NORTH DAKOTA
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

ACCESS. INNOVATION. EXCELLENCE.

2026 Annual Scholarship Report
North Dakota
Academic
Career & Technical Education

September 1, 2026

600 E Boulevard Department 215
Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0230
Website: www.ndus.edu

Table of Contents

REPORT SUMMARY	**1**
PROGRAM OVERVIEW	**2**
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION	**2**
DISBURSEMENT REQUIREMENTS	**2**
ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS	**4**
ELIGIBLE STUDENTS	**5**
DISBURSEMENTS	**6**
APPROPRIATIONS	**7**
SCHOLARSHIP DISTRIBUTION	**7**
STUDENT RETENTION	**8**

Report prepared by
Brenda Zastoupil, NDUS Financial Aid Director

Report Summary

The Academic Scholarship, Career and Technical Education (CTE) Scholarship, and the North Dakota Scholarship are state merit-based awards aimed at increasing high school rigor and retaining students within North Dakota for postsecondary education. High school students can receive up to $6,000 by completing specific high school curriculum and fulfilling grade point average, and test score requirements. This annual report provides detailed information about these scholarships since inception.

- A total of 28,911 students qualified for the state scholarship. [Table 2]
- Twenty-one percent of seniors have qualified since inception. More recently, twenty-three percent of seniors have qualified for the scholarship since 2021-22. [Table 2]
- North Dakota resident students have received $99.7 million in scholarship disbursements. [Chart 2]
- Since inception, 24,223 (84%) of students have received at least one payment under the scholarship. This equates to an average of $4,117 per student.
- The average amount disbursed for the first seven cohorts was $6.1 million. The subsequent seven cohorts' disbursements averaged $7.2 million, with three of those years still receiving payment. [Chart 2]
- Of the 28,911 eligible students,
  - 8,671 (30%) still have remaining scholarship eligibility;
  - 9,000 (31%) have been paid in full at $6,000;
  - 11,240 (39%) have lost scholarship eligibility due to not maintaining a 2.75 GPA or not fully utilizing the award within 6 years of high school graduation. [Chart 1]
- Disbursements in the 2025-27 biennium are expected to be $15.2 million, which is a 2% increase from the prior biennium. The 2023-25 biennium saw the first decline in total payments since inception. [Table 3]
- Since inception, $110.8 million has been appropriated to this scholarship program, which includes a $2.5 million transfer from the ND State Grant to cover a shortfall in the 2019-21 biennium. [Table 3]
- Scholarship recipients are retained in North Dakota at a higher rate than non-scholarship recipients following high school graduation. [Chart 4 and Table 4]

Program Overview

The Academic and Career & Technical Education (CTE) Scholarships have been awarded to North Dakota high school graduates since the 2010-11 academic year. Beginning with the 2022 high school graduates, the North Dakota Scholarship, which is closely aligned to Choice Ready, was also awarded. Beginning with the 2025 high school graduates, only the North Dakota Scholarship eligibility criteria will be used to determine eligibility for the award. Current Academic and CTE scholarship recipients will continue to be eligible for payment until 2030 when the last cohort reaches 6 years after high school graduation. The scholarships are designed to increase high school rigor and retain students within North Dakota for postsecondary education. Specific high school curriculum, grade point average, and testing score requirements are required to earn these merit-based scholarships. The program is authorized in N.D.C.C. §§ 15.1-21-02.4 through 15.1-21-02.10.

Students who meet the requirements and who apply with the ND Department of Public Instruction are awarded a $6,000 scholarship. Awards may not exceed $750 per semester, $500 per quarter or clock-hour term, or $500 per apprenticeship term. Beginning in the 2023-24 academic year, students enrolled in a qualifying apprenticeship program within North Dakota are eligible for payment of the scholarship for a qualifying registered apprenticeship program in North Dakota. Recipients have up to 6 years following high school graduation to fully use the scholarship at a qualifying North Dakota institution. The scholarship may also be used for graduate or professional studies and summer terms, provided all eligibility criteria are met.

Program Administration

This program is jointly administered by the ND Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the North Dakota University System (NDUS). Through the Administration and Data Sharing Agreement, the agencies define their respective roles.

