

Washington Public Enrollment Trends

Fall 2025 Enrollment Research Brief

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June 2026



Introduction

As Washington aims to increase postsecondary educational attainment and equity in the state, enrollment is a key focus.¹ Postsecondary enrollment concerns are even more urgent as the number of Washington high school graduates is projected to decline after 2026.² This research brief offers a more detailed examination of fall enrollment data following the publication of [preliminary enrollment trends for Washington](#).

The following sections describe public enrollment trends first by sector, then by students' financial aid status, race/ethnicity, gender, age group, state residency, and enrollment intensity. Lastly, the brief discusses enrollment for new students and transfer students.

Enrollment by Sector

Over the last decade, the total public postsecondary enrollment trend has roughly reflected the enrollment trend across community and technical colleges (CTCs); see **Figure 1**. While enrollment at CTCs has fluctuated, including a decline of nearly 40,000 students from 2015 to 2022, enrollment at four-year institutions has remained relatively stable, from a high of 103,715 in 2018 to a low of 90,275 in 2023.

Postsecondary enrollment has not returned to pre-pandemic counts, and growth in CTCs is currently driving the state's recovery. From 2024 to 2025, total enrollment within Washington's public institutions rose 2.4 percent to 205,523 students. CTC enrollment of award-seeking students rose 4.2 percent, from 110,248 to 114,862, while four-year institutions experienced only a 0.3 percent increase to 90,661 degree-seeking students.

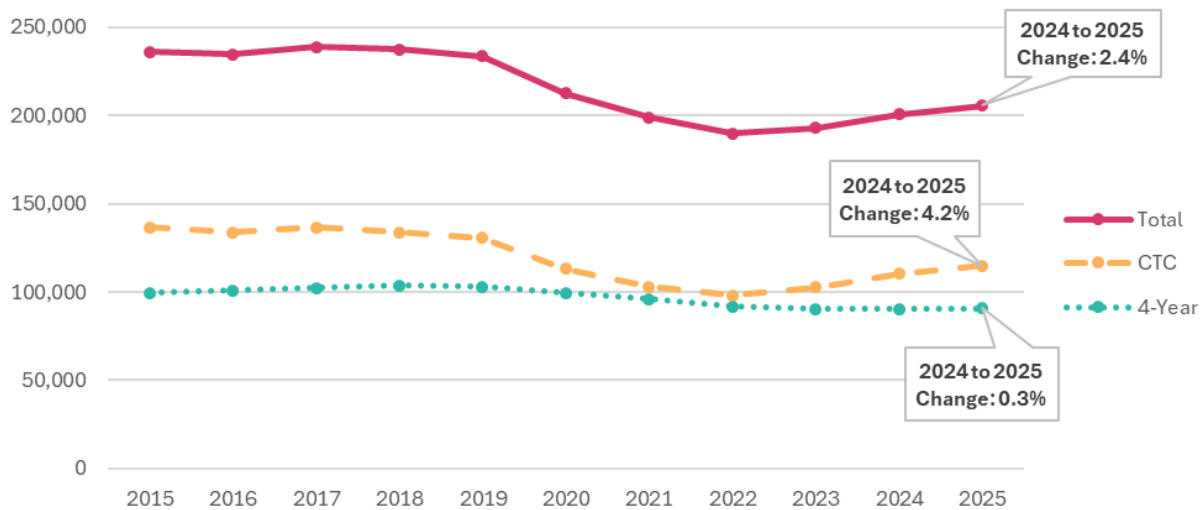
About the Data

Fall enrollment counts come from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) for Washington's community and technical colleges and from the Washington State Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) for public four-year institutions. Specifically, this research brief uses unduplicated counts of award-seeking community and technical college students (those pursuing a degree or certificate, including students in apprenticeships) and unduplicated counts of degree-seeking undergraduates (those pursuing a bachelor's degree) at public four-year institutions. High school students participating in dual enrollment are excluded.

¹ Washington Student Achievement Council. (n.d.). <https://wsac.wa.gov/enrollment>

² Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. (2024). Knocking at the college door. <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking/data-visualizations/geography/>

Figure 1. Fall Enrollment by Year and Sector



Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Enrollment by Financial Aid Status

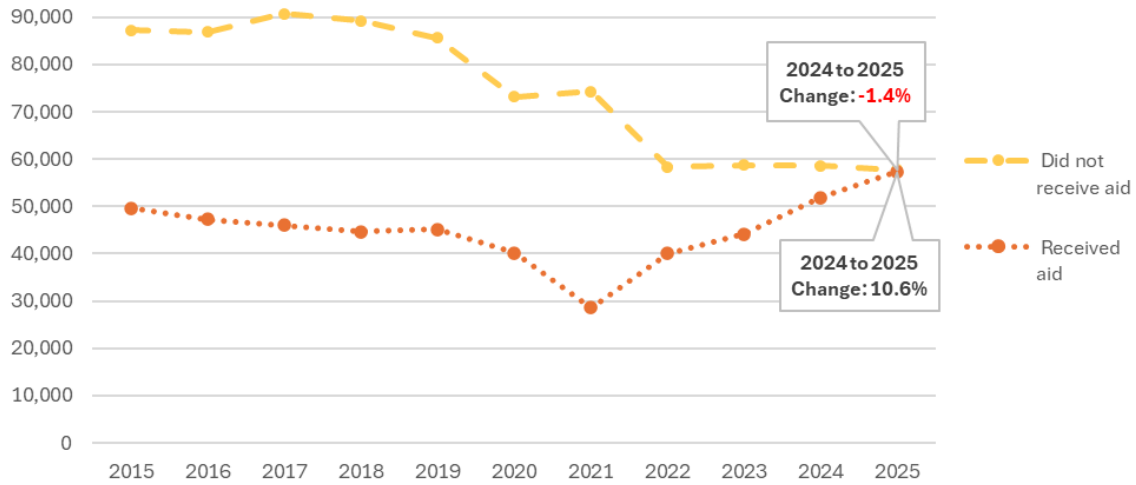
Historically, most postsecondary students in Washington do not receive need-based aid.³ However, in 2025, the total enrollment of students receiving need-based aid rose 7.7 percent and those without need-based aid fell 1.5 percent. As shown in **Figures 2 and 3**, both sectors currently enroll more students who receive need-based aid than they did in fall 2019, after which, in spring 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred and, in the 2020–21 academic year, Washington College Grant⁴ eligibility expanded.

