CollegeBoard

Application Trends Unpacked: Emerging Patterns in Students' Application Behavior

Counselor Webinar Series 25-26

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Event Resources

Questions and Answers

CEU Credit

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You have access to a copy of the PowerPoint slides and various downloadable resources under the Event Resources Tab.

The presenter will answer as many questions as possible during the Q and A session after the presentation. If your question isn't answered, we'll directly email you the answer to your question.

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Pre-Webinar Poll Questions

How knowledgeable are you about this topic?

A. Very knowledgeable

B. Somewhat Knowledgeable

C. Not at All Knowledgeable

Based on your current practices, to what extent do you share/use information about this program/topic with your students?

A. Consistently – I regularly incorporate this program/topic into my counseling activities and correspondence.

B. Occasionally – I share information when it feels relevant or when students ask about it.

C. Rarely – I've only shared this program/topic once or twice, or not in a structured way.

D. Not at all – I do not currently share this program/topic with my students.

Meet Your Presenters

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Director, Counselor
Community Engagement
College Board

College Application Trends

Overview

Overall platform trends

Applicant demographic trends

Trends in test score reporting

Trends by member characteristics

Counts of applicants, applications, and member institutions receiving applications

Counts by applicant race/ethnicity, first-generation status, ZIP-level median household income, geographic region, domestic vs. international citizenship

Counts of applicants reporting vs. not reporting test scores

Counts of applications by public vs. private control, acceptance rates

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Overall Platform Trends

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Applicant counts are up

Figure 4. Growth in first-year applicants since 2015–16

Source: Common App, End-of-season report, 2024–2025: First-year application trends

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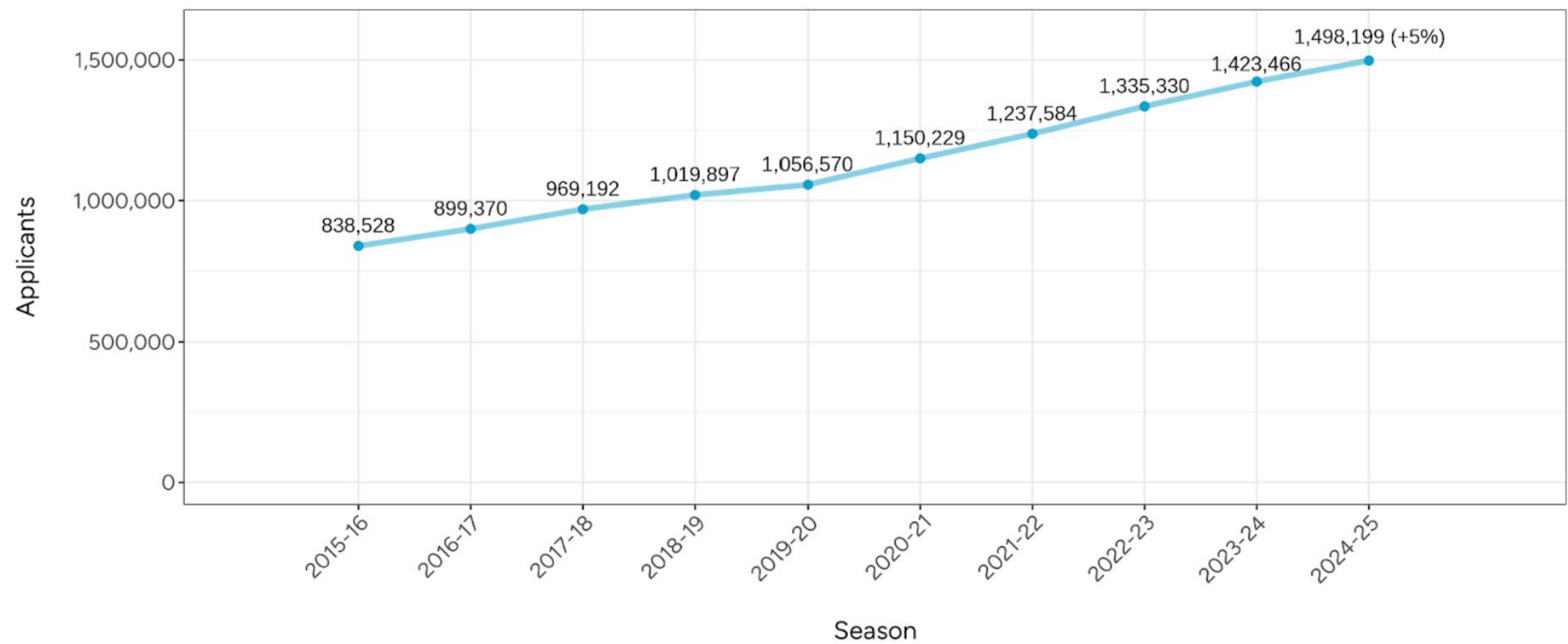
Application counts are up

Figure 5. Growth in first-year applications since 2015–16
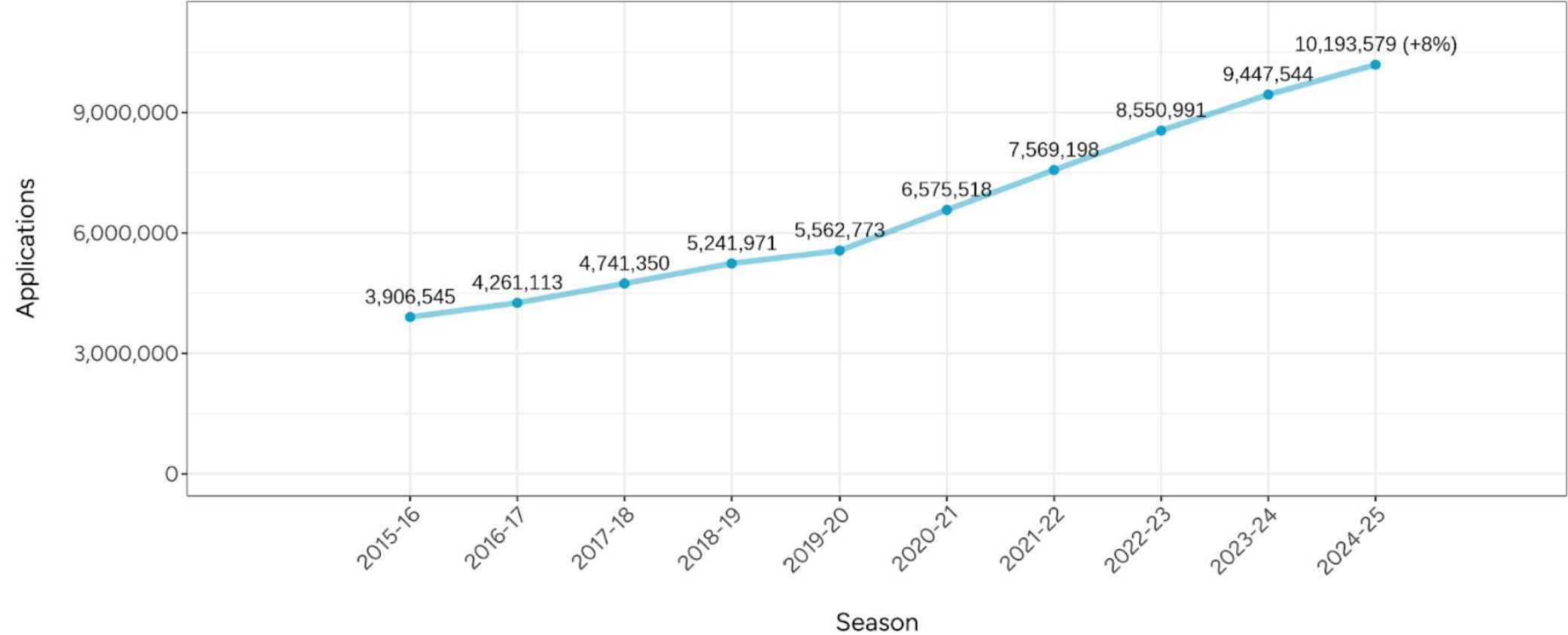
Number of member institutions has increased

Figure 1. Growth in member institutions receiving applications since 2015–16
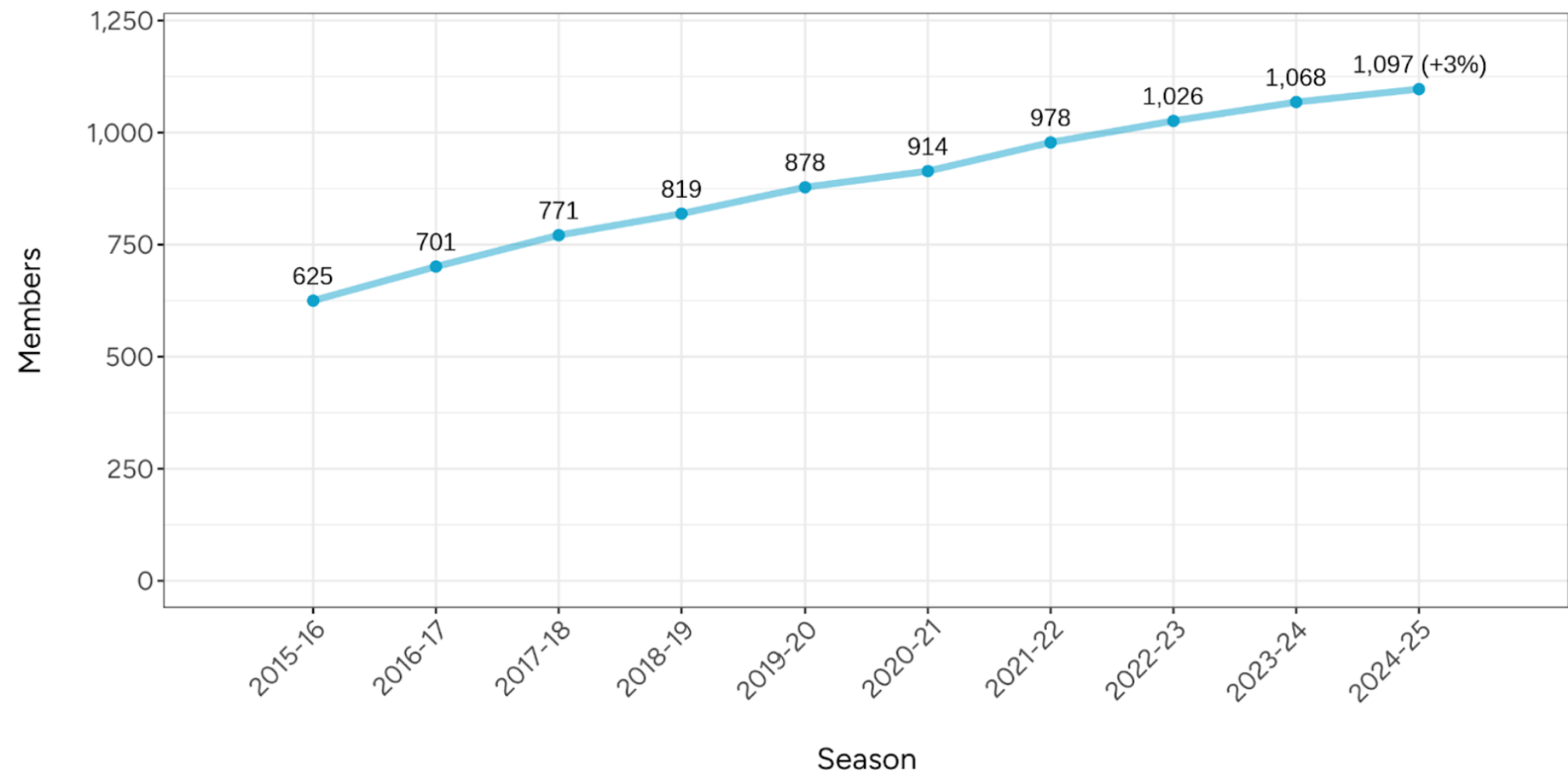
Applicant Demographic Trends

