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A Decade of Data: 21st Century Scholars are Closing Achievement Gaps *Opportunities remain to increase usage and number of students earning scholarship*

(INDIANAPOLIS) – 21st Century Scholars are the only group on track to close Indiana’s college-going achievement gap by 2025, across all races and ethnicities, however opportunities exist to increase program utilization, according to the new [21st Century Scholars Report](#) released today by the [Indiana Commission for Higher Education](#).

Indiana’s Promise: A Report on the 21st Century Scholars Program is the first report of its kind compiled by the Commission. The report provides an analysis of college enrollment, college success and college completion by 21st Century Scholars and disaggregates data by race and ethnicity, income level and gender. The new data show that since the program’s inception, Scholars have seen overall improvements in college readiness, college going, persistence and completion.

“The 21st Century Scholars program has made a profound impact on Indiana’s education attainment with more than 45,000 students having earned a degree with the scholarship,” said Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “We know the transformative power of the program, but our biggest challenge – awareness – remains.”

In 1990, then-State Representative Stan Jones authored the legislation creating Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars program. Indiana’s Governor at the time, Gov. Evan Bayh, championed the bill, which received bipartisan support and was codified into Indiana law.

The [21st Century Scholars program](#), which requires students to apply while they are in seventh or eighth grade, offers income-eligible Hoosiers up to four years of paid tuition at a participating Indiana college or university.

“The 21st Century Scholars program was created to be a promise to students that no matter life’s circumstances or obstacles, college can be an option for everyone,” said Lubbers. “It’s not meant to only provide financial aid. It’s a scholarship program designed to inspire students to see college as an option from an early age and help prepare them throughout their educational journey.”

21st Century Scholars close two-year on-time completion gap

Regardless of race, ethnicity or gender, Scholars are as likely or more likely than their higher-income peers to graduate college on time. They earn a two-year degree on time at a rate of 10 percentage points above their low-income non-Scholar peers and 7 percentage points above the statewide average (26 percent compared to 16 percent and 19 percent respectively).

While Indiana’s overall on-time college completion rates have improved over the past decade, the on-time completion rates of Scholars have improved significantly. Their completion rates at two- and four-year colleges nearly doubled between 2010 and 2016.

Other report findings

- Nearly 9 in 10 qualifying Scholars go to college right after high school (88 percent), greater than the state average of about 6 in 10 students (59 percent).
- Sixty percent of high school Scholars complete all the requirements of the 21st Century Scholars program.
- Race/ethnicity and gender play a role in who becomes a 21st Century Scholar. White and Asian students from low-income households are more likely to be Scholars than students from other races and ethnicities.
- The impact of the 21st Century Scholars program is significant as nearly 10% of high school graduates are 21st Century Scholars. But there are many more students who could access the program, as approximately half of eligible students enroll each year.

“No matter a family’s income, all Hoosier students deserve access to a pathway towards future success,” said Indiana Secretary of Education Dr. Katie Jenner. “We know that a person’s future quality of life and their educational attainment are directly linked, and the 21st Century Scholars program is proven to help more students from low-income families earn a credential or certification. By empowering more eligible students across all demographics to enroll in the 21st Century Scholars program, we can positively impact more of Indiana’s students.”

Recommendations

The Commission releases recommendations with each of its reports, offering strategies aligned to its strategic plan, [Reaching Higher in a State of Change](#), which calls on the 21st Century Scholars program as one of the best ways to close educational equity gaps. Recommendations around improving utilization and outcomes of the 21st Century Scholars program include:

- **Increasing college preparation and readiness** by calling for all high school seniors, not just Scholars, to be required to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (with opt-out provisions available) and encouraging those who counsel 21st Century Scholars to ensure these students are taking advantage of early college credit and/or earning the Academic Honors Diploma while in high school
- **Continuing to make college more affordable** by calling for schools, counselors, businesses, community partners and others to ensure all eligible seventh- and eighth-grade students enroll in the 21st Century Scholars program and maintain their eligibility and advocating for all students to gain financial literacy skills throughout middle and high school
- **Improving student outcomes** through encouraging all high schools to implement the Scholar Success Program and eliminating the general diploma
- **Leaning on community partnerships** by providing direct and specific outreach to low-income Hoosier students across all demographics and partnering with the Indiana Department of Education to streamline and smooth transitions between K-12 and postsecondary education

Read the full 21st Century Scholars Report at che.in.gov.

Explore resources available to help students plan, prepare and pay for college at www.LearnMoreIndiana.org.

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About Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars Report

Indiana’s Promise: A Report on the 21st Century Scholars Program is part of a series of reports provided by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education to clearly define Indiana’s progress preparing Hoosiers for college and the workforce. The reports help inform students, educators, families and policymakers. The report provides an analysis of college enrollment, success and completion by 21st Century Scholars and disaggregates data by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender. Read the full report at che.in.gov and all the Commission’s reports at che.in.gov/reports.

About the Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Created in 1971, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education plans, coordinates and defines Indiana’s postsecondary education system to align higher learning with the needs of students and the state. The Commission also administers Indiana’s financial aid programs, including the [21st Century Scholars](#) early college promise scholarship, which celebrated

30 years in 2020. Learn more about the Commission's [*Reaching Higher in a State of Change*](https://www.in.gov/che) strategic plan at www.in.gov/che.