

Charting a Course to 2030

SREB

Regional State Progress Report

Pushing Ahead with Purpose

2024

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

SREB.org



SREB's
Charting a Course to 2030
Goals for Education

All children **entering school** will exhibit the knowledge and the social and developmental skills needed for success in first grade.

Student achievement for all groups in the **early grades** will exceed state standards and national averages — at rates that close achievement gaps between groups.

Student achievement for all groups in the **middle grades** will exceed state standards and national averages — at rates that close achievement gaps between groups.

Eighty percent of ninth graders will graduate from **high school** ready for college and career training. This likely means more than 90% will need to graduate from high school and more than 80% will need to meet readiness standards for college and career training.

Sixty percent of working-age adults will have a **postsecondary** credential: an associate or bachelor's degree, or a career certificate. Public postsecondary institutions will make it a top priority to help states meet state needs by increasing graduates, public service and research.

Increasing percentages of **adults** without high school or postsecondary credentials will pursue opportunities to earn high school alternative certificates, college degrees or career certificates.

Regional State Progress Report

Pushing Ahead With Purpose

2024 State Progress Report
on Charting a Course to 2030
Goals for Education

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Message From the SREB President

The Southern Regional Education Board has played a critical role in helping states improve education in the South for 76 years. As leaders in education, the focus of our work has involved providing the region's policy makers and education leaders with data to help SREB states set goals and advance education.

Since the adoption of the first set of Challenge to Lead Education Goals in 2002, SREB's state progress reports have helped policymakers gauge their state's performance on a common set of adopted goals and based on our analysis of key indicators that span pre-K through the workforce. While this year is no different, our delivery of these reports is.

The 2024 state progress report you received at this year's annual meeting focuses on the SREB region at large. Since each chart and section provide an analysis for the region, you will see "SREB Average" or "SREB Median" noted throughout the report.

We wanted to give policymakers and education leaders a critical regional analysis and highlight some regional trends. SREB is working to move the 16 state reports to a digital format so you can interact with them across your devices at your convenience.

SREB will be able to update each data point and our analysis as that data becomes available to us. Moving them online allows to reduce the update cycle and get you newer data and analysis on a rolling basis and get it to you much quicker.

Let me share some highlights from this 2024 regional state progress report with data from 2020 to 2023.

High School

- In the SREB region, only 17% of the class of 2023 scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam.
- In the SREB region, of the students in the class of 2023 who took a college-readiness assessment, 17% met all four ACT benchmarks.
- The region's high school graduation rate in 2022 was 88%.

Postsecondary

- Need-based aid decreased as a portion of total state aid in eight SREB states between the 2012-13 and 2021-22 school years.
- The number of Pell Grant recipients declined in all SREB states between 2015-2022, despite the average Pell Grant award increasing.

Workforce

- In the SREB region, the percentage of working-age adults with at least some postsecondary education increased 7.6 points between 2012 and 2022. But across the region in 2022, 38% of working age adults still had a high school diploma or less.
- In the median SREB state, adults with some college or higher earned \$20,645 more than those with a high school diploma or less in 2022.

As always, SREB is committed to working with the states to support substantial progress over time so they can meet their educational, economic and workforce goals now and in the future.



Stephen Pruitt



SREB states set goals
and advance education —
often leading the country
in improving the overall
achievement of its students.

Workforce Prep

Summary

- Helping adults earn a postsecondary certificate or degree is vital to preparing the SREB region's workforce for the future.
- The percentage of working-age adults with at least some postsecondary education increased over the last decade.
- The overall employment rate increased across most SREB states at all education levels.
- By 2030, every SREB state will have more dependent-age individuals than working age adults.
- Adults with higher credentials are less likely than their peers with less than a high school education to earn wages below the poverty threshold.

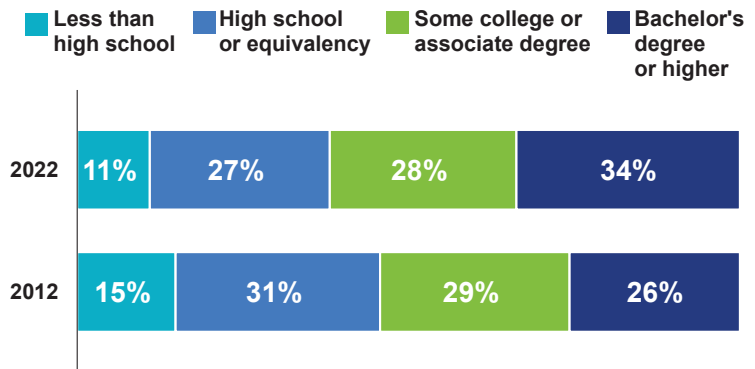
Educational Attainment

Helping adults earn a postsecondary certificate or degree to prepare for employment is imperative for states. Rapid advancements in automation and artificial intelligence will increasingly displace adults with low levels of education, transforming some positions while eliminating others. Better-paying careers in the coming years will require students to earn a certificate or degree after high school.

In the SREB region, the percentage of working-age adults with at least some postsecondary education increased 7.6 points between 2012 and 2022. But across the region in 2022, 38% of working-age adults still had a high school diploma or less.

Educational Attainment

Adults 25-64 in SREB Region



Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

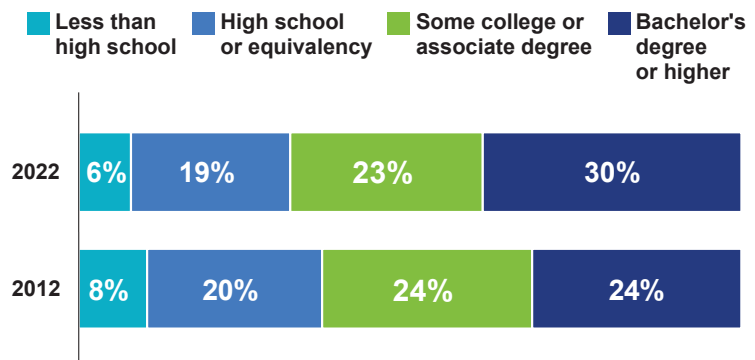
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Job Share

The share of jobs held by adults with a high school diploma or less in the SREB region between 2012 and 2022 decreased by 3.0 points, while the share held by adults with a bachelor's degree or more increased by 6.4 points.

Job Share by Education Level

Percentage of All Adults 25-64 in SREB Region



Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as this does not include those not in the workforce.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Workforce Prep

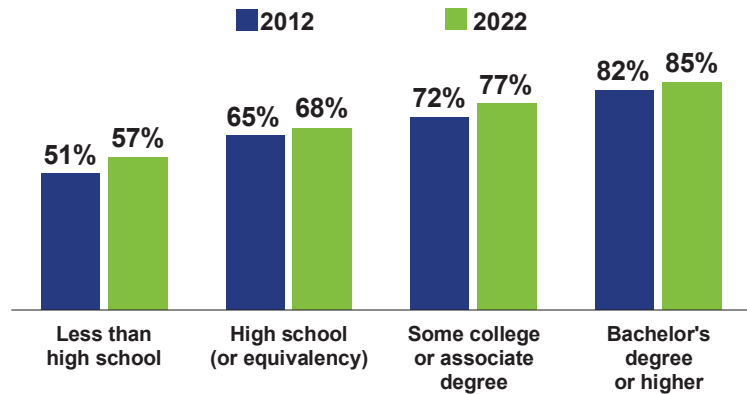
Employment Rates

Despite fewer low-skilled adults in the workforce in 2022 than in 2012, there was an overall employment rate increase across most states at all education levels over the decade. In fact, employment rates for adults with high school credentials increased in all SREB states over the 10-year period, by 3.5 points (See the chart below for state data). In all 16 SREB states, adults with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed at greater rates in 2022 compared to 2012.

