



The State of Higher Education for Black Californians



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our appreciation goes to African American Male Education Network & Development (A²MEND) for their generous support as a commissioning partner of our efforts to examine systemic barriers to college access and success for Black students and to recommend reforms that promote equity in California higher education. We also thank the many funders who make our work possible. Their steadfast commitment to expanding educational opportunities and fostering an equitable future for all students serves as an inspiring model of leadership and advocacy in higher education.

David Drummer, M.S., was the principal author, and Alexis Takagi, Ed.D., co-authored this report. Robby Born, Sukai Kato-Hopkins, Yehuda Potash, Gabby Meyers, Sergio Maciel, Ethan Kozlowski, and Markeshia Henry provided research assistance. We are grateful to Dr. Edward C. Bush and Marisol Cuellar Mejia for reviewing this report and offering thoughtful feedback on its methodology.



FOREWORD

The state of higher education for Black Californians reflects a truth we cannot ignore: Racial equity is not optional and is essential to the future of this state. When Black students are supported, when their success is prioritized, California becomes stronger, more innovative, and more economically secure. This is not theory. It's fact.

We are living through a time when equity efforts are being challenged across the country. Programs created to expand opportunity are being questioned or dismantled. The message is

clear: Step back, scale down, soften the work. But we cannot, and we will not. Not when the cost of retreat is paid by Black students who have already navigated generations of barriers they did not build.

The data in this report makes something else equally clear: Black students have always had the talent, the will, and the ability to succeed. The question is whether our institutions will support them with the structures, resources, and commitment they deserve. This means transfer pathways that actually work. Support systems that see the whole student. Faculty and leadership that reflect the communities they serve. Policies designed with equity at the center, not as an afterthought.

Economic justice must be part of this conversation. If a college degree does not lead to real opportunity, mobility, and the ability to sustain a family and build wealth, then we have not fulfilled our obligation. Education is more than access. It is a pathway to economic freedom, and for too many Black students, that pathway remains uneven. The consequences ripple far beyond individuals. They shape communities, families, and the economic trajectory of our entire state.

Yet, even in a challenging landscape, I remain encouraged. I have seen institutions transform when leaders decide that equity is non-negotiable. I have seen what happens when people move past rhetoric and into real accountability. Progress is possible, but it requires clarity, courage, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

My hope is that this report reminds us what is at stake. It calls us to action. And it keeps us focused on the work ahead. The future of higher education in California will be defined by whether we choose equity in both word and practice. Our students deserve nothing less. Our state requires nothing less.

Edward C. Bush, Ph.D.
Chair, Campaign for College Opportunity Board of Directors
President, Cosumnes River College



INTRODUCTION

California stands at a pivotal moment in its commitment to educational equity. Nationwide, young people are increasingly questioning the value of higher education.¹ Rising college costs continue to create financial strain for Black students who already disproportionately face economic hardship,² while federal policies threaten to undermine what progress has been made by banning [race-conscious](#)³ practices. Taken together, these challenges create a heightened urgency for state and higher education system leaders to advance intentional, student-centered solutions. This report illuminates persistent inequities in K-12 preparation, college access and enrollment, transfer outcomes, and degree completion across sectors, emphasizing the connection between educational opportunity and economic mobility.

The data presented in this report signals a clear call to action: While progress has been made in expanding access and increasing completion rates, disparate outcomes remain, and Black students are too often unable to realize the full promise and value of higher education. Closing equity gaps will require sustained, coordinated efforts that center the experiences of Black students and prioritize the dismantling of structural barriers. Through uplifting the voices and lived experiences of Black students, we aim to inform policymakers, system leaders, and practitioners who are working to build a more just higher education system. Ensuring Black Californians are supported to access and complete higher education is crucial to closing persistent equity gaps, creating pathways to economic mobility for a historically disenfranchised population, and building a more inclusive and prosperous California for all.



The Good News:

- **82% of Black public high school seniors graduated in 2025, with 45% having met their A-G requirements. Both percentages are all-time highs.**
- **31% of working-age Black Californians have a bachelor's degree — a five-percentage point increase since 2018.**

- Over 99% of Black community college students enrolled directly into transfer-level English and math courses, compared to just 15% and 12% in 2015, respectively.
- Simultaneously, completion rates for Black students in these courses have climbed by 20 percentage points for English and 35 percentage points in math since fall 2016.
- 24% of Black California State University (CSU) freshmen from the 2021 cohort graduated within four years, up 50% from six years prior.
- Wages for Black graduates of both the University of California (UC) and CSU systems exceed the state's median yearly earnings within five years of graduation.
- Public four-year graduates from universities with greater shares of Black students recoup their educational costs about a year after graduating- equivalent to the rate of universities with lower rates of Black enrollment.



The Bad News:

- Black students remain highly overrepresented at independent, for-profit colleges, which often have higher costs and lower completion rates than public and non-profit institutions.
- 43% of Black transfer students to a four-year university enrolled at a for-profit university, more than double the rate of any other racial/ethnic group.
- Despite modest increases in recent years, less than one in seven Black community college students earn a degree or approved certificate within six years, well below the rate of one in four for white students.
- Only 40% of Black community college graduates earn an associate degree for transfer (below the statewide rate of 47%), limiting their ability to transfer to four-year institutions.
- Six-year graduation rates for Black CSU freshmen have decreased slightly since 2015, and the gaps in graduation rates between Black and white students after both four and six years have slightly widened.
- No higher education system has a gap in its graduation rates between Black and white students of less than 10 percentage points.
- Graduates from two-year institutions with the highest share of Black students take over three times as long to earn a positive return on their investment than institutions with the lowest shares.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the Campaign for College Opportunity proposes the following recommendations for California's policymakers, advocates, and educational leaders.



State Recommendations

- Implement strategic outreach and resources to increase completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and California Dream Act Application (CADAA) among Black students, ensuring equitable access to higher education and raising completion rates above the current 60% statewide average.
- Establish statewide equity benchmarks by directing the newly established California Education Interagency Council to set specific, measurable TK-16 goals for Black students, including achieving a 90% high school graduation rate, increasing the percentage who meet A-G requirements, and improving college readiness metrics to guide curriculum alignment and intersegmental support.
- Increase transfer and postsecondary attainment by requiring the California Community Colleges (CCC), CSU, and UC systems, in partnership with the state's Education Interagency Council, to set annual and long-term goals to monitor progress and improve transfer rates for Black students from community colleges to four-year institutions.

- Expand access to the A-G, 15-course sequence for all California high school students by increasing college preparatory course availability and hiring more credentialed teachers to provide more opportunities for students to complete the curriculum required for admission to UC and CSU institutions.
- Ensure California community colleges are maximizing placement of Black students on the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) pathway to improve overall transfer and completion rates, close racial and ethnic gaps for Black students, and support students in earning degrees and enrolling at CSU and UC campuses.
- Increase awareness of and student participation in Historically Black College and University (HBCU) transfer opportunities, including the California Community Colleges to HBCU Transfer Guarantee Program and the Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant Program, to increase the number of Black Californians who access streamlined transfer pathways and attain an educational degree, including an ADT.



Community College and University Recommendations

- College presidents, campus leaders, and governing bodies of California’s public colleges and universities must recommit to efforts to identify, hire, retain, and promote Black faculty members.
- Embed statewide goals for Black student attainment, equity, and workforce preparation across California’s public higher education systems (CCC, CSU, UC), while regularly monitoring progress and ensuring alignment across segments to promote coordinated, equitable outcomes for Black students.
- Strengthen equitable placement and completion reforms at California community colleges by supporting all students, particularly Black and other minoritized students, to enroll in and complete transfer-level English and math within one year, and by systematically analyzing disaggregated data to identify and address equity gaps.



High School Recommendations

- Invest in early outreach programs to encourage Black students to enroll in rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement (AP), honors, and dual enrollment classes, by providing academic advising, preparatory workshops, and mentorship opportunities to build skills and college readiness.

- Boost A-G completion rates for Black students by expanding access to college-preparatory courses, increasing the availability of A-G classes, and providing academic support and counseling while monitoring disaggregated data on course completion, graduation, and college enrollment to identify and address gaps.
- Facilitate partnerships between high schools and local colleges to expand dual enrollment opportunities aligned to ADT pathways and Cal-GETC common lower division General Education course requirements and summer bridge programs, giving Black students early exposure to college-level coursework, campus life, and resources to support their academic readiness and success.
- Strengthen family engagement initiatives that educate parents and guardians about navigating higher education pathways and financial aid options, including information exposing students and families to career pathways, such as bringing resources directly to students through on-campus FAFSA and CADAA workshops and informational sessions. The goal of strengthening these family engagement opportunities should be to reframe the predominant college-going narrative from the “costs” of going to college, to the “value” of going to college, with a concerted focus on showing how a college degree can lead to economic mobility and justice.



Federal Recommendations

- Enforce and strengthen the Gainful Employment Rule, established by the U.S. Department of Education in 2023, by continuing to restrict federal grants and loans to for-profit colleges and universities whose programs leave students with unaffordable debt and inadequate earnings outcomes.
- Expand the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard to include equity-centered reporting on institutional effectiveness in serving Black students and other minoritized populations, including disaggregated data on transfer completion rates, return on investment by race/ethnicity, and transparent reporting on campus student support programs. Reporting should incorporate both quantitative outcomes and qualitative student testimonies to assess effectiveness and elevate best practices that advance equitable access, persistence, and completion.
- Increase the annual maximum Federal Pell Grant to fully cover the cost of attendance for students at public colleges and universities.



Note on the COVID-19 pandemic:

The pandemic created lingering impacts on education, such as disruptions to student engagement and overall academic progress.⁴ Graduation rates, transfer rates, and other student outcomes declined during the pandemic, followed by their gradual recovery in subsequent years. This pattern was observed across all student groups, including Black students. As such, in some cases, upticks in recent years are more reflective of a regression to the pre-pandemic status quo than they are of a marked shift. Differences in outcomes for Black students from this general trend, when they occurred, are noted and analyzed throughout the report.



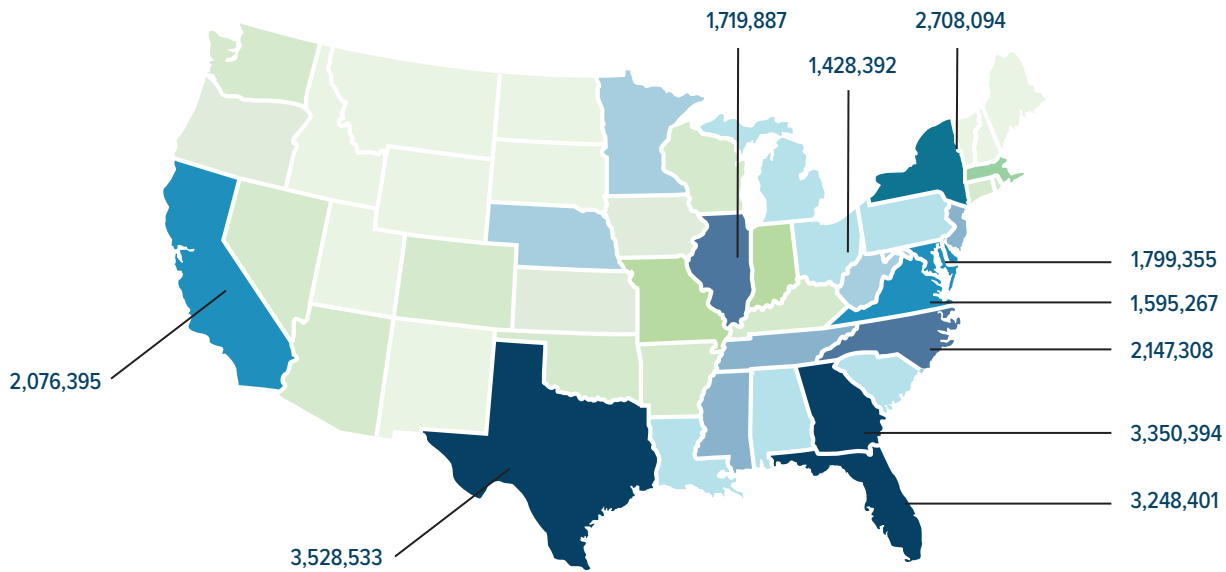


CALIFORNIA'S BLACK POPULATION

California is home to the sixth-largest Black population in the United States, with over two million Black people calling the state home, accounting for over five percent of the U.S. Black population. California's Black population has shrunk by roughly 100,000 residents since 2019, in line with [overall population trends](#)⁵ during the pandemic years. But more recent data⁶ indicates this trend may already be reversing, and projections anticipate⁷ that California's Black population will remain stable through 2070.

California is home to the sixth-largest Black population in the United States.

Figure 1. Black Population by State, 2023.



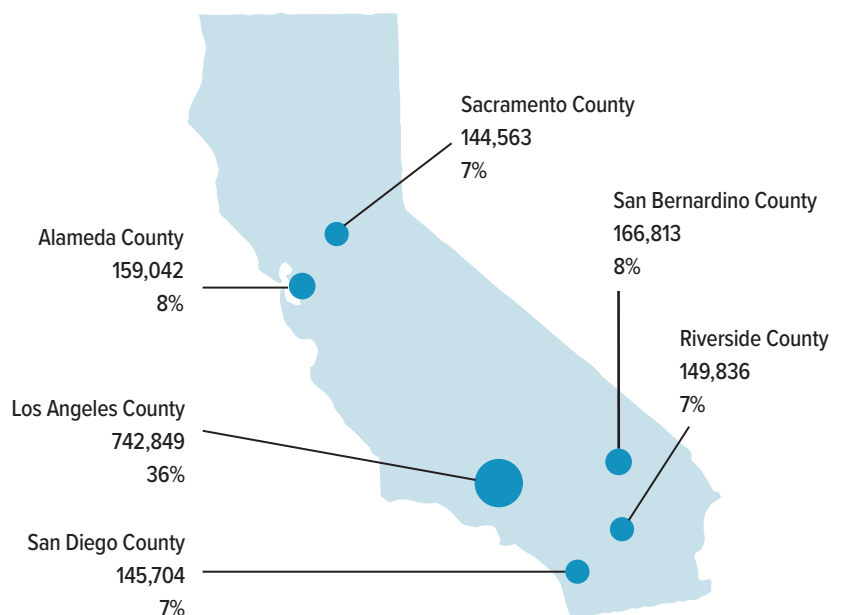
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2025), *American Community Survey 2019-2023 Five-Year Estimates*, Table DP05 Demographic and Housing Estimates. Available from: data.census.gov

California's Black residents remain highly concentrated in Los Angeles County, which is home to more than one in three Black Californians. Another 37% live in just five other counties, all within the state's five largest urban areas.

