



Fall 2025 Enrollment and Retention Report



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Executive Summary



Total Enrollment

One-Year Change: **3.3%**
Five-Year Change: **11.9%**

Total enrollment has increased significantly across all degree levels and sectors over the past five years.



Undergraduate Enrollment

One-Year Change: **4.6%**
Five-Year Change: **15.4%**

Undergraduate enrollment growth has been robust across all sectors since Fall 2020.



Dual Credit Enrollment

One-Year Change: **6.2%**
Five-Year Change: **59.3%**

Dual credit enrollment has grown substantially, with over 60% of dual credit students enrolled at KCTCS.



First-Time Enrollment

One-Year Change: **3.7%**
Five-Year Change: **15.7%**

First-time enrollments grew for the fourth consecutive fall, reflecting progress in the college-going rate.



First-Time Adult Enrollment

One-Year Change: **13.3%**
Five-Year Change: **81.5%**

For Kentucky to reach its 60% attainment by 2030, more adults must earn postsecondary credentials.



Total Adult Enrollment

One-Year Change: **7.1%**
Five-Year Change: **13.6%**

After a decade of declines, adult enrollment is growing across all postsecondary sectors.



Low-Income Enrollment

One-Year Change: **5.0%**
Five-Year Change: **0.2%**

Low-income enrollment increased for the third consecutive fall following a decade-long decline.



Total Graduate Enrollment

One-Year Change: **1.7%**
Five-Year Change: **1.0%**

Graduate enrollment remains flat, with modest gains at Kentucky's four-year public universities.



Public University Retention

One-Year Change: **0.6 pp**
Five-Year Change: **0.1 pp**

First-to-second-year retention at public universities has exceeded 80% for the past three years.

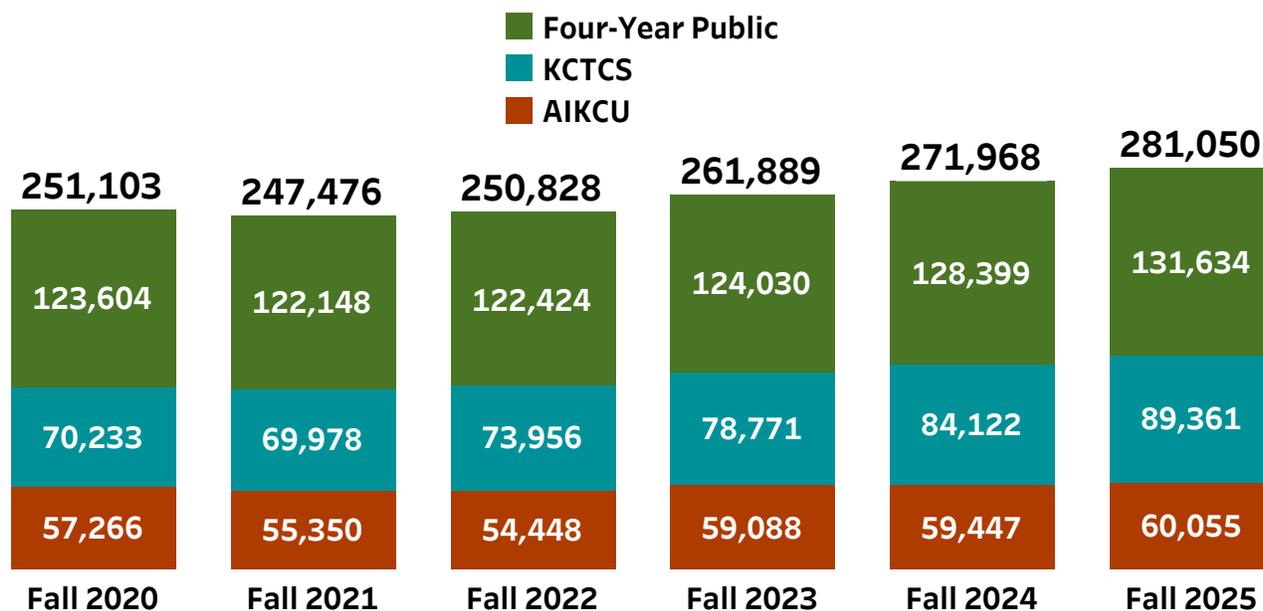


KCTCS Retention

One-Year Change: **0.3 pp**
Five-Year Change: **5.2 pp**

Since falling to 55% in 2020–21, KCTCS's retention rate has topped 60% for the past three years.

