



Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama®

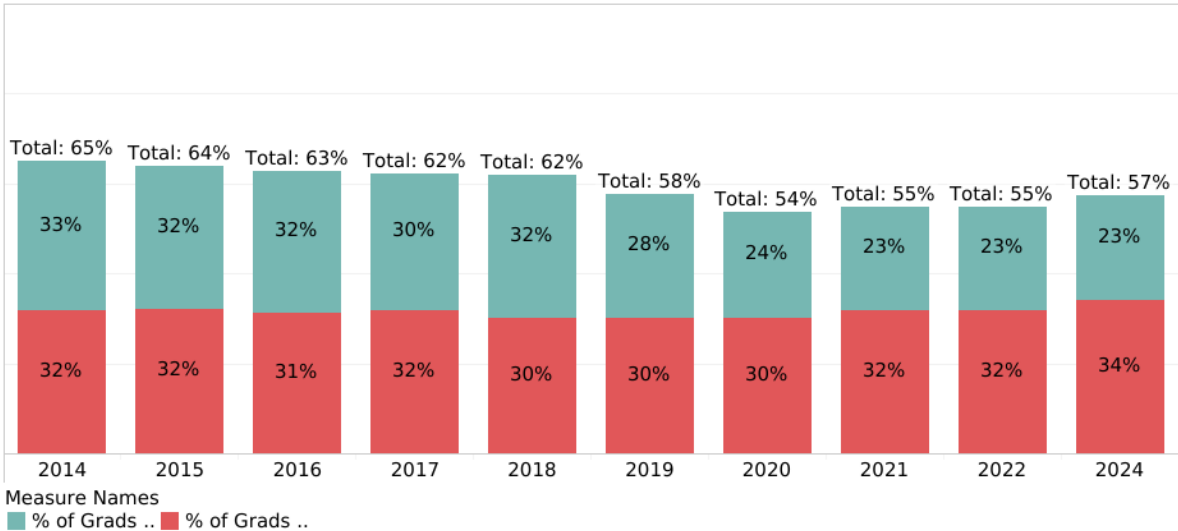
College-Rate Still Recovering for Alabama Public High School Graduates

By Thomas Spencer on November 18th, 2025

The percentage of Alabama public high school graduates going on to higher education is slowly recovering after a sharp drop during the pandemic, according to the most recent figures provided by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE).

Alabama College-Going Percentages by year	2 and 4-year College Trend	Dual Enrollment at % of Total Enrollment	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled

Alabama High School Graduates' College Going Rates



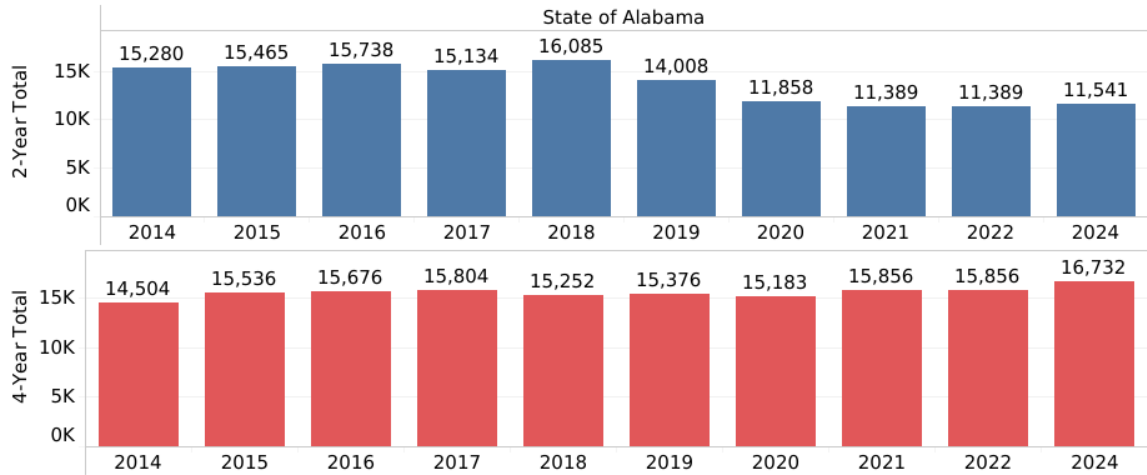
ACHE, the state's higher education coordinating agency, gathers data from Alabama colleges and universities, tracking enrollment, graduation rates, and a multitude of other statistics. To provide the college-going statistics, ACHE works with data from K-12 schools and data obtained through the National Student Clearinghouse. Clearinghouse data tallies the graduates enrolled in higher

education, whether at four-year universities or two-year colleges, whether they go in-state or out-of-state, to private or public schools. The most recent data captures the graduating class of 2024.

