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# CONDITION OF EDUCATION

2020-21

*The Condition of Education in Connecticut* is the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) yearly status report on public education in the state. It fulfills the requirements under Section 10-4(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

## FOREWORD

*The Condition of Education in Connecticut* is the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) yearly status report on public education in the state. It presents indicators that describe the progress of the public education system, the characteristics of its students and educators, and student performance on key indicators of student engagement and student readiness for college and careers.

Equity and excellence are the cornerstones of the State Board of Education's comprehensive plan for public education. Therefore, this report disaggregates data on several of the indicators to separately highlight the experiences and outcomes of students from historically under-performing groups like students with disabilities, English learners, students from low-income families, and those from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The COVID-19 pandemic has broadly affected all areas of human life including education. Several indicators in this report demonstrate those impacts.

Please visit our data portal, EdSight, at <https://edsight.ct.gov> for additional information about students, educators, instruction, resources, and performance of schools, districts, and the state.

Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner  
Connecticut State Department of Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020–21 school year presented a unique set of challenges due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The state’s Next Generation Accountability System was postponed for a second straight year. Therefore, some performance metrics are not part of this year’s report. Here are key highlights:

- Connecticut’s student enrollment continues to decline. In 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment declined by nearly three percent from the prior year – a one-year decline that would occur previously over a five-year period. Though lower, the enrollment is increasingly more diverse (i.e., 50.1 percent are nonwhite), from low-income families (i.e., 42.7 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals), and with greater educational needs (i.e., 16.3 percent are students with disabilities while 8.3 percent are English learners) than just five years ago.
- The racial/ethnic composition of the teaching force is also changing. The percentage of nonwhite educators has increased from 8.1 percent (around 4,300 educators) in 2014-15 to 10.0 percent (around 5,300 educators) in 2020-21.
- The chronic absenteeism rate grew from 12.2 percent in 2019-20 to 19.0 percent in 2020-21. Incidences of chronic absenteeism grew disproportionately among students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families.
- Specialized analyses of state summative assessment data from 2020-21 revealed that in all grades and across most student groups, those who learned in-person during the 2020-21 school year lost the least ground academically. Those who learned in *hybrid* or *remote* models showed substantially weaker achievement and growth during the pandemic. While academic impacts are seen in all subjects, the observed differences are largest in mathematics.
- The four-year high school cohort graduation rates continue to inch up (88.8 percent for the cohort of 2020) while the graduation rate gap between most student groups continues to shrink. Connecticut’s graduation rate also remains higher than the national average. However, it should be noted that the percentage of students who were on-track in Grade 9 in 2020-21 was the lowest in the past seven years.

- The percentage of 11th and 12th graders who met the College and Career Readiness benchmark on any of the following exams – SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) – evidenced a significant decline through the pandemic from 42.6 percent in 2018-19 to 36.0 percent in 2020-21. All student groups showed similar substantial declines.
- College entrance rates were dramatically impacted by the pandemic for the class of 2020 (67.4 percent) down from 71.5 percent for the 2019 cohort. College graduation rates remained steady with 50.4 percent of the class of 2015 earning a two- or four-year college degree in six years after high school graduation.

## THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

### Districts, Schools, Programs, and Adult Education Providers

Public education in Connecticut is provided to students in prekindergarten to Grade 12 through many types of school districts. These include local and regional boards of education, regional educational service centers (RESA), public charter districts, the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System, Endowed Academies, and state agencies. These school districts deliver their educational services to students through regular schools, specialized programs, and outplacements to private facilities.

*Table 1: Number of Schools by the Type of Organization 2020-21*

<b>Organization Type</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>
Public Schools in Local and Regional Districts	936
Regional Educational Service Center Schools	28
Public Charter Schools	21
Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Schools	17
Endowed Academies	3
State Agency Facilities	36
<b>Total Number of Schools</b>	<b>1,041</b>

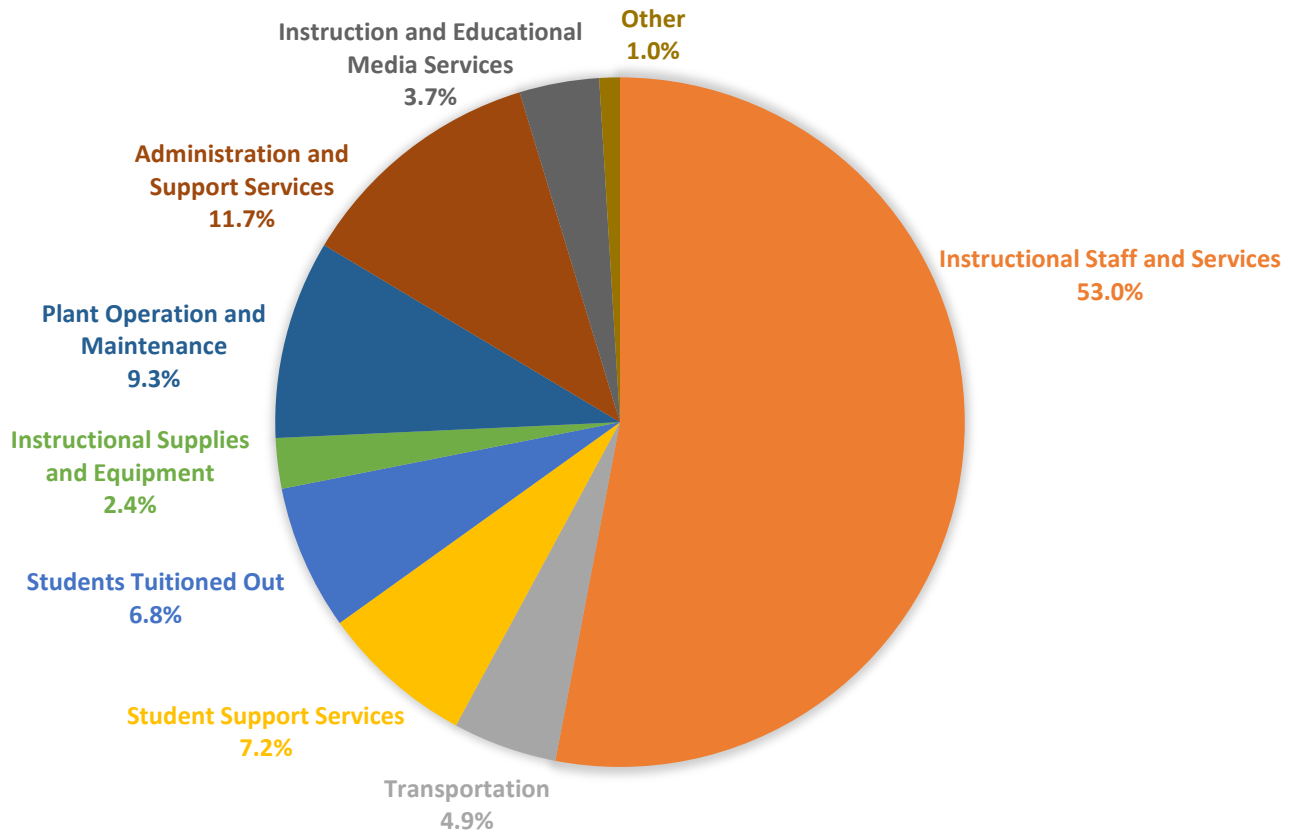
Of the 1,041 schools, 799 are elementary and/or middle schools and 242 are high schools. In addition to these 1,041 schools, 468 specialized programs provide targeted services. The vast majority of these programs are designed for special education students (324), alternative/credit recovery (76), or prekindergarten (40).

In addition to PK-12 education, adult education programs are also provided to residents in all towns across Connecticut through 41 local school district providers, three regional educational service centers, 14 community/faith-based organizations, and one state agency.

## Expenditures

In 2020-21, the state’s overall school expenditures (excluding investments in land, buildings, and debt) totaled approximately \$10.1 billion. Instructional staff and services represented a majority of the total expenditures; 53 cents out of every education dollar were devoted to this area.

*Figure 1: Expenditures by Category, 2020-21*

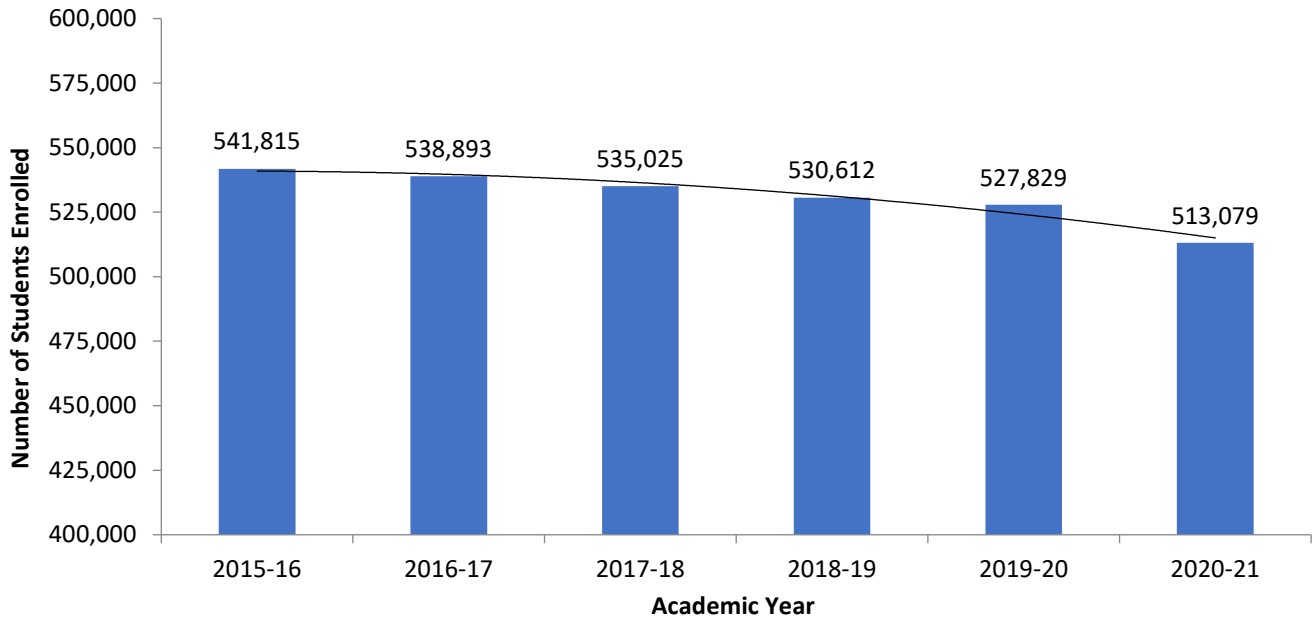


With the infusion of an additional \$1.5 billion in federal COVID-19 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, it is expected that total public school expenditures will increase over the next two to three year period.