Over two-thirds of California's Black population live in one of six counties.

Figure 2. California's Black Population by County, 2023.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2025), *American Community Survey 2019-2023 Five-Year Estimates*, Table DP05 Demographic and Housing Estimates. Available from: data.census.gov

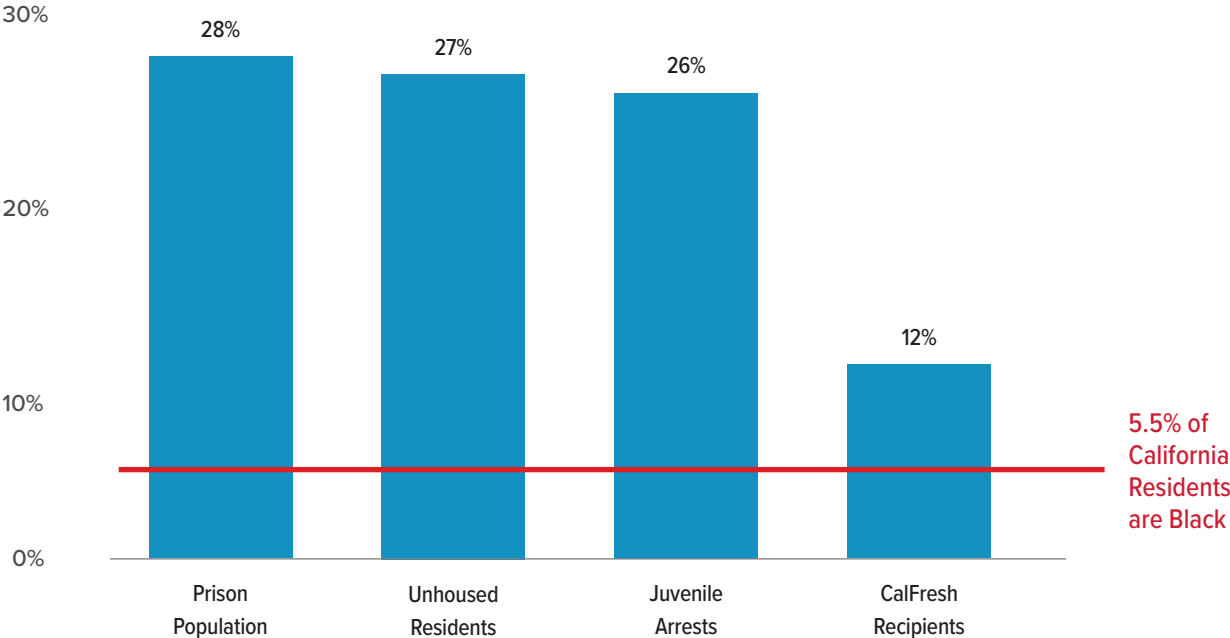


Food and Housing Insecurity

In 2024, Black Californians made up 12% of recipients of CalFresh food assistance.⁸ That rate was roughly double that of their share of the overall state population. As part of the national emergency expansion of SNAP benefits in response to the pandemic, college students were granted expanded eligibility from 2021-2023. During the last year of [expanded eligibility](#),⁹ over 100,000 Black California community college students and nearly 15,000 Black UC students received CalFresh benefits.¹⁰ Those totals indicate that 30% of all Black CCC students and over one-third of Black UC undergraduates were CalFresh recipients, by far the highest rate for any race/ethnicity in the CCC and the second-highest in the UC system (slightly behind the rate for Latinx students). Those rates likely undersell the degree to which Black students continue to struggle with food insecurity, as [research has shown](#)¹¹ that only about 25% of those eligible participate in the program.

Black Californians are overrepresented in California's prisons and among its unhoused residents, juvenile arrestees, and CalFresh recipients.

Figure 3. Black Share of California Food Insecurity and Criminal Justice Indicators.



Data Source: PPIC: "California's Prison Population," (2024); kidsdata.org, Juvenile Felony Arrests by Race Ethnicity table, (2023); California Budget and Policy Center, "Who is Experiencing Homelessness in California?" (2023); California Department of Social Services, CalFresh Participants by Race/Ethnicity CF358F.



Despite accounting for just 5.5% of California’s population, Black residents comprise over a [quarter](#)¹² (27%) of California’s unhoused population and over [one-third](#)¹³ (34%) of LA County’s unhoused residents. Black Californians are extremely overrepresented in the prison system as well, making up 28% of the [prison population](#)¹⁴ and 26% of the [juvenile system](#).¹⁵ Disparities in the labor market further compound these challenges. In the second quarter of 2025, [the unemployment rate for Black Californians](#)¹⁶ was 7.7%, compared with 5.3% statewide and 6.2% nationally.

Black Children in California

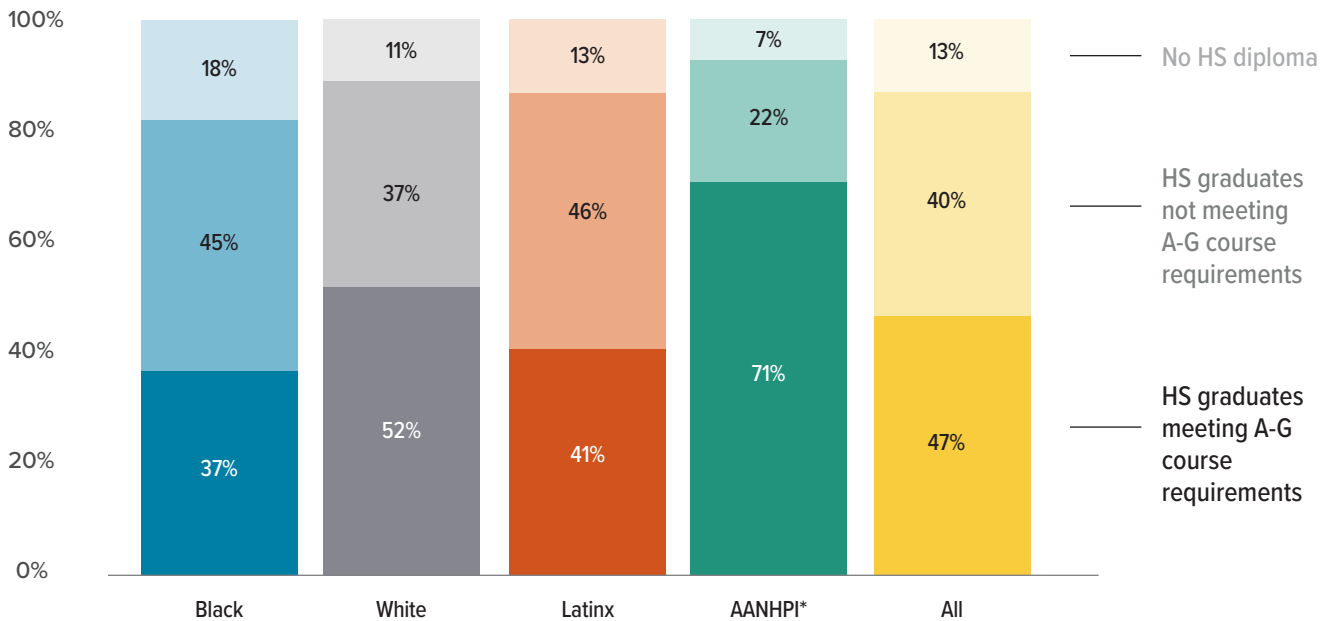
Racial inequalities start early.¹⁷ While California’s infant mortality rates (IMR) are among the [lowest in the nation](#)¹⁸ (although still higher than most OECD countries¹⁹), those rates vary significantly by race/ethnicity. In 2022, Black infants in California had an IMR of 8.9 per 1,000 births, more than twice the state average of 4.1²⁰ and notably higher than that of white and Asian infants (approximately three) and Latinx infants (4.1). For every 1,000 Black babies born in California from 2021-2023, 8.3 died within a year.²¹ This is down slightly from 8.8 as highlighted in our 2021 report, but more than double the state average of 4.1.

In TK-12 schools, Black students are more likely to face disciplinary action than their white peers. In California in 2024-25, Black students were suspended at more than triple the rate of white students (eight percent to 2.5%)²² with the rates of suspensions categorized as “Misconduct, No Injury” serving as the [largest differentiator](#)²³ between the groups. The declines in the Black student suspension rate of the 2010s have stagnated in recent years, and expulsion rates for Black students are four times those of white students. These early inequities compound over time, contributing to disparate educational outcomes for Black students.²⁴ Furthermore, economic insecurity disproportionately affects Black children and plays a role in limiting their educational opportunities. As of early 2023, 14%²⁵ of Black children in California lived in poverty, below the 2019 rate of 18%.²⁶ However, more [recent research](#)²⁷ indicates that these reductions have already evaporated and will backslide to 2019 rates as the pandemic-era expansion of the federal Child Tax Credit (CTC) expires. That expansion immediately [cut national poverty rates](#)²⁸ by more than half, reaching a record low of five percent. Ongoing economic disparities impact Black children’s immediate well-being and limit the resources available to guide them through their educational journeys.

High School Completion

82% of Black students graduate high school, but less than half do so while meeting eligibility requirements for enrollment to the UC/CSU.

Figure 4. Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Outcomes, 2024-25.



*Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander
 Source: California Department of Education (2025). DataQuest- Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate. Retrieved from: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

After several years of stagnation, four-year graduation rates for Black students at California public high schools rose to 82% for the graduating class of 2025. This rate, however, remains well below the statewide²⁹ of Black graduates and 37% of the entire Black cohort supported in meeting all eligibility requirements—up from 41% of Black graduates and 31% of the cohort in 2020. However, that increase mirrored that of the overall population, leaving equity gaps between Black and white students untouched, and A-G completion rates for Black students remain lower than for all groups other than American Indian/ Alaska Native students. Even with small improvements in recent years, **fewer than half of Black high school graduates are eligible for admission to a UC or CSU campus**, leaving over 11,000 students in 2025 alone who had to look elsewhere to continue their educational journey.

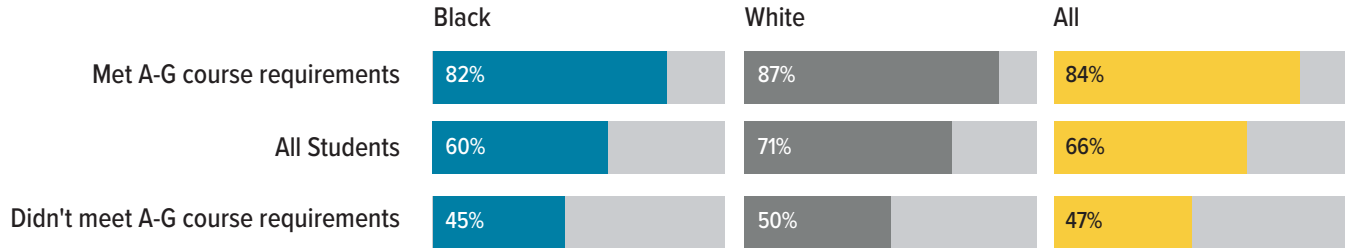
California’s high schools must ensure that Black students have equitable access to courses that satisfy the A-G requirements. However, availability of coursework continues to be a major issue: Nearly 10% of schools do not offer the full slate of A-G approved courses.³⁰ Even where courses are available, Black students are supported to pass A-G courses at disproportionately below-average rates, indicating insufficient levels of available support. We must continue to support A-G courses as the default high school curriculum required for graduation to guarantee that all students are free to pursue higher education, regardless of their race/ethnicity, zip code, legal status, or income.

College Attendance Within 12 Months of High School Completion

The importance of A-G completion rates is further underscored by the discrepancy in college enrollment rates. Students who meet the A-G requirements are far more likely to enroll in college, including community college, within 12 months of graduation. In the 2022-23 academic year, 60% of Black high school students enrolled in college within a year of graduation. When broken down by A-G completion, we see that 82% of Black students who met the A-G requirements enrolled within a year, compared to just 45% of Black students who did not — a pattern consistent across all racial/ethnic groups that has widened in scope in recent years. Notably, the gap is halved when comparing A-G completers to all graduates, further indicating that improving A-G rates serves not just to streamline the path to earning a college degree but also as a means for advancing equitable outcomes.

College enrollment rates are largely determined by A-G completion status.

Figure 5. Enrollment in College within 12 Months of Graduation, 2022-23.



Source: California Department of Education (2025). DataQuest -- College-Going Rate for High School Students. Retrieved from: <https://cdq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>




COLLEGE ACCESS

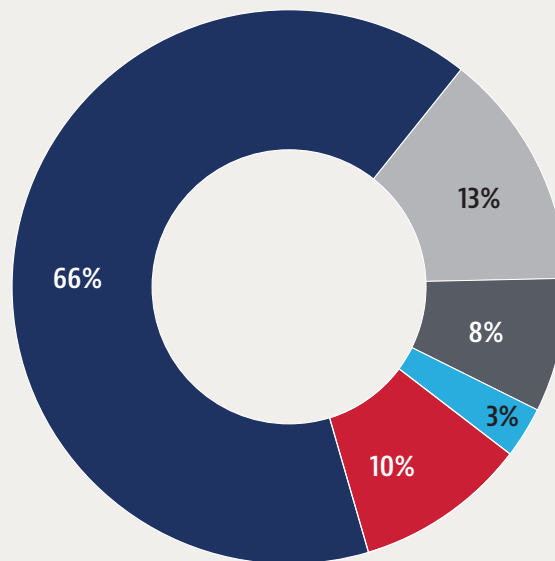
Where are Black undergraduates enrolled?
Over three quarters (79%) of California's 193,973 Black undergraduates are enrolled in a public college or university.

Figure 6. Share of California Black Undergraduate Enrollment by Sector.


