

# **Regional Education Summary Report March 2025**



**COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION**  

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**of Sarasota County**

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## 2024 Regional Education Summary Report

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County is an organization committed to sharing community indicators and insights to better understand the trends shaping our region. By fostering shared learning, we aim to inspire conversations, collaboration, and solutions that enhance the quality of life, health, and well-being for all.

This report summarizes the educational landscape of our four-county region which includes Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. By analyzing educational data and trends, we can identify achievement gaps across demographic groups, track academic performance, and explore pathways to postsecondary opportunities. These insights support informed decision-making and encourage community engagement. Updated annually, the report highlights key trends and contextual stories. The data shares student outcome measures related to readiness, achievement, and postsecondary attainment, not other education performance measures or standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated ongoing education challenges, including effects on instructional delivery, student engagement, mental health, equity, and staffing. These challenges continue to shape educational outcomes today, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The insights and opportunities shared are suggestions based on data-informed trends. The four-county region benefits from proactive school district initiatives, many nonprofit education support programs and services, community partnerships, local business partnerships, and layers of children/youth and family support that are too numerous to review adequately in this summary. The data reveals trends that can serve as an encouragement to expand, broaden awareness, and invest in those educational supports. Children are the foundation of our future, and investing in their education today ensures a thriving, prosperous region tomorrow. By prioritizing their success, we cultivate a skilled, innovative workforce that drives long-term growth and strengthens our community for generations to come.

### Report Overview

The report is organized into four sections with shared insights and opportunities in each section:

- Demographics: County and student demographics, pre-kindergarten enrollment, K-12 enrollment, free/reduced-price lunch eligibility, and absenteeism.
- Academic Performance: From kindergarten readiness to graduation and dropout rates.
- Postsecondary Attainment: Data on educational pathways after high school.
- Opportunities: Data-driven insights and recommendations.

The report summarizes data collected through traditional methods and shared via the [Community Indicators Dashboard](#), provided by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.



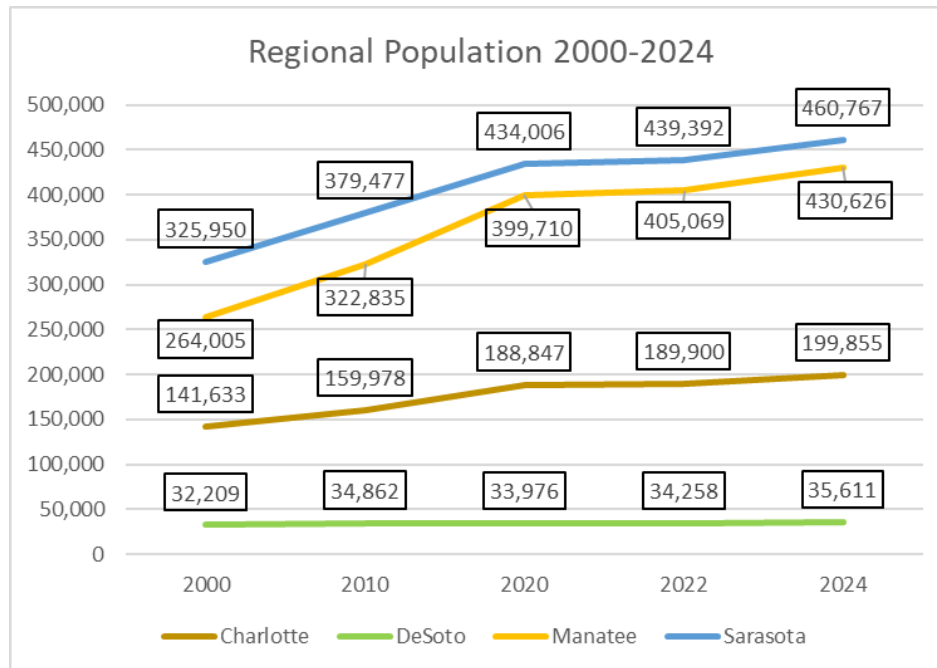
## Demographics

Over the past two decades, Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties in Florida have undergone significant demographic changes. From 2000 to 2024, these counties experienced notable population growth, driven by generational shifts, and increasing racial and ethnic diversity. This data highlights population trends, generational composition, and the growing cultural diversity shaping the region.

As the population grows and diversifies, schools face new challenges in meeting the needs of a multicultural student body. Generational changes bring unique expectations for learning environments, technology use, and career preparation. These trends require educators, policymakers, and communities to ensure equitable resource access, diversify curricula, and to plan infrastructure for a growing population. Understanding these demographic shifts is essential to supporting academic success and postsecondary achievement.

### Population

Between 2000 and 2024 the total regional population grew by approximately 32%. The graph shows population change by county for that period.



Data Source: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

Manatee County has experienced the highest population growth in the region, while DeSoto County has seen the least change. Charlotte County's growth has been steady, and Sarasota County remains the most populous. Current growth is driven by individuals aged 55 and older and those under 27. Tracking population trends can guide decisions on tax revenues, school budgets, and partnership opportunities between nonprofits and educational systems.

Retaining younger populations is essential for a balanced regional demographic, economic, and social vitality. Community development relies on diverse employment opportunities, affordable housing, accessible childcare, and a high quality of life. Changing demographics impact education by increasing demand for early childhood programs, improving student engagement toward achievement, supporting diverse postsecondary pathways, and expanding lifelong learning opportunities. The region benefits from strong community

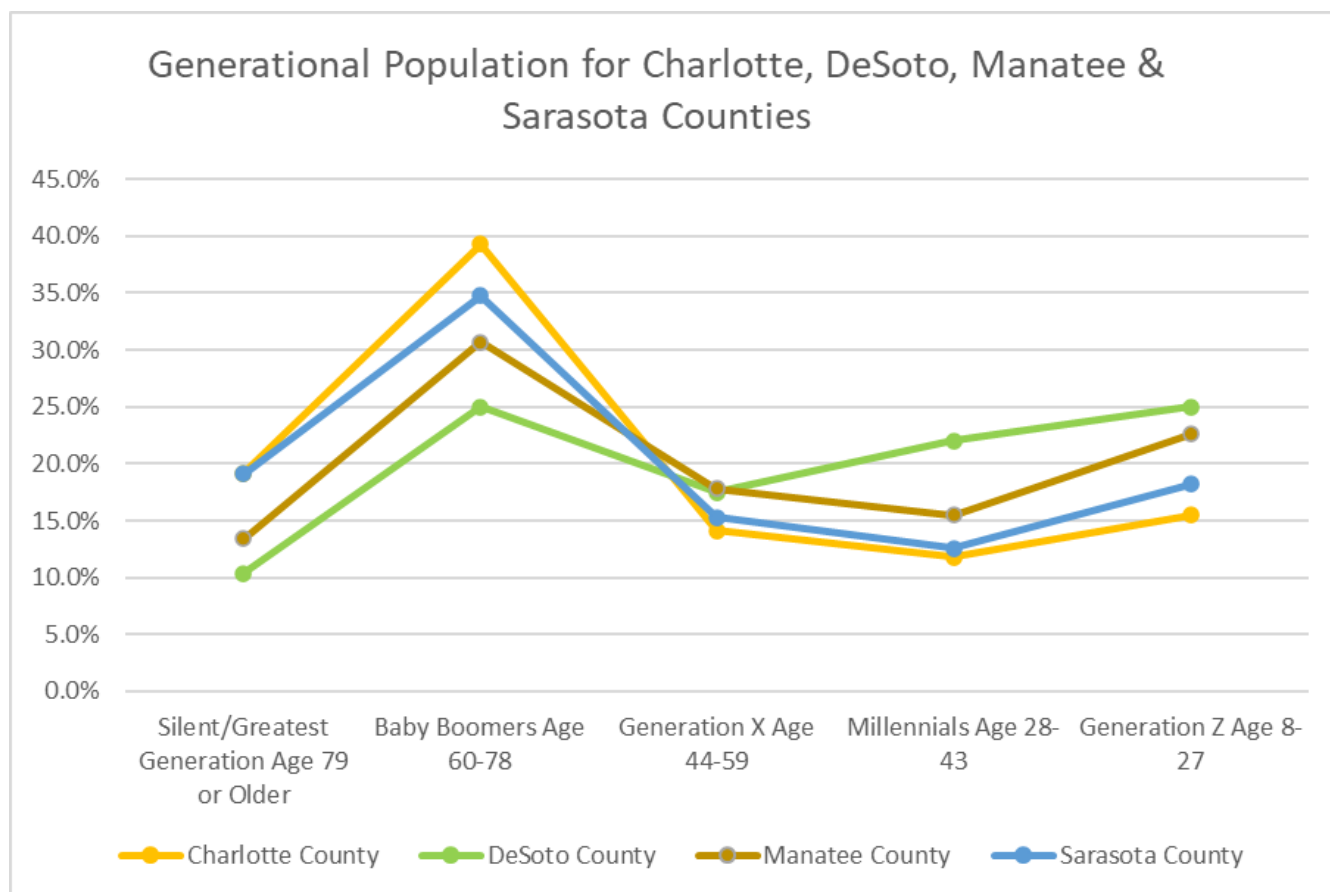


education partnerships, 2Gen (two-generation) programs designed to support children and caretakers simultaneously, and scholarships for youth and adults provided by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and other foundations, all with a focus on equity and inclusion.

## Generations

Tracking population by generation is vital for effective planning and resource allocation in education systems. Generational data helps forecast enrollment trends, ensuring schools are prepared with appropriate infrastructure, staffing, and funding. Regions with younger populations may require investments in early childhood education, K-12 programs, and workforce readiness initiatives, while areas with aging populations may focus on lifelong learning and adult education. Tailoring educational programs to generational needs ensures relevance, equity, and engagement for all age groups.