Figure 1. Total enrollment (undergraduate and graduate), by sector

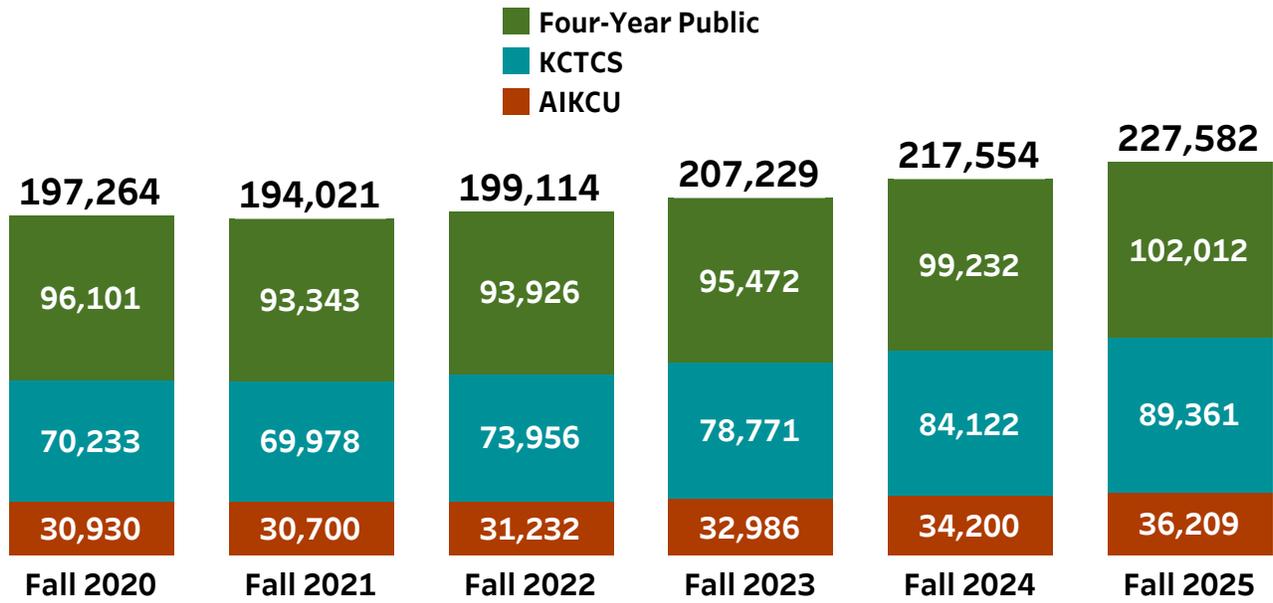


Total enrollment across all three institutional sectors has been rising steadily since the COVID-19 pandemic. Total enrollment has increased by **11.9%** since Fall 2020 and by **3.3%** since Fall 2024, surpassing 280,000.

- Total enrollment at four-year public universities increased to **131,634**, up **2.5%** from last fall and **6.5%** over the past five years.
- Total enrollment at KCTCS institutions rose to **89,361**, an increase of **6.2%** from last fall and **27.2%** over the past five years.
- Total enrollment at AIKCU colleges and universities increased to **60,055**, up **1.0%** from last fall and **4.9%** over the past five years.

Total enrollment includes all resident and non-resident students across all degree levels, from high school dual credit through graduate study. It includes students enrolled at Kentucky’s eight public universities, sixteen KCTCS community and technical colleges, and eighteen institutions of the Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities (AIKCU).

