

The State of College Access and Success in Florida

2024



This report was produced by the Florida College Access Network (FCAN) to benchmark the state of college degree attainment and student success. The information contained herein is a reference for policy-making, strategic planning, resource prioritization, and advocacy. Indicators such as Florida's population growth and demographics provide context to K-20 student outcomes and adult degree attainment. Our research revealed several key findings, including:

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

- Florida surpassed New York in 2014 to become the third most populated state in the United States with a current estimated population of just over 22.6 million.
- For the period from July 2020 through July 2023, Florida experienced the 2nd-largest increase in population 1,019,427 (behind only Texas) and the 2nd-fastest population growth rate (4.7% increase behind only Idaho).
- Over the past decade, Florida has grown more racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. as a whole, as measured by the Census Bureau Diversity Index.
- Hispanic or Latino students have, in the past five years, surpassed white, non-Hispanic or Latino students as the single largest demographic within Florida's public schools.

LABOR FORCE AND EARNINGS

- In Florida, average worker annual earnings increase from \$34,769 for those with a high school diploma to \$56,243 for those with a four-year degree.
- The wage premium between an earner with a high school education and one with a bachelor's degree is +61.8% among Florida earners compared to +74.1% nationally.
- In Florida, the unemployment rate among members of the labor force with a bachelor's degree (2.2%) is roughly half that of those with a high school diploma or equivalency (4.3%).

K-12 EDUCATION

- Florida's high school graduation rate improved slightly from 86.1% in the 2017-2018 school year, to 88.0% as of the 2022-23 school year.
- The gap in high school graduation rates between different races persisted in Florida. The gap between Black and white students being the most significant, with an average achievement gap of 7.2% over the past six years.

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

- Florida ranks 45th out of the 50 states and D.C. in SAT combined scores and 39th out of the 50 states and D.C for ACT scores.
- For degree-granting institutions, Florida's nonwhite enrollment rate exceeds that of the nation as a whole.

POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT

- From 2014 through 2022 the four-year graduation rate for the State University System of Florida steadily increased from approximately 53% to approximately 67%.
- From 2014 to 2022 State University System (SUS) four-year graduation rates increased from 53% to 67%.
- An estimated 54.5% of Floridians aged 25-64 have completed a postsecondary degree or high-value credential, slightly more than the national average of 54.3%.
- Inequities in college attainment based on race and ethnicity persist in 48 of 50 states; Florida's discrepancy between the Black and white degree attainment ranks 23rd-largest among the 50 states and Washington, D.C.

COST OF ATTENDANCE AND AFFORDABILITY

- Florida postsecondary in-state tuition and fees for public institutions have remained relatively stable over the past decade. In real terms - adjusting for inflation - tuition and fees at two-year public institutions have decreased nearly 14% and, at 4-year public institutions, by more than 6%.
- Metro areas in Florida have recorded some of the highest inflation rates since the pandemic, with the South Florida and Tampa Bay metropolitan areas leading the nation in inflation - as measured by the Consumer Price Index - in late 2023, largely due to housing costs, causing additional financial strain for Florida college students.

Florida Population and Demographics

In 2014, Florida surpassed New York and became the third most populated state. By 2023, Florida's population reached 22,610,726, increasing by 4.7% since 2020. Peak growth occurred between 2021 and 2022, when Florida was the U.S.'s fastest-growing state, an accolade not claimed by the Sunshine State since 1957. This growth, while expected to gradually wane over the coming decade, is projected to include over 250,000 K-12 school-aged students from 2020-2030. Through 2028, Florida is projected to add an average of 298,191 residents annually, the equivalent of a city just larger than St. Petersburg.

Figure 1: Population Change, 2020-2023

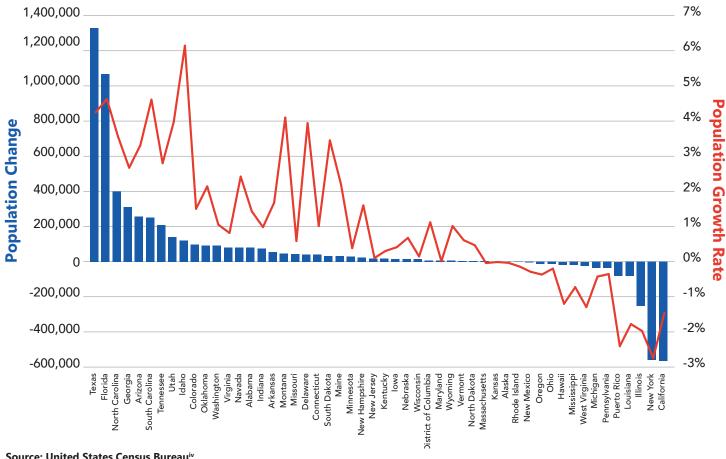
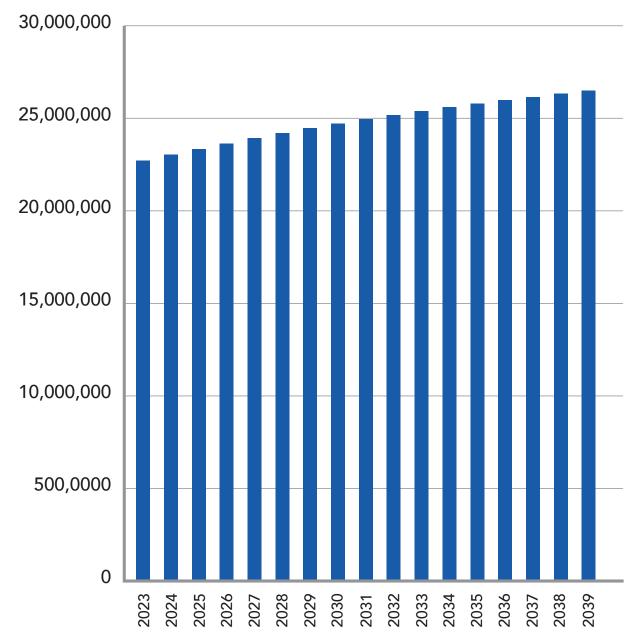