- DPI is responsible for the application process, including promotion and advertising, guidance for counselors and applicants, application creation, collection, verification, and verification of graduation requirements. DPI makes the initial awards to eligible students and notifies them of their scholarship award.
- NDUS is responsible for postsecondary activities including student payment and eligibility monitoring, communications, notification of student eligibility to institutions, verification of eligibility prior to disbursement, payments to institutions, tracking student transfers, verifying eligibility requirements for renewal purposes, and maintaining fiscal files and reporting.

Disbursement Requirements

To qualify for a disbursement under the scholarship program, students must meet the following requirements:

1. Enroll full time at a qualifying institution of higher learning within North Dakota.
    - Full-time enrollment for the purpose of the scholarship has the same meaning as is defined by the institution for financial aid purposes.
    - Students who still have scholarship eligibility and who do not require full-time credits or hours to graduate may request a special exemption to waive the requirement. This exception only applies to the student's final term prior to graduation and may only apply once over the lifetime of the scholarship. Students must request this override from the NDUS financial aid office.
    - For qualifying apprenticeship programs, the apprenticeship sponsor verifies that the student is participating full time in their apprenticeship program and acts in the same capacity as an "institution."

2. Maintain a 2.75 minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA), or equivalent.
    - Students must maintain a minimum GPA, or its equivalent, for renewal of the scholarship.
    - GPA is monitored following each term in which scholarship is disbursed for a student. If a student's GPA, or equivalent, falls below 2.75, the student may receive future payments, however, if the student fails to meet the GPA requirement for a second time, scholarship eligibility is permanently suspended.
    - For programs that grade on a percentage basis, the minimum is 68.7% to meet the 2.75 minimum. For programs that grade on a pass/fail basis, "pass" equates to 2.75 and "fail" equates to 0.00.

3. Maintain program completion progress.
    - To qualify for a subsequent payment, students must establish their program completion progress by earning a minimum number of credits or hours.
    - Tracking earned credits or hours, rather than simply measuring current enrollment provides more assurance that students who receive payment under the scholarship are on track for timely completion, and rewards students for completion rather than simply for enrollment. Tracking progress in this manner also provides flexibility in how and when students earn their credits or hours, such as dual credit in high school, summer coursework, and terms where enrollment exceeds the minimum requirement. Students who do not meet the progress requirements do not lose scholarship eligibility, but rather, must wait for the next payment until the minimum number of earned credits or hours has been attained. Equitable semester-based, quarter-based, clock-hour based, and apprenticeship term guidelines have been established to track degree progress. Note that for payments one and two, students must simply enroll "full-time" and have earned at least 24 cumulative credits by the end of the second term of payment to meet program completion criteria.

Program Completion Criteria				
Table 1 **Pmt #**	**Semester Hours Programs**	**Quarter Hour Programs**	**Clock-Hour Programs**	**Apprenticeship Programs**
1 & 2	Enroll Full-Time			
3	24	24	900	1,000
4	39	39	1,462.5	1,500
5	54	54	2,025	2,000
6	69	69	2,587.5	2,500
7	84	84	3,150	3,000
8+	99	99	3,712.5	3,500

Eligible Institutions

Students may use the scholarship at the following institutions within North Dakota. Qualifying institutions must be accredited, with the exception of apprenticeship programs. The 2023 Legislative Assembly provided the opportunity for students to utilize the award for a registered apprenticeship program in the state. A qualifying apprenticeship program is one that is registered with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeships in North Dakota.

STATE RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

North Dakota State University

University of North Dakota

STATE FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITIES

Dickinson State University

Mayville State University

Minot State University

Valley City State University

TWO-YEAR STATE COLLEGES

Bismarck State College

Dakota College at Bottineau

Lake Region State College

ND State College of Science

Williston State College

PRIVATE COLLEGES

Rasmussen University (Fargo location)

Trinity Bible College

University of Jamestown

University of Mary

TRIBAL COLLEGES

Cankdeska Cikana Community College

Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College

Sitting Bull College

Turtle Mountain Community College

United Tribes Technical College

ACCREDITED CAREER & TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

Josef's School of Hair, Skin & Body (Fargo & Grand Forks)

Lynnes Welding Training (Fargo & Bismarck)

The Salon Professional Academy (Fargo)

The Hair Academy (Bismarck)

Spectrum School of Massage & Esthetics (Minot & Bismarck)

