Pathways to Opportunity:
The Growth and Impact of College in High School Programs Across New York State

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Introduction

College in High School programs—also known as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, or early college[1]—allow high school students to take college-level courses while still in high school. These courses count for both high school and college credit, providing students with a valuable head start on postsecondary education. Across New York, they are a key strategy to expand equitable access to higher education for students of color, first-generation college students, and those from low-income backgrounds. These programs play a vital role in advancing student success by fostering stronger collaboration and alignment across K-12, higher education, and workforce systems, ensuring students experience a smoother and more connected pathway from classroom to career.

New York's college in high school landscape includes three main models:

1. College Credit in High School (Dual or Concurrent Enrollment)
2. Early College High Schools (ECHS)—including *Smart Scholars and Smart Transfer* programs
3. Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH)

Each model helps students earn college credit during high school but varies in structure, funding, and purpose. Together, they form a continuum of opportunity—from single-course exposure to fully integrated degree pathways.

The College Credit in High School (Dual/Concurrent Enrollment) model is the most common. It enables students to take college-level courses through partnerships between high schools and colleges or universities, often at the community college level. Students may take courses on campus, online, or within their high school, taught either by college faculty or by qualified high school teachers approved by the partnering institution. Notable examples include CUNY *College Now* and regional BOCES partnerships. However, New York does not have a consistent state funding stream for these programs; they are supported through district budgets, institutional subsidies, or grants, creating disparities in access and quality.[2] In 2025 however, New York created the College in High School Opportunity Fund, which included new investment and policy reforms.

Early College High Schools (ECHS) offer a more comprehensive pathway, allowing students to earn an associate degree—at no cost—by the time they graduate from high school. NYSED's Smart Scholars and Smart Transfer[3] programs, are grant-funded initiatives that target students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds. Smart Transfer programs ensure that credits are fully transferable to four-year institutions. Students receive academic advising, tutoring, and mentoring to help them succeed in a rigorous environment that blends high school and college coursework. While NYSED grants support startup and early implementation, funding is not tied to enrollment or credit hours.

The P-TECH[4] model integrates grades 9–14 (high school plus two years of college) and combines academic, technical, and workplace learning. Students graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree, and often complete paid internships or mentorships through industry partners such as IBM, Verizon, and healthcare networks. P-TECH programs receive the most structured state support through multi-year NYSED grants, which range from $500,000 to $650,000[5] annually and typically span six years.

Despite differences in design and scope, all three models share a unified goal: to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education by giving students' academic and social-emotional tools to succeed in college and beyond.

To better understand participation trends and outcomes in New York's state-funded College in High School programs, we conducted a quantitative analysis of enrollment and graduation data from the 2020–2021 through 2023–2024 school years. This analysis examines changes in participation across the state's three primary college in high school models—P-TECH, Smart Scholars, and Smart Transfer—and assesses how these programs serve key student populations. Using data from NYSED's publicly reported enrollment and graduation records*, the study measured year-over-year changes in student participation disaggregated by race and ethnicity, economic status, disability status, and multilingual learner designation. It also compared graduation outcomes for students who participated in state-funded college in high school programs with those students statewide.

The findings show that overall enrollment in college in high school programs increased continuously during the four-year period, with notable gains among Black and Latinx students, students from low-income backgrounds and students with disabilities indicating that these programs are meeting their equity and access goals. While multilingual learner enrollment also rose, growth was less consistent over time. Importantly, students who participated in college in high school programs demonstrated higher high school graduation rates than their peers statewide, reinforcing the value of these programs as a proven pathway to college and career readiness.

** The data in this report was gathered from NYSED's publicly reported enrollment and graduation records which do not reflect all of the College in High School opportunities available across New York. As NYSED develops new policy and funding for College in High School Programs, we hope future publicly reported data can better represent College in High School programs statewide.*

Background

As New York deepens its investment in College High School programs, it is increasingly clear that these initiatives deliver strong academic, economic, and equity benefits for students and families. Dual enrollment opportunities help students develop college-ready skills, reduce time to degree, and lower total educational costs—while also promoting equity by expanding access to higher education for historically marginalized groups[6]. Participation in dual enrollment increases students' likelihood of enrolling in college and completing a credential, particularly among students of color and those from low-income backgrounds.[7]

The state has made significant investments to strengthen and expand these opportunities. In 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul announced $31.5 million[8] in new P-TECH funding to expand programs in high-demand industries such as technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. These programs operate through six-year models (grades 9–14) and provide students with the opportunity to earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree, tuition-free. Building on that momentum, the 2025–26 Enacted Budget established the College in High School Opportunity Fund, adding funding to support college in high school expansion statewide. The fund establishes consistent program standards, requires formal partnership agreements between school districts and higher education institutions, prioritizes students from low-income backgrounds, and implements statewide data collection systems to track participation and outcomes. Through this initiative, eligible students can earn up to two years of college credit—potentially saving New York families $20,000 or more in tuition costs. These policy commitments underscore the state's recognition of College in High School programs as a strategic tool for improving educational equity and workforce readiness.