Figure 1 illustrates population growth throughout the U.S. from 2020-2023 in both raw numbers and percentage growth. While Texas added more people (1,268,940) than Florida (1,019,427), Florida's population increase was higher by percentage (4.7% versus 4.3%). Florida's expected population growth is further shown in Figure 2, which highlights state projections through 2039.

Figure 2: Florida Population Projection, 2022-2039



Source: Office of Economic and Demographic Research^v

Between 2010 and 2020, the population of the U.S. and Florida increased and grew more diverse. In 2010, the U.S. had a Diversity Index – a calculation of how likely two people selected at random from a given population will be of two different races – of 54.9% while Florida's index was 59.1%. In the following decennial census, the U.S. had collectively gained six percentage points, and Florida had gained five. The figure below demonstrates how the racial and ethnic composition of Florida changed between 2010 and 2020.

White 51.5% Hispanic or Latino Black or African American Two or More Races 2.4% Asian 0.3% Some Other Race 0.3% 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.1% 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 2010 2020

Figure 3: Florida Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2010 and 2020

Note: Percentages show for Census racial categories reflect non-Hispanic/non-Latino ethnicity. Persons identifying as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.

Source: United States Census Bureau

While Florida's public school enrollment has not grown as fast as the population, it continues to diversify based on race and ethnicity. In the 2018-19 school year, white students made up 37.4% of public school enrollment, with the second largest group, Hispanic students, trailing by 3.5 percentage points. As of the 2022-2023 school year, Hispanic students account for the largest share of public school enrollment at 36.4%.

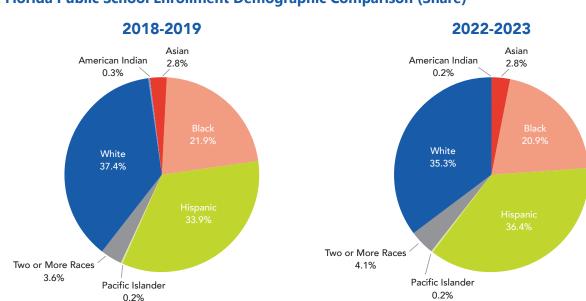


Figure 4: Florida Public School Enrollment Demographic Comparison (Share)

The demographic shifts in public school enrollment reflected a net gain of 23,650 students in the public school system. The net gain was driven by gains in Hispanic or Latino enrollment (+80K) and declines in white (-50K) and Black (-15K) student enrollment. Overall, student enrollment in 2022-2023 returned to pre-pandemic (2019-2020) enrollment.

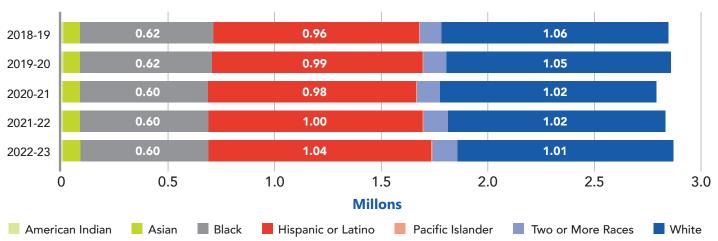
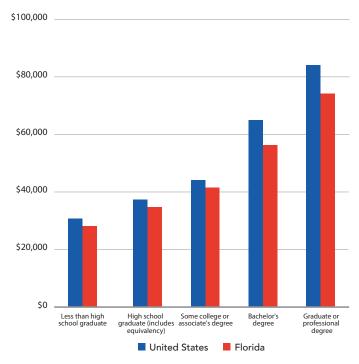


Figure 5: Florida Public School Enrollment Demographic Comparison (Number)

LABOR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

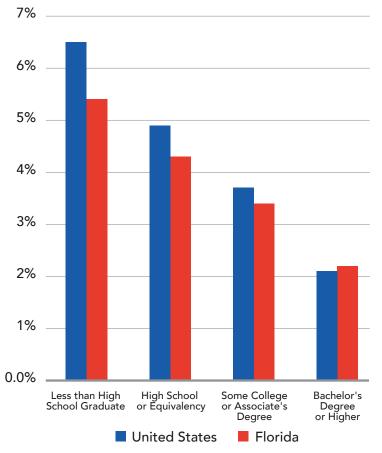
Nationally, an average of approximately 17 million job openings will occur every year through 2029. Job openings occur due to retirements, worker transitions to other jobs, and the creation of new jobs. Due to high turnover in occupations requiring less education, the majority of these national openings will require either no formal education or a high school diploma. However, these positions typically pay less than half the salary or equivalent wage for positions that require at least a fouryear degree. While Florida median earnings trail those of residents nationwide, general trendlines reflecting increased earnings concomitant with increased levels of educational attainment mirror the national experience. The wage premium between an earner with a high school education and one with a bachelor's degree is +74.1% nationally and +61.8% among Florida earners.