Generational insights also guide education support planning, policy development, and community partnerships. They help address disparities in access to quality education, align educational programs with workforce demands, and create opportunities for intergenerational collaboration. By understanding these trends, education systems can adapt to demographic shifts, supporting academic achievement, economic growth, and social well-being across communities.



Data Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2018-2022

Today, the regional population aged 60 and over is approximately 48% of the total population, and younger generations (ages 59 and under) account for approximately 52%. Generation Z (ages 8–27) forms the second-largest group in DeSoto County (25.0%) and Manatee County (23%), indicating a younger demographic in these counties. Charlotte and Sarasota counties skew significantly older, with combined proportions of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation exceeding 55%.



### Implications for Education are:

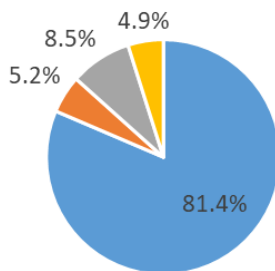
- DeSoto and Manatee counties may face increasing demand for schools, childcare, and workforce development programs due to their larger younger populations (Generation Z and Millennials).
- Education is no longer confined to K-12 and postsecondary years. Generational insights help identify lifelong learning opportunities, from career retraining for Millennials and Gen X to personal enrichment for Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation.

### Race/Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic diversity is shifting across the region. While White (non-Hispanic) residents remain the majority in all counties, Charlotte and Sarasota have the highest proportions, exceeding 80%. DeSoto County is the most diverse, with 52% identifying as White (non-Hispanic), 34% as Hispanic or Latino (the highest in the region), and 12% as Black (non-Hispanic). Manatee follows with 8% Black residents, while Black populations are smaller in Charlotte (5%) and Sarasota (4%). Other racial and ethnic groups remain small across the counties.

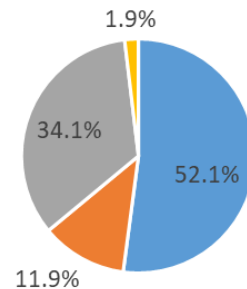
These demographic changes significantly impact education. In all four counties, but especially in DeSoto County where diversity is highest, culturally responsive teaching, bilingual education, and resources for English language learners are essential elements for equitable education. Inclusive curricula celebrating diverse cultures are essential for fostering equity and belonging. Tailored strategies are also needed to address disparities, ensure equitable access to advanced learning opportunities and meet the needs of diverse families. Recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching workforce will be critical to reflecting and serving these evolving student populations. Detailed 2024 race/ethnicity data by county are shown in the charts below.

2024 Charlotte County Population by Race/Ethnicity



■ White (Not Hispanic or Latino) ■ Black (Not Hispanic or Latino)  
■ Hispanic or Latino ■ Other Race/Ethnicity

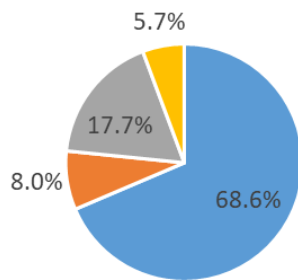
2024 DeSoto County Population by Race/Ethnicity



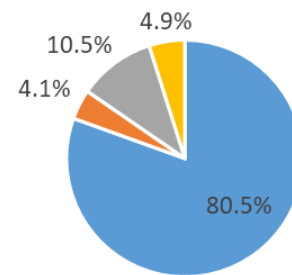
■ White (Not Hispanic or Latino) ■ Black (Not Hispanic or Latino)  
■ Hispanic or Latino ■ Other Race/Ethnicity



2024 Manatee County Population by Race/Ethnicity



2024 Sarasota County Population by Race/Ethnicity



■ White (Not Hispanic or Latino) ■ Black (Not Hispanic or Latino)  
■ Hispanic or Latino ■ Other Race/Ethnicity

■ White (Not Hispanic or Latino) ■ Black (Not Hispanic or Latino)  
■ Hispanic or Latino ■ Other Race/Ethnicity

Data Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2018-2022

### Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment

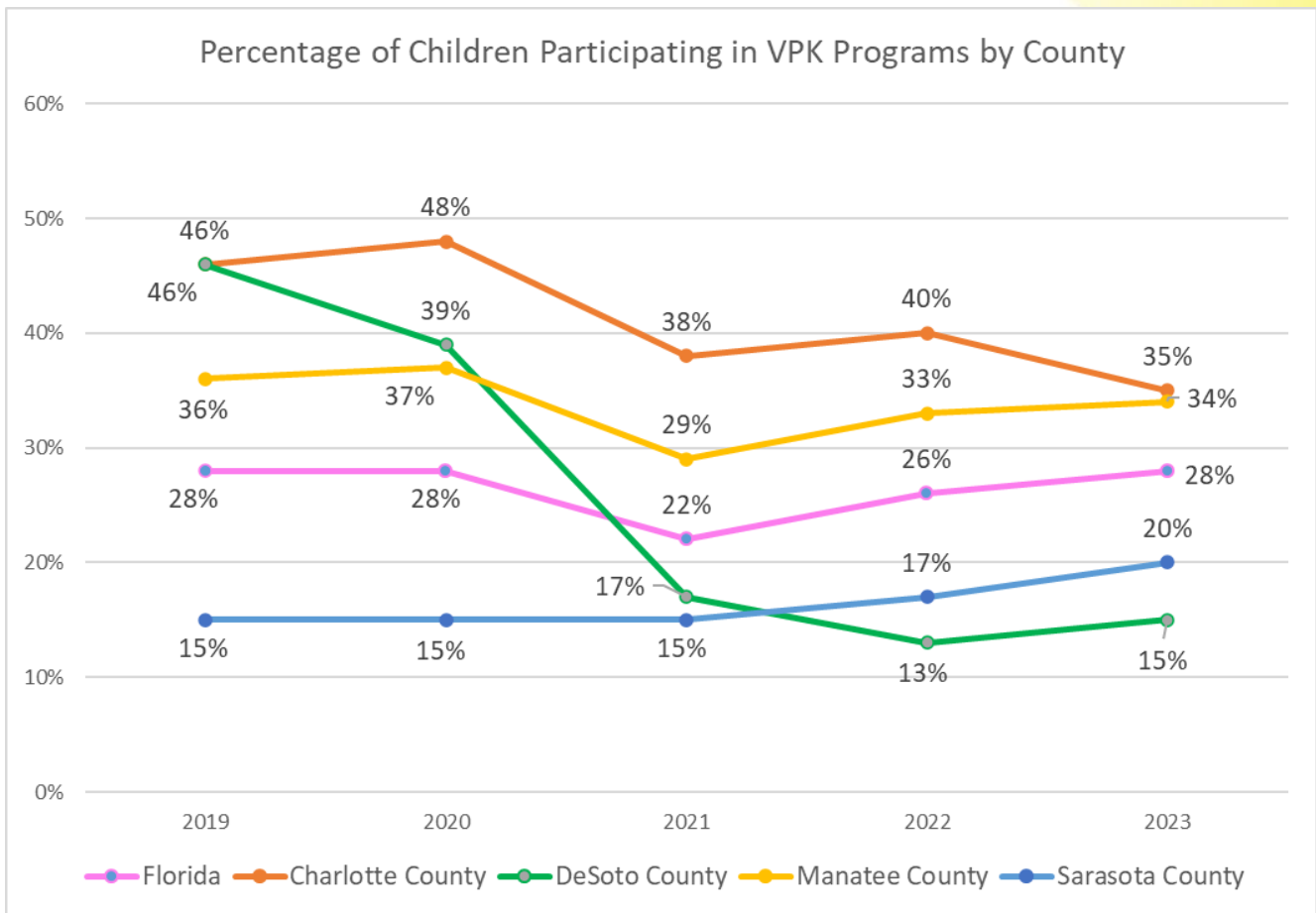
Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programs prepare 4-year-olds for kindergarten by fostering early academic and social skills. In Florida, VPK is free, reducing economic barriers to early education. Research shows that children in VPK programs develop stronger cognitive skills in language, literacy, and math compared to peers without pre-K exposure. For example, studies by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and Florida's VPK program highlight improved kindergarten readiness, particularly in literacy and language, compared to non-VPK participants. VPK supports social-emotional development, including self-regulation, cooperation, and problem-solving—skills essential for academic achievement. According to the NIEER study, the programs benefit all families, especially low-income families, helping narrow achievement gaps and reducing kindergarten readiness disparities. Among the challenges to VPK enrollment are:

- Limited program access
- Work schedules; VPK programs are not full-time
- Before-and-after-care costs
- Transportation to and from VPK program sites

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted enrollment, with some families delaying pre-K or opting for homeschooling. Affluent families may prefer private preschools, while non-English-speaking families often face language and enrollment barriers. Head Start data is not included in this data. Head Start is a separate federal program that promotes school readiness for young children from low-income families. Increasing VPK enrollment improves academic outcomes and supports equitable access to early education. Enrollment trends from 2019–2023 for the four-county region are compared against Florida state benchmarks in the accompanying visualization.







Data Source: Florida Department of Education

### Kindergarten Through Grade 12 (K-12) Enrollment

K-12 enrollment in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties has shifted with population changes. This report summarizes county population trends, school district enrollment changes, and K-12 enrollment by race/ethnicity for the 2023-2024 school year. The data covers public and charter schools, with private school data unavailable for this analysis.

