

Presentation

November 25, 2025

“Mass College Pay-Off”

Summary

- 1. College Affordability is UP**
- 2. Enrollment is UP**
- 3. Degree Completion is a CHALLENGE, But Early Indicators are Promising**
- 4. Earnings Returns are HIGH**

DHE Team Member Presenting Today

Michael Dannenberg
Deputy Commissioner for Policy

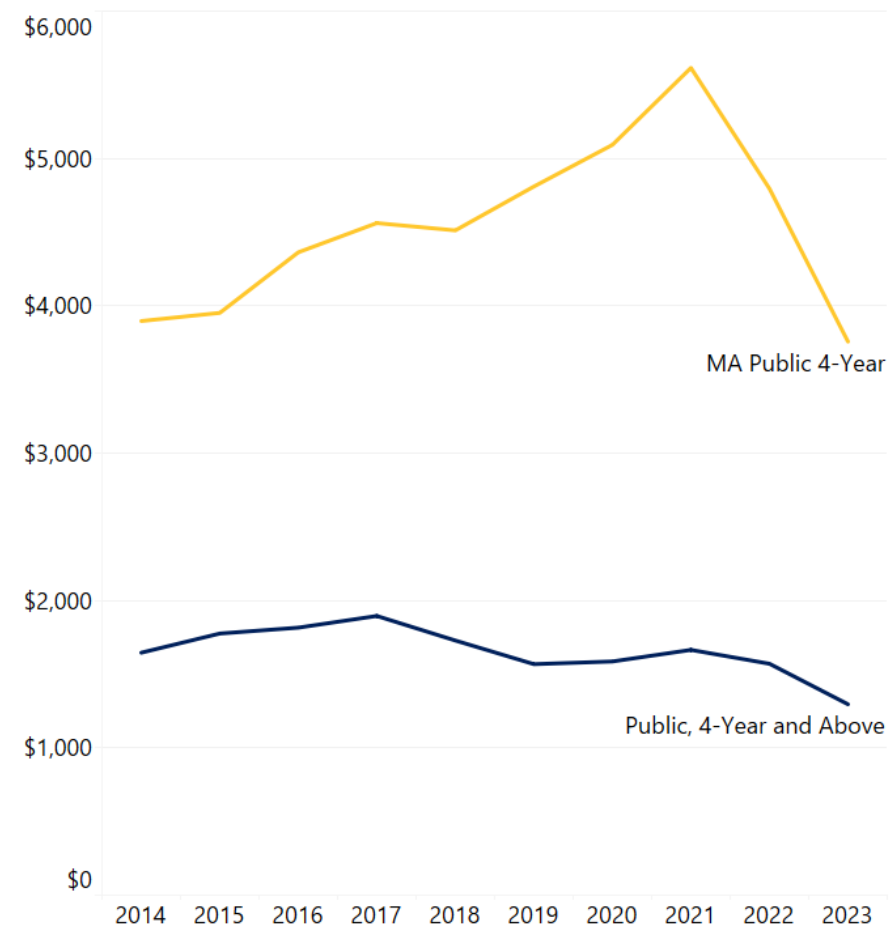
“State Investment is Making Public College MORE AFFORDABLE” – The after financial aid cost of college has been going down nationally. It’s down even more in Massachusetts, because we’re increasing state aid more than others.