## Public School Enrollment

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Connecticut's public school enrollment in 2020-21 declined by nearly three percent (14,750 students) from the prior year. Such a one-year decline would occur previously over a five-year period. The 2020-21 enrollment of 513,079 was also 5.3 percent lower than the 2015-16 enrollment of 541,815.

*Figure 2: Connecticut Public School Enrollment (PK-12)*



The two school-entering grades of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten saw the largest declines. Public pre-kindergarten enrollment fell nearly 19 percent in one year (3,529 students) while kindergarten enrollment declined nearly 12 percent in one year (4,310 students). These declines were disproportionately greater in the 33 Alliance Districts.

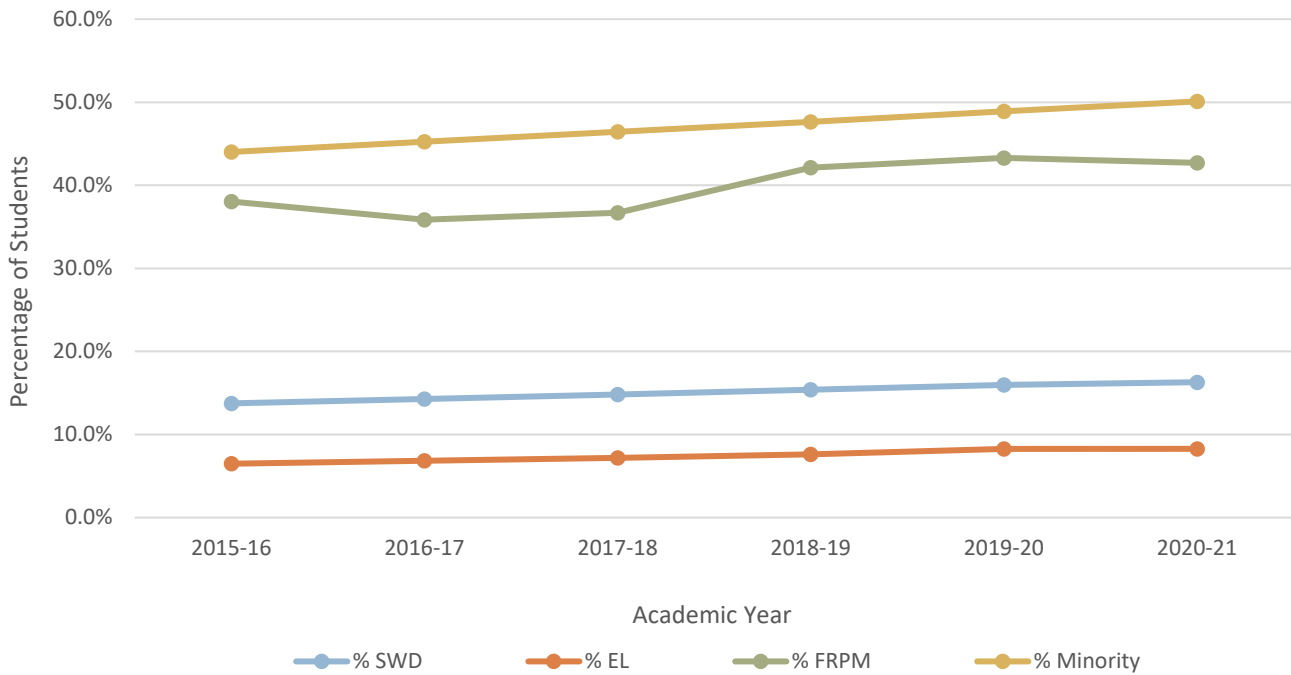
Although statewide enrollment is declining, some districts evidence substantial increases over the same period. These include:

- RESCs like Capitol Region Education Council through the addition of seats in existing magnet schools;
- public charter districts through the expansion of seats in existing charters; and
- the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System which has demonstrated three percent growth in enrollment in each of the last two years.

## Student Demographics and Characteristics

An increasing proportion of public-school students (PK-12) come from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students from racial/ethnic minorities has increased from 44.0 percent in 2015-16 to 50.1 percent in 2020-21. Increases occurred in the percentage of students with disabilities (SWD) for the ninth year in a row, with 16.3 percent of students now receiving special education and related services. Students who are English learners (EL) account for 8.3 percent of the student population. The percentage of students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals (FRPM) decreased for the first time in 2020-21 to 42.7 percent, after three years of increases. This is likely due to the decline in the completion of household meal applications because districts are providing free meals to all students during the pandemic.

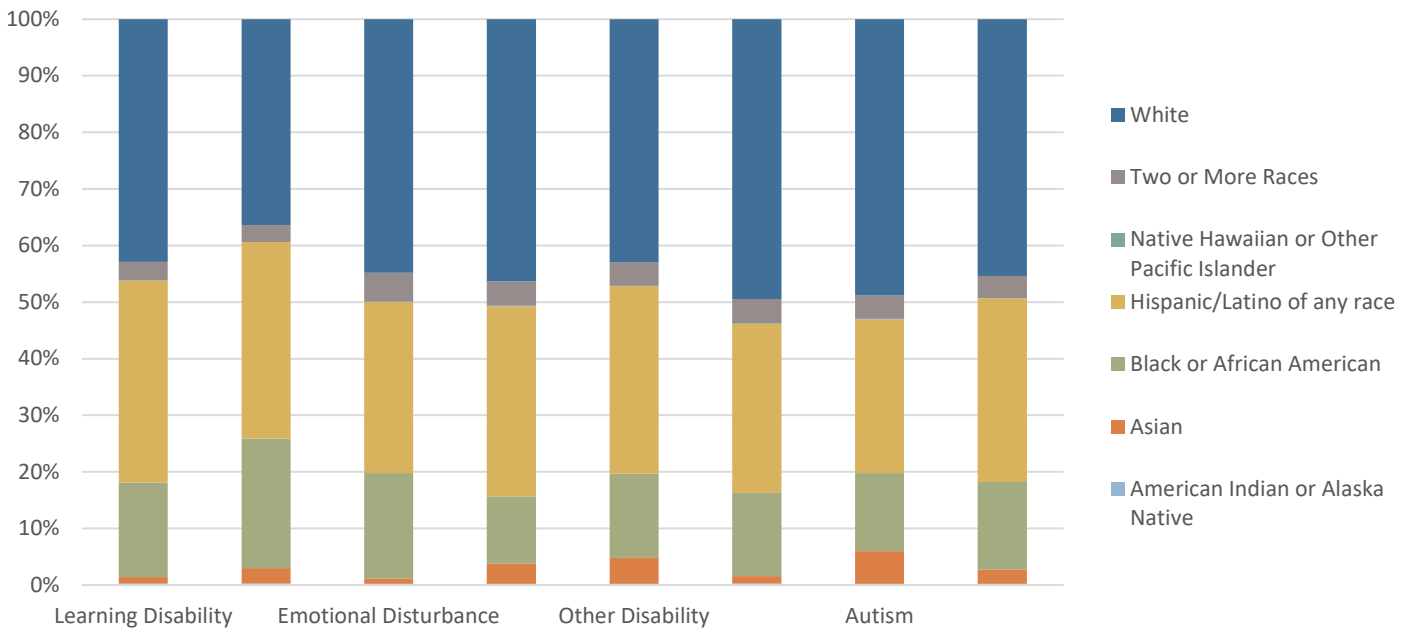
*Figure 3: Student Demographics and Characteristics*



## Special Education by Race/Ethnicity

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the CSDE to investigate disproportionality based on race/ethnicity in the identification of students with disabilities at two levels. First, districts are monitored for disproportionate representation on an annual basis and second, districts are assessed for significant disproportionality for all students with disabilities ages three through 21 over the course of three years. Disproportionate representation requires a district review of policies, practices and procedures contributing to over-representation by race/ethnicity. Significant disproportionality requires the redirection of federal IDEA funds to address the identified disproportionality, after three years of identification without substantial improvement. Below are the state level data used to assess disproportionality. In 2020-21, district-level investigations revealed that the most common group that was disproportionately identified were black/African American students with learning disabilities. Of the districts with data of concern, upon investigation none were found to have disproportionate identification because of inappropriate policies, practices, or procedures. At the state level, black/African American students were more than twice as likely as their nonblack peers to be identified with intellectual disabilities and were more than one-and-a-half times as likely as their nonblack peers to be identified with serious emotional disturbance.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Students with Disabilities, Ages 3-21:  
Disability Type by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-21**



## Languages Spoken at Home among English Learners

In the 2020-21 school year, Connecticut's English Learners (ELs) spoke 140 different non-English languages. The 15 most prevalent non-English languages among ELs in Grades PK-12 are listed below.

*Table 2: 15 Most Prevalent Non-English Languages Spoken at Home among ELs, 2020-21*

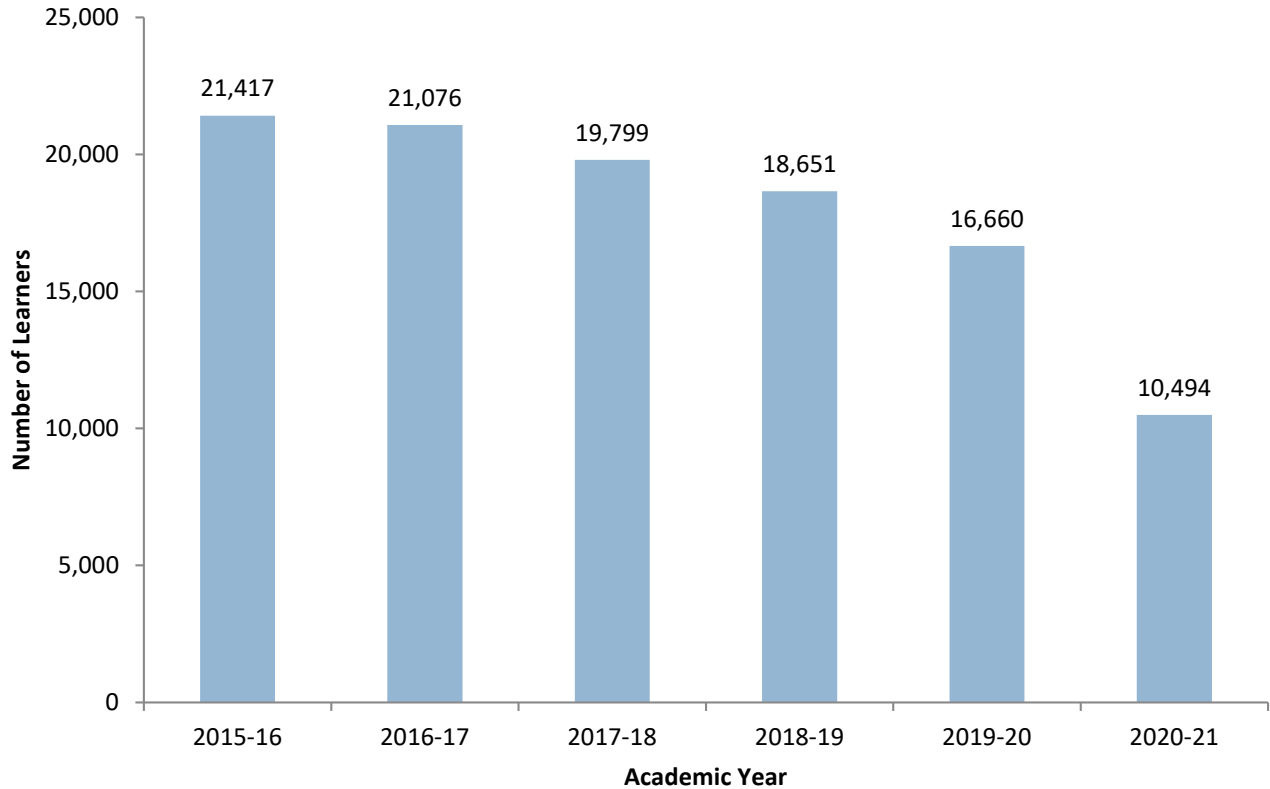
<b>Language</b>	<b>Number of ELs</b>
Spanish	30,800
Portuguese	2,387
Arabic	1,227
Creole-Haitian	746
Mandarin	631
Polish	488
Albanian	486
Urdu	435
Vietnamese	342
Pashto	340
Bengali	301
French	263
Russian	225
Tamil	225
Telugu	224