Population and K-12 Growth Rates Comparison (Based on US Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Data)

#### Population Growth From 2022–2024

Charlotte County: 5% (Projected: 13% by 2031)  
 DeSoto County: 5% (Projected: 12% by 2031)  
 Manatee County: 8% (Projected: 16% by 2031)  
 Sarasota County: 6% (Projected: 12% by 2031)

#### K-12 Enrollment Growth From 2022–2024

Charlotte County: 4% (Projected: 14% by 2031)  
 DeSoto County: 3% (Projected: 10% by 2031)  
 Manatee County: 7% (Projected: 22% by 2031)  
 Sarasota County: 5% (Projected: 16% by 2031)

**Population growth is projected to continue across all counties, with K-12 enrollment growth outpacing overall population growth in some areas by 2031.** For example, Manatee County's K-12 enrollment is projected to grow by 22% through 2031, compared to 16% population growth through 2031, indicating a younger, school-age demographic driving demand. Charlotte County also shows higher K-12 projected growth through 2031 (14%) relative to its projected population growth through 2031 (13%). In contrast, DeSoto County has the slowest projected K-12 enrollment growth through 2031 (10%), reflecting its population and other demographic factors.

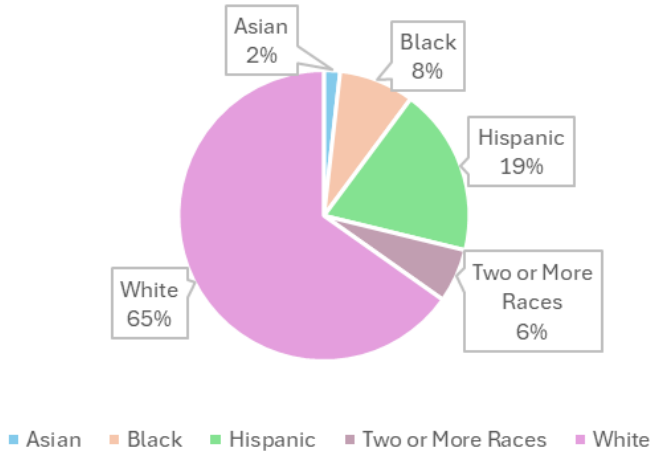
### Kindergarten Through Grade 12 (K-12) Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity





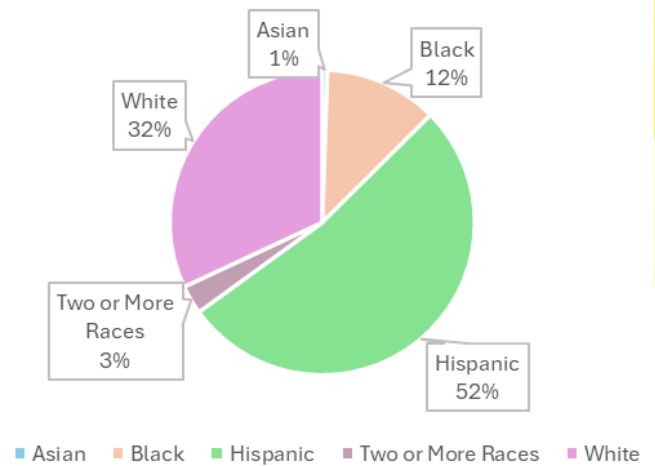
## K-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

### Charlotte County, FL



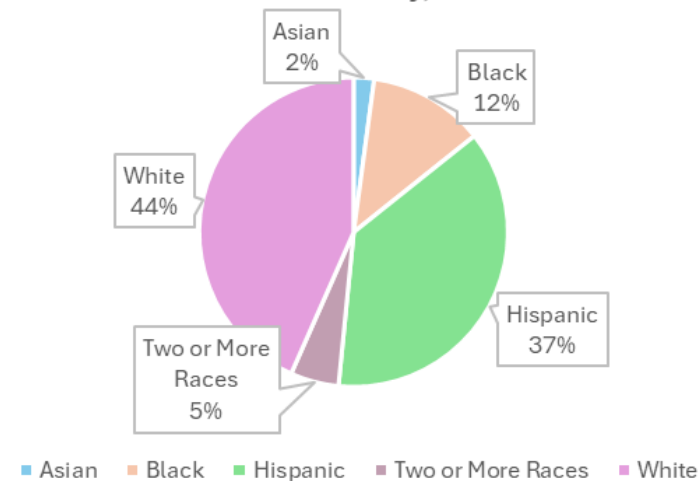
## K-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

### DeSoto County, FL



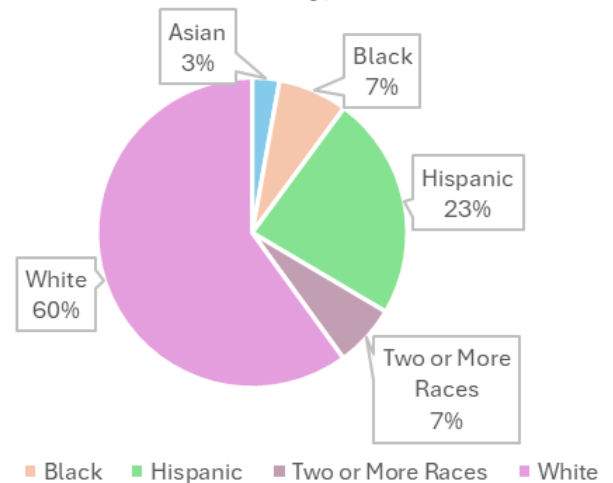
## K-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

### Manatee County, FL



## K-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

### Sarasota County, FL



Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The enrollment data highlights the need for tailored strategies to address potential inequities. Each county may want to consider enhancing equity-focused policies and programs to ensure inclusivity and equity for all students. By recognizing the specific needs of each community, school districts can work to eliminate disparities and create an environment where all students can succeed. DeSoto County is the most racially and ethnically diverse, with a majority of students identifying as Hispanic. Charlotte and Sarasota counties have a higher proportion of White students and a less diverse school enrollment profile. Manatee County shows a balanced mix, with significant proportions of Hispanic, White, and Black students.

## Kindergarten Through Grade 12 (K-12) Enrollment Implications for Education Planning and Community Collaboration:

- Rising K-12 enrollment, particularly in counties like Manatee, underscores opportunities to continue proactive educational planning to ensure sufficient school capacity, resources, and equitable access to



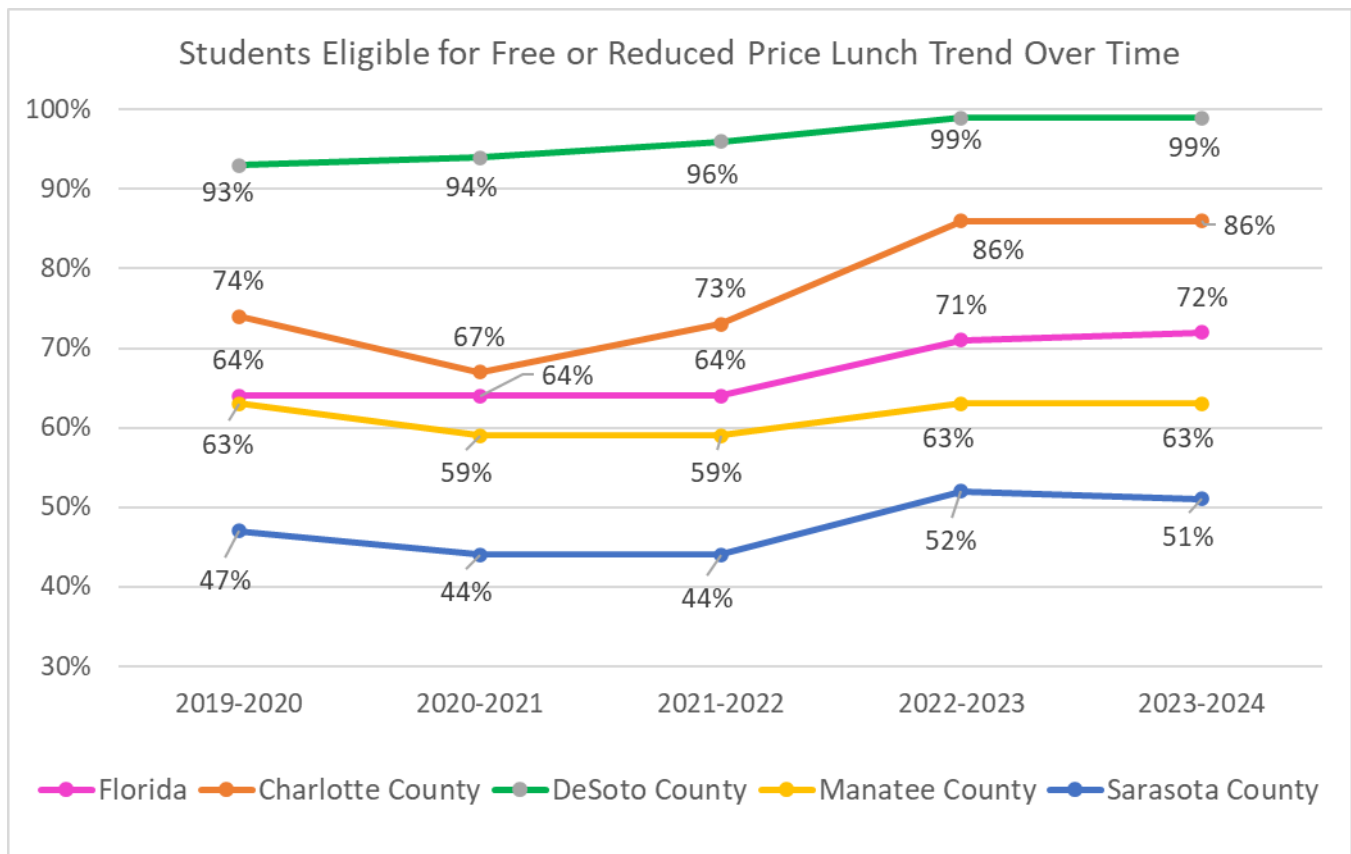
services. Demographic trends could inform decisions on infrastructure, staffing, and program development to meet the region's evolving educational needs.