In 2025, enrollment of community and technical college students who receive need-based aid rose 10.6 percent while enrollment of their non-recipient counterparts fell 1.4 percent. This is the first time that there has been near-parity in enrollment by financial aid status: Roughly half of CTC students do not receive need-based aid and roughly half do. In other words, of students enrolled at CTCs, there are now only 396 more who do not receive need-based aid than who do.

³ Data on financial aid receipt comes directly from the four-year institutions and CTCs, and data availability differs slightly across the two data sources. This research brief defines need-based aid receipt at four-year institutions as receiving the Washington College Grant or the Pell Grant. This definition does not consider all other need-based financial aid, such as institutional grants or Washington’s College Bound Scholarship. For CTCs, students receiving need-based aid refers to students identified as economically disadvantaged in the CTC data system, which includes students receiving any need-based financial aid or waivers or who are enrolled in Workfirst, Basic Food Employment Training, or Displaced Homemaker programs. Source: <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/data-services/data-warehouse/student.pdf>

⁴ The Washington College Grant’s expanded eligibility likely prevented more substantial decreases in postsecondary enrollment during the height of the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 2. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Financial Aid Status and Year

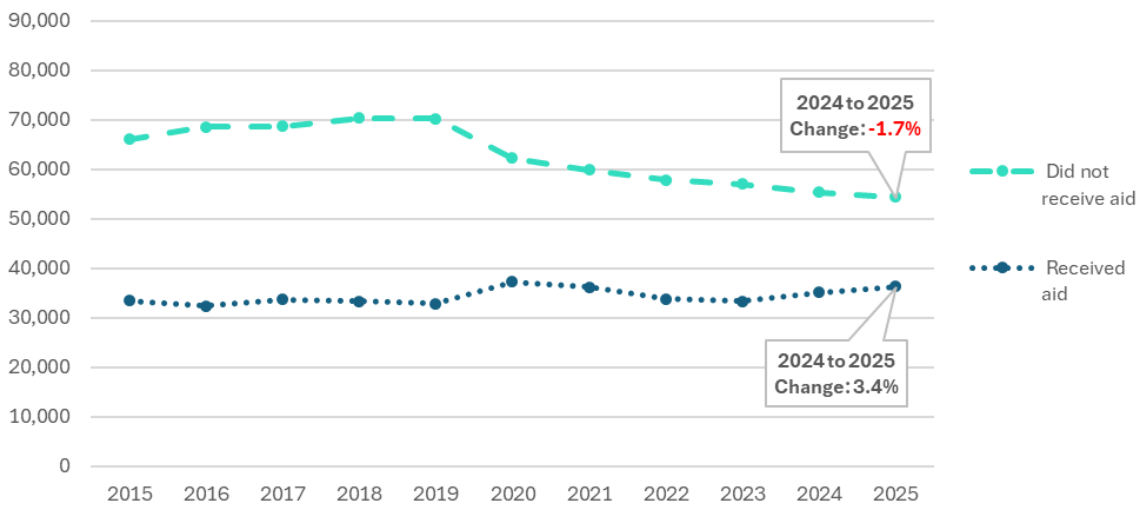


Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

To a lesser extent than at CTCs, the gap in enrollment of students by financial aid status has decreased at public four-year institutions. At four-year colleges and universities, 60 percent of students do not receive need-based aid and 40 percent of students do. Put another way, 18,127 more students do not receive need-based aid than do receive need-based aid. This enrollment gap appears even after a 3.4 percent increase in enrollment of aid-recipient students versus a 1.7 percent decrease in enrollment of non-recipients in 2025.

Figure 3. Fall Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions by Financial Aid Status and Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

