

KNOCKING AT THE COLLEGE DOOR

Higher Education Demographic Projections and Trends

August 14, 2025



Interacting with *Knocking* Data and Trends

- ▶ Data Profiles
- ▶ Key Findings Dashboards
- ▶ Develop Your Own Charts
- ▶ Download the Data
- ▶ Connect



Colorado High School Graduate Trends

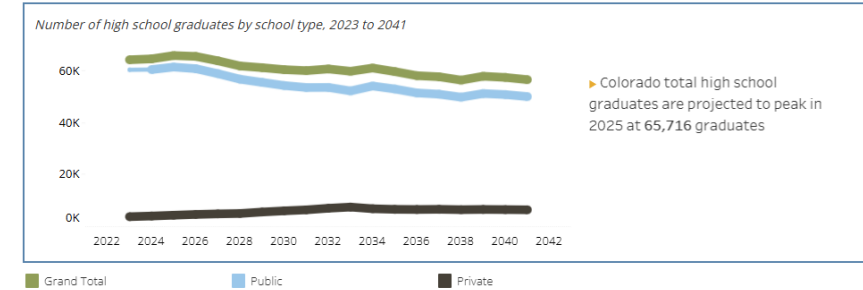
▶ These charts display the projection of high school graduates for each school type and student population. Explore these trends in more detail for each selected state, region, and nation using the navigation icons above. Adjust the charts using the filters on the side.

Filters

Geography
Colorado

Graduation Years
2023 2041

High School Graduates by School Type



High School Graduates by Race and Ethnicity

"After years of growth, higher education in the United States now faces a decline in the size of the traditional college-going population as well as shifting demographic patterns within that population. These enrollment factors and the pressures of inflation and constraints on government funds combine to present the most perplexing set of issues to face higher education planners and administrators in a generation."

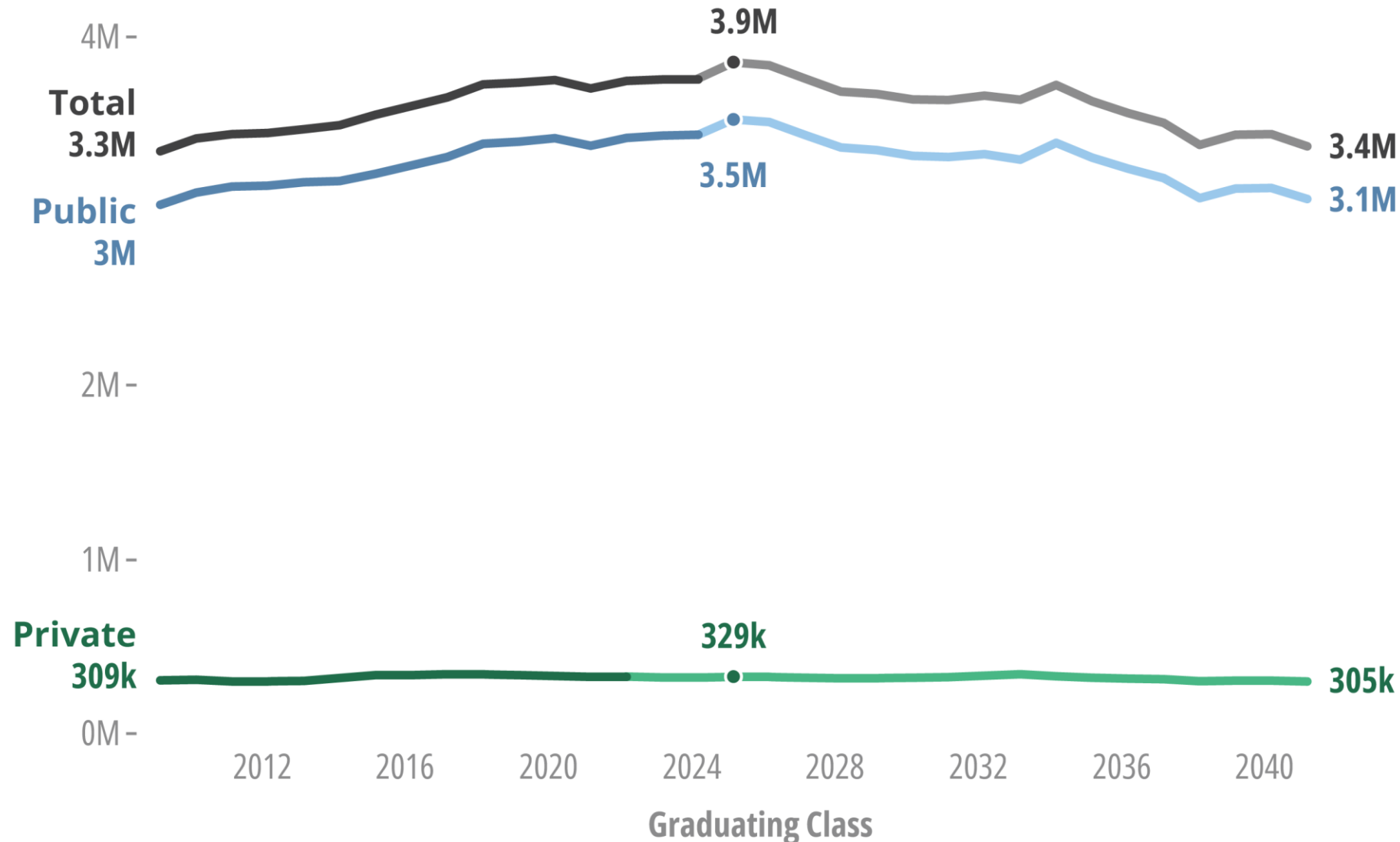
-Phil Sirotkin, Knocking at the College Door, 1st Edition, 1979

Fast Forward 45 years...

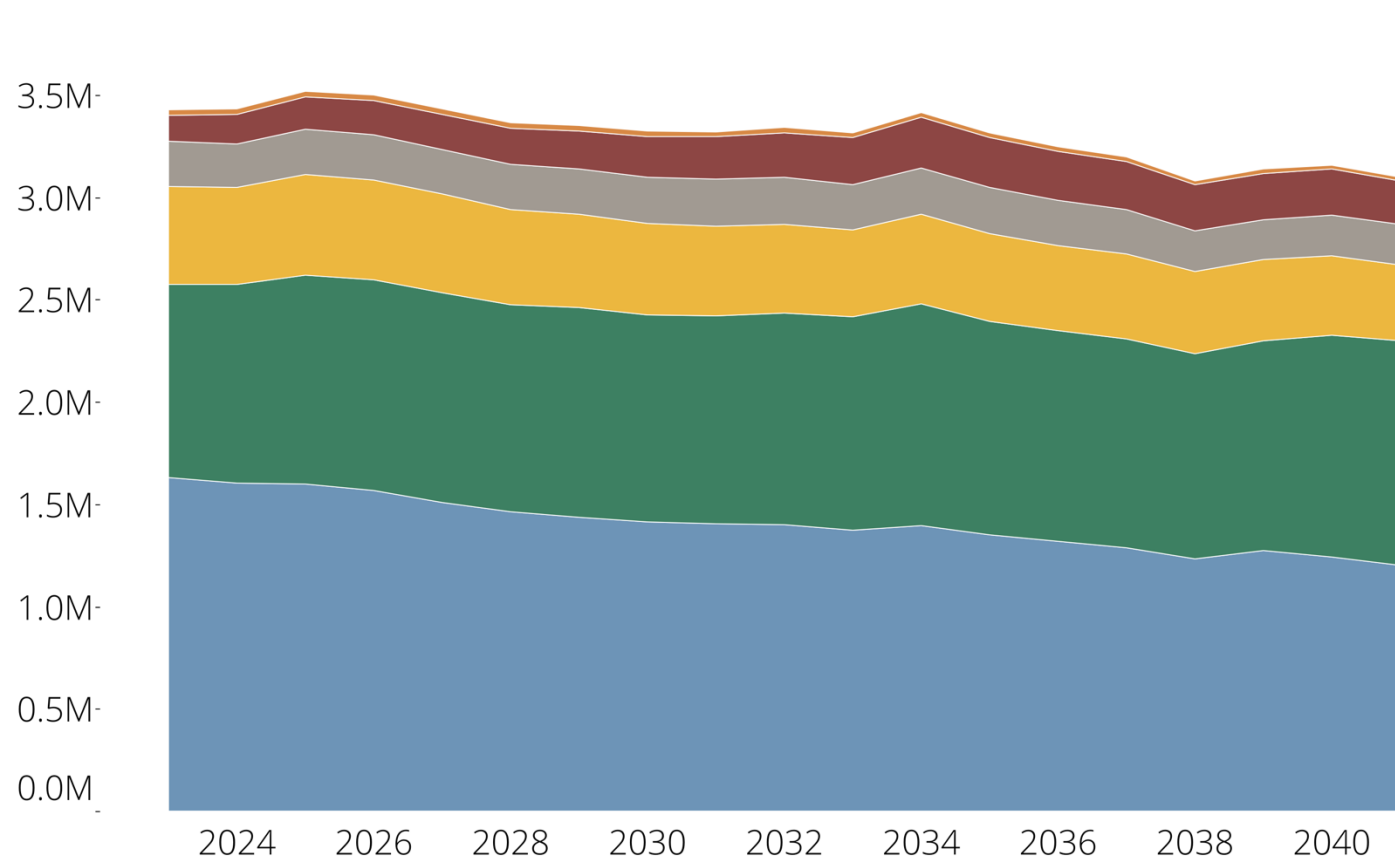
- ▶ **Fiscal uncertainty, including some state-level budget uncertainty**
- ▶ **Changing federal landscape and regulatory environment**
- ▶ **Widespread questions about value (but widespread consensus about the importance of post-HS credentials)**
- ▶ **Declining immediate college-going rate**
- ▶ **Workforce Shortages and Needs**

Demography Be Not Destiny

High school graduates, reported (2009 to 2023) and projected (2024 to 2041)

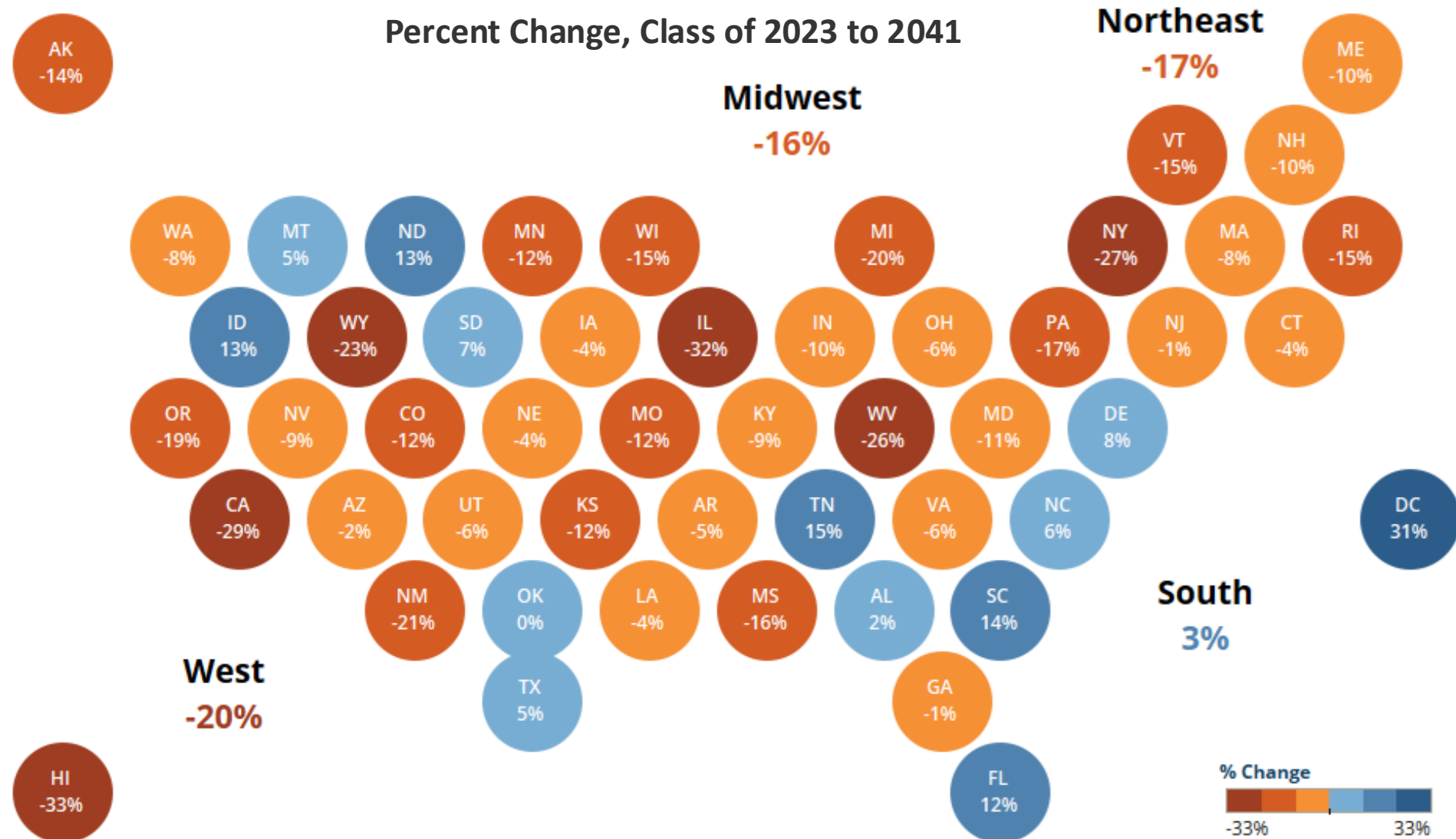


U.S. public high school graduates by race and ethnicity

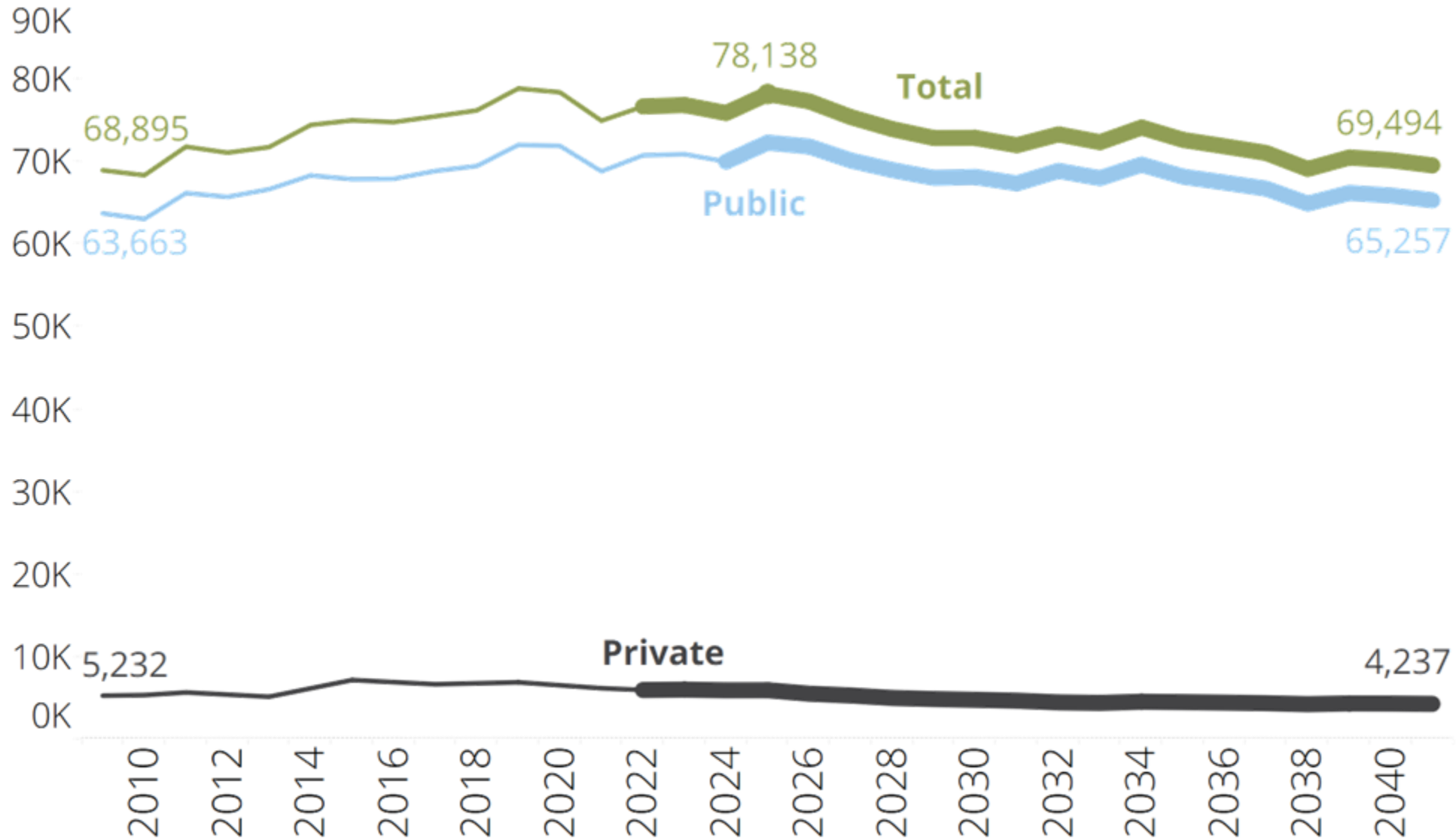


Race/Ethnicity	2023	2041
AI/AN	29,706	17,566
Multiracial	127,352	214,303
Asian & NHOPI	217,616	196,667
Black	480,224	372,960
Hispanic	944,299	1,094,165
White	1,629,974	1,202,287

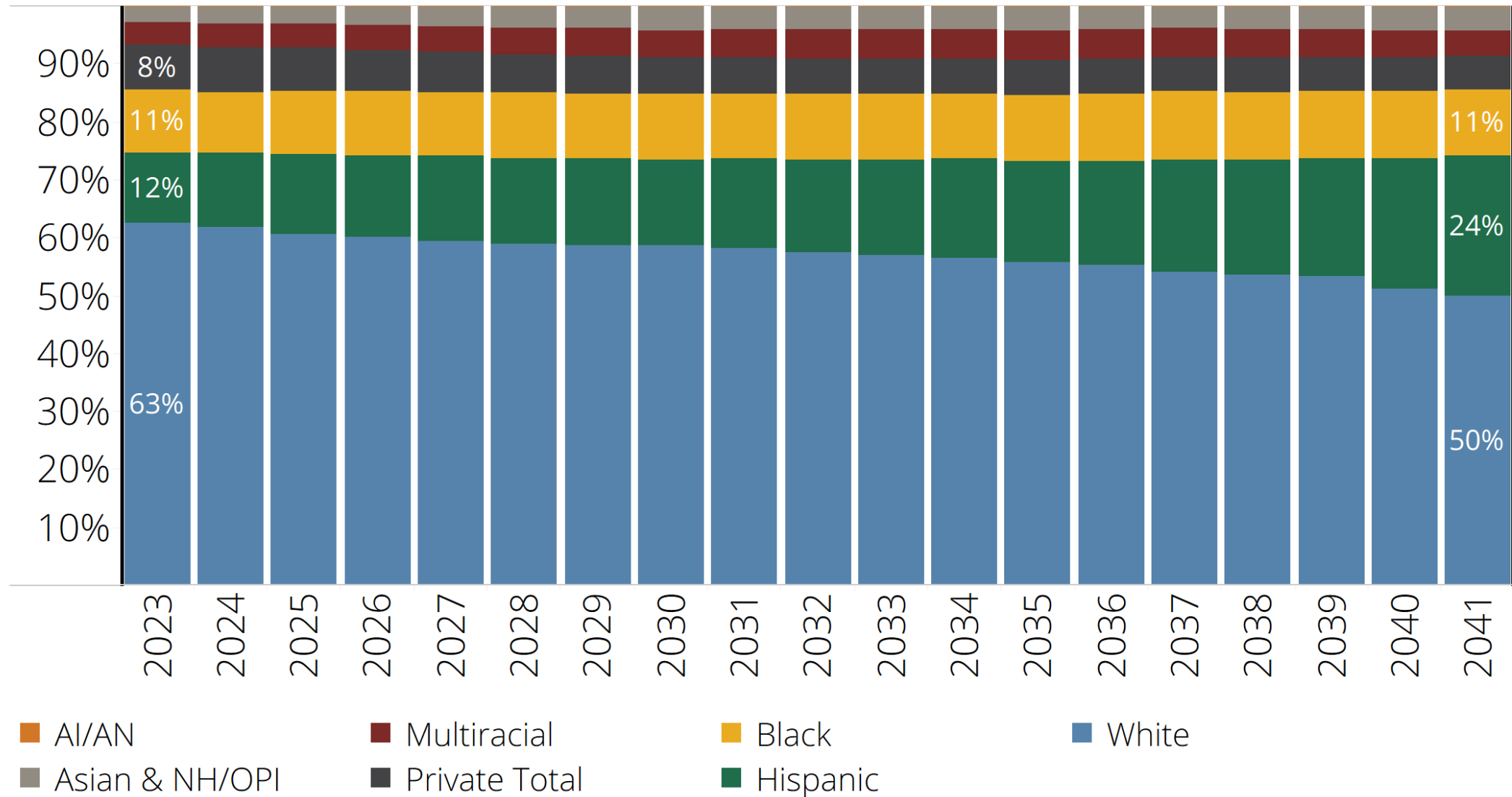
Regional and state variation



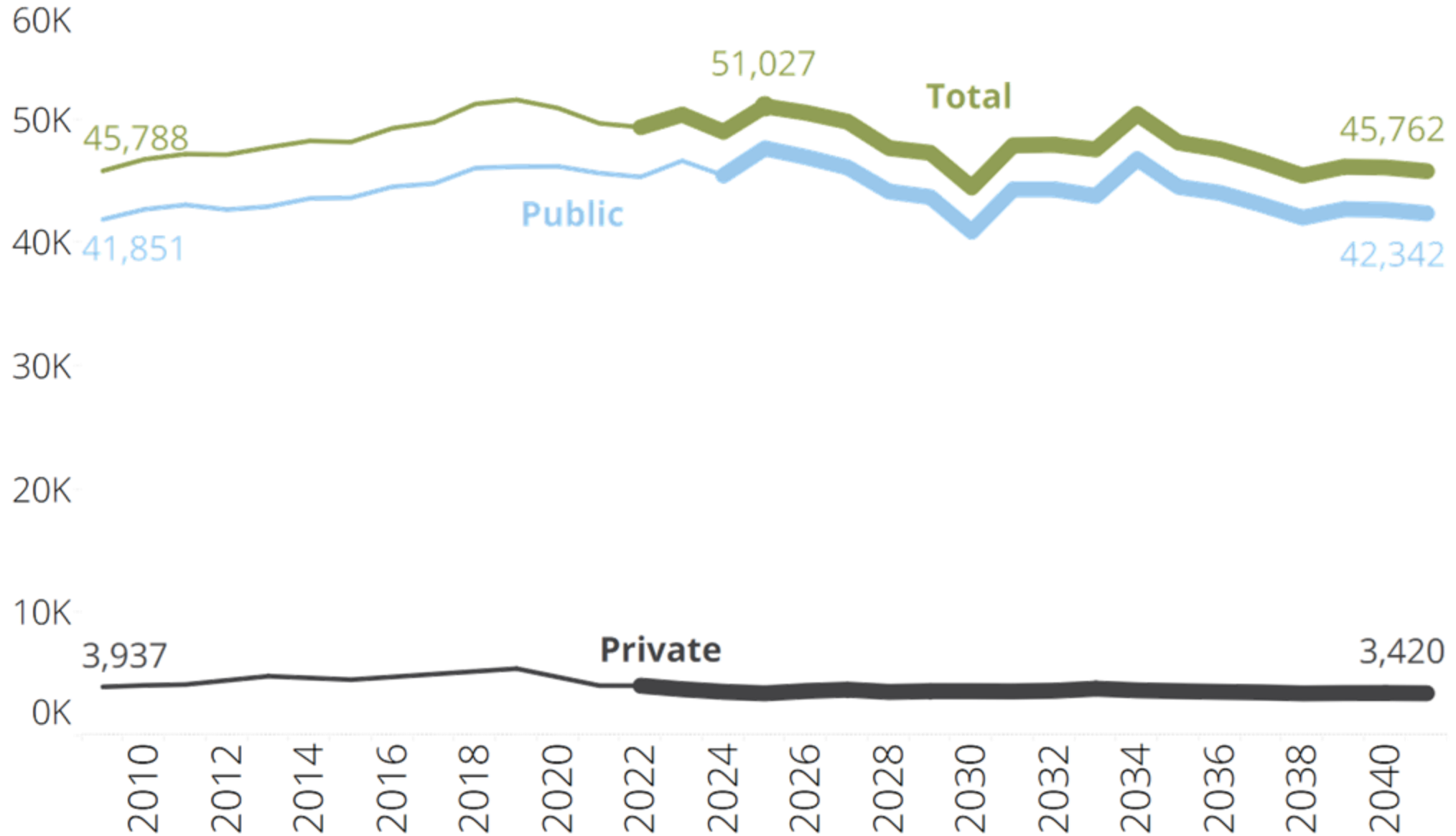
Indiana high school graduates, reported (2009 to 2023) and projected (2024 to 2041)



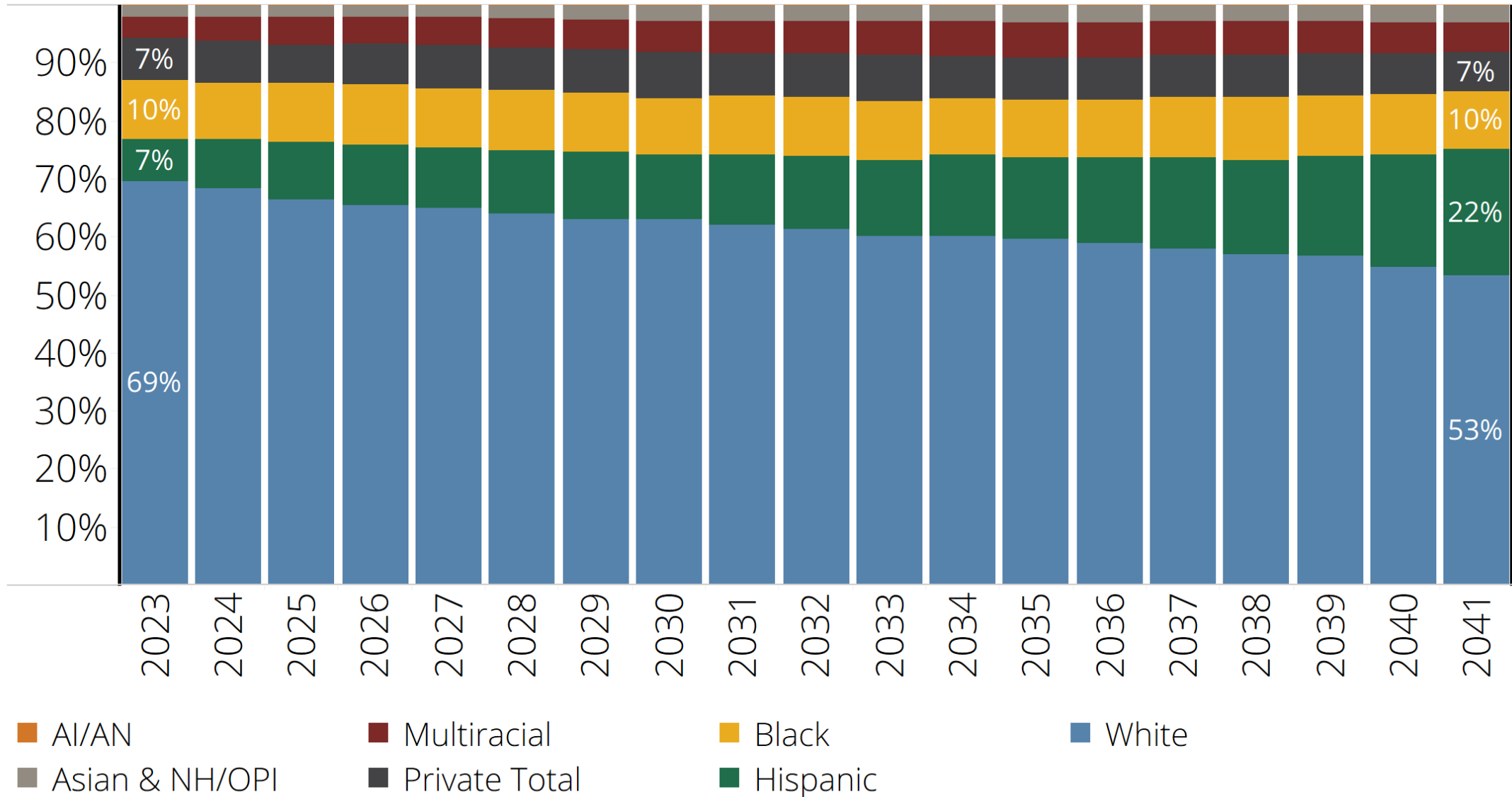
Indiana share of projected high school graduates by population



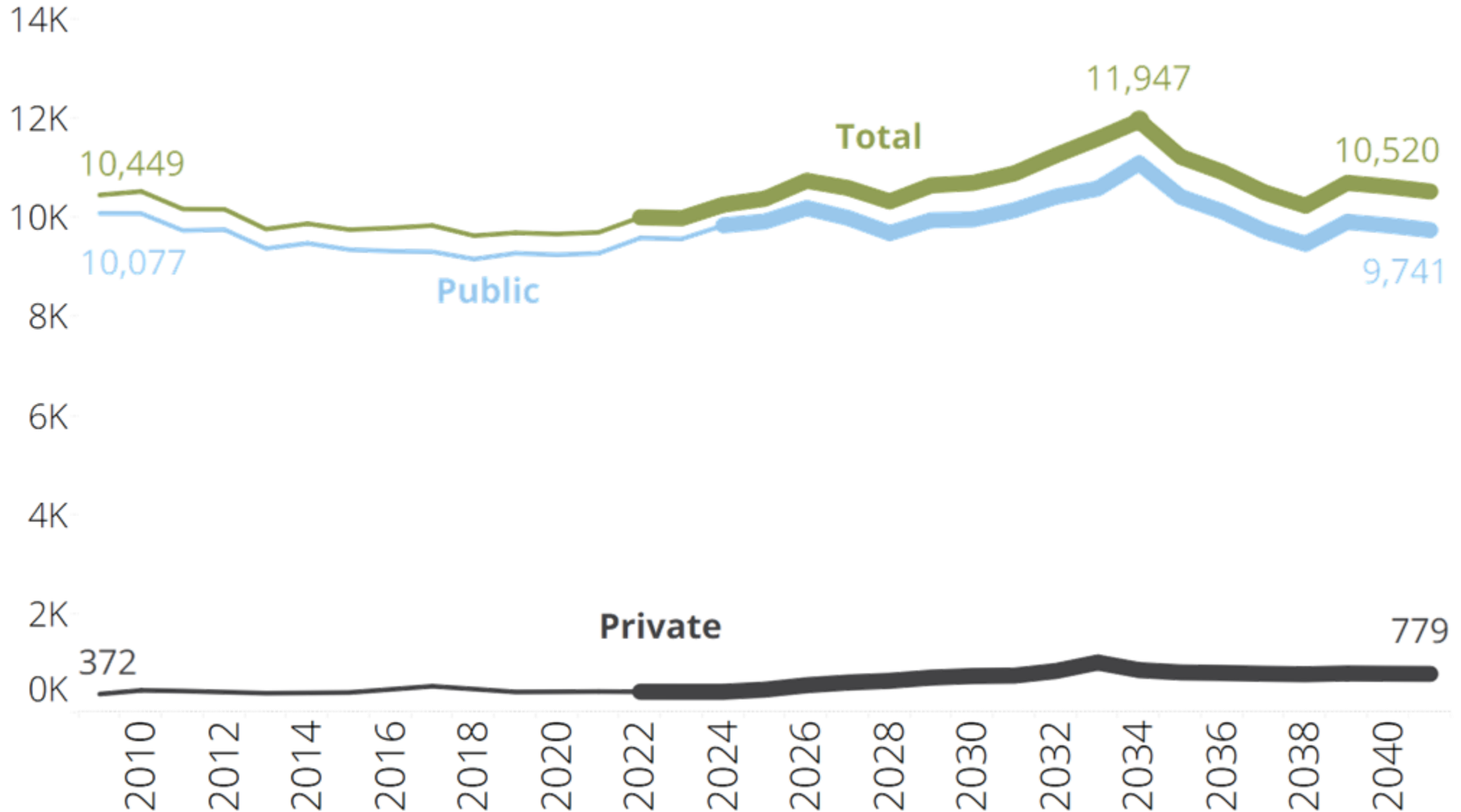
Kentucky high school graduates, reported (2009 to 2023) and projected (2024 to 2041)



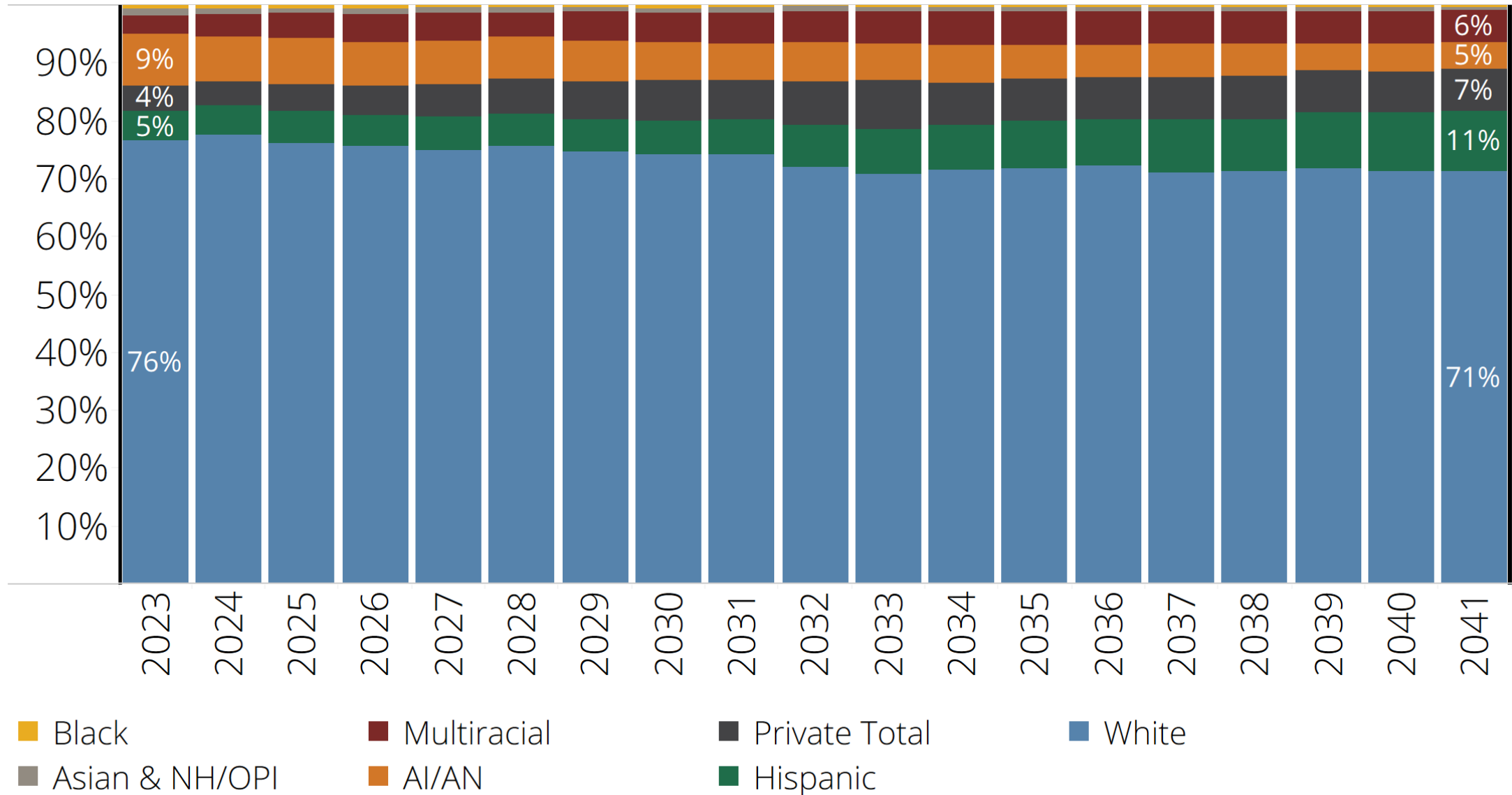
Kentucky share of projected high school graduates by population



Montana high school graduates, reported (2009 to 2023) and projected (2024 to 2041)



Montana share of projected high school graduates by population





Thank you!

For further information:

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<https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>

Sign up for more information at <https://www.wiche.edu/about/news/alerts/>

Overview of Kentucky's College-Going Challenges

Aaron Thompson

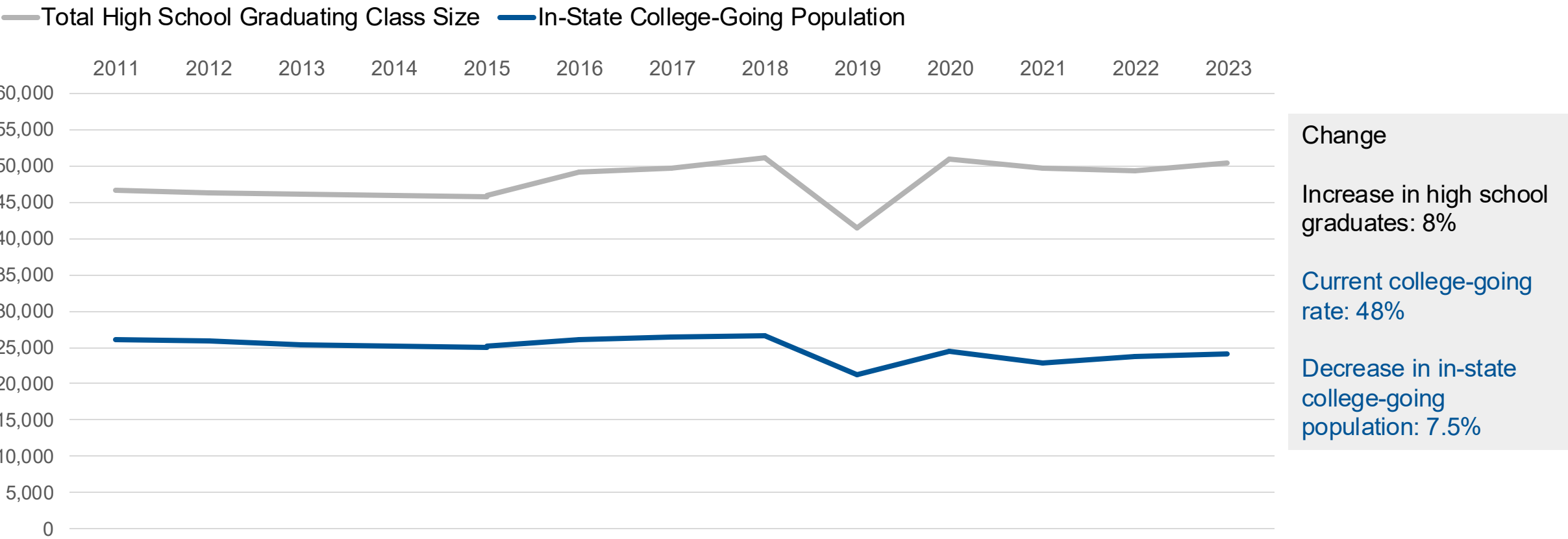
President

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education



Over the past decade, Kentucky has seen growth in the number of high school graduates, but also a decline in the number going on to college

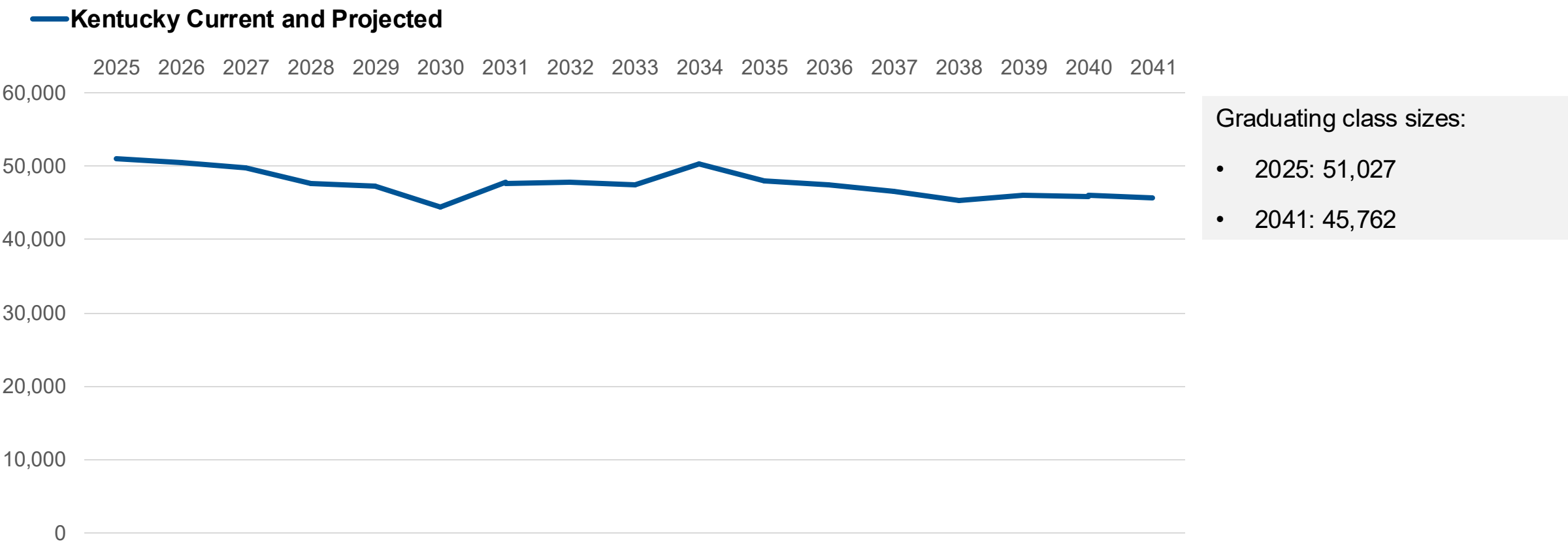
Trends in the Number of High School Graduates, Number Going to College



Note: Data for the Class of 2024 not yet available.
Source: KYSTATS.

Kentucky is expected to experience a 10% decline in the number of high school graduates between now and 2041

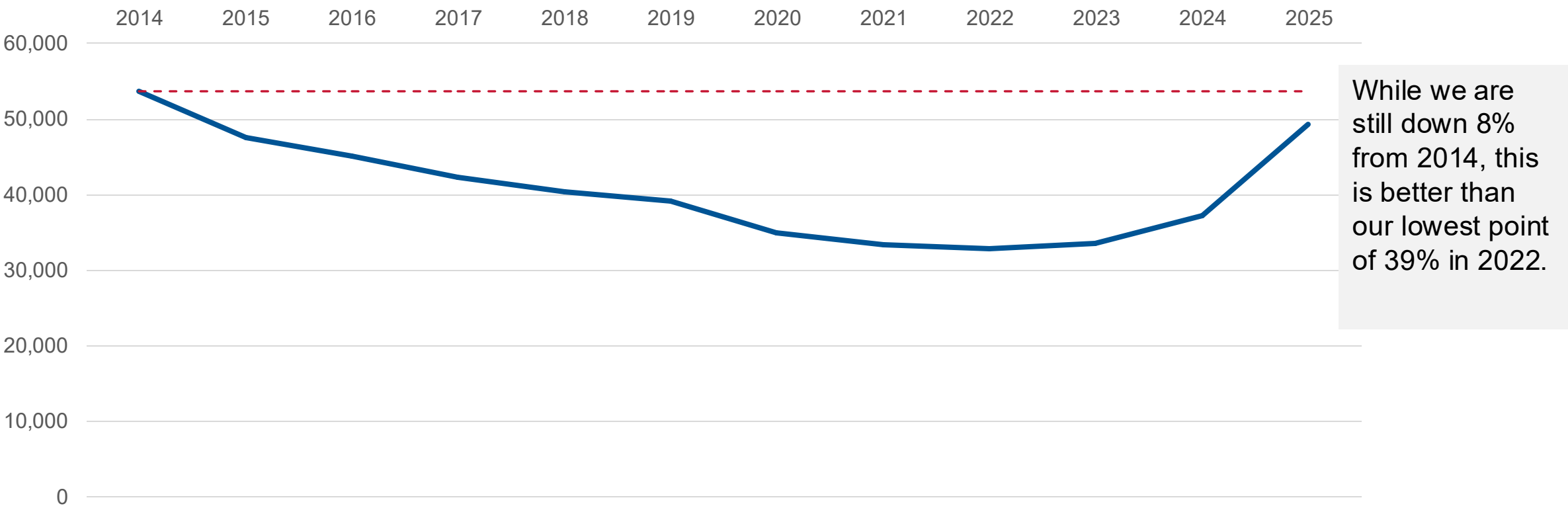
Kentucky: Projected Number of High School Seniors



Source: Knocking at the College Door. WICHE.

Our undergraduate enrollment of adults is slowly rebounding after several years of decline

Kentucky's Undergraduate Enrollment of Adults (Ages 25-49)
Public and Private Institutions



Sources: CPE Enrollment Dashboard.

What we're doing

- Improving academic quality; credentials of value
- Focusing on advising and career development
- Integrating employability skills into curriculum
- Reducing unmet financial need
- Including adult learner in our performance funding model
- Learning more about the external barriers students face (basic needs, mental health, childcare, etc.)

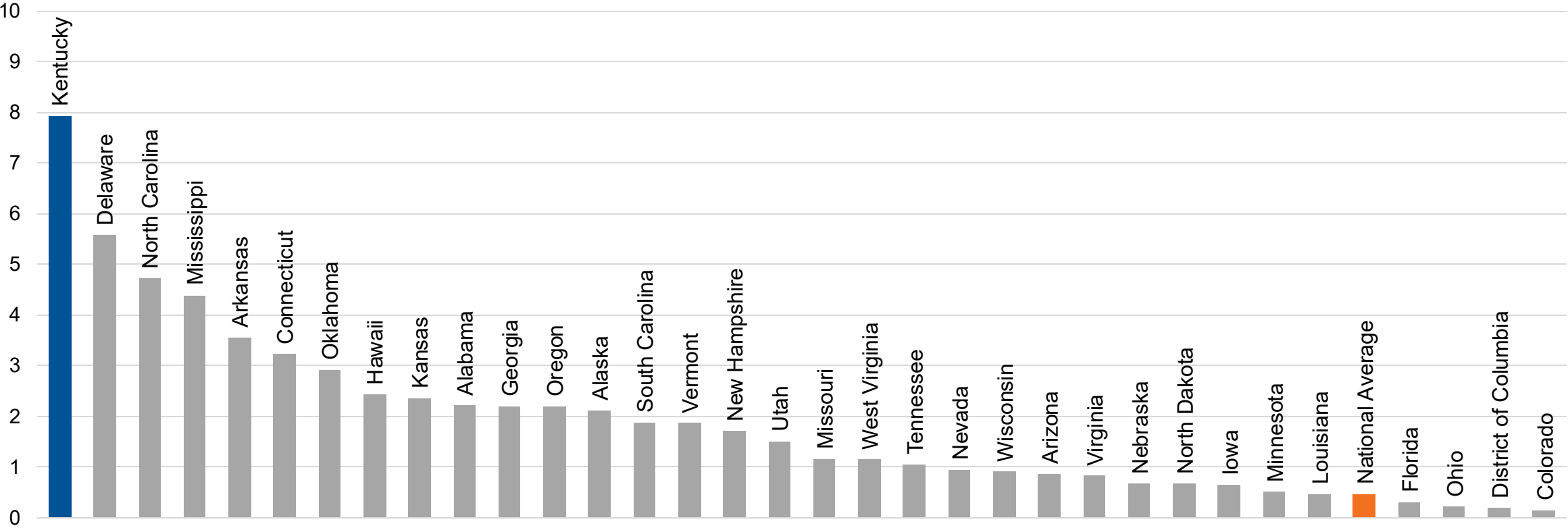
Kentucky's progress, achievements

Most Recent:	National Average	Kentucky	Progress
Fall to Fall Retention Rates	69.5%	74%	Exceeds
Fall to Fall Persistence Rates	77.6%	85.3%	Exceeds
Six-Year Completion Rates	61.1%	62.2%	Exceeds

*Note: Data for four-year institutions used when available; else data includes all sectors.
Source National Student Clearinghouse.*

Kentucky is first in the nation for retention rate improvement

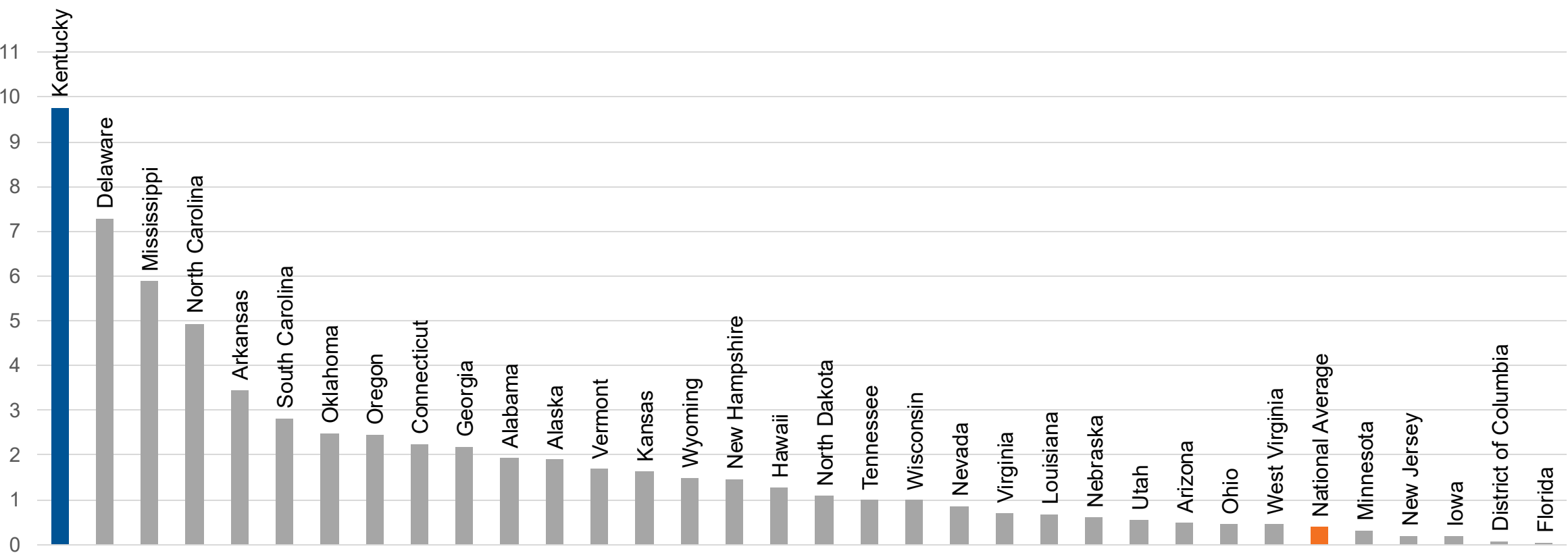
Retention Rates: Year-to-Year Percentage Point Improvement, Fall 2022 and 2023 Cohorts



Source: National Student Clearinghouse.

Kentucky is first in the nation for persistence rate improvement

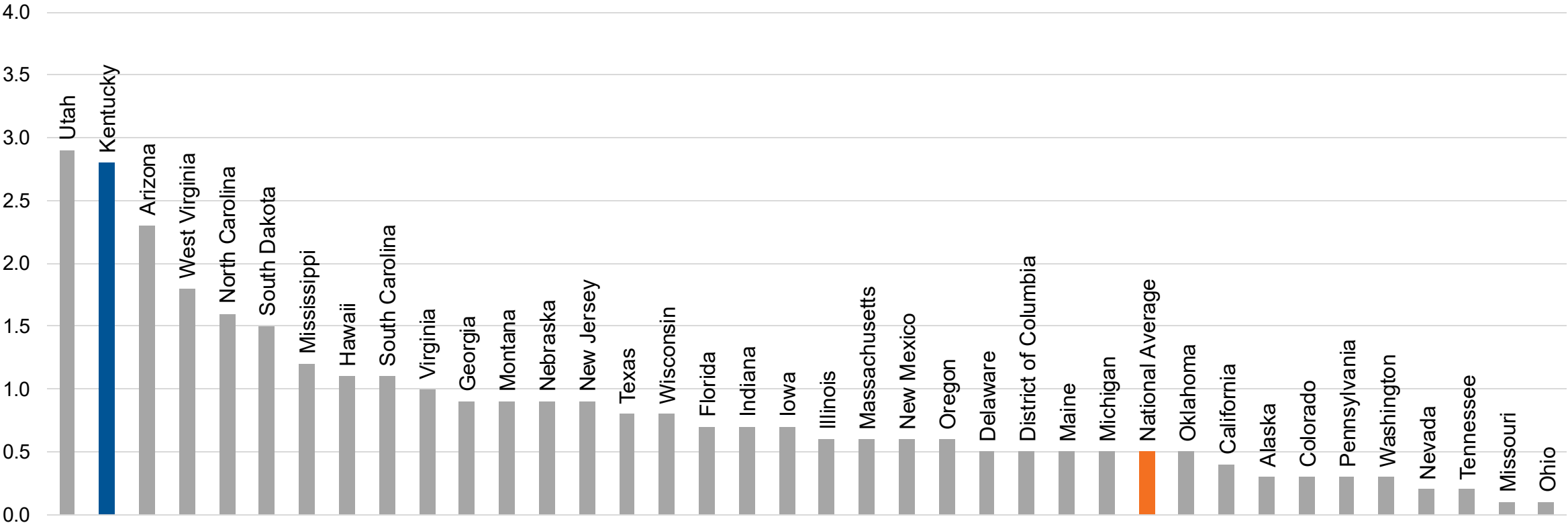
Persistence Rates: Year-to-Year Percentage Point Improvement, Fall 2022 and 2023 Cohorts



Source: National Student Clearinghouse.

Kentucky is second in the nation for six-year completion rate improvement

Six-year Completion Rates: Year-to-Year Percentage Point Improvement, Fall 2017 and 2018 Cohorts



Source: National Student Clearinghouse.

Higher Education Demographic Projections and Trends Montana



Clayton Christian
Commissioner of Higher Education
SHEEO Policy Conference

August 14, 2025

The Landscape

- **System Snapshot**
- **Factors favorable to Montana's public higher education system**
- **Challenges for Montana's system**
- **How Montana is meeting the future**

Montana Higher Education Snapshot

- 📷 Sixteen campuses comprise the Montana University System
 - two flagships (both R-1 research status) and 14 affiliates and community colleges
 - doctoral-level institutions and comprehensive 4-year and 2-year colleges and universities
- 📷 Governed by 7-member Board of Regents, appointed by Governor to 7-year terms
- 📷 42,992 students were enrolled in Fall 2024, a 2.3% increase compared to previous year
- 📷 Resident tuition is among the lowest compared to peer states
- 📷 Three pillars of MUS strategic plan:
 - Access and affordability
 - Workforce and economic development
 - Efficiency and effectiveness

Factors Favorable to the MUS

- **Public support for higher education**
 - Surveys conducted in 2021 and in 2023 indicate that **88% of Montanans** believe residents should have the opportunity to access higher education.
 - Those same surveys show that **72% of Montanans** believe that higher education leads to a better career.
- **Executive and Legislative support for higher education**
 - Strong relationship with the governor and the state legislature through years of identifying and delivering on **shared higher education policy goals**.
 - Key legislative appropriations and policy committees **understand MUS operations** and programs.
 - Relationships and accountability have contributed to legislative funding levels that allow for **maintenance and scaling of innovative programming**.
 - The MUS is **demonstratively responsive** to dynamic workforce needs.

Factors Favorable to the MUS

- **K-12 Agency Partnership**
 - *The MUS, the Board of Regents, and Montana's Office of Public Instruction all recognize the value of a K-20+ approach to education and the need to **share resources and data** to accomplish common goals.*
- **Central Application Portal**
 - ***Apply Montana**, the MUS's signature central application portal, is an **access game-changer**--a one-stop-shop for applying for free to MUS campuses and for exploring degree programs, career opportunities, and financial aid.*
- **Technology Hub**
 - *MUS institutions are leaders and partners in **innovative research and development programs**, notably in the areas of optics and photonics— wins for the state's economy and workforce training.*
- **State Popularity**
 - *Montana has been experiencing a measurable surge in popularity.*

Factors Challenging to the MUS

- **Aging Population**
 - *Projections cited in a 2023 Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services report suggest that by 2030, Montana will be among the ten states in the nation to have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18.*
- **Workforce Shortages**
 - *Worker shortages in areas of critical need such as health care and education demand targeted, focused higher education pathways that lead directly to careers without compromising quality.*
- **Rural Characteristics**
 - *Barriers resulting from Montana's size and remoteness from major population centers must be overcome with robust online options, programs designed for the needs of rural communities, and effective outreach to rural students and families and first-generation college goers.*

Factors Challenging to the MUS

- **Changing federal policies and funding streams**
 - *Research implications*
 - *Interpreting shifting priorities*
- **Demographic trends (the reason we are all here today)**
 - *Fewer traditional high school graduates*
 - *Increasing number of prospective students who will need more institutional support to succeed (first-generation, adult learners, students from lower-income backgrounds)*

MUS is Meeting the Future

- ❖ Access, Success, Retention for ***all*** students
 - ❖ **Workforce** Needs
 - ❖ Cutting-edge **Research**
 - ❖ **World-class Education**
 - ❖ A Healthy Montana **Economy**

**Industry
Partnerships**

CTE

**Legislative
Partnerships**

Sprint Degrees

Montana 10

ApplyMT Central Application Portal

**Seamless
Learning
System**

Headwaters Tech Hub

**Innovative Student Access
& Retention Programming**

Online Options, Brick & Mortar Maintenance