These shifts point to a dire situation for low-skilled adults — those with a high school diploma or less — who are most vulnerable to technological advancement and economic downturns.

Employment Rates by Education Level

Percentage of All Adults 25-64 in SREB Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

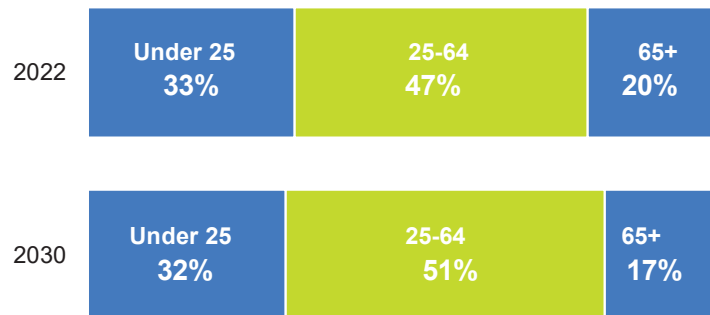
Dependent-Age Population

Without additional education and training, some 18 million SREB adults and their children could be unemployable by 2030. Helping adults earn credentials beyond high school will be critical for 25- to 44-year-olds, who are early- or mid-career and will face job changes.

Technological progress and low educational attainment in the workforce are not the only challenges facing states. By 2030, every SREB state will have more dependent-age individuals than working age adults. Many adults in the 25-64 age range will either be unemployed or out of the labor force by 2030, so the gap between working adults and dependents will likely be higher than conveyed.

Working-Age Adults vs. Dependent Population

Percentage of the Total Population in SREB Region



Notes: Working-age is 25 to 64. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: SREB Fact Book, U.S. Census Bureau

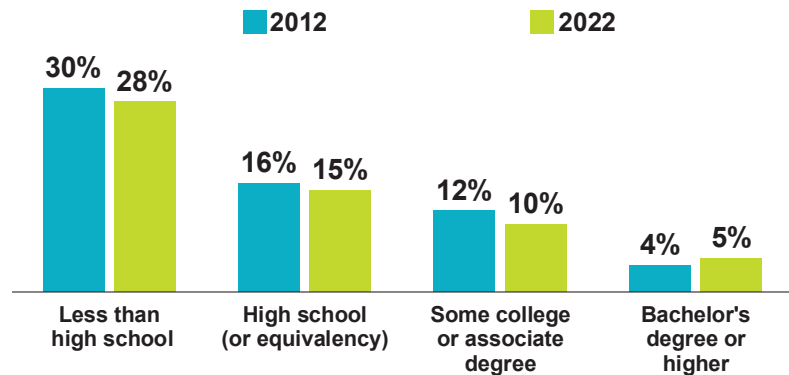
Workforce Prep

Poverty by Education Level

Between 2012 and 2022, poverty rates for adults with any postsecondary education decreased in six SREB states. For adults with a high school diploma or less, poverty rates decreased in nine SREB states.

Percentage of Adults in Poverty by Attainment

Adults 25 or Older in SREB Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Earnings by Attainment

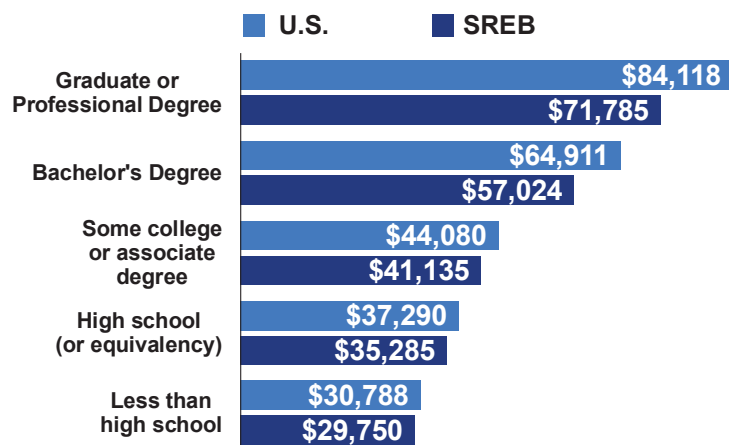
Adults with higher credentials are less likely than their peers with less than a high school education to earn wages below the poverty threshold — \$13,590 for an individual with \$4,720 for each additional person in 2022. In the median SREB state, adults with some college or higher earned \$20,645 more than those with a high school diploma or less.

With the disruption of the pandemic, along with technological advancement shifts, SREB states are facing considerable challenges in meeting workforce needs.

The growing dependent population, rising poverty rates and gaps between attainment and job share seen in 2019 pre-pandemic data will be exacerbated. With millions displaced and fewer high school graduates attending college, training for future job openings may become a necessity for 2030.

Earnings by Education Level

For the Population 25 and Older in SREB Region, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

With fewer people attending and completing college, there are now millions displaced in the workforce pipeline who might need reskilling for future positions. States that coordinate thoughtful partnerships and strategic investments to attain degrees or skills will strengthen a thriving workforce in the future.

Workforce K-12 Teachers

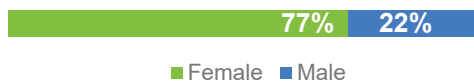
Educator shortages are a workforce issue, not just an education issue.

K-12 teacher shortages have plagued our region and nation for years, limiting districts and states from making crucial educational improvements. The pandemic has only made things worse. Teachers are the number one influence in educational achievement, yet these shortages are also severely limiting our ability to prepare the upcoming workforce, causing economical disadvantages. One workforce sector that is consistently overlooked — yet is integral to supplying workers in all other industries — is the teacher workforce.

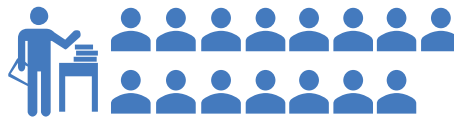
The data below provides a picture of the teacher workforce, shortages and pipeline issues.

Quantity and Quality of Teachers

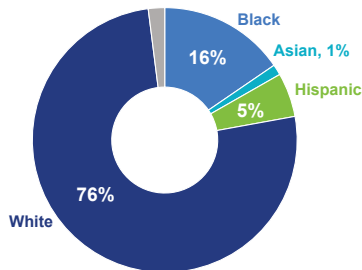
Teacher Gender in SREB States
Percentages of teachers by gender, 2020-21



SREB's Pupil/Teacher Ratio: 15

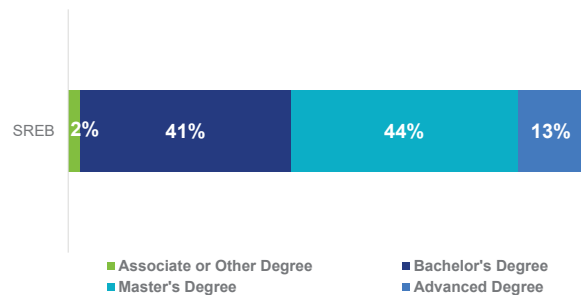


Teacher Race/Ethnicity in SREB States
Percentages of teachers by race, 2020-21



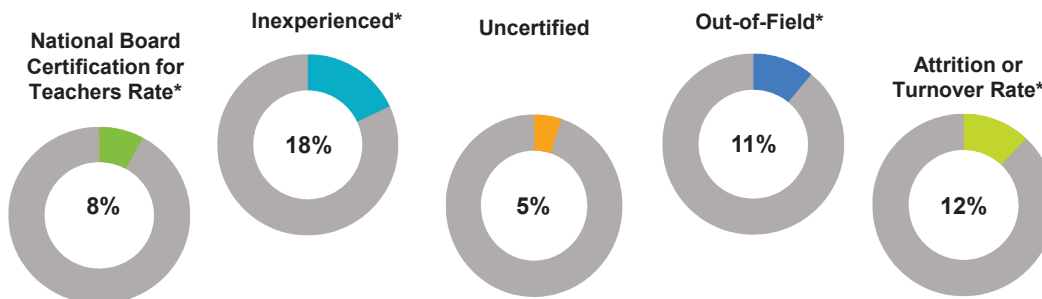
*Note: State data on teachers is inconsistently reported. Percentages of race and gender are approximate due to these inconsistencies.
Source: SREB Teacher Workforce Data by State*

