



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# ISSUE BRIEF

July 2020

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## Utah High School Students Transition to College

### Data gathered through High School Feedback Reports for 2018 High School Graduates

*\*\*\*The data from this report was collected and synthesized prior to the merger of both higher education systems in the State of Utah. This report references what was the Utah System of Higher Education, prior to July 1, 2020. The Utah System of Higher Education now consists of 16 institutions including eight technical colleges, two community colleges, four regional universities, and two research universities.*

During the 2018-19 academic year, over 178,000 students walked the eight Utah System of Higher Education campuses. Of those students, approximately 9.3% came directly from Utah's high school graduating class of 2018. The transition from high school to postsecondary learning is a major step in an individual's life. Leaders on both ends of that academic bridge seek to understand how well students in our state navigate the transition. To that end, the Utah System of Higher Education has collaborated with the Utah State Board of Education for the last five years to share data describing the number of students making that transition and the degree to which they succeed in college. Each year, the data has been summarized in USHE's High School Feedback reports, a compilation of student data used to inform secondary teachers and policymakers of the trends in higher education enrollment for their newly graduated students. The reports include enrollment rates and detailed data on student readiness for college curriculum. The [High School Feedback reports for the 2018 graduating class](#) are available by school district on [ushe.edu](http://ushe.edu).

Not only can this data inform local high schools about the trends of high school graduates enrolling in college, but also our public colleges and universities who can benefit by understanding the new students who are flowing into their classes from our state's K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) education system. The following report is an initial exploration of how this student data can be used to inform the college access conversation for our state's education policymakers.

### Statewide Enrollments

Of the high school graduating class of 2018, 46% of students attended a postsecondary institution one year after high school graduation. Over the five years our office has studied high school to postsecondary education, the first-year enrollment rates have increased by 3.5 percentage points (see Table 1). Across the

nation, [rates of first-year enrollment tend to be much higher, averaging 66.7% in 2017](#)<sup>1</sup>. The ecclesiastical mission system of [Utah’s predominant religion](#)<sup>2</sup> explains why many Utah graduates do not attend college immediately after graduation, but to what degree that explains the difference between Utah students and the national average is unknown. Future analysis will include a three-year enrollment window to more thoroughly understand the state’s success in connecting students from the K-12 system to the postsecondary system.

High School Graduation Year	Share Enrolled First Year
2014	42.5%*
2015	42.2%*
2016	41.0%
2017	45.5%
2018	46.0%

\*May contain duplicate enrollments.

## Districts and Service Regions

The first-year enrollment rates of students in 22 Utah school districts were below the statewide average enrollment rate of 46%. Those 22 districts constitute 45.8% of all high school graduates across the state. The remaining 19 school districts, where 19,322 students graduated, showed enrollment rates above the statewide average. Park City School District topped the list with 68.2% of students enrolling in college within one year of high school graduation. Uintah School District had the lowest enrollment rate at 30.1%. Both Park City and Uintah school districts graduated essentially the same number of students that year—385 students or just under 1% each of the total Utah graduating class.

[USHE policy R315, \*Service Area Designations and Coordination of Off-Campus Courses and Programs\*](#)<sup>3</sup>, designates service regions for each of the eight public colleges and universities in the system. Service regions define the local community each institution is expected to serve. While institutions enroll students from all across the state, the [institution closest to home is likely high on their list of postsecondary options](#)<sup>4</sup>. Table 2 shows enrollment rates by school district, grouped by USHE service areas<sup>5</sup>. Districts in the University of Utah and Salt Lake Community College service region saw the largest number of high school graduates in 2018 and the highest first-year enrollment rate in 2019 at 49.5%. Utah State University’s service region includes the most districts (twelve) but the number of graduates is roughly

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.10., [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_302.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_302.10.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, Religious Landscape Study, Adults in Utah, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/utah/>

<sup>3</sup> Utah System of Higher Education, USHE Policy R315, *Service Area Designations and Coordination of Off-Campus Courses and Programs*, <https://ushe.edu/ushe-policies/policyr315/>

<sup>4</sup> Utah System of Higher Education, Where Do USHE Students Come From?, <https://ushe.edu/where-do-ushe-students-come-from/>

<sup>5</sup> Since charter schools do not belong to school districts, they are excluded from this portion of the analysis.

only one third of the University of Utah and Salt Lake Community College service region. The Utah State University service region also shows the lowest enrollment rate overall at 39.9%. However, three of the districts within that region had enrollment rates more than 50%. The districts in Utah Valley University's service region graduated the second most students, 43.9% of whom enrolled at a postsecondary institution one year after graduation.

