

ELEVATE NC

H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N



Complete Tennessee
Leadership Institute

A PROJECT OF SCORE & THE HUNT INSTITUTE

EQUITY IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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Higher education offers a path toward economic prosperity for both states and individuals. As a result, most states, including North Carolina and Tennessee, established specific [higher education attainment goals](#) to ensure residents are prepared for the workforce. North Carolina's goal calls for [2 million](#) 25- to 44-year olds to hold a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree by 2030. Tennessee's [Drive to 55](#) initiative centers around a goal for 55 percent of 25- to 65-year olds to hold a postsecondary credential by 2025. Equitable access to postsecondary education is one of the many critical factors states must address to reach these goals.

Understanding Access to Postsecondary Education

Enrollment Trends

Enrollment is the primary metric monitored in conversations around access to higher education. Nationally, postsecondary enrollment has declined each year since 2010 – with the COVID-19 pandemic worsening the existing trend. Coming out of the pandemic, higher education leaders are discussing ways to expand their reach to recover from the notable [enrollment cliff](#).

In the last decade, both North Carolina and Tennessee have experienced drops in enrollment. In North Carolina, overall enrollment fell from 420,700 students in 2012 to 403,027 students in 2021 – a drop of 17,673 students or 4.2 percent. [Overall enrollment](#) in Tennessee fell by an even larger margin of 9.6 percent in that same time period, falling from 220,002 students to 198,849 students. Though enrollment did not consistently decrease each year (both states had enrollment increases at times), there are fewer students pursuing postsecondary education than there were a decade ago. This trend is particularly concerning given most new job openings [require a postsecondary credential](#).

Shifting demographic trends are also interesting to

monitor. Figure 1 shows that between 2012 and 2021, the undergraduate student population in North Carolina became less White (a decrease of 4.6 percentage points) and less Black (a decrease of 3.3 percentage points). In turn, the proportion of undergraduate students who were Asian and Hispanic or Latino increased by 1.5 percentage points and 5.8 percentage points, respectively. Given that total enrollment was on the decline, it is notable that both those groups also increased their overall enrollment counts during that time period. Similarly, as shown in Figure 2, White and Black students in Tennessee made up a smaller proportion of the undergraduate population in 2021 compared to in 2012 (a decrease of 4 percentage points and 2.4 percentage points, respectively). On the other hand, more undergraduate Asian and Hispanic or Latino students enrolled – making up a larger portion of the undergraduate student body (an increase of .8 percentage points and 3.6 percentage points, respectively).

Questions for thought:

Should equity-focused postsecondary enrollment and attainment goals exist at the institution level, state level, or both? What insights can stakeholders gain from postsecondary enrollment data? What stakeholders should be monitoring this data?

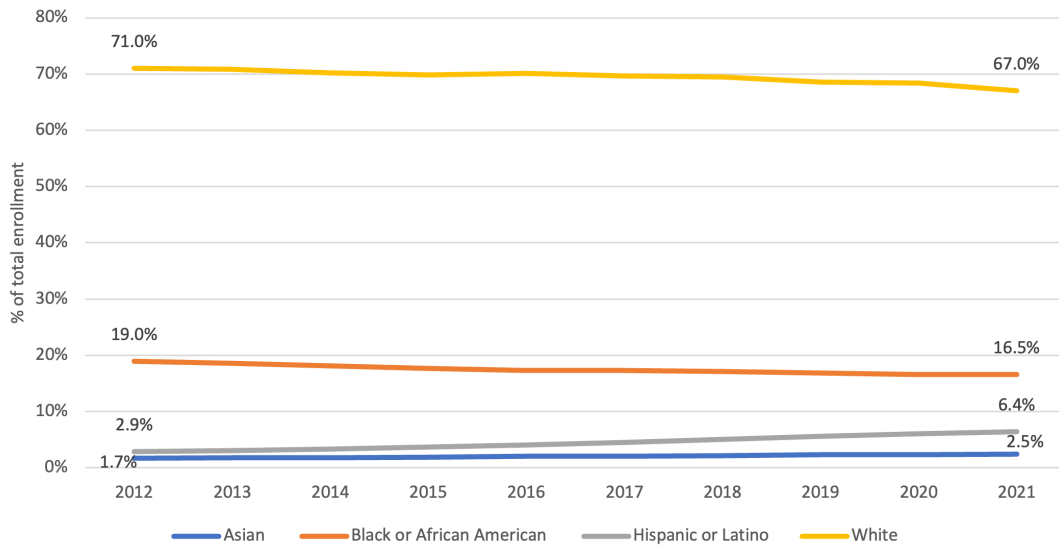
It is important to acknowledge total undergraduate enrollment is an aggregate measure inclusive of learners coming straight from high school, adults, part-time students, and full-time students – all groups with different needs and experiences with higher education. Enrollment trends may be different when looking at these groups separately.