The value of these programs are reflected in their measurable impact. Students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely to enroll in college, persist through completion, and graduate on time. In New York, CUNY's Early College Initiative (ECI)—which currently includes 19 schools serving over 8,000 students—has produced especially strong results: students graduate high school at higher rates, are more likely to be college-ready, and earn significantly more college credits prior to matriculation. A 2017 CUNY analysis found that Early College students earned an average of two additional semesters' worth of credits by the end of their second year in college compared to peers.[9] Likewise, P-TECH students outperform peers on core academic measures; after just two years of high school, 42% of P-TECH 9–14 students passed the English Language Arts Regents exam with college-ready scores, compared to 25% of students in comparable schools.[10] Students enrolled in P-TECH schools earned more high school and college-level credits than peers in traditional schools. Three years after high school graduation, 13% of P-TECH students completed a postsecondary degree, compared to 8% in the control group. This impact was even stronger for young men where 13% of male P-TECH students earned a college degree compared to only 3% in the control group.[11]

This quantitative analysis of enrollment, student demographics, graduation rates, and access to advanced coursework will help to better understand the college in high school landscape. The findings from this analysis reveal not only the growing reach of these programs but also the promise they hold for promoting equitable postsecondary success. Over the four-year period studied, enrollment in P-TECH, Smart Scholars, and Smart Transfer programs increased continuously, reflecting sustained student and district interest in college in high school opportunities. Importantly, this growth was not limited to any single group: students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, participated in these programs at rates that outpaced overall enrollment growth.

Findings

1. Enrollment in P-TECH, Smart Scholars and Smart Transfer programs increased continuously over the four-year period between school year 2020-2021 and 2023-2024.

2. Enrollment of students of color, in particular Black and Latinx students, in college in high school programs increased continuously and at higher rates than for all students in the programs over the same four-year period.

3. Enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds in college in high school programs also rose continuously, and at a much higher rate than the enrollment of their more affluent peers, over the same four-year period.

4. In the four-year period from 2020-2021 to 2023-2024, Black and Latinx students, other students of color and students from low-income backgrounds all saw increased enrollment in college in high school programs at higher rates than all students, indicating that the enrollment targets, explicit or otherwise, are serving their purpose.

5. While the number of multilingual learners enrolled in college in high school programs over the four-year period grew as much as the number of students of color or students from low-income backgrounds, that growth was not continuous over time and has never mirrored their enrollment in all high schools 9-12 in the state.

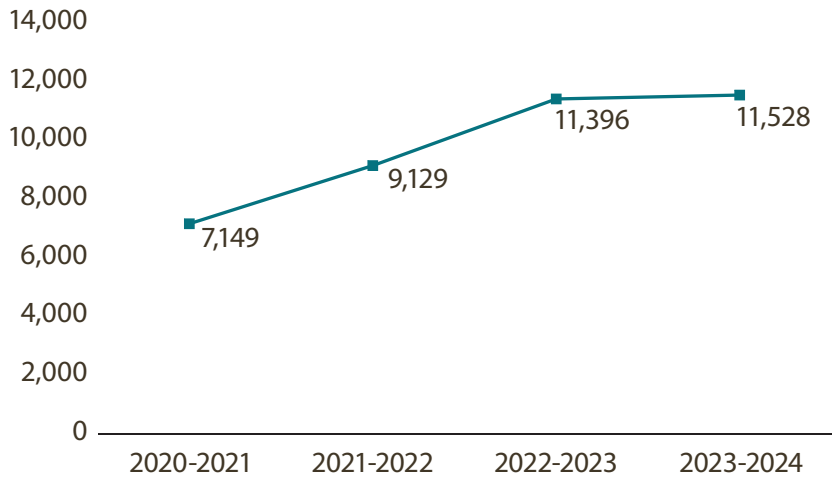
6. The number of students with disabilities enrolled in college in high school programs over the four-year period grew even higher than the increases in enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds or students of color.

7. Students who participated in state funded college in high school programs had higher overall graduation rates than other students across the state from 2020-2021 to 2023-2024.

Finding 1

Enrollment in P-TECH, Smart Scholars and Smart Transfer programs increased continuously over the four-year period between school year 2020-2021 and 2023-2024.

NYSED College in High School Total Enrollment From 2020-2021 to 2023-2024



61%

Increase in enrollment in college in high school programs from school year 2020-21 to 2023-24, from 7,149 students to 11,528.