So far, the college-going recovery has been heavily weighted towards enrollment in four-year colleges. The number and percentage of recent graduates going to four-year schools are now higher than in any year since ACHE began providing the data. Two-year enrollment among recent graduates increased slightly but remains well below the levels seen before the pandemic.

Alabama College-Going Percentages by year	2 and 4-year College Trend	Dual Enrollment at % of Total Enrollment	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled

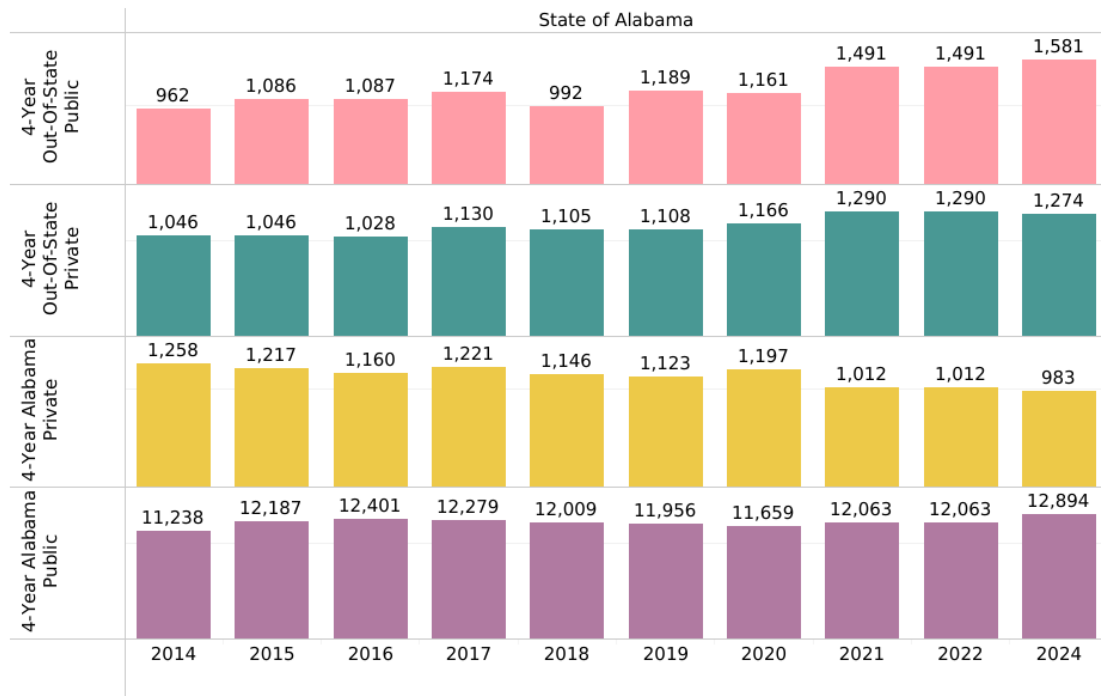
High School and System
State of Alabama, State of Alabama
Number enrolling the year after graduating from high school



Public universities, both in-state and out-of-state, have experienced most of the enrollment growth among recent graduates. More students are attending private schools out of state as well, but enrollment at Alabama private colleges is down.

Alabama College-Going Percent..	2 and 4-year College Trend	Dual Enrollment at % of Total Enrollment	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	Number of College Going by System
---------------------------------	----------------------------	--	-----------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------------