Fastest-growing groups by race or ethnicity

Figure 9. Growth in domestic first-year applicants by federal race/ethnicity groupings since 2015–16

Source: Common App, End-of-season report, 2024–2025: First-year application trends
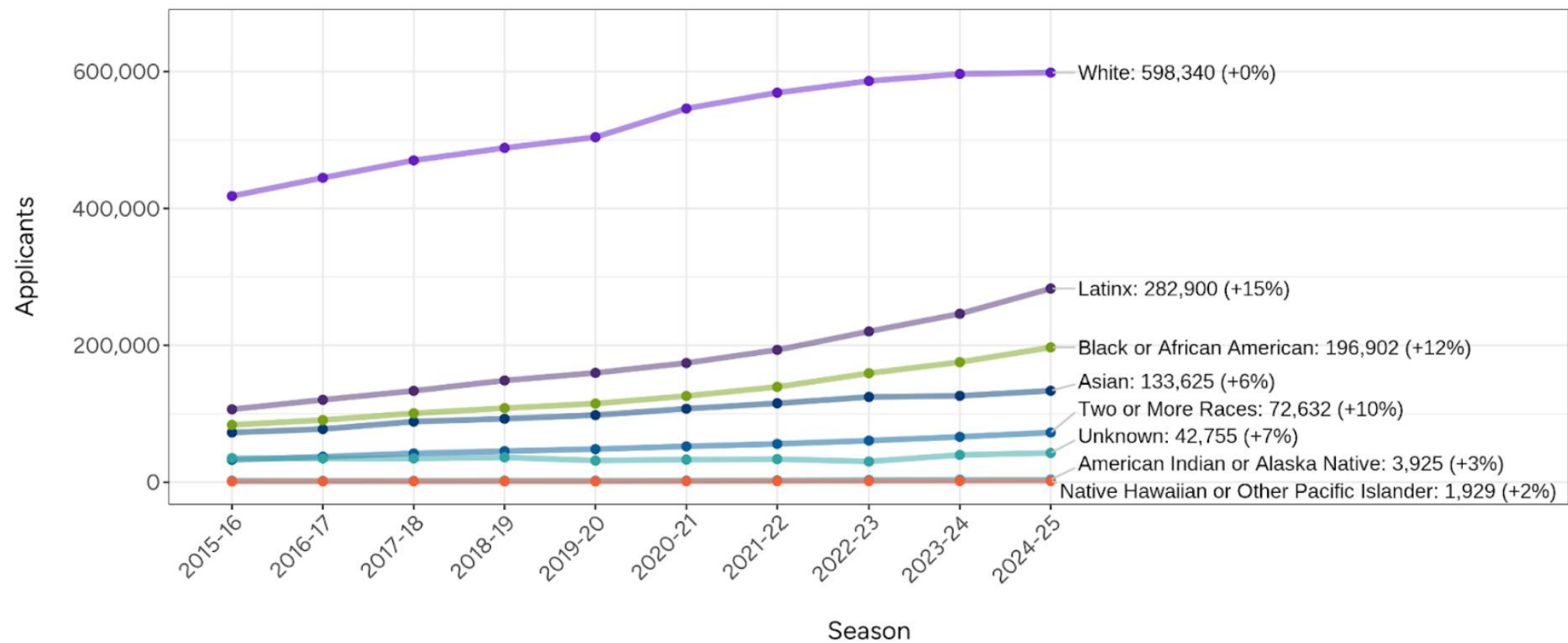
First-generation applicants up

Figure 11. Growth in first-year applicants by first-generation status since 2015–16
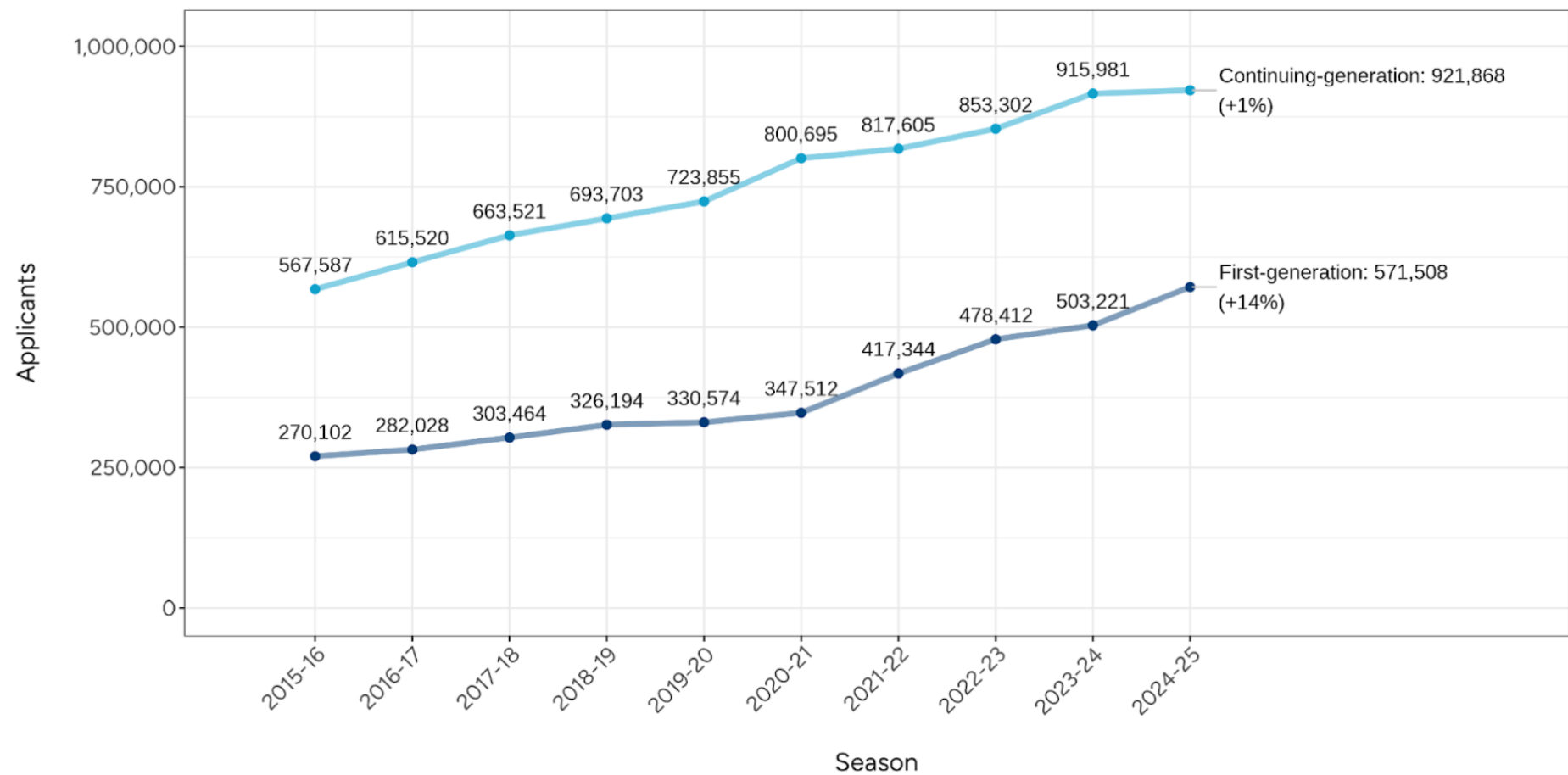
Growth in domestic applicants by ZIP median household income

Figure 13. Growth in domestic first-year applicants by ZIP code median household income relative to national median household income since 2015–16
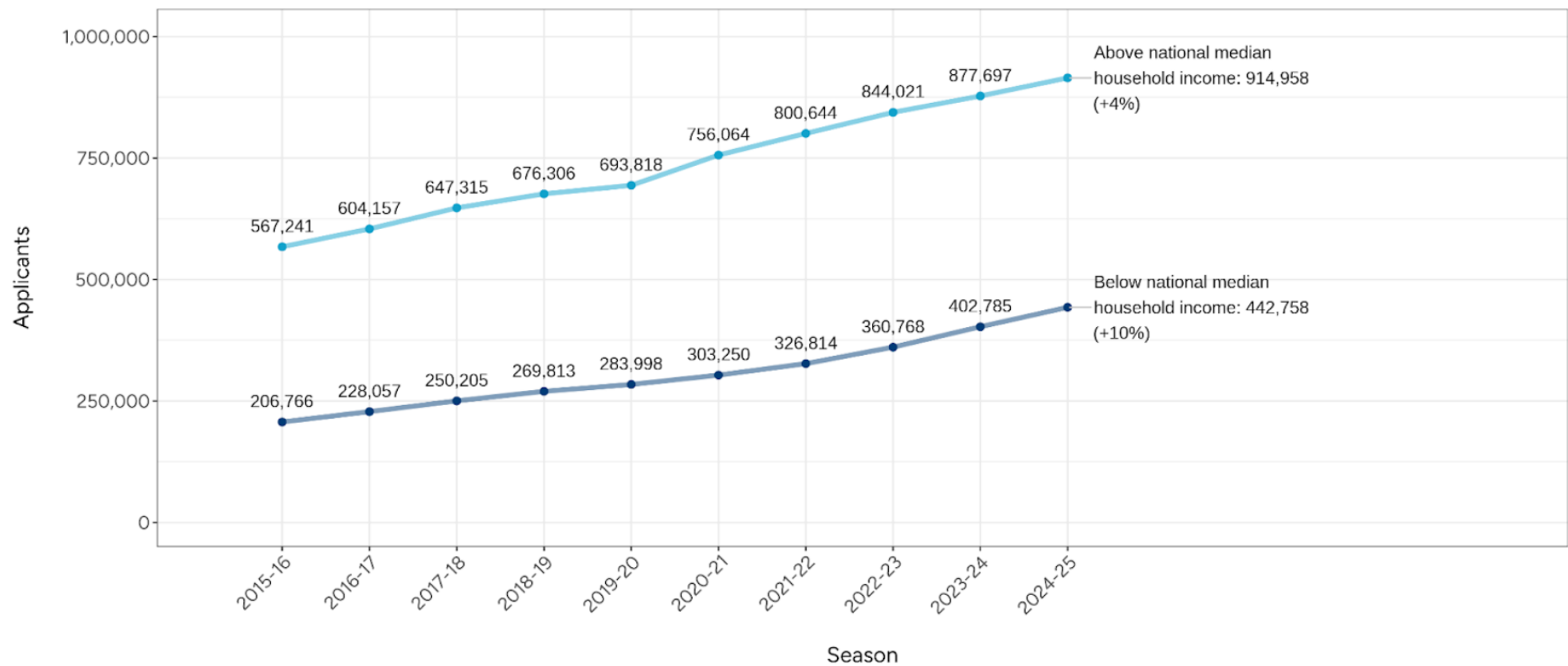
Domestic applicant growth fastest in the Southwest