<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Park City*	68.2%
Canyons	55.2%
Murray	53.2%
Salt Lake	50.4%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>49.5%</b>
Granite	46.9%
Jordan	46.3%

\*Park City is not included in Salt Lake Community College's service region

<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Carbon	53.3%
San Juan	50.4%
Daggett	50.0%
Emery	47.3%
Logan City	45.0%
Tooele	41.2%
Grand	40.4%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>39.9%</b>
Duchesne	39.4%
Cache	38.7%
Box Elder	34.9%
Rich	32.4%
Uintah	30.1%

<b>Table 2. Weber State University's Regional School Districts</b>	
<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Davis	50.9%
Morgan	47.8%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>47.1%</b>
Weber	43.4%
Ogden City	34.5%

<b>Table 2. Southern Utah University's Regional School Districts</b>	
<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Beaver	48.1%
Iron	44.5%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>44.5%</b>
Garfield	38.8%

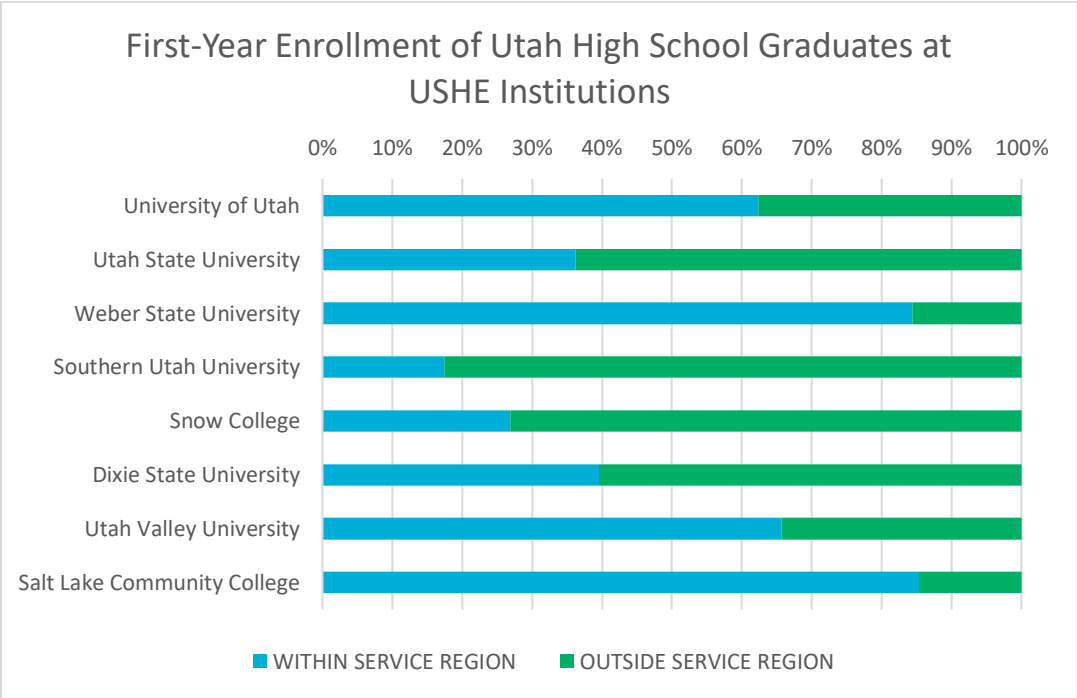
<b>Table 2. Snow College's Regional School Districts</b>	
<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Piute	68.0%
South Sanpete	56.7%
Tintic	52.2%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>47.2%</b>
Sevier	46.4%
Juab	44.4%
Wayne	44.1%
Millard	41.5%
North Sanpete	41.5%

<b>Table 2. Dixie State University's Regional School Districts</b>	
<b>District</b>	<b>First-Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Washington	42.5%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>42.4%</b>
Kane	39.2%

<b>Table 2. Utah Valley University's Regional School Districts</b>	
<b>District</b>	<b>First Year Enrollment Rate</b>
Wasatch	49.4%
North Summit	48.1%
South Summit	44.8%
Provo	44.6%
Alpine	44.1%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>43.9%</b>
Nebo	41.7%

**Institutions and Service Regions**

Graph 1 below disaggregates each institution’s first-year Utah high school students by geographic region to highlight the role of institutional service regions and the overall draw of a local postsecondary institution<sup>6</sup>. Salt Lake Community College exhibits the strongest local draw with 85.3% of its Utah high school graduate enrollment originating from within its service region. Weber State University had the second highest local enrollment at 84.4%. Southern Utah University draws a larger portion of its Utah high school graduate enrollment from outside its local area, with 82.6% of enrollments coming from school districts outside its service region. Utah State University has the largest geographical service area, yet more than half of its Utah graduate enrollment comes from outside its service region (63.8%). Of note, however, is the small total graduation class relative to the geographic coverage of its service region.



<sup>6</sup> Charter school graduates included.  
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## Summary

The State of Utah highly values postsecondary education, which results in statewide [educational attainment rates that outpace national averages](#)<sup>7</sup>. While Utah high school graduates tend to enroll in postsecondary institutions at lower rates than the national average in their first year out of high school, ecclesiastical missions may explain that trend. Future studies will include a three-year analysis of enrollment to understand the effectiveness of engaging with students returning from religious service. Institutions of postsecondary education are assigned service regions in the spirit of assuring all Utahns have access to a quality postsecondary education in their local area. Understanding the effectiveness of an institution in providing postsecondary education to local and distant populations of the state is a first step in addressing issues of access in higher education for our communities. Further studies will also examine demographics and socioeconomics of students graduating from Utah K-12 districts from both inside and outside of institutional service regions.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates show 34.9% of Utahns hold at least a bachelor's degree compared to 32.6 nationwide, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/UT>