- DeSoto and Manatee counties may require additional resources to support bilingual education and culturally responsive teaching to meet the needs of diverse student populations.
- Language barriers might affect academic performance in literacy, math, and other subjects warranting support or accommodation for some students.
- Minority students, particularly Black and Hispanic, are sometimes underrepresented in advanced coursework.
- Efforts can be made to offer inclusive histories, perspectives, and literature to reflect all experiences and promote inclusivity and engagement.
- All school districts benefit from expanding existing partnerships with local organizations, included in school district strategic plans, to address the unique needs of their students and families, building on the current mentoring, after-school programs, and mental health services available to students and families.



## Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) by Trend Over Time and Race/Ethnicity

The percentage of students eligible for FRL is a crucial indicator for understanding the socioeconomic challenges affecting the region's education systems. It highlights the prevalence of financial challenges among students and can be linked to academic performance, attendance, and engagement. High FRL rates signal school districts where additional funding and targeted interventions, such as Title I programs, are needed to create equity and improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. Schools in rural areas like DeSoto County may face unique challenges tied to economic constraints, requiring tailored solutions to address student needs. In more economically diverse areas like Manatee and Sarasota counties, FRL data helps identify pockets of need to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities. FRL eligibility data informs better support systems for students' academic and social-emotional growth, fostering greater equity and long-term success.



Data Source: Florida Department of Education

### County Comparisons:

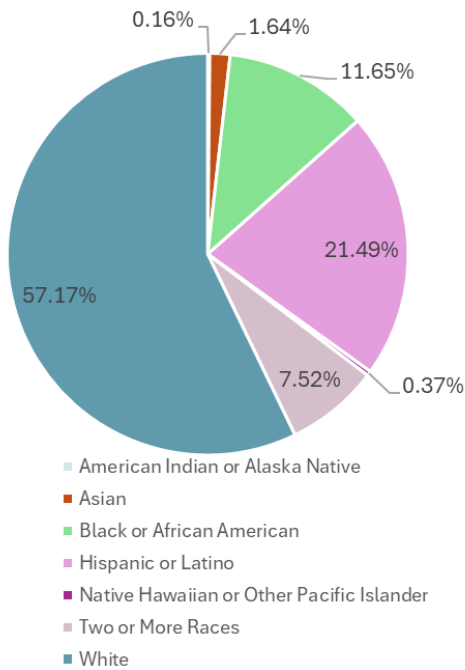
- DeSoto County consistently has the highest FRL percentages, increasing from 93% in 2019-2020 to 99% in 2023-2024, reflecting a significant level of economic need.
- Charlotte County also shows a rise, particularly between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, where FRL rate increased from 74% to 86%, suggesting a growing economic disparity.
- Manatee County has stable percentages, hovering around 59-63%, with only a slight increase over the years.
- Sarasota County has the lowest FRL percentages, though it has increased from 47% in 2019-2020 to 51% in 2023-2024, reflecting changing economic challenges.

The data on free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) eligibility by race and ethnicity reveals significant economic disparities across Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. The chart data show that Hispanic or Hispanic/Latino students consistently exhibit the highest FRL rates, particularly in DeSoto County, where more

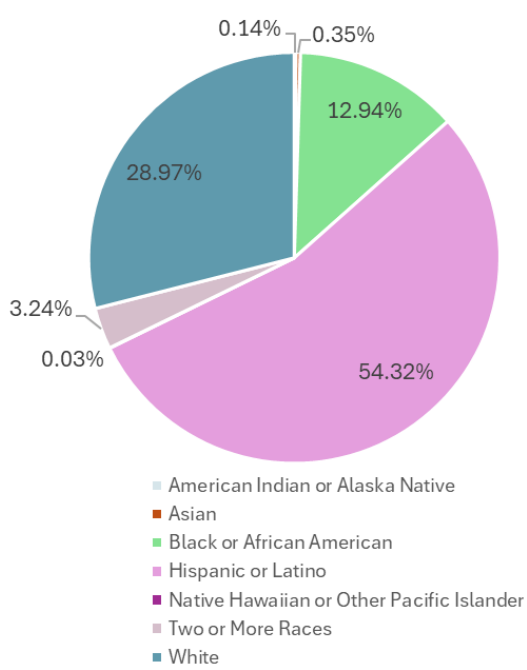


than 54% are eligible, reflecting the economic challenges faced by this demographic. Black or African American students also demonstrate elevated FRL rates, especially in Manatee and Sarasota counties, highlighting persistent socioeconomic disparities.

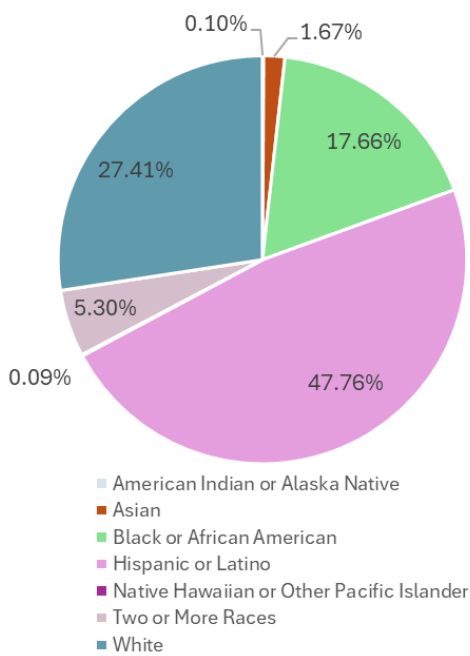
Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price lunch  
by Race/Ethnicity - Charlotte County, FL



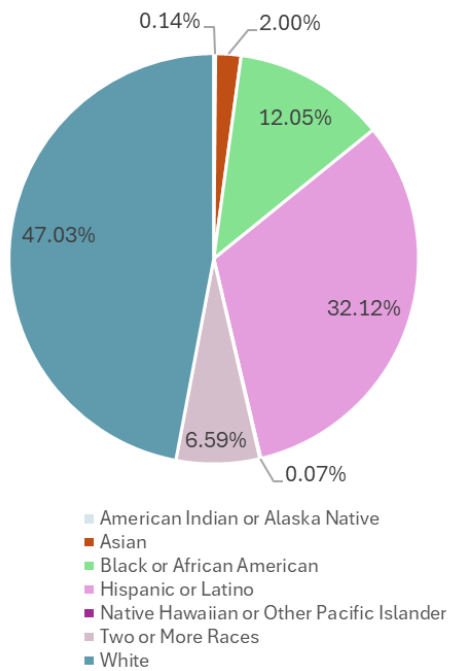
Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price lunch  
by Race/Ethnicity - DeSoto County, FL



Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price lunch  
by Race/Ethnicity - Manatee County, FL



Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price lunch -by  
Race/Ethnicity - Sarasota County, FL



Data Source: Florida Department of Education

In contrast, Asian students, and smaller racial groups such as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native students show lower FRL eligibility rates. Sarasota County has lower FRL

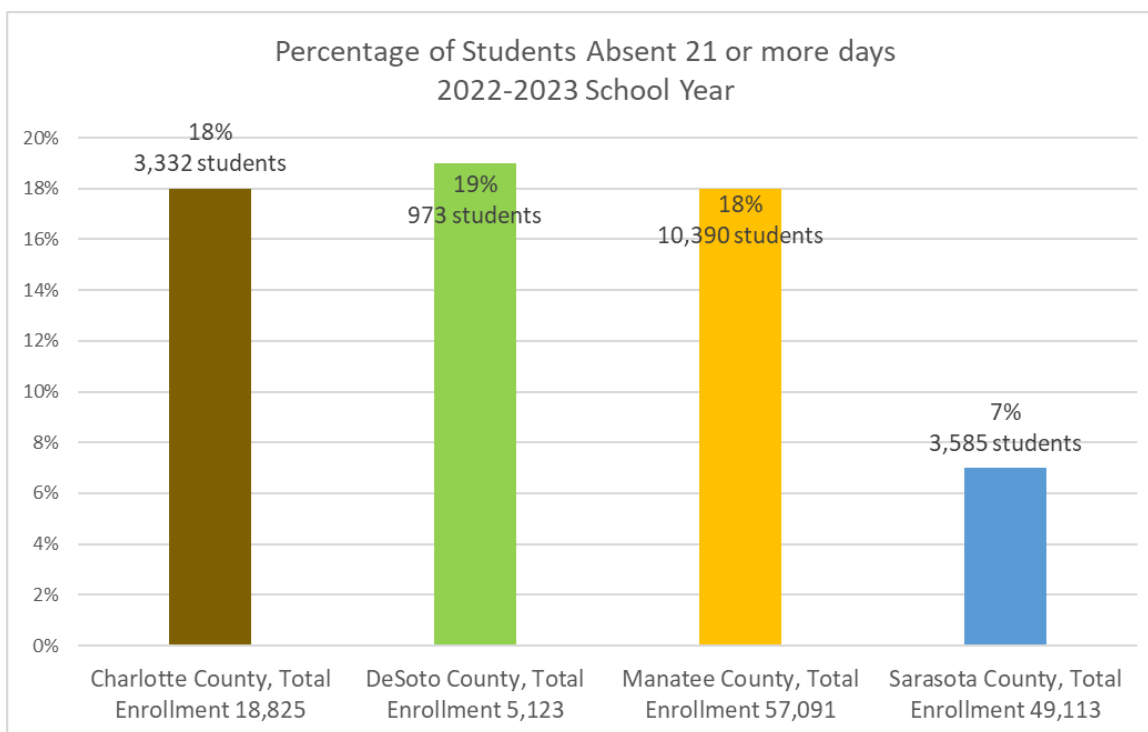


percentages across all racial and ethnic groups compared to the other counties. There are many opportunities for school and community collaborative solutions including:

- Multilingual outreach, resources, and FRL application awareness and assistance.
- Community mentorship and academic support to broaden equity and opportunities for all students.
- School and community nutrition programs, focused on access, equity, and resources for high FRL populations.