Figure 17. Growth in domestic first-year applicants among the ten highest-volume states since 2015–16

Texas: 129,472 (+43%)
New York: 116,203 (+2%)
California: 98,508 (+1%)
Florida: 88,528 (+10%)
New Jersey: 74,365 (+2%)
Illinois: 74,026 (+5%)
Georgia: 65,343 (+6%)
Pennsylvania: 62,943 (+4%)
Ohio: 54,464 (+3%)
Virginia: 52,837 (+3%)
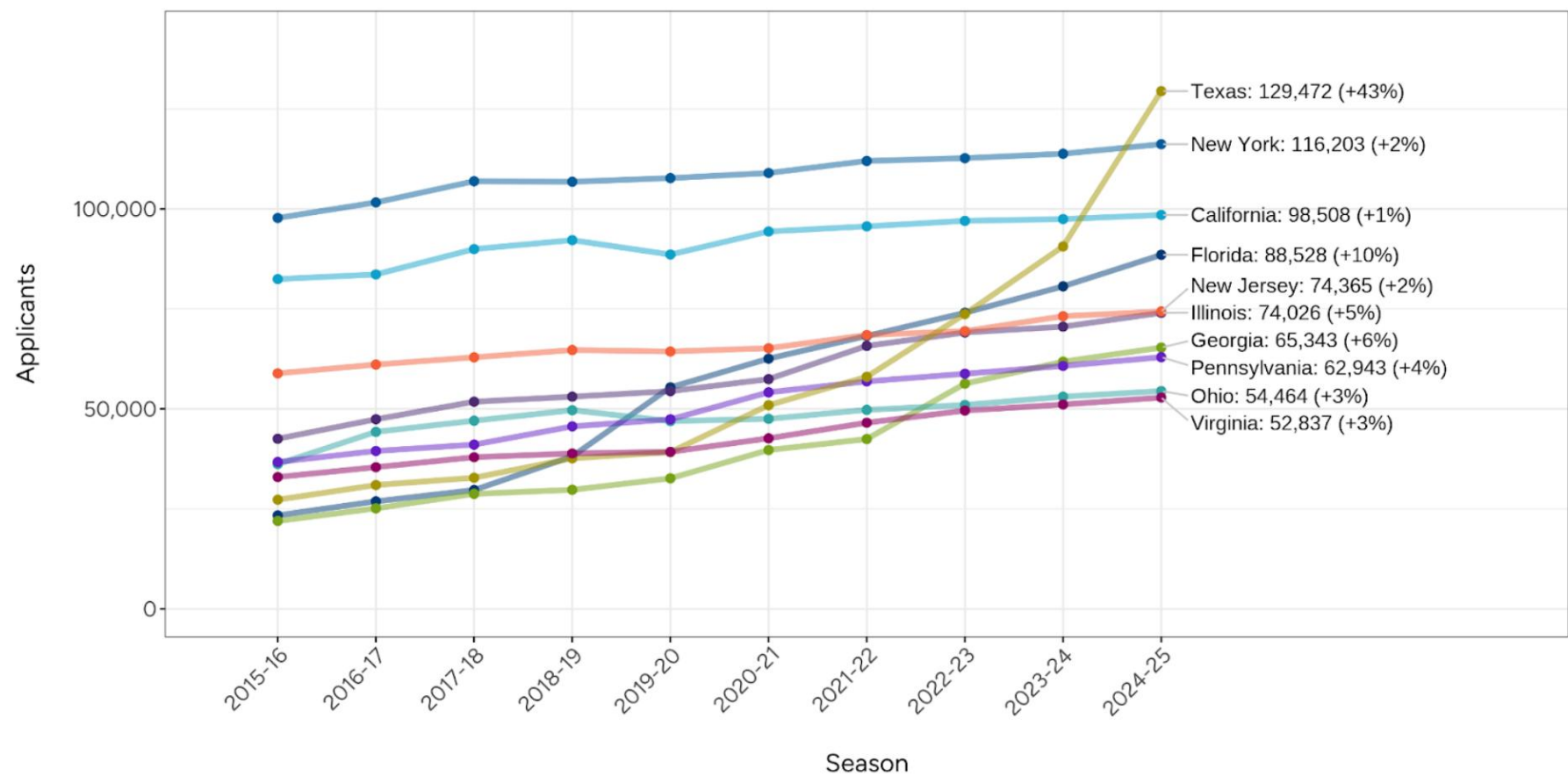
Domestic applicant growth outpaced international

Figure 18. Growth in first-year applicants by international status since 2015–16

Source: Common App, End-of-season report, 2024–2025: First-year application trends
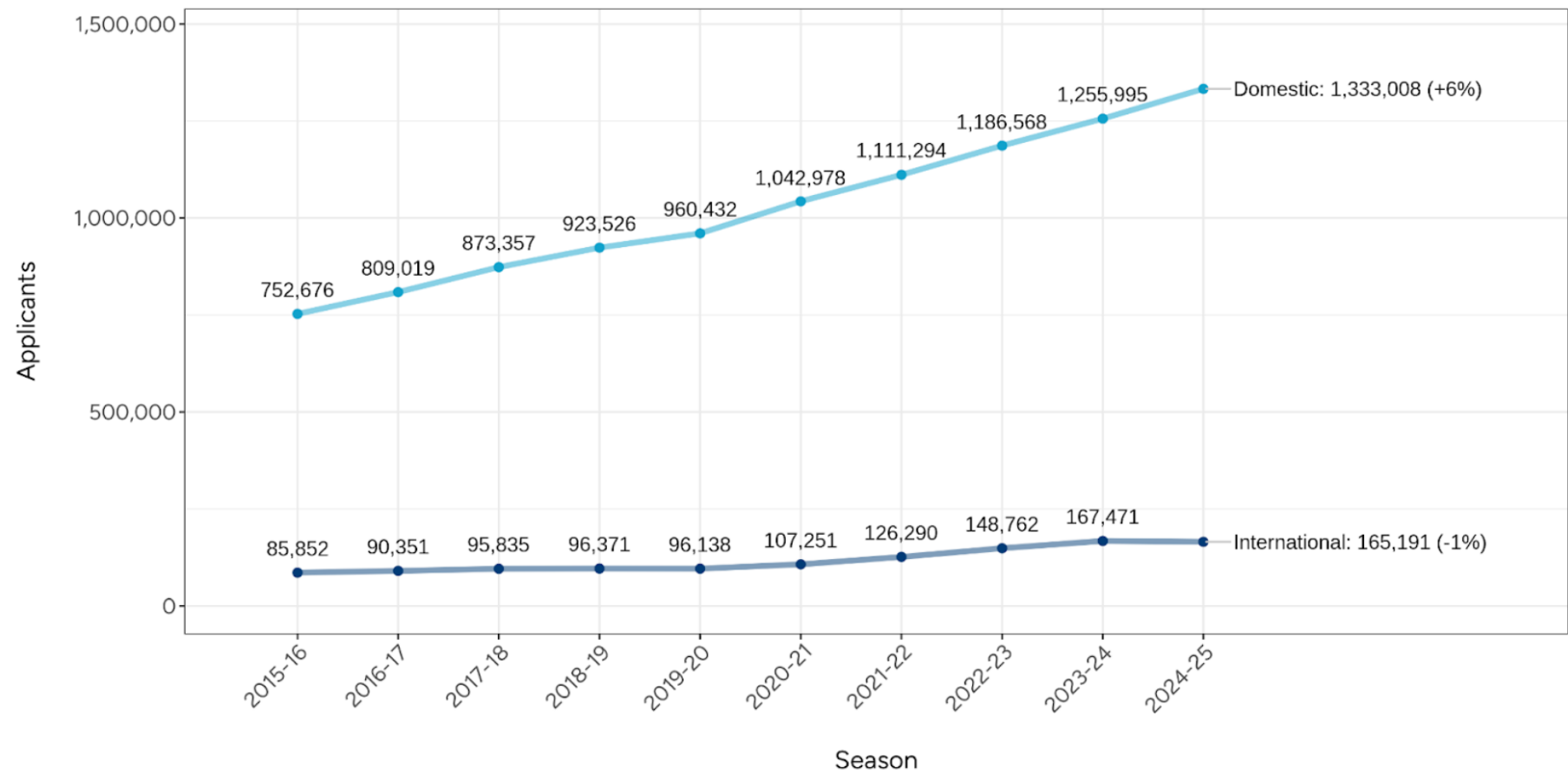
International applicants by region of citizenship

Figure 19. Growth in international first-year applicants by region of citizenship since 2015–16