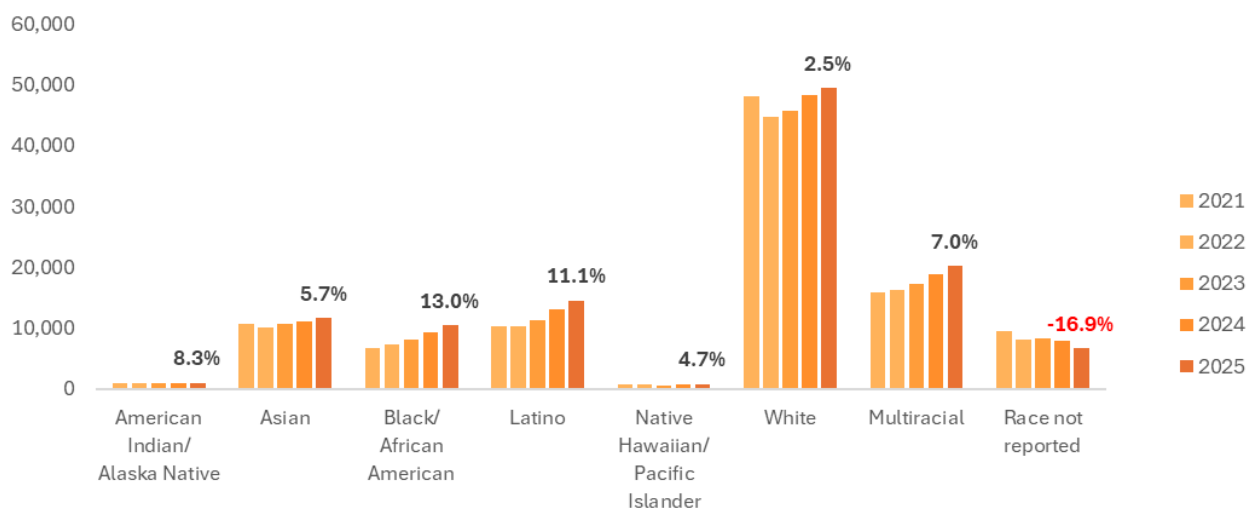
Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Across sectors, Black/African American, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native enrollments grew the most: From 2024 to 2025, total Black/African American, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment grew 9.6 percent, 8.3 percent, and 7.7 percent, respectively. Total enrollment for students of all other races/ethnicities remained roughly on par with or slightly exceeded 2024 headcounts; across sectors, the increase for White student enrollment was the most modest, at only 0.1 percent, or 56 students.

As shown in **Figure 4**, enrollment grew across every category of race/ethnicity for students at community and technical colleges. The largest enrollment increases occurred among Black/African American and Latino students: In 2025, 13 percent more Black/African American students and 11.1 percent more Latino students enrolled at CTCs than in 2024: 1,206 and 1,455 more students, respectively. Importantly, the headcount of these two racial/ethnic groups—as well as for multiracial students—surpassed their pre-pandemic headcounts. Meanwhile, enrollment among CTC students of the other racial/ethnic groups—as well as among those for whom race/ethnicity is not reported—continues to lag behind fall 2019 enrollment.

Figure 4. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Race/Ethnicity and Year

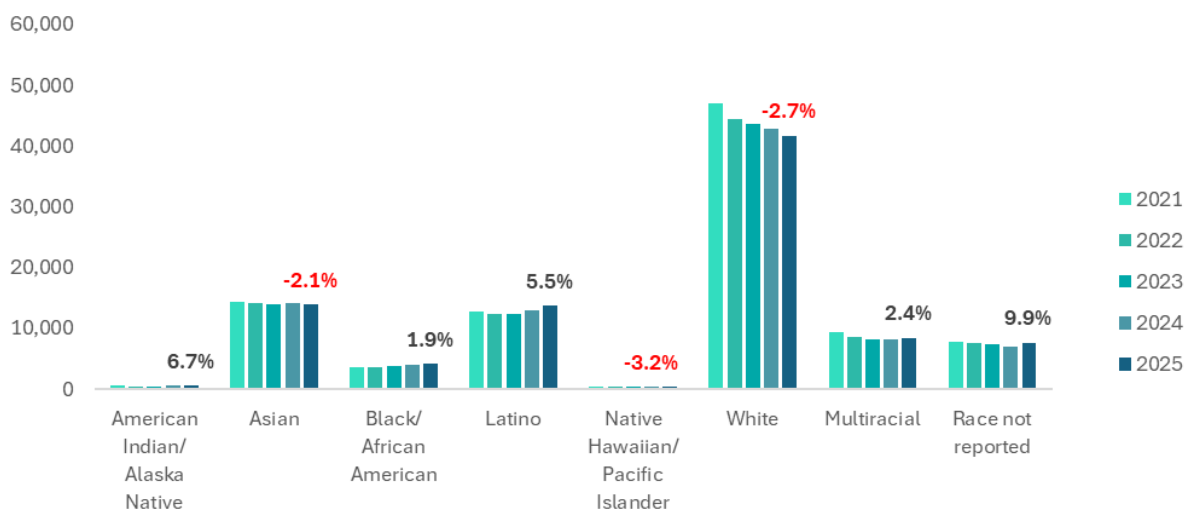


Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

At the state’s four-year institutions, Black/African American and Latino student enrollments are also above pre-pandemic counts; however, unlike at CTCs, the same is not the case for multiracial students. From 2024 to 2025, four-year institutions experienced a decline in Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, and Asian enrollment; see **Figure 5**. There were 14 fewer Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, 1,169 fewer White students, and 295 fewer Asian students, which represents declines of 3.2 percent, 2.7 percent, and 2.1 percent, respectively.

Figure 5. Fall Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions by Race/Ethnicity and Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Enrollment by Gender⁵

Across sectors, female students have long represented a larger share of postsecondary enrollment than male students. As of 2025, after 2.6 percent and 0.9 percent increases in total female and total male student enrollment, respectively, there are 22,214 more female students than male students. The rise in female student enrollment occurred exclusively at community and technical colleges, while both sectors experienced modest gains in male student enrollment; see **Figures 6 and 7**.