Affordability

Postsecondary affordability speaks to a student's (and their family's) ability to pay for all the necessary educational costs and corresponding resources, such as textbooks, while also having enough money

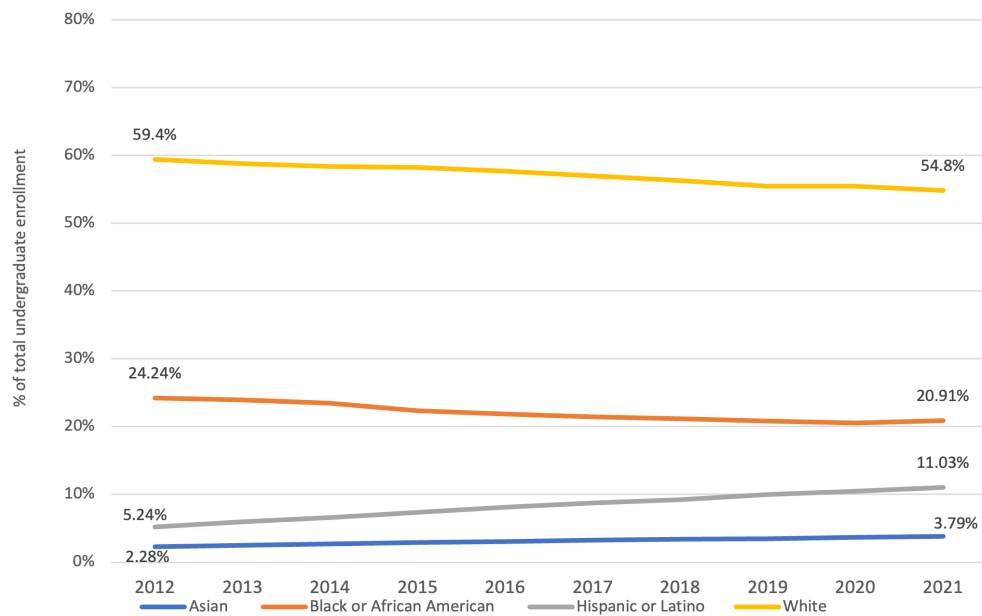
Hispanic or Latino and Asian Students Are Making Up A Larger Proportion of Tennessee's and North Carolina's Undergraduate Populations

Figure 1. Tennessee Undergraduate Enrollment



Source

Figure 2. North Carolina Undergraduate Enrollment



Source

to cover essential needs, such as food and housing. The affordability of postsecondary education varies for each student based on their family's financial circumstances and the financial assistance provided to them through state and federal aid programs. Cost is the largest perceived challenge to accessing education beyond high school, with [57 percent](#) of adults perceiving cost as a barrier. [SCORE polling results](#) reveal that 84 percent of Tennesseans are concerned about the cost of higher education – though the majority still believe that getting an education beyond high school is worth it. There are several important aid programs that students, families, and advocates need to understand when discussing the cost of higher education.

- Loans, which need to be repaid with interest. There are both public and private loan programs.
- Federal [Pell Grants](#), which do not need to be repaid and are awarded to students with financial need.
- State grant and loan programs, which vary across states. Both [North Carolina](#) and [Tennessee](#) offer several state financial aid options. States vary on the percentage of aid allocated based on financial need.

Questions for thought:

Would you rather have a state financial aid system with more dollars, but a smaller proportion allocated based on need? Or fewer dollars, with almost all allocated based on need?

