

TENNESSEE COLLEGE GOING & THE CLASS OF 2022: CONTINUING MOMENTUM



THEC  TSAC

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Executive Summary

Following the release of the *College Going and the Class of 2021* report, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (THEC/TSAC) launched Momentum Year 2023 to articulate and renew the value of higher education in Tennessee, to increase college enrollment, and to use this year as a learning year to set the foundation for a long-term vision for access and attainment in our state.

College-going rate indicates the portion of public high school graduates who seamlessly enroll (i.e., immediately after high school) in postsecondary education. This year's college-going rate report focuses on the class of 2022, a class who graduated and matriculated into college before Momentum Year was enacted. Still, college going is up for the class of 2022 one and a half percentage points over the class of 2021, for a statewide college-going rate of 54.3% (**Figure 3**). This represents the largest statewide increase since the implementation of Tennessee Promise.

College going for the class of 2022 is up across all race and gender pairs. However, these increases are not evenly distributed (**Figure 7**). Black or African American students of both genders, Hispanic/Latino females, and White males saw growth in college-going rates above the statewide growth of one and a half percentage points. Meanwhile, growth for White females, Hispanic/Latino males, and students of either gender in the "Other" race category was smaller than the statewide growth. Pronounced growth for traditionally underrepresented student groups shows great promise toward closing the equity gaps in college going in Tennessee.

In response to feedback last year, this report examines a college-going rate for students who were found to be verified participants in the Dual Enrollment Grant, a state scholarship that funds high school students taking college-level coursework while enrolled in high school. Students who were found to have participated in the Dual Enrollment Grant at any point in their high school career were found to have consistently higher college-going rates than their full high school graduating cohort (**Table 3**).

The proportion of the class of 2022 enrolling at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) and at the Locally Governed Institutions (LGIs) increased compared to the previous class (**Figure 11**). Additionally, the class of 2022 has an increased share of enrollments at out-of-state public institutions compared to previous cohorts (**Figure 12**).

This report includes a new section analyzing the labor market outcomes of high school graduates in the class of 2021. Graduating into a strong labor market, many speculated that students traded the immediate value of high entry-level wages for the longer-term value of a postsecondary education. This analysis finds a small portion of class of 2021 graduates in the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Unemployment Insurance (UI) data. For students found in the UI data, those who were earning high wages had a lower college-going rate than the cohort average, suggesting that some students did in fact trade off education for work (**Table 4**).

The report closes with an update on Momentum Year 2023 efforts, namely those aimed at preventing summer melt, a phenomenon where students who intend to enroll in college "melt" away following high school graduation and ultimately do not enroll. Working together, stakeholders across the state are implementing efforts to prevent summer melt and ensure students are equipped to matriculate in postsecondary education and succeed in earning a credential.

Privacy Notice

Throughout this report, THEC complies with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements to protect students' personally identifiable information. Therefore, when tables are presented, individual observations containing fewer than ten observations are suppressed. The suppressed counts are included in table totals. All cases in which observations are suppressed are identified with a note directly beneath the respective table.

Momentum Year 2023

In May 2022, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (THEC/TSAC) released *College Going and the Class of 2021*, the inaugural report on college-going data in Tennessee which showed sharp declines in postsecondary enrollment for students graduating high school and steep inequalities between race and gender groups. Next, THEC engaged in discussions with a variety of audiences, sharing this data widely and gathering feedback. THEC realized that no single solution would solve the challenge revealed in the college-going data. Instead, to build momentum and work toward a strategy, THEC/TSAC launched Momentum Year 2023, kicking off with a statewide convening of higher education stakeholders to discuss access and completion efforts across the state. This momentum-building year aims to clearly communicate the value of higher education and variety of educational paths available to all Tennesseans, to increase enrollment in postsecondary education, and to set the foundation for a long-term vision for access and attainment in our state.

At the launch of Momentum Year 2023, THEC announced three big goals:

1. Increase the college-going rate for the high school class of 2023 to at least 60 percent.
2. Increase adult enrollment in higher education through Tennessee Reconnect participation.
3. Improve coordination and alignment in education and workforce training to ensure students have portable and stackable options for greater economic mobility.

October kicked off THEC and TSAC's annual [TN FAFSA Challenge](#), an effort to increase the completion rate of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by Tennessee students, and a series of regional convenings. These regional convenings were held in eight locations across the state over four weeks and involved stakeholders across the K-12 and postsecondary spectrum to examine local college-going data, to communicate Momentum Year goals, and to share best practices in college access and completion from their communities. From these regional meetings, THEC gathered feedback about these best practices, as well as challenges facing local practitioners in improving college-going rates.

When asked, *"What promising practices do you see in your community and/or organization that could have a broader statewide impact"*, attendees identified four broad categories:

- 1. Direct Student Supports:** This was the most common promising practice area identified; examples of direct student supports include counseling/advising, mentoring, college transition events, FAFSA events, and existing college access programs such as Advise TN and Tennessee Reconnect. Some respondents cited the importance of serving specific populations such as veterans, adult learners, or undocumented students. THEC/TSAC's Outreach Team offers one-on-one assistance to students addressing FAFSA issues, including targeted outreach to ensure their FAFSA is submitted correctly. Community Colleges are increasing their direct student supports by bringing orientation and class registration to high school campuses, helping to ensure students are registered for classes and have holds removed before they cross the high school graduation stage.
- 2. Collaboration, Partnerships, and Alignment:** Practices in this category include community involvement; alignment between K-12, higher education, and workforce; TCAT partnerships;

and formal community-based collaboratives and networks. One example of a community-based collaboration is [Better Together](#), an effort between Metro Nashville Public Schools and Nashville State Community College to ensure a seamless transition for students from high school to enrollment at Nashville State.

3. **Curriculum:** Other promising practices could be categorized as curriculum, including dual enrollment, work-based learning, and embedded college access materials in existing course work. Many respondents noted specifically dual enrollment opportunities provided through partnerships with local Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology.

4. **Other:** Additional responses fell outside of the three categories listed above. These responses were often related to funding support, policy, communications, and data. Examples of promising practices highlighted in these responses include childcare grants for students and lower student-to-counselor ratios.

Attendees of the regional convenings were also asked about the needs in their community to promote the value of higher education and to increase college enrollment. Responses again fell into four broad categories:

1. **Direct Student Supports:** This category was again the most common response when asked about community needs. Commonly cited examples were early exposure to postsecondary options, increasing parent and family education about postsecondary options and involvement, and counseling/advising.

2. **Communications:** Needs for marketing, advertising, messaging, information dissemination, sharing best practices, and efforts to create college-going culture and increase college awareness were common needs. Several respondents mentioned a need for marketing and clear messaging campaigns to share information with students and families regarding postsecondary options. To that end, THEC/TSAC provided a set of Momentum Year 2023 materials which included a flyer on [Education Paths](#) and an [Education Value Messaging Guide](#).

3. **Collaboration, Partnerships, and Alignment:** Additional responses highlighted the need for better collaboration in their communities. Several respondents mentioned partnerships with business and higher education to provide workforce training as well as garnering community support to promote postsecondary education.

4. **Other:** Finally, responses included community needs in other areas, such as policy and funding supports.

Following these regional convenings, THEC/TSAC continued Momentum Year efforts through a series of stakeholder meetings and through the release of [Momentum Year communications](#) and [college-going rate data downloads](#). In November 2022, THEC announced a record-breaking number of applications (64,612) to Tennessee Promise from the graduating class of 2023. The FAFSA Frenzy continued through March 1, 2023. THEC/TSAC Outreach staff noted that this school year saw a return to normalcy following pandemic and related disruptions, with more in-person events and increased access to students on high school campuses during the school day. These efforts culminated in “Finish the FAFSA Week”, held February 20 – 24, 2023. This marketing campaign promoted FAFSA completion by Tennessee students and their parents, ensuring that families are not leaving crucial

financial aid dollars on the table. The FAFSA priority deadline, March 1, saw a 74.1% FAFSA completion rate among Tennessee Promise applicants, which is an increase over last year's rate that represents approximately 1,600 additional students who completed this crucial step in maintaining eligibility for Tennessee Promise.