While most districts had to accommodate only a few languages, there were 47 districts whose ELs spoke 20 or more different non-English languages. Schools that have 20 or more students who are not proficient in English and speak the same language are required to offer a program of bilingual instruction in the following school year.

## Adult Education Enrollment

Connecticut's adult education programs operate in their local communities to assist adults in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment, self-sufficiency, and citizenship; becoming full partners in the educational development of their own children; and completing their secondary school education. Connecticut law requires that adult education services be provided by local school districts free of charge to any adult, 17 years of age or older, who is not enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school program. In 2020-21, Connecticut programs served 10,494 adult learners, a 37 percent reduction in enrollment compared to 2019-20. While adult education enrollments have been on a decreasing trajectory of one to five percent each year, the global pandemic resulted in a 10 percent decline in 2019-20, and a dramatic 37 percent decline in 2020-21.

*Figure 5: Adult Education Enrollment*

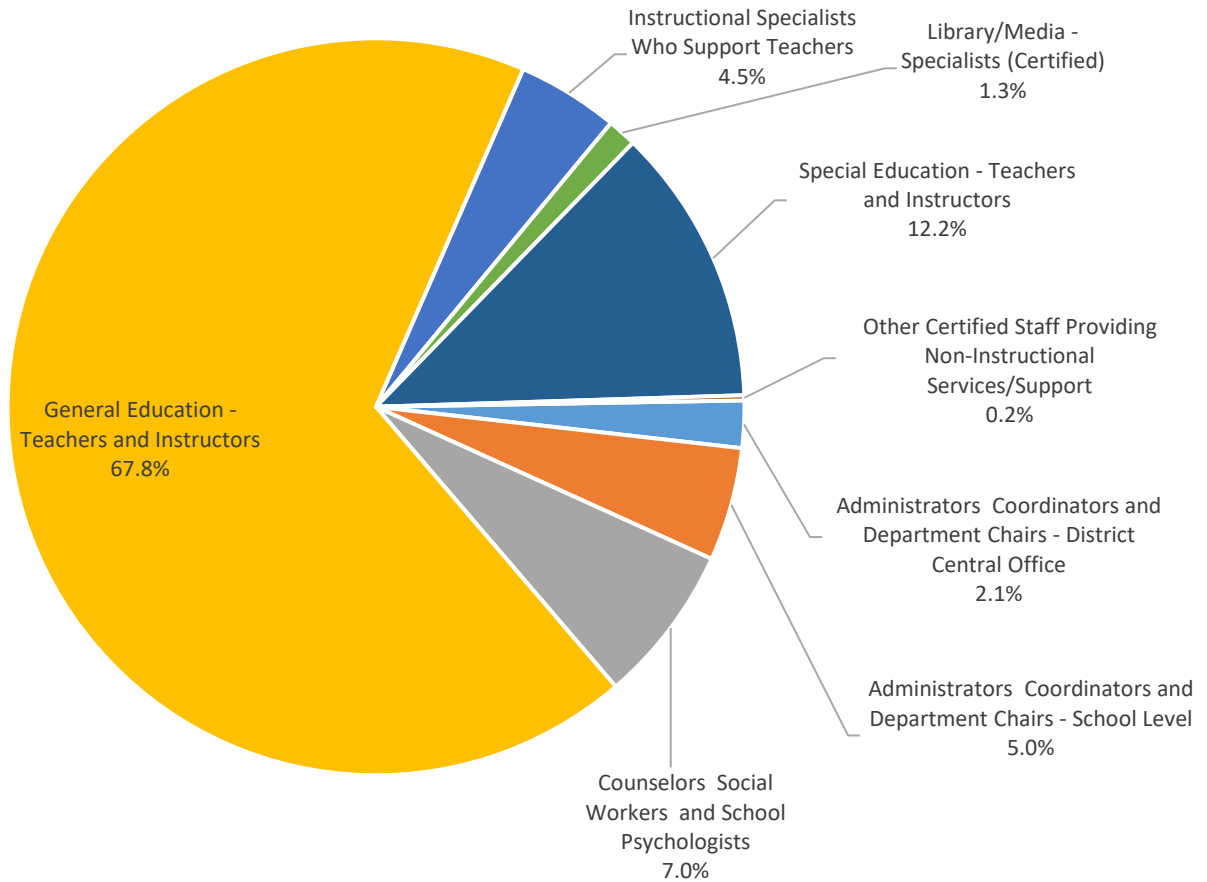


# EDUCATORS

## Capacity

General education and special education teachers combined constitute 80 percent of full-time equivalent (FTE) certified staff. The total general education teacher/instructor FTE increased slightly this year for the first time since 2015-16. The FTE of staff providing both instructional and non-instructional support to students and teachers continues to grow. Of note in 2020-21, the FTE for Library Media Specialists decreased by 8.4 percent compared to just last year.

**Figure 6: Certified Staff Full-time Equivalent by Role Type: 2020-21**

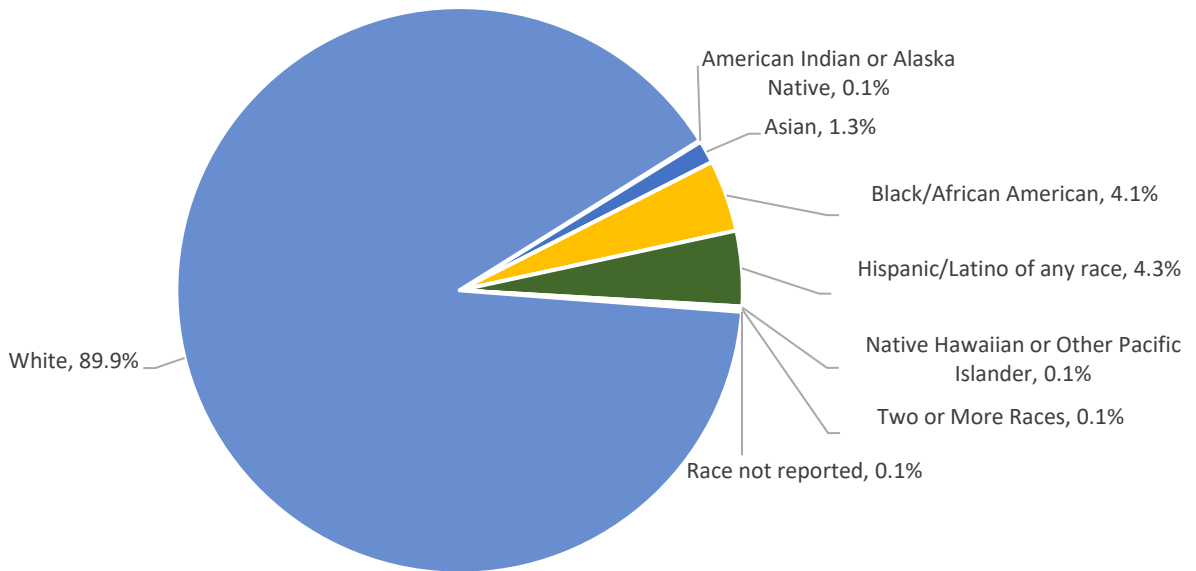


Full-time equivalent (FTE) is derived by dividing the amount of time a person works by the time required of a corresponding full-time position. A full-time position is considered to be 1.0 FTE. For example, a teacher who works two of the five days per week would be a 0.4 FTE (2 days/5 days = 0.4 of full time or 0.4 FTE).