Community Colleges
Two out of three

Black undergraduates enrolled in a California Community College.

-  California Community College
-  California State University
-  University of California
-  Independent, Nonprofit
-  Independent, For Profit



For-Profit
13%

of Black undergraduates enrolled in an independent, for-profit school, compared to 6% of all students.



Four-Year Institutions

Among undergraduates enrolled in four-year institutions, 42% of Black students attend public universities, compared to 67% of all students.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). 2023-24, 12-Month Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity.



“Earning a degree will mean breaking a generational barrier for my family. While I am proud to wear the title of first-generation student now, I will be even prouder knowing that my children will not have to carry that label.”

Dzidzo Lassey
Student
Santa Clara University

The vast majority, 79%, of Black college-going undergraduates attend a public college or university, with California community college students alone accounting for two of every three Black undergraduates across the state. The share of Black students enrolled at a UC or CSU campus remains largely unchanged since 2019, despite improvements in A-G completion, while the share enrolled in independent, nonprofit institutions ticked up two percentage points.

The distressing trend of the previous decade toward an increased share of for-profit enrollment — documented when we last [examined the data](#) — appears to have stalled and even begun to reverse itself, with 13% of Black students enrolled in a for-profit colleges and universities compared to 18% in 2018-19. Even so, **Black undergraduates attend for-profit colleges and universities at a rate more than twice the state average.** Largely due to this discrepancy, just 42% of Black students attending a four-year institution are enrolled at a public university, a whopping 25 percentage points less than the statewide average of 67%.



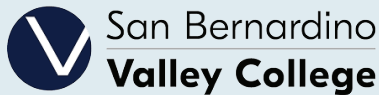
SB 1348: Postsecondary Education: Designation of California Black-Serving Institutions (BSI)

Effective 2025, SB 1348,³¹ authored by California Sen. Steven Bradford, was established to recognize and support California colleges and universities that excel in advancing the academic success of Black students. Institutions must apply for the designation and be approved by a two-thirds vote of an eight-member governing board representing state leadership, public higher education systems, independent colleges, and the California Legislative Black Caucus. To qualify, colleges must enroll at least 10%, or 1,500, Black students, submit an application by the deadline, and post the application on the institution's website. Community colleges must report degree, certificate, completion, and transfer data, while four-year institutions must report graduation, retention, yield, and completion rate data. Initial applications must include a written certification from the institution's leadership that affirms commitment to Black student success in alignment with five-year academic and equity goals, a strategic plan with outreach and support services, and three years of student outcome data.

The BSI designation recognizes institutions of higher education that excel in educating and serving Black students, who are historically underrepresented on college campuses. By setting forth criteria rooted in **representation and support**, this designation encourages colleges and universities to move beyond enrollment numbers and cultivate learning environments where Black students can thrive.

31 institutions were included in the inaugural BSI cohort including two UC campuses, three CSU campuses, 25 California community college campuses, and one independent, nonprofit institution.³²

Institutional Frameworks for Implementing the Black-Serving Institution (BSI) Designation



Goal: Increase first-year retention rates of Black students by 4% annually over five years.

Goal: Increase first-year retention rates to 90% for Black male students and 94% for Black female students over five years.

Goal: Increase first-year retention rates for Black students to at least 95%.

Strategies

- Expand academic advising and culturally responsive mentorship programs (e.g., Umoja, A2MEND)
- Establish peer-to-peer support cohorts
- Establish early alert systems to proactively identify and address academic and non-academic challenges
- Leverage library usage data to assess the impact of library engagement on student retention, completion, and graduation rates

Strategies

- Expand Black Matador Excellence Experience (BMEE) Summer Program outreach and enrollment to increase participation among incoming Black students
- Leverage institutional data to identify academically at-risk students and proactively connect them with advisors for targeted support
- Implement Canvas Insights early alert system to identify early signs of student disengagement and coordinate timely interventions
- Enroll first-year Black students in U100 Black Excellence sections that center Black identity and provide culturally relevant support

Strategies

- Scale academic support programs (e.g., Aggie Black Excellence) to strengthen student success pipelines and resource awareness
- Implement coordinated, equity-focused student success teams integrating advising, financial aid, mental health, and academic enrichment
- Increase investment in research mentorships and internships to boost career readiness
- Use disaggregated data and Sustaining Teaching and Research Task Force (START) initiative guidance to monitor progress and embed equity goals into accountability



California Community Colleges

The California Community Colleges (CCC) system is the largest higher education system in the nation, serving over 2.1 million students across 116 colleges.³³ In the 2023-2024 academic year, **105,701 students in the CCC system identified as Black, representing 5.7% of the student population.**³⁴

As an open-access system, community colleges play a crucial role in expanding higher education opportunities for students across racial and ethnic groups, while providing transfer pathways to four-year institutions for students seeking bachelor's degrees. The CCCs also offer an affordable and flexible option for students seeking an associate degree or transferable credits.

Each year, roughly two-thirds³⁵ of Black students entering California's public higher education system enroll in a California community college. However, just four in 10 of those students enroll full-time during their first semester, well below the statewide average of 50%, setting them down a longer path to graduation or transfer.³⁶ Unfortunately, challenges persist beyond initial enrollment. In 2022-23 only 58% of Black students were successfully retained after their first semester, under the statewide average of 67%.³⁷

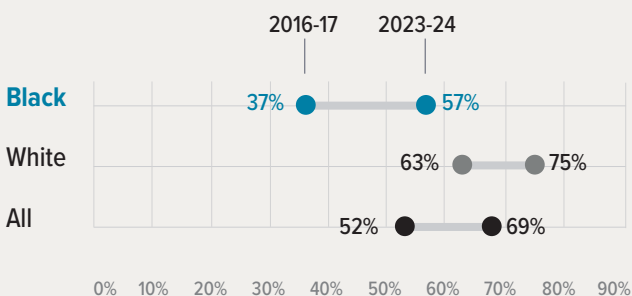
Placement and Remedial Education Reform (AB 705)

In our 2021 report, we highlighted statewide legislation that transformed the way community colleges handled placement into gateway-level math and English courses by limiting the use of placement tests.³⁸ At the time, those reforms were already proving fruitful, with completion rates for transfer-level coursework in both subjects significantly climbing in the following years. That trend has only strengthened in recent years, and as of the fall 2023 cohort, over 99% of students were placed directly into transfer-level English and math courses,³⁹ remarkable shift from under a decade ago, when it was common for three-quarters of the incoming class to be required to attend remedial classes before attempting transfer-level courses. Despite readiness concerns, after switching from a remedial based model toward one with increasing co-requisite supports, the **rate at which Black students complete these courses has continued to climb dramatically, increasing by 20 percentage points in English and more than tripling in math** in just a seven-year period. While the increases remain heartening, very little progress has been made regarding the gaps in completion rates between Black students, their white peers, and the statewide average.

Black students are completing transfer-level courses at much-greater rates, but significant equity gaps remain.

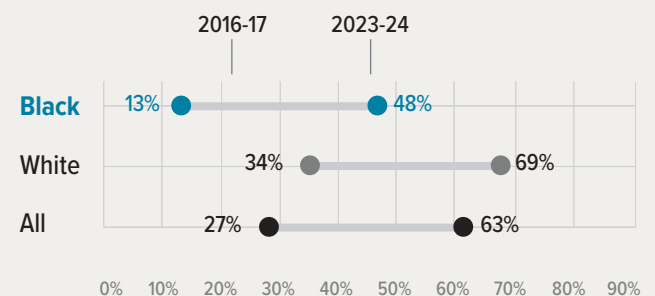
Over half of Black students completed transfer-level English in 2023.

Figure 7. Percentage of First-Time Students completing Transfer-Level English within 1 Year, Fall 2016-Fall 2023.



Transfer-level math completion rates for Black students nearly quadrupled in just seven years.

Figure 8. Percentage of First-Time Students completing Transfer-Level Math within 1 Year, Fall 2016-Fall 2023.



Source: California Community Colleges (2025). Transfer-Level English, English as a Second Language and Math Completion Dashboard. Available from: <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/transfer-level-dashboard>



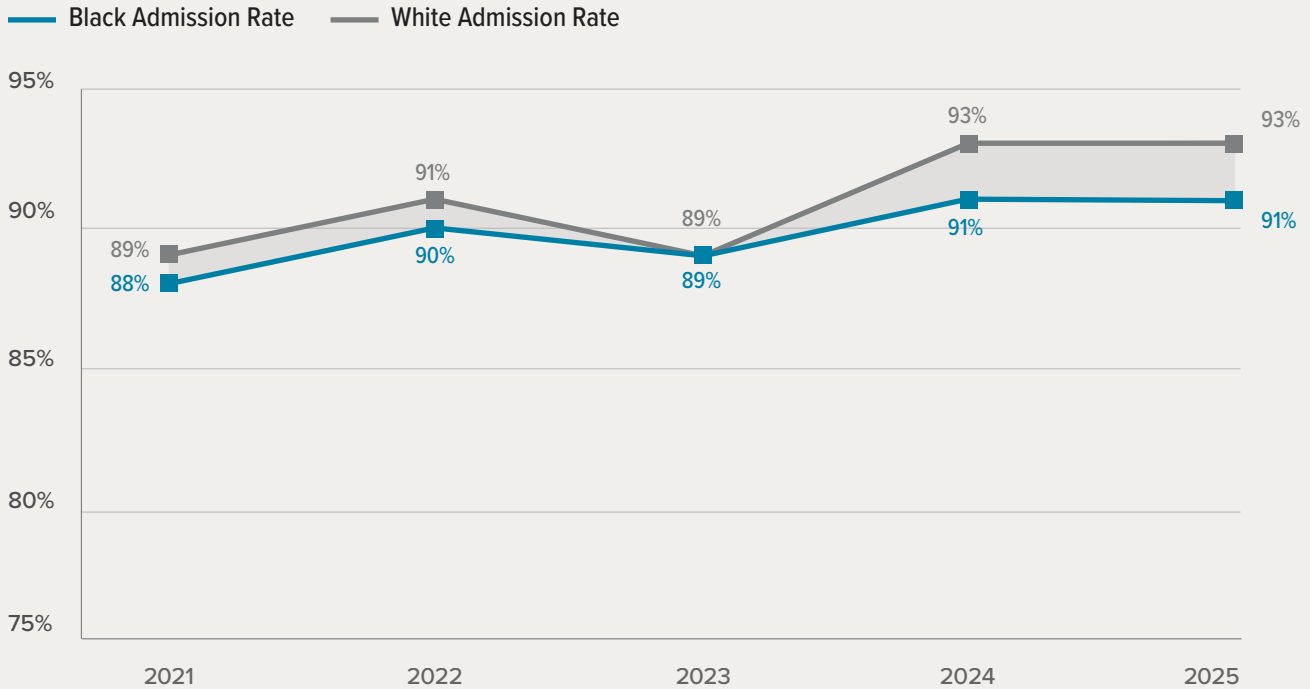
California State University

The California State University (CSU) system enrolled 416,531 undergraduate students across its 23 campuses in the fall of 2025, with 17,835 of those being Black students.⁴⁰ That number marks the highest total of Black CSU undergraduates in at least a decade, despite overall CSU enrollment having not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. One in ten Black California undergraduates were enrolled in the CSU in 2023-24.

In 2024, Black students accounted for just four percent of all CSU applicants, totaling 8,600 students, about two-thirds that of the significantly smaller UC system.⁴¹ 95% of Black applicants to the CSU for the 2024-25 academic year were admitted to at least one CSU campus. Of those admitted, 38% of Black students choose to enroll in the CSU, above the state average of 33% and that of white students at 30%.

Nearly all Black applicants to the CSU system are admitted to at least one campus.

Figure 9. California State University First-Time Freshman Admission Rates, 2021-2025.



Source: The California State University (2025). Application Trends. Retrieved from: tableau.calstate.edu

Impaction at the CSU

Although CSU guarantees admission to all qualified transfer students, it does not have sufficient capacity to offer seats to every eligible applicant. Each year, many campuses, particularly those in metropolitan regions, receive more qualified applicants than they can accommodate.⁴² Campuses and programs that surpass enrollment capacity are “impacted,” which may raise admission standards, such as GPA thresholds or prerequisite coursework. In 2022, Assembly Bill 2973⁴³ streamlined the process for removing impaction by eliminating certain procedural steps, allowing campuses to lift impaction status in a timelier manner, while expanding access to high demand programs. For more information on impaction within the CSU System, please read our [full report](#).