### Absentee Percentage

Absenteeism in school districts has serious consequences for students, schools, and communities. Chronic absenteeism hinders academic achievement, widens skill gaps, and increases grade retention and dropout rates, limiting students’ long-term earning potential and economic mobility. It also weakens school performance metrics, potentially affecting funding and accountability ratings, while disrupting access to essential services like healthcare and social programs. The chart below shows absentee rates for Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties during the 2022–2023 school year; data for 2023–2024 was unavailable at the time of this report.



[Data Source, Florida Department of Education](#)

According to the Florida Department of Education, all four counties had absentee rates below the state average of 19%. Sarasota County recorded the second-lowest absentee rate statewide, with 3,585 students missing 21 or more days. Charlotte ranked 21<sup>st</sup> with 3,332 chronically absent students, followed by Manatee at 24<sup>th</sup> with 10,390 students, and DeSoto at 28<sup>th</sup> with 973 students.

Addressing absenteeism requires a multi-faceted strategy, including early interventions, family and community support, and resources to overcome barriers such as transportation and healthcare access. Current collaborative efforts between families, schools, nonprofits, and community organizations focused on reducing absenteeism offer guidance on addressing this issue to improving educational outcomes.

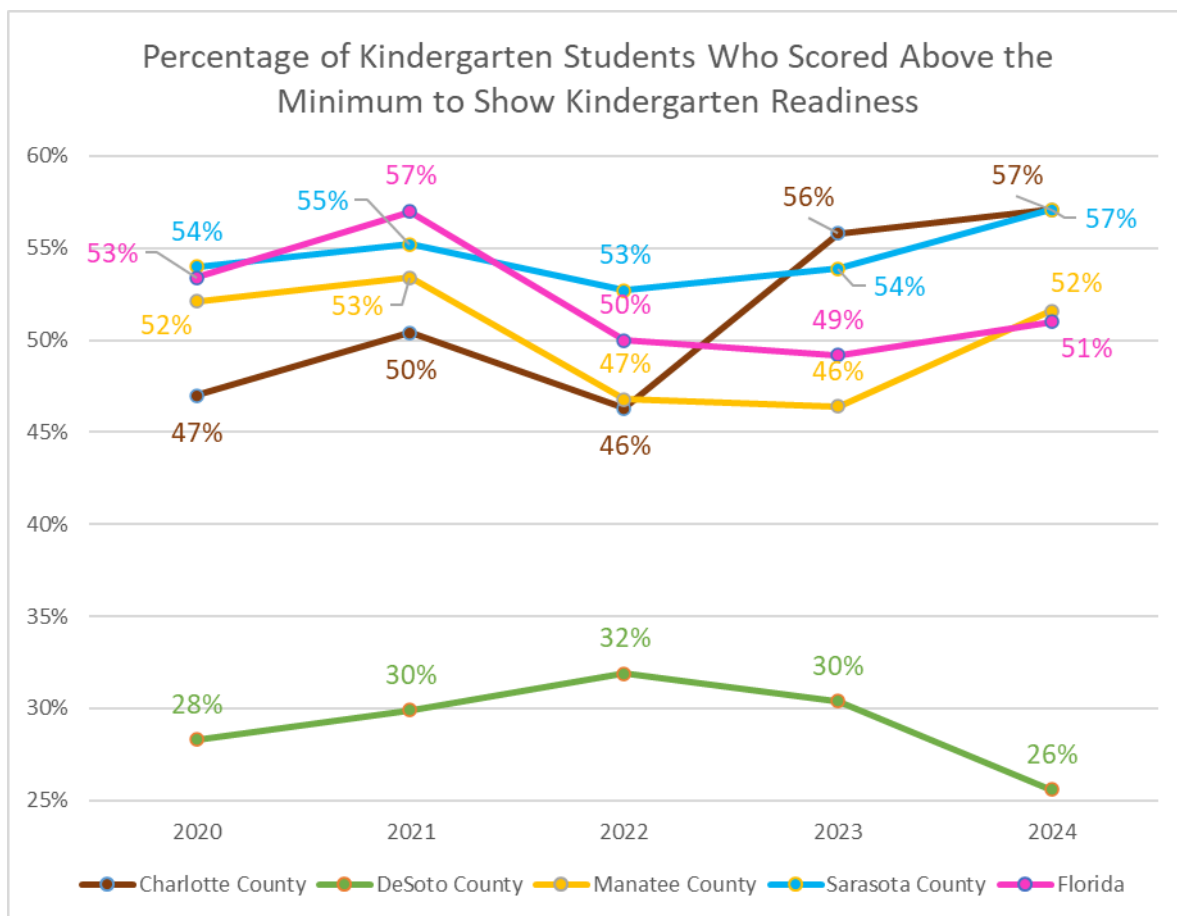


## Academic Performance

This section summarizes academic performance in the four-county region using traditional data benchmarks: Kindergarten readiness, third grade reading level, and eighth grade math level. To provide more comparative data, reading and math level data for additional grades are included to help identify trends and insights.

### Kindergarten Readiness

The recently implemented Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) Star Early Literacy serves as a key metric for evaluating and enhancing early learning systems, identifying at-risk populations, and driving strategic efforts to ensure all children enter school on an equal footing, ready to learn and succeed. Kindergarten readiness is closely linked to future academic success. FAST Star Early Literacy replaced the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener in 2022. Readiness scores help evaluate the effectiveness of early childhood and pre-kindergarten initiatives. By focusing on kindergarten readiness, communities can lay the foundation for long-term educational success, helping all children with the tools they need to succeed in school and beyond.



Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The kindergarten readiness data shows varied trends across the counties. Sarasota County has maintained a readiness percentage above 52% from 2020 to 2024. Charlotte County has shown steady improvement, rising from 47% in 2020 to 57% in 2024. Manatee County experienced fluctuations, with a decline in 2022 but



rebounded to 52% in 2024. DeSoto County declined from 28% in 2020 to 26% in 2024, highlighting a critical need for targeted interventions to boost readiness.

Efforts to improve kindergarten readiness are growing. Manatee and Sarasota counties are expanding pre-kindergarten and voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) opportunities within public schools. This reduces enrollment barriers for families with multiple children by offering one location for all their children and offering an expanded day for children under age 5. Addressing barriers through subsidies, health services, and nutritional support helps increase enrollment. Strengthening family engagement via parent education and community partnerships, coupled with data-driven interventions to identify and support at-risk groups, is essential. Additionally, fostering collaboration between schools and local organizations, investing in teacher development, and raising public awareness about the importance of early learning can ensure more children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

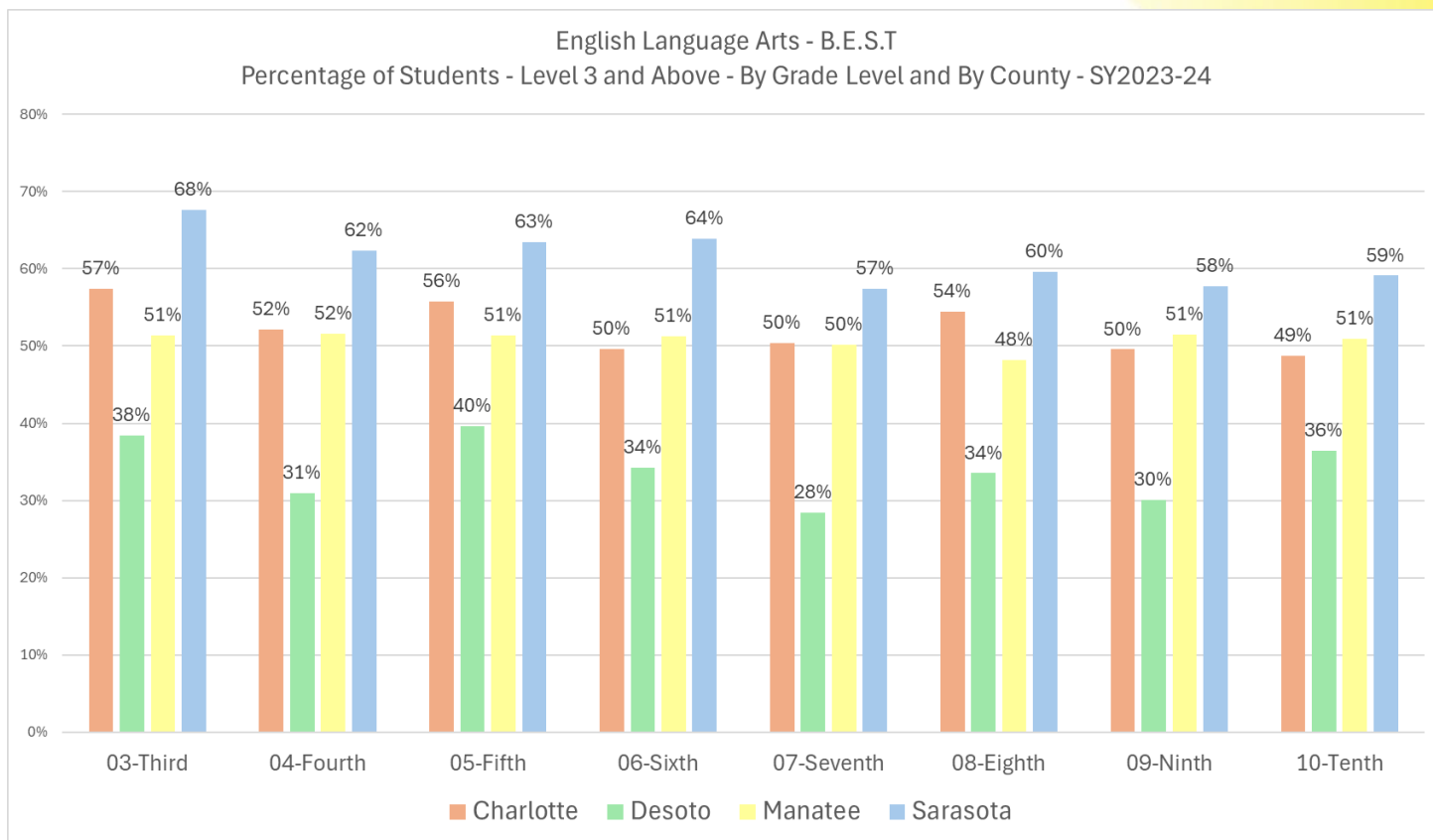
### **Reading Level 3 and Above – 3<sup>rd</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> Grades**