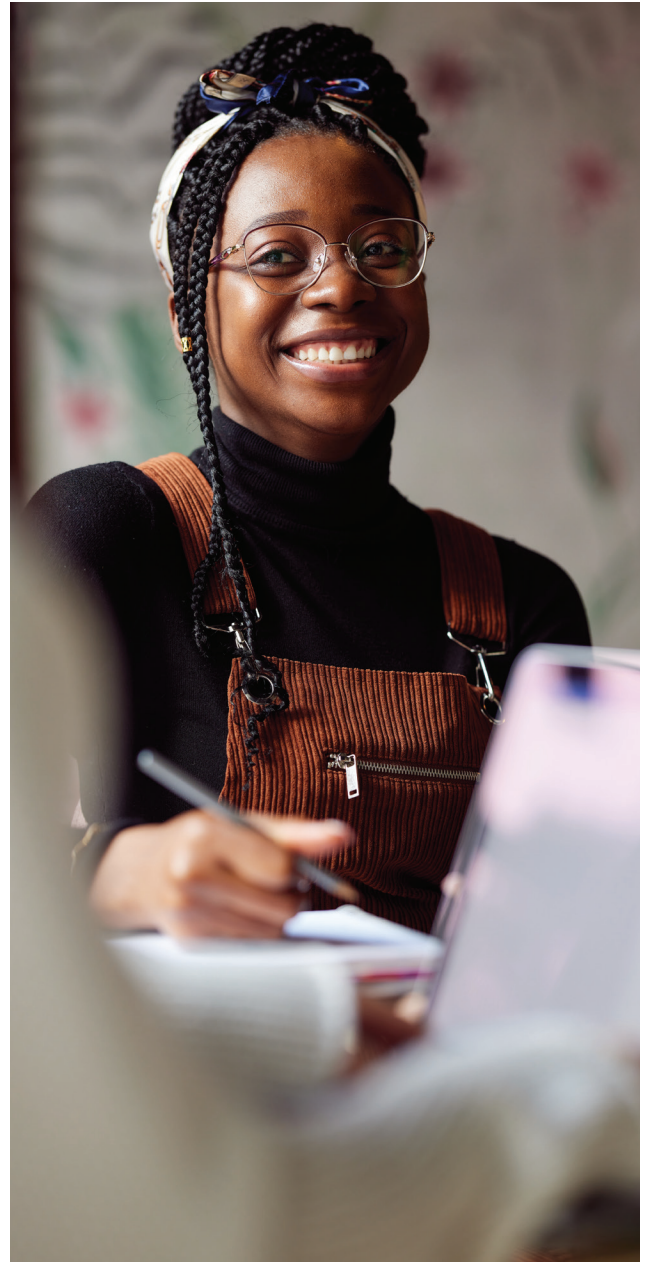


Table 1. Tennessee Provides a Larger Amount of Grant Aid Per Student, But North Carolina Allocates a Larger Proportion of Aid Based on Financial Need

	State Grant Aid Per Full-Time Equivalent Undergraduate	Need-Based State Grant Aid Per Full-Time Equivalent Undergraduate	Percent Of Grant Aid Allocated Based On Need
North Carolina	\$860	\$837	96.8%
Tennessee	\$1,958	\$561	28.6%
National Average	\$1,024	\$744	72.8%

Source



Supporting Postsecondary Access

Access Indicators

There are several indicators related to postsecondary access stakeholders can monitor to understand if students are on a path toward enrolling in higher education. Education Strategy Group (ESG), a national education consulting organization, identified a list of “[momentum metrics](#)” organized around three key phases of a student’s transition from high school to college: preparing, applying, and enrolling. Some of these metrics are listed below.

- Students who complete [Algebra 1](#) in or before ninth grade enroll in postsecondary education at higher rates than those who complete it in grades 10, 11, or 12. The earlier a student completes Algebra 1, the higher the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment.
- The larger [number of completed college applications](#), the more likely students are to successfully enroll in higher education. Submitting two college applications instead of one can increase a student’s likelihood of enrolling at a four-year institution by 40 percent.
- Completion of the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is associated with postsecondary enrollment. The FAFSA is used to determine how much and what kind of financial aid students and their families are eligible to receive from the federal government, and is a requirement for receiving federal and most state aid. As such, [completing the FAFSA](#) significantly increases the probability of a student enrolling in higher education directly after graduating high school.

Questions for thought:

What indicators do you think are most relevant to ensure equity in postsecondary access?
What systems are, or should be, in place in your state to support students through these milestones?