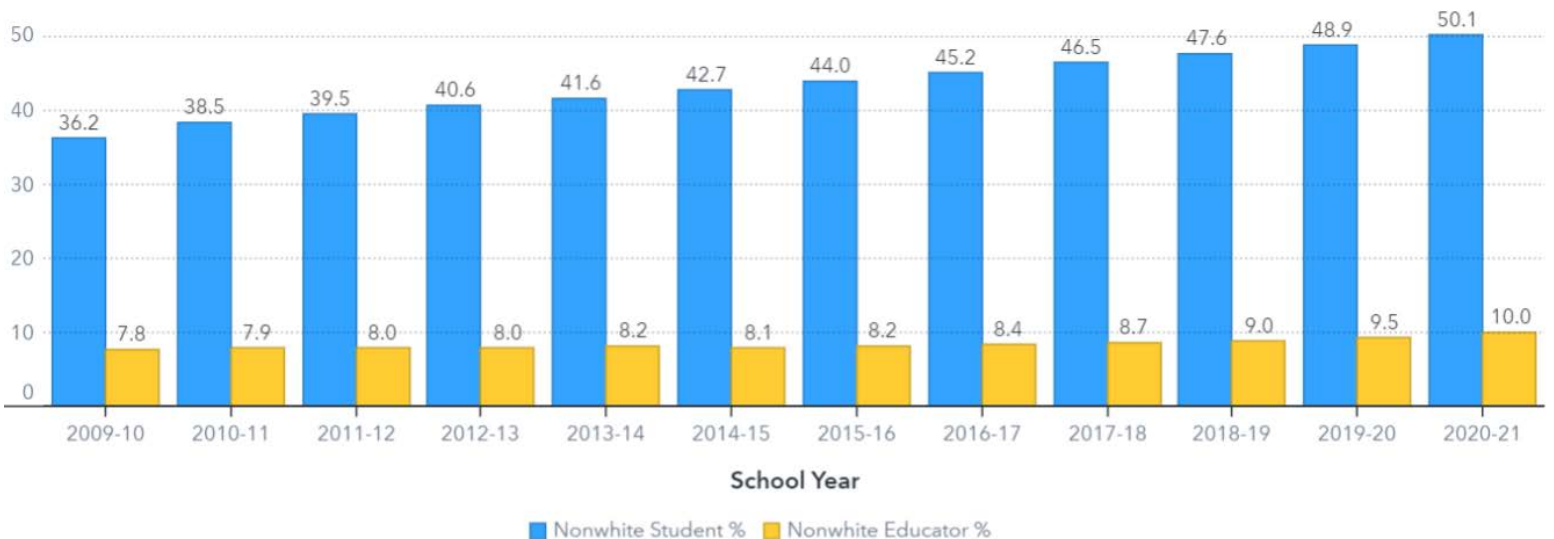
## Demographics

Connecticut’s student population continues to increase in diversity, with nonwhite students comprising 50.1 percent of the student body for the first time ever. Additionally, the diversity of our staff is improving, albeit not at the same rate as our student population, with 10.0 percent of certified school staff identifying as nonwhite. The percentage of nonwhite educators has increased slowly over the past six years from 8.1 percent (around 4,300 educators) in 2014-15 to 10.0 percent (around 5,300 educators) in 2020-21.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Certified Staff by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-21**



**Figure 8: Percentage of Nonwhite Students and Staff (Trend)**

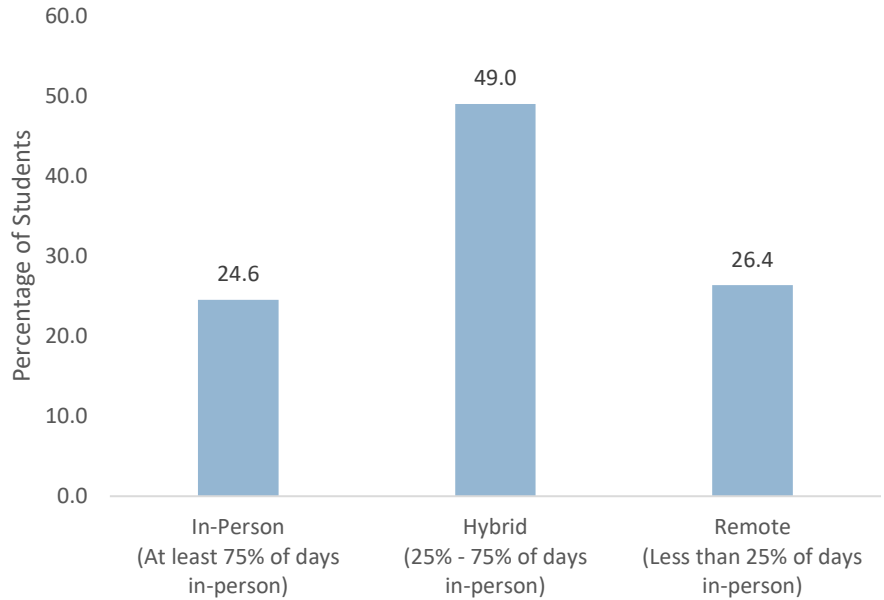


# SCHOOL CLIMATE AND INSTRUCTION

## Student Learning Model

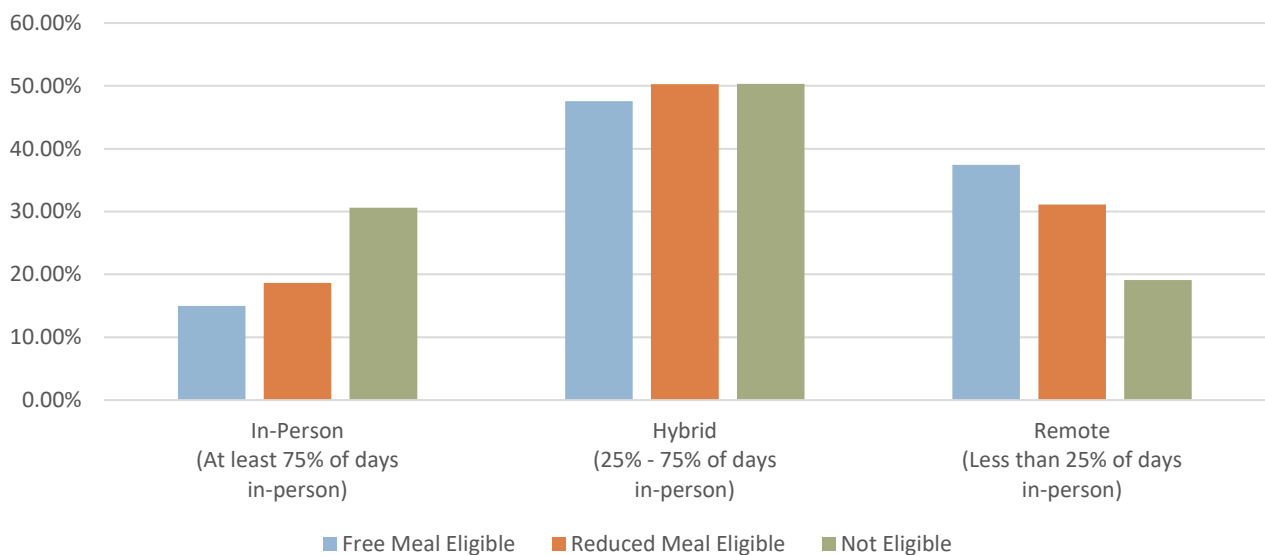
In 2020-21, districts implemented different learning models (i.e., in-person, hybrid, or remote) and those models often changed during the year due to changing local health metrics. Moreover, parents could choose for their child to learn remotely. Consequently, nearly half of all students attended school in a hybrid format while over 26 percent of students (i.e., over 134,000 students) received less than one quarter of their school days in-person.

**Figure 9: Percentage of Students by Learning Model**



Students eligible for free meals were nearly twice as likely to be remote than those not eligible; conversely, those not eligible for free- or reduced-price meals were twice as likely to be in-person than those eligible for free meals. Hybrid rates were similar among the three groups.

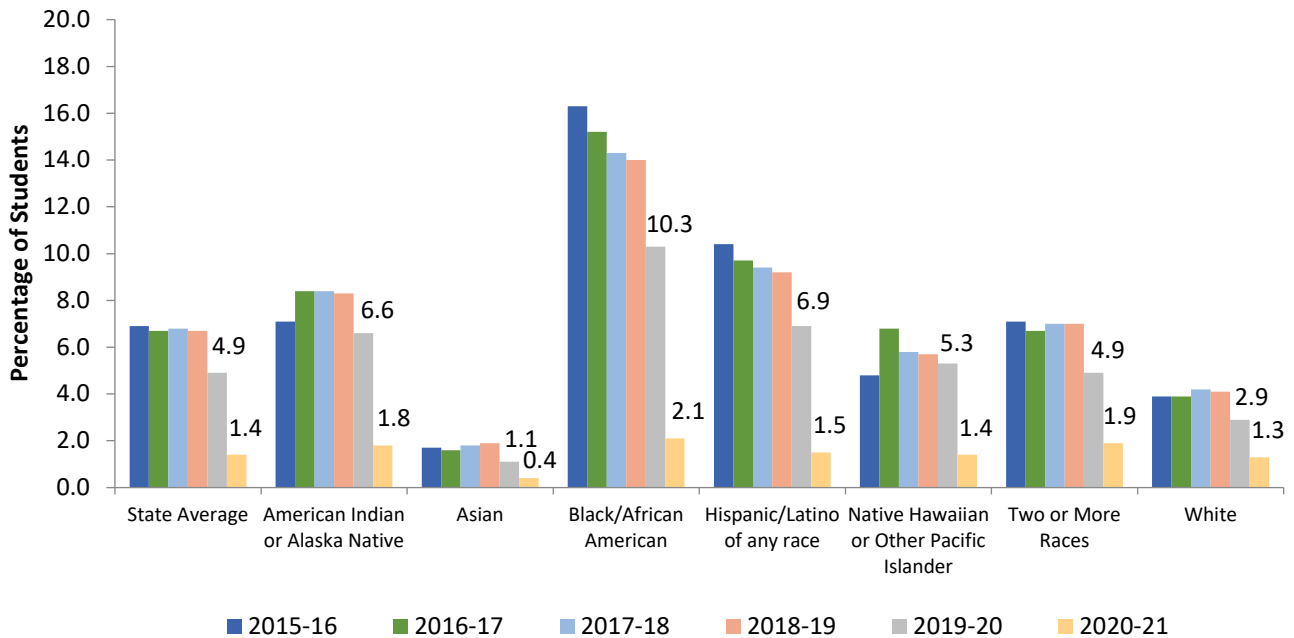
**Figure 10: Student Learning Model by Free- or Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility**



## School Discipline

Districts are required to report to the CSDE all disciplinary incidents that result in any of the following: In-School Suspension (ISS), Out-of-School Suspension (OSS), Bus Suspensions, and Expulsions (EXP). In addition, offenses classified as “serious” and all incidents involving alcohol, drugs, or weapons must be reported regardless of the type of sanction imposed. All bullying incidents must also be reported regardless of sanction. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly skewed the discipline statistics as students attended classes in-person to varying degrees with over 25 percent of students fully or mostly remote for most of the 2020-21 school year. The CSDE has continued grouping districts into four tiers based on their suspension/expulsion rates to provide a system of supports and targeted action planning. Since the 2019-20 and 2020-21 discipline statistics were distorted due to the pandemic, the 2018-19 districts tiers are being used to identify those districts needing additional supports.