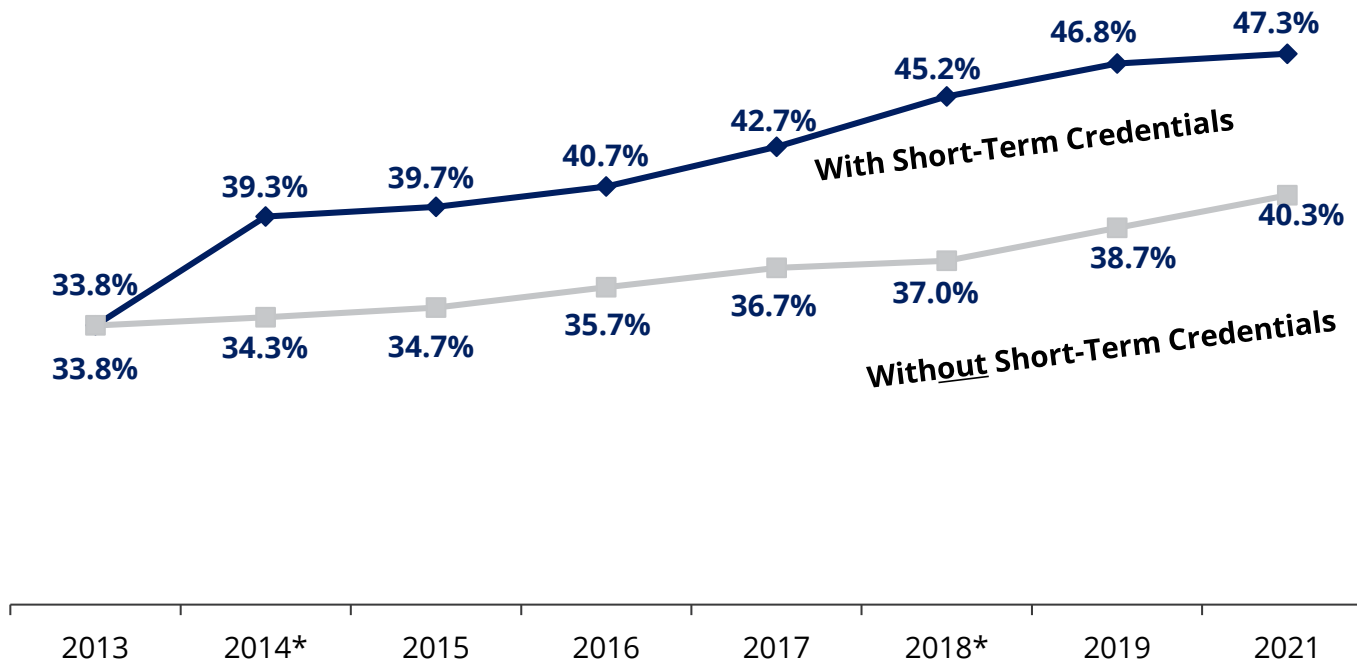
Efforts continue today to reach the Momentum Year 2023 goals. THEC's [Opportunity '23](#) social media toolkit and National College Decision Day campaigns encourage students to take key steps along their path to enrolling in postsecondary training. THEC/TSAC Outreach Specialists continue to work with students to solve FAFSA issues and have identified resources for students needing to complete FAFSA verification in their [Financial Aid Verification toolkit](#). Partnering organizations for the Tennessee Promise scholarship, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation, are working with their students to encourage enrollment, including efforts by tnAchieves to reconnect graduating seniors to their volunteer mentors this spring. Community colleges are holding enrollment events throughout the summer to assist students with applications, registration, and financial aid questions. Momentum Year 2023 has created space for new ideas; encouraged stronger relationships, especially those involving K-12 partners; and opened possibilities for new directions and goals in higher education in Tennessee.

This year's college-going rate report focuses on the high school graduating class of 2022. These are students who crossed the graduation stage just as last year's report was released and Tennessee began to look closely at the college-going gaps in our state. These are students who enrolled in postsecondary training just as we began to set the Momentum Year 2023 goals, and they showed up to campuses that were just beginning to return to fully normal operations following the COVID-19 pandemic. Excitingly, this report shows improvements in college going for the class of 2022. Given all the efforts by stakeholders across the state during Momentum Year 2023, we anticipate even more improvements to the state's college-going rate in the future.

High School Seniors and College Going

The Drive to 55 is the campaign to raise the proportion of Tennessee’s working-age population (ages 25-64) with a postsecondary credential to 55 percent by the year 2025.¹ High school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education are a core group whose postsecondary attainment is critical to reaching the goal. As of 2021, 47.3 percent of Tennesseans aged 25-64 had a postsecondary credential.² This attainment rate includes certificates and industry-recognized certifications that provide a wage premium when compared to individuals with a high school degree only. **Figure 1** shows the difference between an attainment rate that includes these short-term credentials and an attainment rate that measures the percentage of the population ages 25-64 that hold an associate degree or higher. While students in the high school class of 2022 will not reach age 25 by 2025, and thus will not impact the Drive to 55, their college going, as with other recent high school graduating classes, is critical to Tennessee’s long term attainment goals.

Figure 1: Tennessee Attainment Rate (Ages 25-64)



Note: 2014 and 2018 represent a methodological change, adding certificates and certifications, respectively, and are marked with an asterisk (*). These methodological changes affect the **blue** line only.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey and Lumina Foundation’s A Stronger Nation.

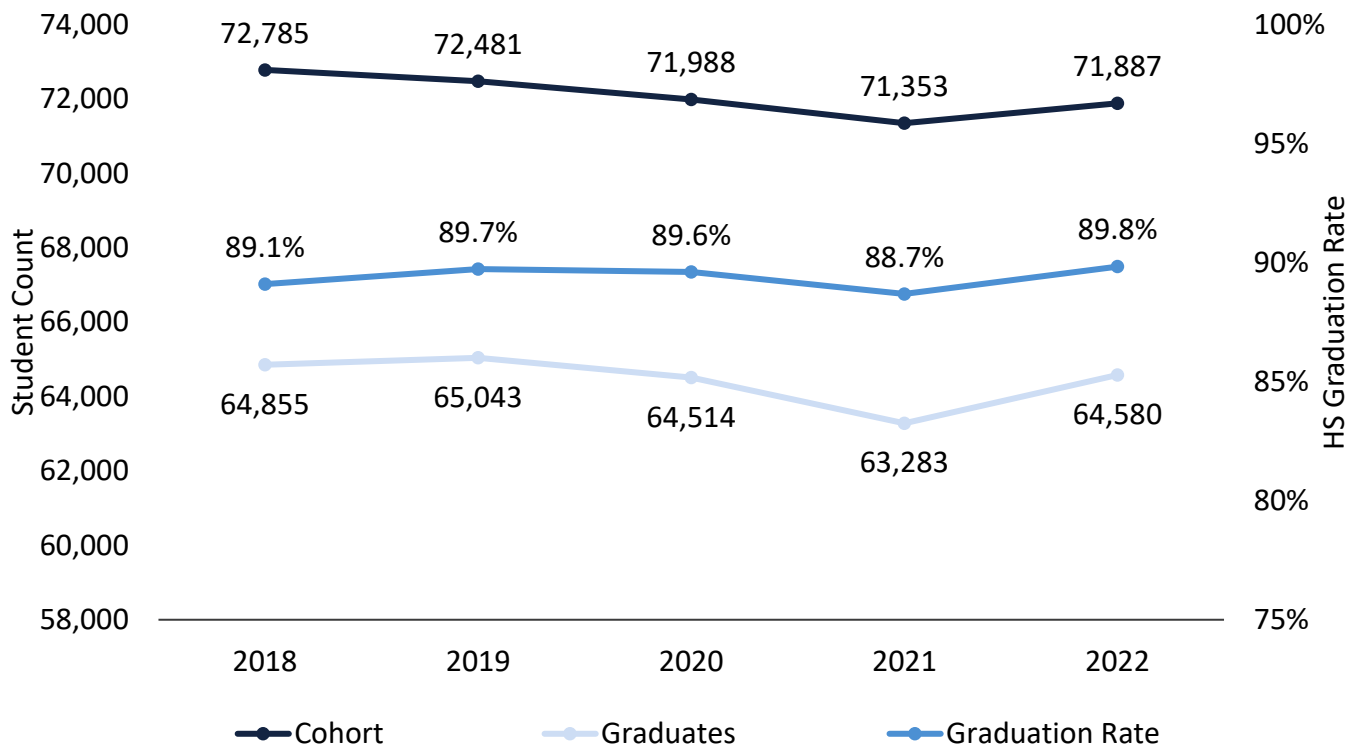
¹ For more information about the Drive to 55, see “Postsecondary Attainment in the Decade of Decision: The Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education, 2015-2025” at https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/master-plan/Master-Plan2025_0418.pdf.

² Data from the Lumina Foundation, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/#/progress/state/TN>; attainment rate includes short-term credentials, which encompass certifications and certificates.

Figure 2 shows cohort graduation rates from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). Graduation rates for the class of 2022 increased slightly to 89.8%. This is the highest graduation rate in the last five years. Notably, the size of the 2022 graduating class cohort increased slightly over the prior year but is still below the 2018 graduating class.³

The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education projects the number of public and private high school graduates across the United States as part of their [Knocking at the College Door](#) initiative. In December 2020, WICHE reported that the number of Tennessee public and private high school graduates would peak by 2026 due to shifting demographics and birth rates in the state and country.⁴ As we anticipate the number of high school graduates in the enrollment pipeline to decrease, ensuring that a higher proportion of those students enroll in postsecondary education and complete needed credentials will be a key part of realizing Tennessee’s attainment needs to fulfill workforce demand.

Figure 2: High School Graduation Cohorts, Graduates, and Graduation Rates



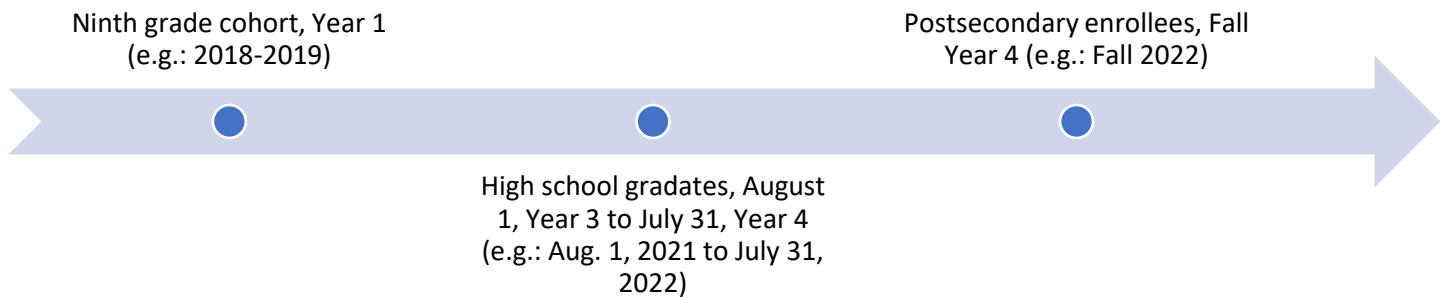
Note: Student counts are shown on the left vertical axis, and high school graduation rates are shown on the right vertical axis. For the class of 2022, 71,887 students made up the graduating class cohort, and 64,580 students graduated, yielding a graduation rate of 89.8%.

³ Statistics in this paragraph and figure 2 based on THEC calculations using data from the Tennessee Department of Education, <https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/federal-programs-and-oversight/data/data-downloads.html>. Graduation rate is based on the count of students in the ninth-grade cohort who earn a regular high school diploma or an alternate academic diploma on time (four years and a summer). For more detail, see the State Report Card technical document at <https://www.tn.gov/education/families/report-card.html>.