Figure 2. Total undergraduate enrollment, by sector

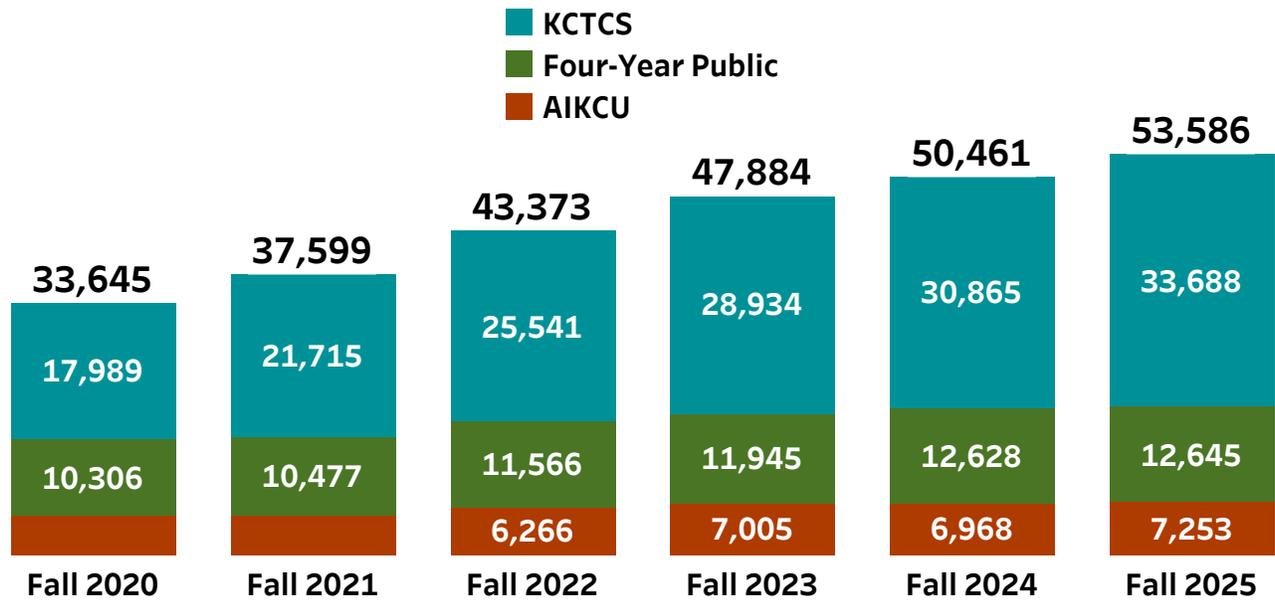


Total undergraduate enrollment has risen **15.4%** over the last five years.

- Total undergraduate enrollment at four-year public universities increased to **102,012**, up **2.8%** from last fall and **6.2%** over the past five years.
- Total undergraduate enrollment at KCTCS climbed to **89,361**, up **6.2%** from last fall and **27.2%** over the past five years.
- Total undergraduate enrollment at AIKCU colleges and universities rose to **36,209**, up **5.9%** from last fall and **17.1%** over the past five years.

Total undergraduate enrollment reflects students enrolled in baccalaureate, associate, certificate, and diploma programs in the fall term. It also includes high school students enrolled in dual credit courses, enabling them to earn high school and college credit simultaneously.

