MONITORING NEW JERSEY'S POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL USING THE NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE DATA SYSTEM

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NJSDS
New Jersey Statewide Data System

Abstract

In 2017, New Jersey set a goal to increase the proportion of state residents with a postsecondary credential to 65% by 2025. The initiative aims to strengthen the economy through increased access to postsecondary attainment for the state's working-age residents. This report, the second in a two-part series, utilizes data from the American Community Survey and the New Jersey Statewide Data System to provide a detailed analysis of the state's progress, covering trends in enrollment, persistence, and completion across demographics and institutions from 2010 to 2021. This report describes the efforts made and explores opportunities for increasing postsecondary educational attainment.

Executive Summary

New Jersey's 65 by 25 Initiative aims to ensure that 65% of the state's workforce will have a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025, thereby responding to the demand for a highly skilled workforce in the evolving job market. The initiative is a statewide effort, led by three state agencies, to strengthen New Jersey's economy through increased access to postsecondary attainment for its working-age residents. This report is the second in a two-part series and provides an in-depth descriptive analysis of the state's progress, drawing on data from the American Community Survey (ACS) and the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS), covering trends in enrollment, persistence, and completion across demographics and institutions from 2010 to 2021. It aims to offer a measurable framework for future monitoring by presenting a comprehensive narrative of the efforts made and continued opportunities in increasing postsecondary education attainment. For methodological details, please see the project overview and methodology section of the report and the appendix.

Postsecondary Education Progress

Enrollments

- **Bachelor's degree enrollments showed an upward trend, increasing by 30%** (from 38,281 in 2010 to 49,847 in 2021), while **associate degree enrollments declined** from 45,158 in 2010 to 26,728 in 2021.[1]
- **Overall first-time, degree-seeking postsecondary enrollments declined** by 12% from 88,044 in 2010 to 77,456 in 2021.[2]

Attainment

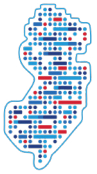
- **Postsecondary attainment increased by 8.2%, with an average annual growth of 0.7%**.[3]
- **In 2021, 53.4% of the population had attained postsecondary degrees**, leaving an attainment gap of about 12% to reach the 65% goal.[4]

[1] The source for these data is NJSDS.

[2] Ibid.

[3] The source for these data is the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

[4] Ibid.



Persistence

- **The retention rates of students persisting from fall to spring and fall to fall were 15% and 70%** on average, respectively.[5]
- **Overall dropout rates remained consistent at around 12% each year.** In 2019, 13% (7,600 students) did not return within five terms.[6]

Educational Equity and Demographics

Gender

- **Female enrollments and completions consistently exceeded male enrollments and completions by 5% to 6% and 12%,** respectively. In 2021, females comprised 56% and males comprised 44% of enrollments. Additionally, females comprised 57% of completions compared with 43% for males.[7]
- **Male students had higher dropout rates than female students** by approximately 6% to 8% each year.[8]

Race and Ethnicity

- **The gap in attainment levels between different racial and ethnic groups remains significant.** White students consistently comprised a majority of total enrollment and attainment rates compared to their peers, followed by Hispanic and Black students.[9]
- **White students reached attainment parity in 2015 and surpassed it in 2018, whereas Black and Hispanic working-age populations never reached parity**, with their distribution remaining almost flat over the years.[10]
- **Notably, Hispanic graduates saw a significant 130% increase in completions between 2010 and 2021**, rising from 6,907 to 15,885 completions.[11]
- **Over the decade, however, the dropout rate for Hispanic students consistently increased, while others remained relatively constant.** Between 2019 and 2020, dropout numbers for Hispanic students increased by 15%.[12]

Age

- **Young adults (ages 18 to 24) led in enrollment and completion rates,** comprising around 77% and 53%, on average, respectively.[13]

[5] The source for these data is NJSDS.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] The source for these data is the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

[11] The source for these data is NJSDS.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

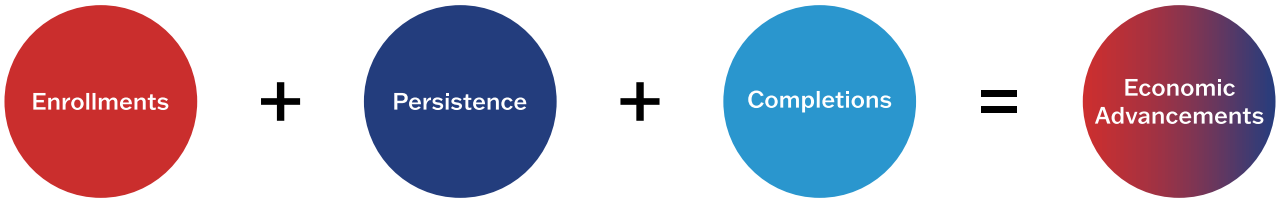
Introduction

New Jersey set a goal of increasing the proportion of its working-age population with a postsecondary credential to 65% by 2025. Rooted in the recognition of the evolving job market and the need for a highly skilled workforce, this initiative strives to enhance education and training beyond high school. To examine the state's progress toward this goal, this study delves into a detailed descriptive analysis of postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion within the state, contextualizing New Jersey's efforts within a nationwide push toward similar educational attainment goals.

New Jersey's 65 by 25 Initiative: Many Paths, One Future

In 2017, a statewide goal was initiated in New Jersey, aimed at increasing the percentage of residents aged 25 to 64 with a postsecondary degree or credential to 65% by 2025 (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education [OSHE], 2019). At the time of the initiative's launch, 51% of New Jersey's workforce possessed a bachelor's or associate degree, or a postsecondary employment certificate (OSHE, 2019).

This postsecondary credential attainment goal was established in response to the growing demand for a highly skilled workforce in a rapidly changing job market. It seeks to promote education and training beyond high school and to ensure that New Jersey residents have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the modern economy (OSHE, 2019).



Central to this initiative is the dual focus on improving college completion rates and adult enrollment, aiming to foster balanced economic growth within the state. Evidence shows that higher education enhances employment opportunities and earning potential (Irwin et al., 2023; Ma & Pender, 2023). Bachelor's degree holders, on average, earn substantially higher lifetime earnings compared with those with a high school diploma or associate degree. Moreover, they face lower unemployment rates, highlighting the significant economic advantages of pursuing higher education (Abel & Deitz, 2019).

To actualize this vision, New Jersey adopted a long-term strategy that concentrates on three pivotal areas for maximum impact:

- Increasing the college-going rate of high school graduates,
- Increasing the number of working-age adults enrolled through reengagement, and
- Increasing degree completion among all students by addressing disparities in high school graduation and college enrollment to ensure equity (OSHE, 2019).

In response to the 65 by 25 Initiative, New Jersey has launched several key higher education initiatives aimed at making postsecondary education more accessible and affordable for all residents. Notable among these are College Promise; the Basic Needs Resource Hub; the Some College, No Degree Initiative; and enhanced mental health support. Each of these initiatives, outlined among others in Table 1, is designed with specific aims, such as to reduce financial barriers to higher education, provide resources for basic needs, reengage residents who have not completed their degree, and address mental health concerns among college students. These efforts collectively work toward ensuring that more of New Jersey's residents

possess a postsecondary credential by 2025, reinforcing the state's commitment to a well-prepared workforce ready to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving economy (Sell, 2022). Table 1 does not reflect existing state programs in support of postsecondary enrollment and completion, such as the Educational Opportunity Fund and GEAR-UP programs.

Table 1: Summary of New Jersey's 65 by 25 Educational Initiatives

Initiative	Goal	Description
College Promise	Alleviates the financial burden of tuition and fees for eligible students based on income.	▸ Includes Community College Opportunity Grant and Garden State Guarantee. ▸ Has benefited over 70,000 students since 2019 (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2023, April 5).
Some College, No Degree	Reengages residents with some college experience but no degree, aiding in degree completion.	▸ Partners with ReUp Education, affecting over 790,000 residents. ▸ Since its inception in 2023, more than 2,800 students have reenrolled (OSHE, 2023).
Basic Needs Resource Hub	Provides essential resources to college students struggling to meet basic needs such as food, housing, childcare, and transportation.	▸ Targets basic needs insecurities, particularly among low-income students of color. ▸ Launched in 2023 as New Jersey's first-of-its-kind online platform for basic needs (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2023).
Mental Health Support	Expands mental health services on campuses to enhance student wellness and success.	▸ In 2023, the program was allocated $55 million. ▸ Establishes tele-mental-health services and community provider partnerships. ▸ Aims to improve the college experience and support student retention and success (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2023, October 19).
Career Accelerator Internship	Fosters practical training through internships in key industries to connect students with New Jersey employers.	▸ Offers funding to cover up to 50% of intern wages, maxing at $3,000 per student. ▸ Expanded in 2019, aligns educational outcomes with state economic needs, especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (New Jersey Office of Innovation, 2023).
Hunger-Free Grant	Addresses food insecurity on college campuses.	▸ Allocated $1 million in Governor's Emergency Education Relief II funding to provide grants to institutions for sustainable solutions to student hunger. ▸ Has expanded to include public and private institutions, aiding 50,000 students since its inception (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2022, November 12).
Adult Students in Transition	Supports children with disabilities for education, employment, and independent living.	▸ Enhanced post-COVID-19 with $4.5 million in funding for County College-Based Centers for Adult Transition, offering mentoring, job coaching, and skills training for students with disabilities (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2022, July 2).
Dual-Enrollment Grant Initiative	Expands dual-enrollment opportunities, particularly for underrepresented students.	▸ Launched in 2023 with $500,000 in funding, targeting high schools with at least 40% economically disadvantaged students and partnerships with higher education institutions (New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, October 10).
Mandatory Financial Aid Application for High School Graduation	Requires financial aid application completion for high school graduation.	▸ Enacted in January 2024, this bill mandates that 11th-grade students submit a financial aid application to graduate, aiming to make higher education more accessible and support the 65 by 25 Initiative (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2024, January 16).