Trends in Test Score Reporting

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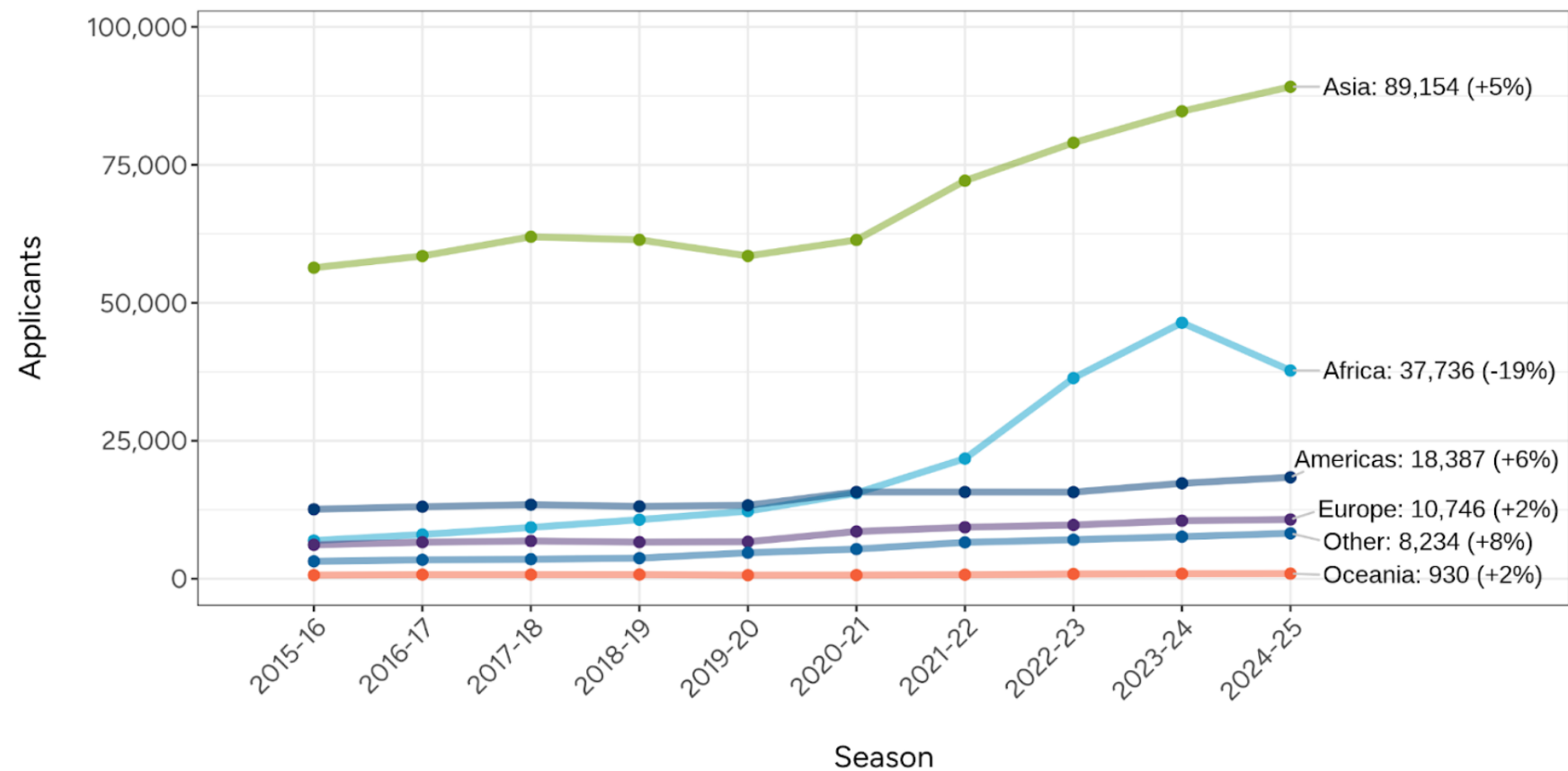
Growth in applicants reporting scores outpaced peers

Figure 22. Growth in first-year applicants by test score reporting behavior since 2015–16

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Trends by Member Characteristics

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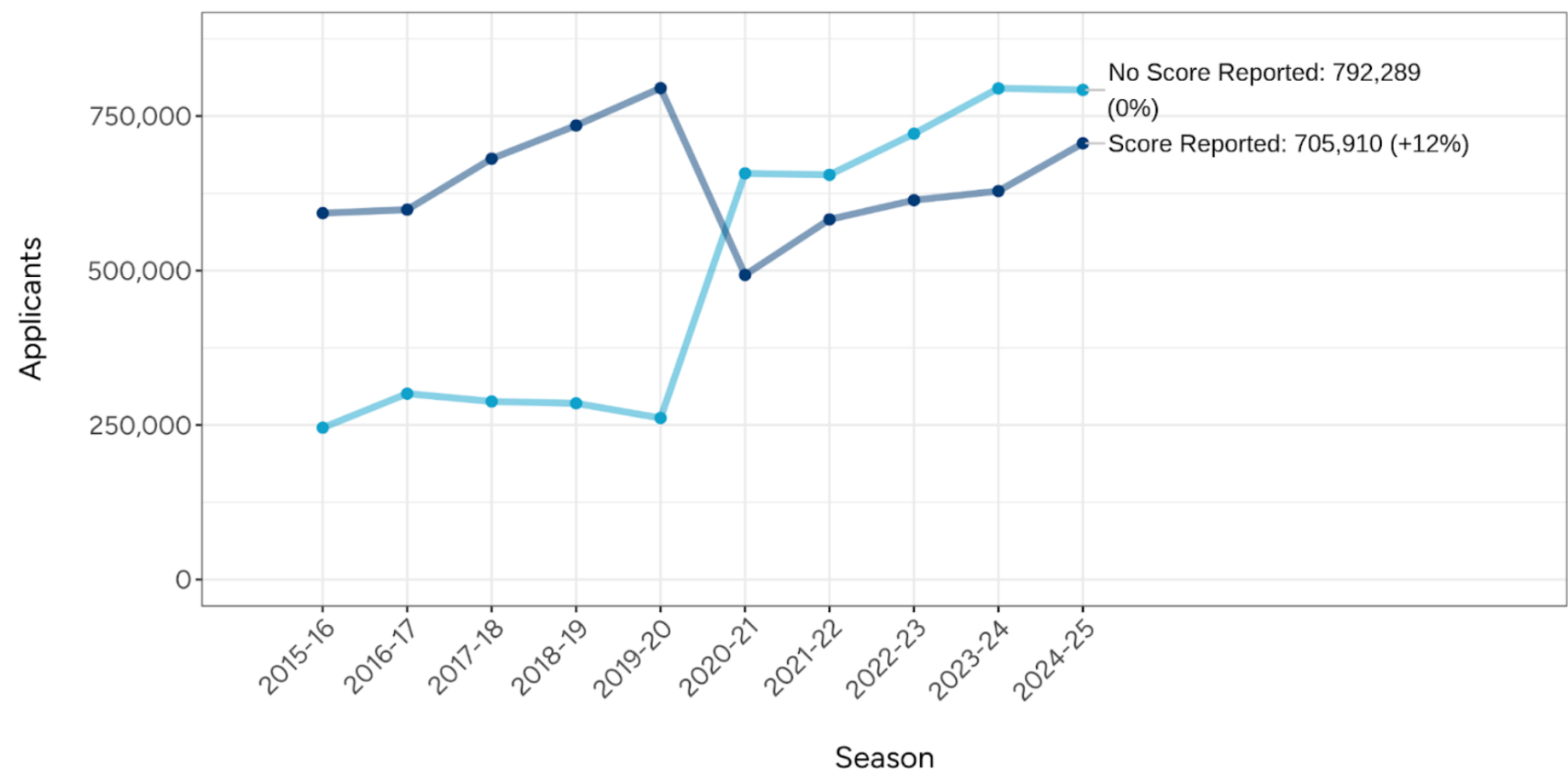
Growth in applications to public members outpaced privates

Figure 23. Growth in applications by member institution type since 2015–16

Public: 5,486,026 (+13%)

Private: 4,668,789 (+3%)
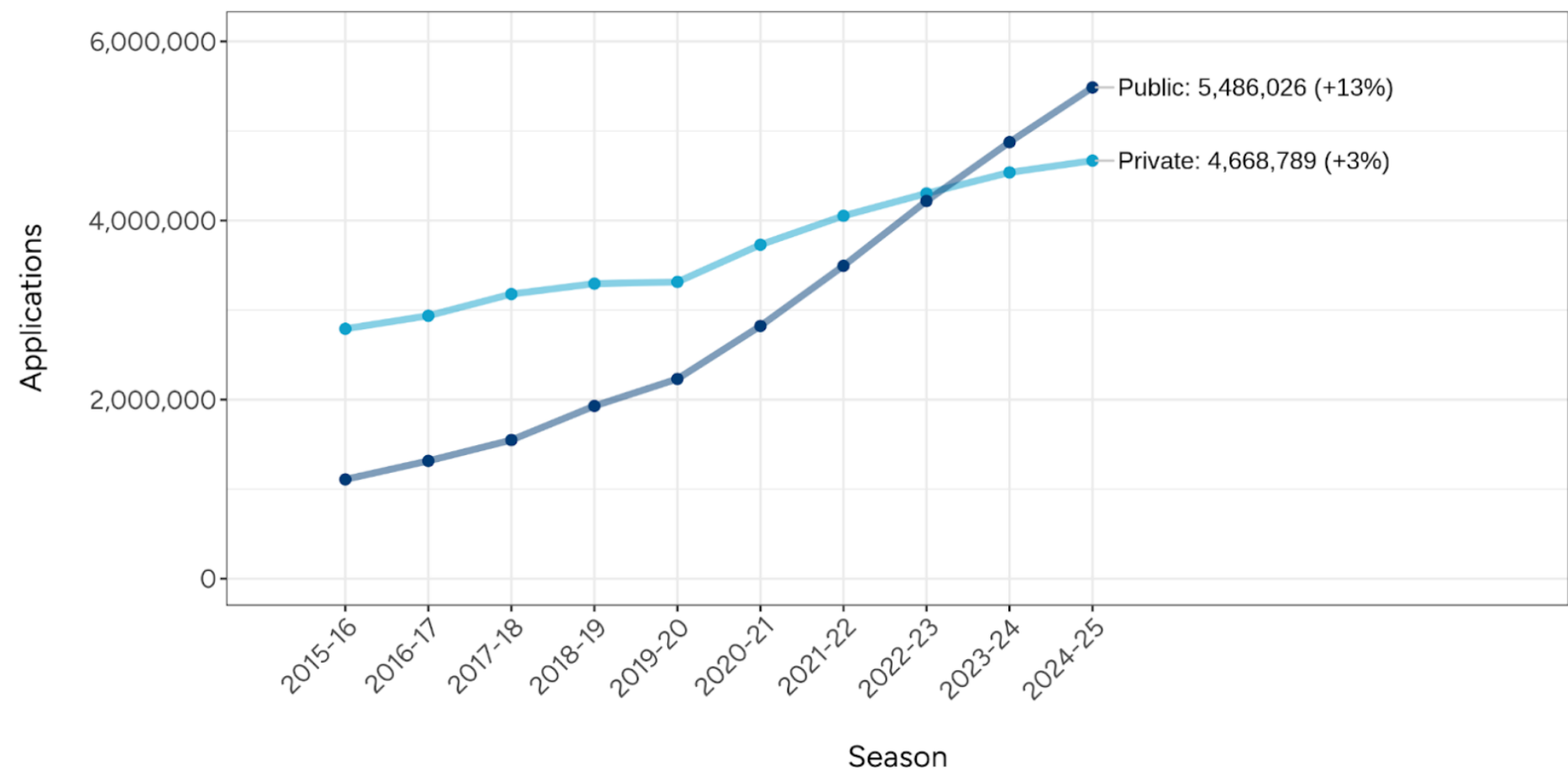
Slowest growth in applications to most-selective members

Figure 24. Growth in applications by member selectivity since 2015–16

Less Selective (>=75%): 3,901,940 (+9%)

More Selective (50-74%): 2,623,920 (+9%)

Most Selective (< 25%): 2,101,288 (+4%)