Figure 3. Total dual credit enrollment, by sector

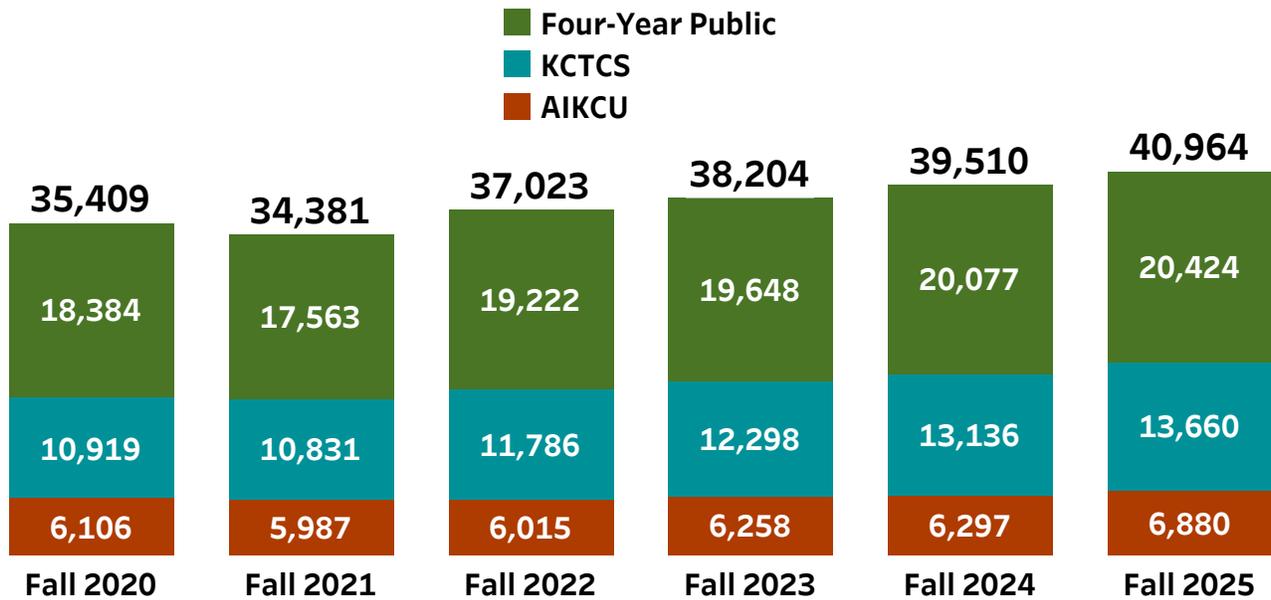


Total dual credit enrollment has risen substantially over the past five years, rising 59.3% to a total of 53,586 in Fall 2025. This includes a 6.2% increase from last fall.

- Total dual credit enrollment at four-year public universities reached 12,645, reflecting a 0.1% increase since last fall and 22.7% growth over five years.
- Total dual credit enrollment at two-year public institutions reached 33,688 reflecting a 9.1% increase since last fall and 87.3% growth over five years.
- Total dual credit enrollment at AIKCU colleges and universities reached 7,253 reflecting a 4.1% increase since last fall and 35.6% growth over five years.

Dual credit enrollment captures the number of high school students participating in dual credit courses in the fall term, which enables them to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. Since dual credit students are significantly more likely to matriculate into postsecondary education, this metric is a leading indicator of undergraduate enrollment.

Figure 4. Total first-time undergraduate enrollment, by sector

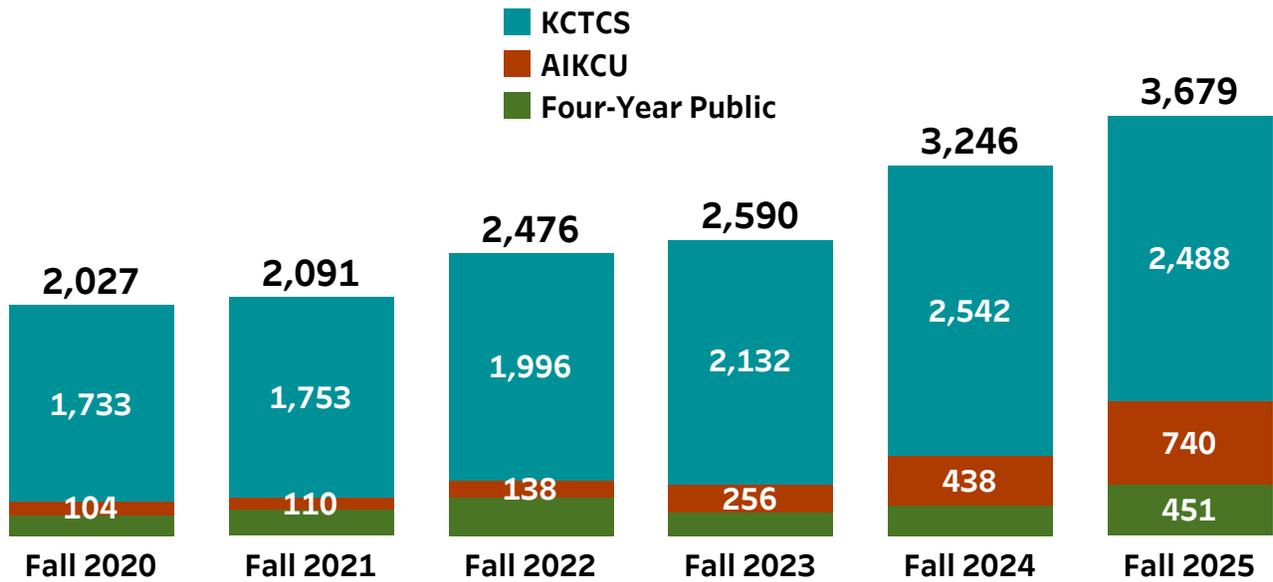


The number of students enrolled in college for the first time has risen steadily. **First-time undergraduate enrollment** is up **15.7%** from Fall 2020 and **3.7%** since last fall, bringing the total to **40,964**.