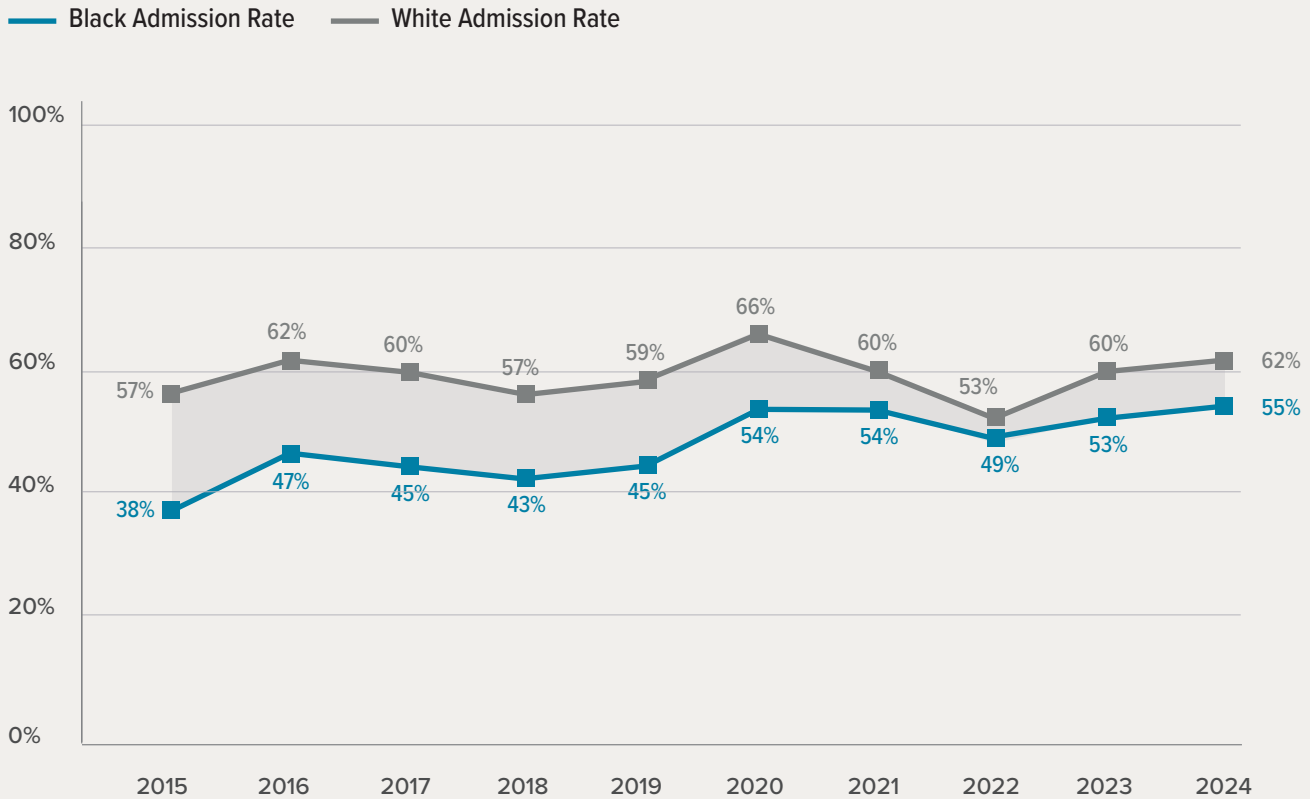
University of California

The UC system is the state's premier public research university system, renowned for its academic excellence and innovation. It encompasses 10 campuses across the state, nine of which enroll undergraduate students, and enrolls nearly a quarter-million undergraduate students each year.⁴⁴ Of the 236,070 undergraduates enrolled in fall 2024, 11,257 were Black students, representing 4.8% of enrollees. Over the past six years, Black student enrollment in the UC system has increased by an average of 4%, or roughly 377 students per year.⁴⁵ **While these increases are encouraging, fewer than 12,000 Black undergraduates have access to the state's flagship university system.**

Black students have consistently represented about 6% of UC freshman and transfer applicants, in line with their overall share of the state population. Admission rates for Black freshmen have remained steady, at 55%, since our last report. While the gap between Black and white students has narrowed from 12 percentage points in 2020 to seven in 2024, this is nearly entirely due to a downturn in rates for white students, rather than to improved outcomes for Black students. Both application and enrollment totals have modestly increased since 2021, lining up with changes in admissions policies, such as the shift to test-optional practices.⁴⁶

The gap between white and Black admissions rates has shrunk since 2020, but not because Black admissions rates have risen significantly.

Figure 10. University of California Freshmen Admission Rates, 2014-15 to 2023-24.



Source: University of California Office of the President, Institutional Research and Academic Planning. Available from: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/admissions-residency-and-ethnicity>

Independent, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities

California has a thriving array of highly competitive nonprofit institutions, such as Stanford University and the University of Southern California, that attract students from around the world. Independent nonprofit institutions are accredited private colleges and universities governed by a board of trustees that reinvest their resources into instruction, student services, and campus operations rather than generating profit. On average, these institutions offer a lower student-to-teacher ratio of 11:1, providing a more personalized learning experience.⁴⁷ Seventy-eight percent⁴⁸ of nonprofit undergraduates receive institutional, state, local, or federal grant aid, increasing access and affordability for students from low-income backgrounds⁴⁹

who would otherwise find it difficult to attend colleges where [tuition is nearly five times higher](#)⁵⁰ than at the average public university. Eight percent of the state’s Black undergraduates enroll in a nonprofit college or university, and they account for six percent of that system’s total enrollment, making them equitably represented in comparison to their share of the overall population. Independent nonprofit institutions offer an alternative pathway to higher education than their public counterparts and accommodate roughly 235,000⁵¹ additional students, including 14,720 Black students in 2023-24.⁵² One in four Black transfer students attend a nonprofit institution, compared to just six percent of first-time freshmen. Nonprofit institutions affiliated with the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) have taken steps to coordinate with the state’s public systems, including efforts to make it easier to transfer between them. As of Fall 2024, 27 nonprofit colleges are incorporated into ASSIST, California’s official course transfer and articulation system, and 34 AICCU institutions have at least [one articulated ADT pathway](#).⁵³



[Independent, nonprofit] schools do require you to take a specific set of courses that they can use for your ongoing academic journey. Some of those courses are not offered by my community college, which is fine, but it does make the transfer process to private institutions a lot harder because there is no access, process, or guidance for that kind of transfer.”

**Joia Miller
Student
Mt. San Jactinto College**

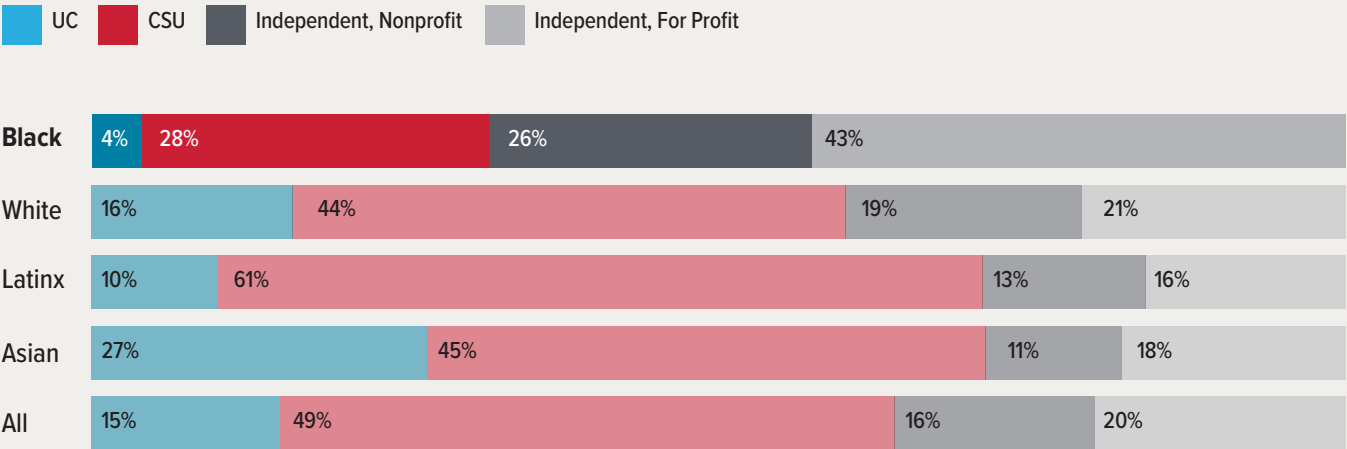
Independent, For-Profit Colleges and Universities

In 2023-24, 180,000 students were enrolled at for-profit, four- and two-year institutions across California, including 25,955 Black students. Black undergraduates represented 13% of all nonprofit students, and 14% of all Black undergraduates attend a for-profit institution, despite Black Californians comprising 5.5%

of the state's population. These rates are lower than rates documented in our last report in [2019](#),⁵⁴ but still substantially higher than in 2016. These reductions have come entirely from the freshmen population, however, as 43% of Black transfer students in 2023-24 were enrolled at a for-profit college, a five-percentage-point gain since 2019, and over double the rate of any other student group.

Over 40% of Black transfer students enrolled in a for-profit university, more than double the state average.

Figure 11. Share of Incoming Transfer Enrollment to a Four-Year Institution by Sector and Race/Ethnicity, 2023-24.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-2024, 12-Month Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

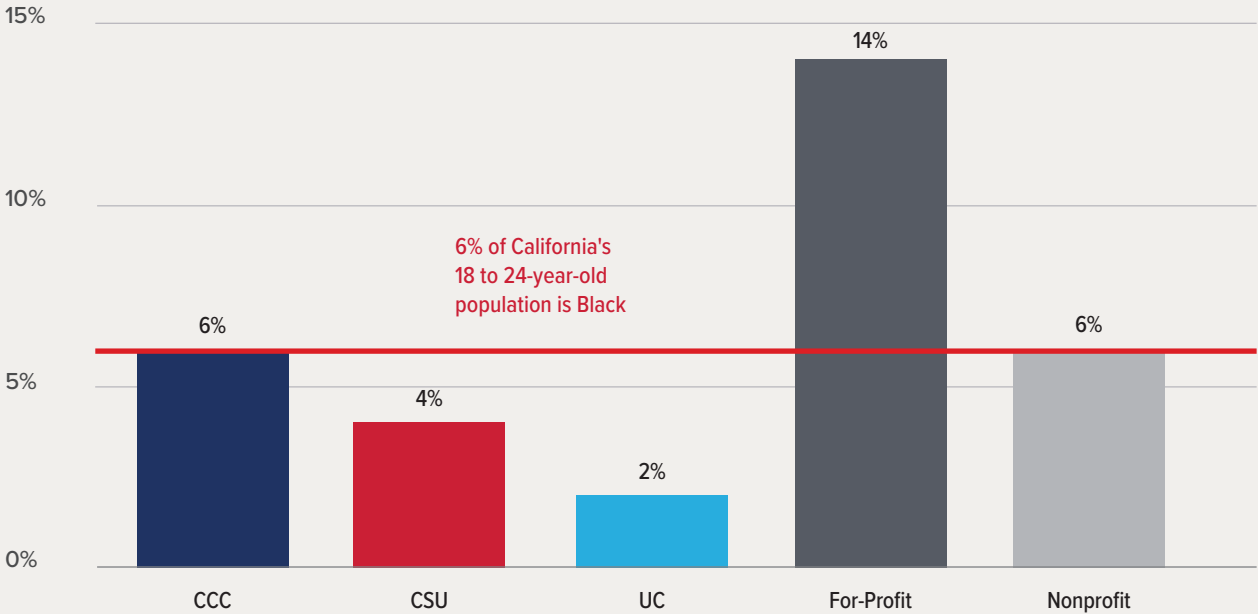
For-profit colleges and universities often promote themselves as accessible and flexible options for students, but have also faced scrutiny for high tuition costs, limited financial aid, and inconsistent student outcomes, including graduation rates, debt levels, and employment outcomes.⁵⁵ Students at for-profit institutions are more likely to accumulate significant debt due to high tuition costs, and the credits they earn often do not transfer easily to other colleges and universities.⁵⁶ Reflecting these challenges, the three-year cohort default rate (CDR) for student loans exceeds 10%.

This indicates that more than one in 10 students default on their loans within the first three years of repayment.⁵⁷ Students who stop out of a degree program also miss out on the earnings boost experienced

by college graduates. Additionally, for-profit colleges have been accused of engaging in predatory marketing practices to recruit students.⁵⁸ Oversight of these institutions has been inconsistent, with the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education taking an average of 18 months to resolve complaints and years to revoke licenses,⁵⁹ as seen with the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), which ultimately closed in 2022 after years of financial mismanagement. Despite efforts to sustain operations, including suspending enrollment, reinstating limited degree programs, and exploring a merger,⁶⁰ SFAI ultimately closed. The closure left many students with debt due to a 31.8% graduation rate and a median tuition cost of \$45,664.⁶¹ These patterns emphasize the need for stronger regulations to safeguard students' educational and financial futures.

Black students are underrepresented at the CSU and UC and overrepresented at for-profit colleges.

Figure 12. Share of Black Enrollment by Sector, 2023-24.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-2024, 12-Month Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity. US Census American Community Survey

Note: Data were drawn from the UC and CSU systems, Data Vista, and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Percentages may differ from those reported above due to variations across data sources.



COLLEGE COMPLETION

The state's economic future is shaped by the educational investments we make in education today. Governor Gavin Newsom's [California Blueprint](#)⁶² champions equity, access, affordability, and student success for every student irrespective of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or geographic location. Central to this vision is the aspirational goal of achieving 70% postsecondary attainment by 2030, a goal that will strengthen our economy by creating pathways to upward mobility and position California as a leader in education and workforce readiness so future generations can participate in a more inclusive economy.

California Community Colleges

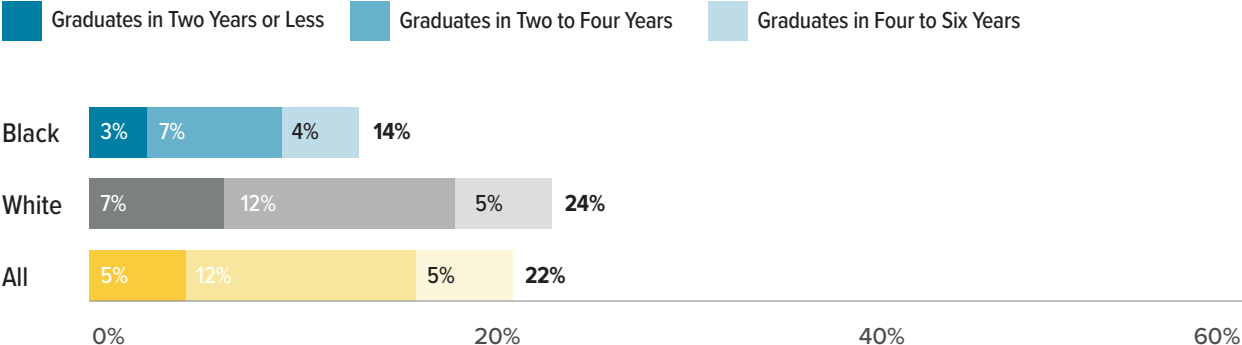
California's community colleges serve as a powerful democratizing entry point into higher education, providing millions of students with an affordable pathway to upward mobility. Fifty one percent of CSU and 29% of UC graduates began their academic journeys at a California community college.⁶³

While the CCC system has expanded opportunities for students through placement reform and the implementation of the California General Education Transfer Curriculum (Cal-GETC) to streamline general education requirements across higher education systems,⁶⁴ disparities in outcomes stubbornly persist.

Completion rates for Black students have improved across all racial and ethnic groups over the past four years, with 14% of the 2017-18 cohort completing within six years, up from 10% three years prior. Even with recent improvements, graduation and transfer rates remain concerningly low, and significant equity gaps remain, as **less than one in seven Black community college students are supported to earn a degree or approved certificate within six years, well below the rate for white students of one in four.**

Less than one in seven Black community college students earned a degree or credential in six years.