Highly Selective (25-49%): 1,491,704 (+10%)
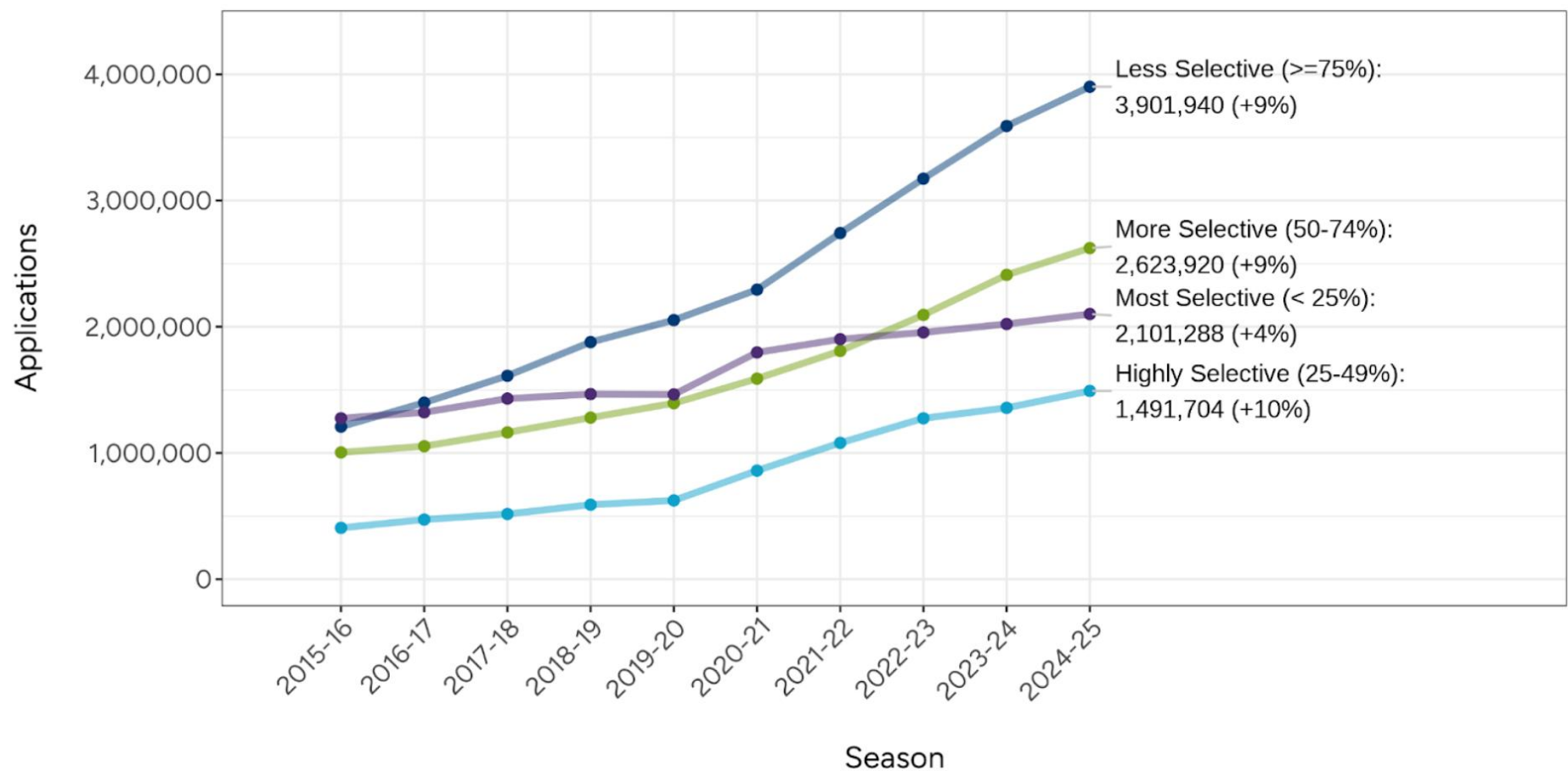
Perspective from the Field

- Counselors are seeing students overwhelmed by "how many to apply to," submitting test scores, and the several essays required (supplemental essays). So we are helping them build curated, **match and fit** lists rather than broad lists.

- With tools like Common App Direct Admissions and Georgia MATCH, we can shift the conversation from "What are my chances of getting in?" to "Where is a good fit and how do I decide among viable options?"

- Applications are no longer just about getting in — they're about aligning interests, self-advocacy, and affordability.

College Application Trends

KIPP Forward Atlanta: Growth and Diversification

- **Significant Volume Growth:** Application submissions significantly increased by **+20.45%** from 2023-24 to 2024-25 (1,540 to 1,855), compared to the 10% national growth reported by Common App.

- **Strategic Platform Diversification:** In addition to utilizing Common App for submissions (78%), students actively utilize new platforms like Georgia Match and the Common Black College App (CBCA).

- **Impact of Removing Financial Barriers:** Common Black College App (CBCA) applications significantly increased from 19 to 380 (and 313 YTD) after the region covered the $20 application fee, demonstrating a direct link between cost and access.

- **More Strategic Applications:** Students are applying more strategically, with a slight rise in Likely/Target submissions (55.5% → 56.9%) and a 16.6% increase in applications to selective and highly competitive institutions—showing more scholars are pursuing ambitious pathways.

Counseling in Practice: Responding to Application Trends

- Make Acceptance & Admission Data Visible

- Build Data-Informed, Balanced College Lists

- Use Direct Admissions & State Match Tools to Remove Barriers

- Implement a College Application Checklist

- Honor Diverse Postsecondary Journeys

Make Acceptance Data Visible

- Students completed a pre/post survey and workshop on NACAC admission factors, résumés, brag sheets, transcript storytelling, and LOR requests.

- NACAC ranking activity increased awareness of evidence-based admission priorities—especially grades, course rigor, and academic engagement.

- Students updated or began résumés and brag sheets, strengthening their application materials.

- Scholars moved from general ideas to strategic recommender choices based on who can best speak to their strengths.

- Students developed clearer transcript narratives highlighting growth, rigor, and resilience.

- Scholars identified next steps, including finalizing documents, drafting LOR request emails, and continuing essays.
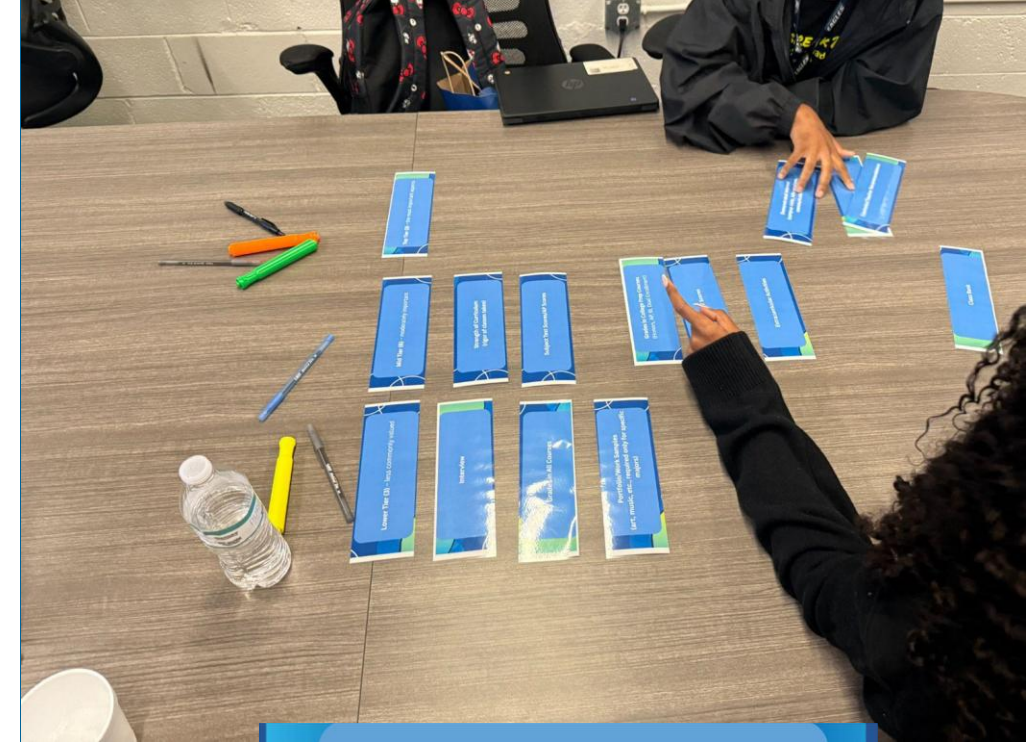
Top Tier (3) – the most important aspects

Mid Tier (6) – moderately important

Lower Tier (3) – less commonly valued

Grades in All Courses

Applying the Research: High-Impact Counseling Moves

- **Explain Academic Context Clearly**
  Students should use the *Additional Information* section to provide context for grade changes, school shifts, or life responsibilities.

- **Choose Recommenders Who Advance the Story**
  Letters of recommendation should highlight growth, character, and contribution—not just familiarity.

- **Align Transcript, Résumé & Essay Narrative**
  Applications should read as one coherent story, not disconnected parts.

- **Show Impact, Not Just Involvement**
  Activity descriptions should communicate leadership, initiative, and results.

- **Start Financial Fit & ED Readiness Conversations Early**
  Use net price calculators and support families in making informed, sustainable decisions.

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College Enrollment

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2025 Spring Enrollment Trends

+3.2%

Total postsecondary enrollment

Undergraduate enrollment grew 3.5% this spring, compared to spring 2024.

+5.4%

Community College undergraduate enrollment growth

Enrollment increased across major institutional sectors, with community college seeing the largest growth.

+2.1%

Bachelor's undergraduate enrollment growth

Enrollment increased for all undergraduate credential types. Associate programs grew by 6.3%. Undergraduate certificate program enrollment continued to grow this spring.

+11.7%

High vocational public two-years enrollment growth

Enrollment at these trade-focused institutions increased almost 20% since the spring of 2020 and now comprises 19.4% of public two-year enrollment.

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Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends

+2%

Postsecondary enrollment increase

Total increase over previous fall. Undergraduate enrollment is increasing by 2.4% with all sectors seeing growth.

+6.6%

Growth in undergraduate certificate programs

This area had the largest growth, continuing gains from last year.