28%

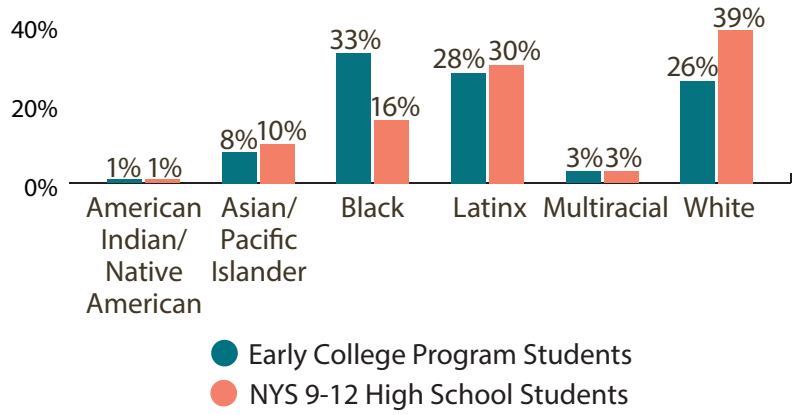
Increase in the number of students enrolled. The largest percentage increase happened between school year 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

Finding 2

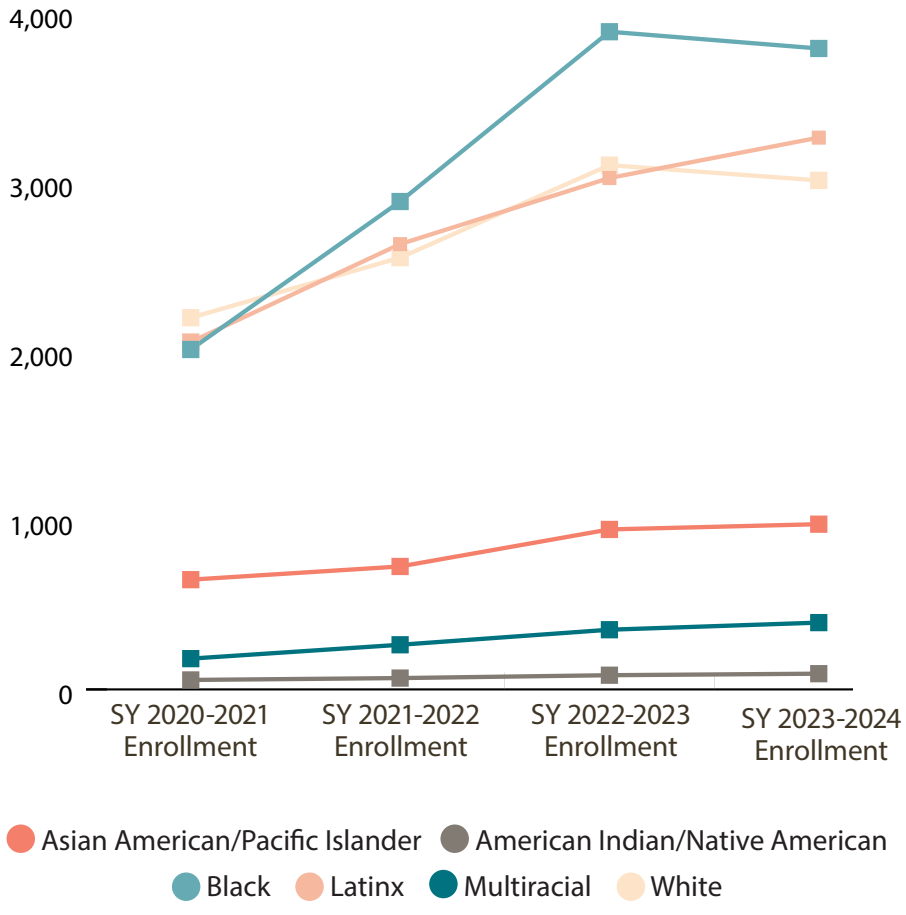
Enrollment of students of color, in particular Black and Latinx students, in college in high school programs increased continuously and at higher rates than for all students over the same four-year period.

For Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Native American and multiracial students, participation in college in high school programs is proportional to their overall enrollment in schools statewide. In contrast, Black and Latinx students were overrepresented in state funded college in high school programs.

9-12 Grade Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in college in high school programs v. NYS High Schools, 2023-2024



Percent Enrollment in College in High School Programs by Race/Ethnicity



72%

Increase in enrollment of students of color from 4,951 students to 8,518, more than 10 percentage points higher than the increase for all students.