The benefits of achieving the goals established by the 65 by 25 Initiative are numerous. For individual residents, having a postsecondary degree or credential can lead to better job opportunities, higher salaries, and improved job security (Simone et al., 2023). For businesses, a highly skilled workforce can increase productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth (Blank, 2022). For the state, the benefit is a stronger economy (OSHE, 2019). Additionally, higher education correlates with lower crime rates and greater civic participation, amplifying the social benefits (Batabyal, 2023; Ma & Pender, 2023). Higher education also enhances democratic engagement and community development, contributing to a cycle of prosperity that benefits future generations (Ma & Pender, 2023). Collectively, these benefits underscore the indispensable role of higher education in promoting individual and societal well-being.

Project Overview and Methodology

This report aims to establish measurable standards and assess progress toward the 65 by 25 initiative in New Jersey. Researchers employed data from ACS (one-year estimates) and NJSDS to analyze postsecondary education trends, attainment levels, college enrollment rates, and the population with some college but no degree within the state. The integration of ACS together with NJSDS results in a robust methodology to enhance the analysis and understand the nuances behind the public numbers.

This report describes the enrollment and attainment rates of New Jersey's working-age population who enrolled in or earned a postsecondary credential between 2010 and 2021. The analysis disaggregates data by **demographic characteristics**, including age, race, and gender, and **educational pathways**, such as degree level, major, and school type. Analyzing these differences among subgroups supports evidence related to the necessary strategies and investments to improve educational attainment by relevant stakeholders.

Following are the methodological details regarding each of the measures.

Enrollment: Enrollment encompasses the number of individuals who have enrolled at a credit-bearing postsecondary educational institution, from certificate programs and associate degrees through graduate degrees. For this analysis, these individuals are first-time,[14] degree-seeking[15] enrollees aiming to further their education. The cohort includes those who enrolled between the 2009–10 academic year and the 2020–21 academic year. This is used to identify and analyze enrollment patterns in New Jersey.

- **Total Postsecondary Education Enrollments:** Annual count of first-time enrollees in postsecondary education programs segmented by gender, race, ethnicity, degree level, and institution type.

Persistence: Persistence metrics track the overall progress and retention of students who enrolled in postsecondary education from fall 2010 to fall 2021. It evaluates:

- **Fall-to-Spring Persistence:** The number of students who continue their studies into the subsequent spring term.
- **Fall-to-Fall Persistence:** The number of students who reenroll in the following fall term, even if they skipped the spring term.

[14] First-Time Enrollee: A student who has not been previously enrolled at the institution at this degree level (either undergraduate or graduate) and who has no earned college credits. Includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term. Also includes students who entered with advanced standing (i.e., college credits earned before graduation from high school.)

[15] Degree-Seeking Enrollee: A student enrolled in courses for credit that are recognized by the institution as earning credit toward a degree or formal award.

- **Stopouts:** Total count of students who paused their studies for two or more terms before reenrolling and returning to their education.
- **Dropouts:** Total count of students who only enrolled for the initial term and did not continue in subsequent terms.

Attainment: Attainment or completion refers to the highest level of education successfully completed. This includes certificates (less than two-year degrees), associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, graduate certificates, doctoral degrees, or professional degrees.

- **Total Postsecondary Education Attainment:** Annual count of individuals who attained postsecondary degrees between the 2009–10 and the 2020–21 academic years, examined across various demographic and institutional dimensions, such as gender, race, ethnicity, degree level (certificates, associate, bachelor's, etc.), and institution type (public or private).

The combined use of ACS and NJSDS data enables a holistic view of postsecondary education trends in New Jersey. While a direct comparison between ACS and NJSDS data is not possible, this report explores this opportunity. Demographic breakdowns shed light on how attainment varies among different age groups, racial backgrounds, genders, and academic disciplines.

For more detailed information on data sources, specific data variables, data collection methods, and statistical analysis techniques, please refer to the appendix.

Results

This section provides insights into New Jersey's educational landscape, drawing from ACS and NJSDS. It offers the current snapshots, and the progress made over the years, setting the foundation for future metric tracking toward the 65 by 25 Initiative.

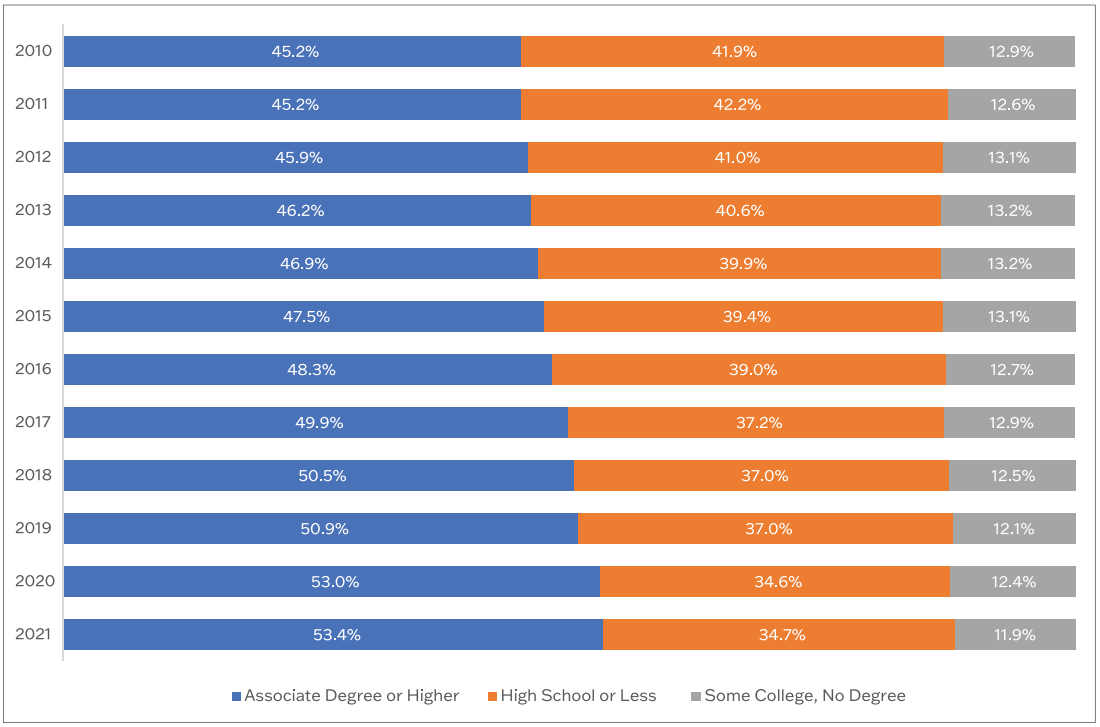
Readers should note that throughout the analysis, a decrease in overall numbers across all metrics observed in the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years may be attributed to COVID-19 pandemic-related impacts.

Current Landscape of Postsecondary Education Attainment in New Jersey

This section provides an overview of the current postsecondary education landscape in New Jersey, highlighting residents' educational levels over time and their changes. It includes a detailed look at how these levels differ by subgroup, underscoring potential inequities and areas for future growth. Additionally, this section focuses on equity in education by examining the educational attainment ratio among the working-age population between the 2010 and 2021 survey years.

The overall trend indicates a positive movement toward postsecondary educational attainment in the state. Between 2010 and 2021, attainment of associate or higher degrees grew over time in New Jersey by 8.2%. On a yearly basis, the average growth in associate or higher degree attainment was 0.7% (see Figure 1).

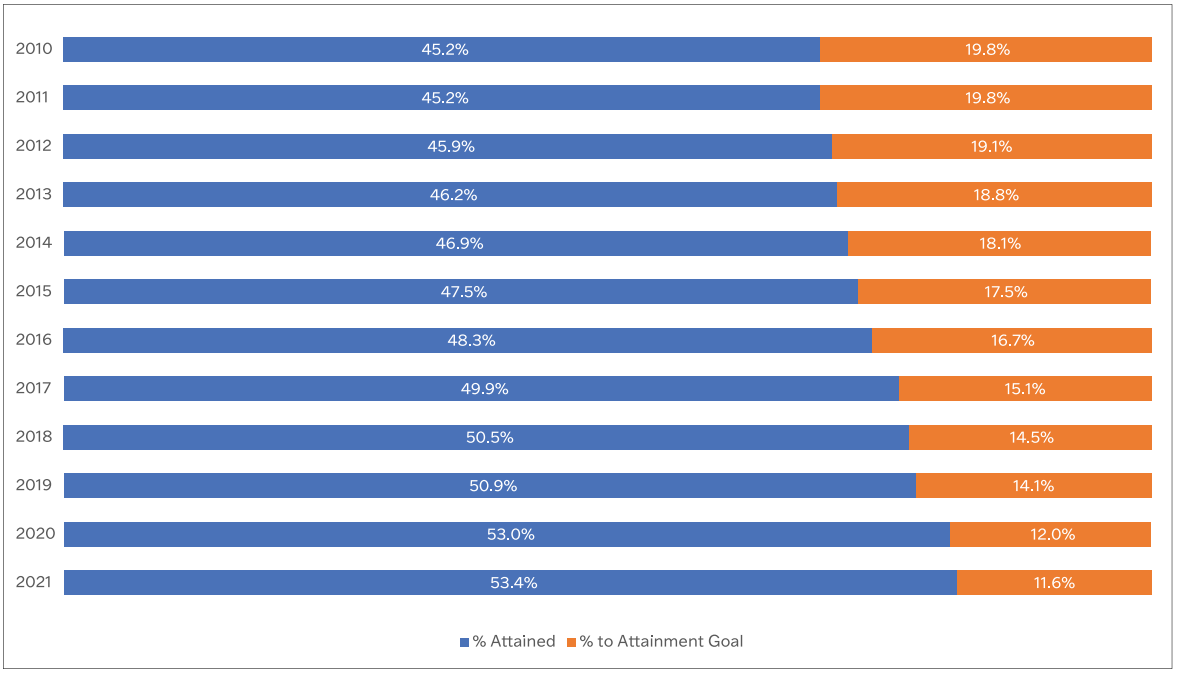
Figure 1: Degree Attainment Growth (2010 to 2021)