- First-time enrollment at public universities reached **20,424**, up **1.7%** since last fall and **11.1%** over the past five years.
- First-time enrollment at KCTCS rose to **13,660**, increasing **4.0%** since last fall and **25.1%** over the past five years.
- First-time enrollment at AIKCU institutions climbed to **6,880**, up **9.3%** since last fall and **12.7%** over the past five years.

First-time undergraduate enrollment reflects students entering an undergraduate program in the fall term for the first time, including those enrolled in the summer preceding their first fall term. Recent improvements in this metric suggest that Kentucky higher education is successfully recruiting new student populations.

Figure 5. Total first-time adult undergraduate enrollment, by sector



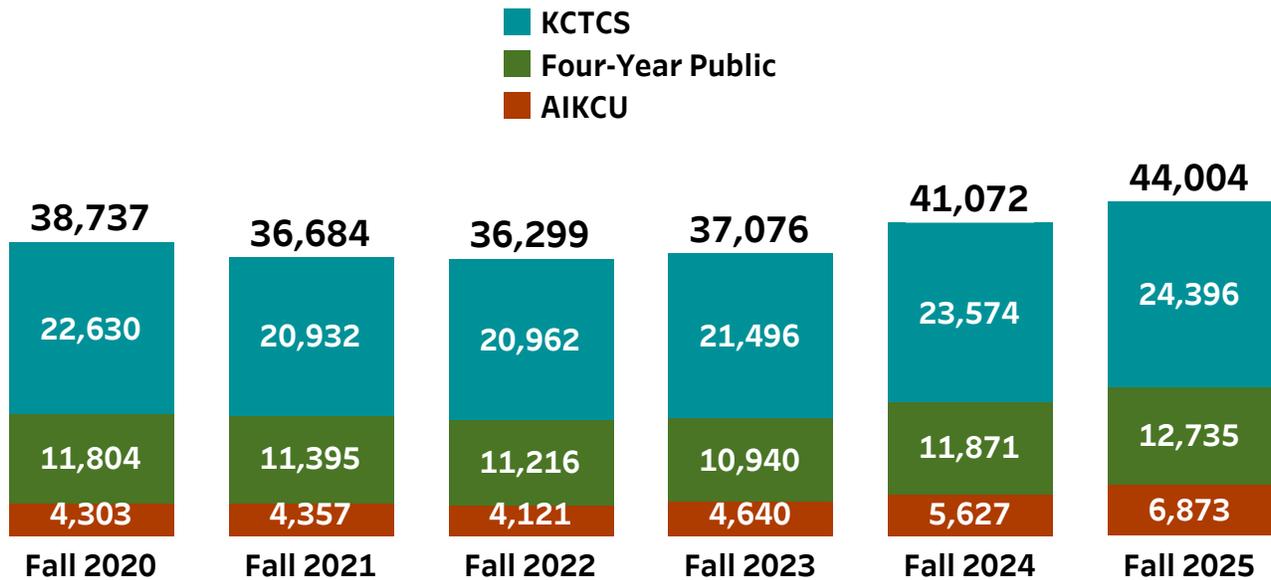
Note: Total first-time adult undergraduate enrollment at four-year public universities (green bars) is omitted due to space. The counts are: Fall 2020 = 190; Fall 2021 = 228; Fall 2022 = 342; Fall 2023 = 202; Fall 2024 = 266.

The total number of students 25 and older enrolled in college for the first time increased to **3,679**, up **13.3%** since Fall 2024, and **81.5%** since Fall 2020.

- First-time adult undergraduate enrollment at public universities totaled **451**, up **69.5%** since last fall and **137.4%** over the past five years.
- First-time adult undergraduate enrollment at KCTCS totaled **2,488**, reflecting a slight **2.1%** decrease from last fall, but a **43.6%** increase over five years.
- First-time adult undergraduate enrollment at AIKCU institutions reached **740**, increasing **68.9%** since last fall and **611.5%** since Fall 2020.

Total first-time adult undergraduate enrollment includes adults 25 and older who enroll in an undergraduate program for the first time in the fall term (or the summer immediately prior). In Kentucky, more than one million adults have some college but no credential or no postsecondary experience, making them a target population for postsecondary institutions.