**Figure 11: Suspension Rates by Race/Ethnicity**

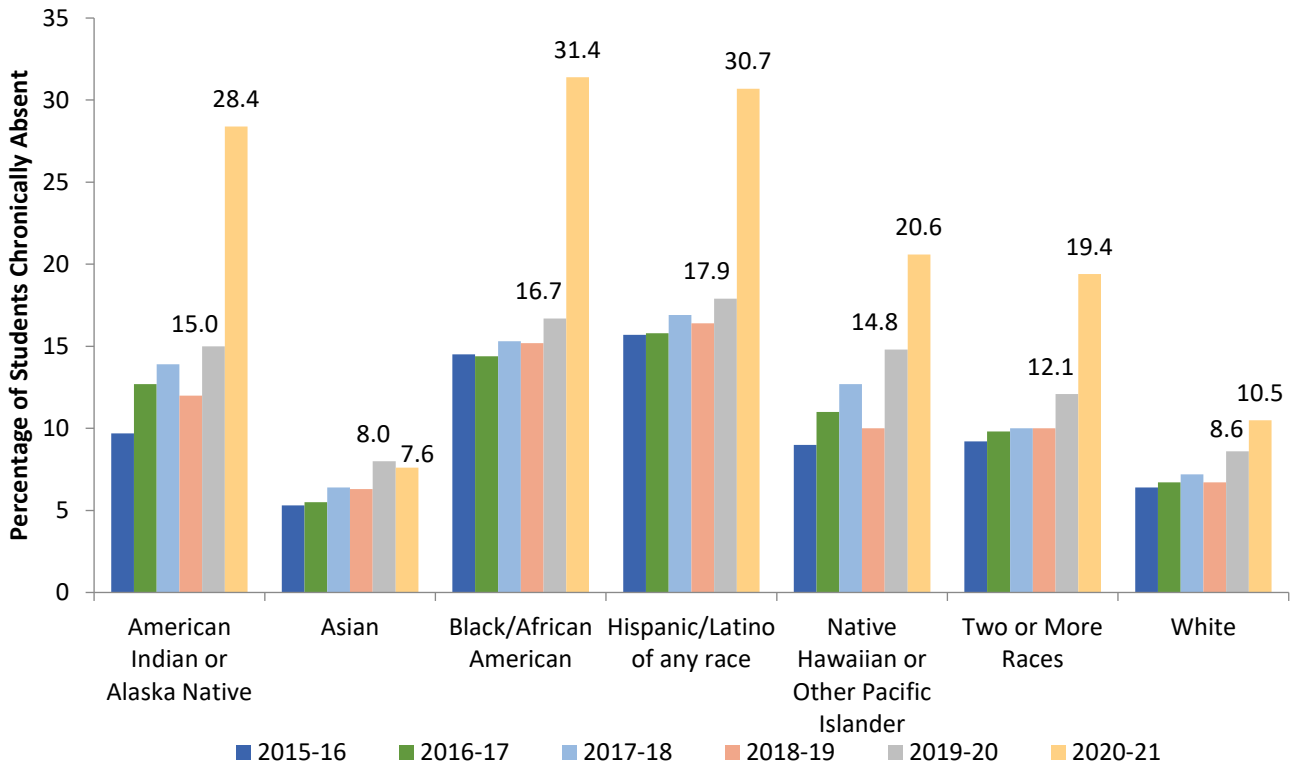


## Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or greater of the total number of days enrolled in the school year for any reason. It includes both excused and unexcused absences. Several research studies have highlighted the association of chronic absenteeism with student academic achievement and high school graduation. Chronic absenteeism is also an indicator in Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System.

Connecticut’s statewide chronic absenteeism rate for students in Grades K-12 was 19 percent in 2020-21, a 55 percent increase over 2019-20. It should be noted that for the 2019-20 school year, chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days through mid-March 2020. In 2020-21, chronic absenteeism rates were calculated using attendance during both remote and in-person school days. There remains considerable variation in chronic absenteeism rates among students from different race/ethnic groups, in addition to the dramatic increases for all races except Asian in 2020-21. Students with high needs continue to demonstrate high rates of chronic absenteeism (students eligible for free lunch, 35 percent – a 72 percent increase; students with disabilities, 30.8 percent – a 48 percent increase; and English learners, 31.8 percent – an 85 percent increase over 2019-20 levels).

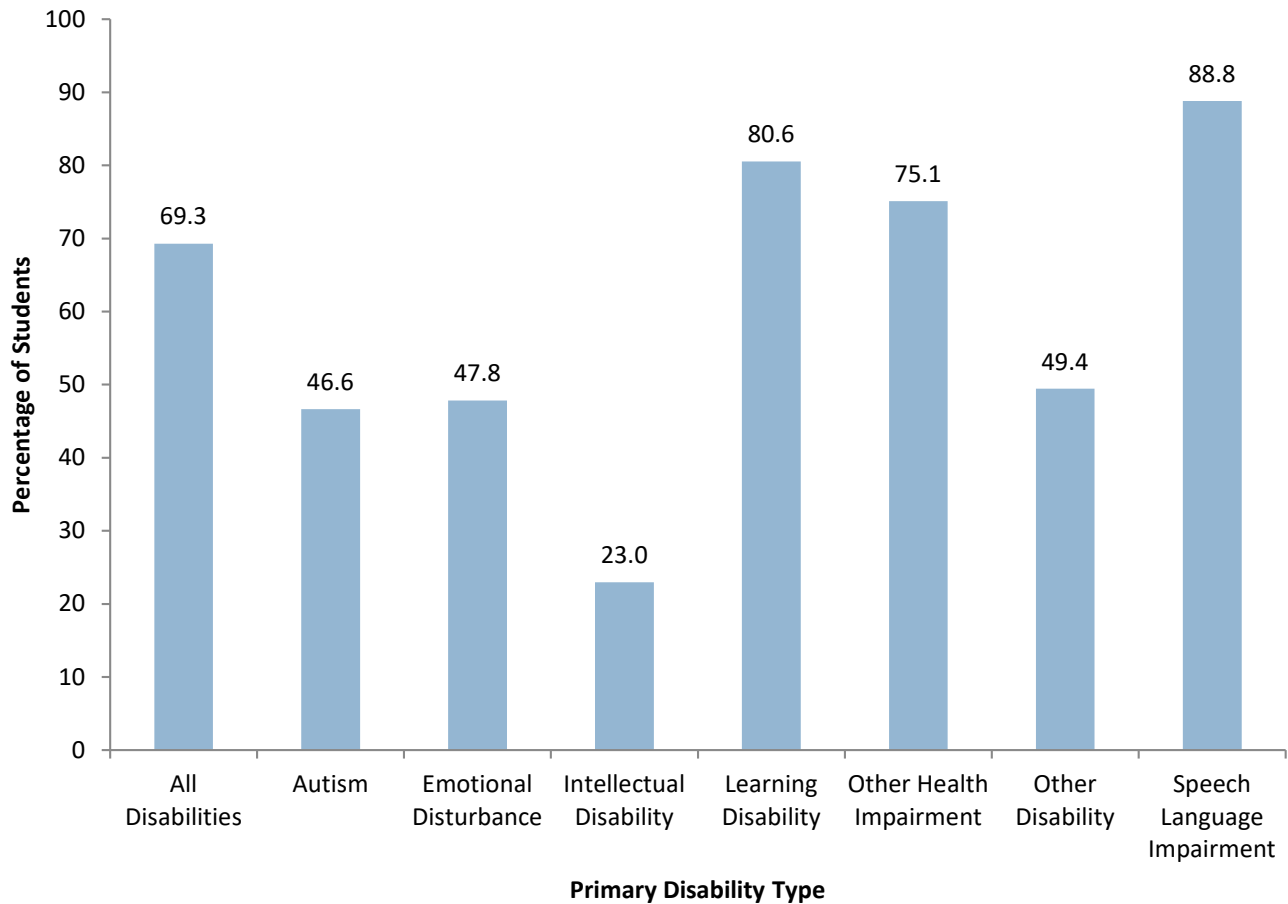
*Figure 12: Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Race/Ethnicity*



## Time Students with Disabilities Spent with Nondisabled Peers

For students with disabilities, time spent with nondisabled peers is an important indicator of access to the general curriculum. It is also a demonstration of students being educated in their least restrictive setting; this complies with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirement that students with disabilities be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. While 69.3 percent of all students with disabilities spent at least 80 percent of their time with nondisabled peers, there is significant variation across the primary disability types. Of all students with an intellectual disability, only 23.0 percent spent at least 80 percent of their time with nondisabled peers as compared to 80.6 percent of students with a learning disability. Similarly, 47.8 percent of students with an emotional disturbance spent at least 80 percent of their time with nondisabled peers, compared to 88.8 percent of students with a speech or language impairment.

*Figure 13: Percent of Students (K-12) who Spend 80-100% of Time with Nondisabled Peers by Primary Disability Type, 2020-21*

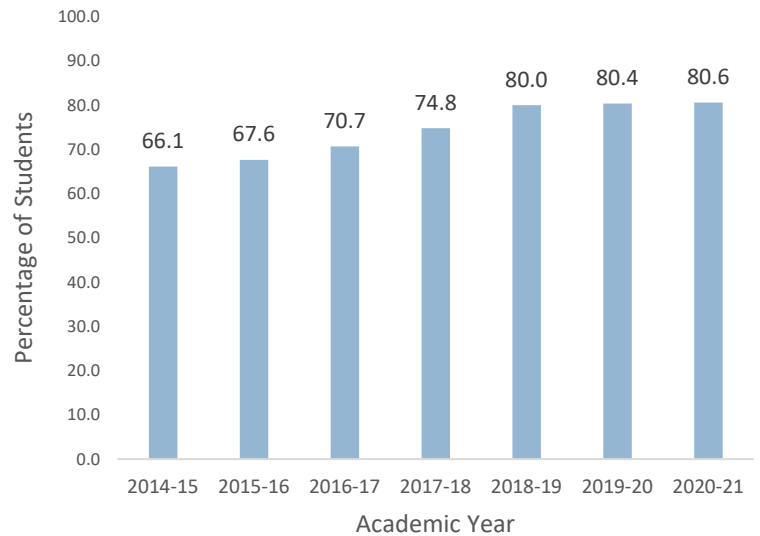


## Participation in College-and-Career Readiness Coursework

Indicator 5 of Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System evaluates the extent to which students participate in rigorous coursework during high school. In recognition of the diverse pathways of our students, the CSDE evaluates the percentage of students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade who participated in at least two courses in one of the following options during high school:

- two courses in advanced placement, international baccalaureate, and/or dual enrollment;
- two courses in one of seventeen career-technical education categories; or
- two workplace experience courses in any area.