Teacher Educational Attainment
SREB Region, 2020-21



*Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to these rounding.
Source: SREB Fact Book*

Teacher Quality in SREB Region
2020-21



Source: SREB Teacher Workforce Data by State

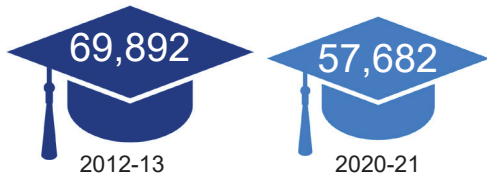
Workforce K-12 Teachers

Current and Future Teacher Shortages

The 2020-21 school year marked the first time in nearly a decade in which the total number of people completing teacher preparation programs increased in the region. In the SREB region between the 2013-14 and 2020-21 school years, the number of teacher prep program completers decreased by 21%.

Teacher Preparation Program, SREB Region

Number of completers



Source: U.S. Department of Education Title II Report

SREB Region's Teacher Preparation Program Completers, 2020-21

Traditional	Alternative - IHE based	Alternative - not IHE based	Total
16,507	4,904	2,892	57,682

Note: Only 12 SREB states supplied data for completers across program types.

All 16 states reported total completers for 2020-21.

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Number of States with Teacher Shortages in the SREB Region by Subject, 2020-21

English/ Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies	Special Education	English as Second Language	Career & Technical Education
10	15	14	6	15	8	10

Source: SREB Teacher Workforce Data by State

Teacher Labor Market Best Practices

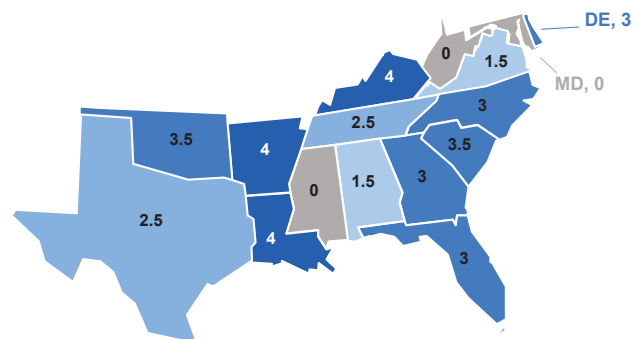
States that coordinate and distribute timely and accurate disaggregated teacher data will be better prepared for teacher shortages. Following teacher data practices will highlight inequities and inefficiencies of local labor markets that individual stakeholders cannot.

States in SREB Region Teacher Data Practices

Produces New Teacher Supply Data	Yes: 12, No: 4
Produces New Teacher Demand Data	Yes: 4, Partially: 8, No: 4
Disaggregates Supply and Demand Data to Institution, District and Certification Level	Partially: 6, No: 7, NA: 3
Publicly Reports Teacher Shortage Data	Partially: 2, No: 11, NA: 3
Publicly Reports Teacher Mobility Data	Yes: 10, No: 6
Makes Teacher Performance Data Publicly Available	Yes: 5, No: 11

Teacher Data Practices in SREB States

How Many of the Six Best Data Practices are Employed in Your State?

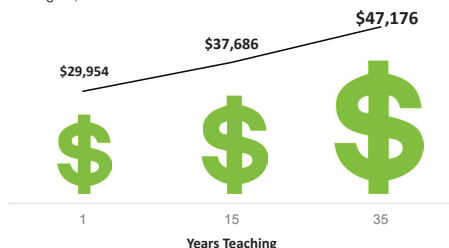


Source: SREB based on NCTQ 2021 State of States Report

Teacher Salaries

Annual Net Salaries For Teachers

SREB Region, 2021-22



Source: SREB Teacher Compensation Dashboard

Average Annual Teacher Salaries

SREB	U.S.
\$56,765	\$66,745

Workforce Postsecondary

Shortages in postsecondary faculty in key fields are preventing technical, community and four-year colleges from supplying enough workers to meet demand in high-needs careers. While teacher shortages are affecting foundational skills preparation, postsecondary faculty shortages in high-demand disciplines are limiting the availability of skilled and ready workers to meet job demand in high-needs careers such as healthcare, information technology, education and other technical fields.

Key Faculty Shortages for In-Demand Career Fields in SREB Region, 2023 through 2033

Postsecondary Faculty Occupation	Annual Supply Gap	Annual Demand	Current Employment, 2021	Projected Employment, 2031
Health Specialties	-840	8,517	77,368	95,892
Nursing Instructors	-265	2,696	24,675	30,431
Business	-123	2,430	25,583	28,798
Career/Technical Education	-23	3,755	44,773	46,690
Biological Sciences	-89	1,768	18,543	20,928
Education Instructors	-37	1,764	19,846	21,440
Engineering	-66	1,265	13,149	14,924
Mathematical Science	-38	1,634	18,463	19,893
Computer Science	-37	1,097	12,038	13,206

Source: JobsEQ

Faculty Quantity and Quality

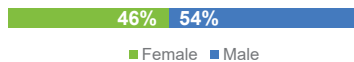
The data below highlights potential contributing factors and top faculty shortages.

Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Total Full-Time Faculty in Alabama: **161,151**

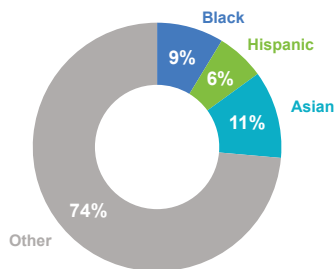
Full-Time Faculty by Gender

Percent of total, 2020-21



SREB Region Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity

Percent of total, 2020-21



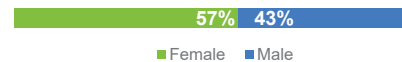
Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

Public Two-Year Colleges

Total Full-Time Faculty in Alabama: **37,330**

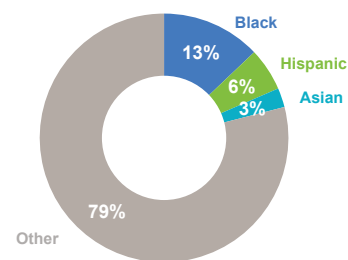
Full-Time Faculty by Gender

Percent of total, 2020-21



SREB Region Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity

Percent of total, 2020-21



Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

Workforce Postsecondary

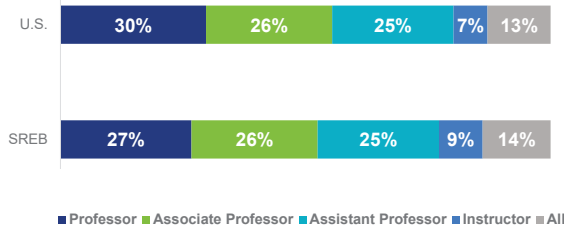
Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities

SREB Region Student-to-Faculty Ratio, 2020



Full-Time Instructional Faculty at Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Percent Distribution, 2020-21



Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

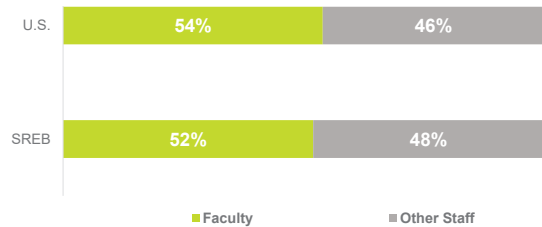
Public Two-Year Colleges

SREB Region Student-to-Faculty Ratio, 2020



Staff at Public Two-Year Colleges

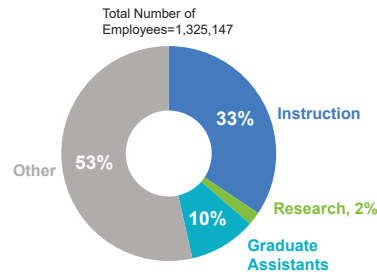
Percent Distribution, 2020-21



Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

Employment at Postsecondary Institutions

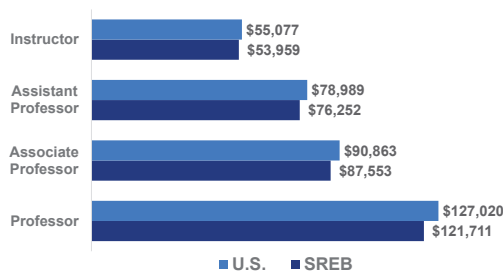
Percent of Total, 2020



Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
Note: "Other" consists of 13 occupational categories

Faculty Salaries

SREB Region Four-Year Colleges and Universities, Full-Time Instructional Faculty Average Salaries



Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

SREB Region Two-Year, Full-Time Instructional Faculty Average Salaries



Source: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education

Postsecondary

Summary

- Need-based aid decreased as a portion of total state aid in eight SREB states between the 2012-13 and 2021-22 school years.
- The number of Pell Grant recipients declined in all SREB states between 2015-2022, despite the average Pell Grant award increasing.
- Of the 14 SREB states that reported persistence data for the 2020 cohort, 10 saw their persistence rates fall in comparison to the cohort of 2015.
- In 2022, 42% of working-age adults, ages 25 to 64, had earned an associate degree or higher in the SREB region.

Need-Based Aid

Adults with education after high school are more likely to be employed, to earn incomes above the poverty level, and to be able to support their children's academic growth. However, as the need to earn a postsecondary credential increased, so has the cost of attaining one.

Earning a higher education credential is pretty much a requisite for future well-being but paying for one is complex. States must help more students enter college and complete programs successfully.

The strategies states use to increase the number and diversity of students in certificate and degree programs vary. Most SREB states provide some combination of need-based and merit-based aid. Need-based financial aid remains an important tool to help students and their families overcome the affordability gap between what college costs and what families can afford. But between 2012-13 and 2021-22, need-based aid decreased as a portion of total state aid in eight SREB states. Changes in the portion of need-based aid ranged from a 37% increase to a 16% decrease.

Key Terms

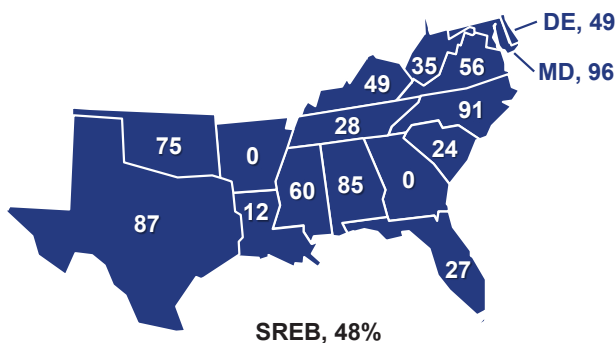
Federal Pell Grants: financial support for low-income students — whose total family income of \$50,000 or less — that does not have to be repaid.

Net price: defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as the total cost of college attendance minus the average state, federal and institutional scholarship, grant aid, and all other types of state and federal financial aid that a student can expect to receive.

Expected Family Contribution: the share of the net price of college attendance expected to be paid by a student's family. It is based on a family's taxable and nontaxable income, family size, the number of members going to college that school year and the student's financial aid information.

Need-Based Undergraduate Grant Aid

Portion of State Financial Aid, 2021-22



Source: National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs

Postsecondary

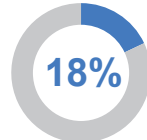
Pell Grants and Student Loan Debt

Students from low-income families may also receive Federal Pell Grant funding to help pay for college. Most Pell money goes to students with total family incomes below \$20,000 per year. From 2014-15 to 2020-21, the average Pell Grant award per recipient at public colleges increased from \$3,575 to \$4,152 nationwide. In 2020-21 the average Pell Grant award in SREB states ranged from \$3,795 to \$4,666.

Even though the average Pell Grant award increased in the SREB region, the number of students receiving money declined in all 16 SREB states. The number of Pell Grant recipients fell by 23% from 2015 to 2022. The proportion of college costs covered by Pell also declined in every SREB state. Federal Pell Grants are at their lowest purchasing power in over 40 years.

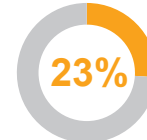
For the Class of 2023 in SREB Region:

Average Pell Grant awards increased



\$626 from 2015.

Number of Pell Grant recipients decreased



699,108 from 2015.

Total Federal Student Loan Debt

Undergraduate and Graduate Debt in SREB Region



Source: Federal Student Aid

Students' families are expected to pay a share of the net price cost for attending college according to their annual Expected Family Contribution. EFC varies dramatically across the five income levels established by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System at the NCES: families with yearly incomes of less than \$30,000, from \$30-\$48,000, from \$48-\$75,000, from \$75-\$110,000, and \$110,000 and above.

Families in the lowest income bracket are expected to contribute less than families in other brackets, but their contribution represents a much larger portion of their annual earnings. Student loans can help, but student debt may hinder graduates' purchasing power for years.

Across SREB states, average student loan debt of borrowers ranged from \$31,182 to \$42,280 in 2023. For borrowers ages 24 and younger across SREB states, the average student loan debt ranged from \$12,643 and \$14,944 in 2023. Faced with the prospect of so much debt, many families may decide that college is just too expensive.

Student Loan Debt by Age in SREB Region

	SREB Region	U.S.	Difference
Average Debt	\$36,293	\$35,695	-\$599
Ages 24 and Younger	\$13,779	\$14,095	\$43,976
Ages 25 to 34	\$32,626	\$32,834	\$208
Ages 35 to 49	\$45,857	\$45,025	-\$832
Ages 50 to 61	\$46,351	\$45,809	-\$542
Ages 62 and Older	\$43,643	\$43,976	\$333

*Includes all federal student loan debt and does not specify between undergraduate and graduate levels

Source: Federal Student Aid

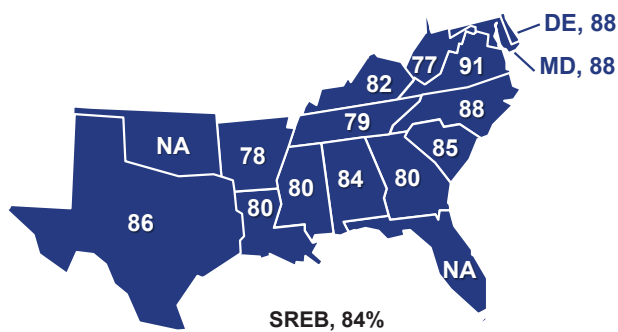
Postsecondary

First-Year Persistence

SREB states monitor their college freshmen's first-year persistence rates as a predictor of college completion. Unlike other persistence rates used across the country, this SREB rate is calculated with data submitted to the SREB-State Data Exchange.

