

# Arkansas

## College Affordability Profile

The Southern Regional Education Board convened a Commission on College Affordability in the South and published a report in 2016 emphasizing that affordability is a critical factor in both access to and completion of postsecondary education. In this year's SREB College Affordability Profiles, SREB examined data for the 2021-22 academic year, the most recent year that student financial aid and net price data are available. The data shows both positive and challenging aspects of college affordability in Arkansas. While the state faces affordability hurdles at its public four-year institutions, the two-year institutions appear to be more accessible for students with stronger state support.

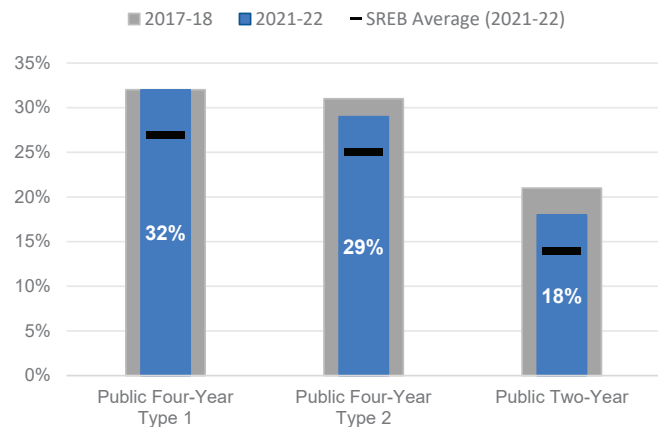
### Family Income Needed for Net Price at Public Institutions

In 2021-22, the percentage of family income required to pay for full-time students at public institutions in Arkansas was lower than 2017-18 for public four-year Type 2 and two-year institutions.

In 2021-22, families in Arkansas needed, on average, 32% of their income to cover educational expenses for a full-time student at four-year Type 1 institutions and 29% at four-year Type 2 institutions. For two-year institutions, the average was 18% of family income.

The 14-percentage point gap between four-year Type 1 and two-year institutions indicates variation in affordability across institution types.

While showing some improvements, all institution types require higher percentages of family income than SREB averages.



U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Files 2018 and 2022. American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples 2018 and 2022. Institutional sectors based on SREB-State Data Exchange categories.

#### Key terms:

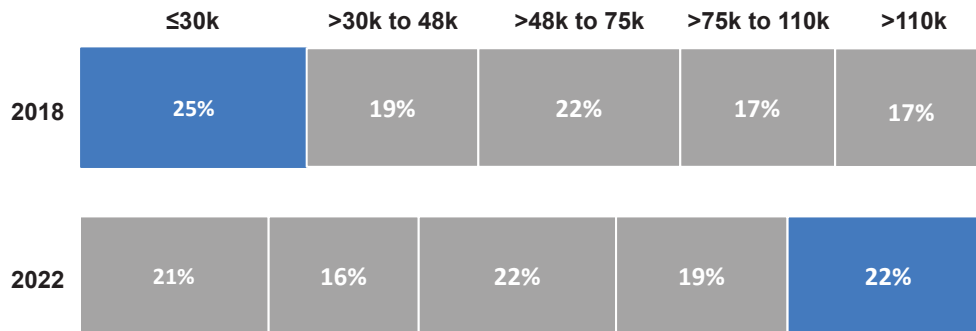
**Four-Year Institution Type 1:** Four-year institutions that awarded at least 30 doctoral degrees in five different areas.

**Four-Year Institution Type 2:** All other four-year institutions.

**Net Price:** Total cost of attendance (includes tuition, fees, room and board, and more) minus federal, state and local government, or institutional grant and scholarship aid.

## Distribution of Average Family Income

A more balanced income distribution in 2018 shifted toward a greater concentration in the highest income group in Arkansas. However, the 1-percentage point gap between highest and lowest income groups in 2022 indicates a relatively balanced distribution compared to other SREB states.



Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022.