Figure 6. Total adult undergraduate enrollment, by sector

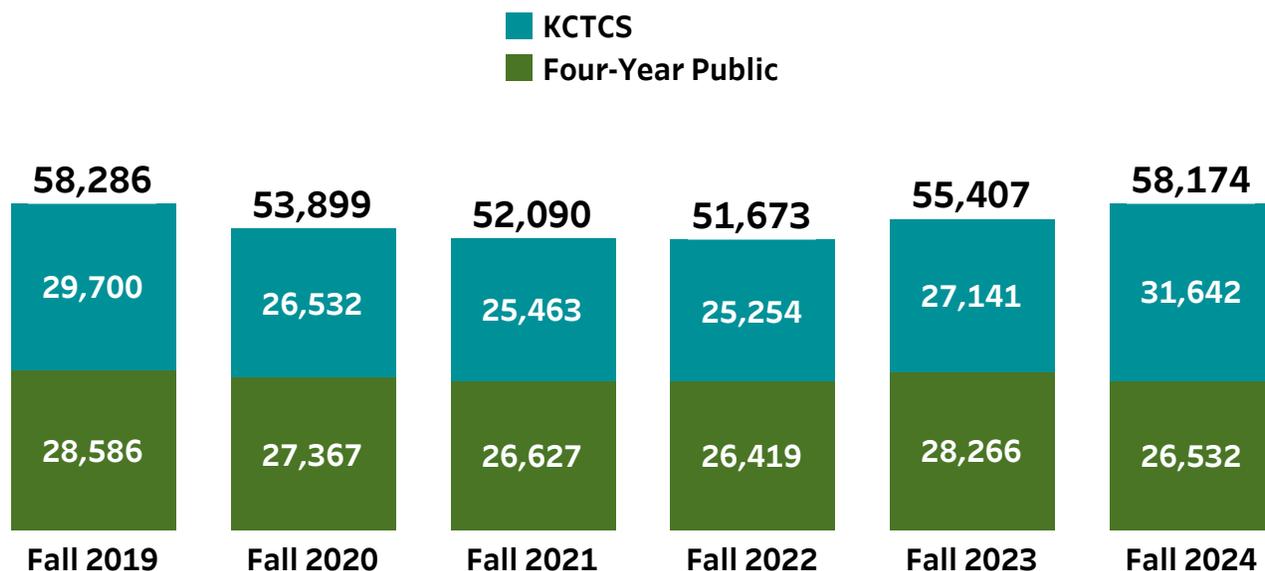


Total adult undergraduate enrollment now exceeds 44,000, increasing 7.1% over the previous fall and 13.6% since Fall 2020.

- Total adult undergraduate enrollment at four-year public universities grew to 12,735, increasing 7.3% over the last year and 7.9% over the past five years.
- Total adult undergraduate enrollment at KCTCS reached 24,396, increasing 3.5% over the last year and 7.8% over the past five years.
- Total adult undergraduate enrollment at AIKCU colleges and universities reached 6,873, increasing 22.1% over the last year and 59.7% over five years.

Total adult undergraduate enrollment refers to the number of adult learners, ages 25 or older, enrolled in programs intended to lead to a bachelor’s degree, associate degree, certificate, or diploma.