Figure 6: Median Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2022 1-Year Estimates, Population Age 25 and Over^{ix}

Figure 7: Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2022 1-Year Estimates, Population Age 25 to 64 Years*

In addition to educational attainment significantly increasing earnings, unemployment is lower for workers with more education.

Both national and Florida unemployment rates are highest for those without a high school diploma, contrasting substantially with those who have attained at least a four-year degree. In Florida, the unemployment rate among members of the labor force with a bachelor's degree (2.2%) is roughly half that of those with a high school diploma or equivalency (4.3%).



K-12 Education

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

In the past five years, the high school graduation rate in Florida improved slightly from 86.1% in the 2017-2018 academic year, most recently registering at 88%. Graduation rates in academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 cannot be directly compared to immediately previous or subsequent years due to pandemic-related suspensions of certain graduation requirements. These requirements – most notably successful completion of the Algebra I end-of-course exam and the 10th-grade English Language Arts assessment – were reinstated in the 2021-2022 academic year.

Despite slight gains overall in high school graduation rates, persistent gaps remain between various demographic groups. On average, male students over the past six academic years exhibited a 5.5% lower graduation rate than female students. In the academic year 2022-2023, the achievement gap in high school graduation rates between Black and white students was 7.8%, with an average gap of 7.2% over the past six academic years. Students who identified as Hispanic or Latino are at or near the total student average overall rate since the 2017-2018 academic year, however over the same period, they graduated at an average 3.6% lower rate than their white contemporaries.^{xi}

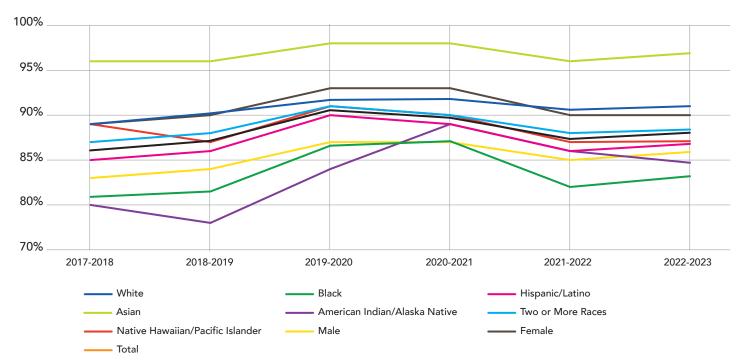


Figure 8: Florida High School Graduation Rate Trends by Demographic

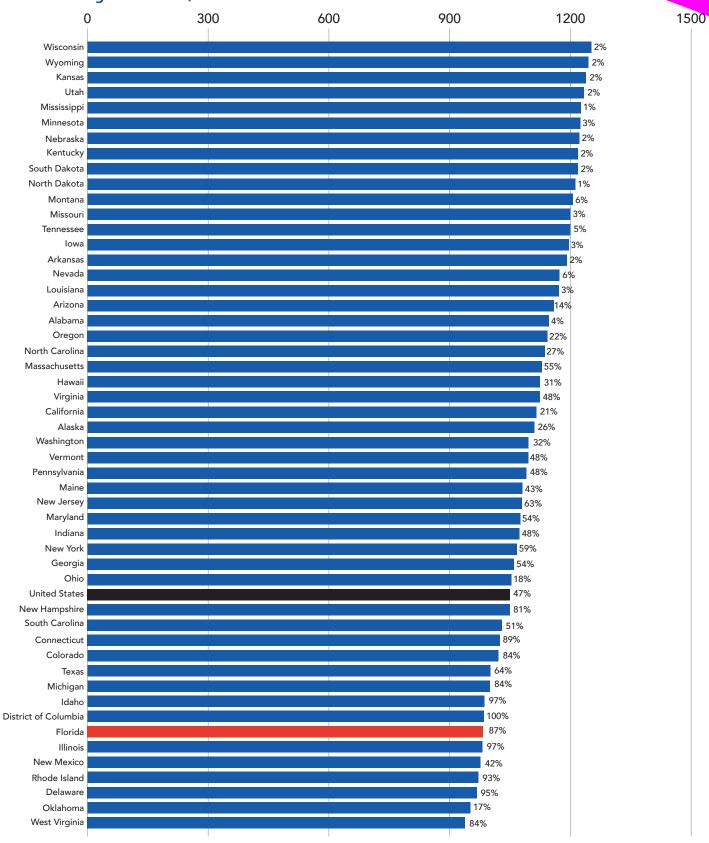
Source: Florida Department of Educationxii