Both female and male student enrollment increased at community and technical colleges:

- Washington leads the nation in the number of institutions offering community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs,⁶ where women make up most enrollees.⁷ A 5.9 percent increase in female enrollment at CTCs, alongside a 1.2 percent decline (592 students) at four-year institutions, suggests more women are choosing to earn bachelor’s degrees through their local CTCs.

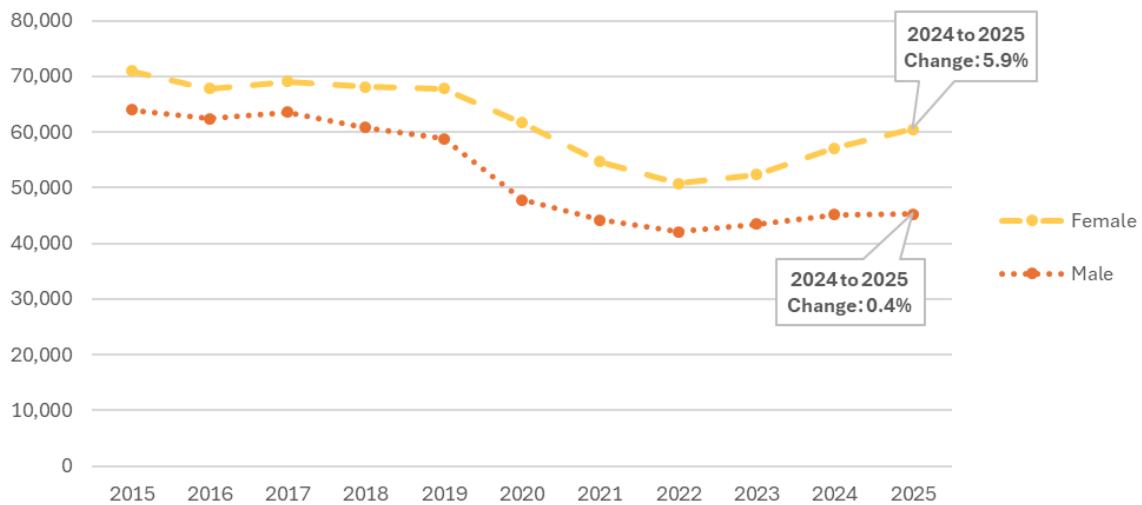
⁵ Future fall enrollment research briefs will include data describing nonbinary students, or those defined as “not exclusively male or female,” if minimum counts are met for reporting purposes. Sources: <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/data-services/data-warehouse/student.pdf> and https://erdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/PCHEES_Data_Submission_Guide.pdf

⁶ Community College Baccalaureate Association & Bragg & Associates, Inc. (2024). Watch them grow: The evolution of community college baccalaureate degrees in the United States. <https://www.accbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Watch-Them-Grow-4.22.24.pdf>

⁷ Meza, E. A. (2024). Community college bachelor’s degrees in Washington State: An update on enrollment, completion, and labor market outcomes. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/community-college-bachelors-degrees-in-washington-state/>

- Male enrollment at CTCs grew by just 163 students (0.4%) in 2025, highlighting the need for more effective outreach to prospective male students. Boys who engage more deeply with Career and Technical Education pathways in high school are more likely to attain a postsecondary certificate,⁸ and male students make up 72 percent of CTC enrollment in apprenticeships.⁹ Thus, bolstering vocational programs—including applied CCB programs—may further support men towards pursuing postsecondary studies.

Figure 6. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Gender and Year



Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

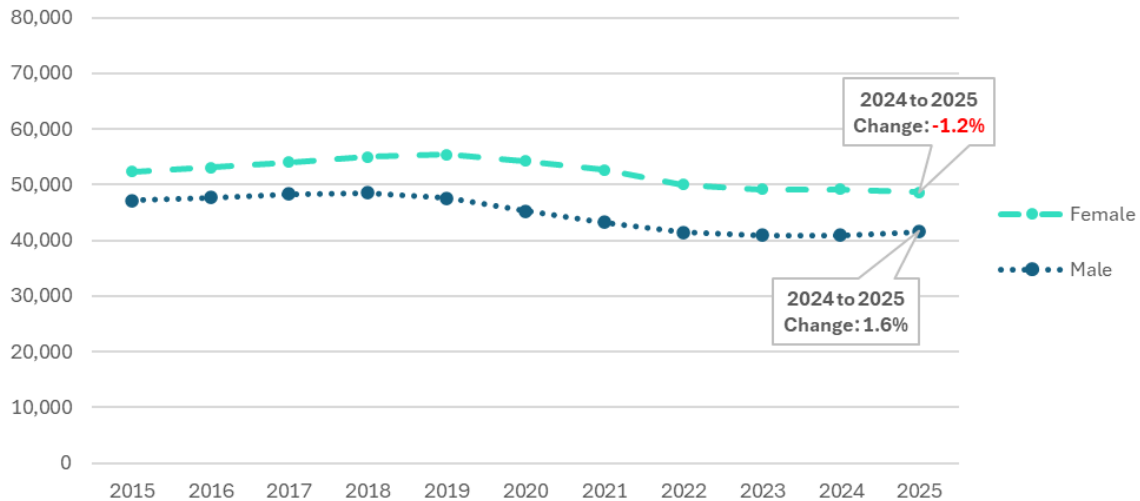
Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

⁸ Riggs, S., & Cigarroa Kennedy, C. (2025). Career and technical education in Washington state: A longitudinal study of student access, participation, and outcomes. Education Northwest. https://erdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/publication_202509_cte.pdf

⁹ State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. (n.d.) Enrollment data dashboard. <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/enrollment-data-dashboard.aspx>

At four-year institutions, male student enrollment rose 1.6 percent, an increase of 644 students.

