



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Public Two-Year Institutions

### HISTORY

Public two-year institutions are operated by government officials, primarily funded by public funds, and offer programs that typically result in associate degrees or other short-term certifications. Although many are known as community colleges, this sector also includes technical and junior colleges that focus on workforce training, transfer options, and continuing education. These institutions expanded rapidly in the 20th century as states aimed to enhance access to affordable postsecondary education and meet local workforce demands. Today, they enroll millions of students annually and serve as a key entry point to higher education for many first-generation, part-time, and adult learners.

### FEDERAL FUNDING

- Public two-year institutions can receive federal funding under Titles II, III, V, VI, VII, and VIII of the Higher Education Act (HEA), depending on the eligibility requirements for specific programs.<sup>4</sup>
- Participating public two-year institutions also receive federal funding through Title IV student aid.<sup>4</sup>

### INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

- In 2024–25, there were 757 degree-granting public two-year institutions across 45 states and two territories, with California (96), North Carolina (58), and Illinois (48) having the most institutions.<sup>2</sup>
  - This represents a 17.7% decrease from 2014–15, when there were 920 institutions.<sup>2</sup>
- 290 public two-year institutions are designated as Minority-Serving Institutions or meet the federal criteria for such designations.<sup>2</sup>

### ENROLLMENT

- Total enrollment at public two-year institutions in fall 2024 was 4,478,755—about 22.8% of total enrollment at all institutions.<sup>2</sup>
  - This is down from 6,397,552 total enrollment at public two-year institutions in fall 2014—31.7% of total enrollment at all institutions.<sup>2</sup>
- At public two-year institutions in fall 2024, students were far more likely to be enrolled part-time than full-time.<sup>2</sup>
  - 68% of students at public two-year institutions were enrolled part-time, far higher than 39.4% of postsecondary students overall.<sup>2</sup>

## FINANCIAL AID

- 41.5% of students at public two-year institutions received Title IV federal student aid in 2019–20, compared to 54.9% of students overall.<sup>3</sup>
  - 36.3% of students at public two-year institutions received a Pell Grant in 2019–20, compared to 40.2% of students overall.<sup>3</sup>
  - 12.2% of students at public two-year institutions used federal student loans in 2019–20, compared to 34.3% of students overall.<sup>3</sup>
- Among students at public two-year institutions who received Title IV aid, the average total amount was \$4,772 in 2019–20. The average Pell Grant was \$3,609, and the average federal loan amount was \$4,937.<sup>3</sup>

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- In 2024, 555,615 degrees were awarded at public two-year institutions, representing 56.6% of associate degrees and 13.6% of overall degrees.<sup>2</sup>
- 35.6% of students at public two-year institutions graduated within 150% of their expected time to degree, compared to 41.1% of students graduating with two-year degrees overall.<sup>2</sup>

## EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- In a 2017 survey, students who graduated from a public two-year institution with an associate degree reported earning nearly \$10,000 more, on average, than students who started but had not completed their degree within the survey's five-year window.<sup>1</sup>

## DATA SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>[Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, June 2024.

<sup>2</sup>[Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics, March 2026.

<sup>3</sup>[National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, February 2024.

<sup>4</sup>[U.S. Department of Education Program Data](#). March 2024.