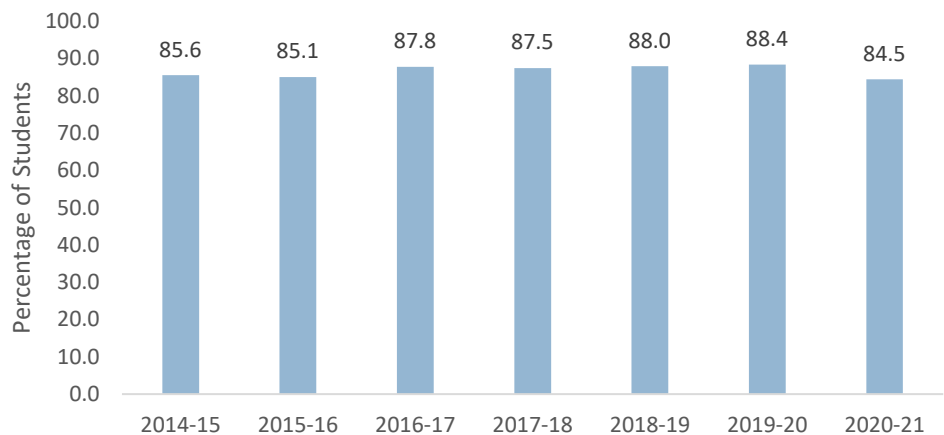
**Figure 14: Percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Students taking CCR Coursework**



## On-Track to High School Graduation

Ninth grade is a critical year. The University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research states that students who are on-track in 9<sup>th</sup> grade “are more than three and one-half times more likely to graduate from high school in four years than off-track students.”

**Figure 15: Percentage of Students On-Track in Grade 9**

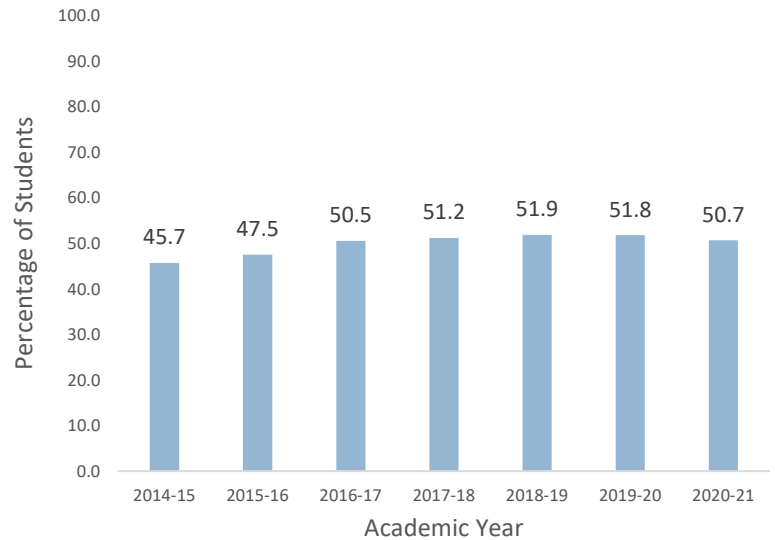


Indicator 7 of Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System evaluates the extent to which students are on-track in Grade 9 (i.e., they’ve earned five full-year credits). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the on-track percentage in 2020-21 was the lowest in the past seven years.

## Access to the Arts

The arts are an integral component of the comprehensive curriculum provided to all Connecticut students. For accountability purposes, the CSDE evaluates the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who participated in at least one dance, theater, music, or visual arts course in the school year. This metric is Indicator 12 of Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System and showed a slight decline in 2020-21.

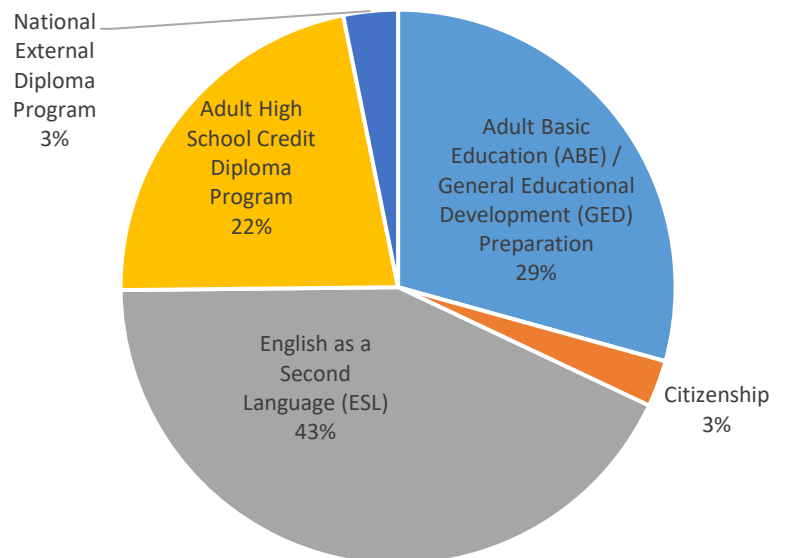
**Figure 16: Percentage of Students in Grades 9 – 12 taking at least One Arts Course**



## Adult Education Program Participation

Adult learners participate in one of the following state-mandated adult education instructional programs: citizenship preparation; English as a second language (ESL); adult basic education (ABE); or one of three secondary school completion programs (i.e., General Educational Development [GED], Adult High School Credit Diploma, or National External Diploma).

**Figure 17: Adult Education Enrollment by Program Type 2020-21**



# PERFORMANCE

## Student Achievement and Growth through the Pandemic

Statewide assessments and district/school accountability were cancelled in 2019-20. In 2020-21, though accountability was not implemented for the second year in a row, Connecticut conducted its statewide assessments to evaluate student achievement and growth through the pandemic. When viewing and interpreting the 2020-21 assessment results – especially when making comparisons with 2018-19 and earlier exam administrations – it is important to note the similarities to and differences from previous years. The 2020-21 exams used the same test blueprint, the same item bank or the same/similar test forms, and the same in-person testing protocols as in 2018-19. The list of differences is significantly longer. First, schools were fully remote from mid-March to mid-June 2020, a marked difference from prior years. In 2020–21, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. In addition, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct for 2020-21. In-person school didn't look the same, and new instructional approaches emerged (e.g., concurrent teaching, remote academies). Students and educators expressed feelings of general stress, anxiety, and trauma. To learn about the impact of the pandemic on student achievement and growth, the CSDE conducted specialized analyses at the state level:

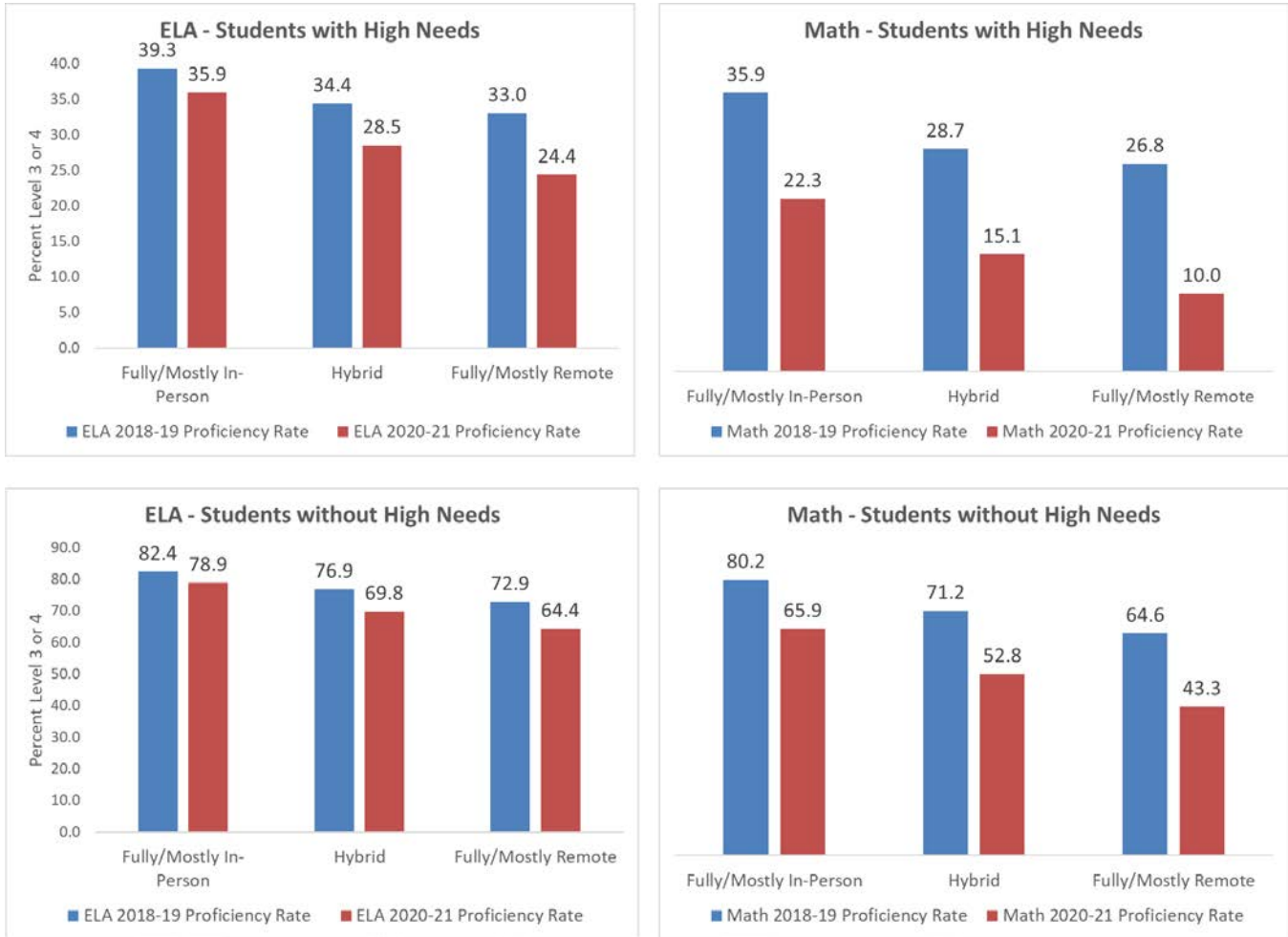
- The CSDE used “matched cohort growth” (i.e., growth of same students from one grade to another) when feasible to evaluate how growth during the pandemic was different from growth before the pandemic.
- All results are disaggregated by a student’s learning model: in-person (more than 75% of days in-person); hybrid (between 25% and 75% of days in-person); or remote (less than 25% of days in-person).
- Only those scores from students who tested in-person were included.
- Lastly, given the variations in learning models and test participation across student groups, comparisons are made within student groups.

These specialized analyses of data from assessments administered in-person reveal the following:

- In all grades and across most student groups, those who learned in-person during the 2020-21 school year lost the least ground academically.
- Those who learned in *hybrid* or *remote* models showed substantially weaker achievement and growth during the pandemic.

- While academic impacts are seen in all subjects, the observed differences are largest in mathematics.