Figure 7. Fall Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions by Gender and Year



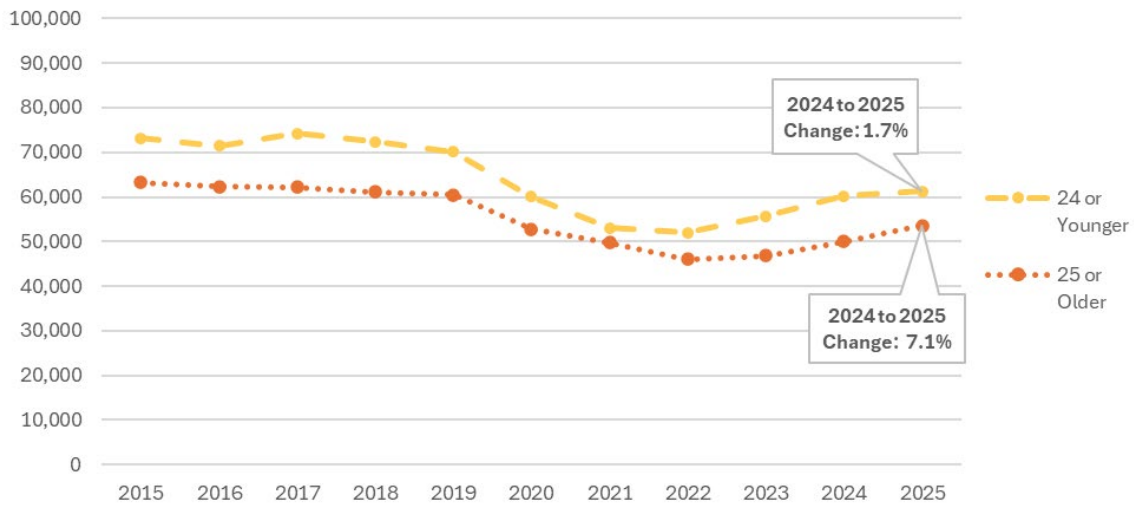
Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Enrollment by Age Group

More than two-thirds of Washington’s public postsecondary students are age 24 or younger: 61,244 CTC students and 81,060 students at four-year institutions. As shown in **Figures 8 and 9**, both sectors experienced modest growth in enrollment of the younger age group (1.7% at CTCs and 0.4% at four-year institutions). Students age 25 or older enrolled in higher numbers at CTCs in 2025: There are 3,574 (7.1%) more of the older age group enrolled, for a total of 53,608 students age 25 or older. At four-year institutions, 100 fewer students age 25 or older enrolled, representing a decline of 1.0 percent to 9,601 students.

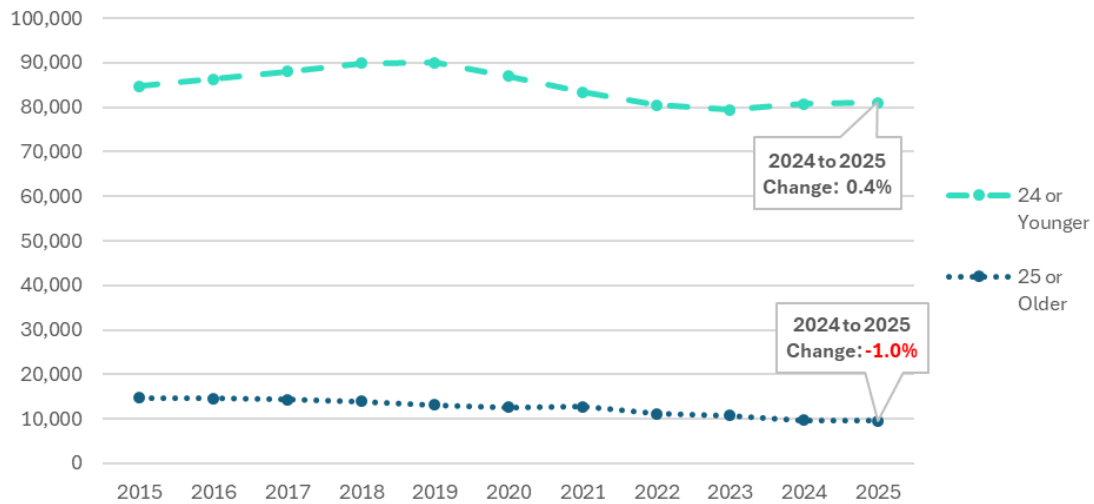
Figure 8. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Age Group and Year



Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Figure 9. Fall Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions by Age Group and Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