Average Net Price of Direct Costs, MA vs. National | FY2014–FY2023

Community Colleges



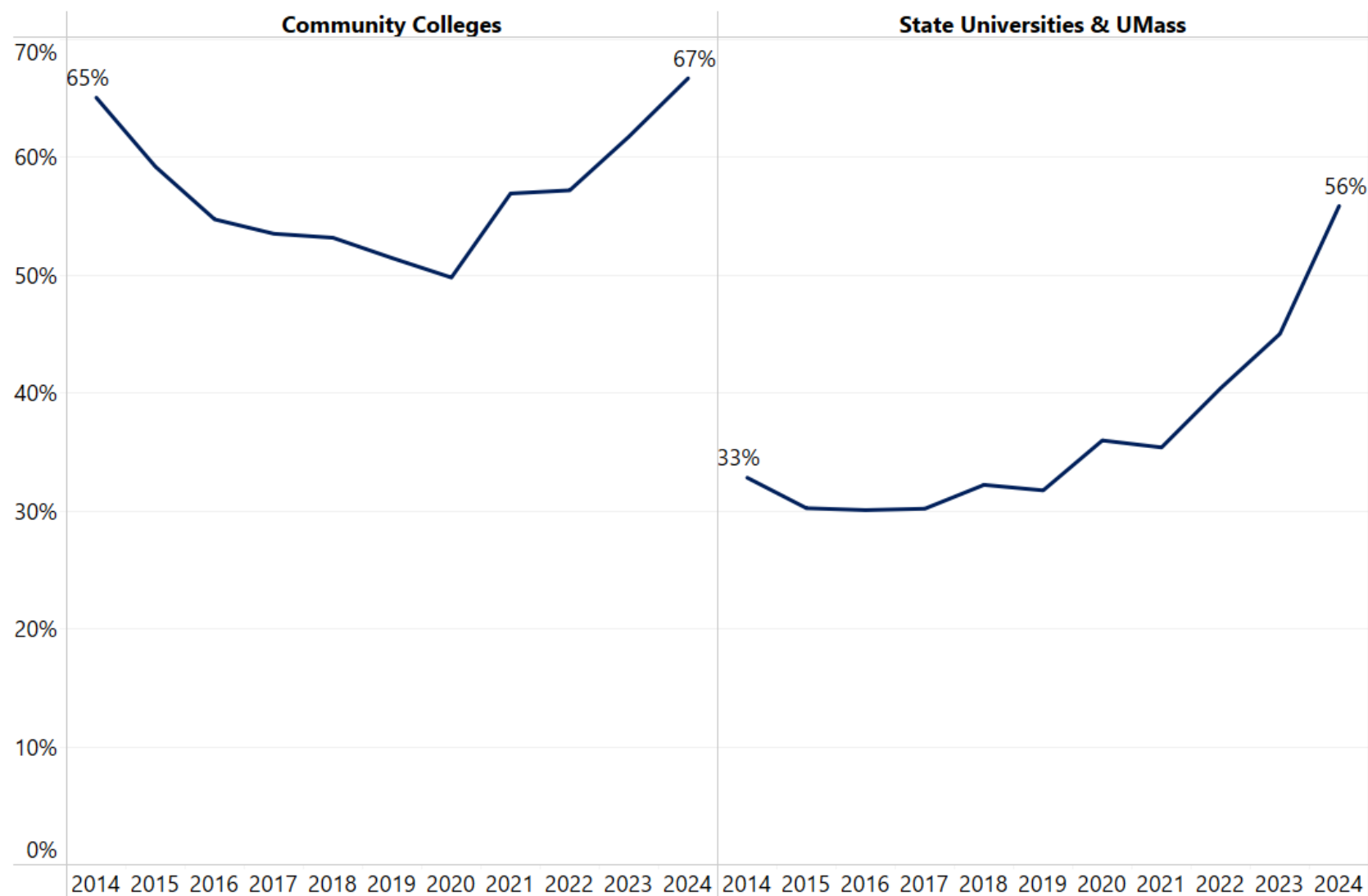
Public 4-Years



Direct costs = in-state tuition and fees + books and supplies. Net price = Direct Costs - Aid. Source: DHE analysis of IPEDS/U.S. DOE data.

“More Massachusetts Students Are Paying ZERO DOLLARS for tuition, fees, books and supplies” – Under the first year of MassReconnect, the percentage of community college students with a zero net cost increased to 67%

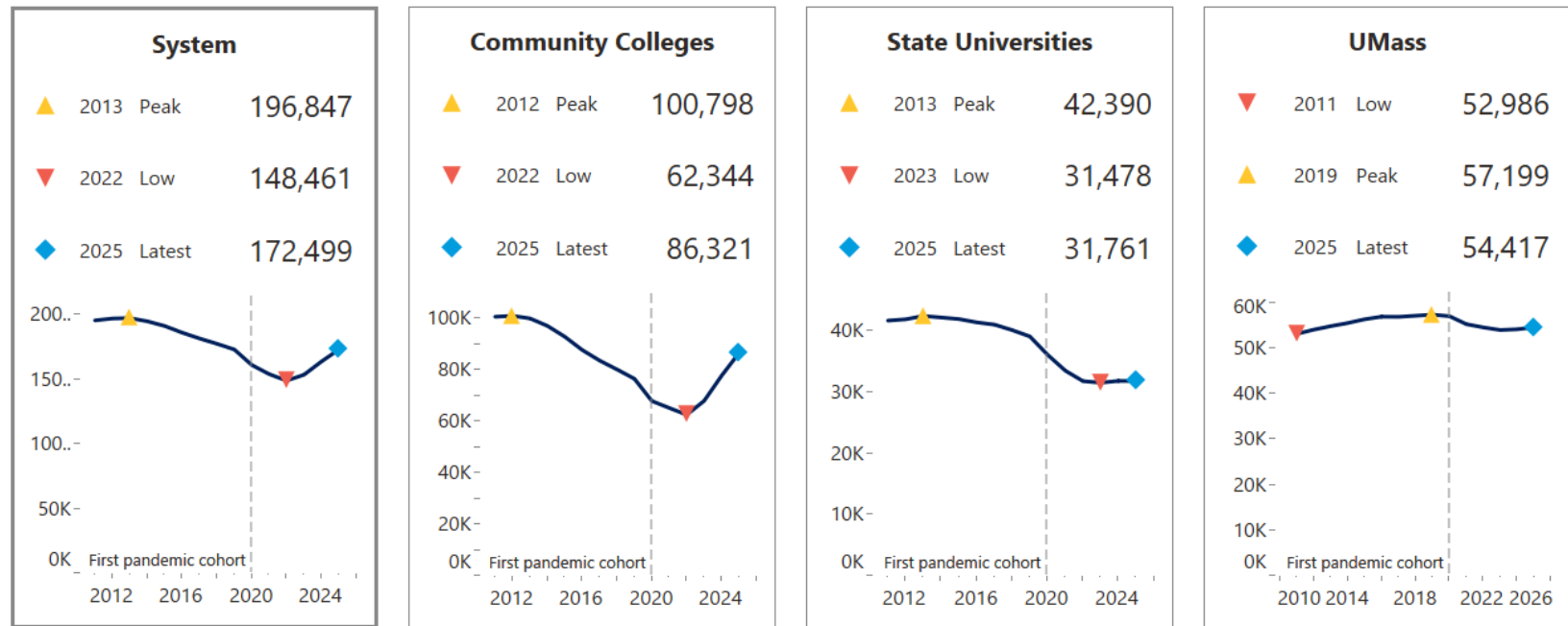
Percentage of MA Full-Time, First-Time, Degree-Seeking Students Receiving Aid Resulting in Zero Net Cost | FY2014–FY2024



Source: DHE analysis of
DHE/HEIRS data

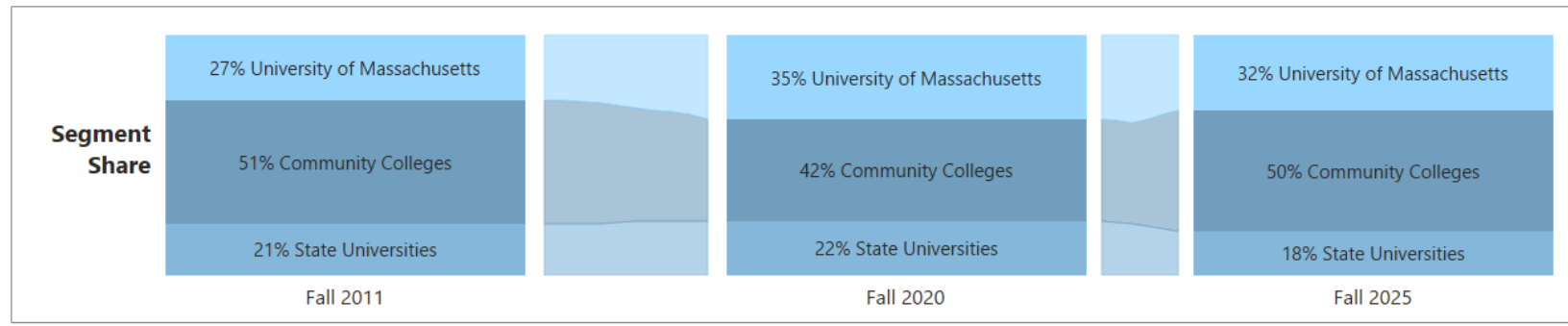
“Massachusetts Public College ENROLLMENT IS UP Substantially under Healey-Driscoll”– Recent enrollment rebound continues in fall 2025, primarily driven by free community college