Figure 13. Six-Year Vision for Success Completion, Students Enrolling in 2017-18.



Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office DataVista , 619C, Cohort Students Who Attained the Vision Goal Completion Definition

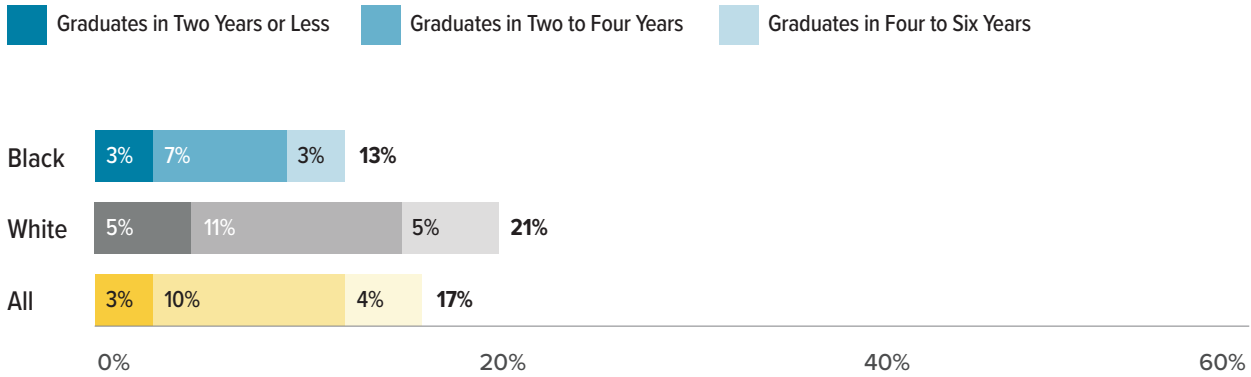
Transfer

Community colleges serve as a critical gateway to higher education and socioeconomic mobility, offering students affordable access to earning an associate degree and transferable credits that can reduce the cost of earning a bachelor’s degree. While both pathways offer higher earnings than a high school diploma alone, the median annual earnings for individuals with an associate degree are approximately \$49,500, compared to \$66,600 for those with a bachelor’s degree.⁶⁵

While nearly 80% of CCC students enroll with the goal of transferring to a four-year university,⁶⁶ only 10% of Black students in the 2016-17 cohort transferred within four years of enrollment, and just 13% did so within six years. As with completion, these rates have increased in recent years, but they have done so at largely the same rate as the system overall, leaving equity gaps essentially unchanged.

Only 13% of Black community college students transferred to a four-year university within six years.

Figure 14. Two-, Four-, and Six-Year Transfer Rates, Students Enrolling in 2016-17.



Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office DataVista , 650C, Cohort Students Who Transferred to a Four-Year Postsecondary Institution

In 2016-17, just 20% of the Black cohort either earned a degree or transferred to a four-year institution, compared to roughly one-third (33%) of white students.⁶⁷ Simply matching the white student rate would mean that an additional 2,719 Black students would have either earned a degree, transferred, or both in that one cohort alone. If California is to meet the governor’s 70%-degree attainment goal, we must systematically pursue opportunities and leverage efforts that remain underutilized.



“My journey from Mt. San Jacinto to SDSU taught me that independence builds strength, and that no matter what you come from, there are always people and programs willing to help you rise.”

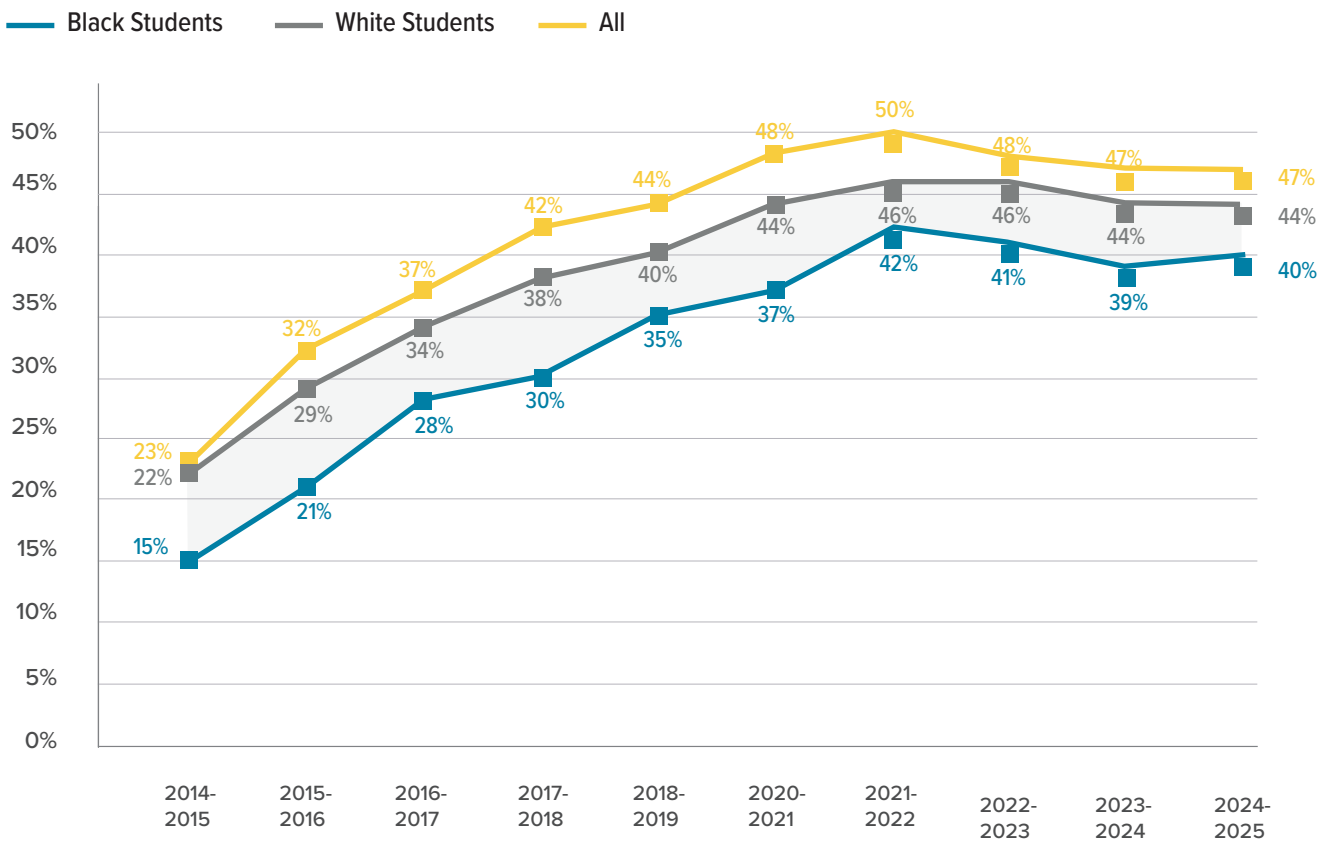
Araya Williams
Transfer Student
Mt. San Jacinto College
San Diego State University

Associate Degree for Transfer

An Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) provides community college students with a streamlined pathway to the CSU system, guaranteeing admission with junior standing in a similar major, and serving as a mechanism for students to save time and money by aligning coursework between community colleges and universities, improving the likelihood of timely degree completion.

Black students earn ADTs at below average rates, with no progress in recent years.

Figure 15. California Community Colleges ADTs as a Share of Associate Degrees.



Source: Data Vista California Community College. (2025). Single Metric View: General Admit Cohort. Earned an Award: Associate Degree for Transfer (608) and Associate Degree (631). Retrieved from: <https://datavista.cccco.edu/>

The percentage of Black associate degree awardees who earn ADTs remains well below the state average, at just 40%. As per Figure 15, these rates have begun to plateau and even regressed in recent years across the system after years of consistent increases. In 2023-24, 49 CCC campuses awarded ADTs to less than 10 Black students, and only 11 awarded ADTs to more than 50.⁶⁸ Since the Fall of 2024, all community college students in a major pathway where an ADT exists at their college are required to be placed in the ADT program pathway by default. To ensure they benefit from the advantages of the ADT pathway, these discrepancies must be acknowledged, and default placement should be utilized to maximize opportunities for Black students at the campus level.

Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant Program

The Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant Program, established through AB 1400,⁶⁹ a bill authored by Assemblymember Isaac Bryan and launched in 2024, provides up to \$5,000 in financial support to CCC students who transfer to eligible Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Administered by the California Student Aid Commission and funded through the California College Access Tax Credit Fund, the program seeks to expand transfer pathways and enhance students' financial and academic success.

To qualify, students must complete an ADT pathway, demonstrate unmet financial need, enroll at a CCC-partnered HBCU,⁷⁰ and express intent to return to California after graduation. This partnership is especially significant for student retention and graduation. HBCU students are more likely to report a stronger sense of belonging than their counterparts enrolled at predominantly white institutions (PWIs).⁷¹ By expanding transfer pathways to HBCUs, California not only increases access to higher education, but also fosters learning environments where students can thrive.



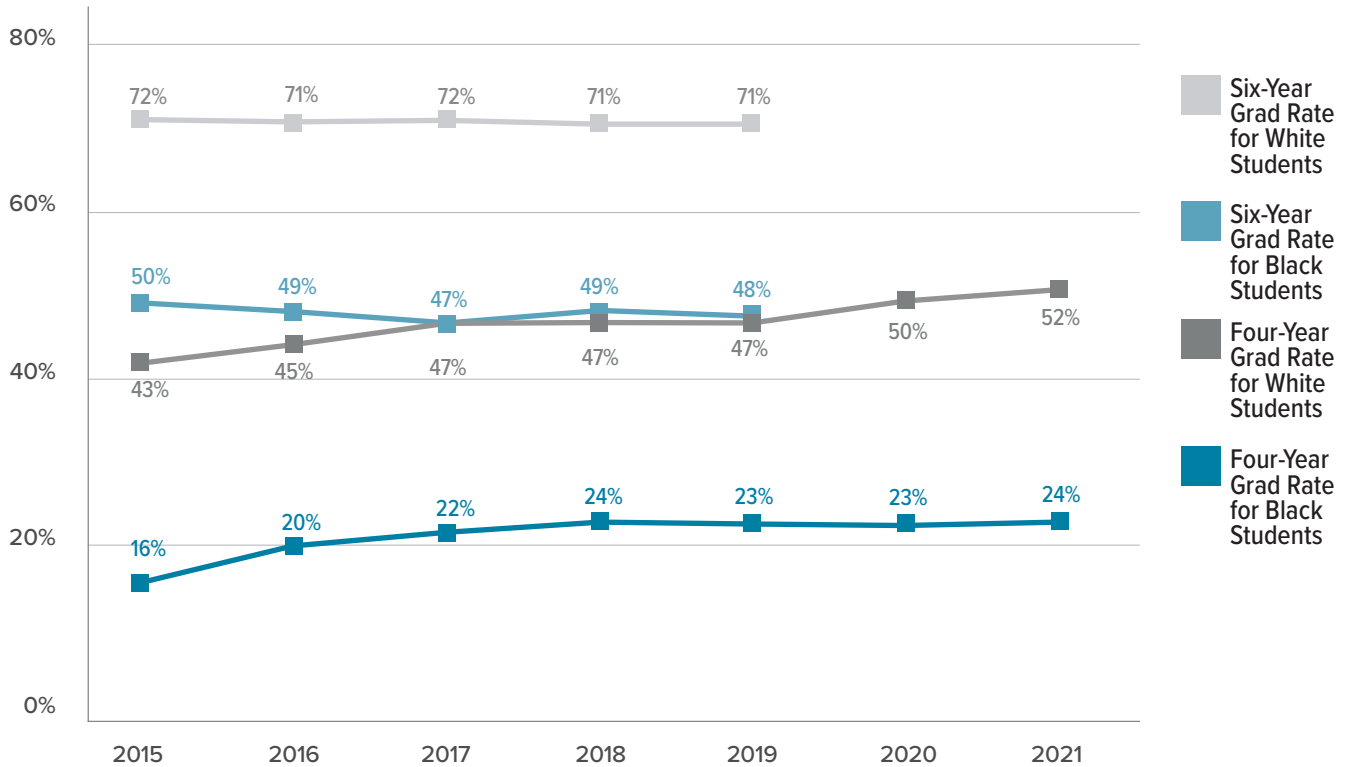
California State University

The CSU system is the nation's largest four-year public university system and awards nearly half of all bachelor's degrees in the state.⁷² In 2015, the CSU launched its [Graduation Initiative \(GI\) 2025](#),⁷³ aimed at improving graduation outcomes for both first-time and transfer students by setting aggressive systemwide goals. In the intervening decade, significant improvements have been made in raising rates, specifically four-year rates for first-time freshmen. Six-year rates, however, have remained virtually unchanged, implying that these gains are largely attributed to students graduating faster, rather than increasing the total rate of students who graduate.

Four-year graduation rates for first-time Black freshmen have increased from 16% of the 2015 cohort to 24% for the 2018 cohort, with no further improvement in the proceeding years. While steady progress has been made, the fact remains that **Black students graduate within four years at less than half the rate of white students**, who reached 52% the same year. Six-year graduation rates for all students have **actually decreased** slightly in recent years, including for Black students, where the rate is 48% for the 2019 cohort compared to 50% for the 2015 cohort. Both the four- and six-year rates for Black students remain woefully short of the GI's goals of 40% and 70%, respectively, and the gap in four-year rates between white and Black students widened by two percentage points.

White students are supported to graduate after four years at higher rates than Black students do after six.

Figure 16. California State University Four-and-Six Year Completion Rates for First-Time Freshmen by Cohort.



Source: California State University (2025). CSU Student Success Dashboard, Graduation Rates, First Time Freshmen. Four- and Six-Year Graduation Rates. Retrieved from: <https://public.dashboards.calstate.edu/csu-by-the-numbers/historical-grad-rates>.