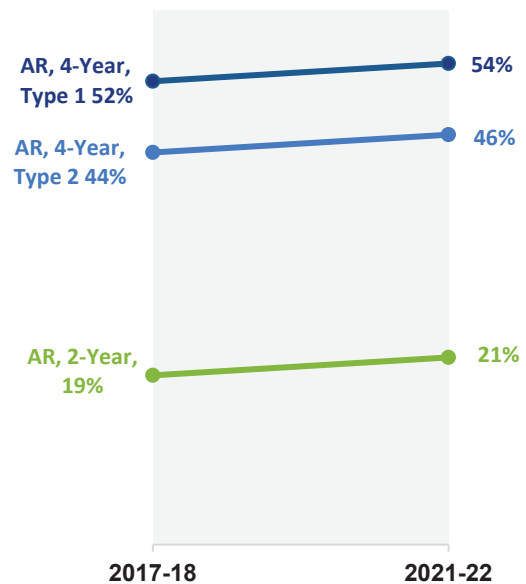
## Income Required for Median Tuition and Fees at Public Colleges for Families Making Less Than \$30,000

The percentage of income required for median tuition and fees increased across all institution types for Arkansas families making less than \$30,000.

In 2021-22, families earning less than \$30,000 needed 54% of their income to cover median tuition and fees at four-year Type 1 institutions and 46% at Type 2 institutions. For two-year institutions, the percentage was lower, with families requiring 21% of their income to cover the median tuition and fees.

The 33-percentage point gap between four-year Type 1 and two-year institutions indicates disparities in accessibility.

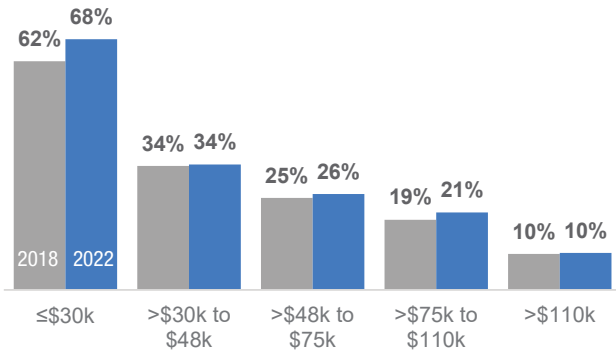
While two-year institutions remain relatively affordable, the universal increase in required income percentages suggests growing affordability challenges for families making less than \$30,000.



U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Charges Data Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Data Files 2018 and 2022. American Community Survey Public Use Micro Sample Files 2018 and 2022.

## Public Four-Year Type 1 Institutions

Arkansas families in the lowest income category were the most affected by the increase in net price at four-year Type 1 institutions.



U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Files 2018 and 2022. American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples, 2018 and 2022. Institutional types based on SREB-State Data Exchange categories.

In 2022, families making less than \$30,000 needed 68% of their income to cover educational expenses, while those earning over \$110,000 required just 10%.

The 58-percentage point gap between highest and lowest income groups in 2022 indicates inequity in affordability.

The data reveals a decline in affordability from 2018 to 2022, with the lowest-income families experiencing the most significant increase in the percentage of income required.

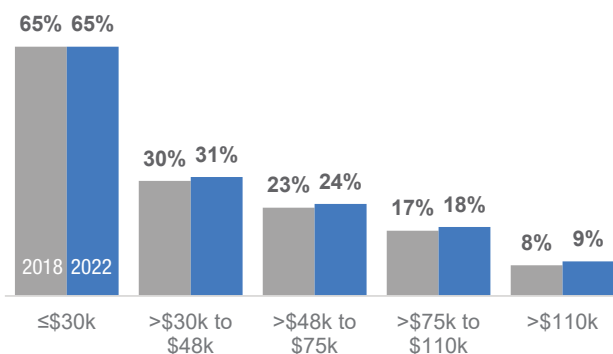
## Net Price as a Percentage of Income for Public Four-Year Type 2 Institutions

The percentage income that Arkansas families needed to pay for educational expenses at four-year Type 2 institutions remained stable from 2018 to 2022.

In 2022, families making less than \$30,000 needed 65% of their income to pay educational expenses, while those earning over \$110,000 required just 9%.