First-Year Student Persistence Rates

Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities, 2019 to 2020



Source: SREB Factbook

For freshmen students entering in 2020, the average persistence rate at public four-year institutions in SREB states was 84% — seven points lower than for their 2013 peers. Across the region, rates for the 2020 cohort ranged from 77% to 91%. Of the 14 SREB states that reported data for the 2020 cohort, 10 saw their persistence rates fall from the cohort of 2015.

Key Terms

First-year persistence rate: the percentage of freshmen in the first-time, full-time, bachelor's degree-seeking cohort who were enrolled at the institution they first attended or transferred to another college or university the next fall.

Three-year and six-year graduation rates: the percentage of first-time freshmen who enter college in the fall term, remain at the same institution, and graduate within three years (at two-year institutions) or six years (at four-year institutions).

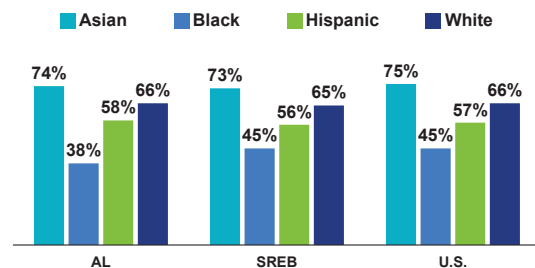
SREB student progression rate: the percentage of first-time freshmen who complete a bachelor's degree or remain enrolled or transfer to another institution after their initial enrollment.

Six-Year Graduation Rates

Key performance outcome measures for states include the six-year graduation rate for four-year colleges and universities and the three-year graduation rate for two-year colleges. Institutions must report these rates to the U.S. Department of Education. The rates do not account for students who enroll at later dates, part-time students or those who transfer from other institutions. Thus, they provide a partial picture of college graduation rates.

Six-Year Graduation Rates

Public Four-Year Institutions in SREB Region, 2020



Note: First-time, full-time freshmen who entered in fall 2014 and graduated by 2020

Source: SREB Fact Book

In 2020, the SREB region's six-year college graduation rate was 61%, up 5% from 2014. It trailed the nation by 2 percentage points. Six SREB states had graduation rates that exceeded the national average of 61% for students who enrolled in 2014. The six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students in seven SREB states exceeded the rate for their peers nationwide. In six of these seven states, Black students also exceeded the rates for their respective peer groups nationwide. In the SREB region, graduation rates for Black students ranged from 30% to 66%. For Hispanic students, the range was 42% to 71%. In eight SREB states, the six-year graduation rate for white students exceeded the rate for their peers nationwide.

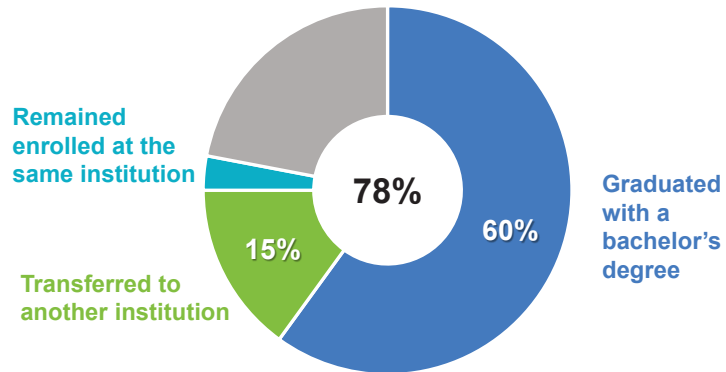
Postsecondary

Student Progression Rates

The Data Exchange partners with SREB states to track students for up to 10 years from the year they enter college to calculate an SREB student progression rate. This rate provides states an indicator of the progress a cohort is making toward graduation.

In 2020, the SREB progression rate was 78% after six years for students who entered public four-year colleges and universities in 2015: 60% had graduated, 15% had transferred to other institutions and 3% remained enrolled.

SREB Student Progression Rate
Status of 2015 Entering Students in the SREB Region, 2020



Notes: First-time, full-time freshmen in public four-year institutions within 150% of normal time. Percentages smaller than 5% are not labeled.

Source: SREB-State Data Exchange

Educational Attainment of Working-Age Adults

The Challenge 2030 adult educational attainment goal calls for more working-age adults in SREB states to earn a postsecondary credential. Postsecondary certificates, as well as associate and bachelor's degrees, count toward the goal. In the SREB region, 42% of working-age adults, ages 25 to 64, had earned an associate degree or higher by 2022 — two percentage points below the nation. Four SREB states matched or exceeded the national average of 44%.

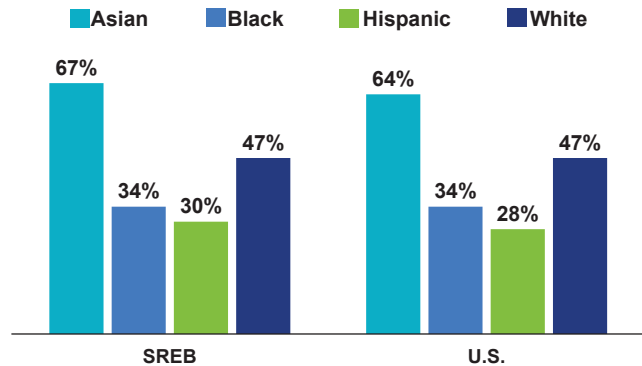
In 2022, the percentages of Black or Hispanic working-age adults with an associate degree or higher exceeded their respective peer groups nationwide in six and nine SREB states, respectively. The percentage of white working-age adults with an associate degree or higher exceeded the nation in four SREB states.

States and institutions should consider ways to support students better so that more graduate. For example:

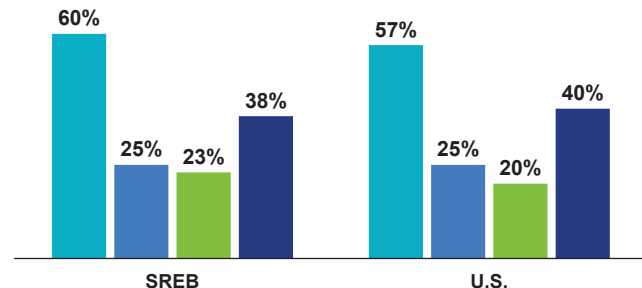
- Provide greater support for their Pell Grant recipients to ensure their success
- Provide support for transfer students to ensure they graduate
- Provide rewards for postsecondary institutions that meet or exceed completion performance targets
- Align postsecondary education and workforce needs to provide incentives to student

Adults 25 and Older in SREB Region, 2022

Associate Degrees or Higher



Bachelor's Degrees or Higher



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Summary

- The percentage of ninth graders who reached 12th grade on time increased in the SREB region between 2014 and 2023.
- Between 2015 and 2022, 13 SREB states increased their high school graduation rates.
- In the SREB region, only 17% of the class of 2023 scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam.

9th Grade Bulge and Grade-Level Progression

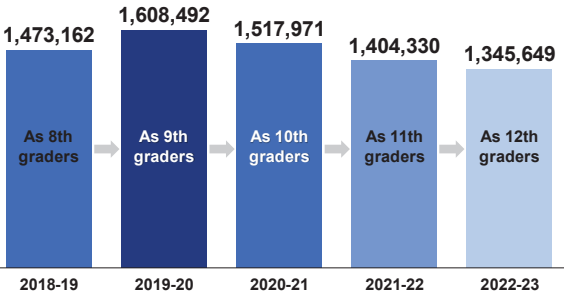
Key Terms

Ninth-grade bulge: Ninth grade public enrollments that exceed that cohort’s eighth grade enrollments could be due to ninth grade retentions, drop-outs, transfers or newly enrolled former home-school students — a possible indicator that too many middle graders were underprepared for high school.