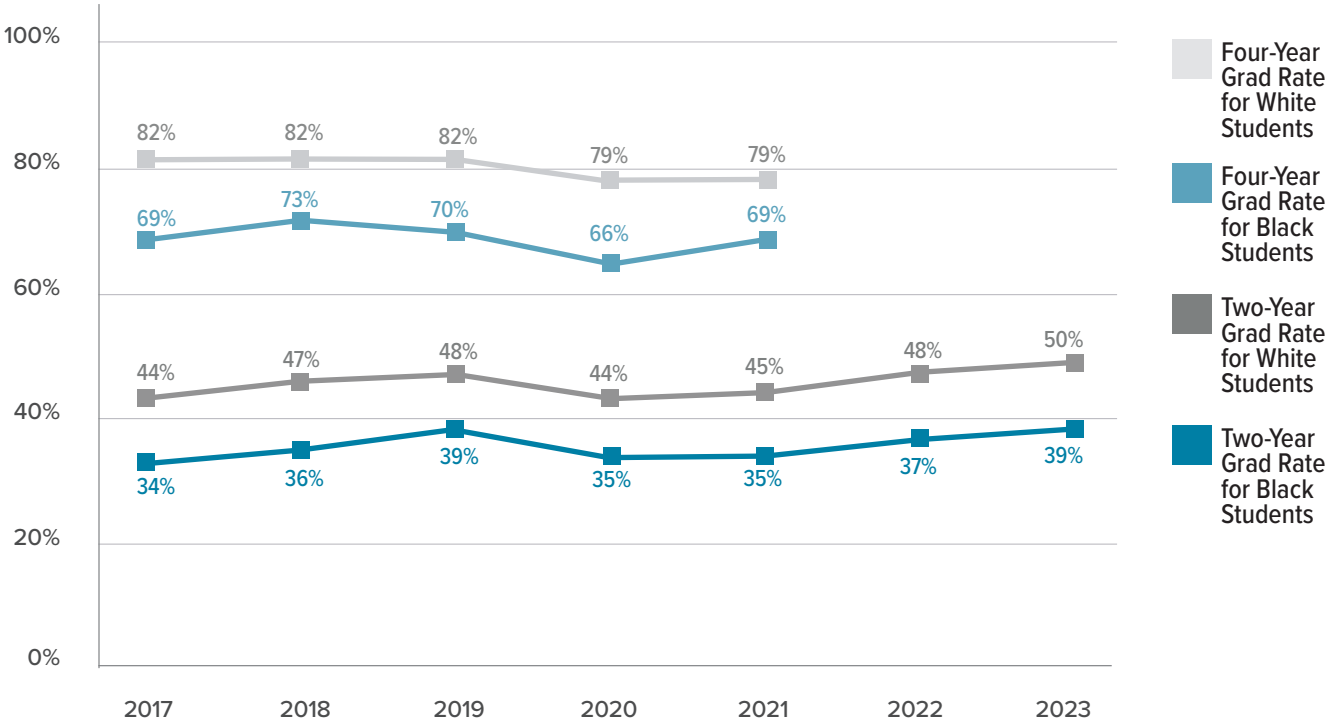
CSU Transfer

Transfer graduation patterns for Black CSU students have mirrored those of their freshmen counterparts in recent years. Two-year rates have increased from 34% for the 2017 cohort to 39% for students who transferred in 2023. Graduation rates for white students and the system overall increased in perfect tandem, leaving equity gaps of 11 and seven percentage points, respectively, between white and Black students. Despite two-year rates increasing during that time, **four-year graduation rates for Black transfer students held flat at 69% between 2017 and 2021**. Four-year rates for white students and the overall system declined slightly, shrinking their gaps with Black students, in turn, despite negligible improvements occurring for Black transfer students.

Moving beyond 2025, the GI will transition to a new [Student Success Framework](#).⁷⁴ The framework outlines systemwide strategies to expand financial aid and basic needs support, enhance academic and career advising that align with students' career interests, and the development of digital tools to provide personalized support, such as online degree audits.⁷⁵ The persistent disparate educational outcomes outlined above underscore the need for the CSU to build on the efforts established by the GI, advancing comprehensive and effective strategies to support student completion.

Two-year graduation rates for Black transfer students rose to 39%, while four-year rates stagnated and gaps persist.

Figure 17. California State University Two- and Four- Year Completion Rates for Transfer Students by Cohort.



Source: California State University (2025). CSU Student Success Dashboard, Graduation Rates, Two- and Four-Year Completion Rates for Transfer Students. Retrieved from: <https://public.dashboards.calstate.edu/csu-by-the-numbers/historical-grad-rates>



“When I got into a CSU, the admissions office sent a bunch of things about what I should be doing to register. I was like, this is like 10 million things, and I’m trying to graduate. I met with my EOP Counselor; he helped me with that, and I felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders.”

Jayla Wade
Transfer Student
Los Angeles Southwest College
Cal State LA

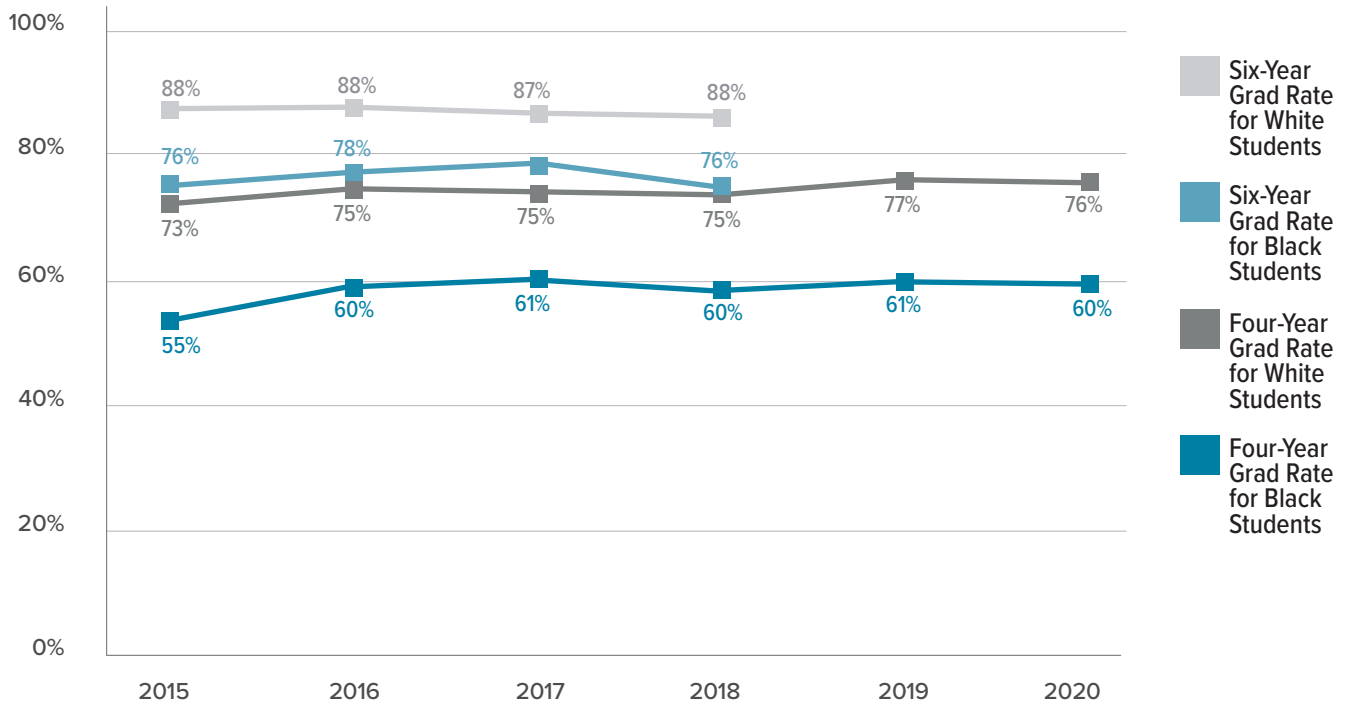


University of California

The University of California (UC) continues to boast the highest college completion rates across the state’s higher education systems, despite modest recent gains. *The UC’s four-year graduation rate for Black undergraduates has remained steady at 60% since 2016, up from less than 50% for the 2011 cohort. This rate is still significantly below the 76% rate for white students, representing a 16 percentage-point gap. Three in five Black UC students from the 2020 cohort completed their degrees in four years, compared with over three-quarters of white students,* and both rates have remained unchanged since the 2016 cohort. Six-year rates for Black students have also held steady at 76%, 12 points below the white student rate.

UC graduation rates have plateaued, leaving significant equity gaps for Black freshmen.

Figure 18. University of California Four- and Six Year Completion Rates for First Time Freshman by Cohort.



Source: University of California Office of the President, Department of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (2025). Four- and Six-Year Completion Rates for First Time Freshmen. Retrieved from: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/ug-outcomes>.



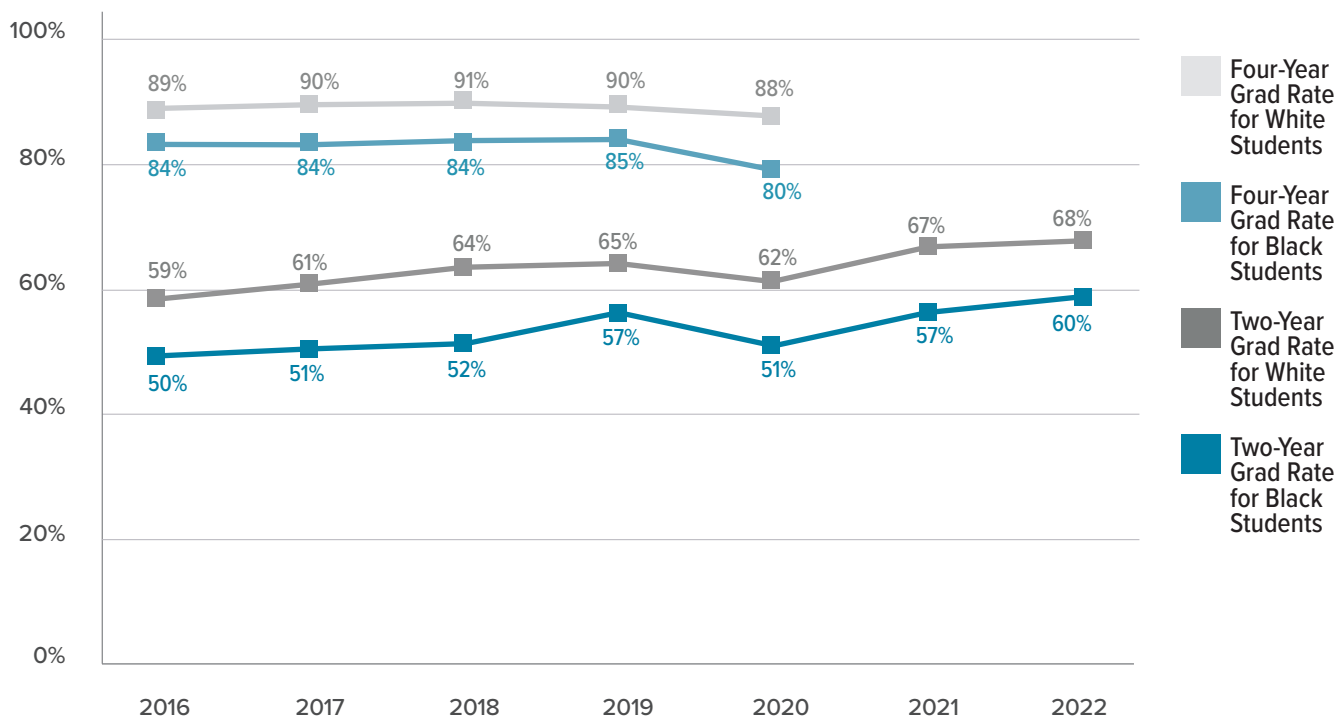
“A really helpful resource I used was the African Student Programs Center (ASP), which served as a study and social space. Events like ‘Village Talks’ connected me to the campus, and staff helped me combat impostor syndrome. Living in the Pan-African Themed Hall (PATH) built my closest friendships and gave me a sense of community I hadn’t found elsewhere.”

Makala Traylor
Student
UC Riverside

UC Transfer

Two-year graduation rates for Black UC transfer students increased by 10 percentage points since 2016 but equity gaps persist.

Figure 19. University of California Two- and Four-Year Completion Rates for Transfer Students by Cohort.



Source: University of California Office of the President, Department of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (2025). Two- and Four-Year Completion Rates for Transfer Students. Retrieved from: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/ug-outcomes>

Black transfer students at the UC are graduating faster than ever before, with 60% of students of the 2022 cohort having done so within two years of enrollment, up 10 percentage points from just 50% six years prior. Four-year rates for transfer students had stabilized around 84% for several cohorts before dipping to 80% for the 2020 cohort. As with the CSU, equity gaps for transfer students are far less severe than those for students who initially enrolled as freshmen, but even so, **white students are eight percentage points more likely than Black students to graduate after both two and four years.** While UC graduation rates for Black students are notably higher than in other systems, the persistence of these gaps indicates that rather than having hit a natural ceiling, there is still room for improvement.