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS IN THE STATE

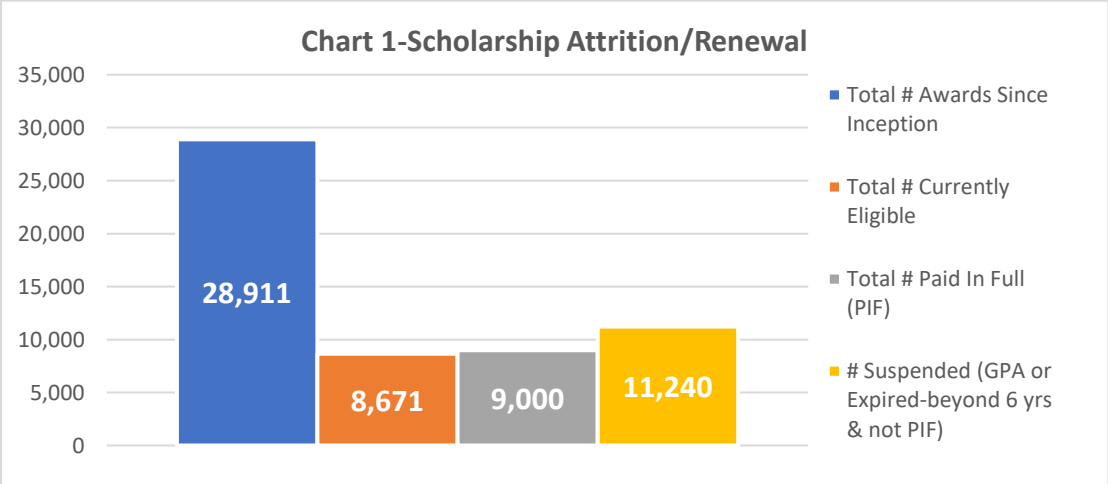
- Multiple programs exist.

Eligible Students

A total of 28,911 students, or 21% of high school seniors, have qualified for one of the scholarships since inception. More recently, the rate is 23%. DPI is still reviewing applications for the 2026-27 cohort as of this report date.