PERFORMANCE ON STANDARDIZED COLLEGE ADMISSIONS EXAMS

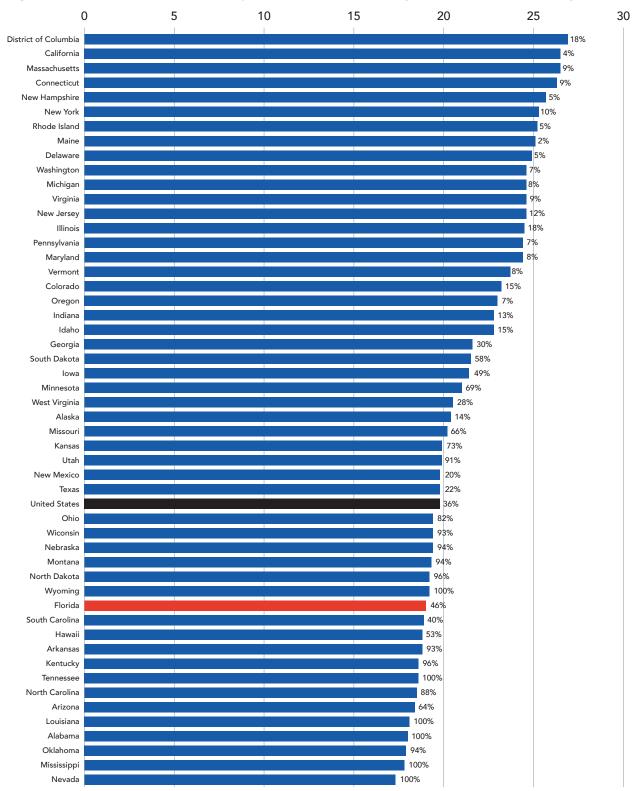
In Florida, most higher education institutions will accept scores from the SAT or ACT college entrance exam. In 2022, approximately 46% of students in Florida took the ACT, and 63% took the SAT. Florida students ranked 39th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia on the ACT in 2022 but were 45th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in SAT combined scores, with an average of 992. The SAT and ACT scores throughout the U.S. can be seen in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9: Mean Combined SAT by State, and Share of High School Seniors Taking Assessment, 2022*iv



Source: National Center for Education Statistics**(Percentages refer to share of seniors who took SAT)

Figure 10: Mean Composite ACT by State, and Share of High School Seniors Taking Assessment, 2022xvi



Source: National Center for Education Statisticsxvii (Percentages refer to share of seniors who took examination)

Postsecondary Enrollment

Full-time enrollment in the state of Florida reached its peak between 2009 and 2012 and has yet to recover from pandemic levels. As of fall 2022, enrollment in the State University System of Florida was at 274,478 students, dropping from 280,355 in 2020.^{xx}

Florida degree-granting institutions enrolled 1,008,186 students in Fall 2020. Of those students, nearly 60% were female. White students were a plurality and not a majority, with just under 40%. The second largest group was Hispanic or Latino students, who made up 29% of college students. Figure 11 further breaks down the ethnic/racial groups by enrollment in higher education in Florida compared with the U.S. as a whole.xi

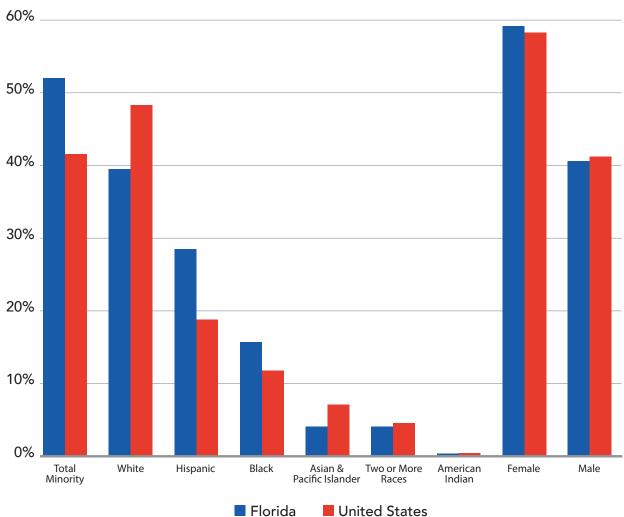


Figure 11: College Enrollment by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, Fall 2020

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023 Almanac

FLORIDA INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Florida higher education institutions are a combination of public four-year institutions, public two-year institutions, private, nonprofit four-year institutions, private, nonprofit two-year institutions, and for-profit four-year and two-year institutions. Nearly 70% of Florida's Fall 2022 college enrollment of roughly 1-million was accounted for by students in public 4-year institutions (Florida College System and State University System institutions), and the addition of enrollment at private four-year institutions yields 87.9% of college enrollment statewide.