Figure 7. Total low-income undergraduate enrollment, by sector

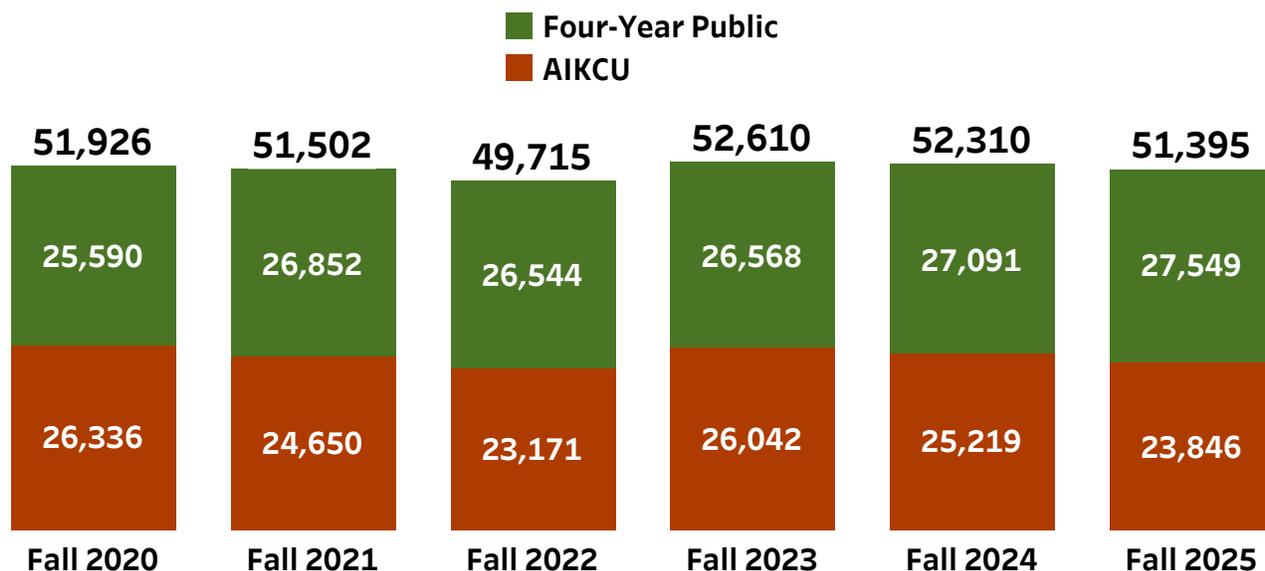


Total low-income undergraduate enrollment rose to **58,174** in Fall 2024, up **5.0%** from last fall, restoring low-income enrollment to pre-COVID levels.

- Total low-income undergraduate enrollment at public universities fell to **26,532**, declining **6.1%** from the previous fall and **7.2%** since Fall 2019.
- Total low-income undergraduate enrollment at KCTCS institutions rose to **31,642**, up **16.6%** over last fall and **6.5%** over the past five years.
- CPE does not collect student financial aid information from AIKCU institutions.

Note: Low-income students are individuals who received a federal Pell grant in the fall semester. Since student financial aid is an academic year collection, the most recent low-income fall enrollment data lag other enrollment indicators by one year. CPE does not collect student financial aid data for graduate students in any sector.

Figure 8. Total graduate enrollment, by sector

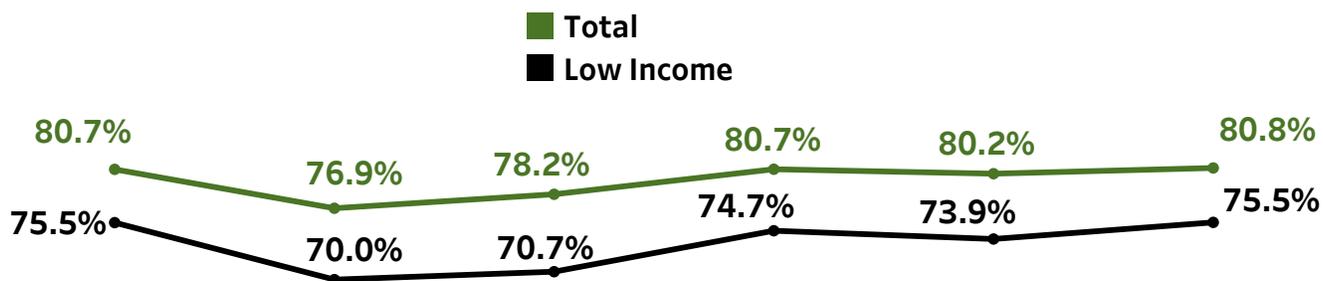


Total graduate enrollment has remained flat since Fall 2020, increasing moderately in Fall 2023 before falling over the past two years. In Fall 2025, **51,395** students were enrolled in graduate school, down **1.7%** from last fall and **1.0%** over five years.

- Total graduate enrollment at public universities increased to 27,549, up **1.7%** from last fall and **7.7%** since Fall 2020.
- Total graduate enrollment at AIKCU institutions fell to **23,846**, down **5.4%** from last fall and **9.5%** since Fall 2020.

Total graduate enrollment refers to the number of students enrolled in post-baccalaureate programs across Kentucky’s public universities and independent colleges and universities. These programs are intended to lead to advanced certificates, master’s or specialist degrees, or doctoral/professional degrees.

