

Enrollment declining for low-income and Black college and university students in Michigan

Michigan Radio | By Toussaint Fancher

Published July 20, 2023 at 10:24 PM EDT



Adobe Stock / 230086131

Michigan colleges and universities have seen a decline in enrollment among low-income and Black students.

The number of Black students that enrolled in higher education in Michigan decreased by about 40% from 2012 to 2022, and enrollment of low-income students fell by close to 30% over that time, according to data from Michigan Independent Colleges and Universities.

The pandemic is one of the many reasons that low-income and Black students either didn't enroll or dropped out of colleges and universities across Michigan, said Lindsay Huddleston II, policy and program associate with the group Michigan's Children.

"What we have to look at post-pandemic is the things that were taking place pre-pandemic, and at the time, a lot of young inner-city kids, particularly African American and brown kids, were struggling in the education system," he said. "It's just really been, I would argue, to some degree, an archaic system that

does not really reflect many of their progressive needs.”

Huddleston said the pandemic created problems for many students, especially those from populations that were already underrepresented at colleges and universities, which contributed to the dropout rates. For example, students may have left school to return home and help their families.

Huddleston said another reason enrollment is dropping among low-income and Black students is misperceptions about cost.

Low-income students may decide early in life that they aren't going to attend college because of their family's finances.

This is the wrong decision, said Michele Strasz, the executive director of the Capital Area College Access Network. “The biggest deterrent is them not understanding their options.”

Strasz said there are many options and opportunities for students to fund their higher education, such as government grants, affordable loans, or work-study programs.

Ryan Fewins-Bliss, executive director of the statewide College Access Network, said with the right financing, higher education pays off. He said high school teachers and counselors should better prepare students for financing their education.

“We should stop giving students bad advice,” Fewins-Bliss said. “We should be honest about the power of

education. It is one of if not the best indicators for long term success for the population at large.”