+3.2%

Growth in 18-year-old students

Undergraduate enrollment is growing across all age groups.

https://nscresearchcenter.org/prelim-fall-enrollment-trends/

Enrollment Changes by Award Level and Sector

Select to Show Community Colleges or Public 2-Year and Public PAB Separately in Figure 2.1:
- ⊙ Community colleges [?]
- ○ Public 2-year and Public PAB separately

Figure 2.1 Enrollment Changes by Award Level and Sector

		Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2023 – Fall 2025
Undergraduate	Public 4-year	2.2%	1.9%	4.1%
	Private nonprofit 4-year	1.8%	0.9%	2.7%
	Community colleges	5.4%	4.0%	9.6%
	Total	**3.3%**	**2.4%**	**5.7%**
Graduate	Public 4-year	2.5%	0.3%	2.8%
	Private nonprofit 4-year	1.9%	-0.6%	1.3%
	Total	**2.4%**	**0.1%**	**2.5%**

% Change from Previous Year | % Change from Previous Year | % Change from 2023

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Enrollment Changes by Credential Program

Figure 2.2 Enrollment Changes by Credential Program

	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2023 - Fall 2025
Undergraduate Certificate	7.6%	6.6%	14.7%
Associate	5.0%	3.1%	8.3%
Bachelor's	2.0%	1.2%	3.2%
Master's	2.5%	-0.6%	1.9%
Doctoral	2.4%	1.1%	3.5%
Total	3.1%	2.0%	5.1%

% Change from Previous Year / % Change from Previous Year / % Change from 2023

Enrollment Changes by Admission Selectivity

Figure 2.3 Undergraduate Enrollment Changes at Public and Private Nonprofit 4-Year Institutions by Admission Selectivity ❓

	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2023 - Fall 2025
Highly Selective	2.2%	0.7%	2.9%
Very Competitive	2.2%	1.1%	3.4%
Competitive	2.1%	1.8%	3.9%
Less Selective	1.4%	3.3%	4.8%

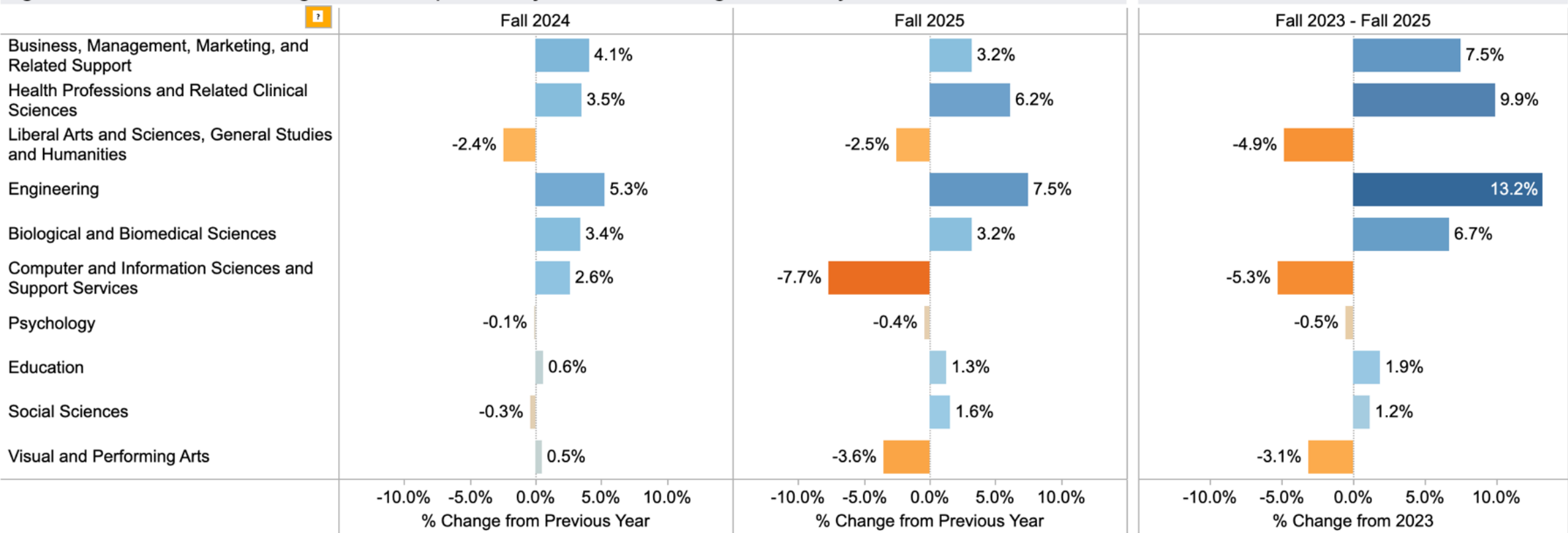% Change from Previous Year | % Change from Previous Year | % Change from 2023
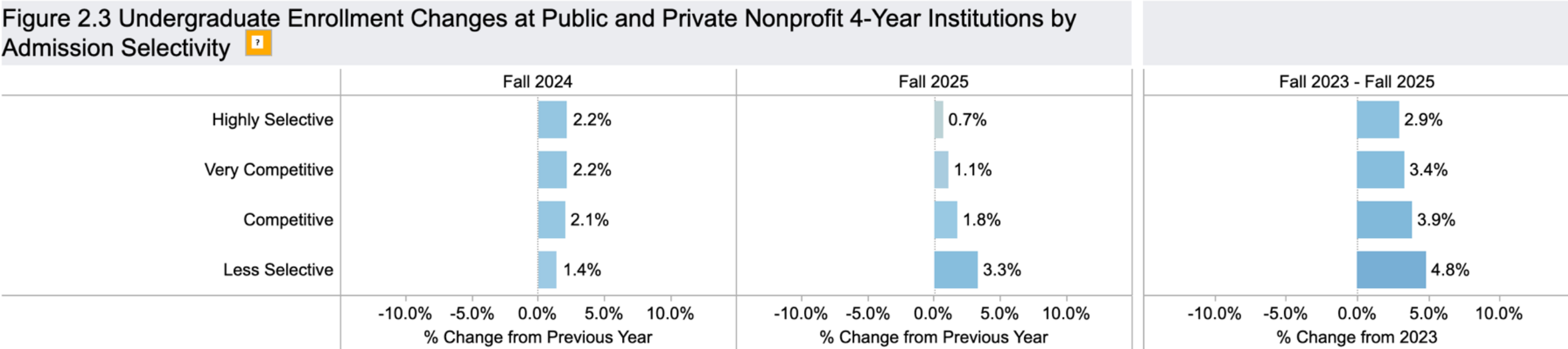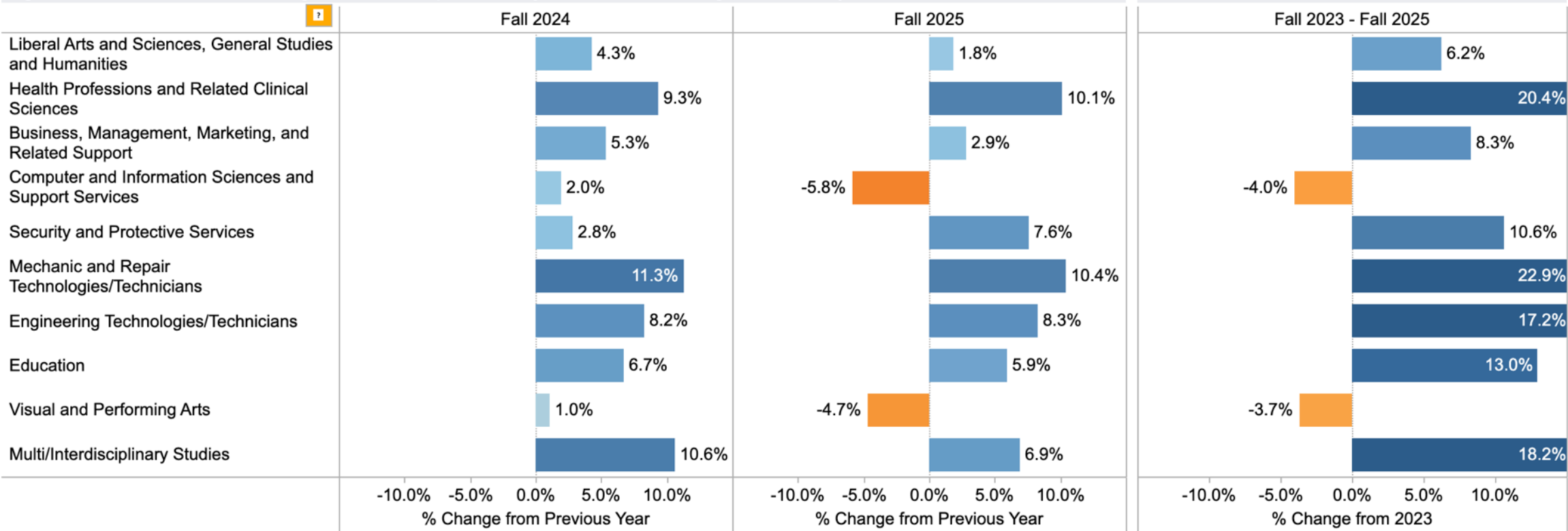
Trends in Top Ten Major Fields Undergraduate 4-Year

Select Award and Institution Level Combination for Figure 3.5

○ Undergraduate 2-year [?]
◉ Undergraduate 4-year
○ Graduate [?]

Figure 3.5 Enrollment Changes in the Top Ten Major Fields: Undergraduate 4-year

Major Field	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2023 – Fall 2025
Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support	4.1%	3.2%	7.5%
Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences	3.5%	6.2%	9.9%
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities	-2.4%	-2.5%	-4.9%
Engineering	5.3%	7.5%	13.2%
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	3.4%	3.2%	6.7%
Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services	2.6%	-7.7%	-5.3%
Psychology	-0.1%	-0.4%	-0.5%
Education	0.6%	1.3%	1.9%
Social Sciences	-0.3%	1.6%	1.2%
Visual and Performing Arts	0.5%	-3.6%	-3.1%

% Change from Previous Year — % Change from Previous Year — % Change from 2023

Trends in Top Ten Major Fields: Undergraduate 2-year

Select Award and Institution Level Combination for Figure 3.5
- ⦿ Undergraduate 2-year [?]
- ○ Undergraduate 4-year
- ○ Graduate [?]

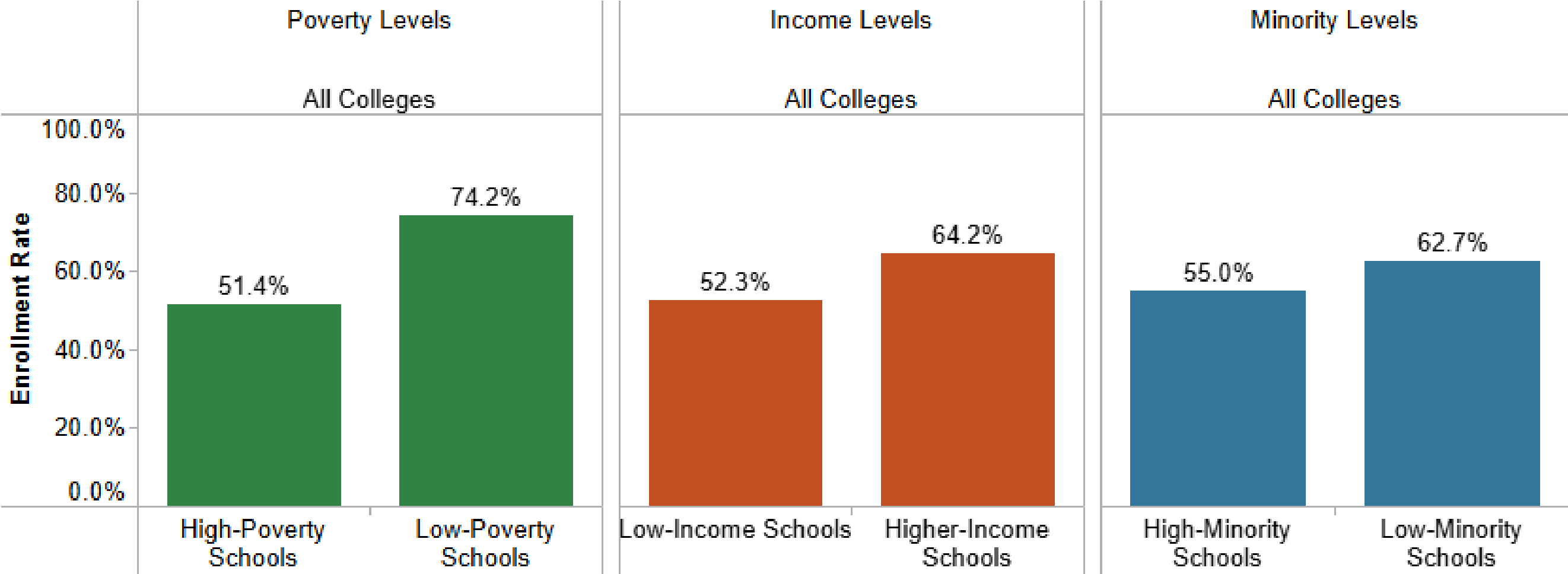Figure 3.5 Enrollment Changes in the Top Ten Major Fields: Undergraduate 2-year [?]