Data Source: ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

In 2021, 53.4% of the population attained degrees higher than a high school diploma, leaving an attainment gap of about 12% to reach the 65% goal. This does not include those with some college experience who did not earn a degree. To reach 65%, New Jersey will have to maintain 3% annual growth (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Degree Attainment Gap Between Students with Postsecondary Education (2010 to 2021)



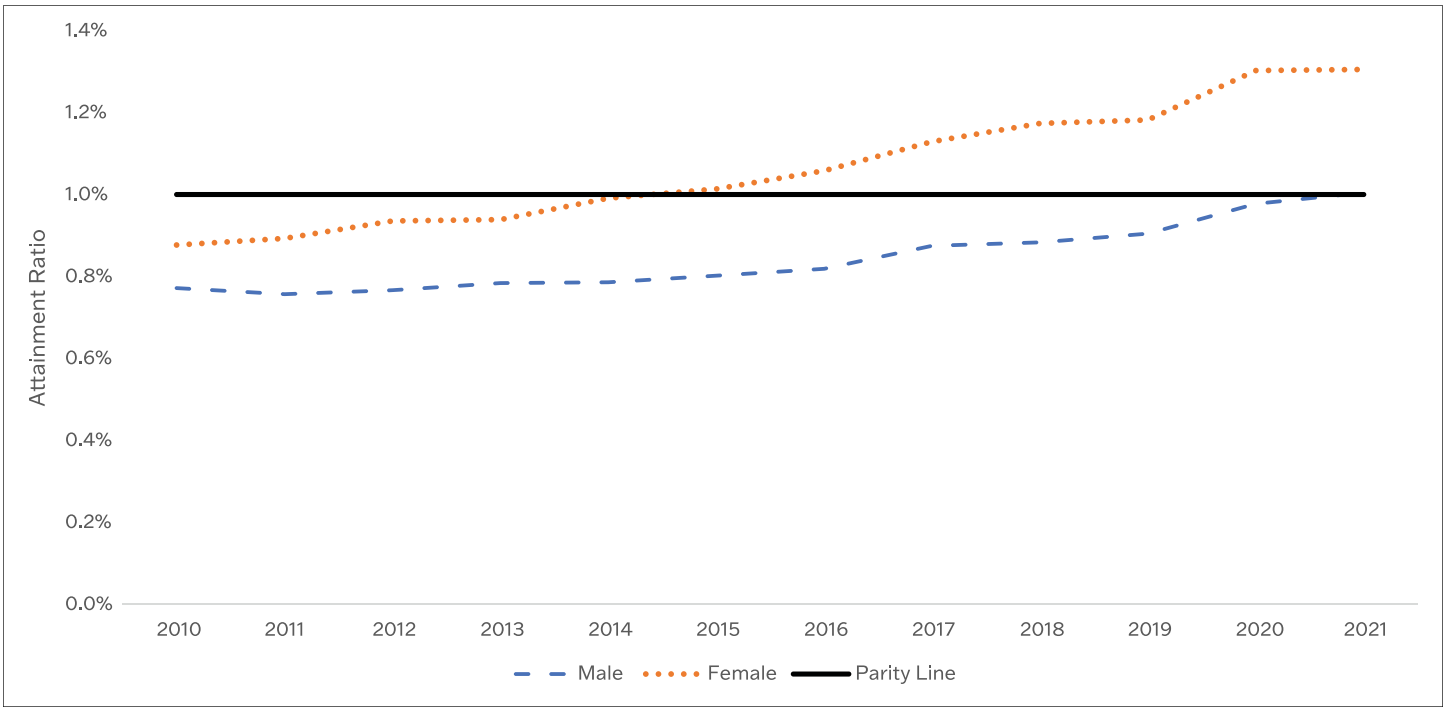
Data Source: ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

Equity in Education in New Jersey

The attainment ratio compares the proportion of the working-age population with an associate degree or higher to those with some college but no degree or less education. A ratio of one indicates parity, as indicated by the parity line in Figure 3, where the proportions are equal. A higher ratio means a greater proportion of individuals with an associate degree or higher, indicating better educational attainment. This development has been seen overall in New Jersey's working population since 2018.

Males reached parity in 2020, while females reached parity much earlier in 2014. In 2021, the proportion of females with an associate or higher degree far exceeded that of some college or less by 13% (see Figure 3).

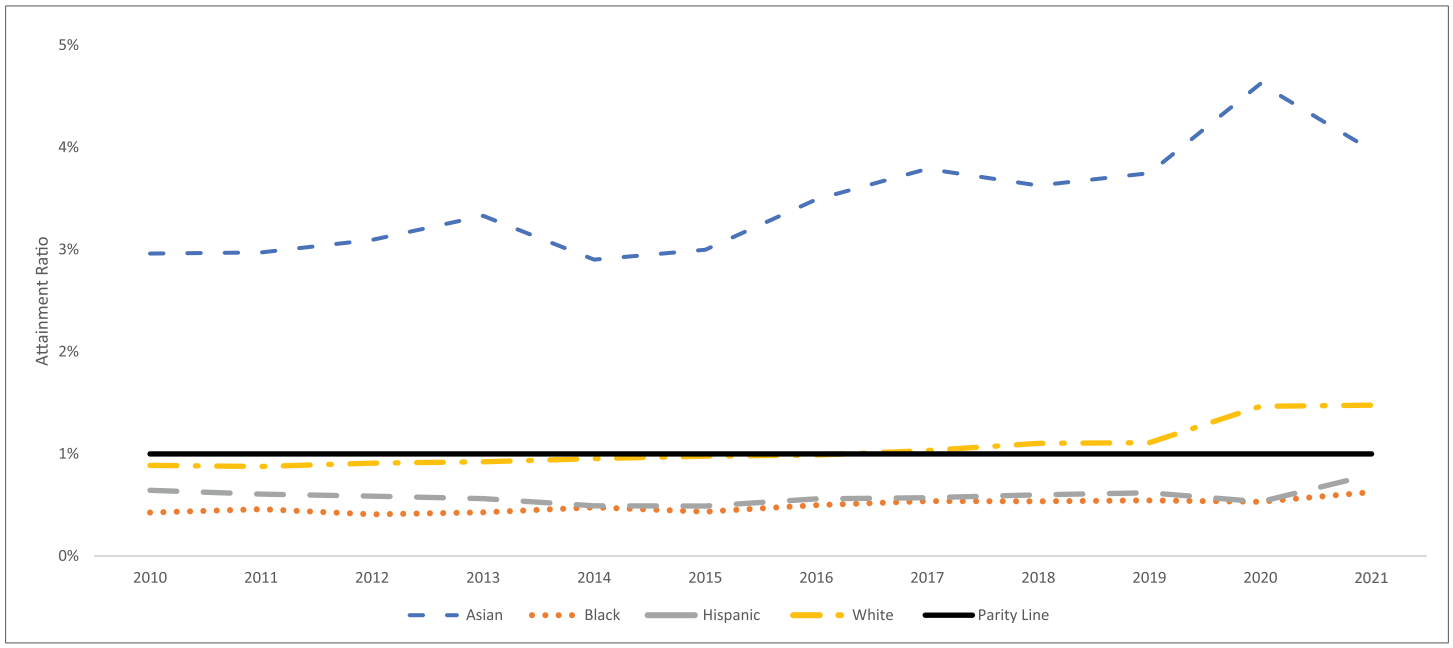
Figure 3: Gender Disparity Between Degree Earners to those with Some College or Less (2010 to 2021)



Data Source: ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

Distribution by race/ethnicity presents a more varied picture. Black and Hispanic working-age populations have not yet reached parity, with their distribution remaining almost flat over the years. In contrast, the Asian population started at a much higher rate, with those holding an associate degree or higher being three times greater than those with some college or less in 2010, and this increased over time. White students reached parity in 2014 and surpassed it in 2018 (see Figure 4).