Figure 9. Retention rates at public universities, by student type



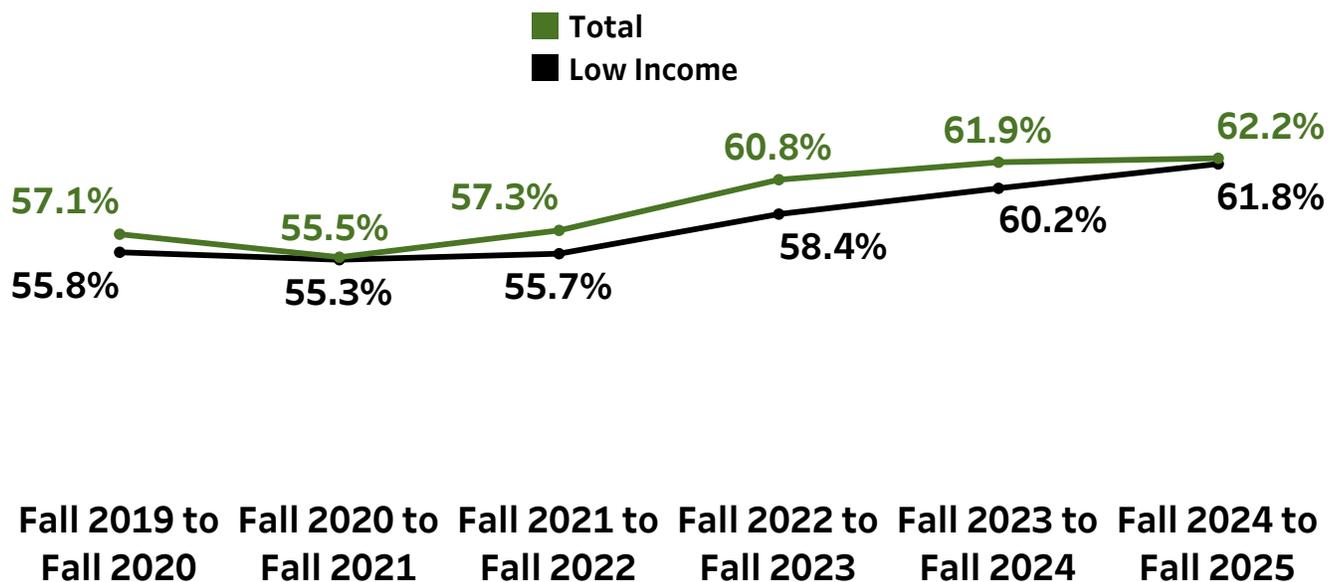
Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 to Fall 2022 to Fall 2023 to Fall 2024 to Fall 2025

The number of first-year students who persist to a second year of college is a leading indicator of degree completion and graduation rates.

- In Fall 2025, **80.8%** of first-time public university students returned for their second year, an increase of **0.6 percentage points** from the previous cohort. This is the third consecutive cohort with a retention rate above 80%, signaling continued stabilization and progress since the global pandemic.
- Low-income students are retained at a lower rate than students overall, but this gap is narrowing. In Fall 2025, **75.5%** of first-time, low-income students at public universities returned for a second year, up **1.6 percentage points** from the previous cohort. Although low-income students experienced greater retention losses during the pandemic, their retention rate has rebounded more quickly.

The **first-to-second year retention rate** reflects the percentage of first-time, degree or credential-seeking students enrolled in the summer or fall of their freshman year who are still enrolled at the same institution the following fall. Advising, mentoring, and just-in-time financial aid are factors that can positively influence retention.

Figure 10. Retention rates at KCTCS, by student type



First-to-second year retention rates at KCTCS have increased significantly over the past five cohorts despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In Fall 2025, **62.2%** of first-time KCTCS students returned for their second year, a **0.3 percentage point** increase from the previous cohort, marking the fourth straight year of retention gains after a pandemic-related decline.
- First-to-second-year retention for first-time, low-income KCTCS students has improved since 2021-22. In Fall 2025, **61.8%** returned for their second year, a **1.7 percentage point** increase, narrowing the gap with overall retention.

The **first-to-second-year retention rate** measures the percentage of first-time, degree-seeking students from their first fall who are still enrolled the following fall, including those who earned a degree or credential in between.

About the Council

The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is Kentucky's higher education coordinating agency committed to strengthening Kentucky's workforce, economy, and quality of life. The Council achieves this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse, and accessible system of postsecondary education.

Key responsibilities include:

- Implementing a strategic agenda for higher education with progress measures.
- Submitting a biennial budget request for public funding of higher education.
- Determining tuition rates and admission criteria at public institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology at public institutions.
- Licensing non-public institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.

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