Undergraduate Enrollment | Fall 2010–2025 Trend



Key Takeaways

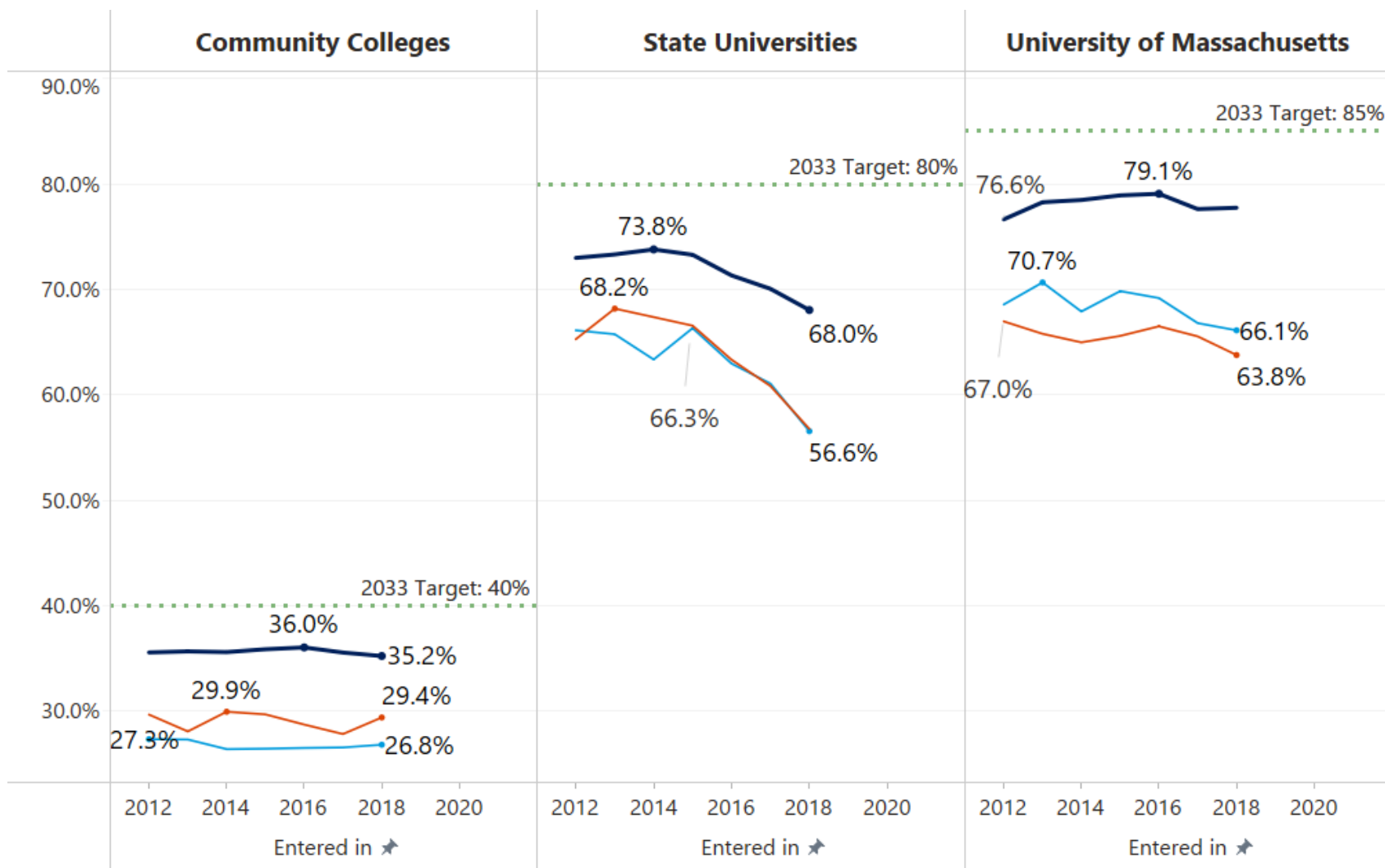
- At the system level, undergraduate enrollment in fall 2025 has returned to the pre-pandemic, fall 2019 level.
- This fall’s increase is primarily driven by continued enrollment growth within the **community colleges**, where headcount has **grown** by +11.4% (+8,832) since fall 2024 and **by +38.5% (+23,977) since free community college was made available (fall 2023–2025)**. Fall 2025 headcount is nearly at the fall 2016 level.
- Compared to fall 2024, undergraduate enrollment at the state universities is flat and at UMass campuses is up by +0.8%.
- Community college students represent 50% of all undergraduate students enrolled in Massachusetts public colleges and universities in fall 2025. This is consistent with the community colleges’ historical share of enrollment, though their share dropped as low as 42% during the decade of enrollment decline prior to free community college.



Note: Data displayed are headcount enrollment of undergraduate students enrolled for credit in Massachusetts public higher education each fall. 2025 data are estimates prior to final fall data collection in December 2025. Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

DHE Data. Challenge: “Massachusetts Public College COMPLETION RATES ARE LOW” – Community college completion rates are lower than the national average; state universities are in sharp decline, particularly for racial minorities