A²MEND at UC Berkeley

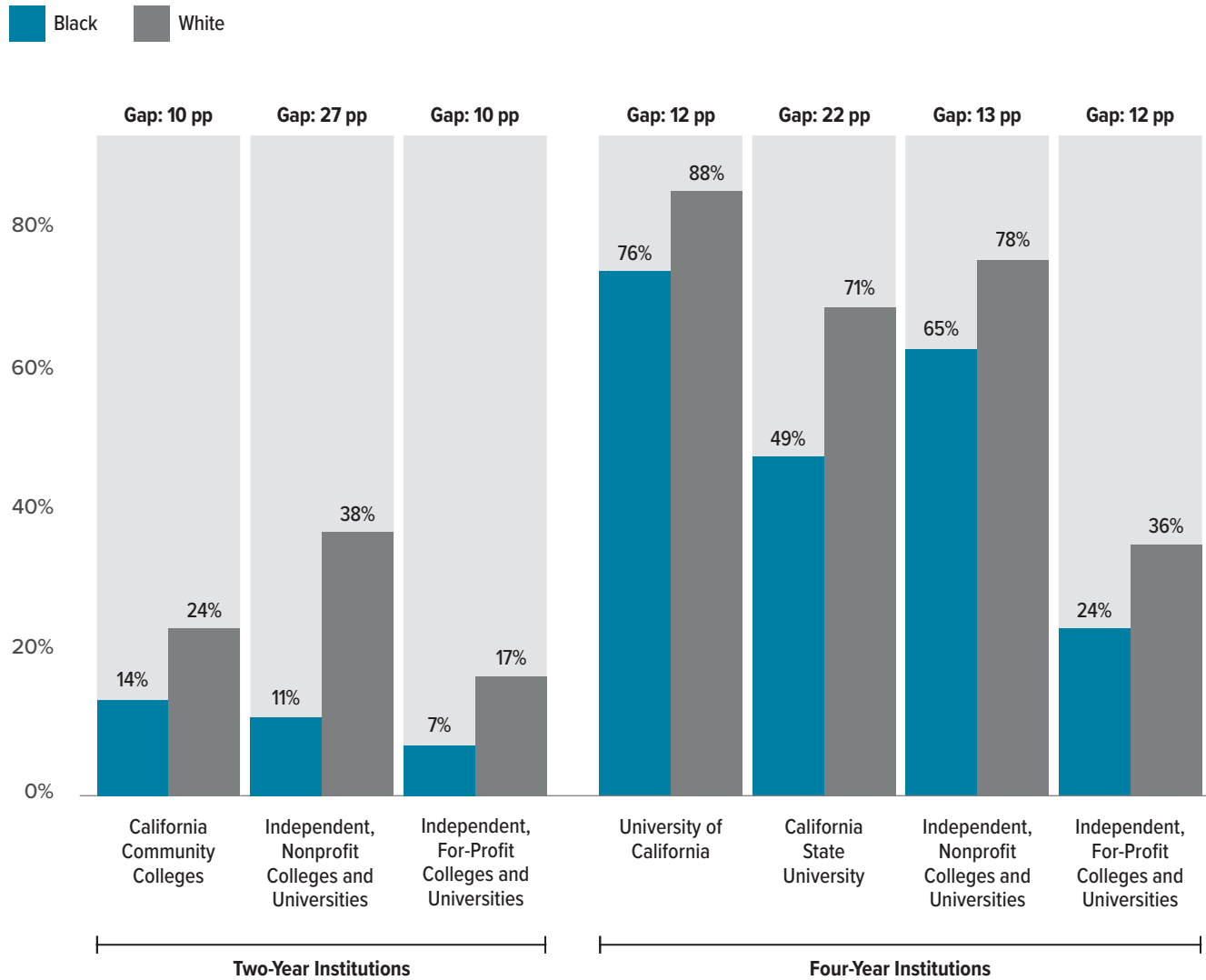
In 2024, UC Berkeley became the first UC campus and university nationwide to establish an African American Male Education Network Development (A²MEND) charter.⁷⁶ A²MEND's mission is to provide a system of support and mentorship to foster the academic, psychological, and spiritual development of Black male students, faculty and staff members, and administrators. The student-led effort was created to support their peers' academic success and leadership development and has the potential to serve as a transformative bridge for community college transfer students seeking a sense of community. The chartering process requires institutional support and resources dedicated to empowering Black male students —signaling a broader investment in students of color. The organization specifically supports the retention and success of men of color by providing targeted mentorship, academic advising, access to scholarship, and campus programming that promotes academic, cultural, personal, and professional growth.



Independent Colleges and Universities

Black students graduate at significantly lower rates than their white peers across every system.

Figure 20. Six-Year Graduation Rates for California Colleges and Universities Freshmen by Higher Education Sector, Race/Ethnicity.



Note: pp = percentage points

Source: California State University (2025). CSU Student Success Dashboard, Graduation Rates. Retrieved from: <https://public.dashboards.calstate.edu/csu-by-the-numbers/historical-grad-rates>; Data Vista California Community College. (2025). Student Success Metrics: General Admit Cohort. Earned an Award: Vision Goal Completion Definition. Retrieved from: <https://datavista.cccco.edu/>; National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall component, 2023, Table: GR2023_RV. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>; University of California Office of the President, Department of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/ug-outcomes>



Independent, nonprofit four-year universities have completion rates that are, on average, above those of the CSU but below those of UC campuses. Two-year nonprofit colleges, however, have Black completion rates below those at the CCC and have the largest such gap between Black and white students among any California sector.

The independent, for-profit sector has the largest share of Black students of any sector other than public community colleges, but its completion rates remain by far the lowest in the state, with just 24% of Black students at a four-year institution graduating within six years, less than half the rate of the next closest sector, the CSU. Two-year for-profits perform no better, as just seven percent of Black students complete within six years. While the scale of the gaps varied, **every sector of California higher education has double-digit equity gaps between Black and white students**, and the size of most gaps have either remained unchanged or widened in recent years. This persistent pattern highlights the need for continued structural interventions to improve degree completion among Black students across all of California's higher education systems.



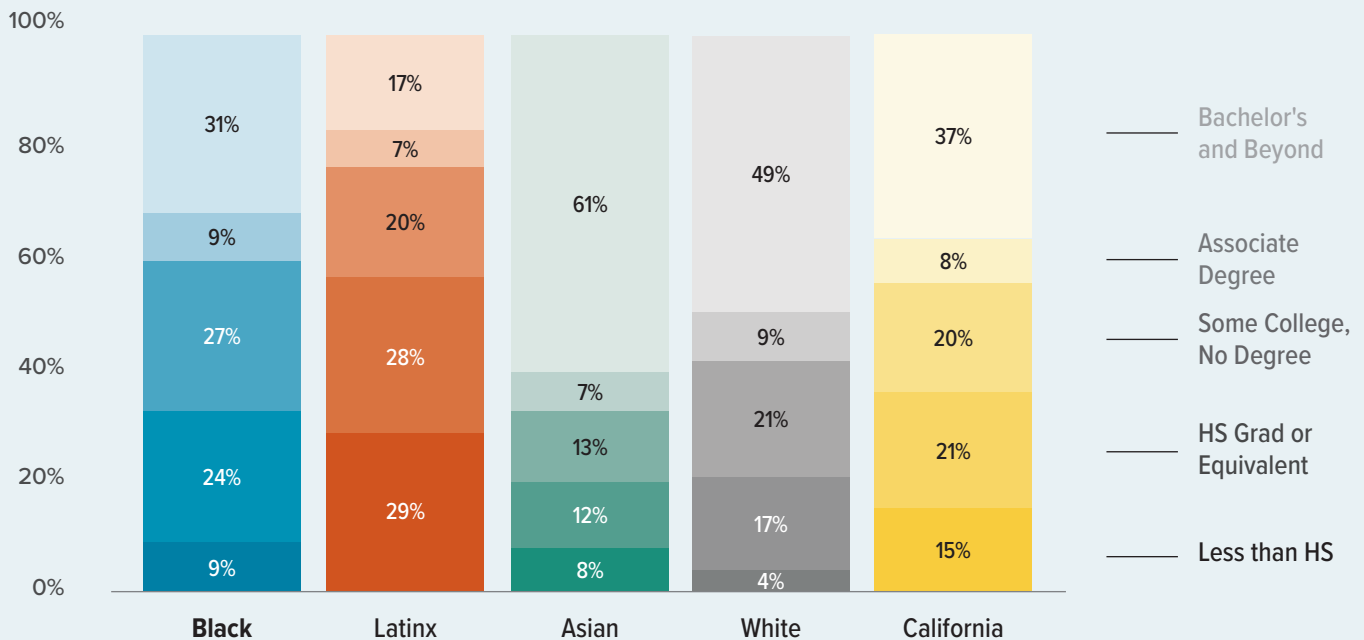
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Fewer than one-third (31%) of working-age Black Californians have a bachelor's degree, slightly below the state average of 37% and far below the rates for white and Asian Californians. But, Figure 21 does represent a five-point increase from 2021, the last time we explored this data. Comparable increases across the state, however, mean that the degree attainment gap between Black and white Californians shrank by just one percentage point over that period. Over one-quarter (27%) of Black Californians have attended college without earning a degree, the highest non-completion rate of any racial/ethnic group.

To support Black students in reaching their full potential, ensure that the state meets the governor's goal of a 70% educational attainment rate, and maintain California's position as one of the largest and most dynamic economies in the world, we must pull out all the stops. Projections indicate that by 2031, 72% of jobs nationwide will require a bachelor's degree.⁷⁷ Maintaining a workforce prepared to thrive in tomorrow's job market will require a wide range of strategies to improve enrollment rates for first-time Black students, ensure institutions provide the support needed to foster higher completion rates, and engage with the 323,000 Black adults who have attended college but do not have a degree.

Thirty-one percent of working-age Black Californians have a bachelor's degree, and nearly seven in 10 have attended college.

Figure 21. Educational Attainment of California Adults Ages 25-64.



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).

Faculty Diversity

Diverse representation among the faculty is essential to fostering equitable and effective higher education institutions. When the composition of faculty members more closely reflects the demographics of the student body, it strengthens students' sense of belonging and contributes to improved educational outcomes. A diverse faculty also brings a wider range of perspectives, professional experiences, and cultural knowledge into the curriculum and classroom environment, enriching learning for all students. Institutional commitments to recruiting, retaining, and promoting the diversification of faculty helps advance broader goals of equity and inclusion, shaping campus climate, decision-making, and leadership in ways that better serve California's diverse communities.

The past decade has seen notable improvement across the state in ensuring that Black faculty members are properly represented at rates on par with the students they serve, and the population as a whole. Despite these improvements, **as of 2024 there was one Black faculty member for every 64 Black**

students across all of the state’s public colleges and universities, compared with a ratio of 23 white students per faculty member. For more information about representation across California higher education, including analysis by race/ethnicity, sector, and administrative body, see our [2023 “Still Left Out” report](#).



“I’ve learned how to approach students and communities with empathy, cultural awareness, and evidence-based practices, and my academic journey has equipped me with both the knowledge and practical skills needed to support, educate, and advocate for diverse learners effectively.”

Mackenzi Gill
Graduate, University of the Pacific
Student, Jessup University

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Higher education is one of the most powerful engines of upward mobility available to individuals, families, and communities. Research has [consistently](#)⁷⁸ shown that higher levels of degree attainment are [associated](#)⁷⁹ with substantially higher lifetime earnings. Access to postsecondary education can significantly enhance the potential for intergenerational upward mobility: For many individuals from low-income backgrounds, obtaining a degree increases the likelihood of reaching higher income tiers than their parents.

California’s economic strength relies not only on ensuring that more students complete college, but also on ensuring that their degrees translate to economic opportunity. The promise of higher education lies in the expectation that earning a college degree will lead to financial stability and long-term wealth building, and extensive research⁸⁰ has shown that this promise remains intact.

Yet, for too many Black Californians, the economic return on higher education remains unequal compared to their peers. Despite similar educational achievements, Black graduates often earn less than their white peers across all sectors of public higher education. While degree attainment can unlock the potential to an array of benefits, including higher earnings, improved job stability, access to comprehensive employment benefits, better health outcomes,⁸¹ and expanded opportunities to economic mobility, these gains are not equitably realized by Black graduates.

Post-Graduation Earnings

Within two years of graduation, UC and CSU students earn wages substantially above that of the median Californian high school graduate of \$38,400. Those wage gains only increase over time, and within five years, Black graduates of both systems have salaries over \$10,000 greater than the median earnings for a California adult, despite that population including many workers who are much farther along in their careers.

While UC and CSU graduates clearly outearn the median Californian worker, there are substantial differences both between the systems, and among graduates of the same system. Just two years after graduation, Black UC alumni earn roughly \$5,800 less than their white counterparts. After 15 years, the difference grows as large as \$20,200, and although data collection does not continue past this point, there's no reason to believe the trend does not continue. These steep and widening gaps compound across a lifetime, shaping pathways to economic mobility and financial advancement.

Similar patterns are observed in the CSU system, with earnings gaps between Black and white graduates ranging from \$6,700 after two years to \$11,000 after 15 years — roughly half the size of the gaps for UC graduates, although much more comparable when viewed on a rate basis. Most startling, **among graduates of both systems, the earnings for Black students after 15 years only slightly exceed those of white students after 10 years.**

These wage gaps translate into long-term repercussions for financial stability that extend into homeownership rates,⁸² retirement readiness,⁸³ and overall wealth accumulation. Lower earnings compound over time, restricting the ability for Black graduates to build intergenerational wealth.