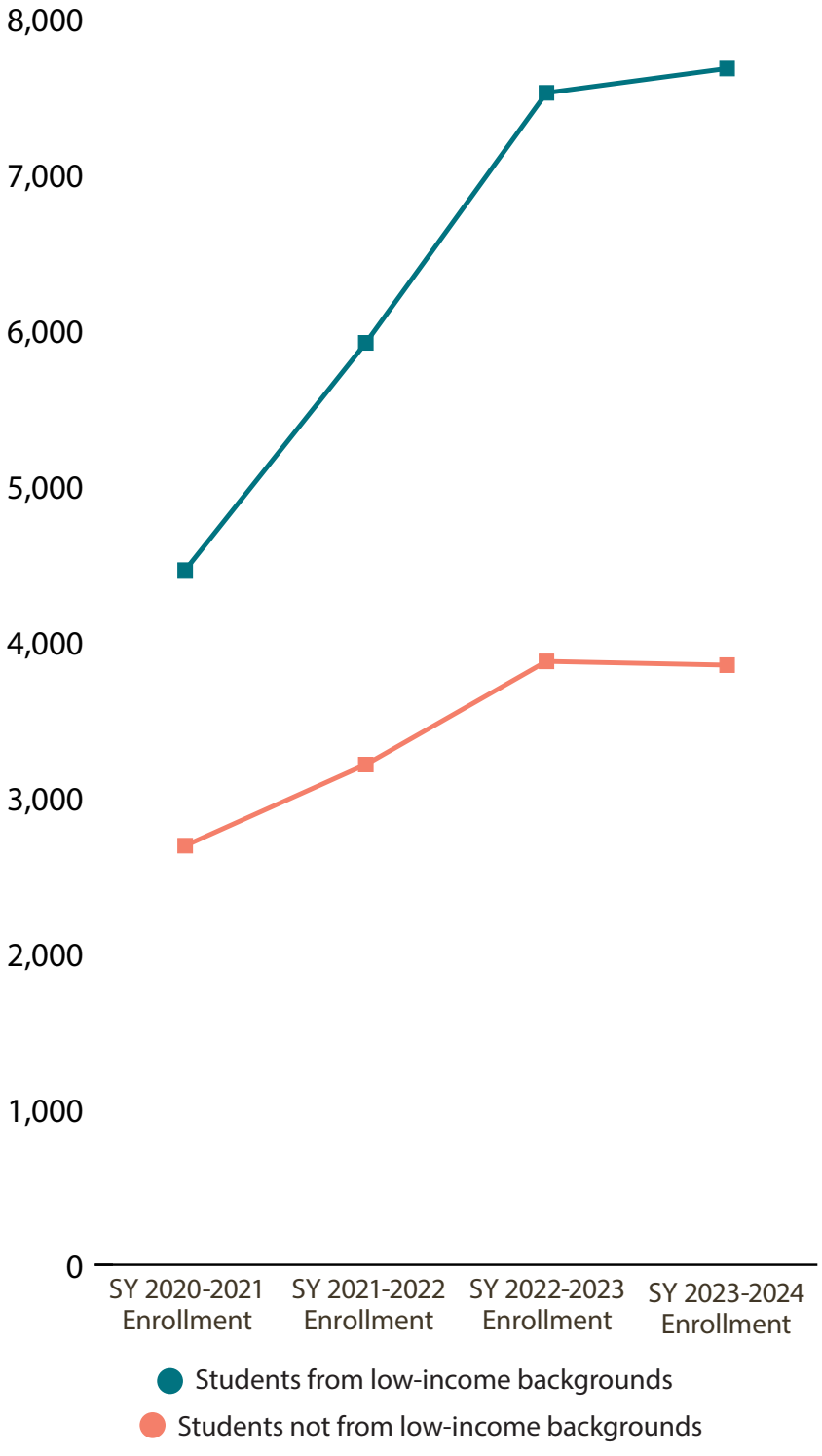
34%

The share of Black students enrolled in college in high school programs rose to a high in school year 2022-23.

Finding 3

Enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds in college in high school programs also rose continuously, and at a much higher rate than the enrollment of their more affluent peers, over the same four-year period.

Change in Enrollment in College in High School Programs by Socioeconomic Status



72%

Increase in enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds in the same time frame, from 4,459 students to 7,679, almost 30 percentage points higher than the 43% increase in enrollment for their more affluent peers.