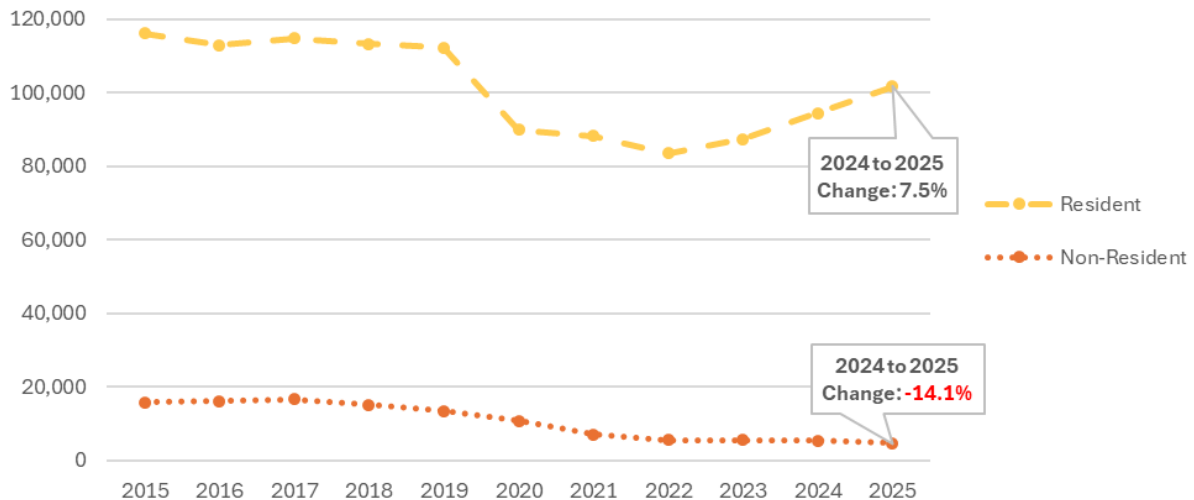
Enrollment by State Resident Status

In 2025, there were 176,087 Washington state residents and 20,889 nonresidents enrolled in CTC and four-year institutions. Total enrollment of state residents rose 4.6 percent while total enrollment of nonresidents fell 5.3 percent.

As shown in **Figure 10**, enrollment at community and technical colleges over time is remarkably different by resident status. On the one hand, state resident enrollment at

CTCs follows a more expected trend: There was a sharp dip from 2019 to 2020 after the onset of the pandemic; during the pandemic recovery period, starting in 2022 and continuing through 2025, there were steady increases. On the other hand, beginning in 2024, nonresident CTC enrollment declined 14.1 percent, or by 766 students. In fact, fewer nonresidents have been enrolling at community and technical colleges each of the last eight years. Nonresident CTC enrollment fell from 16,612 students in 2017 to only 4,674 in 2025.

Figure 10. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by State Resident Status and Year

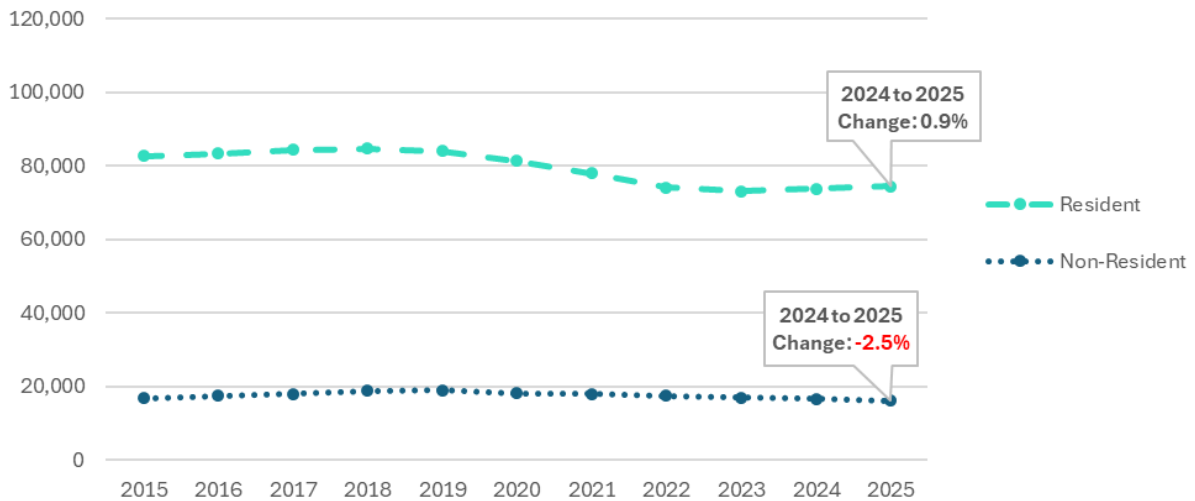


Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Compared to CTC enrollment, enrollment by resident status at four-year institutions has been more stable in the last decade. However, neither state resident nor nonresident enrollment has returned to pre-pandemic counts. In **Figure 11**, the 0.9 percent increase in state resident enrollment translates to 663 more students, while the 2.5 percent decrease in nonresident enrollment means 414 fewer students.

Figure 11. Fall Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions by State Resident Status and Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