**Figure 18: Matched Cohort (2018-19 to 2020-21) Proficiency Rates by High Needs Status (Grades 5-8)**



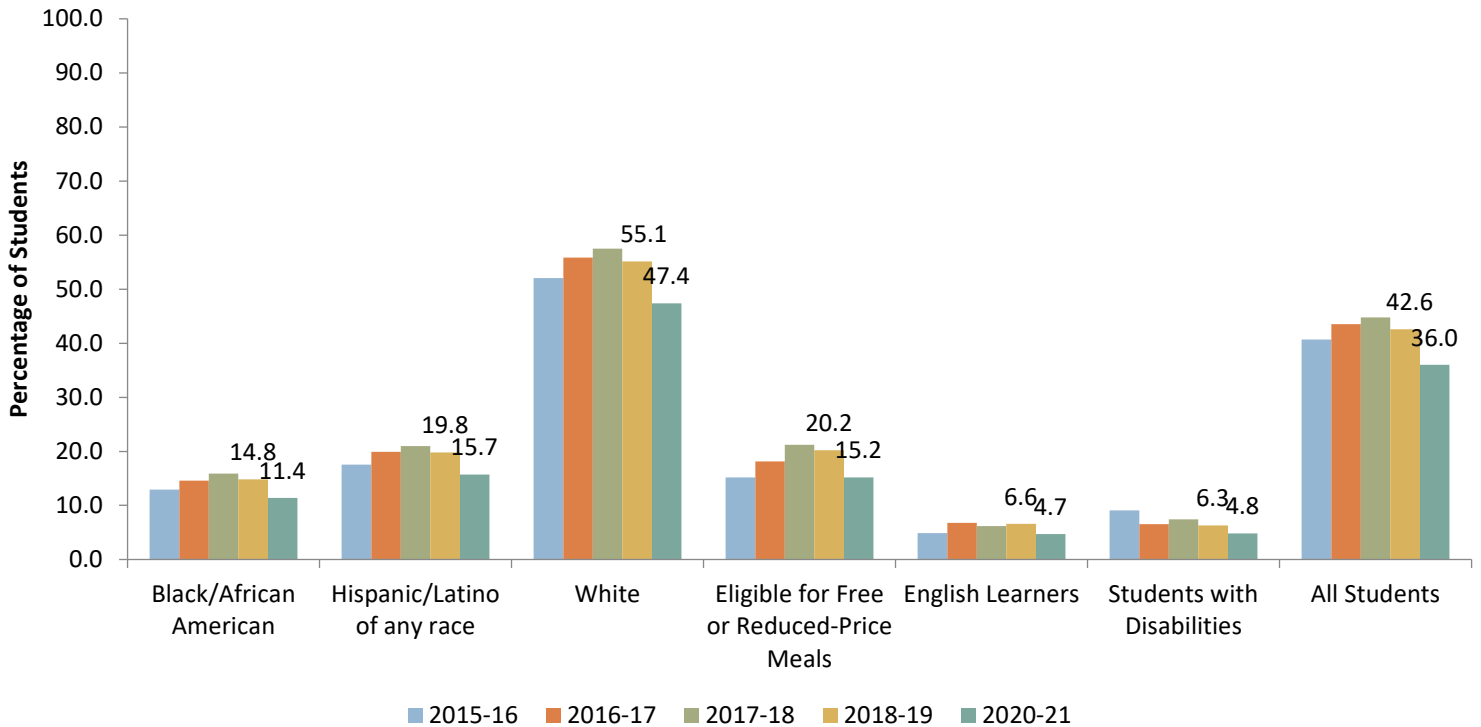
Estimated statewide results from Connecticut’s growth model further indicate the following:

- Growth before the pandemic was much stronger than growth during the pandemic.
- Among low- and high-achieving students, those learning in-person showed greater growth than those learning in hybrid or remote models.
- During the pandemic, students below proficiency (Levels 1 and 2) grew at lower rates than those above proficiency; this was not the case before the pandemic.
- Students above proficiency (Levels 3 and 4) who learned in-person neared pre-pandemic growth in ELA but not in Math.

## Meeting Benchmark on a College and Career Readiness Exam

The graph below shows the percentage of 11th and 12th graders who met the College and Career Readiness benchmark on any of the following exams: SAT, CT SAT School Day, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB). This metric is Indicator 6 of the Next Generation Accountability System. Overall, 36.0 percent of Connecticut 11th and 12th graders in 2020-21 met a college and career readiness standard on any of the aforementioned exams. This is a substantial decline from 2018-19 when 42.6 percent met standard. All student groups showed similar substantial declines. This is another indication of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student performance.

**Figure 19: Percentage of 11th and 12th Graders Meeting Benchmark on a College and Career Readiness Exam**

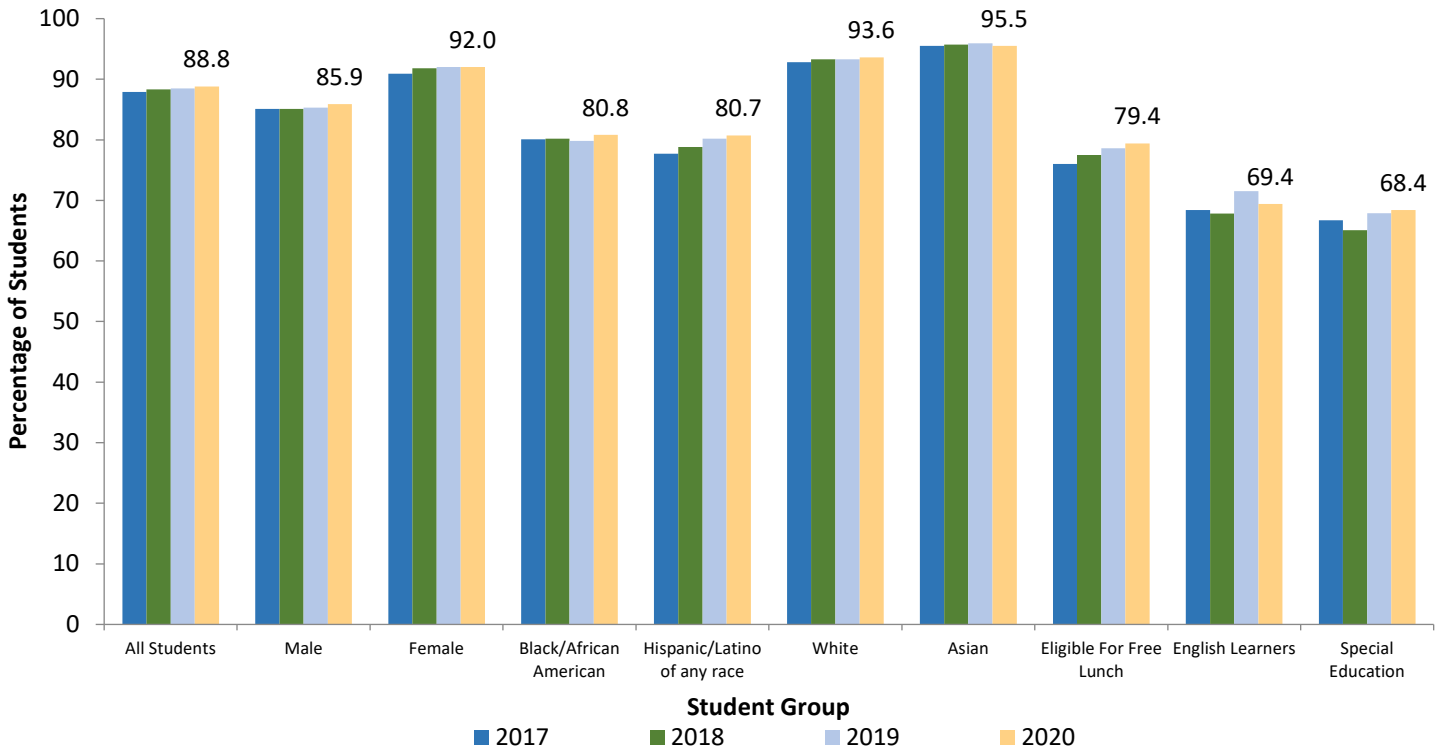


Source: EdSight June PSIS, SAT and AP from The College Board, ACT from ACT, Inc., and IB from International Baccalaureate.

## High School Graduation Rates

The four-year graduation cohort rate is the percentage of first-time ninth graders who graduate in four years or less with a regular high school diploma. Connecticut’s four-year graduation rate has increased from 85.5 percent for the cohort of 2013 to 88.8 percent for the cohort of 2020. The graduation rates for students who are black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, students with disabilities, or eligible for free meals have increased at a rate that is greater than that of the state average.

*Figure 20: Four-Year Graduation Rate Trend by Student Group*



Some students benefit from having an extra year or two to complete high school. They may be English learners who came to this country in high school, or students with disabilities receiving transition services. For these students, the six-year graduation rate serves as an important measure of high school success (see table below).

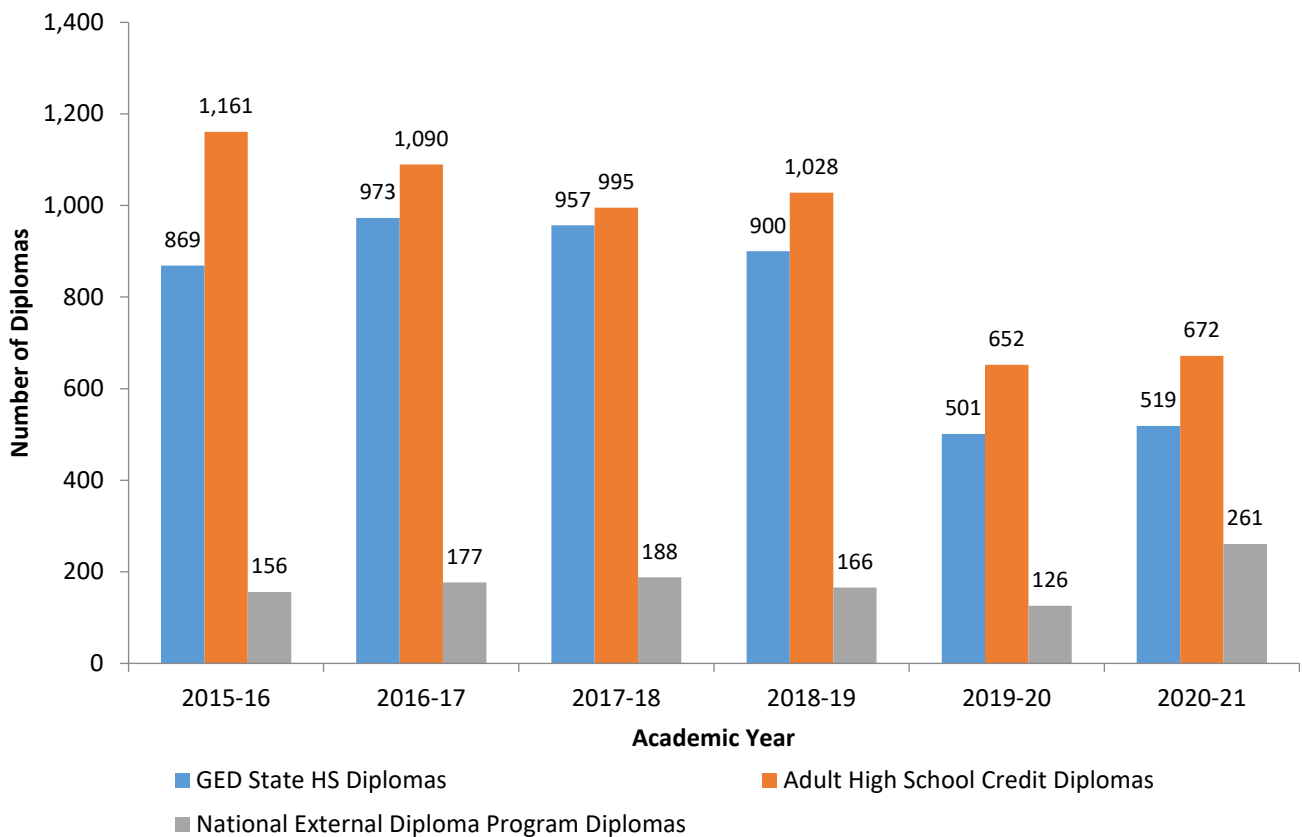
*Table 3: Four- and Six-year Graduation Rates for the 2018 Graduation Cohort*