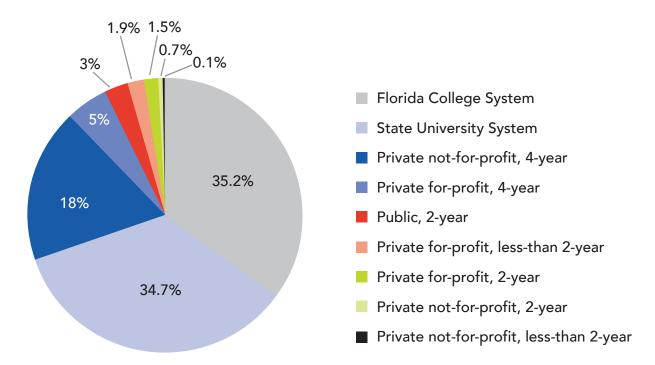


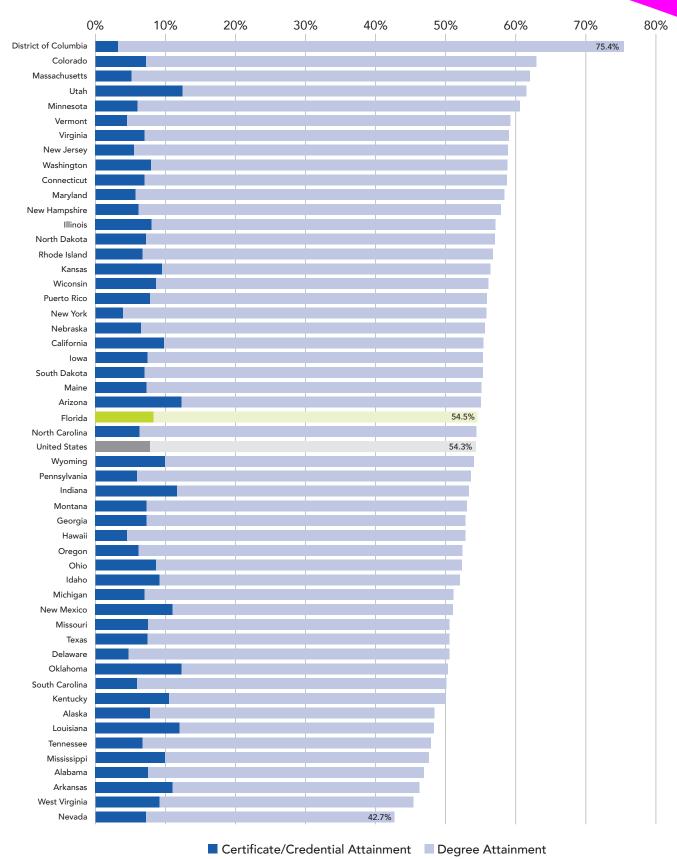
Figure 12: Florida Degree-Granting Institutions by Enrollment

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023 Almanac

Postsecondary Attainment

Approximately 54.3% of Americans aged 25-64 attained some type of postsecondary degree or credential, with a disaggregation of 46.5% degree attainment and 7.8% credential or certification attainment. A slighty larger share – 54.5% – of Florida residents in the same age cohort undertook formal education beyond high school, with 46.2% degreed and 8.3% possessing a credential of certification. Overall postsecondary attainment for the working age population deviates significantly between Nevada, with 42.7%, and the District of Columbia at 75.4%.

Figure 13: Postsecondary Attainment for the Population Age 25-64



Source: The Lumina Foundation, 2024

College graduation rates in Florida and the United States vary by race, ethnicity and gender. For the Florida cohort who enrolled in a 4-year institution (college or university) in Fall 2015, 66.5% received their bachelor's degree within 150% of time, or six years, outpacing the 64.9% graduation rate among national contemporaries. Disaggregated by demographic, Florida graduation rates again exceed national cohorts, with the sole exception that a slightly smaller share of Florida male enrollees graduated on time vis-à-vis male enrollees nationwide. In Florida, 69.5% of white enrollees earned their bachelor's within 6 years, compared to 51.8% of Black enrollees and 59.4% of Hispanic/Latino enrollees.

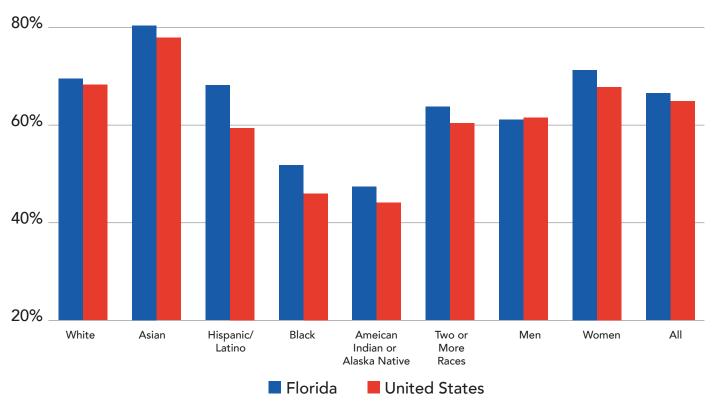
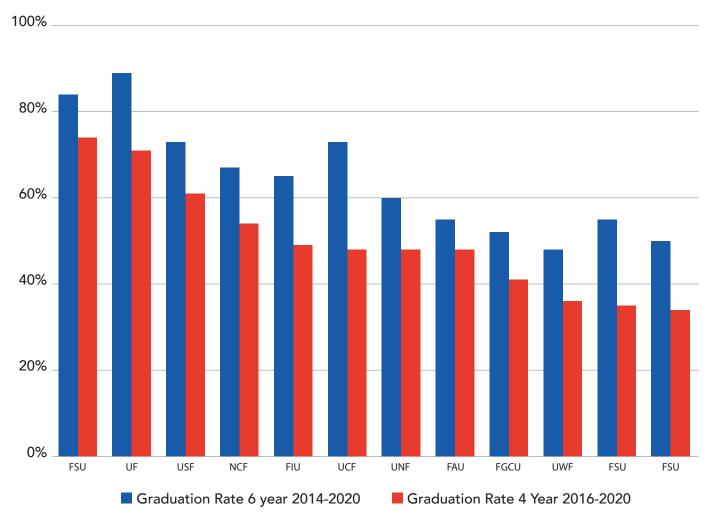


