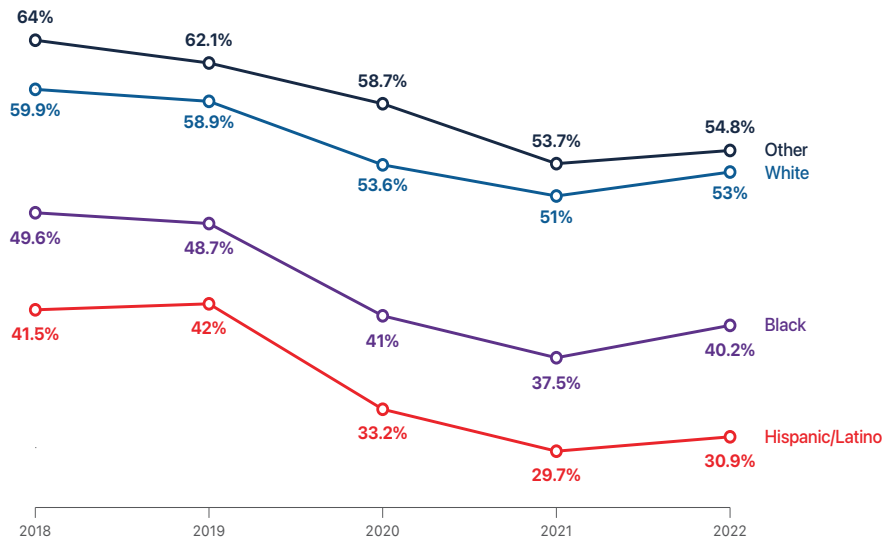


Accelerating Black Male Success

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TENNESSEE'S EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES are expected to grow significantly faster than the national average, and research shows that some type of postsecondary training will be required for the majority of those projected jobs.¹ Yet not all Tennessee students are being set on a path for postsecondary success. Tennessee college-going data reveal that Black males are less likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education compared to their White peers, and just over 40 percent of Black male students are enrolling in postsecondary institutions after high school, compared to 53 percent of their White male peers.

College-going rates for male students by race/ethnicity over time



While the college-going rate for Black and Hispanic males increased during the past year, current rates remain approximately 10 percentage points below their college-going rate in 2018.

Source: THEC (Tennessee Higher Education Commission) College-Going Report, 2023

Moreover, these students are much less likely to persist and finish a postsecondary credential. In Tennessee's community college system, the Black male three-year graduation rate for the 2019 entering cohort is over 15 percentage points lower than White males, resulting in Black male students being the least likely of all student groups to persist and finish a college education. Postsecondary credential holders earn more than those without a credential, meaning this low completion rate for Black students has a significant impact on future earnings and economic success for Black students when they enter the workforce.²

Additionally, the return on investment is not felt equally by Black students in the labor market. Research shows that even when Black males, and students of color in general, do persist and attain a postsecondary degree or credential, they experience a lower return on investment compared to their White peers.³ On average, Tennesseans with a bachelor's degree earn \$1.4 million more than high school graduates over their careers. Black men with same level of education, however, earn just \$548,000 more than Black men without a college degree, meaning we must do more to ensure they receive support to earn degrees with labor market value.⁴ In Tennessee, Black males who complete bachelor's degrees in fields like business and STEM tend to earn more over a lifetime than peers who earn degrees in other fields. Comprehensive support at every level of a student's education is critical to ensuring that students in historically underserved groups earn credentials of value that lead to economic independence.