Completion Anywhere Rate | Fall 2012–2018 Cohorts

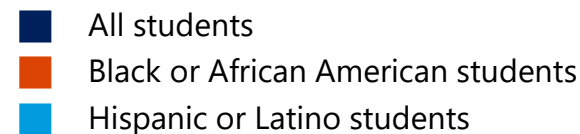


Metric

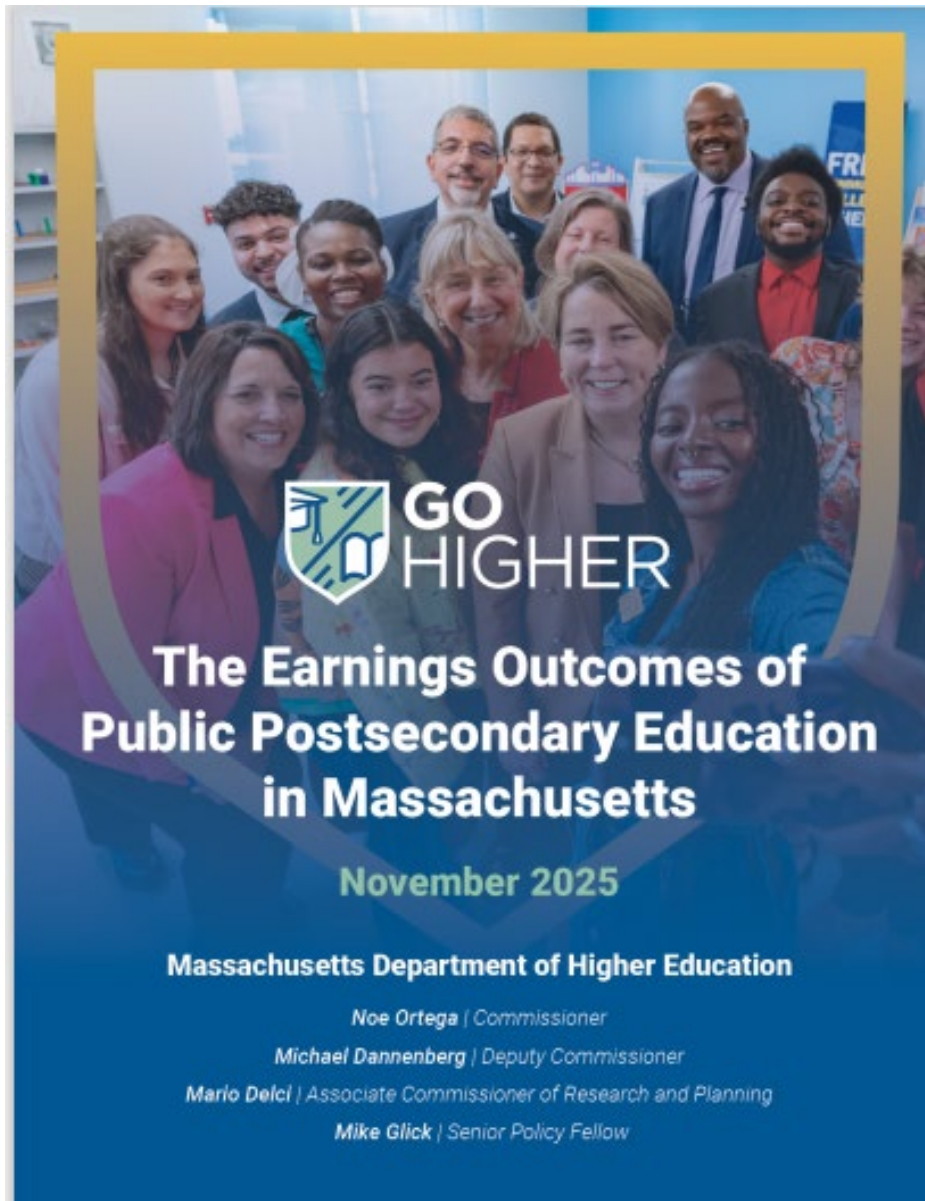
- Cohort: New first-time and new transfer degree-seeking students each fall (full- and part-time)
- Outcome: Percent who completed a degree or certificate anywhere in the U.S. within six years
- Source: DHE analysis of DHE/HEIRS and National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data
- Targets set by BHE in June 2023, to be met by 2033

Next Updates

- **Early November 2025:** Completion rates for the cohort that entered in fall 2019 and completed by 2025