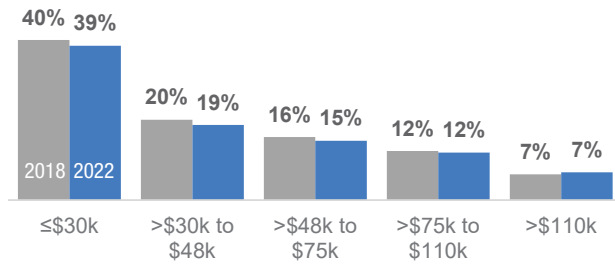
The 56-percentage point gap between highest and lowest income groups in 2022 indicates severe inequity in affordability.

As the changes are minimal, the pattern shows persistent inequities with a particularly high burden on lowest income families.



U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Files 2018 and 2022. American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples, 2018 and 2022. Institutional types based on SREB-State Data Exchange categories.

The percentage of income that Arkansas families needed to pay for educational expenses at two-year institutions decreased slightly or remained stable from 2018 to 2022.



U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2018 and 2022, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Files 2018 and 2022. American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples, 2018 and 2022. Institutional types based on SREB-State Data Exchange categories.

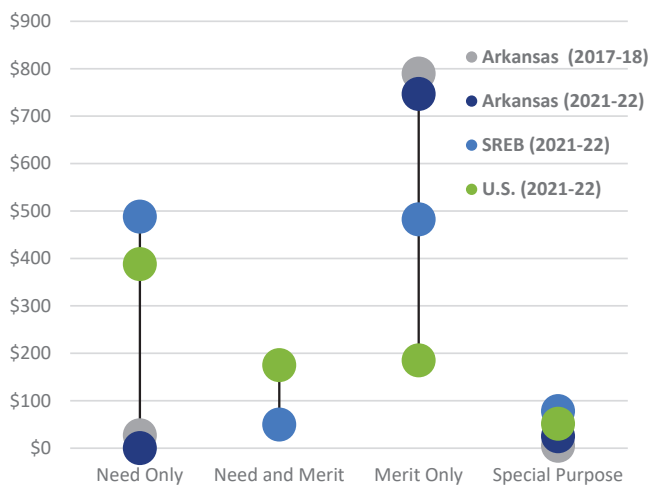
Two-year institutions in Arkansas provide more affordable options, for economically disadvantaged students and families. However, challenges around college affordability persist, particularly for the lowest income groups.

The 32-percentage point gap between highest and lowest income groups in 2022 indicates inequity in affordability, though less severe than four-year institutions.

# State Financial Aid Per Student

Arkansas awarded more merit-based aid in 2021-22 per full-time-equivalent student than the SREB and national averages. Special purpose-aid increased from 2021-22 to 2017-18.

	Need Only	Need and Merit	Merit Only	Special Purpose
Arkansas (2017-18)	\$27	NA	\$790	\$5
Arkansas (2021-22)	\$0	NA	\$747	\$25
SREB (2021-22)	\$488	\$50	\$483	\$78
U.S. (2021-22)	\$388	\$175	\$185	\$51



Arkansas shows a strong emphasis on merit-only aid, with amounts significantly above both regional and national averages.

The pattern suggests a clear policy focus on academic achievement rather than financial need in aid distribution, though total aid amounts have decreased slightly over the period.

National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs 2018 and 2022 annual survey (results for public institutions only). U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Instructional Activity File, 2018 and 2022, and Directory File, 2018 and 2022.

## Student Borrowing at Public Institutions

In 2020-21, Arkansas graduates borrowed less than the SREB and national average to earn degrees at four-year Type 2 and two-year institutions.

	Arkansas 2015-16	Arkansas 2020-21	SREB Average 2020-21	U.S. Average 2020-21
Four-Year Type 1	\$20,625	\$21,750	\$20,710	\$20,550
Four-Year Type 2	\$18,543	\$20,315	\$21,912	\$20,758
Two-Year	\$8,298	\$9,180	\$10,088	\$10,653

U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2016-17 and 2021-22. U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Data Files 2018 and 2022 and Directory Files 2018 and 2022.