Figure 14: Six-Year Graduation Rates, Four-Year Institutions (Fall 2015 Cohort)

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education*xii

In the past four years, four-year graduation rates among full-time first time in college students attending one of Florida's 12 public universities have increased from 50.6% to 60.3%. Figure 15 shows the most recent four- and six-year graduation rates for each public university and the system as a whole.

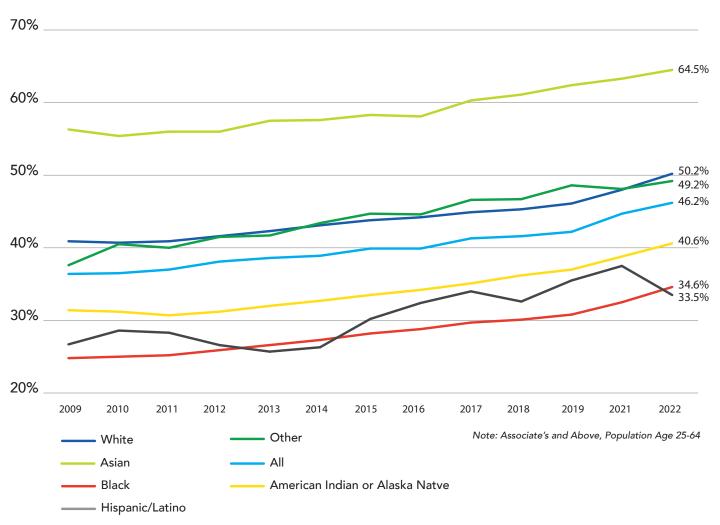
Figure 15: Four- and Six-Year Graduation Rates for State University System Institutions



Source: State University System of Florida 2023 System Accountability PlanSystem Accountability Plan

Inequities based on race and ethnicity exist and persist with regard to higher education attainment. This is true for every state, including Florida. Despite a broad increase in degree attainment since 2009, the current attainment gap in Florida is 15.6% between white and Black students, and 9.6% between white and Hispanic/Latino students. The gap in college degree attainment nationally between white and Black students is 16.0%, and the gap in attainment between white and Hispanic or Latino students is 22.2%.

Figure 16: Florida Degree Attainment Trends

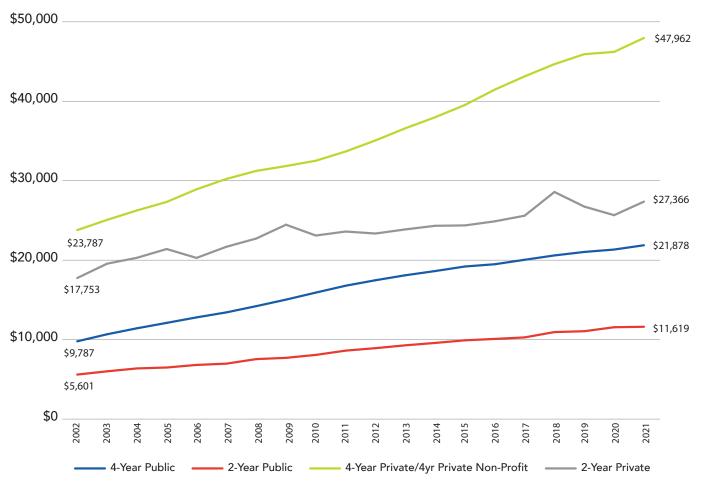


Source: Lumina Foundation

Higher Education Affordability

In nominal terms, tuition and fees for 2- and 4-year institutions across the nation grew significantly in the past twenty years. Since the 2002-2003 academic year, tuition and fees for 2-year public and 4-year (public or private) institutions have more than doubled, with public 4-year tuition and fees growing by 123.5% over that time period. Somewhat more modest growth was exhibited by 2-year private institutions, for which tuition and fees increased by 54.1%. Figure 17 reports national nominal tuition and fee charges by institution type.