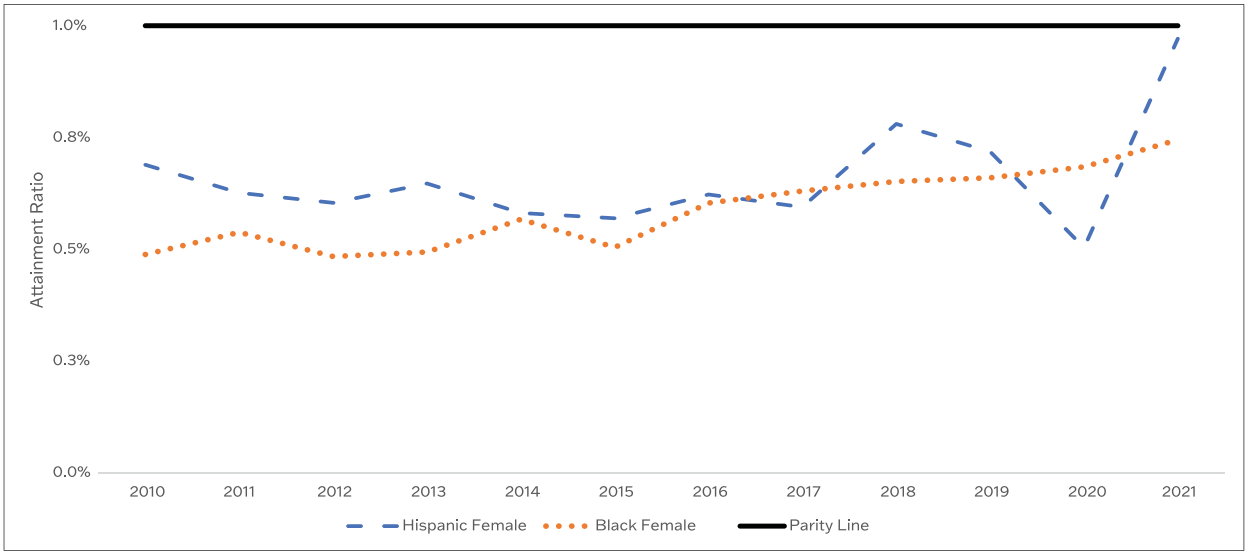
Figure 4: Racial and Ethnic Disparity Between Degree Earners to those with Some College or Less (2010 to 2021)



Data Source: ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

While the attainment ratio[16] for Black and Hispanic females is higher compared to the overall Black and Hispanic population, it does not reach the parity line. For Black females, the attainment ratio grew over time. For Hispanic females, the growth started in 2018. In 2021, the proportion of Hispanic females with an associate or higher degree was in parity with the proportion of Hispanic females with some college or less (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Gender and Ethnic Disparity Between Degree Earners to those with Some College or Less (2010 to 2021)



Data Source: ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

[16] The attainment ratio is the proportion of the working-age population (ages 25 to 64) with an associate or higher degree to the proportion of the working-age population with some college or less degree. This ratio is used as a measure of educational attainment of the working-age population. A ratio of one indicates the proportion of associate or higher degree is the same as the proportion of some college or less. A higher ratio means there are more people with an associate or higher degree. As such, the higher the ratio, the better the educational attainment.

Monitoring Metrics

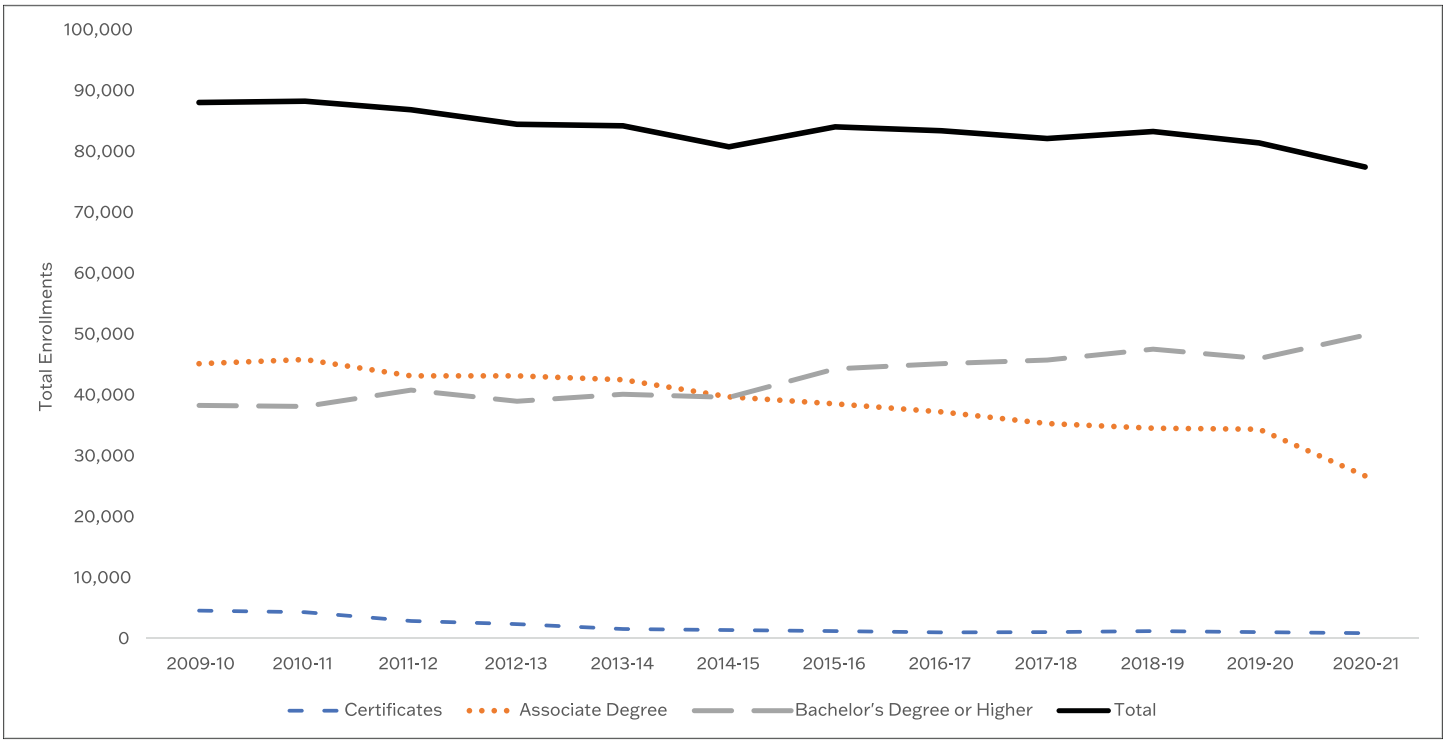
This section provides insights into the trends and developments in New Jersey's key postsecondary metrics: enrollments, persistence, and attainment. The annual monitoring of these indicators is crucial for evaluating the current state and future trajectories of higher education and providing nuanced insights for the state's progress toward the educational attainment goal under the 65 by 25 Initiative.

Postsecondary Education Enrollment

The enrollment trends of first-time, degree-seeking students in New Jersey between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years are divided into three categories: certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees or higher.

There was a decline in total first-time, degree-seeking postsecondary enrollments. In the 2009–10 academic year, New Jersey reported 88,044 postsecondary enrollments. This number decreased to 81,433 in 2019–20 and 77,456 in 2020–21. While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this reduction, a lesser declining trend in enrollments was present before the pandemic (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of Postsecondary Degree Enrollees, by Degree Type (2010 to 2021 Academic Years)



Data Source: NJSDS

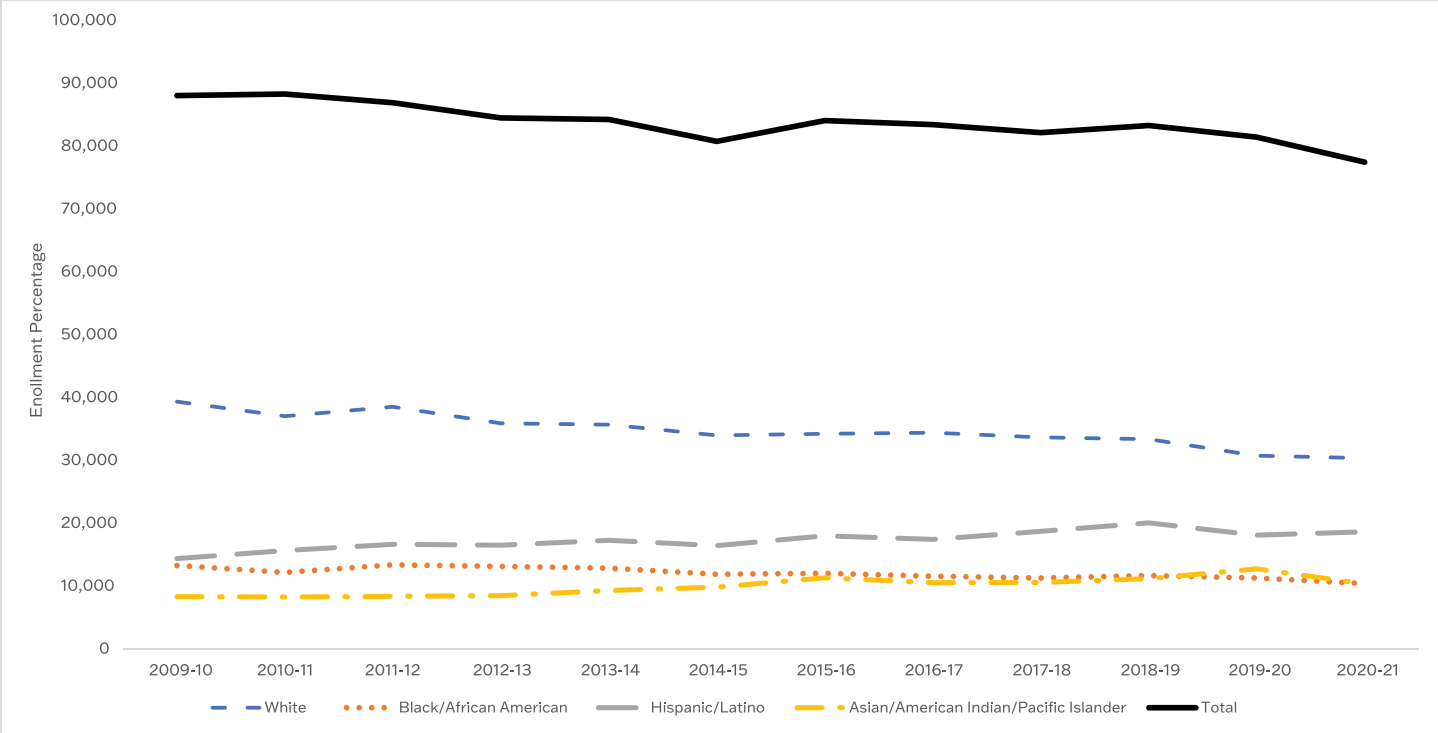
Postsecondary enrollment trends varied across degree types. Enrollments in bachelor's degree or higher increased from 38,281 in the 2009–10 academic year to 49,847 in the 2020–21 academic year, an increase of 30%. Conversely, associate degree enrollments declined from 45,158 in the 2009–10 academic year to 26,728 in the 2020–21 academic year, representing a 41% decline.