	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2023 - Fall 2025
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities	4.3%	1.8%	6.2%
Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences	9.3%	10.1%	20.4%
Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support	5.3%	2.9%	8.3%
Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services	2.0%	-5.8%	-4.0%
Security and Protective Services	2.8%	7.6%	10.6%
Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians	11.3%	10.4%	22.9%
Engineering Technologies/Technicians	8.2%	8.3%	17.2%
Education	6.7%	5.9%	13.0%
Visual and Performing Arts	1.0%	-4.7%	-3.7%
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	10.6%	6.9%	18.2%

% Change from Previous Year | % Change from Previous Year | % Change from 2023

National Student Clearinghouse High School Benchmarks

Most current data on high school graduates' postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes

- Differences in immediate fall enrollment remained stable across nearly all high school characteristics for the high school graduating classes of 2023 and 2024.

- Enrollment within one year of high school graduation increased by more than 1 percentage point for low-income, high-poverty, and high-minority high schools between the high school graduating classes of 2022 and 2023.

- Persistence rates from the first to second year of college held largely steady except for high-poverty high schools. These schools—which already have the lowest persistence rates—saw a decline of 1.1pp for the class of 2022 to 74.4 percent.

- Low poverty high schools were the only high schools where more than half of the 2018 high school graduates completed an associate degree or higher within six years. This was true of only one-quarter of 2018 graduates of high poverty high schools.

- Graduates of low-poverty and higher-income high schools were more likely to complete STEM degrees within six years (22.4% and 17.5%, respectively) than their counterparts at high-poverty (8.1%) and low-income (9.1%) high schools.

https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks/

Enrollment: Class of 2024 High School Graduates

https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks/

Perspective from the Field: Enrollment

Supporting Students to and through Matriculation

Early Alerts	Onboarding	Academic Support

Identifying students who may struggle with:

- FAFSA and verification

- Course placement

- Balancing work and life responsibilities

Students need:

- Clear onboarding steps

- Orientation guidance

- A sense of belonging

Students also need:

- Tutoring

- Study hall and structured accountability.

- Institutional resources

Perspective from the Field: Who's Enrolling?

- **Traditional students** who are enrolling upon graduating from high school

- **Transfer students** seeking flexible pathways to complete their degrees

- **Non-traditional students** balancing school with work, family, or other commitments

- **Students returning after stopping out** and looking for structured support to re-engage and finish their education

Hurdles to Enrollment

Summer Melt
- Students may fail to enroll because they lose support after high school and struggle to complete final college tasks over the summer

Finances
- Unexpected costs, unclear aid, or financial document issues can stop students from committing to college

Family concerns
- Family pressures or responsibilities can limit students' ability to leave home or begin college on time.

Missed Deadlines
- Without strong guidance, students may miss key admissions or financial aid deadlines that prevent them from enrolling

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College Enrollment Trends

KIPP Forward Atlanta

- **Exploring Pathways:** 53% of our students indicated plans to enroll in a 4-year (BA) institution, showing a slight increase since 2021, whereas 36% indicated plans to enroll in a 2-year, CTE, or Military program.

- **Significant Growth in HBCU Enrollment:** There was a substantial 11 percentage point increase in students matriculating to an HBCU, rising from 22% in 2023-24 to 33% in 2024-25.

- **In-State vs. Out-of-State Enrollment:** Students are increasingly exploring options outside the state. In-state matriculation showed a decrease from 84.1% to 78.3%, and in-state applications also showed a decrease (47.9% to 40.9%).

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Counseling Strategies for a Strong Transition to College

Prevent Summer Melt

Address Financial Barriers Early

Support Students Navigating Family Responsibilities

Prevent Missed Deadlines

Provide a **Strong Transition Checklist** outlining key tasks—such as portal login, immunization records, and housing deposits.

Host Financial Aid Review Meetings to compare offers, estimate net price, and guide next steps such as accepting aid, setting up accounts, and completing loan entrance counseling.

Honor family values in postsecondary decision conversations and help students establish a communication and support plan for their first semester.

Provide deadline reminders and enrollment checklists to ensure students complete required onboarding steps for fall enrollment.

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Counseling Strategies for a Strong Transition to College (cont'd)

Identify Students Likely to Struggle With Key Processes

Identify students who may need higher-touch support using a spring transition screener, then connect them early to placement test prep, academic/advising and accessibility services, and workshops on time management, work-study, and campus employment.

Reinforce Support, Belonging & Academic Persistence

Host class push-ins to highlight the benefits of summer bridge, first-year, and TRIO programs, and offer a **Know Before You Go** session to promote early use of tutoring, study groups, and writing labs.

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Persistence and Completion

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Persistence: Class of 2022 High School Graduates
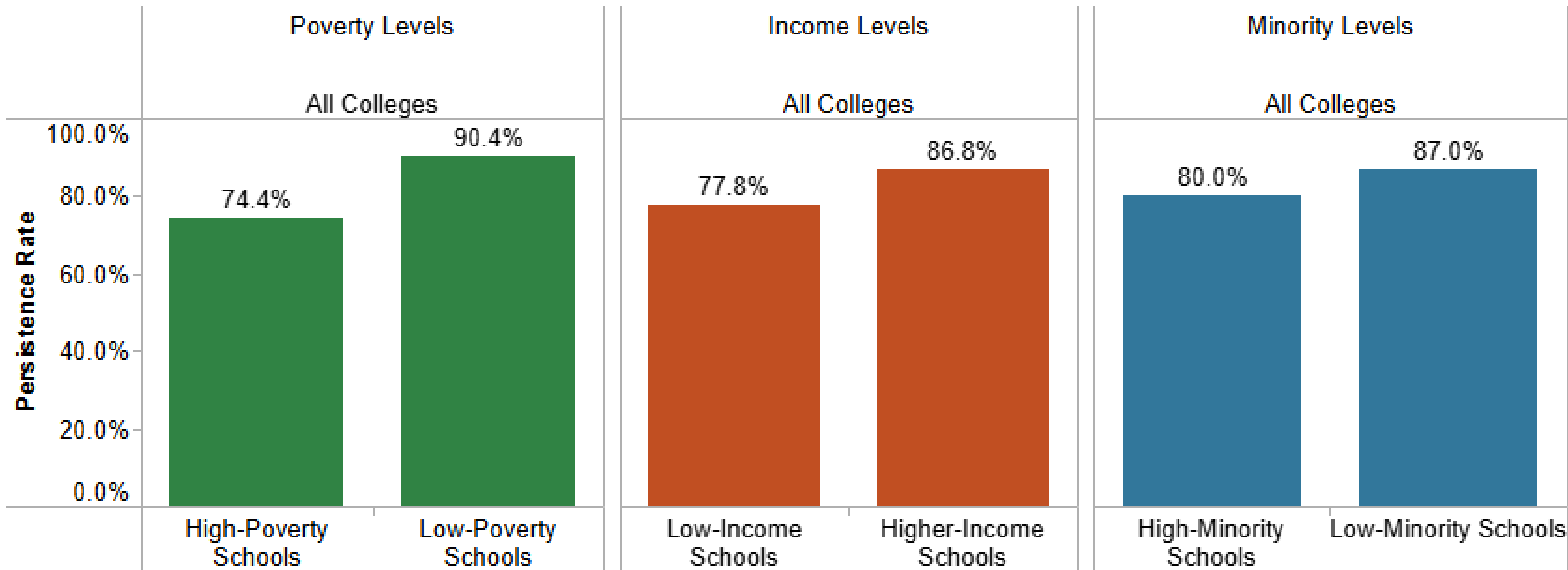
Completion: Class of 2018 High School Graduates
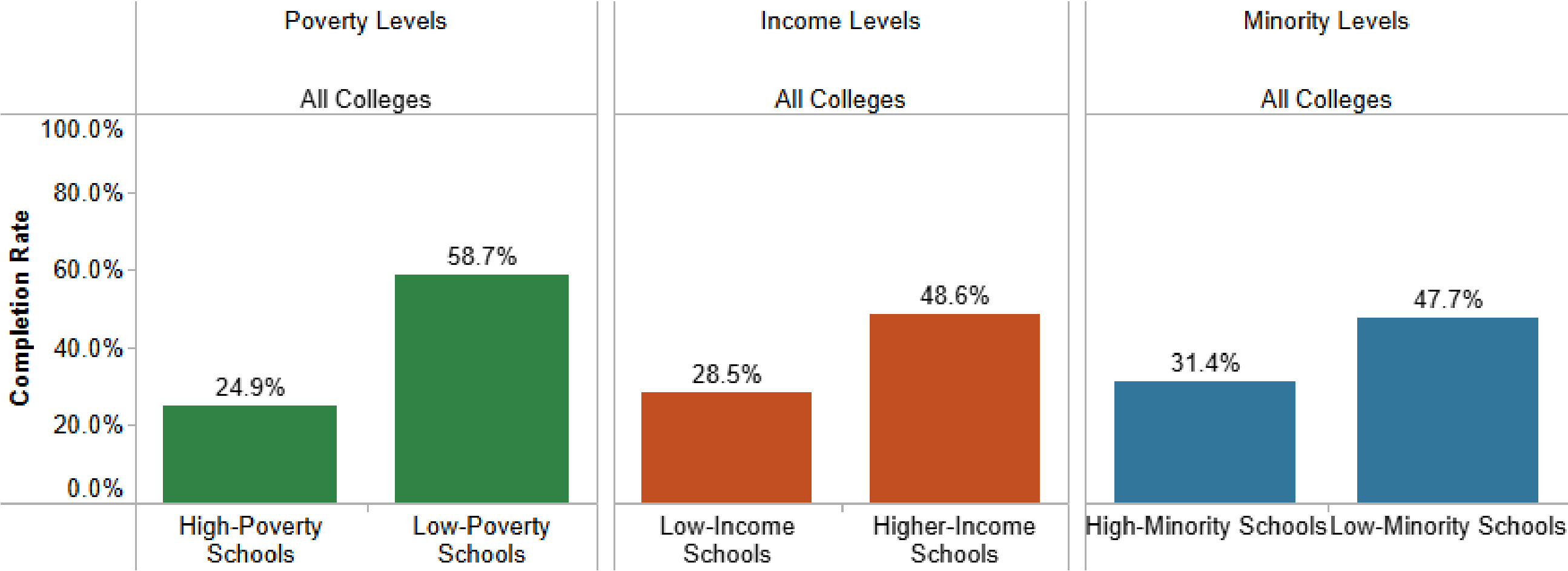
Perspective from the Field: Persistence