⁴ For more information on the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education’s graduate count projections, see <https://knocking.wiche.edu/data/knocking-10th-data/>.

College-Going Data and Methods

The college-going rate is a measure of the proportion of graduates in each high school cohort that seamlessly enroll in postsecondary education. More precisely, this metric counts public high school students in the Tennessee Department of Education’s (TDOE) ninth grade cohort who earn a regular high school diploma and enroll at a postsecondary institution the following summer or fall term after graduating high school.⁵ The THEC cohort of graduates is thus slightly smaller than the graduate cohort counts provided by TDOE. The THEC cohort measure excludes students who do not earn a regular diploma, meaning that students who earn alternate academic diplomas are not included. Using a cohort method is aligned with TDOE methods for calculating graduation rate; however, THEC’s high school graduate base does not include high school graduates who graduate more than a year before their anticipated graduation.⁶ Cohorts of high school graduates are referred to by their high school graduation year in this report. The process is shown below using the example of the class of 2022.



Notably, there are alternative paths through and after high school that students may take which are not captured by this college-going rate measure. Students who earn postsecondary credentials while in high school are not captured as college-going if they do not then go on to enroll in postsecondary after high school. Students who enter the military or who join Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeships are also not included due to a lack of data to track these post-high school outcomes.

⁵ Students who graduate high school early may also be found in college enrollment in earlier terms, such as a December graduate who enrolls in postsecondary in the following spring term. For more information on TDOE’s cohort methodology, see <https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/federal-programs-and-oversight/data/data-downloads.html>.

⁶ High school graduates included in THEC’s college-going base include winter, spring, and summer graduates in cohort’s fourth (or senior) year. THEC and TDOE data services staff are in ongoing discussion to ensure consistency between organizations for this measure.

Data Sources and Notes

The data in this section were sourced from the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (also known as P20 Connect), the National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker (NSC), and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s Student Information System (THECSIS). High school graduate data, from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) is pulled from P20 Connect and matched to enrollment data from THECSIS and NSC to present a complete picture of public high school graduates’ enrollment behaviors, whether they enrolled in-state or out-of-state, at public or private institutions. Throughout this report, demographic groups are aligned with TDOE reporting and are not necessarily comparable to other THEC reporting.

College Going in Tennessee

Figure 3 presents the overall college-going rate of Tennessee’s public high school graduates over the last decade. For the high school class of 2022, the overall college-going rate increased one and a half percentage points from the prior class to 54.3%. **Table 1** shows counts of public high school graduates and postsecondary enrollees for the last decade. These counts of high school graduates utilize THEC’s cohort measure and thus differ from the TDOE graduation cohort counts for reasons clarified above.

The implementation of the Tennessee Promise program statewide is reflected in an increase in college-going rate from fall 2014 to fall 2015. Since that significant shift in the state’s higher education environment, college-going rate changes have been marginal, until the disruption of 2020. The one and a half percentage point increase in college going for the class of 2022 represents a significant improvement over prior years. This increase likely reflects a stabilization in college enrollment following the enrollment declines related to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, this increase also occurred before the Momentum Year interventions described above. This significant increase is a huge step forward toward meeting Momentum Year goals.

Figure 3: Statewide College-Going Rate

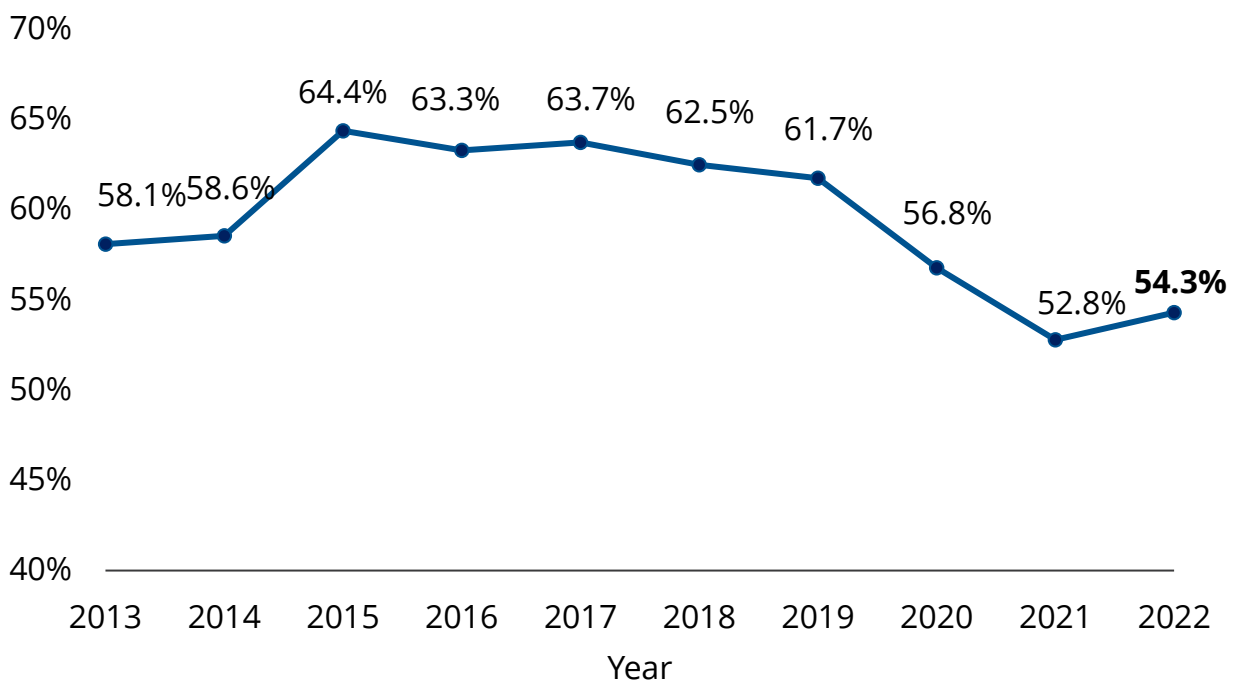
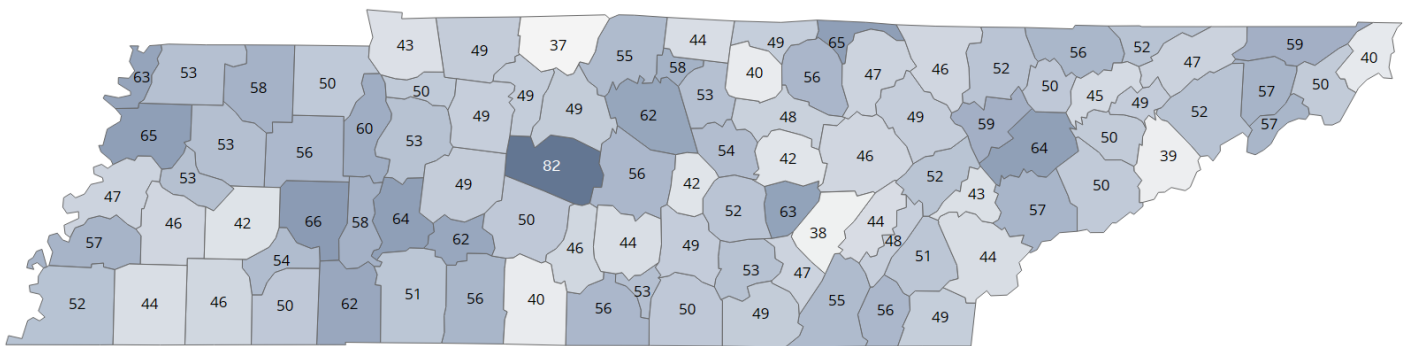


Table 1: Public High School Graduates and Postsecondary Enrollees

HS Class	Public HS Grads	Postsecondary Enrollees	College-Going Rate
2013	59,573	34,608	58.1%
2014	59,860	35,050	58.6%
2015	60,599	39,013	64.4%
2016	62,339	39,456	63.3%
2017	63,486	40,463	63.7%
2018	63,912	39,942	62.5%
2019	64,061	39,553	61.7%
2020	63,519	36,061	56.8%
2021	62,238	32,856	52.8%
2022	63,113	34,264	54.3%

Figure 4 shows a heat map of college-going rate by county for the class of 2022. Darker blue counties have a higher college-going rate, and lighter colored counties have a lower college-going rate. College going ranges from 37.2% in Robertson County to 81.6% in Williamson County. Sixty-four of Tennessee’s 95 counties have a college-going rate below the statewide rate of 54.3% for the class of 2022. More detailed data on college-going rate by county over the last five years is available in **Appendix A**, including counts of the high school graduating cohort to demonstrate the relative size of each county. In counties with a smaller number of high school graduates, a handful of students enrolling in postsecondary education can change the college-going rate by several points.

Figure 4: Class of 2022 College-Going Rate by County



Note: Numbers shown in each county represent county college-going rate (in %) for the class of 2022.

College Going by Student Demographics

Just as college-going rate varies by county, postsecondary enrollment behavior varies by gender and race. **Table 2** shows college-going rates by gender and by race for the class of 2022. Females have a higher college-going rate than males, but the gap between male and female college-going rates narrowed very slightly between the class of 2021 and the class of 2022. Students in the “Other” race category have the highest college-going rate, followed closely by White students. The “Other” race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races; students who identify as Asian or as Two or More races make up most of this category. Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino students enrolled in postsecondary at a much lower rate than the rest of their class.

These college-going rates represent a within-group rate, comparing students in a race or gender demographic with other students in the same demographic. Some groups are notably smaller in Tennessee. Historically and in the class of 2022, White students represent the largest share of college-going students, as well as the largest share of Tennessee’s overall high school graduates and postsecondary enrollment. **Table 2** reflects the sizes of these groups for the class of 2022. Over the 5-year period shown in subsequent figures, the share of high school graduates in the Hispanic/Latino and “Other” race categories has grown while the shares of Black or African American students and White students have decreased. The shares of male and female high school graduates have remained relatively stable over that time.