Female postsecondary enrollments consistently exceeded male enrollments by an average of five to six percentage points. In 2020–21, females and males comprised 56% and 44% of enrollments, respectively, highlighting the steady pre-pandemic trend.

There was a notable decline in enrollments for the 25 to 34 age group during the pandemic. This group's proportion decreased from 13% in 2009–10 to 6% in 2019–20. However, the drop in enrollment was due to data limitations as the year of birth had the highest missing value in the 2019–20 and 2020–21 academic years.

White students historically held the highest proportion of enrollments, followed by Hispanic and Black students (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of Postsecondary Degree Enrollees, by Race/Ethnicity (2010 to 2021 Academic Years)



Data Source: NJSDS

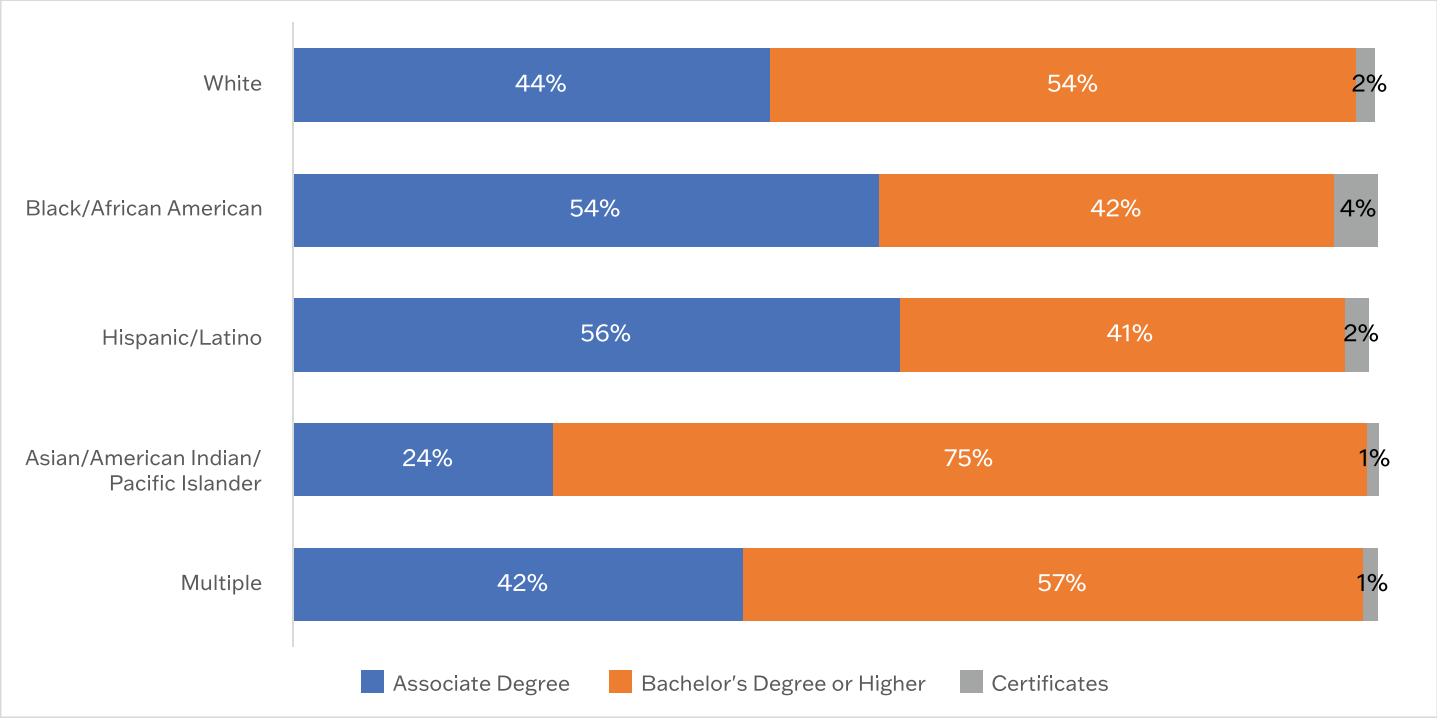
The trends for each group have been reflective of the demographic changes occurring in New Jersey (New Jersey Policy Perspective, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Table 2 summarizes the enrollment trends and corresponding demographic changes in New Jersey by percentage between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years.

Table 2: Enrollment Trends and Demographic Changes in New Jersey (Academic Years 2010 to 2021)

Enrollment Proportions Trend	Demographic Changes in the State
White student enrollment decreased from 45% to 39%.	**The white adult and child populations decreased by 8% and 20%, respectively.**
Hispanic/Latino student enrollments increased from 16% to 24%.	**The Hispanic adult and child populations grew by 26% and 23%, respectively.**
Black student enrollments peaked at 16% in 2013 and then decreased to 13% by 2021.	**The Black adult population increased by 3%, whereas the Black child population decreased by 23%.**

The enrollment degree level varied across racial and ethnic groups. Hispanic and Black students had higher proportions of associate degrees, with 56% and 54%, respectively. In contrast, Asian/American-Indian/Pacific-Islander and white students showed higher proportions for bachelor's degrees or greater, with 75% and 54%, respectively (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Proportion of Postsecondary Enrollees, by Degree Level and Race/Ethnicity (Academic Years 2010 to 2021)



Data Source: NJSDS

Postsecondary Education Persistence

The persistence of first-time, degree-seeking postsecondary students in New Jersey was examined by looking at fall-to-spring[17] and fall-to-fall[18] retention, dropouts,[19] and stopouts,[20] covering fall 2010 to fall 2021. Enrollment up to five consecutive terms after the initial fall term enrollment was tracked. For more details, please refer to the appendix. To better understand persistence, the average time to completion and the impact of financial aid were also analyzed.

Retention: On average, around 15% of students persisted from fall to spring and approximately 70% of students persisted from fall to fall, with slight variations each year (see Figure 9). In 2019, 14% and 72% of the 59,474 enrolled students persisted from fall to the following spring and fall semesters, equating to 8,373 and 43,031 students, respectively (see Figure 9).

The fall-to-spring retention proportions between male and female students were consistently similar, averaging 50% between the 2010 and 2020 academic years. This suggests no significant gender disparity in short-term persistence. Female students consistently had higher fall-to-fall retention rates compared to male students, however, with an average of 4% to 6% higher rates each year.

Between 2010 and 2020, white students formed the majority proportion of students who persisted over the terms tracked with 40% or more, followed by Hispanic students.

Stopouts: The stopout rates were generally low, averaging around 3% per year. In 2019, less than 1% of the students returned after skipping two or more terms (see Figure 9).

In 2019, the stopout rates were 54% for female students and 46% for male students. This could indicate longer breaks taken by females and their higher likelihood to return to their studies after a break.

Dropouts: Dropout rates remained consistent, with an average of around 12% each year. For example, in 2019, 13% of students (7,608) did not return even after five terms following their initial fall enrollment (see Figure 9).

Male students had higher dropout rates than female students by approximately 6% to 8% each year. This trend potentially highlights a higher probability for male students to not return to their studies entirely within the tracked period.

Over the decade, the dropout rate for students identifying as Hispanic consistently increased, while others remained relatively constant. Between 2019 and 2020, dropout numbers for Hispanic students increased by 15%. Similarly, African-American students experienced a 6% increase in dropout numbers in 2020. In contrast, dropouts for other racial groups decreased during the same year.