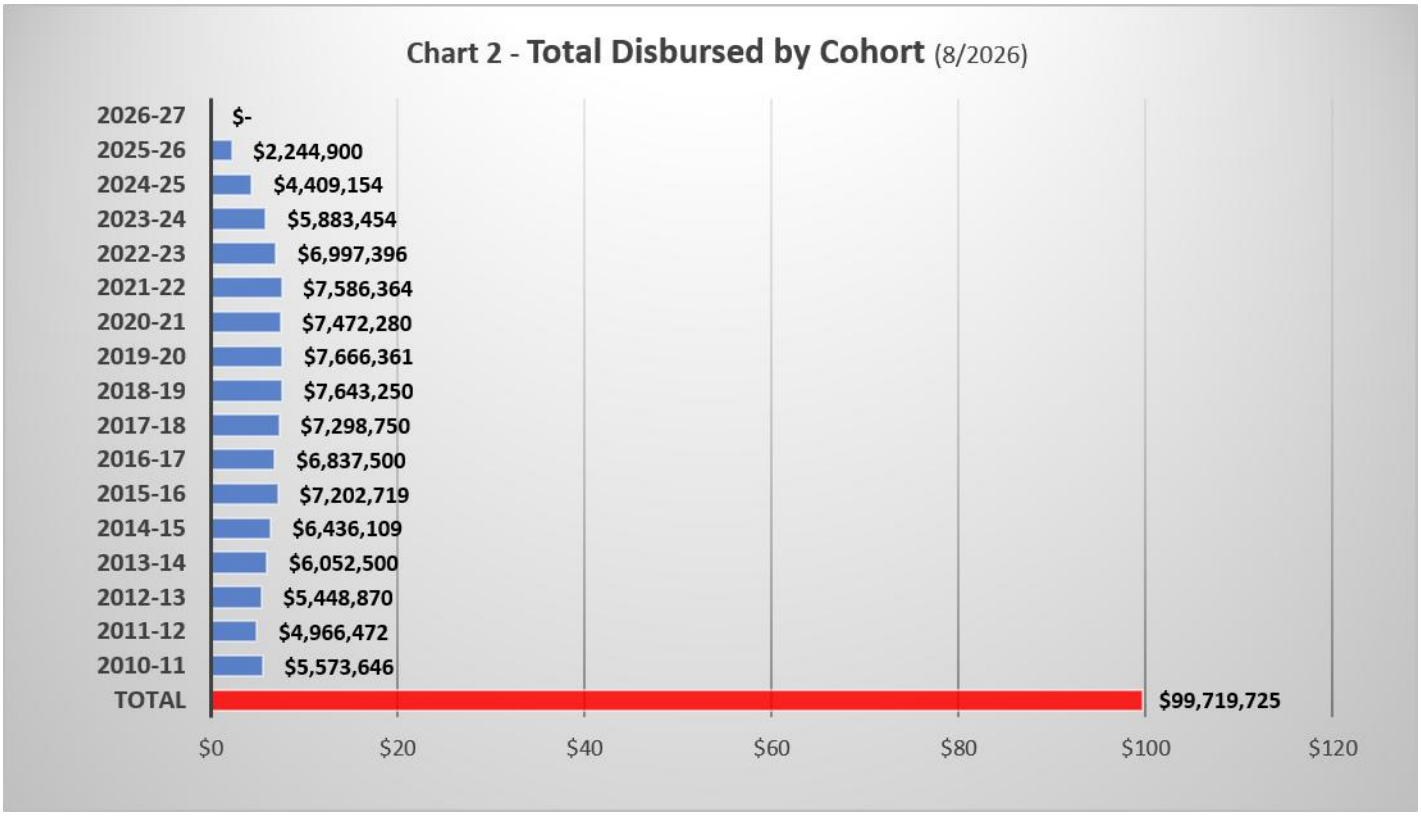
Table 2 - ND High School Seniors Meeting the Scholarship Requirements				
Cohort	**# Seniors**	**# Eligible**	**% Seniors Eligible**	
2026-27 est.	**8,801**	**1,793**	***20%***	**23%**
2025-26	8,749	1,761	*20%*	
2024-25	8,381	1,872	*22%*	
2023-24	8,205	1,793	*22%*	
2022-23	8,093	1,784	*22%*	
2021-22	8,081	1,918	*24%*	
2020-21	7,874	1,867	*24%*	
2019-20	7,962	1,882	*24%*	
2018-19	7,723	1,866	*24%*	
2017-18	7,752	1,785	*23%*	
2016-17	7,856	1,670	*21%*	
2015-16	7,839	1,724	*22%*	
2014-15	7,768	1,557	*20%*	
2013-14	8,398	1,499	*18%*	
2012-13	7,994	1,350	*17%*	
2011-12	8,674	1,201	*14%*	
2010-11	7,677	1,589	*21%*	
TOTAL	**137,827**	**28,911**	***21%***	

Of the eligible students, the NDUS is currently monitoring 8,671 for ongoing eligibility, 9,000 have been paid in full, and 11,240 no longer qualify for the scholarship. Students can lose eligibility due to not meeting GPA requirements for two terms or if the scholarship is not fully utilized within six years of high school graduation.



Disbursements

As of this report date, a total of $99.7 million in scholarship payments have been made in this program. Since the program began, 84% of eligible students—24,223 individuals—have received at least one scholarship payment, with an average award of $4,117 per recipient. Program participation has steadily increased over time. The first seven student cohorts received an average of $6.1 million in total disbursements, while the next seven cohorts averaged $7.2 million. Because students in three of the latter cohorts remain eligible for funding, total disbursements for those cohorts are expected to increase further. Scholarship utilization has remained high, although it has declined slightly over time. Approximately 91% of students in the first seven cohorts received scholarship funding, compared with 89% in the subsequent seven cohorts. This pattern may indicate that, while a slightly smaller share of students is accessing the scholarship, recipients are using it across more enrollment periods. As a result, overall program costs continue to rise.



Appropriations

The 2025 Legislative Assembly appropriated $17.2M to cover expenses in the 2025-27 biennium. Statute does not allow for a reduction of the payment amount if appropriations are exhausted.