Table 2: College-Going Rates of Class of 2022 by Race, Gender, and Race-Gender Pairs

	Public HS Grads	College-Going Rate
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	31,524	48.3%
<i>Female</i>	31,588	60.2%
Race		
<i>Hispanic/Latino</i>	6,414	37.3%
<i>Black or African American</i>	12,630	46.9%
<i>White</i>	40,239	58.8%
<i>Other</i>	3,830	60.1%
Race-Gender		
<i>Male Hispanic/Latino</i>	3,248	30.9%
<i>Male Black or African American</i>	6,082	40.2%
<i>Female Hispanic/Latino</i>	3,166	43.9%
<i>Male White</i>	20,378	53.0%
<i>Female Black or African American</i>	6,548	53.1%
<i>Male Other</i>	1,816	54.8%
<i>Female Other</i>	2,014	64.7%
<i>Female White</i>	19,860	64.7%

Note: The “Other” race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.

Figure 7 compares college-going rates for the class of 2022 to rates for the class of 2021 and shows that college-going rate increased to different degrees for different race-gender pairs. Excitingly, college-going is up across all race-gender pairs, though the magnitude of this increase differs across groups. Black or African American students of both genders, Hispanic/Latino females, and White males saw growth in college-going rates above the statewide growth of one and a half percentage points. Meanwhile, growth for White females, Hispanic/Latino males, and students of either gender in the “Other” race category was smaller than the statewide growth rate. Smaller student groups may see more volatility in college-going rates over time, as those rates are based on a smaller number of high school graduates in that demographic group. However, pronounced growth for traditionally underrepresented student groups shows great promise toward closing the equity gaps in college going in Tennessee. These disparate growth rates also suggest additional opportunities to promote college going among Hispanic/Latino males, a small but growing group of students in Tennessee.

Figure 7: College-Going Rate Increases, 2021 to 2022, by Race-Gender Pairs

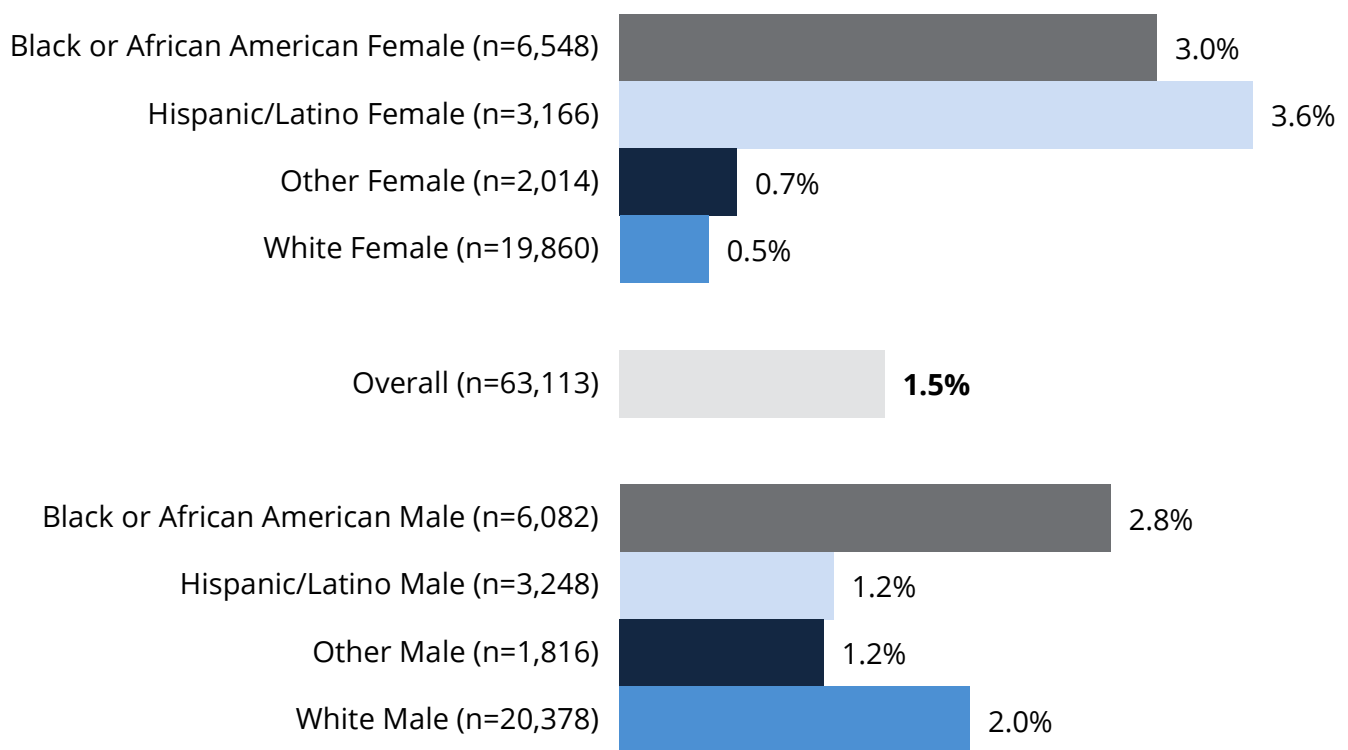


Figure 8 shows college-going rates over the last five years by gender. Females have consistently higher college-going rates than their male counterparts. The gap between female college going and male college going narrowed slightly for the class of 2022; the gap has decreased since 2020, when male college-going rates were 14.6 percentage points behind female college-rates. Despite narrowing the gap to 11.9 percentage points, male college-going rates still fall well below female rates.

Figure 8: College-Going Rates by Gender

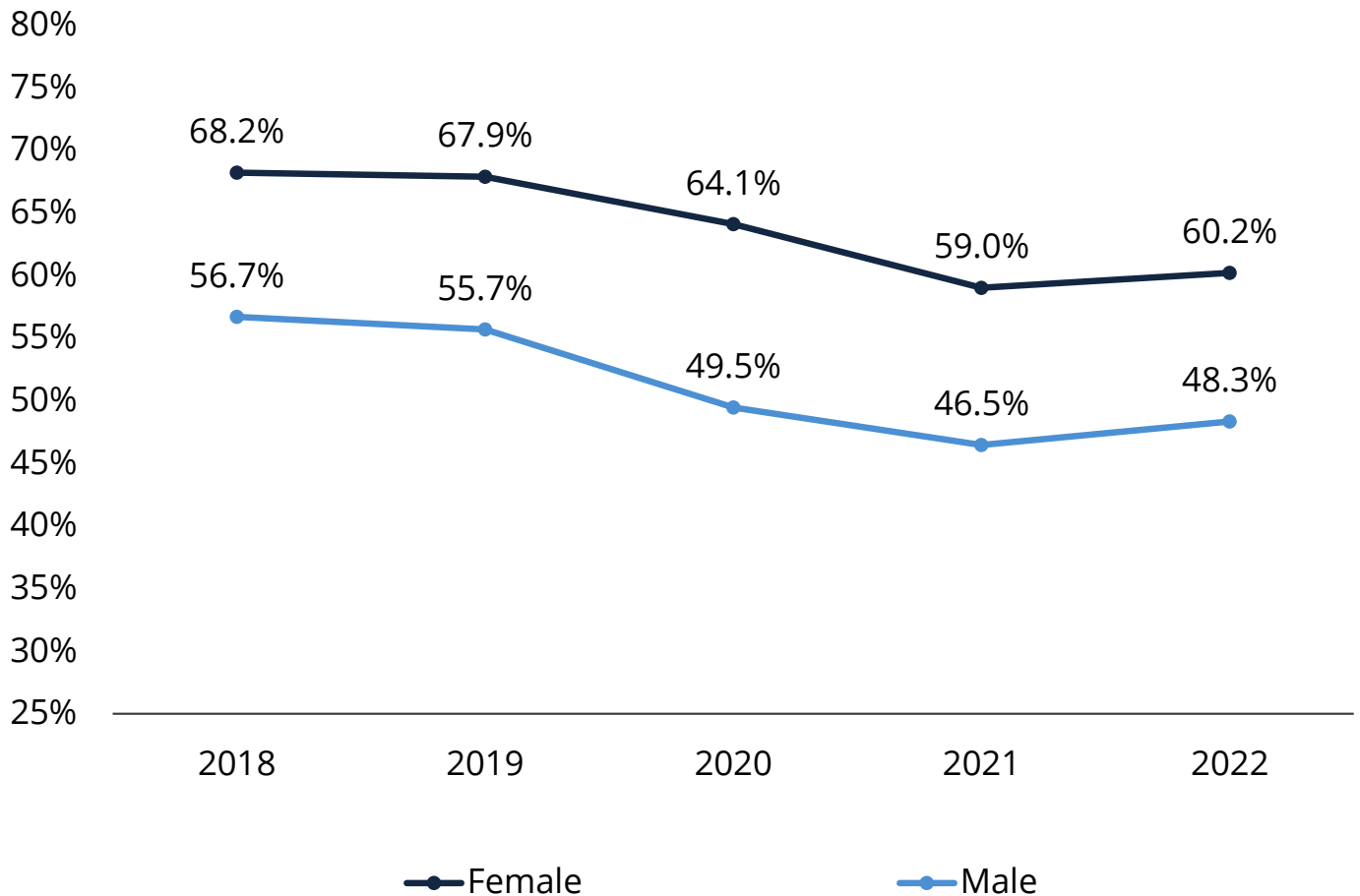
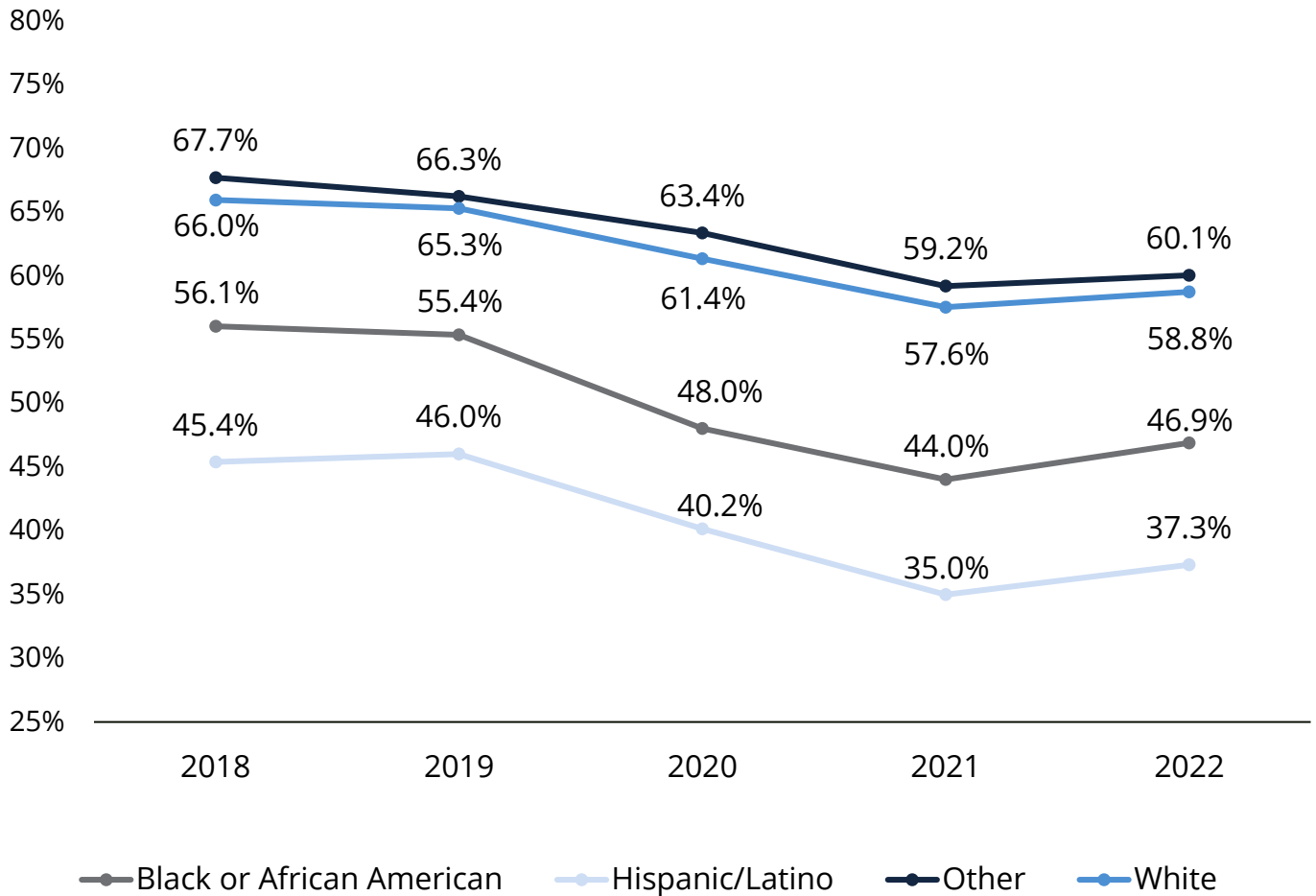