- As higher education institutions face increased enrollment and financial challenges and the looming enrollment cliff, there's been a renewed and critical focus on what institutions can more directly control—student retention.

insidetrack ®

Success Coaches help students to:

- Objectively assess barriers to academic success
- Establish attainable educational goals
- Develop and maintain positive daily routines
- Improve time management and organizational skills
- Enhance self-esteem and self-advocacy skills
- Develop personal study schedules
- Become active learners and class participants
- Prepare for exams, quizzes, and presentations
- Balance academic and social demands
- Establish rapport with professors and key campus partners
- Utilize and build campus support system

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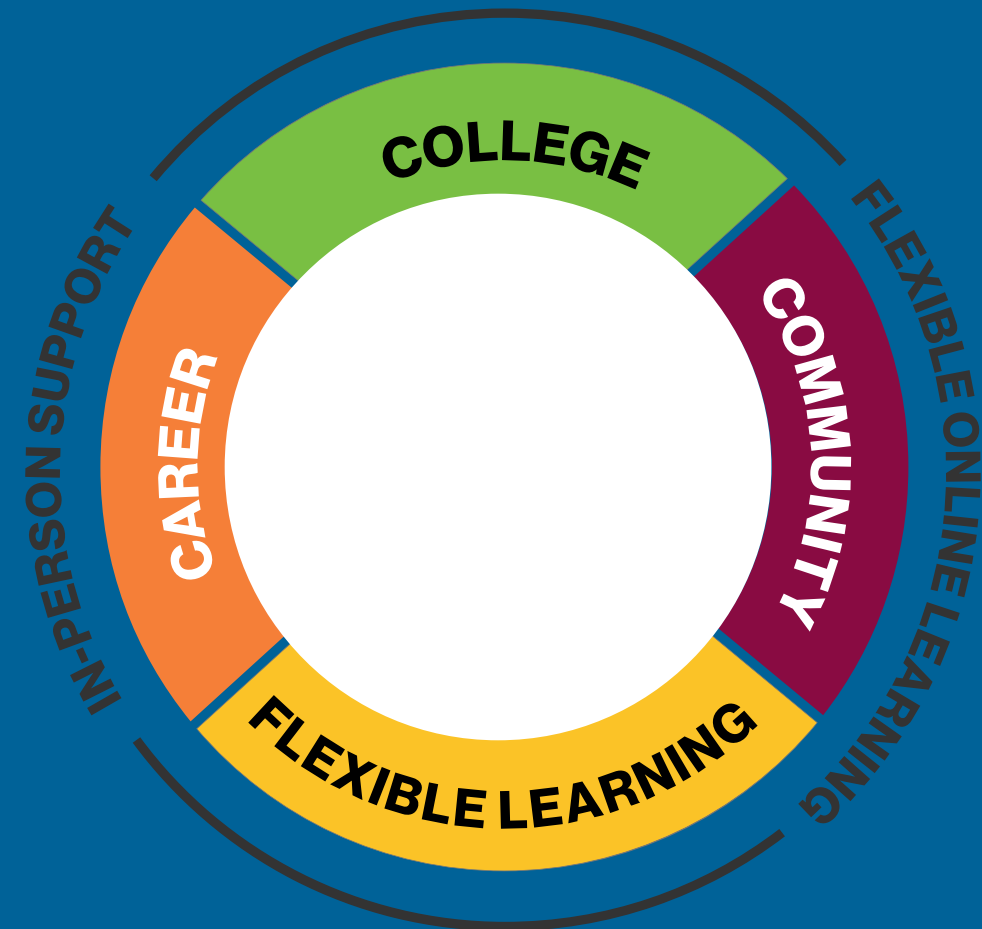
What is ASU Local?

- ASU Local reimagines how students experience college, supporting them holistically across academics, wellbeing and career.

- We want to equip you with an opportunity to earn your university degree through a unique blend of in-person and online experiences — all in your local community.

Persistence: What's Working to Keep Students Enrolled

Student Success Coaching Model

Coaching Model	Why Coaching Works	Results

Flourishing Framework (Dr. Keys)

- Academic well-being

- Social well-being

- Psychological well-being

Focus Areas

- Goal setting

- Accountability

- Academic confidence

- Resource navigation

- Holistic Support

85–90% pass rate each semester among coached students

Data Analytics Includes:

- Attendance

- Grades

- Coaching notes

- Surveys

- Career interests

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Trends for Student Success Coaching

Improving student outcomes

1 **Shift Toward Proactive, Holistic Coaching**

Institutions are moving from reactive, academic-only advising to proactive coaching that addresses academics, wellness, social belonging, finances, and career readiness as an integrated system of support.

2 **Increased Use of Data + Early Alerts**

Coaching programs now rely heavily on data dashboards, early alert systems, and predictive analytics to identify students at risk *before* they disengage, allowing earlier, targeted outreach.

3 **Relationship-Centered, High-Touch Models**

Research shows consistent coaching relationships improve persistence; therefore, colleges are prioritizing bi-weekly meetings, continuity with the same coach, and strengths-based coaching models (e.g., flourishing frameworks)

4 **Expansion to Support First-Gen and Underserved Students**

More institutions are building coaching programs specifically designed for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, using peer coaching, culturally responsive advising, and social-capital-building strategies

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College Persistence

KIPP Forward Atlanta: Pre-Enrollment Strength & Year 2 Stability

- **Pre-Enrollment Success:** The summer melt rate for BA-intending students who did not enroll was 3%, which is significantly below the national average of 10-12%.

- **Year 2 Persistence Stability:** Historical data (2018-2023) indicates a strong average Year 2 persistence rate of 72%. This rate demonstrates stability in retention, approaching typical national benchmarks.

- **Attrition Factors:** Despite the strong rate, the primary reasons cited for students stopping out are financial affordability (e.g., loss of the HOPE scholarship) and academic performance.

- **Intervention & Strategic Pivot:**

  - The provision of emergency funds (starting in 2023) has shown growth in graduation rates for the region.

  - The support model now extends from a 2-year to a 6-year persistence framework, ensuring students receive sustained academic and financial support through to completion.

Resources

BigFuture + Common App

What's Next

November Deadline Update	**December Deadline Update**	**Counselors Research Brief**	**First-Gen Enrollment and Persistence Brief**
Published on November 13	Coming in mid-December	Coming in March 2026	Published in October

commonapp.org/research
commonapp.org/advisors

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Question and Answer

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Post-Webinar Poll Questions

How knowledgeable are you about this topic?

A.   Very knowledgeable

B.   Somewhat Knowledgeable

C.   Not at All Knowledgeable

Based on what you learned in today's webinar, how likely are you to share/use information about this program/topic with your students?

A.   Very likely

B.   Somewhat likely

C.   Not likely

D.   Not applicable

College Board for Counselors

Where to find helpful resources
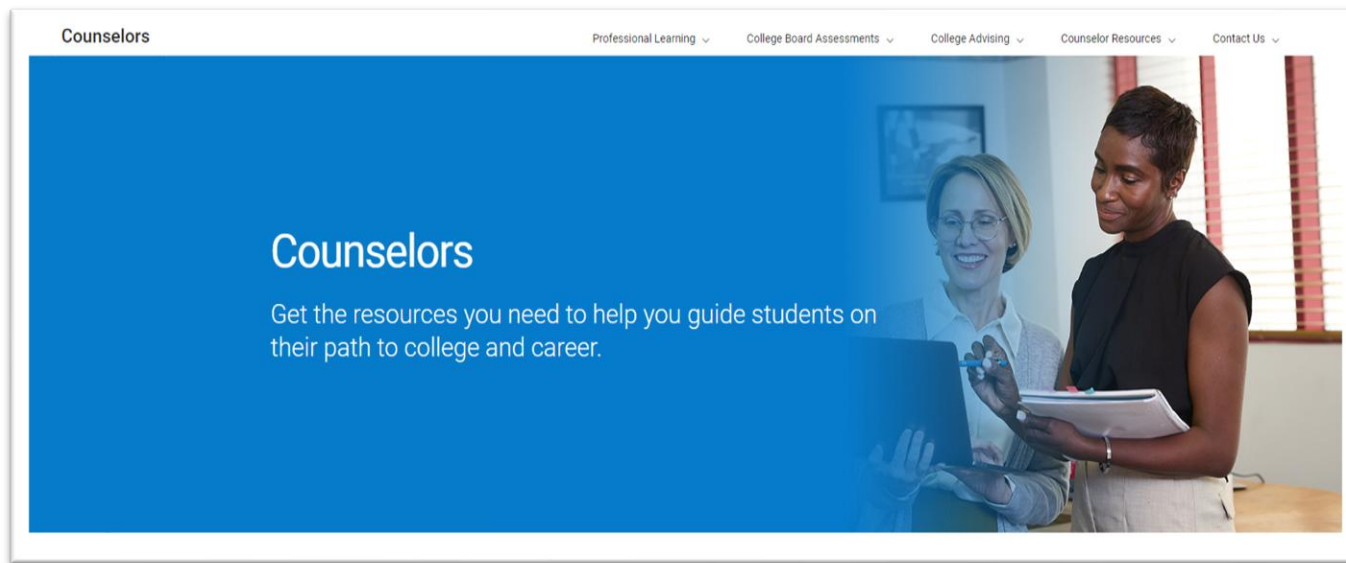
Professional Learning

Register for upcoming events and workshops so you can develop your skills as a counselor. Plus, you could earn continuing education units (CEUs).

Toolkits for Counselors

Find helpful resources, strategies, tools, and more to help you support your students' learning and growth as they prepare for college.

Modules for New Counselors

Free professional development designed to help new counselors as they embark on the career of high school counseling.

Visit **collegeboard.org/counselors**

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Counselor Webinar Series 25-26

AUG 20
Navigating College Application Season: A Guide for New High School Counselors

SEP 18
Next Gen Guidance: Counseling Gen Z and Gen Alpha

OCT 16
Getting it Done: How School Counselors can Help Boost FAFSA Completion

NOV 20
Application Trends Unpacked: Emerging Patterns in Student's Application Behavior

JAN 22
Middle School Matters: Preparing Middle School Students for Rigorous High School Courses

FEB 19
Using BigFuture School to Access Scores and Explore Careers—Middle School

MAR 19
College and Career Trends: What Every Counselor Should Know

APR 16
Middle School Matters: College & Career Conversations Now

Register today at collegeboard.org/counselors

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Sessions come with free CEU credit.
Sessions are recorded and will be available on-demand if you are unable to join the live event.

Thank you for joining us today!

At the close of the webinar, please

- Complete the webinar evaluation. We want to ensure we continue to provide excellent professional development.

- Complete the 5-question quiz to earn CEU hours (optional).

- Feel free to review and share today's webinar. The presentation will be forwarded to your email address in 24 hours.

- Thank you for all that you do in the service of students!

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