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR BLACK MALES TO SUCCEED IN THE WORKFORCE

Tennessee's public colleges and universities have a critical role to play in charting a new course for students in historically underserved groups, and Black male students in particular, to achieve economic independence. Institutions must be intentional in engaging directly with every student, leveraging data and technology to support these students to persist in postsecondary education, complete a credential, and obtain a career in a high-wage, high-demand field. This includes helping students identify programs that result in degrees and credentials with workforce value. Once in those programs, supports, such as academic tutoring, mentorship, and career advising, must be in place to ensure students are able to persist, complete, and find success upon entering the workforce. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) see some of the most promising completion rates for Black male students because they actively work to address the specific needs of this population and provide a supportive and nurturing environment.⁵

Black male initiative (BMI) programs are often implemented at colleges and universities to help Black male students successfully persist to graduation, which is an important first step on the way to a promising career.⁶ Increasingly, businesses and community partners are also launching programs to ensure deeper support and better career alignment. The partnership between education, industry, and community partners creates seamless pathways for Black males and students of color to experience a return on investment as they enter the workforce. Several exemplars nationwide can be used as a guide for Tennessee to improve outcomes for Black male students.

- **[One Million Degrees](#)** accelerates community college students' progress on career pathways to economic mobility by implementing a holistic support model for students attending City College campuses in Chicago. Their model includes goal setting on academics and career in addition to academic support, monthly professional development, pairing with an industry mentor to help build social capital, and financial support. Ninety-five percent of students served through the program are students of color.
- **[Chattanooga's New Heights Lineworker Pathway](#)** is a community partnership including multiple business (EPB, Tennessee Valley Authority, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Bulwark FR), philanthropic (Benwood Foundation and Chattanooga 2.0), and academic (Hamilton County Schools and the Southeast Lineman Training Center) partners that connects and supports students to and through a 15-week training program that results in certifications and an electrification lineworker job with an average starting salary of \$89,000. The partnership specifically targets students from underrepresented communities.
- **[The University System of Georgia's \(USG\) African American Male Initiative \(AAMI\)](#)** is a system-wide initiative designed to increase the number of students who complete their postsecondary education from any USG institution. Its mission is to provide an integrated program model of academic, leadership, and life skills that supports any participating student to successfully complete each academic level and graduate, with many completing degrees in high-demand fields, such as business and STEM.
- **[The North Carolina Community College System's Minority Male Success Initiative](#)** was developed to address and increase persistence and completion rates of minority male students by providing integrated and targeted supports and supporting students to progress through programs that lead to valuable credentials.

POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN BLACK MALE STUDENT SUCCESS

Black male success is an economic imperative for Tennessee, and the following policy recommendations are intended to support more students to succeed in postsecondary education and seamlessly transition into high-demand careers.

- 1** Dedicate funding to cohort-based student support initiatives that include career-focused supports such as mentorship, professional skills training, and career advising/coaching. By ensuring that students are selecting and progressing through a program of study with a meaningful career in mind, students may be more motivated to complete a degree or credential in a high-demand field.
- 2** Set a renewed education attainment goal that is aligned to workforce needs with specific attention to increasing attainment for students in historically underserved groups — in this case, Black males. This will ensure we are collectively focused on and accountable for building the diverse workforce our future employers demand.
- 3** Reimagine Tennessee's outcomes-based funding formula to focus on incentivizing colleges and universities to support more students of color to persist in and complete college and to offer high-quality credentials of value. This will help close long-standing equity gaps in completion rates and ensure students receive training and skills that meet employer needs.
- 4** Dedicate funding to support innovative partnerships between employers and education providers, such as apprenticeships, codesigned programs, and work-based learning opportunities, with a focus on supporting more Black males and students of color from education into high-quality careers.

CONCLUSION

Supporting Black males in the transition to college and helping them navigate the pathway to a meaningful career is critical work. To make a significant impact, institutions should scale evidence-based practices — work that will require strategic planning, campus-wide investments, and staffing support to ensure that programs are sustainable over time. Outside of the traditional pathways to postsecondary education, there is an opportunity for employers and community partners to work with K-12 and higher education partners to develop innovative solutions that lead to high-wage careers. SCORE is committed to ensuring all students are prepared for success in college, career, and life, and these widening completion gaps and lagging economic outcomes for Black males are evidence that we must work collectively and urgently to support students in achieving that success.

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