62%

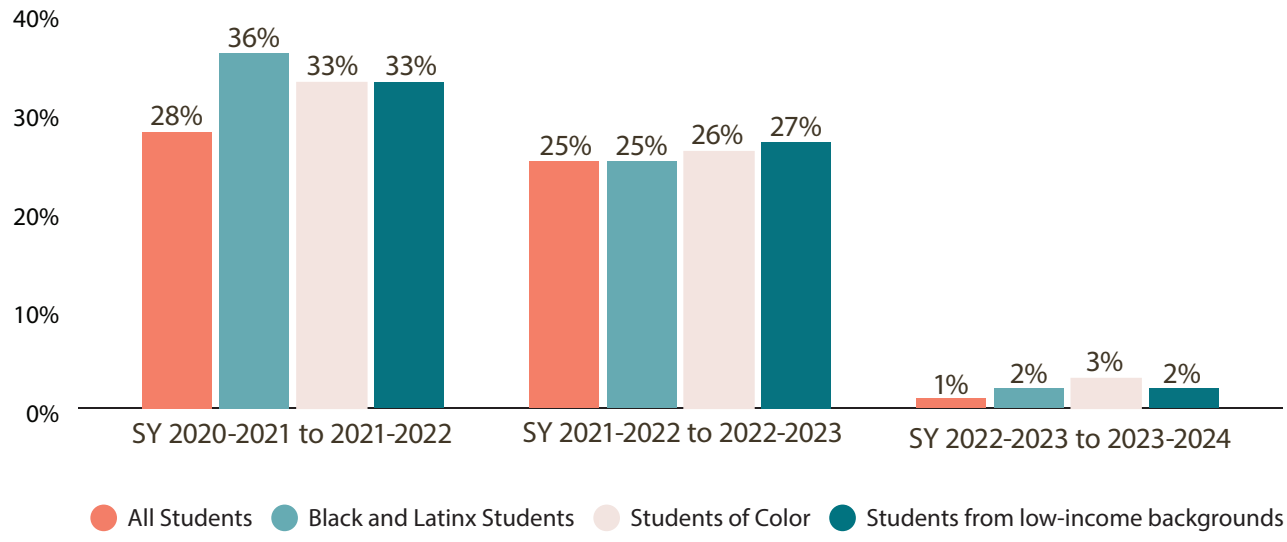
of students who are from low-income backgrounds are enrolled in college in high school programs compared to their share of total statewide school enrollment (under 60%).

Finding 4

In the four-year period from 2020-2021 to 2023-2024, all students of color and students from low-income backgrounds all saw increased enrollment in college in high school programs at higher rates than all students, indicating that the enrollment targets, explicit or otherwise, are serving their purpose.

- While Black students, Latinx students and students from low-income backgrounds are not explicitly named as enrollment target groups, NYSED claims that at least the Smart Scholars program" is targeted to students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education." From higher education enrollment data from IPEDS[12], we know that Black and Latinx students, continue to enroll at lower rates than their share in the public school population, leading to their underrepresentation in colleges and universities.
- The increases in enrollment in college in high school programs were not evenly sustained year over year in the timeframe represented, however increases in enrollment for Black and Latinx students was continuously higher than for all students.
- Similarly, students of color (all non-White students, including Black and Latinx students), also experienced growth in enrollment at higher rates than all students, as did students from low-income backgrounds.