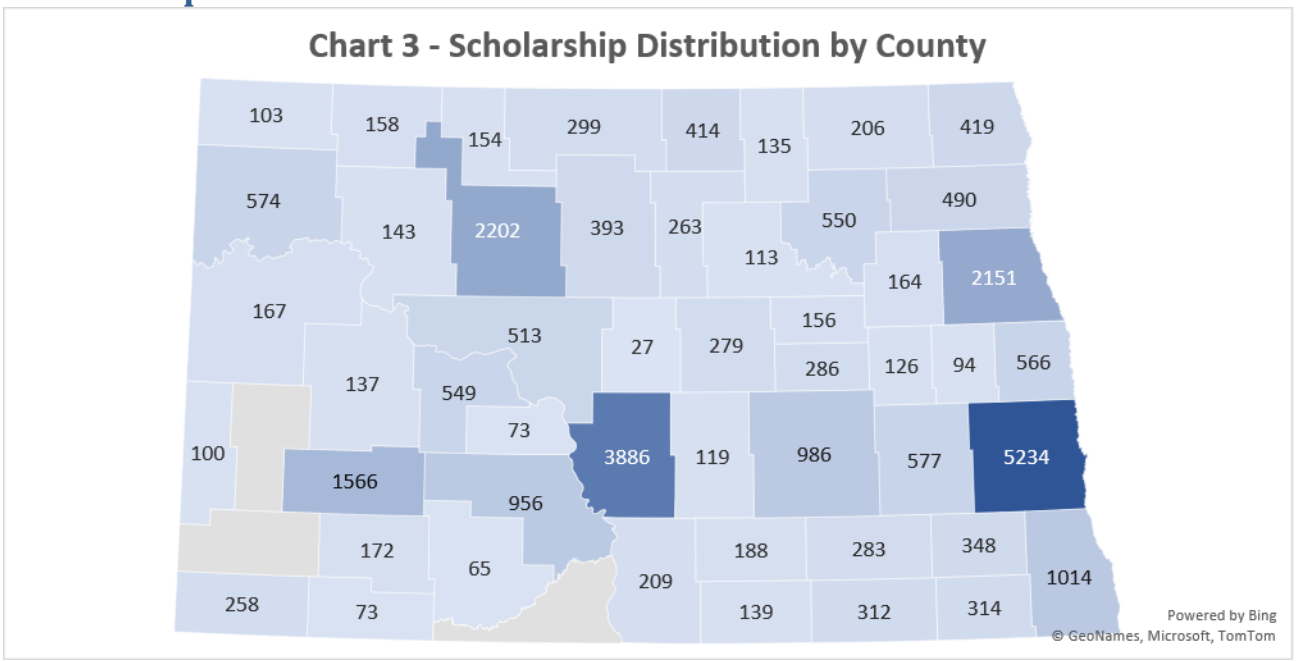
Payment amounts are:

- $750 per semester
- $500 per quarter
- $500 per clock-hour term
- $500 per apprentice term

In the 2019-21 biennium, a shortfall required a transfer of $2.5 million from the need-based ND State Grant to this scholarship program to cover expenditures. The following table shows the increasing disbursements through the years, with the exception of the 2023-25 biennium. The 2023-25 biennium saw a 2% decline in total payments, which is the first time that this occurred since inception of the program. Payments in the 2025-27 biennium are estimated to be $15.2 million, which is a 2.2% increase from the prior biennium.

Table 3	Biennial Scholarship Appropriation and Disbursements (in millions)								
	2009-11	2011-13	2013-15	2015-17	2017-19	2019-21	2021-23	2023-25	2025-27
Appropriation (post-allotment)	$3.00	$10.00	$10.00	$13.13	$12.02	$12.02	$16.22	$17.22	$17.22
Fund Transfer to Cover Shortfall	-	-	-	-	-	$2.50	-	-	-
$ Disbursed	$1.87	$6.97	$11.19	$12.68	$14.70	$14.84	$15.20	$14.87	$7.40
% Change in Disbursed	-	-	61%	13%	16%	1%	2%	-2%	

Scholarship Distribution



Distribution of scholarship eligibility remains widespread across the state. Chart 3 illustrates the geographic distribution of scholarship recipients since the program's inception. Eligible students may receive scholarship payments while attending any accredited public, private, or tribal institution with a physical presence in North

Dakota, including accredited career colleges. Additionally, as noted earlier, participants in qualifying registered apprenticeship programs are also eligible to receive scholarship funding.

Chart 3 does not include 214 scholarship recipients who were homeschooled, as county-level information for these students is not collected during the application process. Three counties show no participation. Billings and Slope counties have not had seniors. Sioux County has had seniors, but none have qualified for the scholarship.

Student Retention

ND Information Technology Dept. (NDIT) performed analysis on the retention of scholarship recipients in North Dakota versus non-recipients. Retention was defined by either enrollment in a NDUS institution and/or employment in North Dakota.