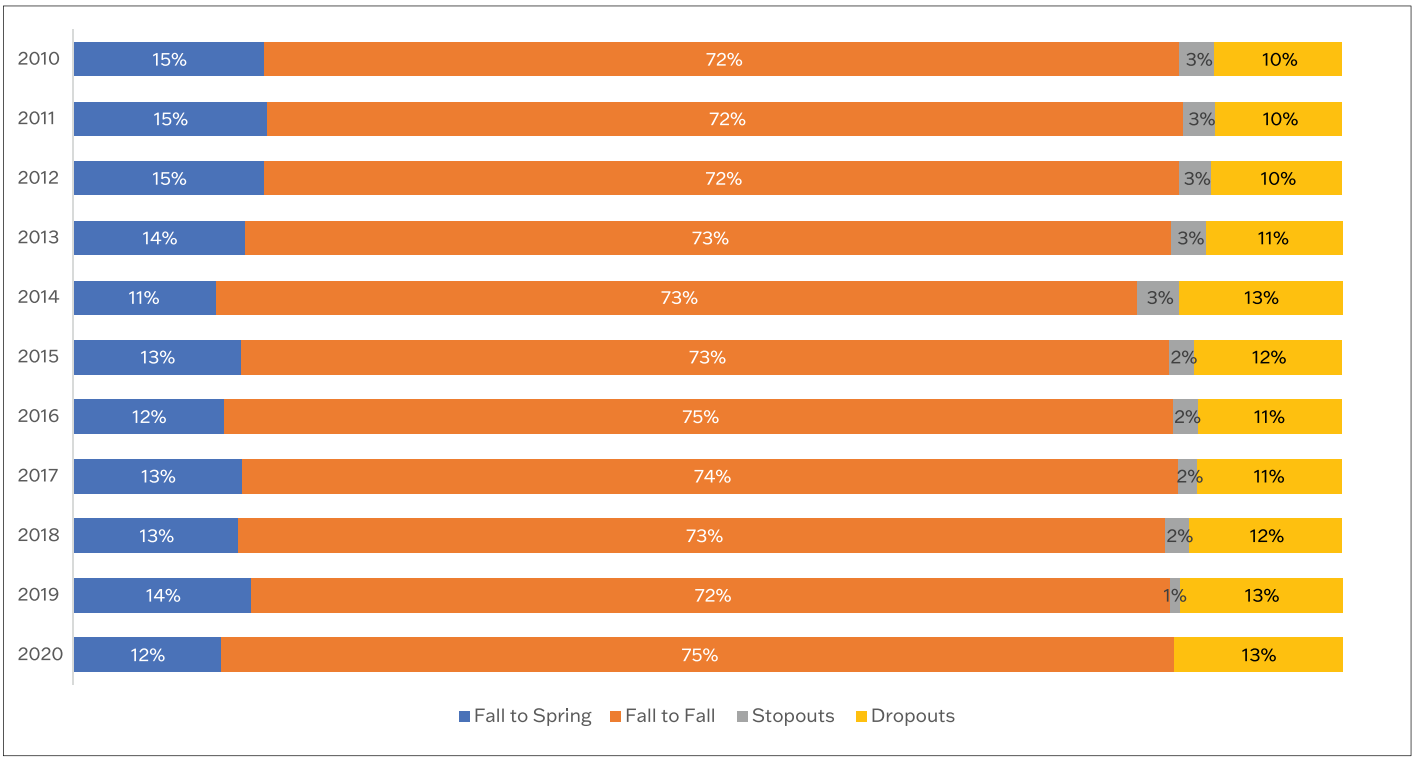
[17] **Fall to spring:** Of the total students enrolled, those students who persisted to the spring term of the next year.

[18] **Fall to fall:** Of the total students enrolled, those students who persisted to the fall term of the next year. These include students who might have skipped the spring term.

[19] **Dropout:** Of the total students enrolled, those students who only enrolled initially and did not enroll in subsequent terms.

[20] **Stopout:** Of the total students enrolled, those students who enrolled initially, skipped two or more terms, and then enrolled again.

Figure 9: Overall Persistence of Postsecondary Enrollees, by Year (fall 2010 to fall 2021)



Data Source: NJSDS

Postsecondary Education Attainment

The postsecondary degree attainment trends between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years were analyzed across seven categories: less than two-year certificates, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, post-bachelor's certificates, master's degrees, post-master's certificates, and doctoral degrees (academic and professional practice). To avoid double-counting, only the highest degree obtained was considered.

An overall increasing attainment trend was observed between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years. Total degree attainments were 63,640 in 2009–10 and 82,285 in 2020–21. Attainment dropped by 12% in 2018–19 compared to 2017–18.

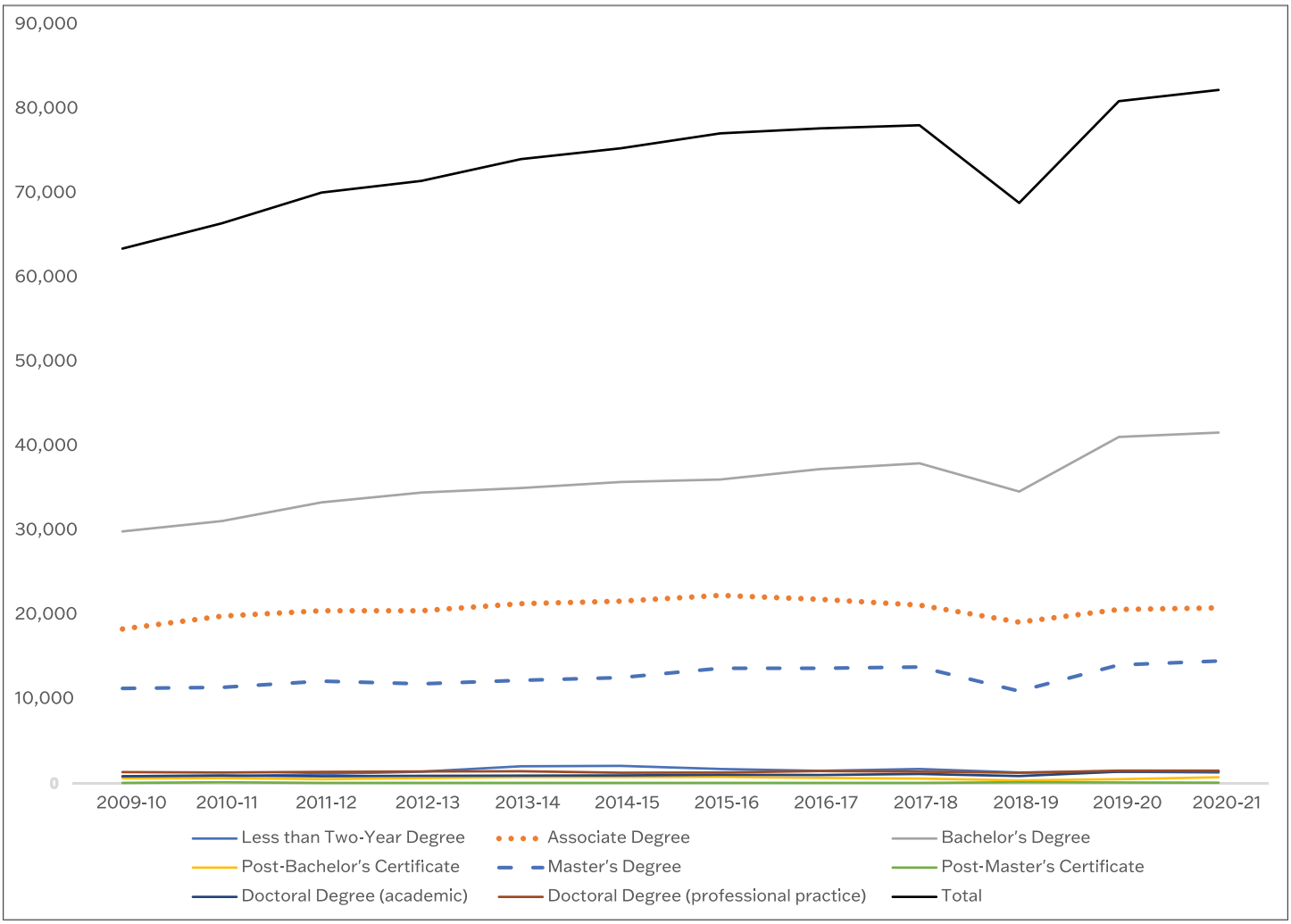
Female students consistently achieved higher completion rates than males by an average of 14%. In 2020–21, females accounted for 57% of completions compared with 43% for males.

White students comprised most of the total completions, with consistent growth since 2011. Hispanic graduates saw a 130% increase between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years, from 6,907 to 15,885. Other groups, including Asian/American-Indian/Pacific-Islander and African-American students, also experienced notable growth. This reflects the increasing diversity and advancements in educational equity in New Jersey.

The 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 age groups consistently led in degree completions, representing 51% and 32% in 2009–10, respectively. This trend increased in 2020–21 to 56% for the 18 to 24 age group, but remained the same for the 25 to 34 age group. Older age groups displayed a smaller, consistent share of overall attainment, with a slight downtrend over the years.

Postsecondary attainment trends varied across degree types. Bachelor's degrees consistently represented the highest proportion of completions, averaging 48% between the 2009–10 and 2020–21 academic years. This was followed by associate (28%) and master's (17%) degrees, with other degrees collectively averaging 6% (see Figure 10).