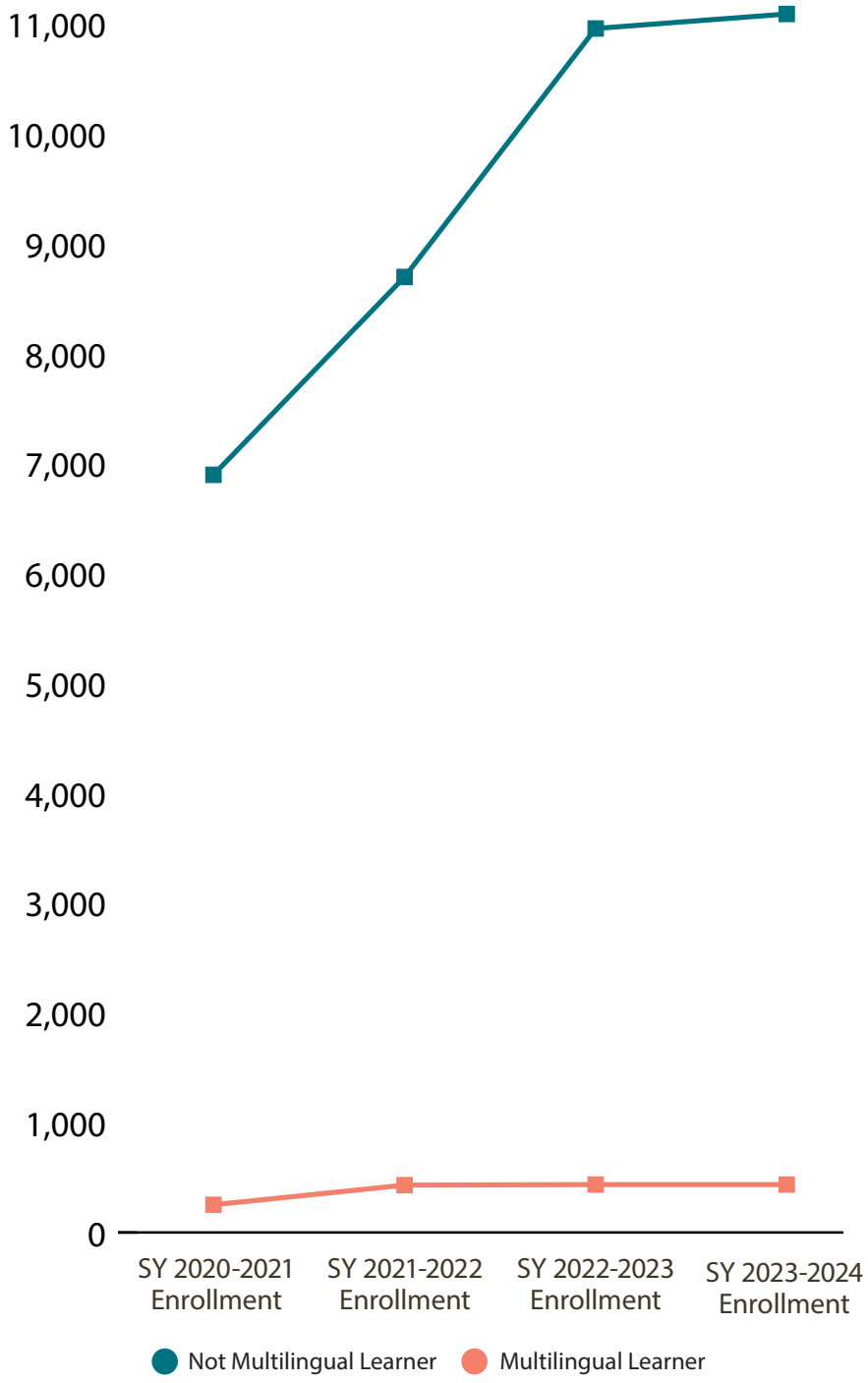
NYSED College in High School Enrollment Increases Year-Over-Year Target Enrollment Groups



Finding 5

While the number of multilingual learners enrolled in college in high school programs over the four-year period grew as much as the number of students of color or students from low-income backgrounds, that growth was not continuous over time and has never mirrored enrollment in the larger school population.

Change in Enrollment in College in High School Programs by ELL Status



73%

increase in multilingual learner enrollment in college in high school programs over the four-year period, but most growth occurred early and was not sustained.

