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# SUNY's student numbers outshine nationwide trend 1.3% rise in state system eclipses country's 0.2%

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Enrollment ticked up at Stony Brook University and most other SUNY schools on Long Island this fall, with the gains outpacing national trends as a growing number of older students return to classrooms.

The number of students at State University of New York schools increased by 1.3% this fall from a year earlier, according to a report released Wednesday by SUNY. That's higher than the 0.2% growth in total undergraduate and graduate enrollment nationwide over that period, according to preliminary data reported last month by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

This fall, 392,401 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the 64 institutions in the SUNY network, the nation's largest comprehensive public higher education system, SUNY reported.

On Long Island, the student body grew year-over-year by 1.8% at Stony Brook and Farmingdale State College, and 0.2% at SUNY Old Westbury and Nassau Community College. Enrollment dropped by 2.3% at Suffolk County Community College.

Stony Brook had a "record-breaking" class of about 4,140 first-year undergraduates, said Richard Beatty, senior associate provost for enrollment management. The school's business, engineering and health care programs are especially sought after, he said.

"With economic downturns, students are looking for affordable options, and they're seeing Stony Brook and SUNY in general as an affordable, high-caliber, high-quality education," he said.5-year uptickOver the past five years, all SUNY schools on Long Island saw enrollment increases. From 2021 to 2026, enrollment rose by 13.1% at Old Westbury, 10% at Farmingdale, 4.2% at Stony Brook, 9.6% at NCC and 1.5% at SCCC, SUNY reported.

Andy Lockwood, owner of Glen Head-based Lockwood College Prep, said he has seen a rise in students interested in SUNY schools. "Cost is one of the big drivers," especially since new borrowers now face $20,000 annual limits for federal Parent PLUS loans, he said.

It also helps that SUNY schools are rising in college rankings, he said. This year, Stony Brook was ranked 59th among national universities by U.S. News & World Report, up from 91st in 2019.

"The prestige is a nice thing," Lockwood said. SUNY schools, he said, "are not necessarily safety schools for a lot of kids the way they used to be."

The SUNY population gains come even as international student enrollment dropped by 8.7% in the United States and as colleges nationwide face an "enrollment cliff," as the number of graduating high schoolers is falling due to a

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decline in births after 2007.

"The cliff is here. ... We're seeing a lot more competition among all of us," said Bryan Terry, vice president of enrollment management and marketing at SUNY Old Westbury, where he said programs in psychology, education, business and biology are among the most popular. "Students are really doing the due diligence when it comes to shopping around. So it's not just price. It's, 'Hey, listen, are you going to make the commitment to graduate me?' "

At Farmingdale, the global business management program saw a 66% annual increase in enrollment, and civil engineering and health programs also saw gains, according to the school. Growing interest in such programs "underscores the importance of aligning higher education with emerging industry and workforce needs," Sean Lane, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, said in a statement.Community college gains Throughout the SUNY system, the overall annual enrollment gain was slightly higher at community colleges, which saw a 1.4% increase, compared with a 1.1% uptick at schools offering bachelor's and graduate degrees, SUNY reported.

SUNY also saw a jump in the number of students age 25 and up. Older students made up 23% of SUNY's overall enrollment, up from 20.6% in 2023, SUNY reported. The share of older students was slightly higher at community colleges, with those age 25 and up accounting for 23.4% of enrollment, up from 19.1% in 2023, SUNY figures show.

A program launched in 2025, SUNY Reconnect, offers free tuition for two-year degrees in high-demand fields such as health care for students age 25 to 55. Starting in 2027, adults can enroll in SUNY Reconnect even if they have already graduated from college. Previously, most programs were open only to adults without degrees.

At Nassau Community College, the number of Reconnect students has increased from about 200 when the program started to about 500 this semester, with most focusing on health care and business programs, said Jerry Kornbluth, vice president for community and governmental relations.

At Suffolk County Community College, despite the recent decrease, officials "are encouraged by our long-term enrollment growth," Patty Munsch, vice president for student affairs, said in a statement. SUNY Reconnect, she said, "is helping us reach new populations of students who can benefit from free access to high-quality education in areas of high labor market need."

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Affordability and a rise in the rankings of SUNY colleges and universities have led more students to consider the state schools, according to one expert.

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