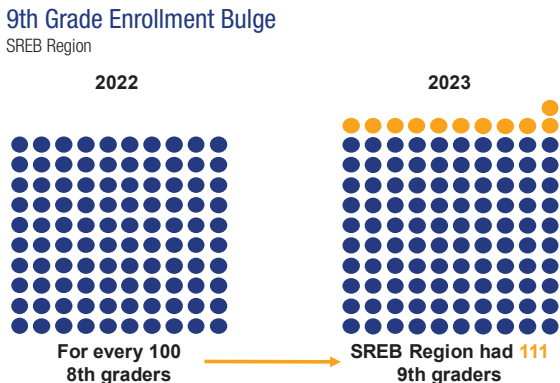
Grade-level progression: The percentage of students who successfully advance from one grade to the next.

Making a successful transition from eighth to ninth grade is key to student success in high school. But this transition proves difficult for many students. In the SREB region, 111 ninth graders were enrolled in public schools in 2023 for every 100 eighth graders in 2022. The ninth-grade bulge ranged from two to 19 more students in ninth grade across all 16 SREB states.

Grade-Level Progression
Enrollment for the Class of 2023, SREB Region



Source: SREB, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics



Source: SREB, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics

Students can struggle with transitions as they advance through high school as well, potentially putting them at risk of failing a grade or dropping out, although states have seen some improvement. From 2014 to 2023 the percentage of ninth graders who reached 12th grade on time increased 12 percentage points to 84%, trailing the nation by five points. In 2023 the high school progression rates in SREB states ranged from 76% to 92%.

Several factors influence both the ninth-grade bulge and high school progression rates. Monitoring students’ progression into and through high school can help school staff identify students at risk of failure and show state leaders where state policies and programs can support student success.

Graduation Rate

Between 2015 and 2022, the region’s graduation rate rose by 3 points to 88%, one percentage point higher than the national average. Thirteen SREB states saw their high school graduation rates rise during this time, by one to nine amid overall gains in graduation rates, significant gaps remain among student groups. Black and Hispanic students,

High School

students with disabilities, those from low-income families, and English learners continued to graduate at rates lower than their Asian and white peers. The median graduation rate gains for Asian and Black students, English learners and students from low-income families outpaced those made by all students in the region.

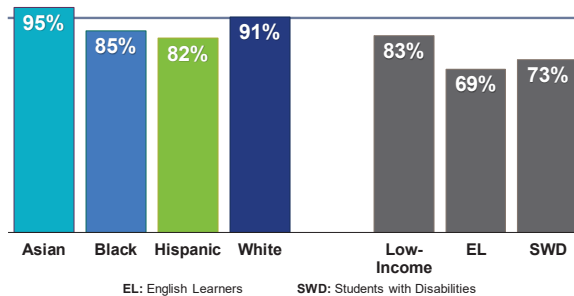
In 2022, 85% of Black students in SREB states graduated from high school, compared to 84% in 2019. Hispanic students graduated at a rate of 82%, compared to 84% in 2019.

At the same time, students from low-income families graduated from high school at a rate of 83%. English learners graduated at a rate of 69%, while students with disabilities graduated at a rate of 73%.

Grade-Level Progression

Enrollment for the Class of 2023, SREB Region

SREB Graduation Rate Target: 90%



Source: State departments of education

Advanced Placement

In addition to graduating students from high school, states need to focus on preparing students for a rapidly changing workforce. The Challenge 2030 goals call for states to increase access to accelerated programs, such as dual enrollment, Early College, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement.

For those students who take AP courses in high school and attempt the related exams, the research suggests that they are more academically successful as college freshmen. This is true even if the students do not earn a score of 3 or higher on the test — considered passing and generally sufficient to earn college credit.

Nationally, 34.7% of the graduates in the Class of 2023 took an AP exam, compared to 20% to 46% across the SREB states. For students in the SREB states, passage rates ranged from 8% to 28%. Only three SREB states exceeded the national passage rate of 22%.

In the SREB Region:

The high school graduation rate in 2022 was



up 3 points from 2015.

84% of ninth graders advanced to 12th grade on time — 4 point more in 2023 than in 2015.

For the Class of 2023,



of students scored a 3 or higher on an AP test, trailing the nation by 4 points.

Source: College Board, Inc., NCES, and state departments of education

Advanced Placement in SREB Region

Student group	Number of tests taken		Percentage of tests with scores 3+	
	2013	2023	2013	2023
Asian Students	157,765	273,169	64%	74%
Black Students	158,694	178,627	25%	34%
Hispanic Students	268,689	467,485	38%	42%
White Students	753,540	750,662	56%	62%

Source: College Board, Inc.

High School

Summary

- Across the region, eight states had higher participation rates of the ACT and eight states had higher SAT participation rates.
- ACT and SAT participation increased or stayed the same in 13 SREB states.
- In the SREB region, 61% of the class of 2023 took the ACT.
- The SREB average SAT score for the class of 2023 was higher than the national average.
- The SREB average ACT composite score for the class of 2023 was lower than the national average composite score.

Focus is on College and Career Readiness

While increasing high school graduation rates is important, the focus of the SREB 2030 goal for high schools is on college and career readiness. Like Advanced Placement, **dual enrollment** courses may help prepare students for college and career training beyond high school.

Recently, states have paid increased attention to dual enrollment programs to provide greater access to post-secondary for more students. And there is some evidence that these programs can encourage students to enroll in college and help them be successful, though research findings are mixed.

Many of the positive outcomes attributed to dual enrollment were observed in **Early College High Schools**, and due to data and sampling limitations, findings from such studies are not generalizable beyond the original program(s) or location(s). Researchers have also been unable to determine whether participation causes positive outcomes or if they are simply associated with dual enrollment due to other factors, such as student characteristics or programmatic variations.

To help states answer these questions, SREB began a Dual Enrollment Initiative in 2019. This initiative convened an advisory panel including state and local K-12 leaders, state higher education agency leaders, and technical college system and institutional staff to evaluate ideas, problems and goals to understand the impact of dual enrollment. This panel aims to address key policy questions, explore dual enrollment as a strategy to connect secondary and postsecondary to career opportunities, and examine state methods of establishing college readiness.

Key Terms

Dual enrollment: Courses taken during high school in which students receive both high school and college credit.

Early College High Schools: Organized programs of study in which students earn no less than 12 transferable college credit hours that count toward their high school diploma at no cost to students or their families.

SREB Region class of 2023

SAT

- The average SAT score for females was 29 points lower than for males.
- Females scored 2 points lower than males in reading and writing; males scored 28 points higher in math.

ACT

- The average ACT composite score for females was 0.4 points higher than for males.
- Females scored 1.1 points higher than males in reading; males scored 0.6 points higher in math.

The advisory panel identified five issues confronting all SREB states — student access, eligibility and costs, program quality measures, program funding streams, and data collection and reporting.

ACT and SAT scores are used for college admission decisions and the awarding of merit-based scholarships. Both assessments are attempting to measure a high school student's readiness for college and provide a common data point that can be used to compare all applicants.

