

## Share the message in your communities: Education after high school matters

Although Kentucky has been making amazing progress with college enrollment, persistence, retention, degrees earned, and student debt reduction, we still have much work to do to meet our 60x30 goal over the next 4 years.

Through policy and practice, we are preparing more people to earn higher wages in Kentucky's economy. We are working with our partners in K-12 through initiatives like the Kentucky Advising Academy and GearUP Kentucky to ensure that more high school students are transitioning smoothly to postsecondary courses directly after graduation.

More students are enrolling in college, earning certificates, and completing degrees—especially at our community and technical colleges, where graduation rates now exceed 50 percent. FAFSA completion has also improved, reaching 61 percent for the Class of 2025, helping more students access financial aid and take the next step after high school.

Affordability remains central to our progress. Six out of 10 Kentucky undergraduate students are now graduating debt-free, according to our data. This is up from 2019-20, when four out of 10 students were graduating debt-free. The percentage of debt-free graduates from community and technical colleges is now 74%, and 46% for public university graduates.

Not only are more students graduating debt-free, but the report also shows that average loan balances are decreasing. In 2024-25, the most recent year available, the average borrower at KCTCS owed \$13,739 at



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### 2024 Median Wages for 2017 Kentucky High School Graduates



Source: KYSTATS

These data show why higher education matters. Kentuckians with postsecondary credentials, from certificates to advanced degrees, make more money over time - and those wages increase as education levels increase.

graduation (down from \$14,167 five years ago), while the average public university graduate (baccalaureate only) owed \$32,564 (down from \$35,100 over the same period).

Still, challenges remain. College-going rates for recent high school graduates have not fully recovered, particularly for students from low-income families. Many students are unsure how education connects to real jobs, or they face financial and personal barriers that keep them from enrolling. This is where leadership at the local level matters most. I encourage our board members and community leaders to help tell a clear and hopeful story: college and workforce training lead directly to good jobs Kentucky needs today. High-demand fields like healthcare, construction technology, and other skilled trades depend on educated workers.

When students hear this message from trusted local voices—school boards, employers, faith leaders, and elected officials—it becomes real. Together, we can show every Kentucky student that education after high school is not just an option, but a pathway to purpose, stability, and a stronger future for their communities.

## Fall 2025 Kentucky postsecondary enrollment up 3.3% over previous year

Enrollment across Kentucky's postsecondary system continues to show encouraging momentum aligned with the state's 60x30 goal. Total enrollment increased 3.3 percent statewide, driven by a 4.6 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment. Growth was led by two-year public institutions (+6.2 percent), followed by independent colleges (+5.9 percent) and four-year public universities (+2.8 percent).

These gains reflect the continued efforts of campuses to be student-ready by strengthening pathways, advising and support structures. Dual enrollment rose 6.2 percent overall, with especially strong growth at two-year public institutions (+9.1 percent), while first-time undergraduate enrollment increased 3.7 percent statewide - signaling renewed momentum among recent high school graduates.

### SINCE FALL 2024 ...



**TOTAL ENROLLMENT**  
+3.3%



**UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT**  
+4.6%



**TOTAL DUAL ENROLLMENT**  
+6.2%