Figure 9 shows college-going rates over the last five years by race. Hispanic/Latino students have the lowest college-going rates, while students in the “Other” race category have the highest college-going rates. The gap between White students’ college-going rate and the college-going rate of Black or African American students narrowed for the class of 2022 compared to the class of 2021, as did the gap between the college-going rates of White students compared to Hispanic/Latino students.

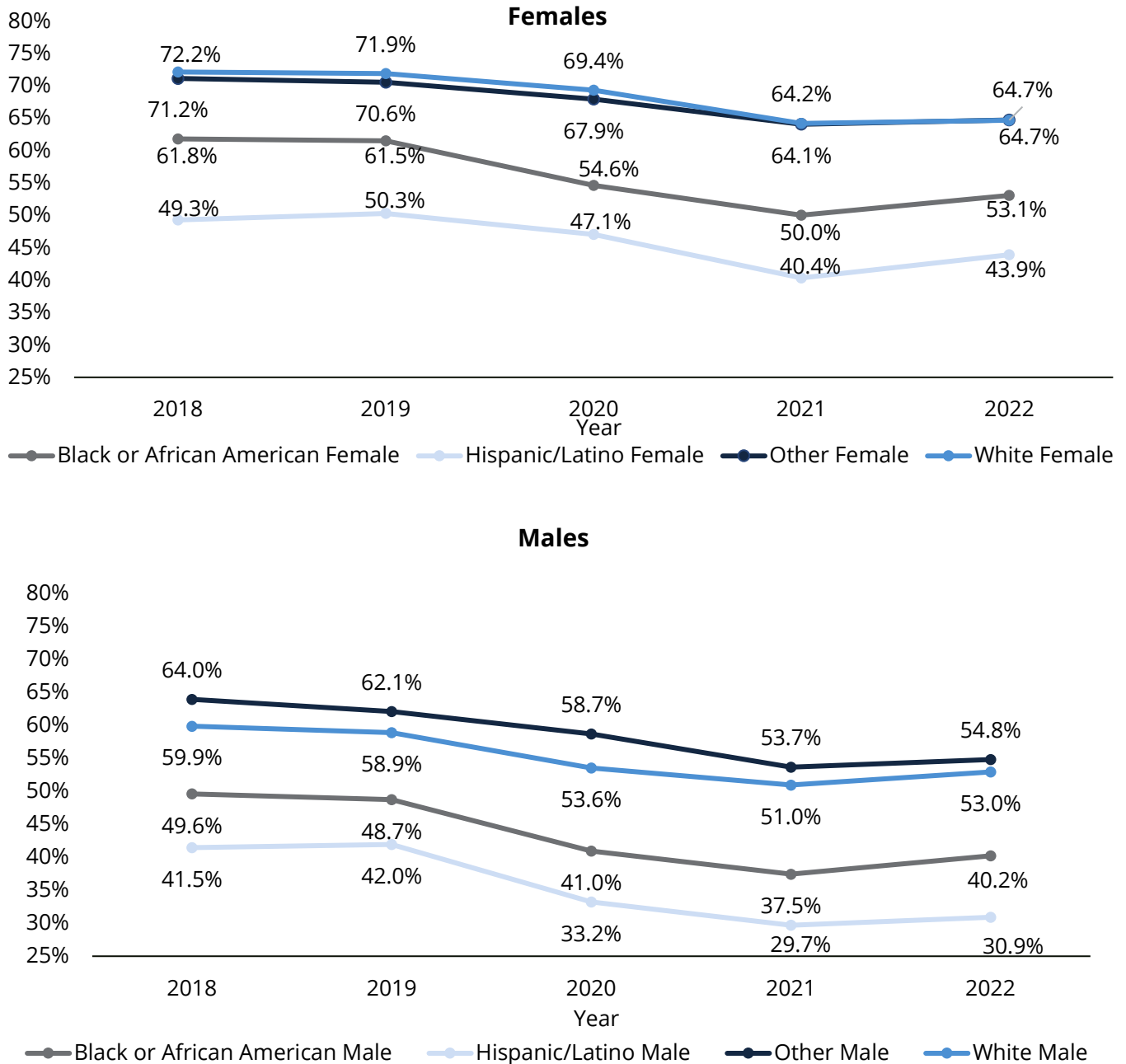
Figure 9: College-Going Rates by Race



Note: The “Other” race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races. Here and throughout the college-going data, demographic groups are aligned with Tennessee Department of Education reporting and are not necessarily comparable to other THEC reporting.

Figure 10 shows college-going rates by race-gender pairs for the last five years. Female students by race are shown in the top graph, while male students by race are shown in the bottom graph. White females and females in the “Other” race category have similar college-going rates while “Other” males have slightly higher college-going rates than White males. Further, the gap between female and male college-going rates for students of the same race are particularly pronounced.⁷

Figure 10: College-Going Rates by Race-Gender Pairs



Note: The “Other” race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.

⁷ For more on THEC’s work to increase postsecondary attainment for Black Male students in Tennessee, see the Black Male Success Initiative Taskforce Report at <https://www.tn.gov/thecc/bureaus/academic-affairs/bmsi.html>.

Additional Influences on College Going

Along with race and gender, a multitude of other factors impact a student's decision to enroll in postsecondary education following their high school graduation. In response to feedback from the previous iteration of this report, there are three such factors added for consideration in this year's report: family income, dual enrollment and other early postsecondary opportunity (EPSO) participation, and the broader economic outlook for workers in this state.

First, much feedback on the previous iteration of this report centered on the need to measure college-going rates by socioeconomic status. Possible measures here include family income, participation in federal free and reduced-price lunch programs, or other indicators of economic disadvantage. However, due to privacy restrictions and the sensitive nature of this data, an economic indicator was not available to examine college-going rates for this report. Future iterations of the report will seek inclusion of this data or consider alternative approaches to measuring a student's economic background.

Second, literature suggests that participation in EPSOs positively impacts college-going rates. Exposure to opportunities to take college-level coursework in high school gives students a chance to see themselves in a college-setting; these opportunities include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge International, dual credit, dual enrollment courses, industry certifications, and college level examination program or CLEP.⁸ Additionally, these opportunities may include opportunities to earn a credential while in high school; as noted above, students who earn a credential in high school and do not go on to pursue any additional postsecondary training immediately after are not included as college-going in this report.