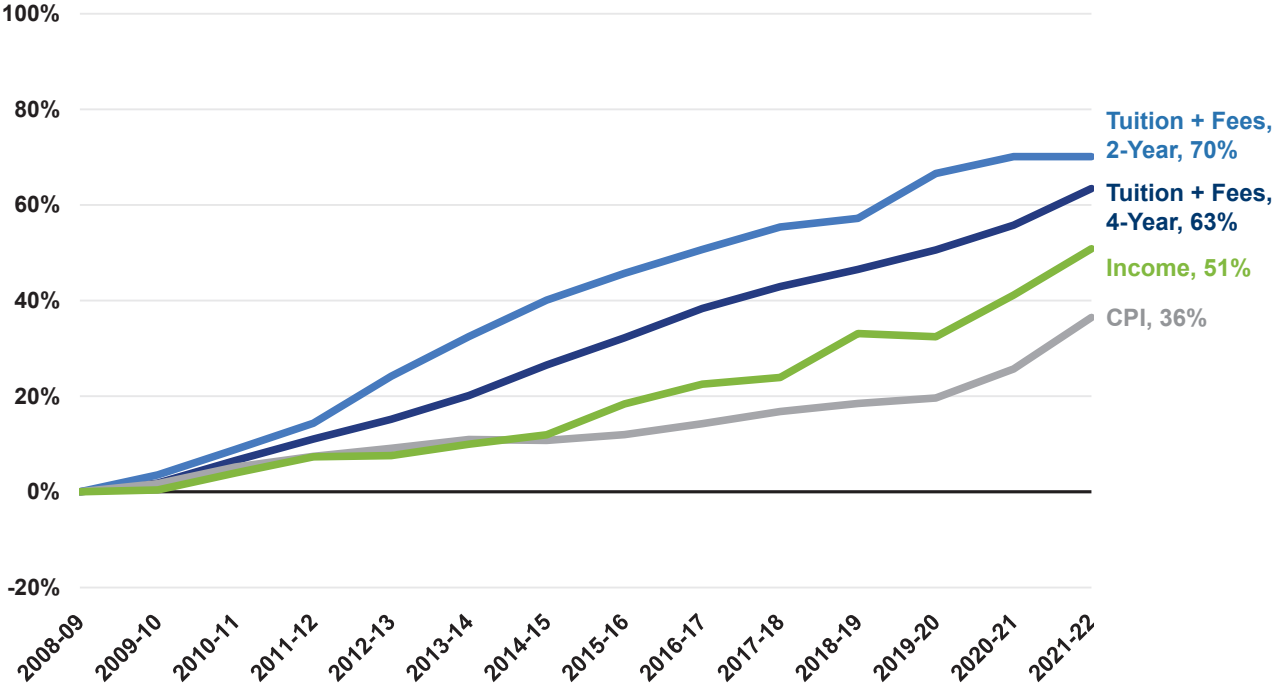
Graduates who sought a degree or certificate from four-year Type 1 universities in Arkansas in 2020-21 borrowed, on average, \$21,750 and graduates of four-year Type 2 institutions borrowed \$20,315. These amounts were higher than the average amounts borrowed in 2015-16, but lower than the national average in 2020-21.

Students at public two-year colleges borrowed, on average, \$9,180 in 2020-21, less than the average amount of SREB and national averages in 2020-21. The consistent increases across all institution types suggest growing affordability challenges, though two-year institutions remain the most affordable option with the lowest borrowing amounts.

# Changes in Tuition and Fees, CPI and Family Income

A moderate gap is evident in Arkansas between 2008-09 and 2021-22, reflecting more gradual and steady increases in tuition and fees, family income, and the Consumer Price Index.

Growth rates of tuition and fees at four-year and two-year institutions are relatively close, with only a 6-percentage point difference. The data indicate declining college affordability in Arkansas, though the increases are more moderate and tuition growth is more closely aligned with income growth compared to other SREB states.