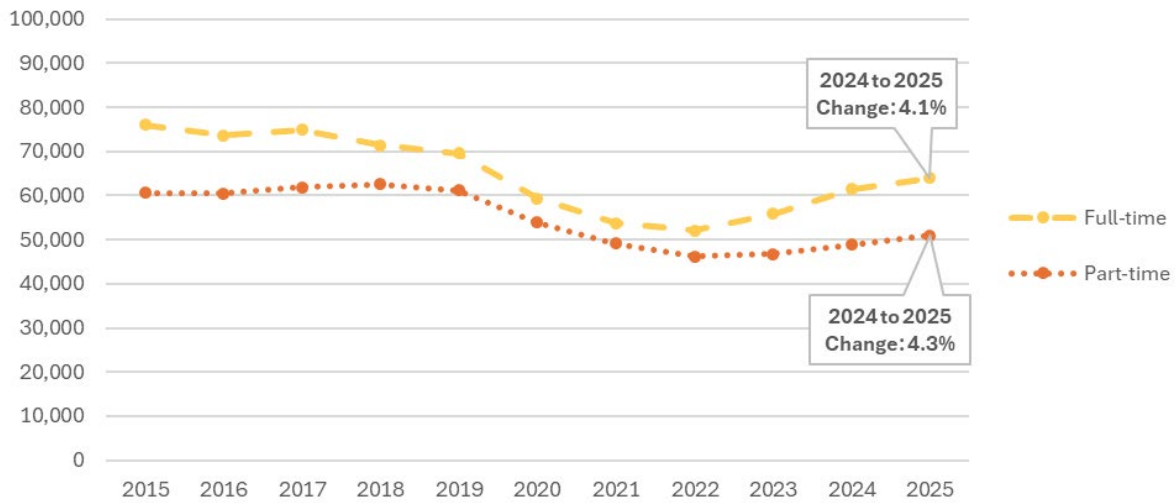
Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Enrollment by Enrollment Intensity

Most public postsecondary students enroll full time¹⁰ rather than part time (70.7% vs. 29.3% in 2025). From 2024 to 2025, full-time enrollment rose 4.1 percent for community and technical colleges and 0.9 percent for four-year institutions; see **Figures 12 and 13**. That means there were 64,018 full-time CTC students and 81,332 full-time four-year institution students in 2025.

¹⁰ Per ERDC, full-time enrollment is equal to 10 or more credits attempted in any term in each academic year at CTCs or four-year institutions.

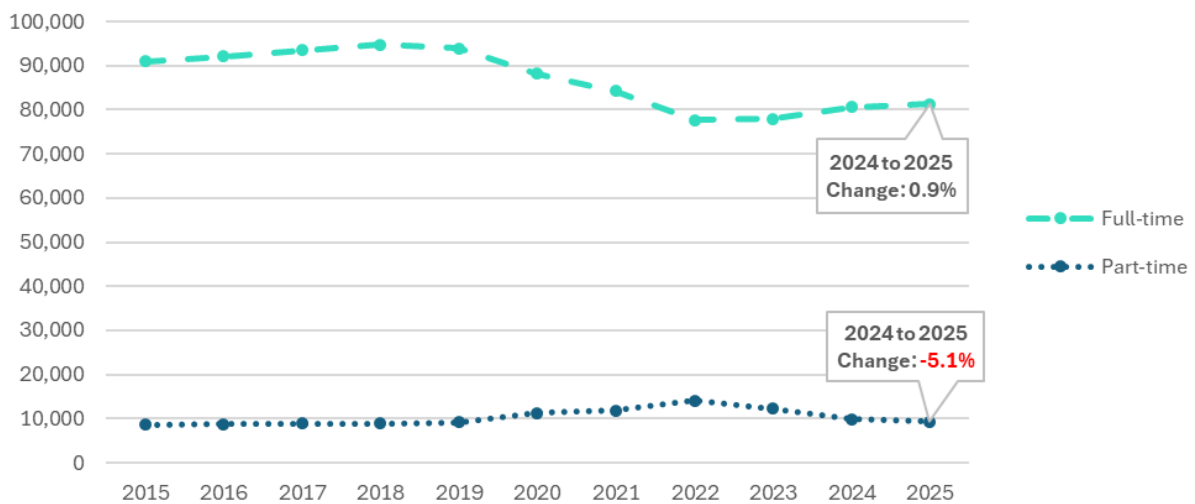
Figure 12. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Enrollment Intensity and Year



Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Figure 13. Fall Enrollment at CTCs by Enrollment Intensity and Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

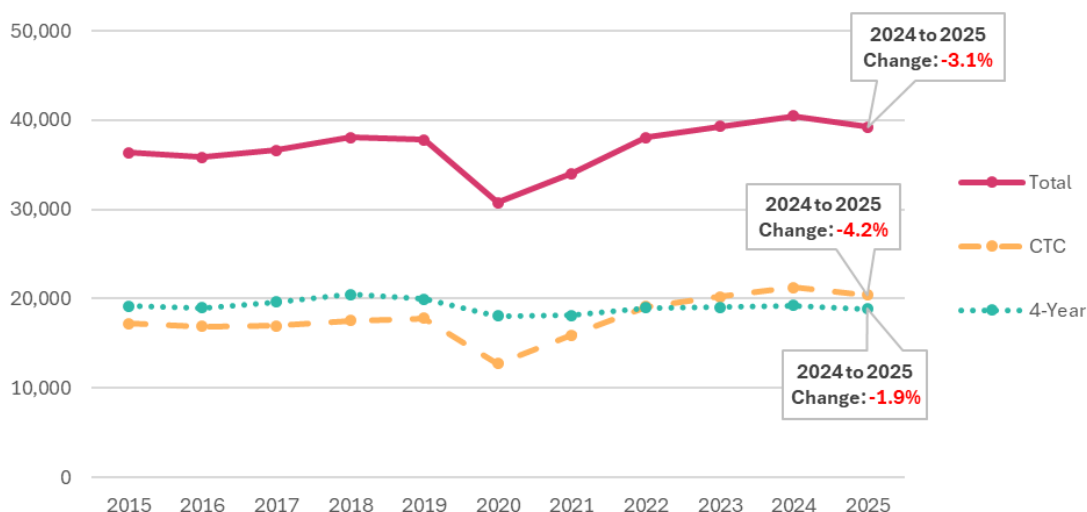
Across sectors, the largest change by student enrollment intensity is in the enrollment of part-time students at four-year institutions: 501 fewer part-time students enrolled in 2025, which represents a 5.1 percent decline from 2024. Among community and technical colleges, part-time enrollment rose 4.3 percent to 50,962 students.