TSAC administers Tennessee's financial aid programs, including the Dual Enrollment Grant (DEG).⁹ Using THEC/TSAC data, **Table 3** shows the count of students and proportion of each high school graduating class that was found to have received the Dual Enrollment Grant at any time in their high school career, as well as the college-going rate for those dual enrollment grantees. Participation in the Dual Enrollment Grant has increased over time, though students in the classes of 2021 and 2022 participated at slightly lower rates, a likely effect of the pandemic. College-going rates for students who received a Dual Enrollment Grant are notably higher than the state average. Over a quarter of the class of 2022 participated in the Dual Enrollment Grant at some point in their high school careers, and those students went on to enroll in postsecondary education at 78.4%, much higher than the college-going rate of the full cohort. While this investigation faces data limitations, as not all EPSO participation is included, the descriptive findings suggest that EPSO participation may increase a student's likelihood of postsecondary enrollment. Additional research may move beyond the descriptive and consider factors like student academic preparation – as those who are more likely to participate in EPSOs may also tend to be higher achieving students who are more likely to enroll in postsecondary.

⁸ Tennessee Department of Education, Early Postsecondary Opportunities, <https://www.tn.gov/education/students/early-postsecondary.html> (accessed May 16, 2023)

⁹ Dual Enrollment Grant records from the Financial Aid System of Tennessee (FAST) were matched to enrollment records in THECSIS to confirm which students in each THEC cohort of high school graduates participated in the dual enrollment grant at any point in their high school years. This is an undercount of dual enrollment participation and of EPSO participation more generally, as not all students who take dual enrollment courses receive the state Dual Enrollment Grant, and not all EPSO participants take dual enrollment courses. For more information about the Dual Enrollment Grant, see <https://www.collegefortn.org/dualenrollment/>.

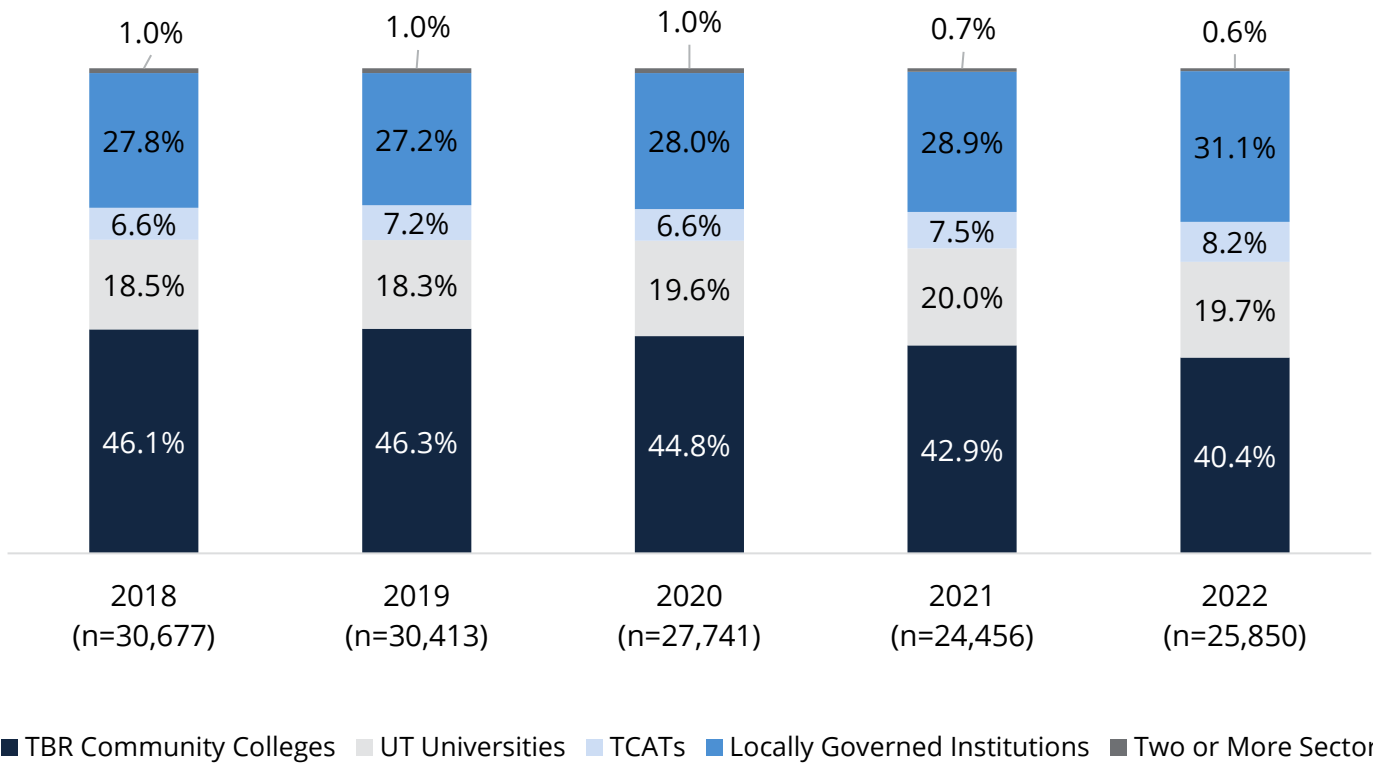
Table 3: College-Going Rate for Dual Enrollment Grantees

HS Graduating Class	Dual Enrollment Grantees	DEG College-Going Rate	Full Cohort College-Going Rate
2018	17,623 (27.6%)	85.2%	62.5%
2019	18,818 (29.4%)	82.6%	61.7%
2020	19,244 (30.3%)	79.4%	56.8%
2021	17,542 (28.2%)	78.1%	52.8%
2022	17,729 (28.1%)	78.4%	54.3%

College Going by Sector

Figure 11 shows the distribution of college-going public high school graduates who enroll in Tennessee’s public institutions by system. This is a subset of all postsecondary enrollees. A smaller portion of the class of 2022 enrolled at Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) community colleges than previous cohorts, a trend continuing over time. The proportion of the class of 2022 enrolling at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) and at the Locally Governed Institutions (LGIs) increased compared to the previous class. Continued TCAT growth likely reflects statewide efforts to invest in these institutions through historic state appropriations and through initiatives like the Governor’s Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE). In the LGI sector, five of the six Locally Governed Institutions saw growth in their first-time freshmen enrollment for fall 2022, including explosive growth at Tennessee State University.

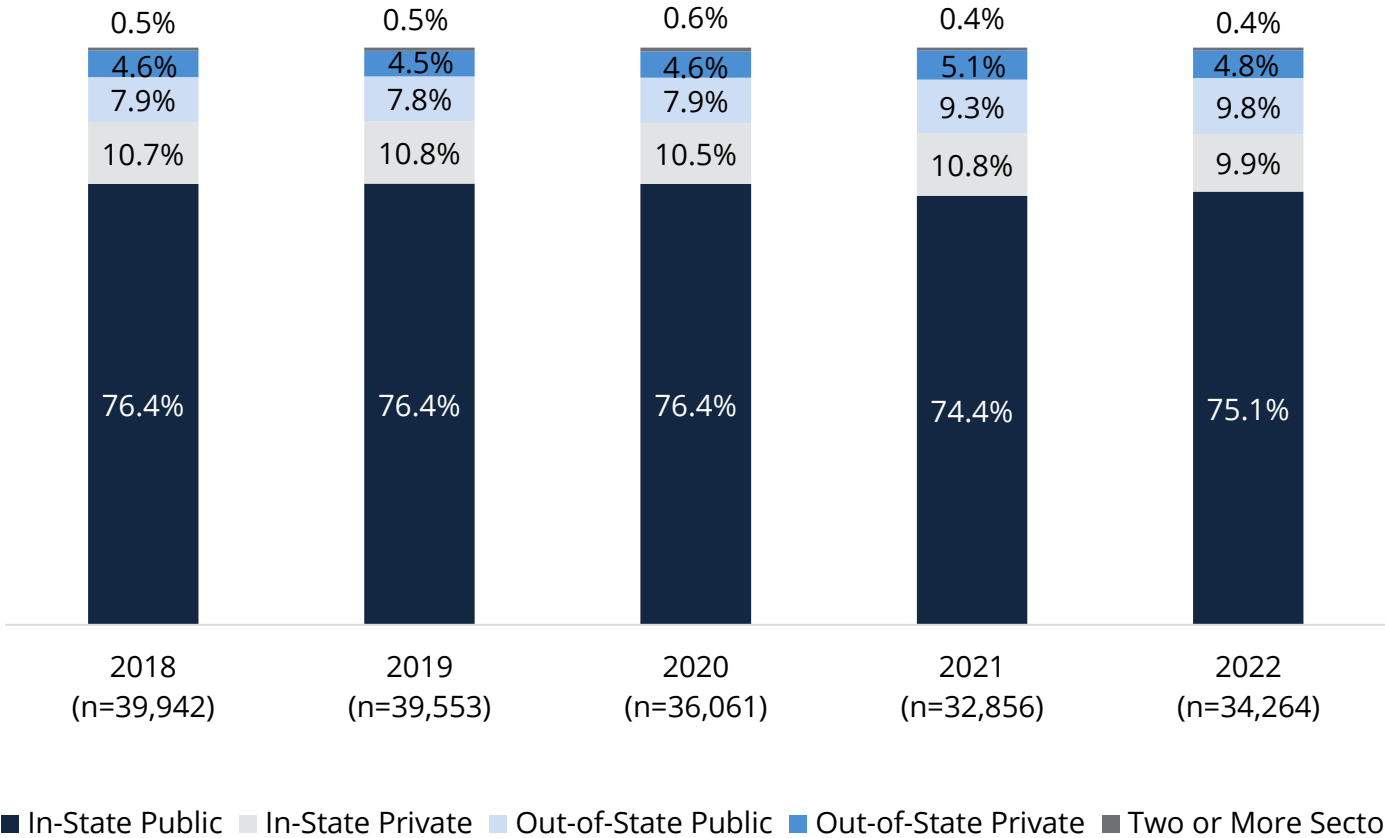
Figure 11: Public In-State High School Graduate Enrollment by System



Note: The classes of 2021 and 2022 include UT Southern in the UT Universities proportion.

