% of first-time, full-time Black students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2017 graduated within six years, compared to 64.5% for all students.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- Of the more than two million bachelor's degrees conferred in the 2021-22 academic year, 199,962 (9.9%) went to Black students.<sup>3</sup>

## EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.<sup>8</sup> Ten years after graduating:
  - 47% of Black graduates reported owning a home, compared to 63% of all graduates.<sup>2</sup>
  - 80% of Black graduates had a retirement account, compared to 87% of all graduates.<sup>2</sup>

## POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Black students carry the largest student loan debt burden, which can greatly affect mental health.<sup>7</sup>
  - Compounding this issue, Black people are much less likely to receive help for mental health-related issues.<sup>7</sup>
- Black students are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or college prep courses in high school.<sup>6</sup>
- Black students are also less likely to have family members who 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

## DATA SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> [American Community Survey & Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> [Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>3</sup> [Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.

<sup>4</sup> [HBCU Well-Being Report](#). Gallup, October 2015.

<sup>5</sup> [National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>6</sup> [Office of Civil Rights](#). Department of Education, October 2022.

<sup>7</sup> [Student Debt is Harming The Mental Health of Black Borrowers](#). The Education Trust, July 2022.

<sup>8</sup> [Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.