Trends in 4-Year



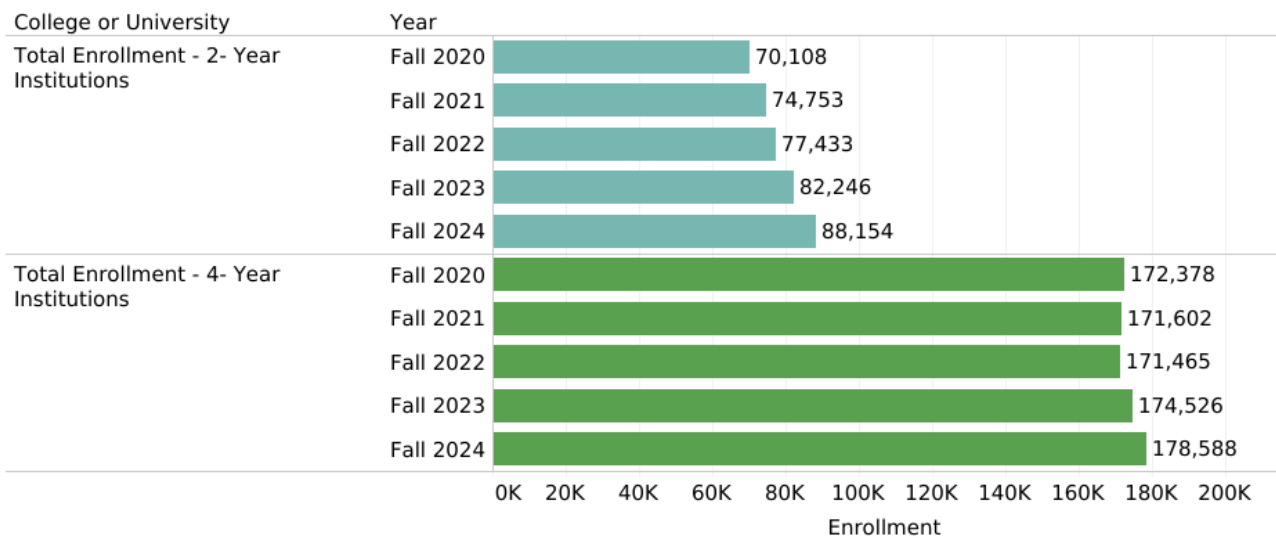
Community College Changes

Beginning prior to the pandemic, far fewer high school graduates have been enrolling in two-year colleges immediately after graduation.

Since fewer recent high school graduates are enrolling in community colleges, you might expect that overall enrollment at two-year colleges would be down as well. Surprisingly, though, two-year college headcount enrollment is at a 10-year high. How can that be? The visualization below presents headcount enrollment of all students, not just Alabama public high school recent graduates. The totals include in-state and out-of-state students.

2 and 4-year College Trend	Dual Enrollment at % of Total Enrollment	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	Number of College Going by System	Alabama College-Going Numbers by School
----------------------------	--	-----------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------------	---

Fall Headcount Enrollment Trends



It turns out that a substantial chunk of that two-year enrollment is comprised of students who are still in high school. Dual enrollment, which allows high school students to take courses and earn both high school and college credit at the same time, is booming.

In 2024, 34% of community college enrollment was dual enrollment. At some community colleges, over half the students are high school students taking courses through dual enrollment.

Alabama College-Going Percentages by year	2 and 4-year College Trend	Dual Enrollment at % of Total Enrollment	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled
---	----------------------------	--	-----------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------

College .. All

Dual Enrollment Trends: Dual Enrollment Students as a % of Headcount Enrollment

College or University	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Year	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
			Fall 2022		
Northwest-Shoals Community College	30%	37%	49%	53%	57%
Wallace State Community College Selma	29%	41%	53%	57%	55%
Bevill State Community College	30%	31%	40%	44%	50%
Northeast Alabama Community College	35%	37%	39%	46%	49%

Dual enrollment has also increased at four-year colleges. Though more modestly. Still, at some universities — Auburn University Montgomery, the University of Montevallo, Jacksonville State, and the University of North Alabama — dual enrollment accounted for 10% or more of overall enrollment in 2024-2025.

Context of Change

First, consider the following facts when evaluating trends in college-going. Back in 2014, only 86% of high school seniors graduated. Now more than 90% do. The state produces about 5,000 additional graduates each year as a result of the higher graduation rate. However, the percentage of those graduates entering higher education declined, and the number of graduates not enrolling has increased. However, with the Class of 2024, the number of graduates entering higher education increased, and the number not enrolling decreased compared to 2022 (data for the Class of 2023 are not available). Also, the number of public high school graduates is down.

Dual Enrollment at % of Total..	4 Year College Trends	Overall enrollment Trends	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	Number of College Going by System	Alabama College-Going Numbers by School	College Going by System, 2014-2024
---------------------------------	-----------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------------	---	------------------------------------

State of Alabama, State of Alabama

High School and System

■ TOTAL # HS Grads ■ Total of Grads in Higher Ed ■ Not Enrolled

Alabama High School Graduates, Enrolled in Higher Ed vs. Not Enrolled Numbers

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2024
TOTAL # HS Grads 45,760	TOTAL # HS Grads 48,416	TOTAL # HS Grads 49,953	TOTAL # HS Grads 49,764	TOTAL # HS Grads 50,528	TOTAL # HS Grads 50,840	TOTAL # HS Grads 50,410	TOTAL # HS Grads 49,615	TOTAL # HS Grads 49,615	TOTAL # HS Grads 49,177
Total of Grads in H.. 29,784	Total of Grads in H.. 31,001	Total of Grads in H.. 31,414	Total of Grads in H.. 30,938	Total of Grads in H.. 31,337	Total of Grads in H.. 29,384	Total of Grads in H.. 27,041	Total of Grads in H.. 27,245	Total of Grads in H.. 27,245	Total of Grads in H.. 28,273
Not Enrolled 15,960	Not Enrolled 17,413	Not Enrolled 18,539	Not Enrolled 18,826	Not Enrolled 19,191	Not Enrolled 21,456	Not Enrolled 23,369	Not Enrolled 22,370	Not Enrolled 22,370	Not Enrolled 20,893

Another factor depressing the college-going rate: Beginning in 2019, Alabama's unemployment rate dropped below the national unemployment rate. Aside from the sharp spike during the pandemic, unemployment in Alabama has remained under 4%, dropping as low as 2%. When the job market is strong, community college enrollment tends to be lower, as high school graduates are lured straight into the workforce.

