

Common App's Next Chapter

2026 impact report





Dear friends,

In 1975, a small group of colleges and universities got together to reimagine the college application process. One application, 15 forward-thinking institutions. 50 years later, while the technology and the methods have changed, the mission and the vision stay the same. In 2024, Common App launched its Next Chapter with a clear and ambitious moonshot goal: to close the income gap in students applying for opportunities beyond high school and ensure that all learners, regardless of their circumstances or where they live, can pursue postsecondary pathways.

This year's Next Chapter Impact Report shows that we are continuing to make steady progress toward that goal. More students from low- and middle-income communities are using Common App. Key initiatives, particularly direct admissions, state partnerships, and expanded affordability programs, are reaching more learners than ever before.

At the same time, this report makes something else equally clear: incremental progress is not enough. To meet our moonshot goal, we must continue to scale what works and find ways to do it faster. And, we can't do that alone.

Over the past year, we've nearly doubled participation in Common App Direct Admissions, seen promising early results from new state partnerships, and connected more students to financial support through scholarship matching. These efforts are moving the needle, but the size of the opportunity ahead demands continued innovation, collaboration, and investment.

This report offers a transparent look at where we are, what's driving change, and where we must focus next. We remain deeply grateful to our members, counselors, and partners who are helping turn this vision into reality and who remind us every day why this work matters.

Warmly,

Jenny Rickard
Chief Executive Officer
Common App

Applicants from
above-median ZIP codes

70%

GOAL

22-23

30%

Applicants from
below-median ZIP codes

THE CHALLENGE

Common App's Next Chapter is grounded in a simple but ambitious goal:

to close the income gap in college access by evening the proportion of applicants from below-median and above-median income communities.

We set our baseline for our moonshot goal during the 2022–2023 academic year, where:

30% of Common App applicants lived in ZIP codes below the median household income (\$70,000), while **70%** lived in areas above it.

To close the gap, these proportions must move toward 50% each.



Applicants from
above-median ZIP codes

71% 70% 69% 68%

GOAL

21-22

22-23

23-24

24-25

29%

30%

31%

32%

Applicants from
below-median ZIP codes

TRACKING OUR PROGRESS

During the 2024–2025 application season, Common App **continued to see steady movement toward this goal.**

Key indicators show:

- **Continued growth** in applicants from below-median income ZIP codes
- **Sustained year-over-year momentum** since the launch of the Next Chapter
- Evidence that scaled initiatives are beginning to **drive broader reach**

While progress has not accelerated at the pace required to close the gap by 2030, the trajectory remains positive and reinforces **the need to scale effective strategies and continue to innovate.**

In the 2024–2025 application season, we reached **over 471k low- and middle-income students.**



THE OPPORTUNITY

Our unique data shows there is a mountain of opportunity to reach low-income students that **do not create Common App accounts.**

Many of these students aren't aware of the amount of postsecondary options they have, nor the type of economic mobility that postsecondary education can provide. By helping them see that **there is a place for them in higher education** and **they are welcomed on college campuses,** we increase the likelihood of them taking that first step of applying.



FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENTS



INDEPENDENT
STUDENTS









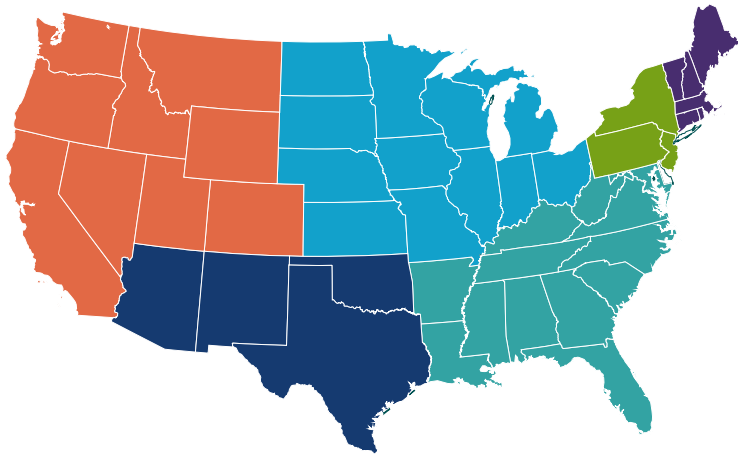
TRANSFER
STUDENTS

BREAKING DOWN OUR PROGRESS

Reaching moonshot students requires a wide range of approaches. Our data shows they are found across several demographics, regions, and educational backgrounds

REGIONS

 Southern 147,728	 Western 38,446
 Midwestern 105,613	 Southwestern 58,928
 Mid-Atlantic 94,533	 New England 26,060



1

FIRST-YEAR

430,265



TRANSFER

41,086

INDEPENDENT STUDENTS

[View report](#)

Military-affiliated
4,786

Older than 22
16,718

Parenting students
8,622



FIRST-GEN

275,565

CONTINUING-GEN

193,553









URM*

249,062

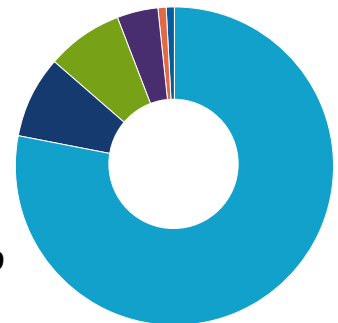
NON URM*

222,289

HIGH SCHOOL TYPE first-year students

-  Public **337,552**
-  Religious **33,951**
-  Charter **34,169**
-  Independent **17,178**
-  Home schooled **3,239**
-  Unknown **4,176**

Title 1 schools: **232,683**



* underrepresented minority race/ethnicity

PROGRESSING TOWARDS OUR MOONSHOT IN 2025

We're encouraged by the progress we've made throughout the first two years of our Next Chapter. But, it is clear that the work we are currently doing, as is, will not be enough to reach our moonshot by 2030. That's why we're continuing to find ways to make the college application process more simple, logical, and joyful, including:

- Expanded direct admissions program
- Expanded scholarship matching partnerships
- New state partnerships to connect more students with Common App
- Expanded membership to community colleges that primarily award associate degrees

While the progress is slow and steady, its existence reflects a possible pathway to continue to strive and eventually reach our moonshot. The Next Chapter is not a single initiative—it is an ongoing commitment. And while the moonshot remains ambitious, **this year's data affirms that progress is possible when innovation, partnership, and purpose align.**



In our upcoming **Innovations Guide**, we'll provide more updates on the progress of our key initiatives, and we'll also highlight promising pilots and practices happening at our member institutions, in high schools, and by partner organizations that help all students connect to postsecondary opportunities.