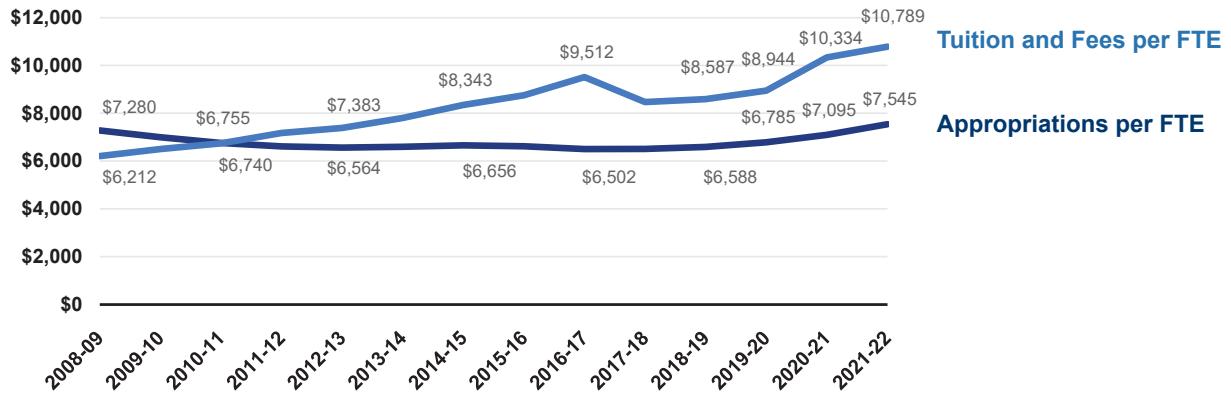


Consumer Price Index retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: Bureau of Labor Statistics, South urban area, 2021. Tuition and fees retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Institutional Characteristics Files, 2008 to 2021. Median family income retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B19113, 2023.

## Dollars per FTE Student from State Appropriations and Tuition and Fees

Operational funds consisted mostly of tuition and fees for Arkansas's public four-year institutions in 2021-22.

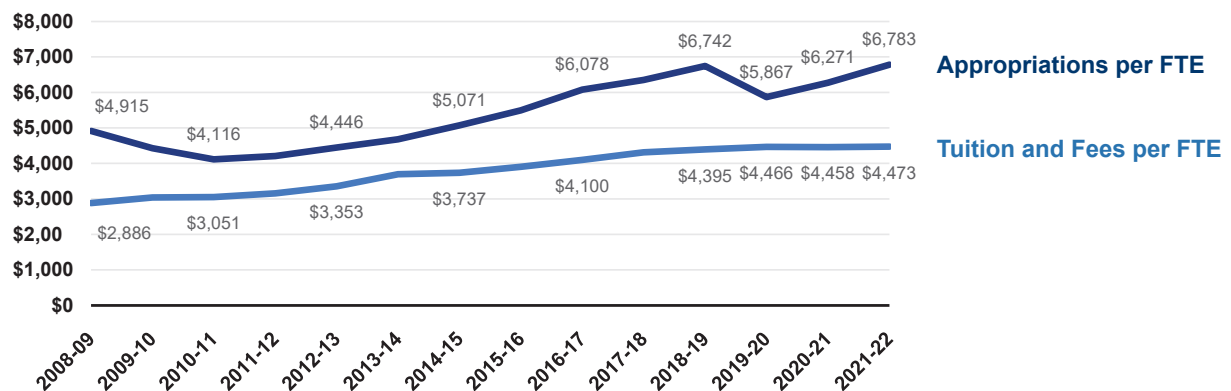
While tuition and fees increased by about 74% since 2008-09, state appropriations showed minimal growth of about 3.6%. By 2021-22, tuition and fees exceeded state appropriations by \$3,244, indicating a shift towards greater reliance on student-paid tuition rather than state support for funding four-year institutions in Arkansas.



Source: SREB-State Data Exchange

Operational funds consisted mostly of state and local appropriations for Arkansas's public two-year institutions in 2021-22.

Arkansas saw growth in both funding sources for two-year institutions, with state appropriations showing particularly strong growth. By 2021-22, appropriations significantly exceeded tuition by \$2,310, indicating strong state support for two-year institutions.