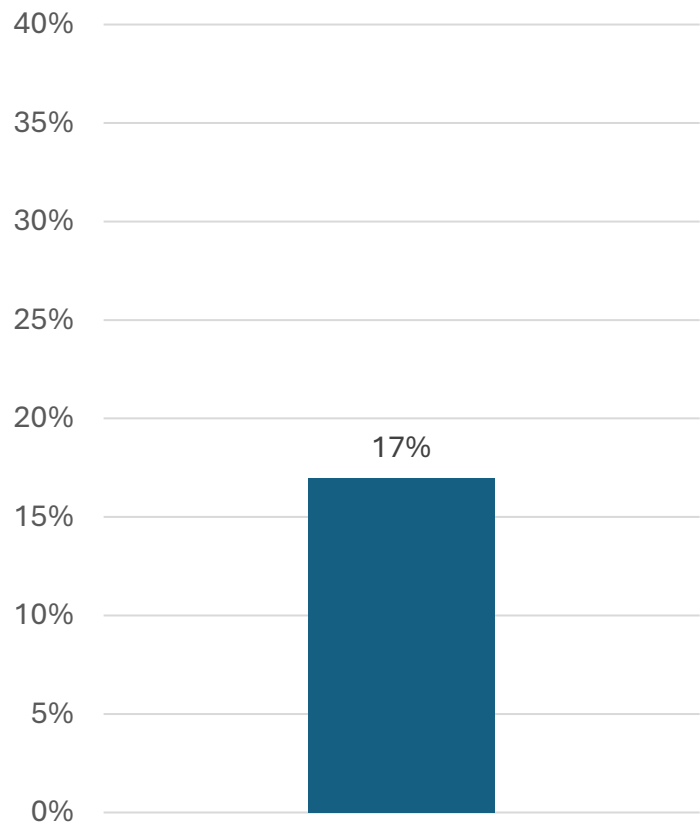
New Report on Earnings



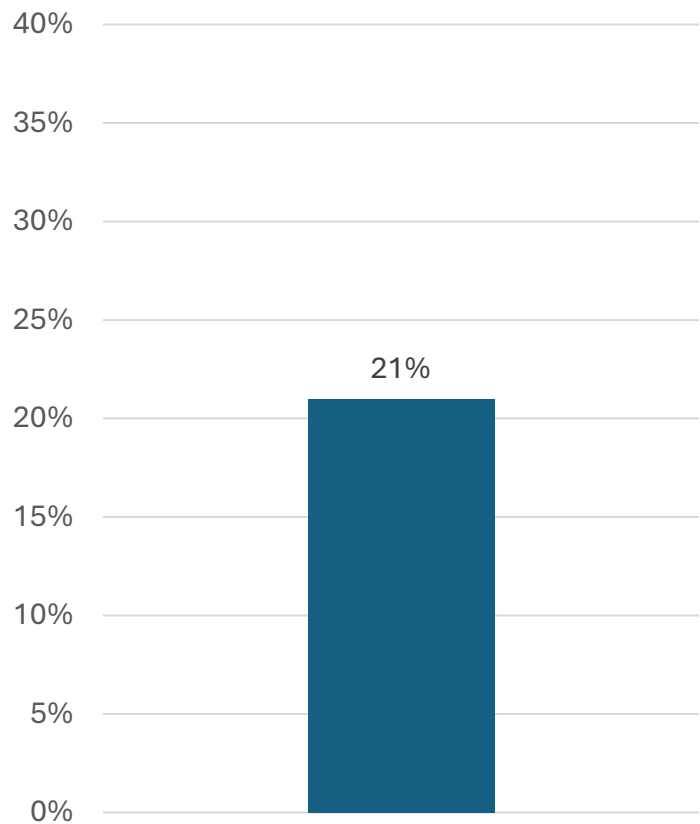
www.mass.edu/earnings

New DHE Report. “DEGREE ATTAINMENT MATTERS; Investment in Success is Crucial” – Those who complete a Massachusetts public college degree earn significantly more vs. those who “stop-out”

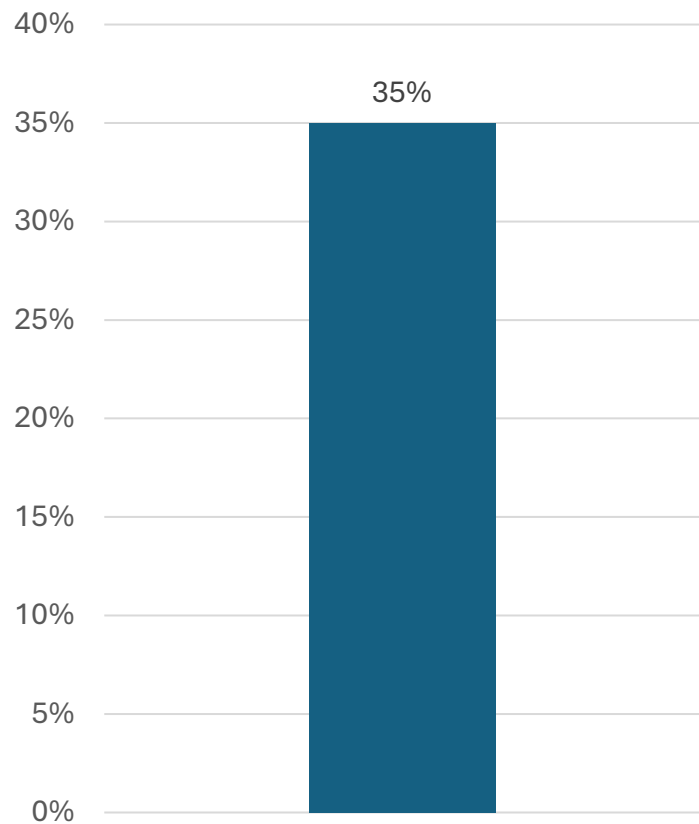
Median earnings comparison:
% completion premium
*Associate degree completers
vs stop-outs*



Median earnings comparison:
% completion premium
*Bachelor’s degree completers
vs stop-outs (non-UMass)*



Median earnings comparison:
% completion premium
*Bachelor’s degree completers
vs stop-outs (UMass)*



Notes: 1) Earnings are inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars; 2) Displaying data for graduates and stop-outs from 2014-2018, five years after exit. Source: Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data.

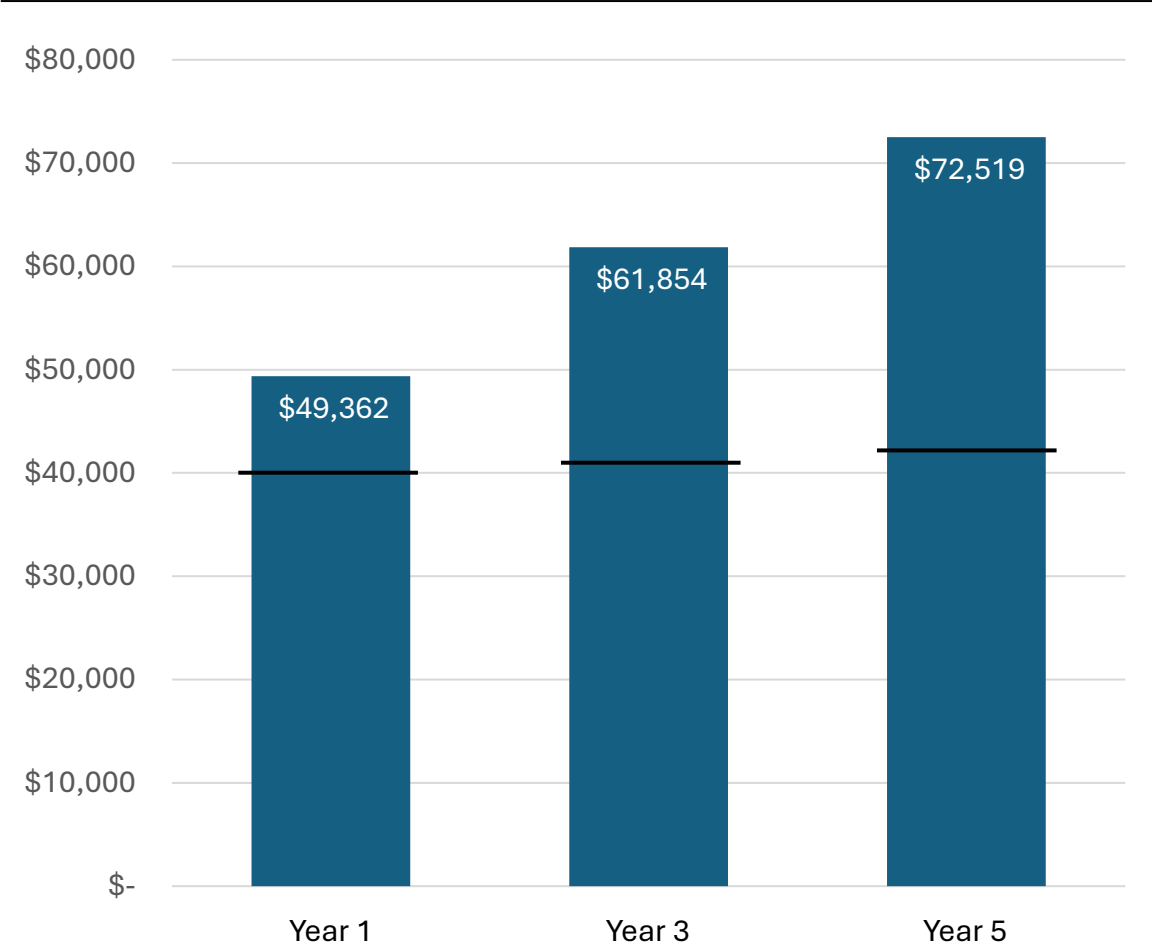
New DHE Report. Completion of postsecondary pathways is associated with substantially higher earnings as compared to earnings of those with only a HS diploma; ~\$20,000 TO ~\$30,000 MORE IN EARNINGS five yrs out