Enrollment for New Students

As shown in **Figure 13**, total, CTC, and four-year enrollment of new students¹¹ declined in 2025 after a few years of recovery post-pandemic. There were 1,250 fewer new students across Washington public institutions: 886 fewer at CTCs and 364 fewer at four-year colleges and universities.

New students compose a smaller share of total enrollment in 2025 than they did in 2024 (19.1% vs. 20.2%). At CTCs, new students dropped from 19.3 percent of enrollment to 17.8 percent. Among four-year institutions, new students declined from 21.3 percent of enrollment to 20.8 percent.

Figure 14. Fall Enrollment for New Students by Sector and Year



Source: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Washington State Education Research and Data Center
Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

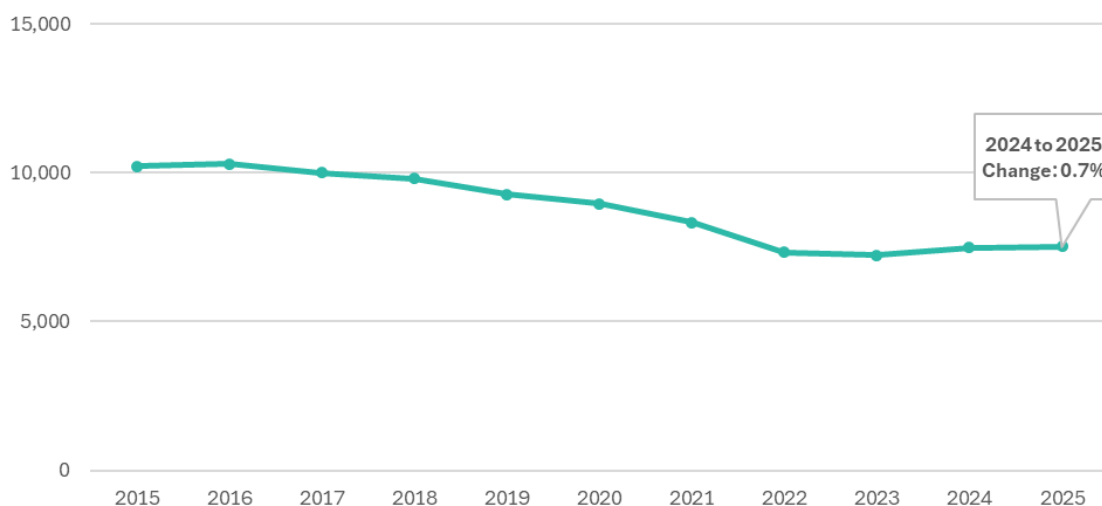
Enrollment of new students is necessary to sustain the state’s postsecondary education system and labor market. Thus, recruiting—and supporting—underserved students, such as adult learners and male students, is a pressing need for the state.

¹¹ New CTC students are those who have not previously attended a Washington community or technical college. New four-year institution students are beginning their first bachelor’s degree programs “following completion of high school or an equivalent avenue of academic preparation”; this category includes students who participated in dual enrollment and excludes transfer students. Sources: www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/data-services/data-warehouse/student.pdf and https://erdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/PCHEES_Data_Submission_Guide.pdf

Enrollment for Transfer Students¹²

Fewer students transferred to public four-year institutions each year from 2016 through 2023. Between 2024 and 2025, however, there was a slight increase in enrollment from 7,481 to 7,533 students, translating to a rise of 0.7 percent; see **Figure 15**. New transfer students now compose 8.3 percent of four-year institution enrollment.

Figure 15. Fall Enrollment for Transfer Students to Four-Year Institutions by Year



Source: Washington State Education Research and Data Center

Note. Data labels indicate the year-over-year percent change in enrollment from fall 2024 to fall 2025.

Conclusion

Washington’s public postsecondary enrollment fluctuated during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery periods. At 205,523 students, total enrollment is currently 28,125 students shy of 2019’s pre-pandemic headcount of 233,648. In fall 2025, more students enrolled at community and technical colleges or four-year institutions than in the prior year: There was a 4.2 percent increase in enrollment at CTCs and a 0.3 percent increase at four-year institutions. Because four-year enrollment has remained relatively stable, the total enrollment trend over time largely reflects enrollment changes across CTCs.

Although post-pandemic enrollment increases initially appeared promising, enrollment at Washington public postsecondary institutions has not fully recovered or stabilized. The looming decline in the number of Washington high school graduates makes these concerns even more urgent. Previously enrolled students—not new students—drove recent gains in enrollment. From 2024 to 2025, the total, CTC, and four-year enrollment of new students declined, and transfer enrollment into four-year institutions increased only by 0.7 percent. Improving outreach to prospective students (especially underserved students), sustaining need-based financial aid, and bolstering CTC programs can help grow enrollment and raise the state’s postsecondary attainment rate.

¹² Future fall enrollment research briefs will include data on students transferring into community and technical colleges from non-CTC institutions.