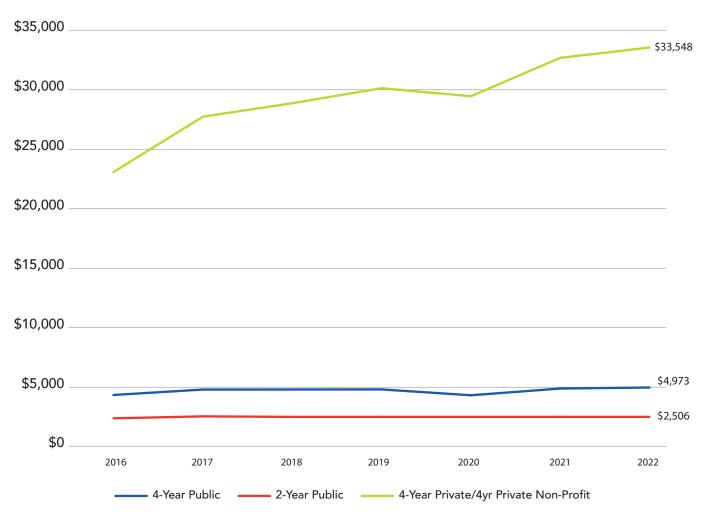
Figure 17: Nominal Tuition and Fees by Institution Type, 2002-2021



Source: National Center for Education Statisticsxxiv

While not directly comparable to the national data presented in Figure 18, Florida-resident tuition and fees over recent years remained relatively stable, owing to the prescription of tuition rates and allowable fees in state statute. For private, non-profit 4-year institutions not subject to state statute, however, nominal tuition and fees – while lower than similar institutions nationwide – saw tuition and fees increase significantly greater (41.6%) than the national cohort (15.7%). Figure 18 shows the average tuition and fees assessed to students in Florida public (in-state rate only) and private (all residency statuses) for the years 2016 through 2022.

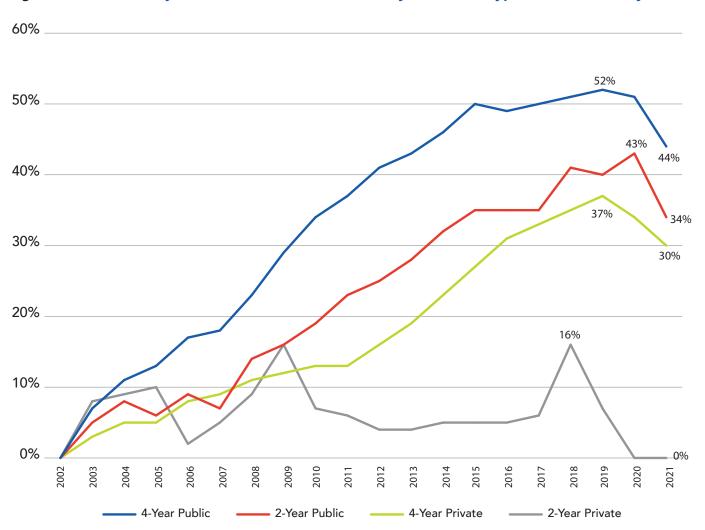
Figure 18: Florida nominal tuition and fees by institution type, 2016-2022



Source: Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017 through 2023 Almanacsxxv

In real terms, adjusting for inflation, national college tuition and fees for 4-year (public and private) and 2-year public institutions experienced rapid growth in the 2010s, generally peaking at the end of the decade. As shown in Figure 19, reaL tuition and fee growth relative to the academic year beginning in 2002 peaked in 2018 for private 2-year institutions (16%), in 2019 for 4-year institutions (52% public, 37% private) and 2020 for 2-year public institutions (43%). In the post-pandemic inflationary period, real tuition and fees decreased across all institution types, with 4-year public tuition and fees falling to 44% more than the 2002 value.

Figure 19: Inflation-Adjusted Tuition and Fees Growth, by Institution Type (2002 reference year)



Source: National Center for Education Statisticsxxvi

In real terms, adjusting for inflation, college tuition and fees for Florida public institutions have declined recently. Relative to the academic year beginning in 2016, real tuition and fees paid at the in-state rate fell by 6.16% for 4-year institutions and by 13.79% at 2-year institutions. In the same time period, tuition and fees at Florida's 4-year private non-profit institutions have increased 19.18%.

30% 25% 20% 19.18% 15% 10% 5% 0% -5% -6.16% -10% -13.79% -15% 2016 2017 2018 2021 2022 2019 2020 4-Year Public - 2-Year Public 4-Year Private/4yr Private Non-Profit

Figure 20: Inflation-Adjusted Florida Tuition and Fees Growth, by Institution Type (2016 reference year)

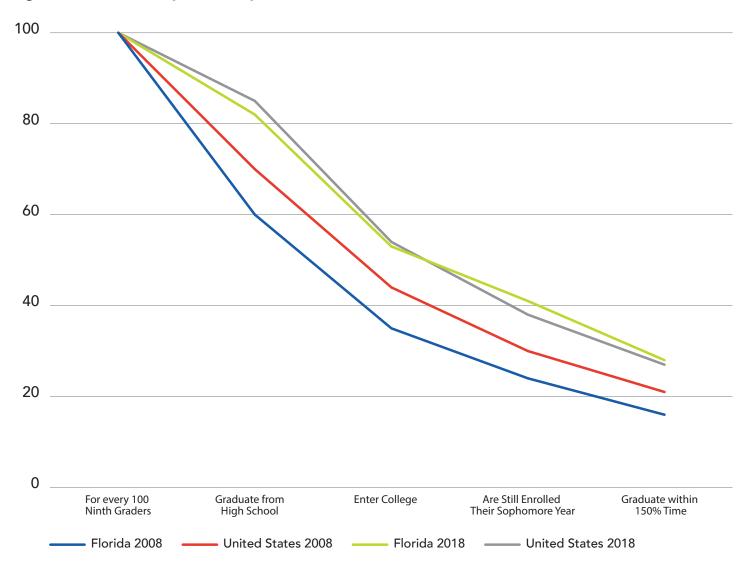
Sources: Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017 through 2023 Almanacs; Bureau of Labor Statistics" superscript*xxvii