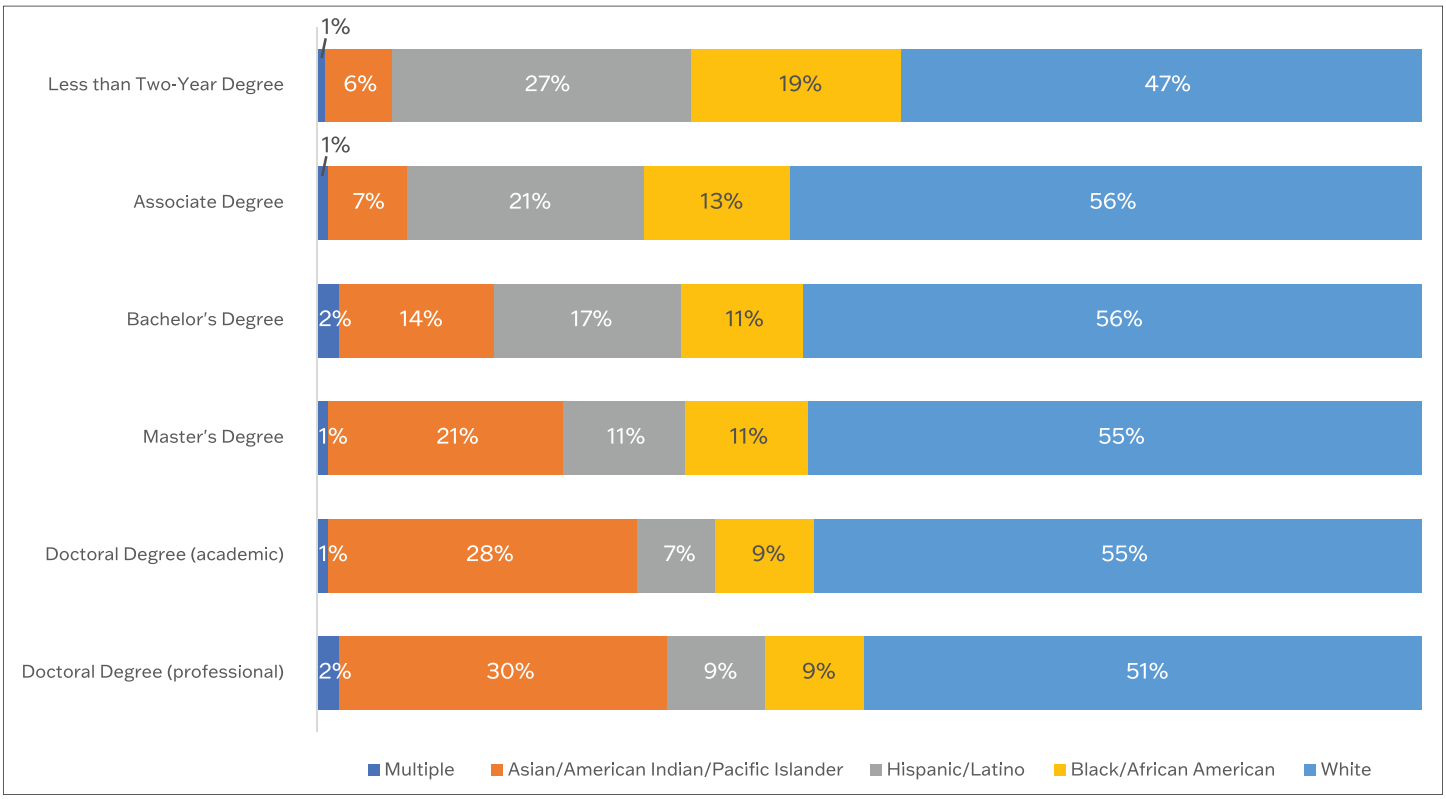
Figure 10: Proportion of Postsecondary Degree Completions, by Degree Type (Academic Years 2010 to 2021)



Source: NJSDS

All groups had a higher propensity for completing bachelor's degrees over other degree types. As shown in Figure 11, when reviewing the degree level completed by race/ethnicity, the largest share for each group was a bachelor's degree.

Figure 11: Completions, by Degree Level and Race/Ethnicity (Academic Years 2010 to 2021)



Data Source: NJSDS

Future Potential Monitoring Measures

The analysis of educational attainment in this report provides a foundational understanding of New Jersey's educational outcomes. To build on this foundation and inform strategic decisions for the 65 by 25 Initiative, several key areas for future monitoring are proposed (see Figure 12). These measures will offer a more holistic view of educational attainment and guide policymakers in achieving the state's ambitious goals. Table 3 outlines the key areas and metrics that are particularly relevant, depending on data accessibility and availability.

These key metrics, when analyzed annually, will offer a comprehensive view of the state's progress toward the 65 by 25 Initiative, guiding policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to shape strategies to enhance postsecondary education outcomes in New Jersey.

Figure 12: Potential Future Metrics for Tracking New Jersey Postsecondary Education Goals

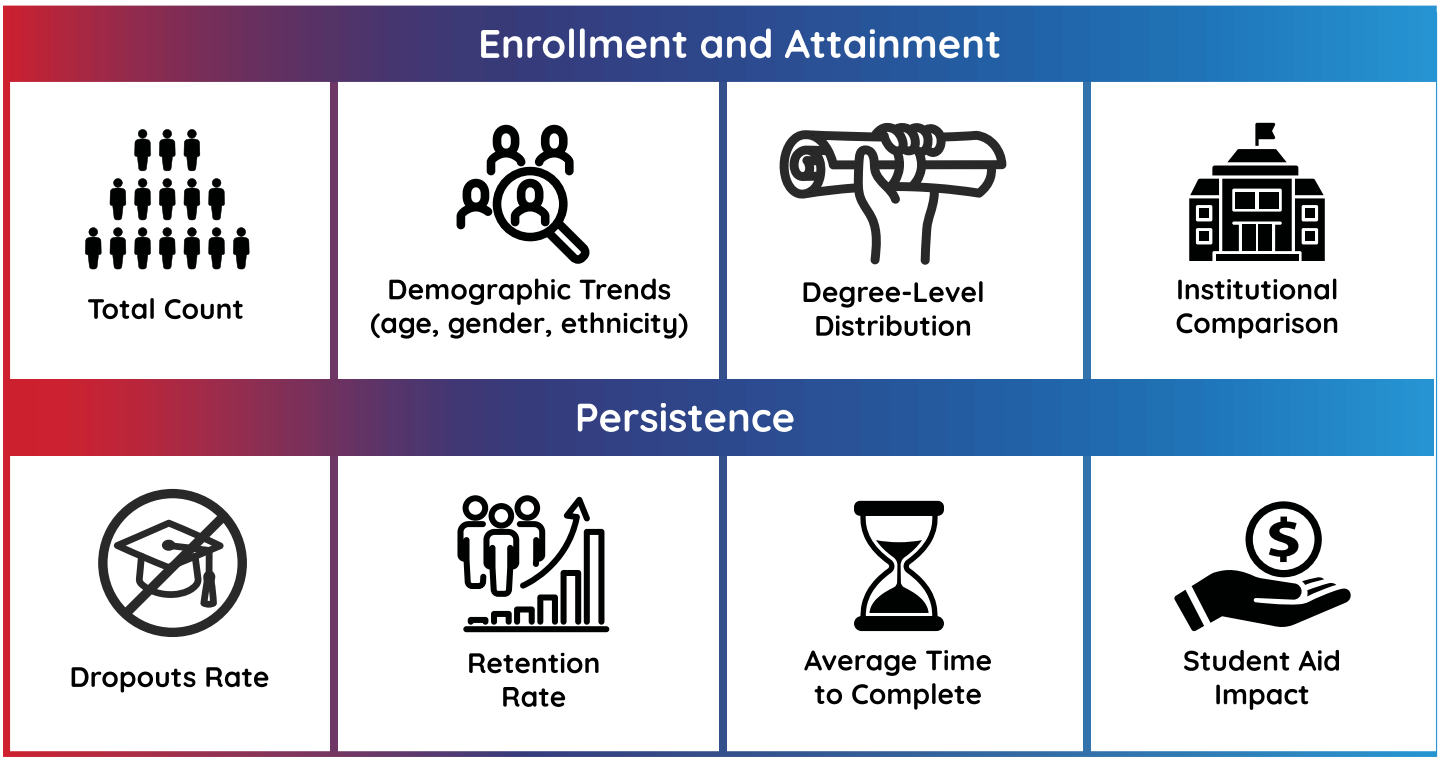


Table 3: Proposed Monitoring Metrics

Metric	Description	Importance
High School to College Transition College transition examines the percentage of high school students who advance their educational journeys by enrolling in postsecondary institutions after completing high school		
High School Graduation Rate	Number of students who have completed high school.	▸ Understanding the high school graduation rate lays the foundation for future educational endeavors. ▸ A high school diploma often serves as the initial step for individuals entering postsecondary education or the workforce. By tracking this metric, it is possible to accurately estimate the number of students who have completed high school and are now prepared to pursue postsecondary education.
College-Going Rate	Count of high school students who enroll in postsecondary education within a specific timeframe,[21] typically within 12 to 16 months after graduating from high school.	▸ This rate is directly linked to New Jersey's 65 by 25 Initiative. Achieving a higher level of postsecondary attainment depends on ensuring that a significant portion of high school graduates continue their educational journeys. ▸ When examined across different demographics, it can also provide insights into the alignment between the state's high school curricula and college readiness. ▸ Analyzing this rate helps identify areas for improvement.
Academic Curricula and Pathways Academic curricula and pathways examine the progression of students through various educational programs, including their choice of major, persistence within their chosen field, and the relationship between specific courses and student outcomes.		
Postsecondary Program Attainment by Major of Study	Count of individuals who have completed postsecondary programs, categorized according to specific fields of study.[22]	▸ By analyzing program attainment, deeper insights into the educational choices and achievements of the state's residents can be gained.
Certificates and Non-Credit Credentials	Tracking completions of proprietary certificates[23] in New Jersey.	▸ Such information can provide insights into these specialized training programs and their alignment with job market demands.
Financial Measures This measure focuses on the financial aspects of students' educational journeys, including the utilization of loans, scholarships, grants, and other forms of financial aid.		
State Loans and Other Financial Aid	Monitoring the utilization of state loans, and other forms of financial aid, beyond student aid provided from state programs.	▸ This can shed light on the financial challenges students face while pursuing postsecondary education and how students rely on financial assistance. ▸ It can help explore the impact of loans and other financial aid programs on completions.
Socioeconomic and Household Factors This measure explores the various socioeconomic and household factors affecting educational journeys.		
Socioeconomic Factors	Measuring factors: Income level, employment status, tuition costs, parental background (ethnicity, education, income), experiences with welfare programs, and first-generation college student status.	▸ Understanding the influence of socioeconomic and household factors on educational attainment can provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals pursuing postsecondary education. ▸ These factors can shed light on how different aspects of an individual's socioeconomic and household environment affect their educational choices, persistence, and success in postsecondary education, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in New Jersey.
Household Factors	Measuring factors: Support systems, household mobility (transfers), family structure (single-parent households, two-parent households, etc.), and parental involvement.	

[21] Specifically, this metric measures the number of high school students who enroll in postsecondary education programs within one year (if they choose institutions outside of New Jersey) and within two years (if they continue their education within New Jersey).

[22] These categories encompass a diverse range of disciplines, including business; health; humanities; social sciences; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and other.