Figure 12 shows the distribution of college-going public high school graduates who enroll in any college according to their sector of enrollment. While the majority of students enroll at in-state public institutions, the class of 2022 has an increased share of enrollments at out-of-state public institutions compared to previous cohorts. Enrollment at private institutions, both in- and out-of-state, saw slight declines in the proportion of college goers.

Figure 12: Public In-State High School Graduate Enrollment by Sector



Note: The classes of 2021 and 2022 include UT Southern in the In-State Public proportion.

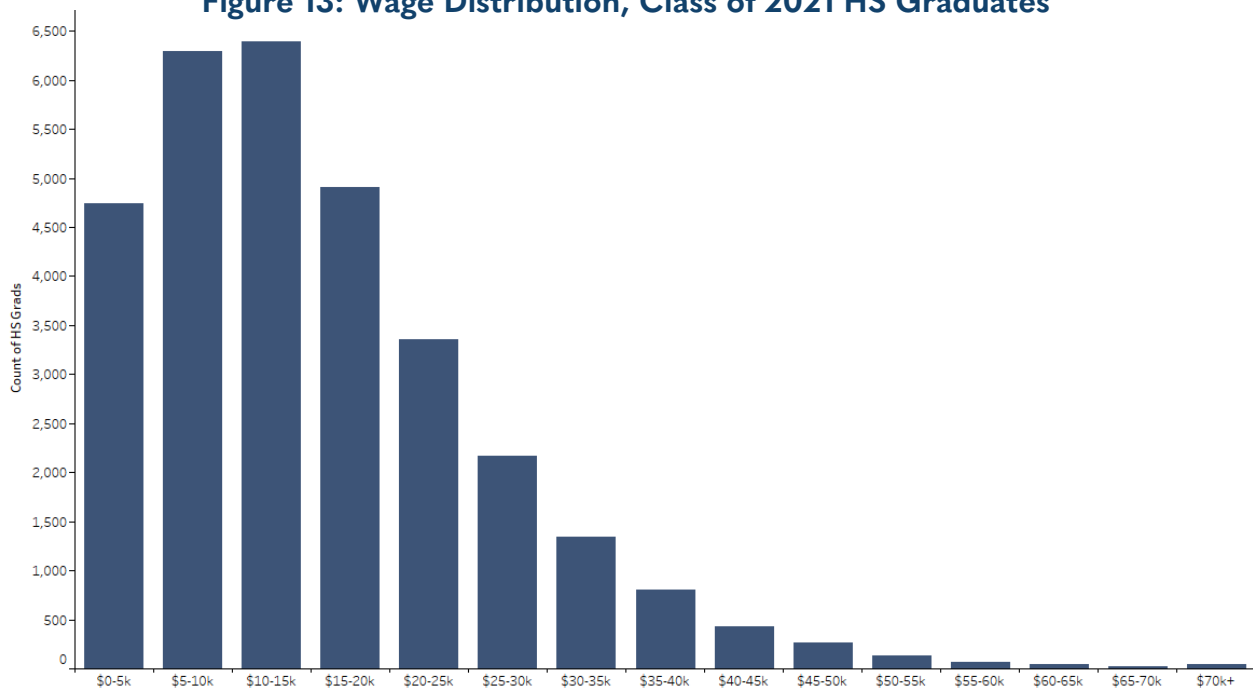
Class of 2021 Labor Market Outcomes

Economic conditions presented to high school graduates certainly impact their college-going decisions. When the class of 2021 graduated, there was a labor shortage and employers advertised high starting wages for entry-level work. These short-term economic gains are often considered by students when weighing the trade-off of furthering their education. Many speculated that students were opting to enter the workforce instead of enrolling in college.¹⁰

To better understand this issue, data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) was merged with college-going data for the class of 2021 to better understand how those students who entered the workforce, instead of enrolling in college, fared. For more information on the methodology used to calculate wage data, see **Appendix B**. To try to compare only full-time wages, graduates were separated into three groups: those for whom no wage data was found (either because they were not working or because they could not be matched into wage data), those for whom wage data was found but estimated annual wages were less than \$15,080, and those for whom wage data was found and earnings were above \$15,080 annually. The \$15,080 threshold approximates full-time work at minimum wage, where minimum wage is \$7.25/hour and full-time work is assumed to be 40 hours a week for 52 weeks in a year.

For the class of 2021, 50.2% of students were not found in the TDLWD wage data. These students with no wages had a college-going rate of 55.3%, slightly higher than the overall college-going rate for the class of 2021 (52.8%). Students may have no wages in the data for a variety of reasons, so definitive conclusions cannot be drawn about the college-going rate for these students. **Figure 13** shows the distribution of estimated annual wages for all students with wage data. From the 2021 cohort, 17,530 students, representing 28.2% of the 2021 cohort, were found to have wages below the \$15,080 annual threshold. These students with low wages have a 63.1% college-going rate suggesting they are more likely to be working part-time while enrolled in school.

Figure 13: Wage Distribution, Class of 2021 HS Graduates



¹⁰ See, for example, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/13/1072529477/more-than-1-million-fewer-students-are-in-college-the-lowest-enrollment-numbers->; CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/09/strong-job-market-is-causing-more-students-to-drop-out-of-college.html>; and Diverse Issues in Higher Education, <https://www.diverseeducation.com/students/article/15286161/gap-year-youth-are-taking-advantage-of-a-temporarily-booming-job-market>.

Finally, 13,466 students (21.6% of the 2021 graduating cohort) were found with annual wages that met the \$15,080 minimum threshold. These students had a college-going rate of 33.4% and had a median annual wage of \$22,639, suggesting that students in the class of 2021 did choose the trade-off of higher wages rather than enrolling in postsecondary education. Additionally, wages for students who were enrolled in postsecondary had a median wage of \$24,107, while median wages for students who did not enroll were lower at \$20,244. These findings are summarized in **Table 4**. Overall, the low number of graduates who were found in wage data makes definitive conclusions hard to draw, but this descriptive analysis provides some evidence supporting the theory that students chose to enter the labor force due to high entry-level wages available.

Table 4: Wages of 2021 HS Graduates

Metric	No Wage Found	Low Wage, <\$15,080	High Wage, >\$15,080
Count (Proportion) of Class of 2021	31,242 (50.2%)	17,530 (28.2%)	13,466 (21.6%)
Overall CGR	55.3%	63.1%	33.4%
Median Wage for College-Goers	--	\$7,457	\$24,107
Median Wage for Non College-Goers	--	\$9,484	\$20,244

Conclusion

College-going data for the class of 2022 shows a promising reversal of recent declines; Tennessee's college-going rate increased to 54.3% (**Figure 3**). This represents the largest statewide increase in college-going rate since the implementation of Tennessee Promise, and this growth occurred before the Momentum Year interventions described in this report. Additionally, gaps between race and gender groups began to close, as some groups saw higher increases in college-going rate than the state's one and a half percentage point increase (**Figure 7**). These disparate growth rates also suggest additional opportunities to promote college going among Hispanic/Latino males, a small but growing group of students in Tennessee.

New analysis in this year's report shows that participants in the state's Dual Enrollment Grant are more likely than their cohort overall to seamlessly enroll in postsecondary education (**Table 3**). However, only about a quarter of high school graduates are found in FAST Dual Enrollment Grant records. This lack of data suggests that data quality can be improved to ensure we are able to comprehensively track participation in Dual Enrollment courses; additionally, expanded data could track participation and college going in other Early Postsecondary Opportunities. Future research may strengthen the ties between EPSO participation and college going, but descriptive analysis here suggests that Dual Enrollment Grant participation is correlated with higher rates of college going. This finding suggests that more students should have access to Dual Enrollment courses and other EPSOs as a means to promote college access. Recent expansions to the Dual Enrollment Grant should be applauded, but work remains to ensure that EPSO participation is equally accessible to all students across the state.

In October 2022, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (THEC/TSAC) launched Momentum Year 2023, bringing together college access, K-12, and system and institution professionals to discuss the college-going decline and collaborate around a shared vision for addressing this challenge. Through this work, Momentum Year 2023 was developed. THEC announced three big goals:

1. Increase the college-going rate for the high school class of 2023 to at least 60 percent.
2. Increase adult enrollment in higher education through Tennessee Reconnect participation.
3. Improve coordination and alignment in education and workforce training to ensure students have portable and stackable options for greater economic mobility.

In addition to the promising data shared here for the class of 2022, early indicators show that the class of 2023 is on a trajectory to sustain and potentially increase college-going rates. The class of 2023 had a record number of applicants to Tennessee Promise, higher than any previous cohort, and a high FAFSA completion rate at 74.1%. To convert these early steps to actual matriculation, THEC/TSAC and college access partners remain committed to Momentum Year 2023. Summer melt, an issue where 10-40% of college-intending students fail to enroll in college after summer break, is a focus area for intervention.¹¹ Strategies to mitigate summer melt include text message nudges to complete key tasks, exit surveys to document student intentions and current contact information, summer bridge pro-

¹¹ Estimate and many recommendations in this paragraph from the Harvard Center for Education Policy Research, Strategic Data Project Summer Melt Handbook, <https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/summer-melt-tools>.

¹² Summer Bridge Programs are programs offered by many universities and some community colleges, which occur in the summer between high school graduation and fall transition to college. They offer students accelerated, focused learning opportunities that can help better prepare them to succeed in college. For more on the tnAchieves Summer Bridge Program, see <https://tnachieves.org/summer-programs/bridge/>.

grams¹², and completion of college enrollment before high school graduation. Access organizations like GEAR UP TN, Advise TN, and tnAchieves utilize text messages to nudge students through the summer and stay in contact. The Ayers Foundation also aims to keep their counselors connected to students at least monthly. tnAchieves also offers a Summer Bridge Program at each community college campus for three weeks. Additionally, new state funding will ensure that Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the state will host summer bridge programming at their campuses starting in 2024. Finally, THEC/TSAC Outreach Specialists proactively reach out to Tennessee Promise students to correct FAFSA errors, and many community colleges across the state work with incoming students to address any application, registration, or financial aid issues well in advance of classes starting in the fall.