— *High School Diploma Only Benchmark*

Median earnings, USD | Associate degree completers from MA public community colleges



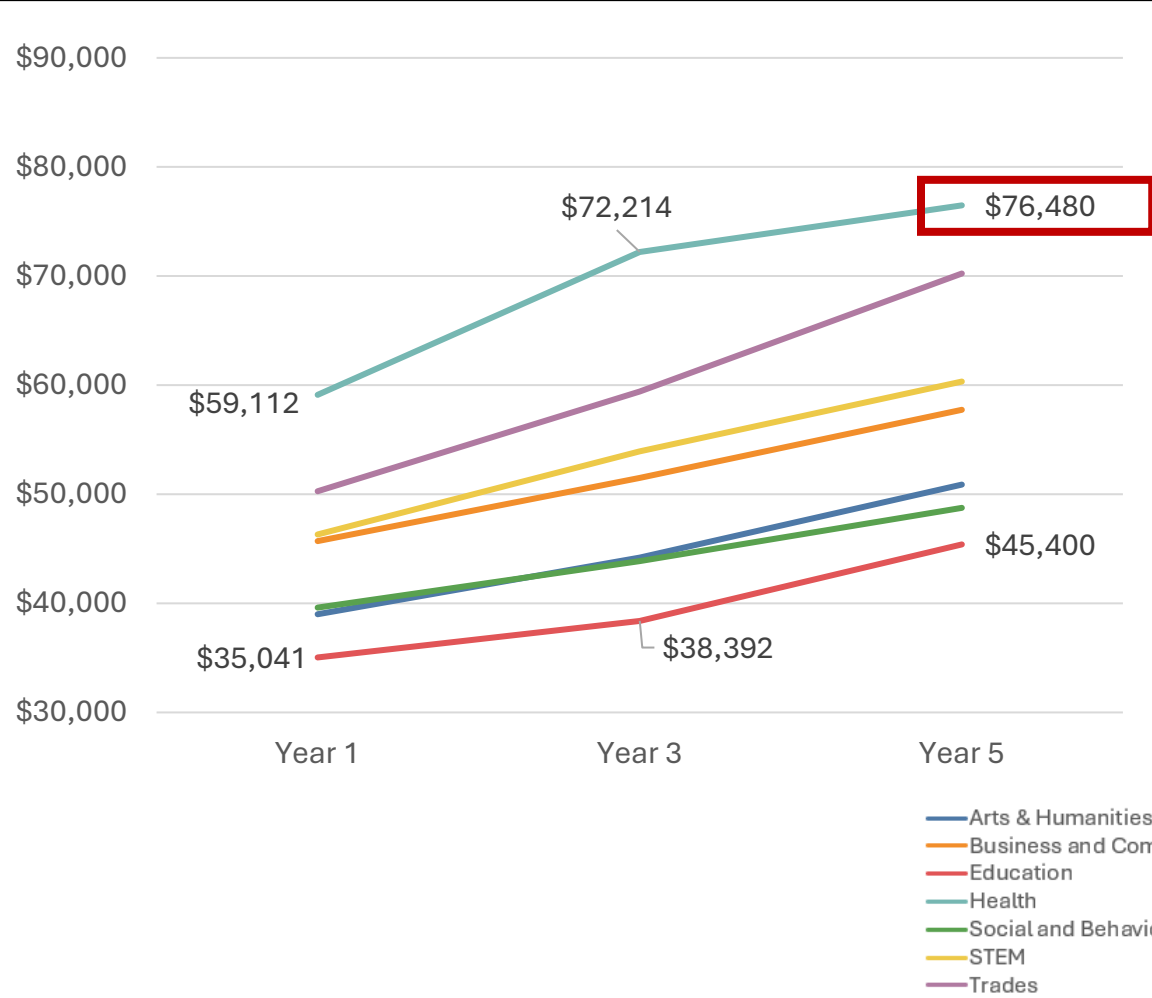
Median earnings, USD | Bachelor's degree completers from MA state universities and UMass campuses