[23] Proprietary certificates represent specialized training programs offered by private educational institutions or organizations. These certificates often target specific industries or professions, providing learners with the skills and knowledge needed for particular career paths.

Future Research

In addition to core metrics through NJSDS and other potential data sources, the Heldrich Center aims to explore specific socioeconomic factors, demographics, and subgroups within New Jersey's population through future research briefs. Through the inclusion of additional high school and workforce data, such as high school graduate college-going rates by cohort, and the inclusion of non-credit certificate and licensure data, future work will explore progress toward the state's postsecondary attainment goal and expand the scope of traditional reporting. These briefs will uncover educational disparities and opportunities and address workforce development needs. Future studies will examine economic and educational outcomes for working students, older students, historically underserved groups (Black, Indigenous, people of color, and low-income), part-time students, and adult learners. Other potential briefs can focus on community colleges as vital institutions, the potential for reengagement and credential completion among students with some college but no credential, and examining the economic outcomes to determine program-of-study pathways. These studies will help tailor educational strategies to diverse student populations, advancing New Jersey's postsecondary education goals.

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Appendix

Population/Cohort Development

For this study, the population under investigation consisted of New Jersey residents between the ages of 25 and 64. The study considered two main categories of individuals within this age range:

Enrollment Cohort: This cohort comprised individuals who enrolled in postsecondary education programs at any time between the 2010 and 2021 academic years. The cohort consisted of first-time and degree-seeking students. These individuals were tracked to examine their enrollment and completion status. Additionally, students who enrolled in 2015 and onwards but did not graduate within the study period were also included. This included individuals pursuing bachelor's degrees over four to six years and associate degrees over two to four years.

Attainment Cohort: This study also included individuals who completed their postsecondary education within the specified timeframe (the 2010 to 2021 academic years).

This broader cohort allowed for a comprehensive analysis of both enrollment and completion trends.

Data Sources and Methodology

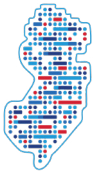
This study relied on data primarily sourced from the American Community Survey (ACS) and the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS). The integration of data from these comprehensive sources allowed for a thorough and multifaceted analysis of educational trends and outcomes in New Jersey.

ACS: Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, ACS is a repository of demographic and socioeconomic data covering the entire United States, including New Jersey. It provides a comprehensive overview of the state's population and their educational achievements.

NJSDS: This state-level data system was instrumental in sourcing valuable information related to education and the workforce within New Jersey. NJSDS is designed to collect, integrate, and analyze data related to education and employment in New Jersey. It incorporates data from various state institutions, including the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. Data reported by these institutions were extracted from NJSDS and served as the primary dataset for this study. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education data were used to obtain information on postsecondary education enrollments, attainment, and associated measures. The Higher Education Student Assistance Authority database provided insights into student financial aid, thereby facilitating an examination of the impact of financial support on postsecondary education completion rates.

Data Variable and Measures Calculations

This section outlines the methodologies and variables used in analyzing postsecondary attainment, enrollment, and persistence, contributing to understanding New Jersey's progress toward its postsecondary education attainment goal.



Academic Year: This variable was derived from the dataset's year and quarter information to match standard academic periods. It was constructed by combining the third and fourth quarters of a year with the first and second quarters of the following year, reflecting a full academic cycle. This approach, consistent from the first and second quarters of 2009 to 2021, aligns with the typical academic calendar and is vital for tracking trends and conducting chronological analyses over distinct academic periods.

Gender: A binary gender variable was created using existing gender data from the dataset, categorizing students as female or male. Notably, missing data (NA values) were coded as male to prevent data loss and better represent the actual demographic distribution. This approach helped ensure a more accurate analysis of gender demographics in the dataset.

Age Group: The analysis considered the working-age group, ranging from age 24 to age 55 and above. An age-group variable was created using the difference between the award year (the year of degree completion) and students' year of birth. This variable helps in understanding the age distribution of students completing their postsecondary education.

Race and Ethnicity: The racial and ethnic composition was captured by transforming individual race variables into a consolidated race/ethnicity variable. This was achieved through a multi-criteria approach, categorizing students into specific racial groups, including Hispanic/Latino; Black; Asian/American Indian/Pacific Islander; white; and multiple races for those identifying with more than one race. Additionally, a category for unspecified or missing race was included to ensure comprehensive dataset representation. This race/ethnicity variable was instrumental in this analysis, allowing for detailed segmentation and insights into the students' demographic diversity.

Degree Type: The type of degree awarded was categorized using the award type variable. The classifications included various levels, including less than two years (to represent certificates), associate, bachelor's, master's, post-master's certificate, doctoral (academic), and doctoral (professional practice). Such a classification is crucial in understanding the scope of degree attainment across different levels.

Degree Level: In analyzing enrollment data, a degree-level variable was created using available pre-baccalaureate degree program data. This variable is pivotal in identifying the type of certificate or degree conferred in pre-baccalaureate programs. Researchers categorized all values associated with certificate programs under "certificates" and those related to associate degree programs as "associate." Notably, instances of missing data were classified as "bachelor's and above," providing a comprehensive view of the educational spectrum in the dataset. Such a classification is crucial in understanding the scope of degree enrollments across different levels.

Institution Type: The type of institution, either private or public, was determined based on the institution code. This categorization is crucial in evaluating the role of different types of institutions in postsecondary education outcomes.

Completion Status: The completion status binary variable was established based on the award date (completion or graduation date) to distinguish completers (with a completion date) from non-completers (without a completion date). This categorization facilitated an in-depth analysis of the total count of students enrolled in postsecondary programs by their graduation status.

Persistence: This metric tracks the enrollment patterns of a cohort of first-time, degree-seeking students from the initial fall term, covering fall 2010 to fall 2021. It assesses student persistence by monitoring their continuous enrollment across up to five consecutive terms after the initial fall term. It measures this by looking at the following indicators:

- **Fall to Spring Retention:** Number of students, of the total enrolled, who persisted to the spring term of the next year.
- **Fall to Fall Retention:** Number of students, of the total enrolled, who persisted to the fall term of the next year. These include students who might have skipped the spring term.
- **Dropouts:** Number of students, of the total enrolled, who only enrolled initially and did not enroll in the subsequent five terms.
- **Stopouts:** Number of students, of the total enrolled, who enrolled initially, skipped two or more terms but then enrolled again.

Information Obtained from these Variables

From the variables and their respective transformations, as stated above, the following measures yielded comprehensive insights into the analysis of New Jersey's 65 by 25 Initiative:

Degree Types and Attainment

Information on the total number of postsecondary attainments between the 2010 and 2021 academic years. This information was segmented **by highest degree level and categorized as academic year, degree level, age, race/ethnicity, gender, and institution type**. Such detailed segmentation facilitates a nuanced understanding of the educational landscape in New Jersey, highlighting trends and patterns crucial for policy development and assessment of the state's educational goals.

Degree Levels and Enrollments

This analysis covers the spectrum of postsecondary enrollments from the 2010 to 2021 academic years, **focusing specifically on fall term enrollments. The data were segmented by academic year, degree level, age, race/ethnicity, gender, and the type of institution.** This comprehensive segmentation offers an in-depth look into New Jersey's educational dynamics, illustrating critical trends and informing policy decisions.

NEW JERSEY'S HIGHER EDUCATION GOAL: 65 BY 25

In September 2017, New Jersey launched the "65 by 25" campaign.[14] This ambitious, innovative plan established a statewide goal *(Figure 4)*: 65% of working-age New Jerseyans will have a high-quality credential or degree by 2025.[15]

The goal, first proposed by the Governor's Higher Education Council in April 2015, marked the first time New Jersey set a statewide higher education attainment target.[16] Three state agencies are now working together to lead the campaign: OSHE, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD), and the Department of Education (DOE). Achieving a 65% postsecondary attainment rate will strengthen New Jersey's economy by opening doors of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans and providing an expanded pool of high-value workers to thousands of employers.

Critically, New Jersey has already taken steps to close the gap between the current level of attainment in the state and the target goal. The New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund is expanding in an effort to assist more low-income New Jersey residents who are capable and motivated for college, but need extra supports to succeed.[17] The New Jersey Community College Opportunity Grant will allow approximately 13,000 qualifying students to attend one of 13 community colleges tuition-free and fee-free in spring 2019.[18] And the 2016 College Affordability Study Commission identified recommendations to increase completion and reduce time to degree.[19]

Initiatives like these help support students and increase completion, but New Jersey needs a comprehensive plan in order to achieve the goal of 65 by 25. To make this goal a reality, the state will need to implement an aggressive long-term strategy focused on the **three areas** that can make the biggest difference:

- increasing college enrollment among high school students,
- increasing the number of working-age adults through re-engagement, and
- increasing degree completion among all students.

Source: https://www.nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/StateEducationplan.pdf

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Sahar Sherwani, former Graduate Assistant, and Khudodod Khudododov, Ph.D., Research Project Manager.

The report was reviewed by Laurie Harrington and Stephanie Walsh, Ph.D. Robb C. Sewell was the editor. Kim Deng was the graphic designer.

About the New Jersey Statewide Data System

The New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS) is the State of New Jersey's centralized longitudinal data system for education and workforce data. Its mission is to safely use the state's existing administrative data for evidence-based policymaking. Developed in 2012 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, NJSDS creates a single place where state education, postsecondary education, employment, and workforce longitudinal data are securely stored to help stakeholders make data-informed decisions to improve student learning and labor market outcomes. The data system is owned by the State of New Jersey and operated by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NJSDS is a collaboration between the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Department of Education, and the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority.

About the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, "Solutions at Work," the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center's work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers' skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers.