Tennessee High School Pipeline Analytics

Trends & Projections

Background

Using data from TBR and TDOE, we have begun to think about the high school pipeline to TBR community colleges, both about current and future students and historical trends. Over the past decade, first-time enrollment at TBR colleges has increased, and dual enrollment has doubled. Although awards have increased 79% from 2009 to 2019, overall enrollment has decreased 4% in that same time period. Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect have altered enrollment at TBR colleges, boosting first-time enrollment and reversing the steady decline in adult enrollment, but as the impact of these policies begins to level off over time, we have begun to think critically about strategic enrollment management.

Tennessee Population Projections: According to the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, the state’s population is expected to grow more slowly between X-year and Y-year than it has in recent years. Although overall trends are positive, most of the projected growth by 2040 will be in Middle Tennessee (Davidson, Williamson, Rutherford, Wilson, and Sumner counties). Overall, 66 counties will see increases in population, while 27 rural counties will experience population decreases.

Tennessee will also see demographic changes. By 2040, the Boyd Center projects that 1 in 5 Tennesseans will be over age 65, which means the proportion of working-aged adults in certain areas will decrease. Additionally, every county in Tennessee will see a decline in white non-Hispanic population, while the Hispanic population is expected to almost double by 2040.¹

High School Enrollment Projections: According to WICHE’s Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates, high school classes plateaued in 2013 nationwide, and the nation is expected to produce fewer high school graduates through 2027. In particular, WICHE also predicts fewer white and black students and growth in non-white public school students. WICHE predicts that in Tennessee, the number of high school graduates will peak in 2026².

Similarly, the National Center for Education Statistics predicts slight growth in enrollment in grades 9-12, with decreases in white and American Indian/Alaska Native and increases in all other non-white students by 2027. For Tennessee in particular, NCES projects a less than 5% increase in high school enrollments and graduates from 2012-13 to 2027-28³.

Interactive Dashboards

TBR’s Office of Policy & Strategy has created interactive dashboards for colleges to leverage as they plan for incoming classes. This publicly available high school enrollment data contains information about enrollment at each public K-12 school in TN by grade and some demographic characteristics.

Using this data from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), as well as some of TBR’s enrollment data, these dashboards begin to answer colleges’ questions about the high school pipeline in their service areas, including:

- How many students in my service area will graduate from high school this year or next?
- Which high schools have the strongest pipeline to my college, and are there gaps?
- At which colleges do students from a certain high school enroll? Are students from high schools in my service area enrolling at another community college?
- How might we expect enrollment patterns to change over the next few years?

¹ Boyd Center Population Projections: Gains in Middle Tennessee, More Seniors, 2019 (Link)
² Knocking at the College Door, WICHE, 2016 (Link)
³ Projections of Education Statistics to 2027, Forty-sixth Edition, February 2019 (Link)
Key Takeaways

1. Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) planning is underway at community colleges.

In May 2019, campus teams convened to learn more about Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM), with the goal of identifying recruitment goals considering external competition, labor market demands, and equity challenges. A major focus area of SEM is identifying students in the pipeline to TBR colleges, and these tools were developed to assist colleges with data analysis and environmental scanning. Taking a critical look at our recruitment and enrollment practices will help our colleges think more strategically about gaps in enrollment, institutional needs, and future enrollment targets.

2. Not all students attend the community college in their service area.

TBR service areas are the counties each of the thirteen Community Colleges serve. In Fall 2019, on average, 86% of first-time freshmen attended the college in their high school’s service area. This means that almost 1 in 7 (14%) first-time freshmen attended a college outside of their service area. This number varies across colleges and is as high as 25% in some areas and as low as 7% in others. Within service areas, these numbers vary by each county even more substantially, from as low as 2% to as high as 69%.

3. The percent of recent high school graduates enrolling at TBR CC is declining slightly.

High school students have many options for college after high school, if they attend at all. In Fall 2019, 23% of high school seniors from 2018-19 enrolled as first-time freshmen at TBR community colleges.

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4. Statewide growth in cohort size peaks in 2026.

In addition to statewide population projections, we can look to K-12 data for current cohort sizes at each grade level. Overall, the expected cohort size will increase until 2026, where it will peak at 78,070, or a 12% increase over 2019 cohort. After 2026, the cohort size begins to decline.

5. Cohort growth differs across service areas.

**Slowed growth:** At Chattanooga, Nashville, and Southwest, cohorts may grow but at a slower rate after 2026. The 2022 cohort size in these service areas is 10-15% larger than the 2019 cohort, and only 16-23% larger by 2031.

**Flat or no growth:** Other colleges may also see very slight growth. For these schools, growth peaks at as high as 9% at Columbia in 2025 and drops back down to just above or just below 0% for these colleges by the 2027 cohort.