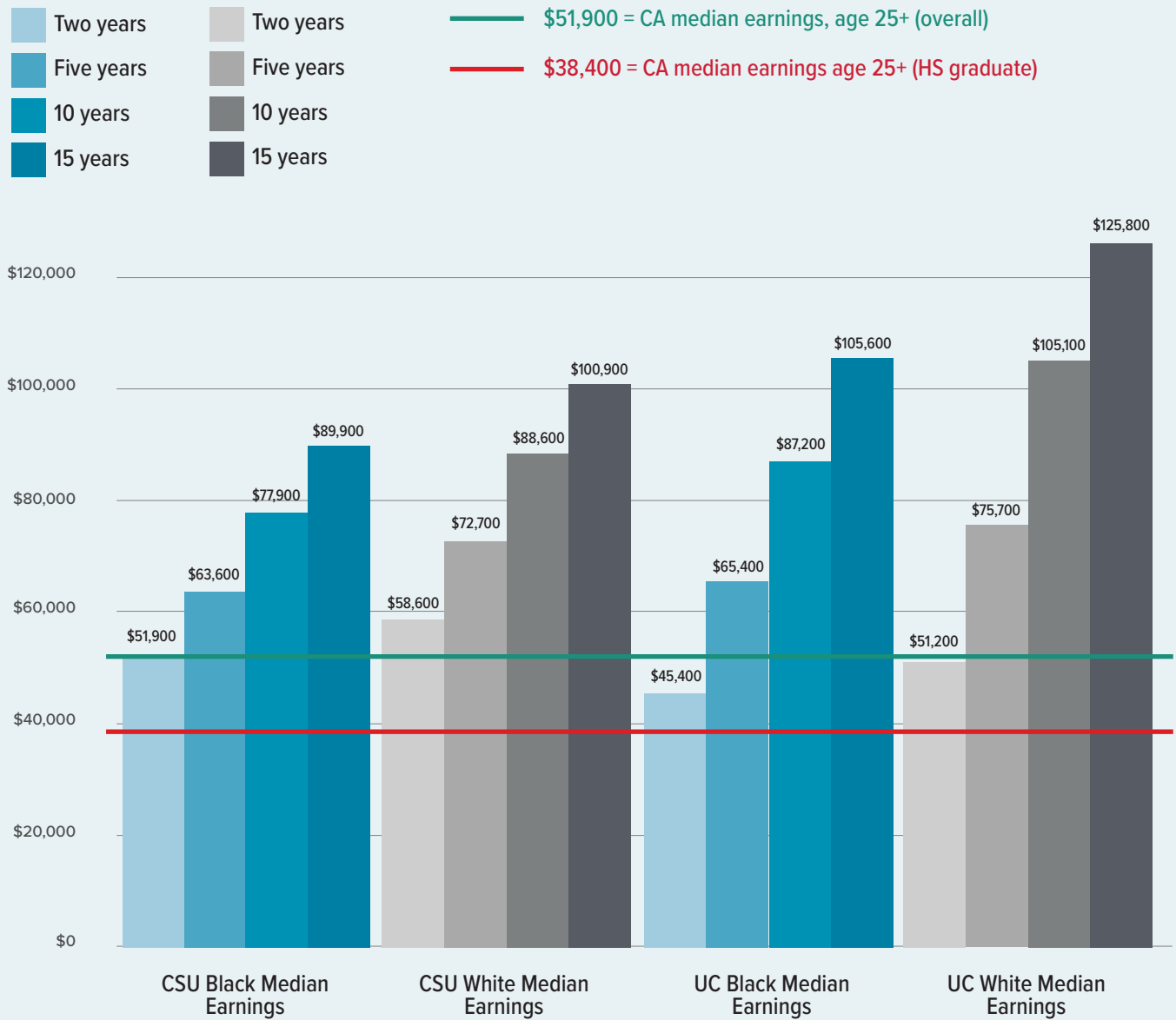


“Grounded in the belief of lifting as I climb, I intend to use my education to expand access, challenge inequitable systems, and create long-term opportunities for future generations.”

Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ifediba
MBA Student
UC Berkeley Haas School of Business

Black graduates at the CSU and UC earn far more than those without bachelor's degrees, but far less than white graduates.

Figure 22. Median Earnings of Black and White CSU and UC Graduates by Years After Graduation (2002-2019 Cohort, Bachelor's Only).



Source: California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office, Postsecondary Employment and Earnings Reports. Available from: <https://tableau.calstate.edu/views/LaborMarketOutcomes/LaborMarketDashboard>; University of California Office of the President, Institutional Research and Academic Planning. Available from: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/alumni-grad-outcomes>; United States Census Bureau. Table S2001: Earnings in the past 12 months (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) — California (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Available from: <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2001?q=median+individual+income+california>.



Return on Investment

A college degree is a uniquely powerful engine of economic mobility. However, the return on investment for a degree varies considerably across higher education sectors, institutions, or even between students within the same institution from different socio-economic backgrounds.

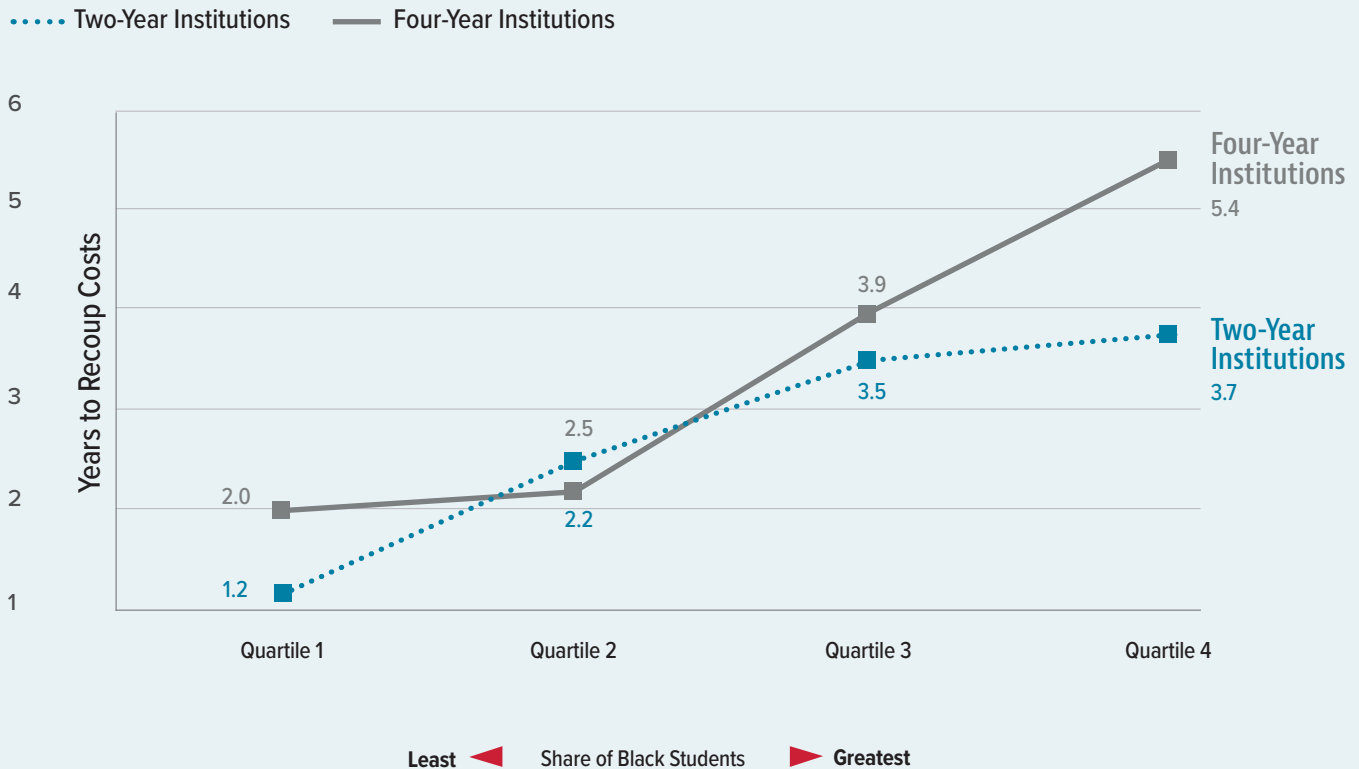
Earlier this year, the College Futures Foundation, in partnership with the HEA Group, released [Golden Returns: A Regional Look at the Return on Investment](#) of California’s Community and Career Colleges⁸⁴ and their [4-Year California Mobility Index](#),⁸⁵ in an attempt to shine a light on the variation in the return on investment (ROI) of roughly 400 colleges and universities across California. By incorporating “net price”—the price that students pay out of pocket after all grants and scholarships are deducted—and the median earnings of students 10 years after graduation relative to the average wage of a high school graduate (earnings premium), researchers were able to determine how long it would take the average graduate of each institution to quantify the speed at which students recoup the cost of their education after graduation.

One unavoidable limitation of ROI figures from this analysis and others of its kind is that while it’s incredibly useful in comparing institutions to each other, it does not allow us to analyze the variation between graduates at the same college or university by race, gender, socio-economic status, or other variables of interest. This is because ROI data is sourced from the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard, which, while an excellent data repository, does not currently collect earnings data disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

The following analysis—using methods adapted from a previous [Campaign report](#) delving into availability of college-preparatory coursework⁸⁶—aims to circumvent this limitation by examining the variation in the average ROI of colleges and universities by the share of Black students as a proxy for directly examining the rates for Black students in isolation. This was accomplished by grouping institutions from each sector into quartiles based on the undergraduate total enrollment share for each racial/ethnic group. The first quartile (Q1) contains institutions with the lowest enrollment share of Black students, while the fourth quartile (Q4) contains the highest.

Graduates from institutions with higher shares of Black students take longer to earn positive return on their investment than those with lower shares.

Figure 23. Years to Recoup Net Costs for Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions by share of Black undergraduate enrollment, 2023-2024.



Note: Enrollment data is based-off of IPEDS 2023-2024 total enrollment of degree- or certificate-seeking undergraduate students. Two-year institutions include all community colleges and other institutions whose primary award is an associate degree; private institutions granting primarily certificates as well as adult education schools are excluded from this analysis. Furthermore, 6 institutions are removed for having negative earnings premiums (no valid ROI) and 2 more are omitted for being outside the State of California.

Source: College Futures Foundation Golden Returns: A Regional Look at the ROI of California’s Community and Career Colleges. <https://collegefutures.org/golden-returns-2-year-roi/>

Among California’s four-year institutions, **graduates of colleges with the highest share of Black enrollment take more than three additional years than those with the lowest share to recoup their costs.** Notably, this trend is driven nearly **entirely by private universities** — as graduates from CSU/UC campuses take about a year, on average, to recoup costs, far quicker than private graduates. These rates are consistent along quartiles. **Graduates of UC and CSU campuses recoup their costs at equivalent rates, regardless of the demographic makeup of their institution.**

California's two-year institutions, follow a similar pattern: **Graduates from institutions with higher shares of Black students take longer to earn a positive return on their investment than those with lower shares.** While colleges with the largest share of Black students (Q4) had both higher net prices and lower median earnings than colleges with the smallest share (Q1), the differences in earnings were modest (roughly \$2,500), while the average net cost for Q4 colleges was nearly 2.5 times higher than those of Q1 colleges (\$24,182 to \$10,636), making cost not earnings the primary cause of the variation in ROI across quartiles. Public community colleges make up the majority of the sample, and thus the variance is likely driven not by differing rates in tuition and fees (the CCC has flat per-unit rates), but by the availability of scholarships and grants — both of which factor into calculating net costs.

While the overall trend line for CSU/UC campuses is flat with equal ROI values, when you look under the hood there are substantial differences between the way Q1 and Q4 campuses achieved those values. On average, Q1 graduates earned roughly \$78,000 a year, significantly higher than the Q4 total of \$62,000.

However, with increased earnings came increased costs (\$43,000 for Q1 graduates compared to \$31,500 for Q4), which effectively canceled each other out. While this means that graduates of universities from both groups recouped their costs simultaneously, those additional earnings will undoubtedly provide a higher ROI when viewed through the lens of a lifetime, rather than the first decade after graduation.

Implication of ROI Findings

This analysis reveals that students at institutions with higher concentrations of Black student enrollment face higher costs and take longer to recoup investments, particularly in the private two- and four-year sectors. Though the data cannot determine whether Black students specifically bear the burden of these patterns, the **institution-level findings suggest significant disparities in the value offered across California's higher education landscape.** For many, the increased costs accrued while attending an independent, four-year institution are not accompanied by equivalent increases in median earnings, although this varies considerably by institution. When the three worst ROI performers among four-year institutions (two independent nonprofits and one for-profit) are dropped from the analysis, the recoupment time for Q4 graduates drops by a full two years.

One additional factor is that earnings data is not available for most for-profit universities, and as such, they were not included in either the College Futures Foundation analysis or ours. Given that for-profit institutions tend to have higher costs than public universities, and that Black students are disproportionately enrolled in for-profit institutions, it is likely these results are an understatement of the

degree to which institutions with higher shares of Black students have worse ROI outcomes than those with lower shares. Additionally, this analysis is for graduates only. Students who leave college without earning a degree (a population in which Black students are overrepresented, as discussed above), do not receive the benefits in lifetime earnings that a degree confers, dramatically decreasing their educational return on investment.

The good news is that public institutions demonstrate equitable outcomes are achievable. **Campuses of the CSU and UC deliver consistent value, regardless of enrollment composition.** The challenges lie primarily in the private sector — where increased tuition does not bring with it an equal increase in post-graduate earnings. In recent years, we’ve seen a concerning wave of [headlines](#)⁸⁷ highlighting the increasing share of the population that is skeptical that higher education can still serve as the pathway toward economic mobility that it was for prior generations. Combatting this narrative requires uplifting our public institutions and continuously reiterating our commitment to providing high quality, affordable education for all.





CONCLUSION

California is now the world's fourth-largest economy,⁸⁸ but sustaining this growth depends on our collective commitment to investing in the state's future talent. Our state is not immune to shortages in critical fields, including health care, education, climate, and technology, and meeting these demands requires an inclusive higher education system that supports all students. Yet, persistent inequities continue to impede upon the success of Black students, who remain steadfast in their pursuit of higher education but too often encounter systemic barriers that prevent their success. Governor Newsom's California Blueprint outlines an ambitious vision of achieving 70% postsecondary attainment by 2030. Realizing this goal is not feasible without closing racial equity gaps.

Higher education remains one of California's most powerful equity levers for expanding economic opportunity, earning potential, and upward mobility. However, the full promise of higher education can only be achieved when Black students are equipped with the resources, support, and institutional commitment to thrive. Since our last report, the state has taken meaningful steps toward strengthening Black student success. New initiatives, including the establishment of BSI designations, are prompting colleges to publicly outline their goals, strategies, and resource commitments to support Black students.

However, disparities remain entrenched. Black students continue to encounter systemic barriers at every stage of the educational pipeline that restrict enrollment and impact persistence and completion rates. California's future depends on the investments made today and campuses' commitment to create inclusive learning environments. The progress being made is admirable, but lasting change requires intentional and sustained investment and accountability.



DATA AND METHODS

The central data source for this report was the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Twelve-month enrollment figures for the 2023-2024 academic year were taken from the IPEDS 2024 survey year. First-time student and transfer student enrollment data for fall 2024 was taken from the 2024 survey year. IPEDS data used excludes less-than-two-year institutions.

Additional data was collected from the California Department of Education, the California Community Chancellor's Office, the California State University Institutional Research and Analysis Office, and the University of California Office of the President. Outcomes data is included through 2023-2024 or the most recent year/cohort for which data was available.

Demographic data was pulled from the American Community Survey (ACS), which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Where applicable, this report utilizes data from tables produced by the U.S. Census Bureau that was based on the 2019-2023 ACS five-year estimates.

Return on Investment (ROI) analyses utilized earnings and net price data sourced from the College Futures Foundation, "Golden Returns" and "4-Year California Mobility Index" project in conjunction with enrollment data from NCES IPEDS.



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