The analysis includes students who graduated from high school between 2010 and 2024. Among scholarship recipients who enrolled at an NDUS institution immediately following high school graduation, retention rates ranged from 97.2% to 98.6%, compared to 87.4% for students who did not receive a scholarship. The data shows that access to the state scholarship results in more students staying within North Dakota. The new North Dakota Scholarship recipients have just started to be tracked and therefore have only one year represented in the data below.

The analysis in the following charts is being reported with the permission of NDIT and Job Service North Dakota. Employment data is provided by unemployment insurance data. If any recipients are self-employed at some point following graduation, they will not be reflected in the employment figures.

CHART 4

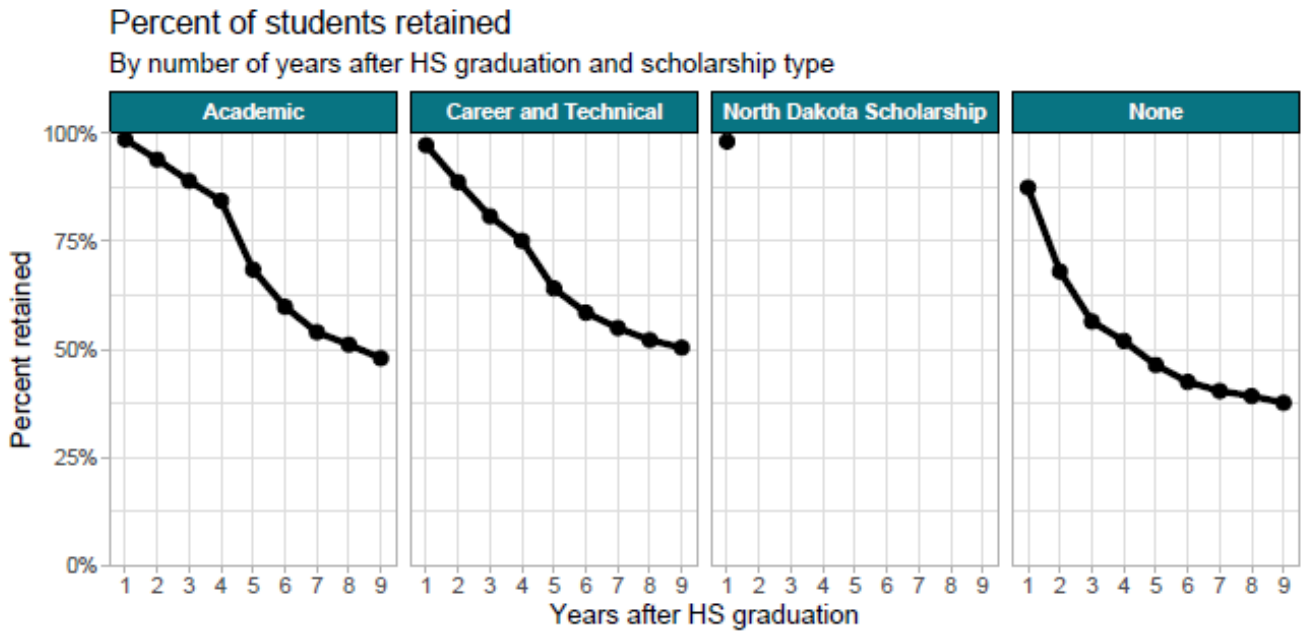


TABLE 4 # Years After Graduation	Academic Scholarship Recipients	CTE Scholarship Recipients	ND Scholarship Recipients	No Scholarship
1	98.6%	97.2%	98.1%	87.4%
2	93.9%	88.7%		68.1%
3	89.0%	80.8%		56.5%
4	84.4%	75.1%		52.0%
5	68.5%	64.1%		46.4%
6	59.9%	58.5%		42.5%
7	54.0%	55.0%		40.4%
8	51.1%	52.2%		39.3%
9	48.0%	50.5%		37.7%

When interpreting Chart 4 and Table 4, it is important to recognize that the number of students included in the analysis decreases as the years since high school graduation increase. This occurs because more recent graduating classes have not yet had sufficient time to reach the later observation periods. For example, a student who graduated six years ago can only be evaluated through the six-year mark and cannot yet be included in ten-year retention measures. As a result, retention rates reported for later years are based on smaller cohorts of students than those reported for earlier years.