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Earning Postsecondary Credit During High School Acrosss SREB Region

Policy Elements	Details
State offers multiple ways for students to earn postsecondary credit in high school	Yes: 9, No: 7
Term for courses in which a student earns secondary and postsecondary credit	Dual Enrollment: 10, Dual Credit: 5, Concurrent Enrollment: 2
State requires dual enrollment courses to be offered in high school	Yes: 7, No: 9
Grades in which students may participate in dual enrollment	9-12: 4, 10-12: 1, 11-12: 6, Not Specified: 3, Other: 2
Public postsecondary institutions are required to accept credits	Yes: 13, No: 3

Source: Education Commission of the States

ACT and SAT Participation and Performance

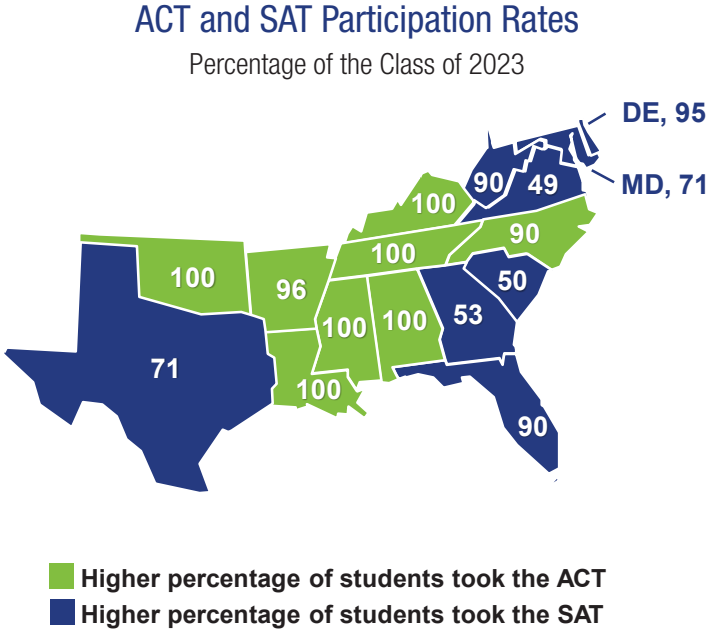
Participation rates on the ACT or SAT ranged from 26% to 100% in the SREB states for the graduating class of 2023. While nine states required participation on college admissions tests for high school students in 2023, six states had 100% participation. Another three states had participation rates over 90% — Arkansas and North Carolina on the ACT and Delaware on the SAT.

Among SREB states, the percentage of students taking these admission tests differs greatly, and the proportion of students taking them has shifted in recent years. In South Carolina, 40% took the ACT and 50% of the class of 2023 took the SAT. Of those remaining, nine had 50% or more participation on only the ACT, and eight had 50% or more participation on only the SAT.

In the SREB region, 61% of the class of 2023 took the ACT, a three-percentage increase from the class of 2021. SAT participation for the 2023 class was 39%, up 8 percentage points from the class of 2021.

SREB’s 2030 goals call for states to reach national averages on the ACT and SAT. The average composite ACT score for all student groups in the SREB region for the class of 2023 was 18.8, compared with the national average of 19.5. Since 2021, both the national and regional averages fell by 0.8 points and 0.7 points respectively. For the ACT, 0.1 point is considered statistically significant.

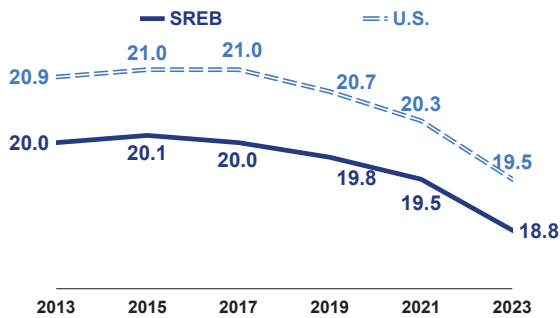
In the SREB region, the average ACT composite score worsened compared with the class of 2021. In 2023, two student groups in the region met their national peers’ scores while two fell behind the national average. Asian students averaged 24.2 points in both the region and nationally. Hispanic students averaged 17.4 points in the region and nationally, did not meet their national peers’ scores. Black students fell behind the nation by 0.2 points, while white students trailed the nation by 0.5 points.



Sources: ACT, Inc. and College Board

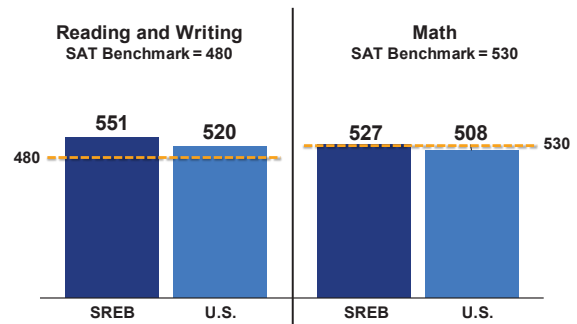
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Average Composite ACT Scores
Graduating Classes, SREB Region



Source: ACT, Inc.

SAT: Section Scores and Readiness Benchmarks
Graduating Class in SREB Region, 2023



Source: College Board, Inc.

SAT Benchmarks by Student Group

The 2021 SAT results cover two sections: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Math. While this test is derived from previous ones, it was greatly revised in 2017 so previous scores do not directly correspond to current and future ones. The SAT has set empirically based benchmarks of college readiness for each section: 480 for ERW and 530 for Math.

In SREB states, the average SAT score for the class of 2023 was 1077, 29 points lower than in 2021 and 49 points higher than the national average.

Difference from SAT Benchmark Scores SREB Region, Class of 2023

Student Group	Benchmark	
	ERW: 480	Math: 530
All Students	+80	+67
American Indian	-2	-77
Asian	+127	+93
Black	+13	+14
Hispanic	+48	-11
White	+93	-28

Note: ERW means Evidence-Based Reading and Writing.

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Summary

- Across the region, the gap between graduation rates and students meeting ACT and SAT readiness benchmarks remains a concern for the SREB region for the class of 2023.
- The percentage of students meeting both SAT benchmarks decreased in 13 SREB states.
- The percentage of students meeting all four ACT benchmarks decreased in six SREB states.
- For the class of 2023, the percentage of students meeting the ACT STEM benchmarks decreased in 15 states.

Measuring Career and College Readiness

States can use various measures to gauge their students' progress toward the SREB college- and career-readiness goal. These include the ACT, SAT, state assessments, and indicators such as graduation rates and completion of dual enrollment courses, and industry certifications.

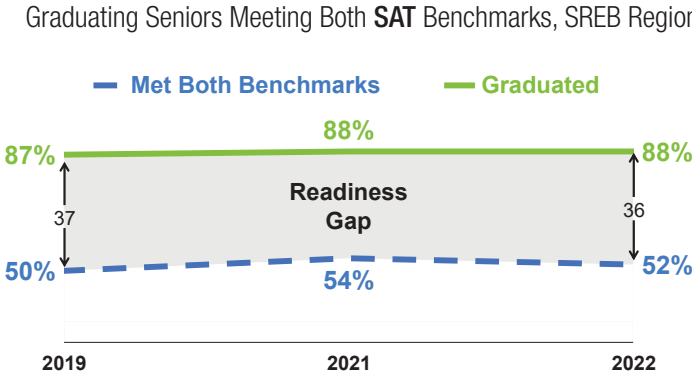
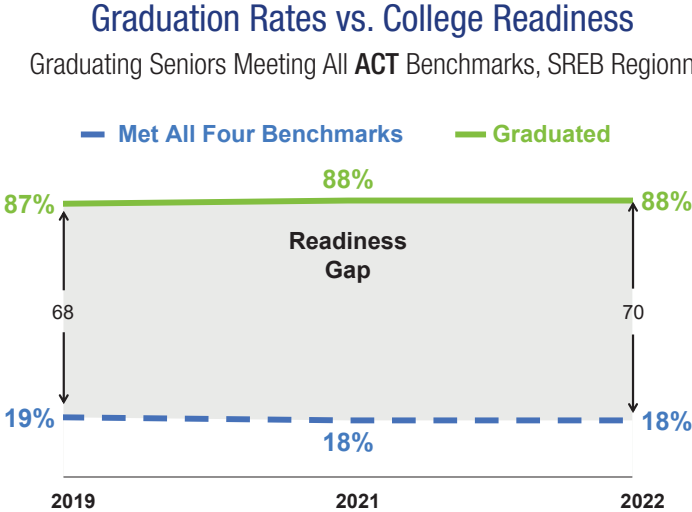
Key Terms

ACT and SAT readiness benchmark: the minimum scores that indicate students have a high probability of success in college courses.

- **ACT:** a benchmark score indicates a student has about a 50% chance of earning a B or better and about a 75% chance of earning a C or better in the corresponding college courses.
- **SAT:** a benchmark score indicates a student has about a 75% chance of earning a C or better in the corresponding college courses.

Readiness gap: the gap between high school completion rates and the percentage of students meeting college readiness benchmarks.

SREB states have significantly increased their high school graduation rates since 2002, but ACT and SAT college-readiness results show that too many graduates are leaving high school unprepared for college coursework. This **readiness gap** comes at a time when labor projections suggest that nearly two-thirds of future job openings will require candidates with post-secondary credentials.



Source: College Board, Inc. & State Departments of Education

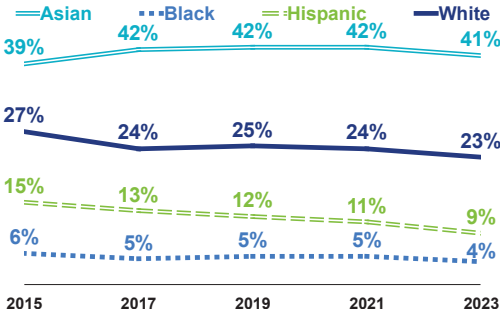
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ACT and SAT Performance by Student Group

Nationwide, of the students in the class of 2023 who took a college-readiness assessment, 21% met all four ACT benchmarks and 40% met both SAT benchmarks. In SREB states, 17% met all four ACT benchmarks and 48% met both SAT benchmarks.

Students Meeting All Four ACT Benchmarks

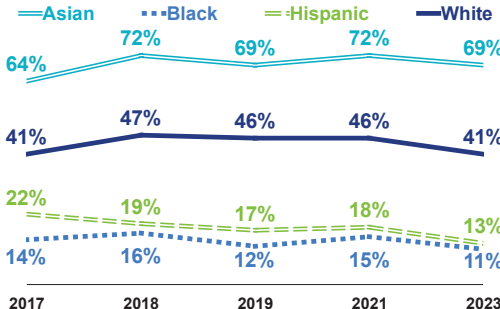
Percentage of Graduating Class by Subgroup, SREB Region



Source: ACT, Inc.

Percentage Meeting Both SAT Benchmarks

Graduating Class by Subgroup, SREB Region



Source: College Board, Inc.

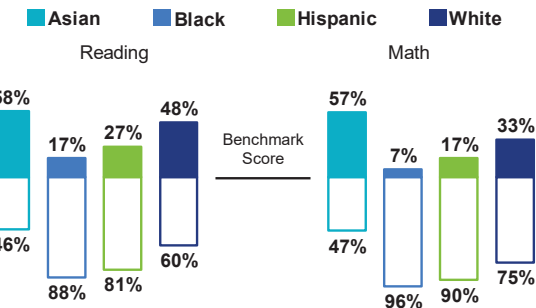
A closer look at ACT and SAT benchmark results shows wider performance gaps in meeting the benchmarks for Black and Hispanic students than for Asian or white students.

Across the SREB region in 2023, ACT benchmarks results showed: 41% of Asian and 23% of white students met all four college-readiness benchmarks; 9% of Hispanic students and 4% of Black students did.

The pattern of results was similar on the SAT. In 2023, 74% of Asian and 51% of white students met both SAT benchmarks, but only 24% of Hispanic students and 17% of Black students did nationwide. In the region, fewer than 22% of Black students and 38% of Hispanic students met at least one of the SAT benchmarks, compared with 58% of white students and 76% of Asian students.

Class of 2023 Meeting ACT Benchmarks

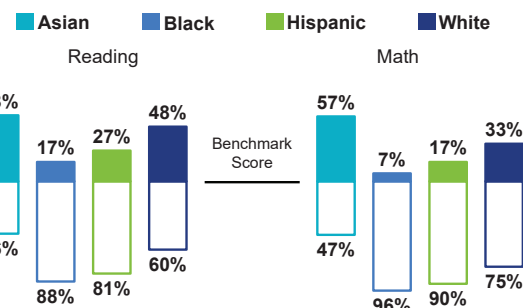
Students in SREB Region by Subgroup



Source: ACT, Inc.

Class of 2023 Meeting SAT Benchmarks

Students in SREB Region by Subgroup



Source: College Board, Inc.

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STEM and Career and Technical Education

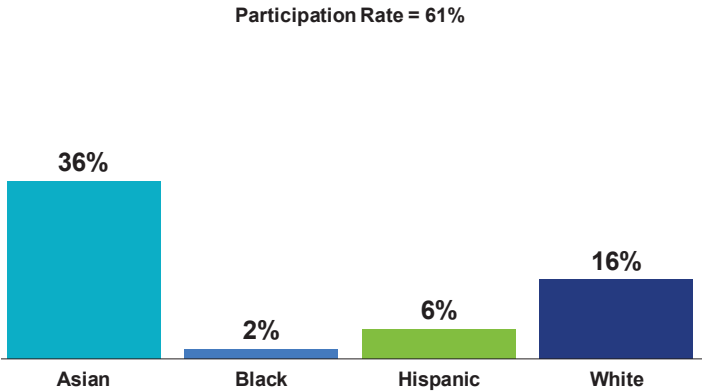
According to ACT results, students are particularly underprepared in STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Nationwide, 15% of students in the class of 2023 who took the ACT met the STEM benchmark, compared with 12% in the SREB region. While 36% of Asian students and 16% of white students in the SREB region met this benchmark, just 2% of Black and 6% of Hispanic students did.

In the seven SREB states with full ACT participation for the class of 2023, 1-2% of Black students and 3-7% of Hispanic students met the STEM benchmark; 8-18% of white students and 27-36% of Asian students did.

According to SREB’s 2017 publication, *Valuing Both C’s in College- and Career-Readiness Accountability Systems*, industry leaders already struggle to find workers who possess a broad mix of workplace skills, including STEM and industry-specific technical skills. Employers have expressed a need for workers who also have essential employability skills like the ability to communicate well, read technical manuals, work in teams and solve complex problems.

Percentage Meeting ACT STEM Benchmark

Graduating Class in the SREB Region, 2023



Source: ACT, Inc.

Career and Technical Education in SREB Region, 2021-22

Public High School Enrollment	5,860,628
High School CTE Enrollment	1,634,492
Total Secondary CTE Enrollment	4,907,353
High School CTE Concentrators	28%
High school graduation rate for CTE concentrators	97%
CTE concentrators who earned a postsecondary credential after high school	60%
“Good jobs” held by workers without a bachelor’s degree*	79%

*Note: “Good jobs” have median annual earnings of \$55,000 and pay no less than \$35,000 for adults under age 45.

Source: Advance CTE

To prepare more students to graduate with the skills needed to meet workforce needs, states offer career and technical education courses, often as part of defined pathways or programs of study. Career pathways that connect to college-ready courses and career opportunities teach critical technical and employability skills, but they also keep students engaged and achieving at higher levels, preventing dropouts and promoting transitions beyond high school.

CTE courses can be funded using federal Perkins V awards that require each state to report data on at least one of three program quality indicators. Most SREB states report how many students attained a recognized postsecondary credential — an industry-recognized certification, apprenticeship or degree. The other two available indicators are students who attained postsecondary credits and those who participated in work-based learning.

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