Many of these access metrics are impacted by a variety of factors. For example, [application fees](#) can impact a student’s ability to submit numerous college applications and completing the FAFSA can be [a long, and confusing process](#) for students and families. As such, ongoing mentoring, counseling, and other supports are essential to help students navigate through these milestones and close opportunity gaps that create inequities in postsecondary access.

Partnerships to Support Transitions

Many stakeholders with a goal of supporting equitable postsecondary access rely on partnerships across K-12, higher education, and non-profit groups to reach students. It is estimated that [between 10 and 40 percent](#) of students across the nation who intend to enroll in a postsecondary institution the fall after high school graduation do not ultimately enroll. This phenomenon, known as “summer melt”, has a disproportionate impact on students from low-income backgrounds. Partnerships can be an effective tool to help combat summer melt. For example:

- Creating strong [partnerships across high schools and IHEs that often serve their graduating class](#) can ensure students can access key points of contact and information to smooth their transition into postsecondary education.
- Partnerships developed with non-profit mentorship organizations to send [nudging texts](#) to students can have a positive impact on college enrollment.
- In Tennessee, there are non-profit [partnering organizations](#) ([tnAchieves](#) and the [Ayers Foundation](#)) responsible for administering the [Tennessee Promise Scholarship Program](#). These partnering organizations provide mentors who support scholarship recipients through their senior year of high school and first year of college – serving as a resource to smooth that transition.
- North Carolina is home to several nonprofit organizations dedicated to increasing postsecondary access for students. The [North Carolina College Advising Corps](#) places advisers in North Carolina high schools to provide college counseling and assistance with the college application and financial aid processes. The [College Foundation of North Carolina](#), a state-sponsored initiative that provides students with information, resources, and tools to plan, apply, and pay for college.

Once students are enrolled in higher education, cross-institution partnerships can be created to support transfer practices. The North Carolina Transfer Pathways Program aims to simplify the transition

for students by providing clear, guided pathways and ensuring that their credits earned at community colleges transfer smoothly to four-year universities. Pathways include Career and College Promise (CCP), an initiative that provides high school students the ability to take college credit bearing coursework through the UNC System and the NCCCS at a subsidized rate. CCP offers students three pathways to choose from: [Career and Technical Education](#), [College Transfer](#) and [Cooperative and Innovative High School](#). Tennessee similarly values transfer, launching statewide articulation agreements between community colleges and universities in 2010 through the [Tennessee Transfer Pathways](#). The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) is also supporting partnerships across Tennessee’s colleges of applied technology (TCATs) and community colleges to encourage [seamless transfer](#).

Partnerships can also exist to increase access to higher education beyond students just out of high school. Intentional partnerships across higher education and industry promote workforce-relevant educational opportunities that make postsecondary education attractive to students (recent high school graduates and adults alike). These partnerships further the [shared goal](#) of IHEs and employers to prepare students for career opportunities and develop talent pipelines.



Early Exposure to Workforce Development

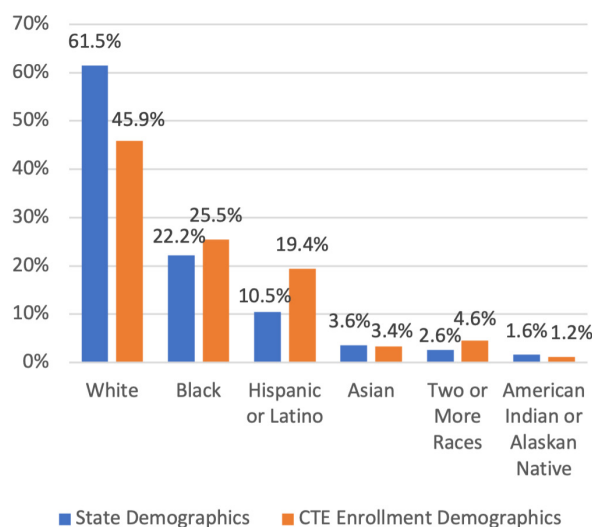
Career and technical education (CTE) is one strategy to improve postsecondary access. Research shows that participation in [advanced coursework](#) (such as Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment) and [CTE](#) increases a student's likelihood of graduating high school and attending postsecondary education. There

are significant [equity gaps](#) for low-income students and students of color to access advanced coursework. However, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, participants in CTE courses tend to be more [representative](#) of the broader student population than participants in advanced courses.