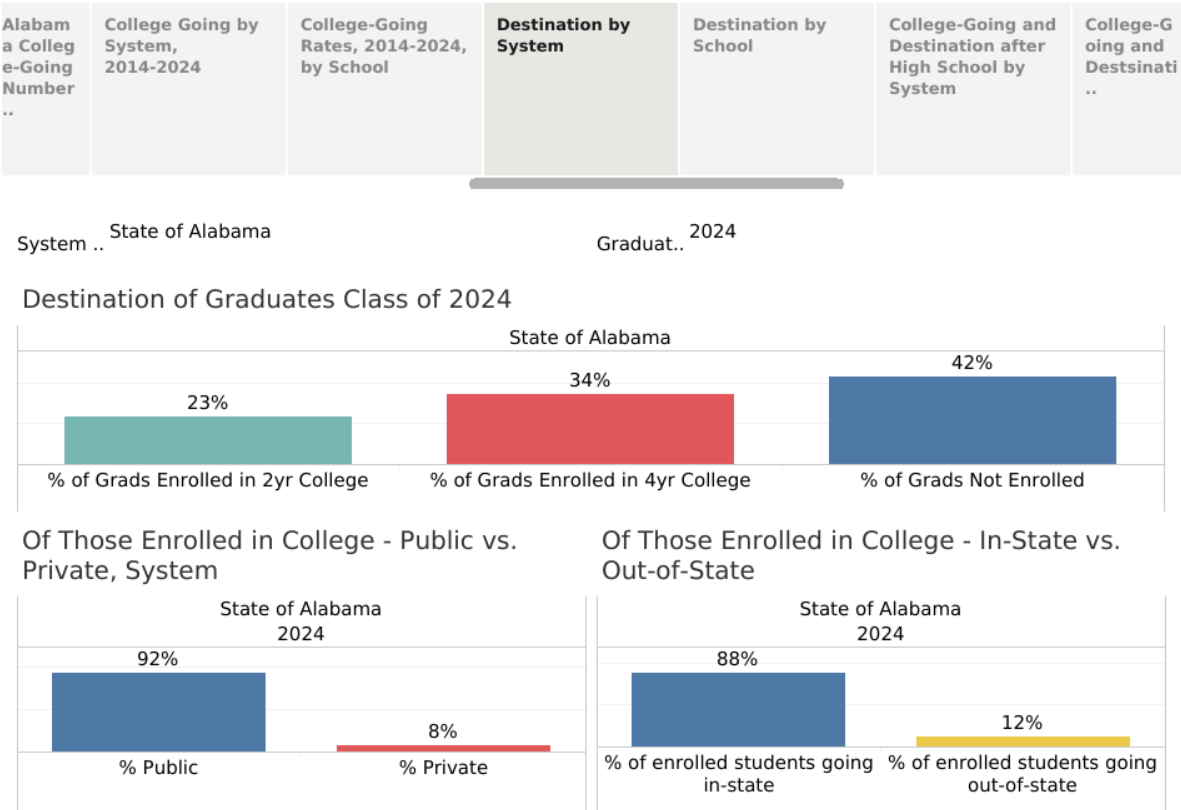
A third factor. The pandemic caused a drop in community college enrollment across the country. Community colleges have been slower to recover than four-year colleges.

A final factor. Throughout the period, Alabama high schools have been asked to focus on increasing the number of their graduates who are demonstrably college- and career-ready. One of the primary ways they do this is through dual enrollment at a community college and/or career-technical training. The increasing interaction with the two-year college system during high school may position more graduates to enter four-year colleges or the workforce directly.

Other Basic Facts

Most college-bound Alabama public high school graduates enroll in a public college in the state of Alabama: 88% stay in the state of Alabama for higher

education; 12 percent of graduates go to college out of state. Choosing between public and private colleges, 92% go to a public college vs. 8% to private colleges.



Across Alabama, school systems differ in where their graduates enroll after high school. According to the National Student Clearinghouse data, 93% of Mountain Brook High School graduates go to 4-year colleges, while 4% enrolled in two-year colleges, producing the highest college-going rate in the state.

Meanwhile, the Guntersville School System also ranks in the top 10 of systems when it comes to college-going, but it sends 40% of its graduates to two-year colleges, while 36% enroll at four-year colleges in the year after graduation. Using the tabs above the visualizations and the menus included in the visualization, you can explore the results for school systems and schools you are interested in.

For more information about this and other PARCA research, visit parcalabama.org.