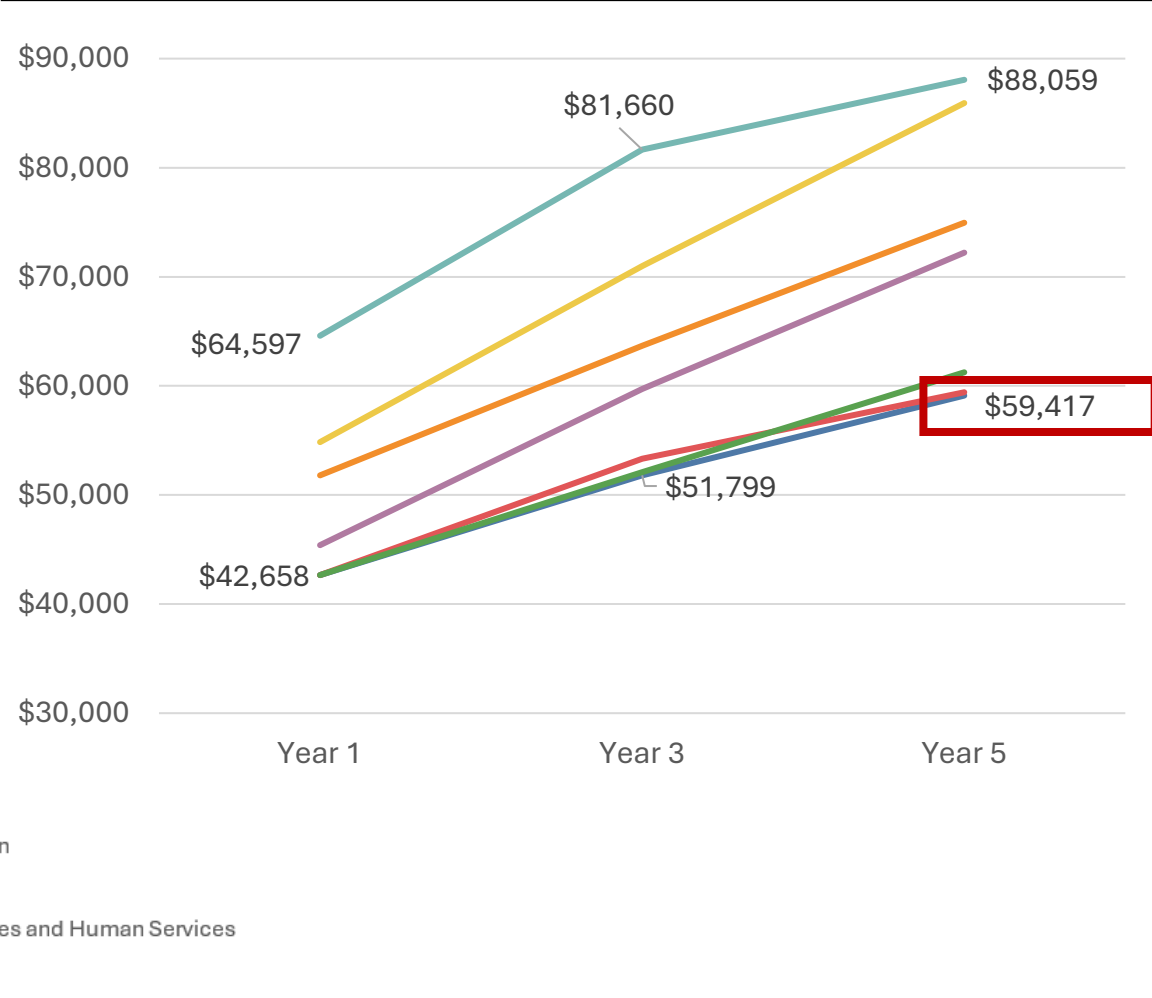
Notes: 1) Earnings are inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars; 2) Displaying data for graduates from 2014-2018; 3) High school benchmarks based on 2023 ACS data for those aged 18-25, living and working in Massachusetts, employed with earnings above minimum wage for the year, with a high school diploma or GED as their highest credential, and not currently in school. Year 1 value leverages earnings of those 18-20 years old; Year 3 value, 21-22; Year 5, 23-25; outcomes calculated separately by gender, with average taken across genders. Source: Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data; Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample.

New DHE Report. “WHAT YOU STUDY MATTERS” – The highest earnings are often associated with degrees in STEM, Health Science, & Trades; Some associate degrees lead to higher median earnings than bachelor’s degrees

Median earnings, USD | Associate degree completers from MA public community colleges



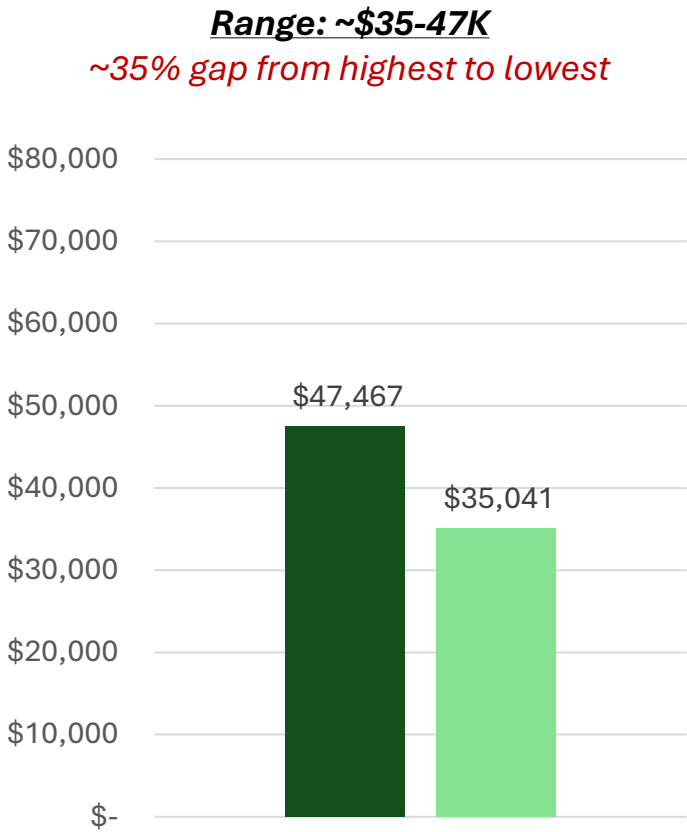
Median earnings, USD | Bachelor’s degree completers from MA state universities and UMass campuses