Table 2. State CTE Quick Facts

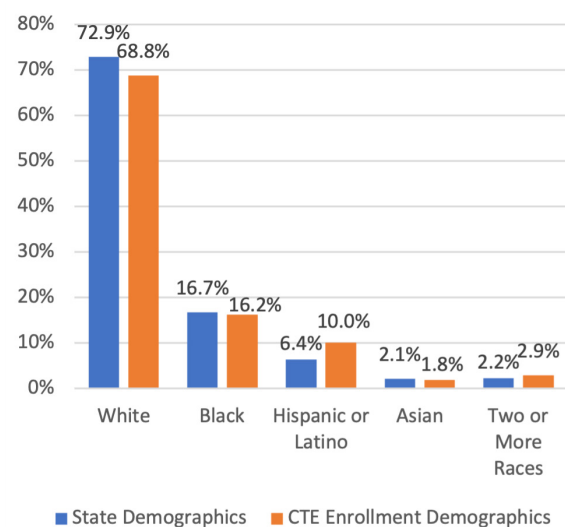
NORTH CAROLINA	TENNESSEE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total high school CTE concentrators: 54,075 Graduation Rate for high school CTE concentrators: 97% Postsecondary enrollment rate for CTE concentrators: 97% <p>Source</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total high school CTE concentrators: 74,594 Graduation Rate for high school CTE concentrators: 97% Postsecondary enrollment rate for CTE concentrators: 89% <p>Source</p>
<p><i>*Note: A CTE concentrator is defined as a student who earned two or more credits within a single program of study</i></p>	

Figure 3. North Carolina Secondary CTE Enrollment Is Slightly More Diverse Than Overall State Demographics



[State Source](#), [CTE Source](#)

Figure 4. Tennessee Secondary CTE Enrollment Is Fairly Representative Of Overall State Demographics

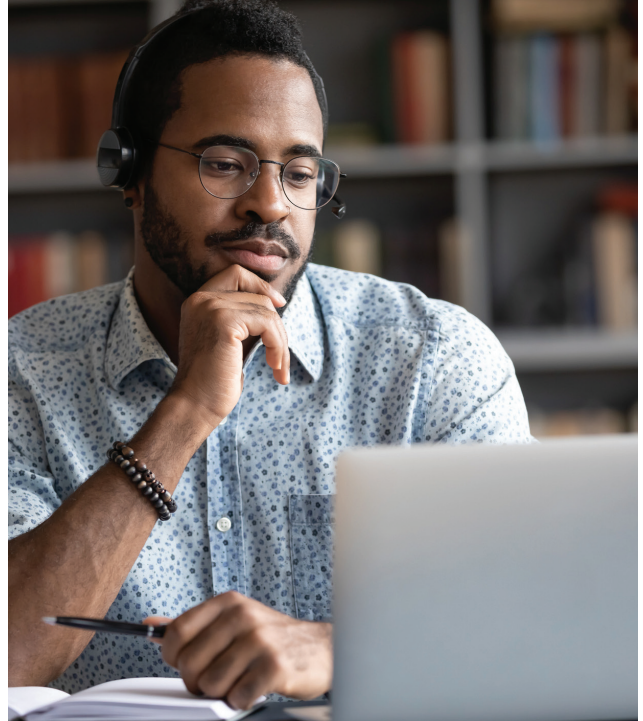


[State Source](#), [CTE Source](#)

Other important forms of early exposure to workforce development include work-based learning, career exploration courses, internships, and pre-apprenticeships. However, there is much less publicly-available data on access to and experience in these opportunities.

Questions for thought:

What stakeholders should be engaged to design meaningful opportunities for early workforce exposure? What data could be used to measure the quality of early workforce opportunities?





Established in 2001, **The Hunt Institute** honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

Learn more at www.hunt-institute.org.



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The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit education policy and advocacy organization founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate Majority Leader. SCORE advocates for changes that transform education, so Tennessee students develop the knowledge and skills to succeed in school, career, and life.

Every student in Tennessee deserves a high-quality education from kindergarten to career. With this belief in mind, SCORE has four goals for Tennessee focused on preparing students for success:

01. All students receive an excellent Public k-12 education
02. All students earn a credential or Postsecondary degree
03. All students are prepared for a Career that enables economic Independence
04. Across all goals, all students have Equitable opportunities for success

Learn more at www.tnscore.org



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