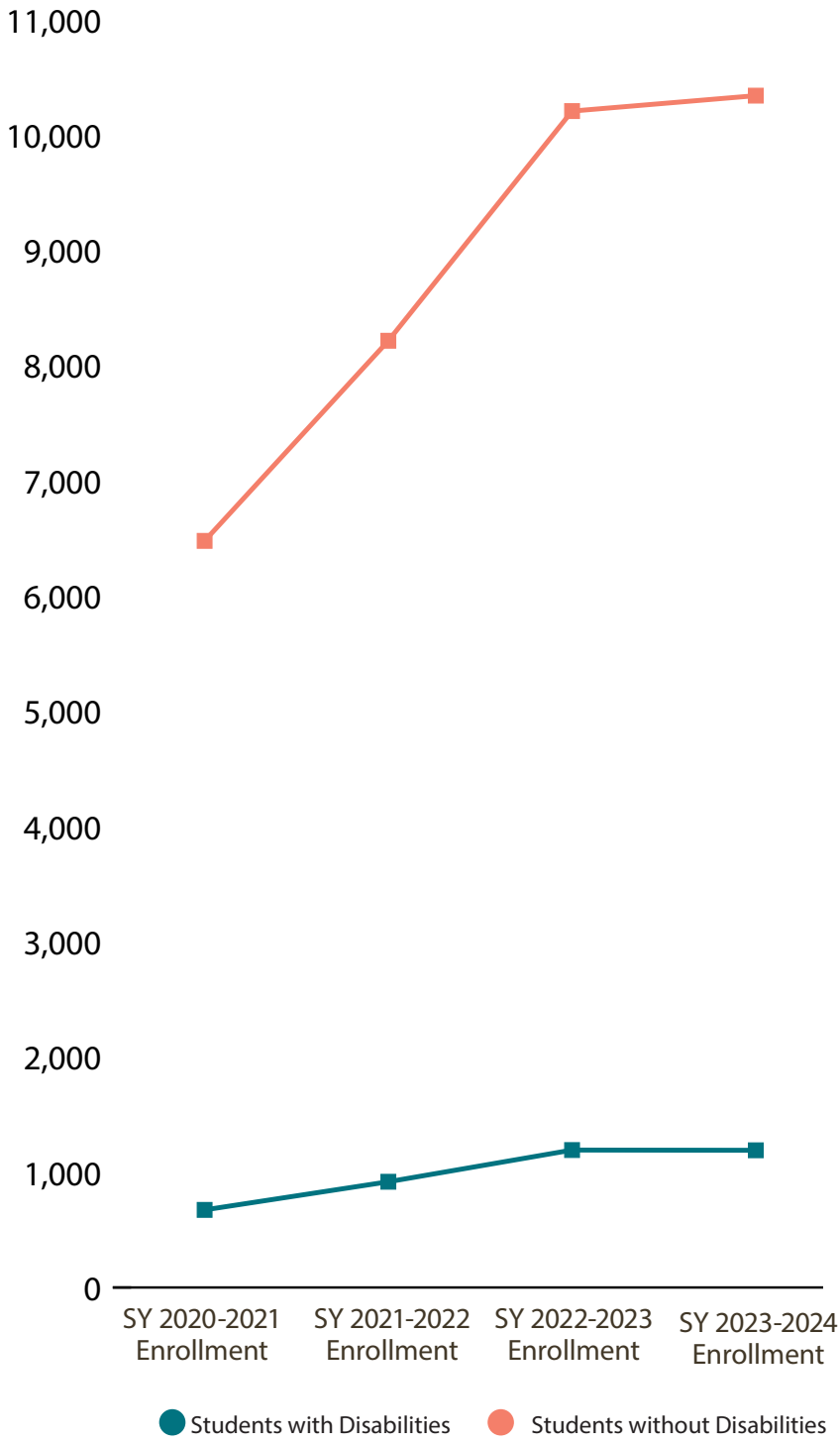
4-5%

of the students enrolled in college in high school programs are multilingual learners, yet they remain underrepresented compared with their 11% share of students statewide.

Finding 6

The number of students with disabilities enrolled in college in high school programs over the four-year period grew by 77%, even higher than the increases in enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds or students of color.

Change in Enrollment in College in High School Programs: Students with Disabilities



Despite rapid enrollment growth, students with disabilities remain underrepresented in college-in-high-school programs, comprising 19% of public school students statewide but only 10% of participants.

19%

of public school students are students with disabilities.

Only 10%

of students with disabilities are participants in college in high school programs statewide.

(SY 2023-2024 enrollment)

Finding 7

Students who participated in state funded college in high school programs had higher overall graduation rates than other students across the state from 2020-2021 to 2023-2024.

Black, Latinx, Native American, and Multiracial students from college in high school programs also had higher graduation rates in 2023-2024 than graduates statewide, with rates comparable to their White and Asian program peers.

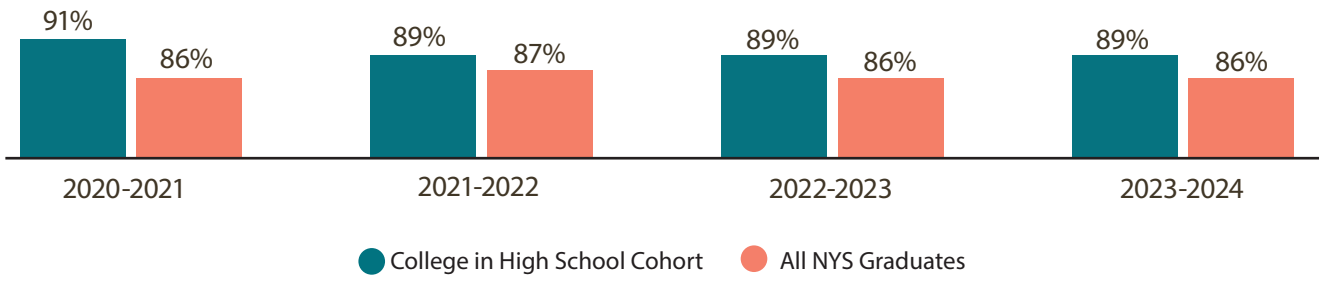
89% 4-year graduation rate

In 2023–24, the four-year graduation rate for college in high school students exceeded the statewide rate of 86% and was consistently higher than the state average from 2020–21 through 2023–24.