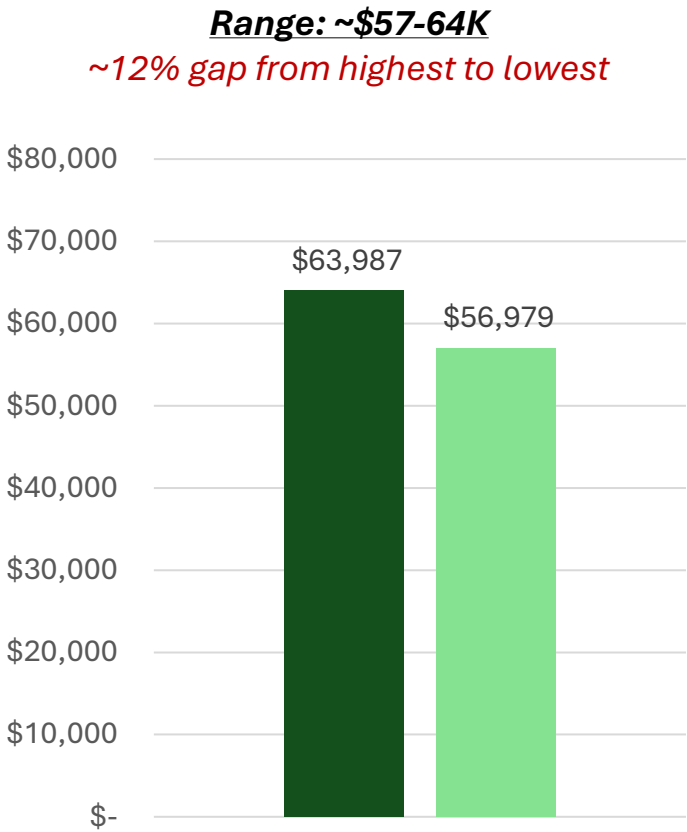
Note: Earnings are inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars. Displaying data for graduates from 2014-2018. Source: Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data

New DHE Report. “Public Higher Ed Degree Attainment Significantly CLOSES EARNINGS GAPS” – The degree of earnings gap closing by race and ethnicity similarly reflects that by economic class

High school degree completion
Median earnings by socioeconomic status



Associate degree completion
Median earnings by socioeconomic status

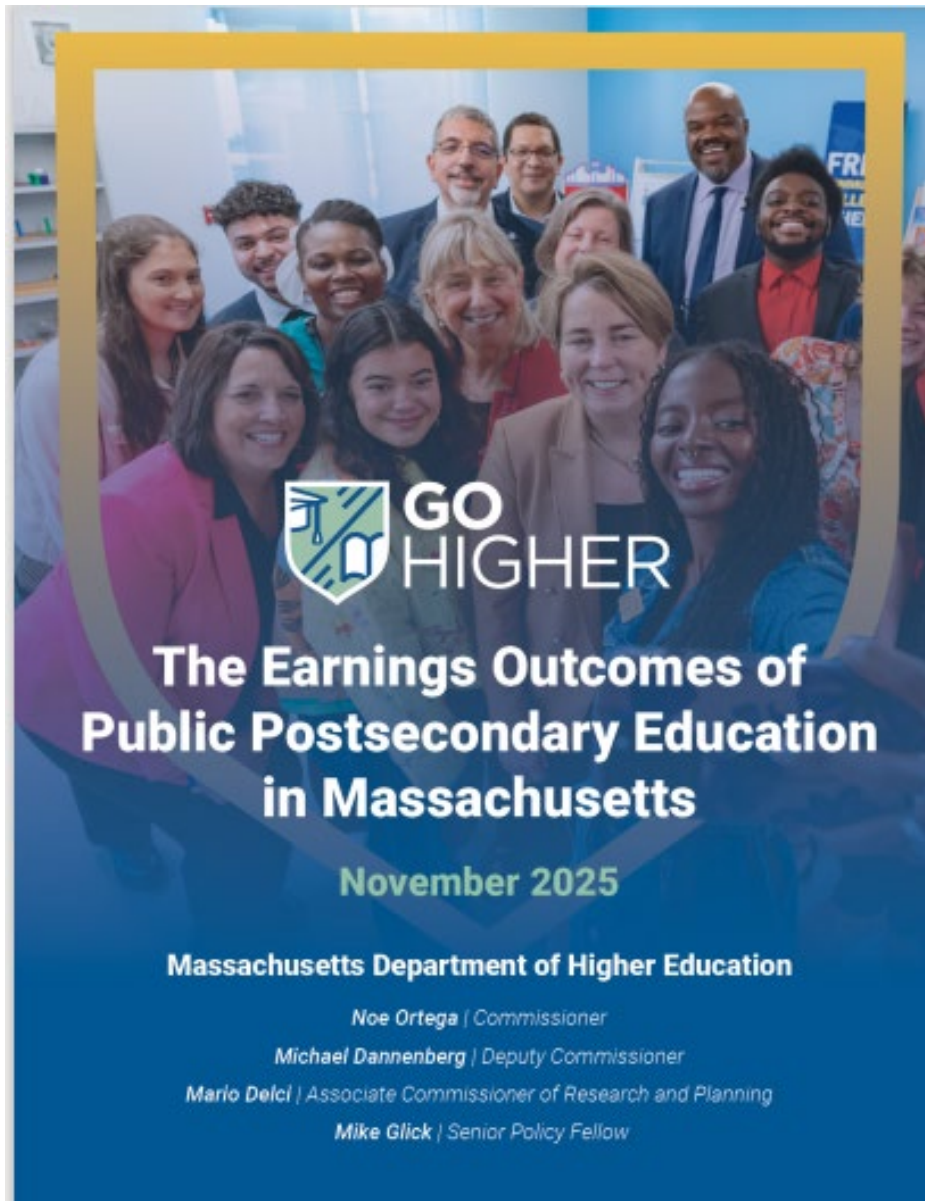


Bachelor’s degree completion
Median earnings by socioeconomic status



Notes: 1) Eligibility for free/reduced lunch determines upper- vs lower-income classification for HS degree completers; Pell status determines upper- vs lower-income classification for associate degree and bachelor’s degree completers; 2) Leveraging 10-year earnings outcomes for 2012 high school graduates in Connecticut who did not attend college as a proxy for differences by income levels in Massachusetts, given similar overall ranges; and; 3) Earnings are inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars (2022 in the case of HS comparison point, based on data available); 4) Displaying data for 2014-18 graduates, 5 years after exit, for associate degree and bachelor’s degree completers. Source: Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data; ACS; EdSight Connecticut.

New Report on Earnings



www.mass.edu/earnings

Questions