Source: SREB-State Data Exchange



## Arkansas Fast Facts

**Postsecondary Enrollment:** According to 2018 fall enrollment, 28% of students in Arkansas were enrolled in public four-year Type 1 institutions, 38% were enrolled at public four-year Type 2 institutions and over 34% were enrolled in public two-year colleges.

**FAFSA:** As of July 5, 2024, Arkansas' high school class of 2024 had a FAFSA completion rate of 46%, a 13% decrease from the rate on the same date in 2023.

**Federal Student Aid:** In 2021-22, 22% of students receiving any form of federal student aid were awarded Pell Grants, while 35% received federal student loans.

**Education Attainment:** In 2022, 46.2% of Arkansas's working adult population (ages 25 to 64) held a postsecondary credential, placing the state 8.1 percentage points below the national average of 54.3%. This figure includes short-term credentials, which account for 11% of Arkansas's credential attainment rate, including certificates and industry-recognized certifications.

**Workforce Needs:** By 2031, 59% of jobs in Arkansas will require a postsecondary credential. Arkansas ranks 50th among states in the percentage of jobs projected to require such credentials.

Sources: Postsecondary Enrollment: U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems, 2022.

FAFSA: FAFSA Tracker – National, Retrieved November 2024. <https://national.fafsatracker.com/schoolView/4>.

Federal Student Aid: SREB analysis of National Center for Education Statistics student financial aid database, 2021-22.

Educational attainment: Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Nation, Retrieved November 2024. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/#/progress/state/AR>.

Workforce Needs: Georgetown University, After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031, Retrieved November 2024. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/projections2031/>.

## Arkansas Institutions by Type

### Public Four-Year Type 1

University of Arkansas

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

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### Public Four-Year Type 2

Arkansas State University

University of Arkansas at Monticello

Arkansas Tech University

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Henderson State University

University of Arkansas-Fort Smith

Southern Arkansas University Main Campus

University of Central Arkansas

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### Public Two-Year

Arkansas Northeastern College

Black River Technical College

Arkansas State University Mid-South

Cossatot Community College of the University  
of Arkansas

Arkansas State University Three Rivers

East Arkansas Community College

Arkansas State University Beebe

National Park College

Arkansas State University Mountain Home

North Arkansas College

Arkansas State University Newport

# Arkansas Institutions by Type

## Public Two-Year (continued)

NorthWest Arkansas Community College  
Ozarka College  
Phillips Community College of the University  
of Arkansas  
South Arkansas Community College  
Southeast Arkansas College  
Southern Arkansas University Tech  
University of Arkansas Community College  
Rich Mountain

University of Arkansas Community  
College Batesville  
University of Arkansas Community  
College Morrilton  
University of Arkansas Community  
College Hope-Texarkana  
University of Arkansas-Pulaski  
Technical College

## Notes

**Type 1** four-year institutions award at least 30 doctoral degrees in five different areas. **Type 2** includes all other four-year institutions. The **public two-year category** includes institutions that primarily award associate degrees; the list may include two-year institutions that award bachelor's degrees. The **technical college category** includes postsecondary institutions that offer programs of less than two-years duration below the baccalaureate level and occupational and vocational schools with programs that do not exceed 1800 contact hours. This profile does not report data for the technical college category if less than 3% of students are enrolled in this sector.

Institutions are listed as they were categorized in the 2021-22 Data Exchange Survey and if they submitted the data required for this profile.

This profile is based on data reported to IPEDS by institutions during the 2021-22 academic year. Some IPEDS surveys collect data for the prior academic year; for instance, the 2022-23 Student Financial Aid survey collected data for the 2021-22 academic year.

Institutions or states may have updated data previously reported, or adjusted methodology to calculate a statistic. As a result, some data in the current profile may differ from data reported in past Affordability Profiles for the same time period.

See the technical guide at <https://www.sreb.org/state-affordability-profiles> for detailed sources and explanatory notes.

*SREB College Affordability Profiles detail data and trends specific to each SREB state to assist policy-makers with decisions on postsecondary affordability and attainment. For additional resources, including recommendations of the Commission on College Affordability in the South and the SREB Fact Book on Higher Education, visit [SREB.org/Affordability](https://www.sreb.org/Affordability).*