Looking beyond 2023, THEC/TSAC remain committed to increasing college-going rates as a key pillar of our relentless focus on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential. Next year, staff are preparing trainings on the upcoming changes to the FAFSA, as well as ongoing webinars for practitioners across a variety of college access and financial aid topics. Momentum Year 2023 has set important short-term goals but has also encouraged new thinking as Tennessee looks toward the future.

Appendix A: College-Going Rate by County, 2018 to 2022

County	HS Grads, c/o 2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Anderson	815	68.2%	66.2%	62.6%	57.0%	58.7%
Bedford	495	56.0%	48.5%	47.2%	44.7%	43.6%
Benton	136	59.9%	57.9%	51.0%	46.1%	59.6%
Bledsoe	99	63.5%	58.0%	41.7%	35.2%	38.4%
Blount	1,216	64.0%	61.7%	58.8%	54.1%	56.8%
Bradley	1,116	65.0%	65.2%	63.4%	59.1%	55.9%
Campbell	330	57.3%	56.5%	47.3%	46.9%	51.8%
Cannon	112	54.5%	59.5%	45.7%	42.0%	42.0%
Carroll	289	66.1%	63.8%	70.1%	50.5%	55.7%
Carter	551	57.8%	61.4%	57.3%	52.8%	49.5%
Cheatham	368	55.2%	58.1%	56.3%	46.0%	48.9%
Chester	173	53.6%	60.8%	59.0%	51.7%	54.3%
Claiborne	281	56.8%	61.2%	45.8%	50.7%	56.2%
Clay	74	62.9%	62.0%	60.3%	47.9%	48.6%
Cocke	336	49.6%	49.1%	40.2%	38.8%	39.0%
Coffee	563	55.2%	57.0%	52.2%	49.0%	49.0%
Crockett	175	59.7%	64.0%	56.8%	44.0%	53.1%
Cumberland	431	53.1%	53.0%	49.5%	42.1%	45.9%
Davidson	4,612	56.2%	56.9%	51.5%	46.7%	49.5%
Decatur	98	72.5%	78.9%	71.6%	76.1%	58.2%
DeKalb	163	41.8%	53.2%	50.3%	52.2%	54.0%
Dickson	540	57.6%	57.4%	57.6%	51.9%	48.5%
Dyer	398	67.2%	68.0%	66.1%	56.3%	64.6%
Fayette	158	47.1%	55.4%	45.7%	32.6%	43.7%
Fentress	164	56.5%	55.9%	51.8%	50.3%	47.0%
Franklin	325	58.0%	57.3%	56.6%	45.1%	50.5%
Gibson	558	66.7%	63.5%	57.7%	53.0%	53.4%
Giles	221	51.5%	48.2%	48.7%	44.3%	39.8%
Grainger	227	52.4%	56.5%	51.9%	35.9%	44.9%
Greene	655	57.5%	62.3%	57.5%	49.5%	52.2%
Grundy	118	58.8%	54.5%	56.7%	45.0%	52.5%
Hamblen	675	61.3%	64.3%	51.8%	51.2%	49.0%
Hamilton	2,727	63.7%	63.2%	59.5%	54.7%	54.8%
Hancock	65	50.0%	47.3%	53.6%	43.8%	52.3%
Hardeman	203	65.0%	55.1%	46.5%	43.9%	45.8%
Hardin	213	56.4%	51.0%	51.9%	51.3%	61.5%
Hawkins	482	58.2%	60.2%	51.5%	47.4%	47.3%
Haywood	170	59.6%	63.7%	51.4%	41.6%	45.9%
Henderson	318	72.2%	68.9%	65.0%	62.6%	66.0%
Henry	299	60.4%	68.9%	52.0%	47.1%	50.2%
Hickman	238	57.0%	66.0%	56.4%	48.9%	49.2%
Houston	68	53.5%	44.1%	40.7%	51.7%	50.0%
Humphreys	196	62.9%	63.6%	55.7%	51.1%	52.6%
Jackson	103	63.0%	50.0%	45.6%	44.3%	39.8%

College-Going Rate by County, 2018-2022 (continued)

County	HS Grads, c/o 2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Jefferson	442	60.9%	52.6%	44.6%	46.6%	49.5%
Johnson	205	64.5%	48.4%	58.5%	53.4%	40.5%
Knox	3,969	64.6%	61.6%	63.7%	59.5%	64.3%
Lake	43	58.5%	62.8%	48.8%	72.5%	62.8%
Lauderdale	219	53.5%	62.2%	47.3%	47.9%	47.0%
Lawrence	462	69.1%	66.5%	59.4%	53.9%	56.5%
Lewis	102	52.6%	57.8%	49.5%	45.5%	61.8%
Lincoln	327	62.0%	65.5%	59.8%	54.1%	56.0%
Loudon	491	60.6%	52.4%	53.9%	43.8%	43.2%
Macon	226	59.2%	56.7%	51.0%	50.0%	43.8%
Madison	758	59.8%	60.5%	54.1%	43.8%	42.3%
Marion	283	63.0%	50.6%	51.4%	45.9%	49.5%
Marshall	347	54.8%	55.7%	50.5%	49.5%	45.8%
Maury	755	62.3%	62.0%	51.6%	48.0%	50.3%
McMinn	417	56.2%	59.1%	50.2%	49.9%	51.1%
McNairy	334	68.3%	65.4%	55.0%	51.0%	50.3%
Meigs	116	55.7%	50.0%	47.7%	55.9%	48.3%
Monroe	432	45.1%	47.2%	42.7%	40.9%	44.0%
Montgomery	2,143	56.6%	53.7%	50.6%	45.4%	49.2%
Moore	77	67.6%	72.7%	80.4%	64.9%	53.2%
Morgan	217	57.7%	59.4%	49.6%	47.6%	48.8%
Obion	290	64.2%	66.4%	55.4%	57.9%	53.1%
Overton	204	67.7%	64.9%	58.3%	51.7%	56.4%
Perry	76	87.7%	85.5%	67.6%	75.5%	64.5%
Pickett	48	68.3%	66.7%	63.0%	73.8%	64.6%
Polk	154	49.7%	53.3%	53.7%	49.3%	48.7%
Putnam	808	63.5%	60.0%	53.0%	50.8%	47.6%
Rhea	286	55.8%	56.4%	54.2%	47.2%	44.1%
Roane	415	68.1%	57.6%	63.3%	52.5%	52.0%
Robertson	1,042	60.9%	58.2%	48.4%	41.4%	37.2%
Rutherford	3,827	64.6%	63.5%	59.4%	55.0%	56.1%
Scott	237	62.9%	59.1%	51.0%	57.4%	46.0%
Sequatchie	145	62.3%	56.9%	50.0%	54.8%	46.9%
Sevier	931	56.6%	58.6%	50.2%	48.7%	49.8%
Shelby	8,610	62.0%	60.0%	52.6%	49.2%	52.3%
Smith	181	60.4%	57.8%	54.1%	43.9%	53.0%
Stewart	163	54.5%	54.9%	43.6%	39.3%	42.9%
Sullivan	1,444	68.1%	71.8%	62.3%	61.5%	58.7%
Sumner	2,078	68.3%	65.3%	59.0%	53.9%	54.7%
Tipton	697	62.4%	64.3%	60.5%	57.4%	57.0%
Trousdale	81	76.9%	80.9%	58.5%	53.7%	58.0%
Unicoi	175	64.9%	62.7%	57.7%	62.5%	56.6%
Union	175	43.6%	43.9%	44.9%	34.6%	50.3%
Van Buren	52	55.4%	53.4%	52.7%	53.6%	63.5%

College-Going Rate by County, 2018-2022 (continued)

County	HS Grads, c/o 2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Warren	357	55.0%	60.5%	54.9%	52.6%	51.8%
Washington	1,254	64.5%	66.1%	61.8%	53.9%	57.2%
Wayne	162	71.4%	62.8%	56.8%	49.7%	51.2%
Weakley	242	67.9%	69.3%	60.5%	57.3%	57.9%
White	248	53.1%	46.6%	43.5%	40.5%	41.5%
Williamson	3,234	85.3%	84.9%	80.5%	81.3%	81.6%
Wilson	1,578	67.5%	66.7%	65.3%	62.5%	62.4%
Tennessee		62.5%	61.7%	56.8%	52.8%	54.3%
Statewide Public HS Grads		39,942	39,553	36,061	32,856	34,264
Statewide College Enrollees		63,912	64,061	63,519	62,238	63,113

Appendix B: Class of 2021 Wage Methodology

High school graduates were searched for in TDLWD’s unemployment insurance (UI) records in quarter four (Q4) of 2021 and quarter one (Q1) of 2022 following their high school graduation. UI data reflects wages earned by employers participating in Tennessee’s UI system. Notably, this excludes self-employed individuals, those employed by the federal government, and those who work outside of Tennessee (an exclusion which may particularly impact students living in border counties close to other states). Waiting two quarters from spring graduation gives graduates time to enter the workforce full-time or to enroll in college, which does not preclude a student from entering the workforce either full- or part-time. These Q4 and Q1 wages were summed and multiplied by two to determine an estimated yearly wage for class of 2021 high school graduates. Graduates must be found employed in Tennessee for two quarters to be included in the wage outcomes. Graduates found in only one quarter of wage data (n=7,174) are not included in annual wage estimates, and those students are included in the group for whom no wage data was found.

¹³ Quarter Four of 2022 represents October, November, and December 2022. Quarter One of 2023 represents January, February, and March of 2023.

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