Category	4-Year	6-Year
All Students	88.3	91.5
English Learners	67.8	79.2
Students with Disabilities	65.1	77.9
Eligible for Free Meals	77.5	83.4

## Adult Education Diplomas Granted

Connecticut offers three pathways for adult learners to attain a high school diploma: (1) pass the General Educational Development (GED) Tests; (2) earn adult education credits toward an adult high school diploma; or (3) demonstrate 100 percent mastery on the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) assessments. In 2020-21, a total of 1,452 individuals earned diplomas through these adult education pathways. Earning a diploma through adult education enables individuals to pursue postsecondary education/training opportunities and participate more fully in Connecticut’s workforce.

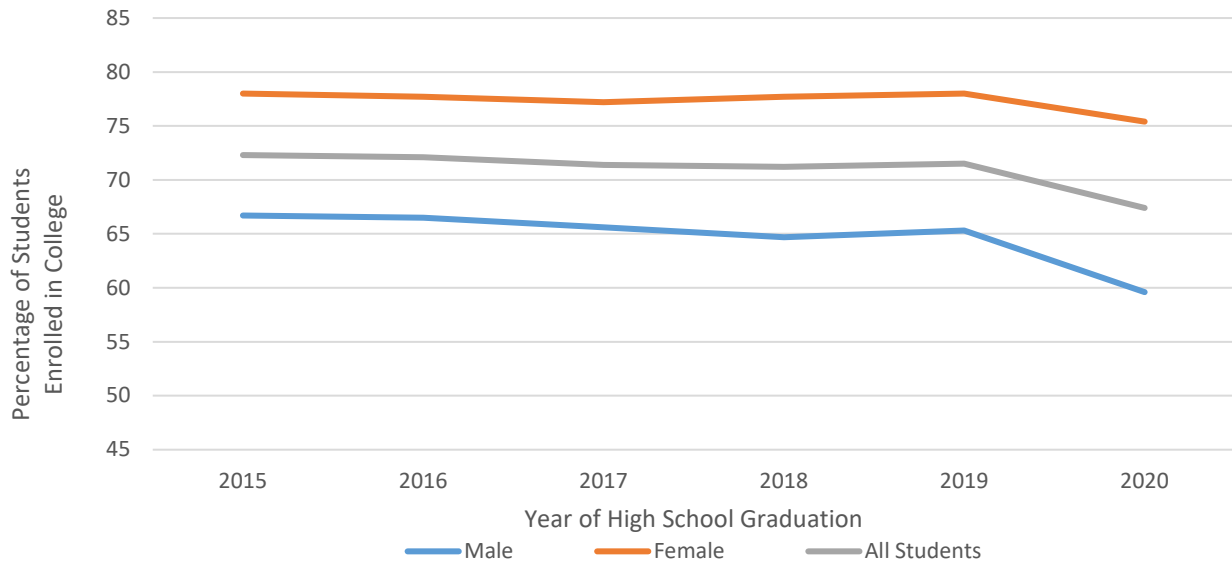
*Figure 21: Adult Education Diplomas by Type*



## College Enrollment

After many years of stability, the college enrollment rates for the public high school graduating class of 2020 declined substantially from 71.5 percent for the class of 2019 to 67.4 percent for the class of 2020. The decline in the college enrollment rate of males was nearly twice that of females.

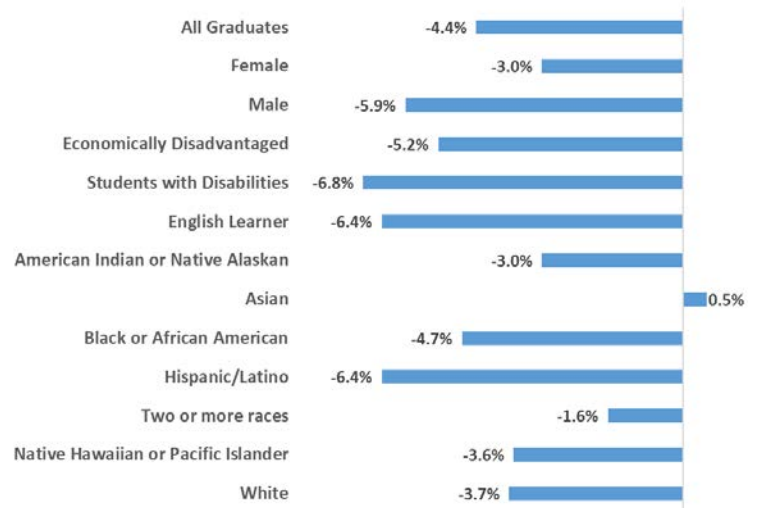
**Figure 22: Percentage of High School Graduates Who Enroll in College in the First Year after High School**



Source: EdSight and National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker

Students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income families all experienced more significant setbacks compared to their peers. College enrollment rates among students with disabilities fell by 6.8 percentage points, the largest decline among all student groups. Black and Hispanic students’ enrollment rates declined significantly, while that of Asian students inched up slightly. English learner enrollment rates declined 6.4 percentage points and rates for those from low-income families declined 5.2 percentage points.

**Figure 23: College Enrollment Rates of the High School Class of 2020: Change from Previous Year**

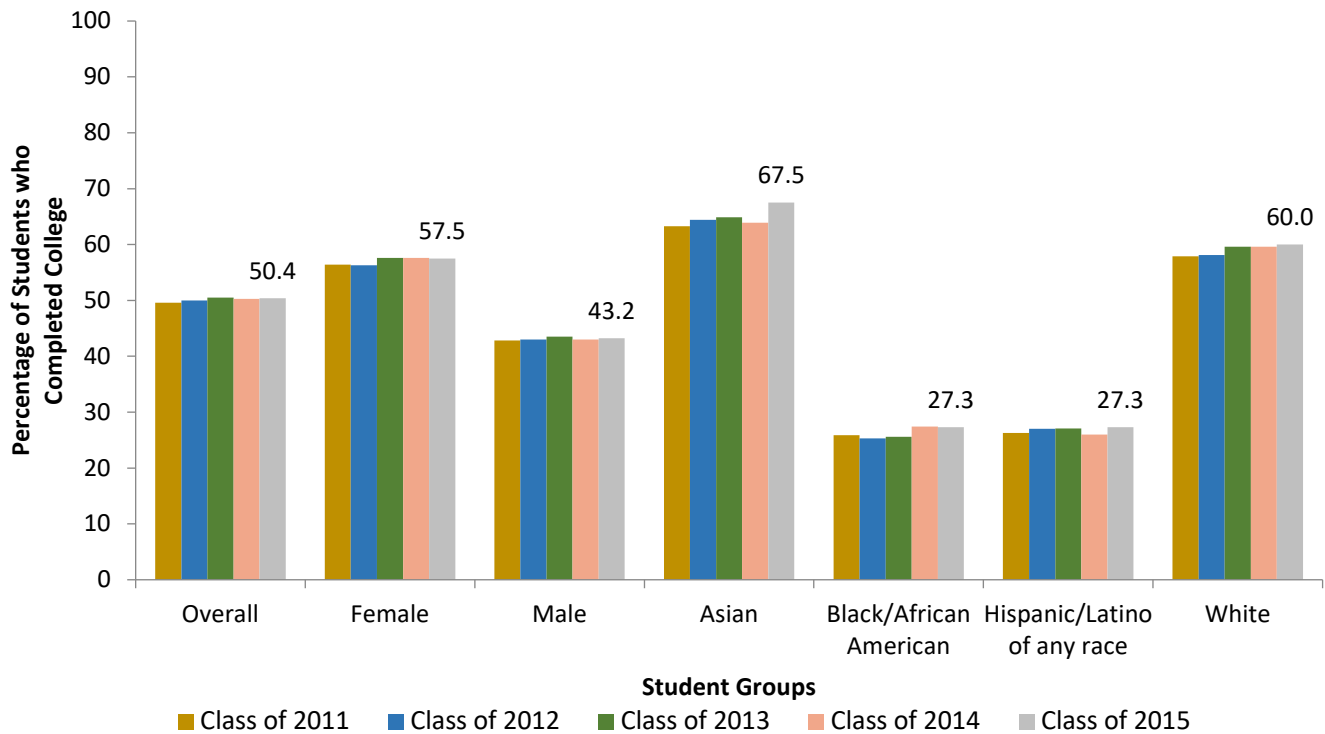


## College Completion

More than fifty percent of the 2015 high school graduating class graduated from college with an associate, bachelor’s, or higher degree within six years. This is a slightly higher proportion (50.4 percent) than the class of 2014 (50.3 percent). The college completion rate for females was consistent among the 2015 high school class (57.5) as compared to the 2014 class, while the corresponding rates for males evidenced an increase (43.0 to 43.2) for the class of 2015.

The college completion rate for students who identified as black/African American remained consistent at 27.3 percent among the class of 2015. An increase from the prior year was evidenced among Hispanic/Latino students (26.0 percent to 27.3 percent). The six-year college completion rates were substantially higher among Asian students (67.5 percent) and white students (60.0 percent).

**Figure 24: Percentage of High School Graduates Earning a College Degree in Six Years or Less**



Source: EdSight and National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker

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