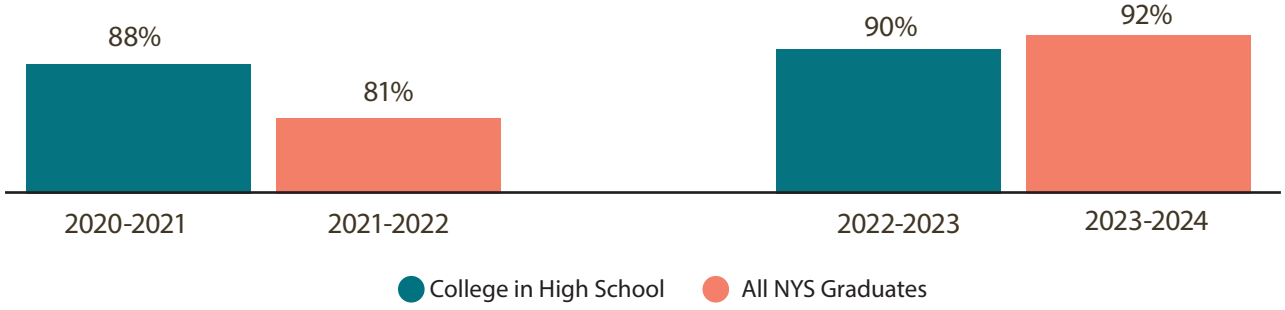
2 Percenteage-point-gap

For the 2024 cohort, the graduation gap between students from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers exceeded 10 percentage points statewide but was under 2 points in college in high school programs.

College in High School 4-Year Graduation Rates from SY 2020-2021 to 2023-2024

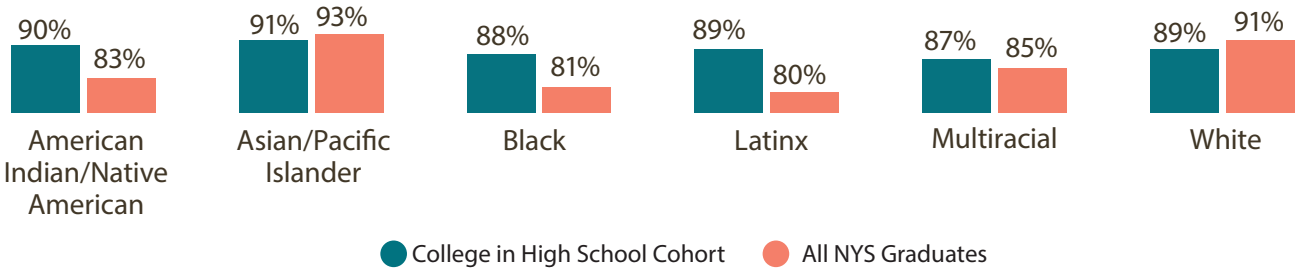


4-Year Graduation Rate by Socioeconomic Status in College in High School Programs v. NYS High Schools, 2023-2024



Finding 7

4-Year Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity in College in High School Programs v. NYS High Schools, 2023-2024



Data Note:

The enrollment and graduation outcomes data used in this analysis are from a public data records request from NSYED. The student-level dataset includes anonymized student enrollment and graduation outcomes in P-Tech, Smart Scholars or Smart Transfer cohorts from the 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years.

Statewide high school enrollment and graduation outcomes data used is publicly available at https://data.nysed.gov/.

Recommendations

While New York has a rich history of college in high school programming to build on, significant work remains to ensure more students across the state, particularly students of color and from low-income backgrounds, have access to rigorous college in high school opportunities.

Fortunately, there are several recent state policy developments that provide important opportunities to accomplish this goal.

1. The new College in High School Opportunity Fund offers an unprecedented chance to both expand access and improve quality for all programs, including those not funded by NYSED. While the new state funding is critical, it's equally important that NYSED provides strong regulations, guidance and equity guardrails focused on a wide range of issues such as program quality, partnership agreements, student admission criteria, faculty selection, and credit transferability. Without strong state leadership, there is a risk that the new Fund will support programming that doesn't result in meaningful learning opportunities or improved post-secondary outcomes. At the same time, the Fund must require that key institutions such as CUNY, SUNY, NYSED, BOCES, and LEAs, collect and disaggregate data by demographics—such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college status—to help identify disparities in access, retention, and success across their programs.

2. NYSED and other state leaders should utilize the pending changes to state graduation measures to position college in high school programs as a rigorous pathway for students to demonstrate proficiency aligned to the new Portrait of a Graduate. By taking advantage of the Opportunity Fund, the state can improve and strengthen the high school and college experience for more students.

3. New York is in the early stages of building a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), which can track student and program outcomes across early childhood, K-12, post-secondary, and the workforce. State leaders should prioritize college in high school longitudinal data to inform policy by identifying which programs lead to strong outcomes in college and career, particularly for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

4. The state is leading multiple workforce and economic development efforts across the state, with the promise of high-paying jobs for qualified New Yorkers. College in high school programs must be better integrated and aligned with local industries across the state to create clear career pathways that include internships and real-world learning experiences for students.

5. Stable and sustainable state funding is critical to future efforts and must also include supports—such as tutoring, advising, and mental health services—to help underrepresented students persist through college in high school programs and into higher education.

Endnotes

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