In addition to the cost of tuition, students in the state of Florida face some of the highest cost of living increases in the country. Metro areas in Florida experienced double-digit rates of inflation in the immediate post-pandemic period, and while the cost of household items and inflation generally stabilized for much of the U.S. and was recorded at three percent in June 2023, it remained more than twice that in much of metro Florida, with the cost of groceries alone increasing by four percent between May 2022 and May 2023. More recently, South Florida metropolitan inflation was the highest in the U.S. at 7.4% as of October 2023; Tampa Bay tied for the nation's highest metropolitan inflation rate as of November 2023 at 5.2%. XXVIII

College Access and Success Pipeline

Figure 21 compares the education pipeline from ninth grade through college (whether 2-year or 4-year program) completion between Florida and the national average. From 2008 to 2018, Florida dramatically improved its performance, closing the gap between the Sunshine State and the U.S. and – in some categories – surpassing the national average.

Figure 21: Education Pipeline Comparison



Source: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems*xix

Notably, while Florida high school graduation rates and college entrances lag the national average, Florida college students exhibit higher persistence rates – as measured by sophomore year enrollment – as well as graduation rates within 150% of program time (i.e. completing a 2-year program in four years and a 4-year program in six years), revealing a sign of the efficiency of Florida's higher education system and indicating that access (student success in high school and enrollment in college following high school) is key to increasing attainment.

Methodology and Limitations

The goal of this report is to benchmark the state of college degree attainment and student success. The following limitations should be kept in mind while interpreting the data presented in this report.

OLD DATA: Within each area of performance reported in this study, the most current data was sought after. Educational research depends on the release of institutional data from states and education systems. For many reasons, this data tends to lag behind at least a year and sometimes longer, which is a limitation when attempting to understand what is happening in the most present contexts of education.

DIFFERENT "DENOMINATORS": Denominators are used when calculating rates such as high school and postsecondary graduation. Not all rates are calculated the same, meaning different groups or cohorts of students can be used to do so. These calculations are not perfect and many times leave out entire groups of students, making generalizations about broad populations a challenge. It is acknowledged that there are ongoing debates and controversies among education researchers and other about the best way to accurately capture performance of students. As better data is made more available and consensuses is reached, FCAN's data collection will reflect those changes.

MOST DATA IS DESCRIPTIVE: The data that is used in this report is mostly descriptive, meaning

they describe very basic features (i.e. student/institutional characteristics, performance). Descriptive data is useful for benchmarking, the observation of patterns, and understanding performance gaps, but readers should caution themselves about drawing conclusions about root causes about student, institutional or system behaviors. Further analysis is needed to make judgments about the phenomenon observed by descriptive data.

education data is difficult to report locally. Without micro-data, one can only hypothesize the impact broader measures of higher education access and success has on local communities.

BROAD, NOT COMPREHENSIVE SCAN OF DATA:

This report was limited in the amount of time and resources available to scan all of the possible sources of data that exists in databases, reports, websites, etc. It is acknowledged that it is possible that sources of data were not considered as a part of this report. Investigation of the available data is ongoing and as better data becomes accessible and attainable it will be considered by the FCAN research team to inform its efforts catalyzing a statewide network. Among some of the indicators of higher education access and success that are not a part of this report but future efforts will include measures of quality, learning, rigor, affordability, credentials and career preparation.

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^{iv}2022 National and State Population Estimates Press Kit (2022). Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2022/2022-national-state-population-estimates.

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*Florida Department of Education, Florida's High School Cohort 2022-23 Graduation Rate (2024). Retrieved from https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7584/urlt/Grad-Rates2223.pdf.

xii ibid

in September Florida's public university system approved the Classic Learning Test in addition to the ACT and SAT

xiv ibid Percentage label refers to share of graduating class who took the test

**National Center for Education Statistics, SAT mean scores of high school seniors, standard deviations, and percentage of the graduating class taking the SAT, by state: Selected years, 2017 through 2022. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_226.40.asp?current=yes.

xviPercentage label refers to share of graduating class who took the test

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xxivNational Center for Education Statistics, Average undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: Selected academic years, 1963-64 through 2021-22. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_330.10. asp?current=yes.

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About Florida College Access Network

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and a rewarding career. We envision a Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility for all.

FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies, and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida. For more information, visit www.floridacollegeaccess.org.

FCAN is a statewide independent organization hosted by the University of South Florida (USF). The statements and positions presented are those of FCAN and are not made on behalf of the USF Board of Trustees or intended in any way to be representative of USF.

Online version of this report includes hyperlinked resources.









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