The third grade reading level is a vital metric for guiding targeted strategies to improve individual and systemic outcomes. It is a critical benchmark for educational achievement and can indicate future academic success and long-term outcomes. By third grade, students transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," making this a key stage for identifying students at risk of falling behind. Proficiency rates, indicated by a score of level 3 or above, reflect the effectiveness of early education systems, highlight disparities across socioeconomic and demographic groups, and guide targeted interventions. Evidence links early literacy skills to better economic mobility and reduced risks of negative academic outcomes. As a measurable indicator, third grade reading levels support school accountability, resource allocation, and the evaluation of educational initiatives.

To provide additional context for reading, listening, and speaking proficiency, the data below shares scores for third through tenth grade from Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.):







Data Source: Florida Department of Education

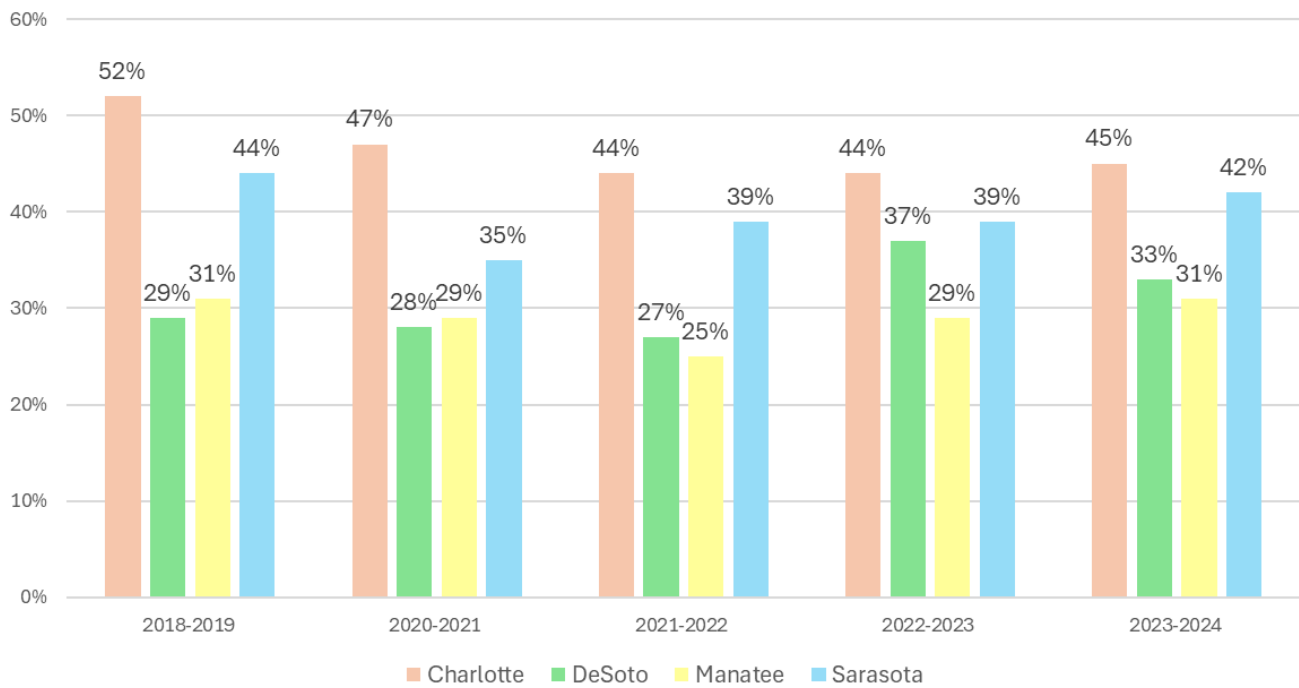
#### Data Observations:

- Sarasota County: Has the highest percentage of third grade students scoring Level 3 or above (68%).
- Charlotte County: Achieved 57% of third grade students at or above Level 3.
- Manatee County: Shows 51% of third grade students at or above Level 3.
- DeSoto County: Shows significant opportunity for improvement with 38% of third graders scoring at Level 3 or above.
- Including the third through tenth grade data provides a comprehensive review of Level 3 or above achievement through the continuum of students' grade school through early high school years.

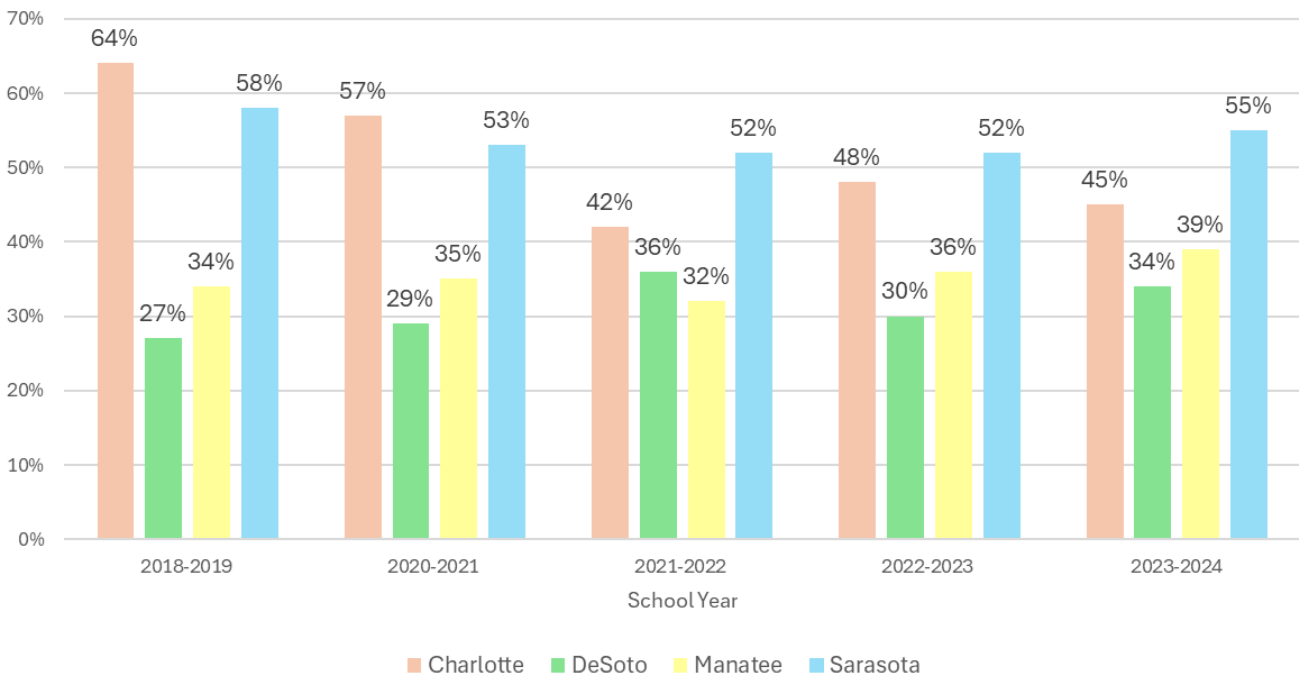
Reviewing third grade reading level data by race/ethnicity within each county over time reveals additional insights:

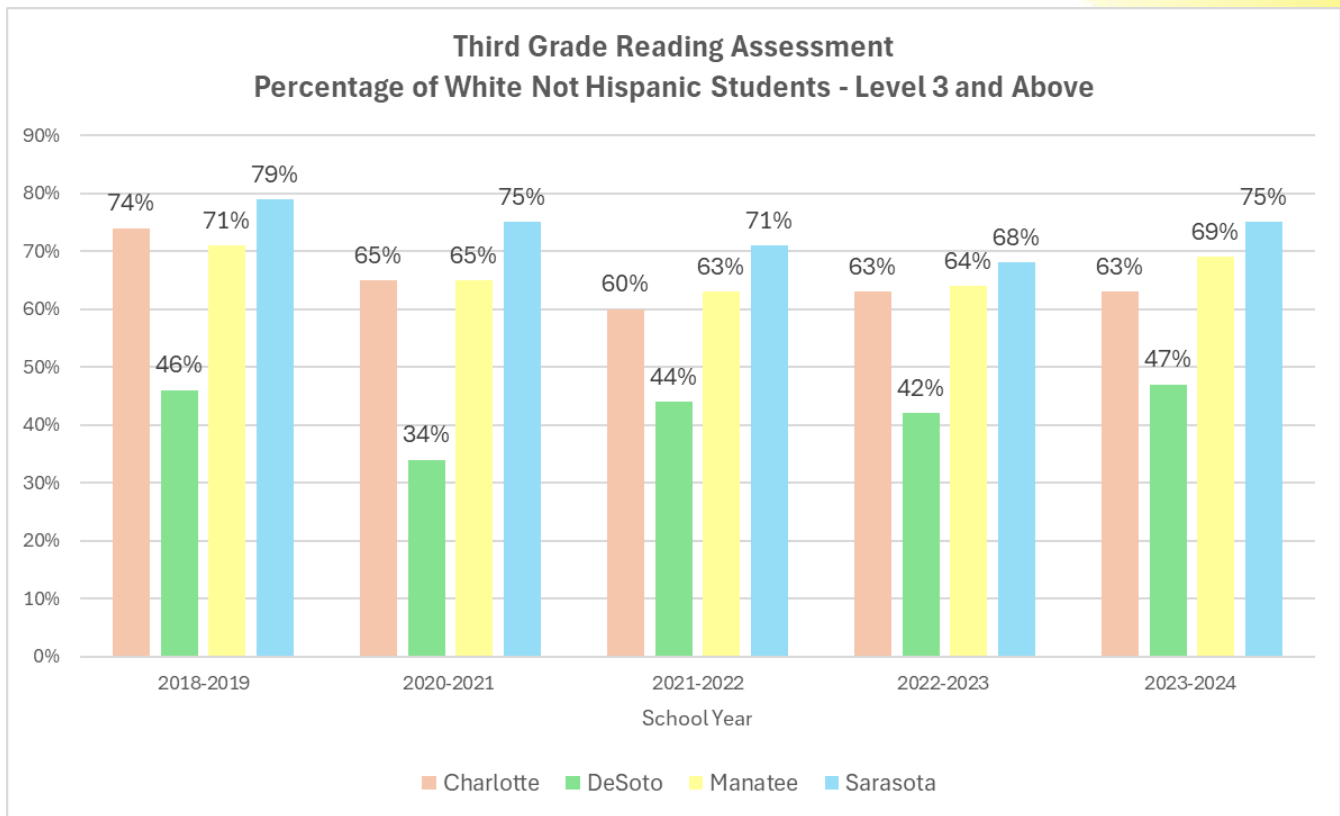


### Third Grade Reading Assessment Percentage of Black/African-American Students - Level 3 and Above



### Third Grade Reading Assessment Percentage of Hispanic & Latino Students - Level 3 and Above





Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The charts show the percentage of Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and White Non-Hispanic third grade students who achieved reading Level 3 or above, relative to their third grade racial/ethnic group population in each county. The data trends by county help identify performance disparities. The data also informs current school district initiatives, nonprofit programs, community partnerships, and State of Florida reading initiative updates.

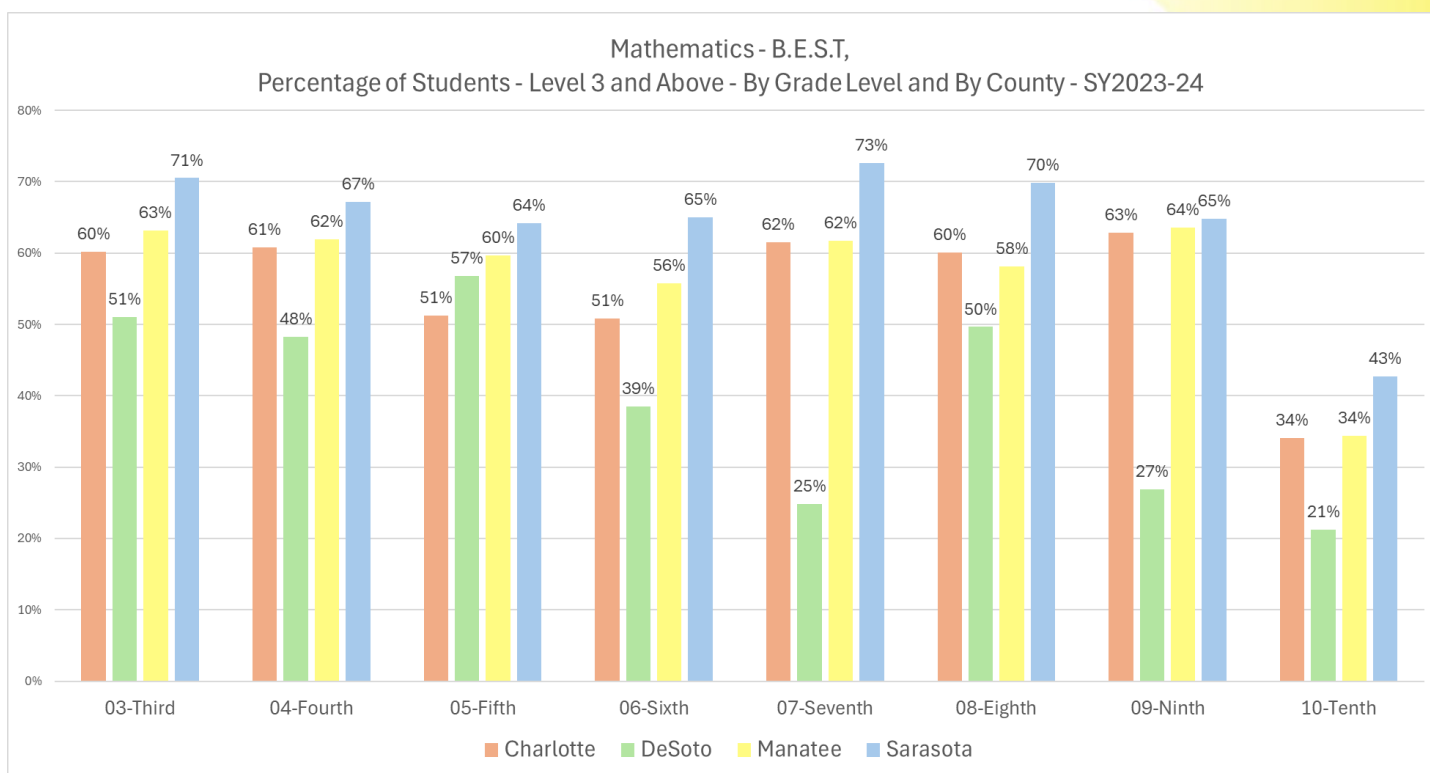
Credible, quantitative data for other races/ethnicities for the four-county region were not available as this report was being prepared.

### Math Level 3 and Above – Third through Tenth Grades

Level 3 math assessment achievement is a crucial indicator of grade-level proficiency, reflecting a student's readiness for more advanced concepts and their ability to apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It predicts long-term academic and career success, especially in STEM fields, and helps identify struggling students for targeted support. Disaggregating Level 3 data by demographics also highlights equity gaps, guiding efforts to ensure all students have access to quality instruction and resources. Additionally, this metric provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of educational systems, informing curriculum and resource allocation decisions.

Frequently, eighth-grade math assessment is the milestone measured. The Florida eighth grade Level 3 math assessment, aligned with the B.E.S.T. Standards, evaluates students on number sense and operations, algebraic reasoning, functions, geometric reasoning, and data analysis & probability. To achieve Level 3, students must demonstrate on-grade-level proficiency in these areas, including solving equations, understanding functions, and analyzing data. All Florida high school students are required to complete three credits in mathematics. To provide context, the math assessment data for third through tenth grades are shown:



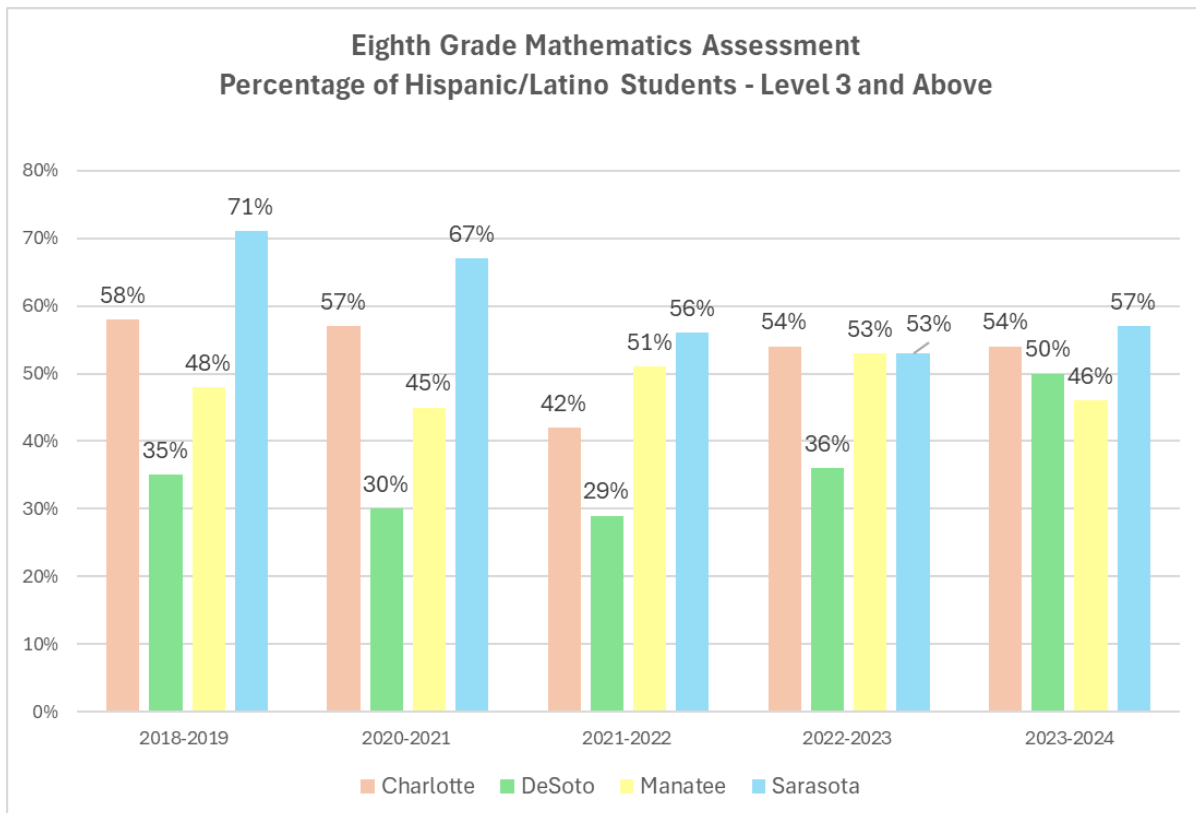
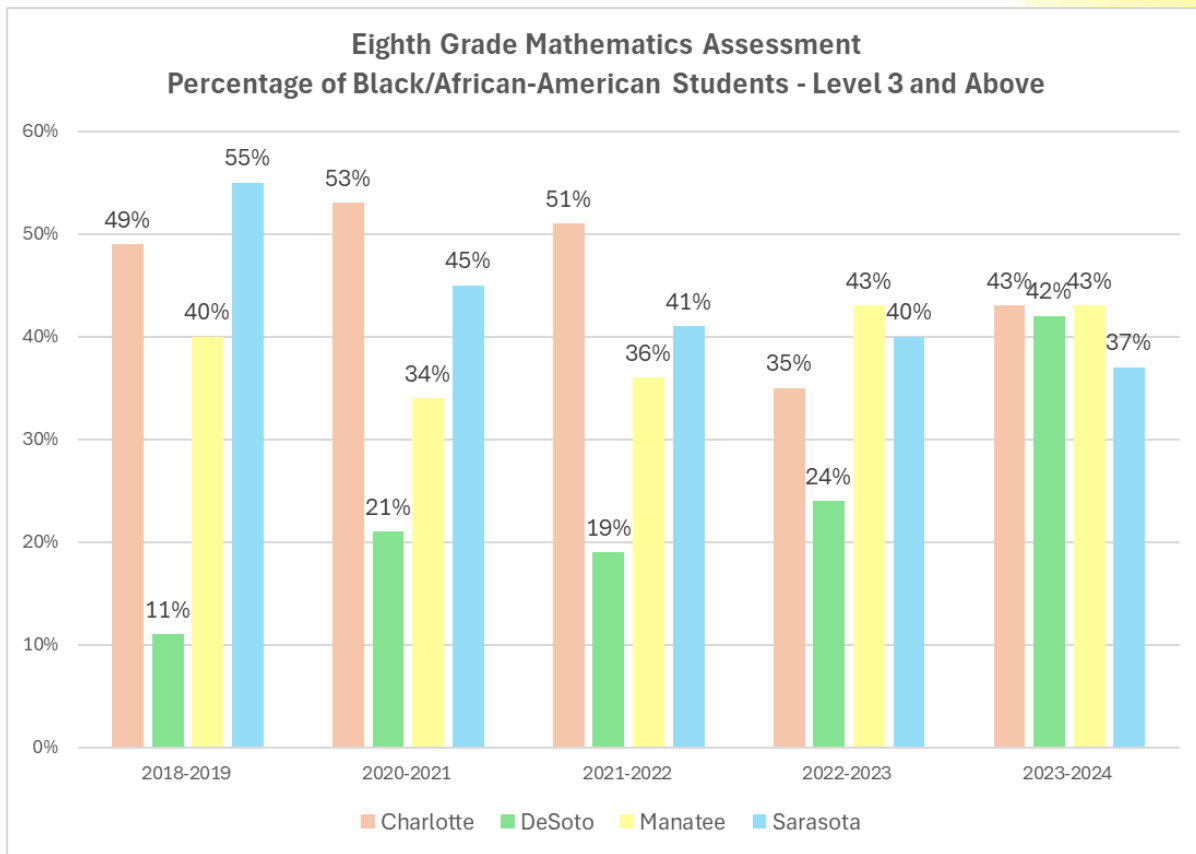


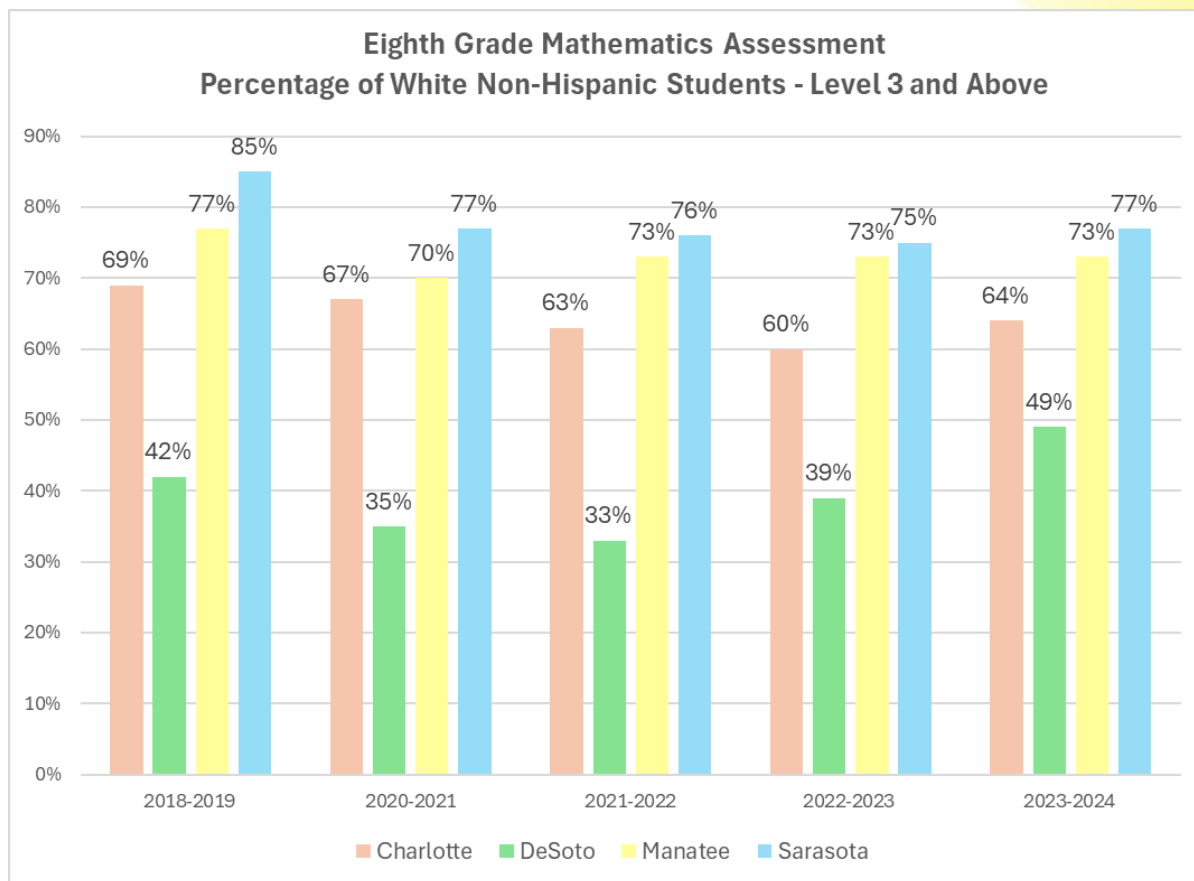
*Data Source: Florida Department of Education*

The Level 3 math assessment data highlights significant variations in proficiency across Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. Sarasota consistently leads with the highest proficiency rates, reaching over 70% for seventh and eighth graders and maintaining strong performance through middle school. Charlotte and Manatee demonstrate steady, moderate performance, with seventh and eighth-grade proficiency between 58-62%. DeSoto scores are lower at certain grade levels, compared to other counties, with a seventh-grade proficiency rate of 25% and an eighth-grade rate of 50%. These trends highlight the opportunities to engage existing school district initiatives, nonprofit programs, and community partnerships supporting math tutoring, and targeted interventions that support students struggling with advanced concepts.

Reviewing eighth-grade math assessment data by race/ethnicity within each county reveals additional insights:







Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The eighth-grade math assessment data by race/ethnicity highlights persistent disparities, with Black students consistently performing below county averages across Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. DeSoto County shows significant improvement, with proficiency for Black students rising from 11% in 2018–2019 to 42% in 2023–2024, though overall performance remains low. In contrast, Charlotte and Sarasota counties have seen declines for Black students, with Sarasota dropping from 55% proficiency in 2018–2019 to 37% in 2023–2024. These trends reveal challenges in sustaining progress and underscore the need for targeted interventions, equitable resource distribution, and culturally responsive teaching to close achievement gaps and support underserved groups.

### Accelerated Course Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Accelerated course enrollment data is important for assessing academic achievement and college or career readiness. The data makes the connection to changing county and student populations, and how schools are preparing students through advanced course opportunities. High enrollment in these courses is linked to anecdotal evidence of higher graduation rates, postsecondary success, and workforce readiness.

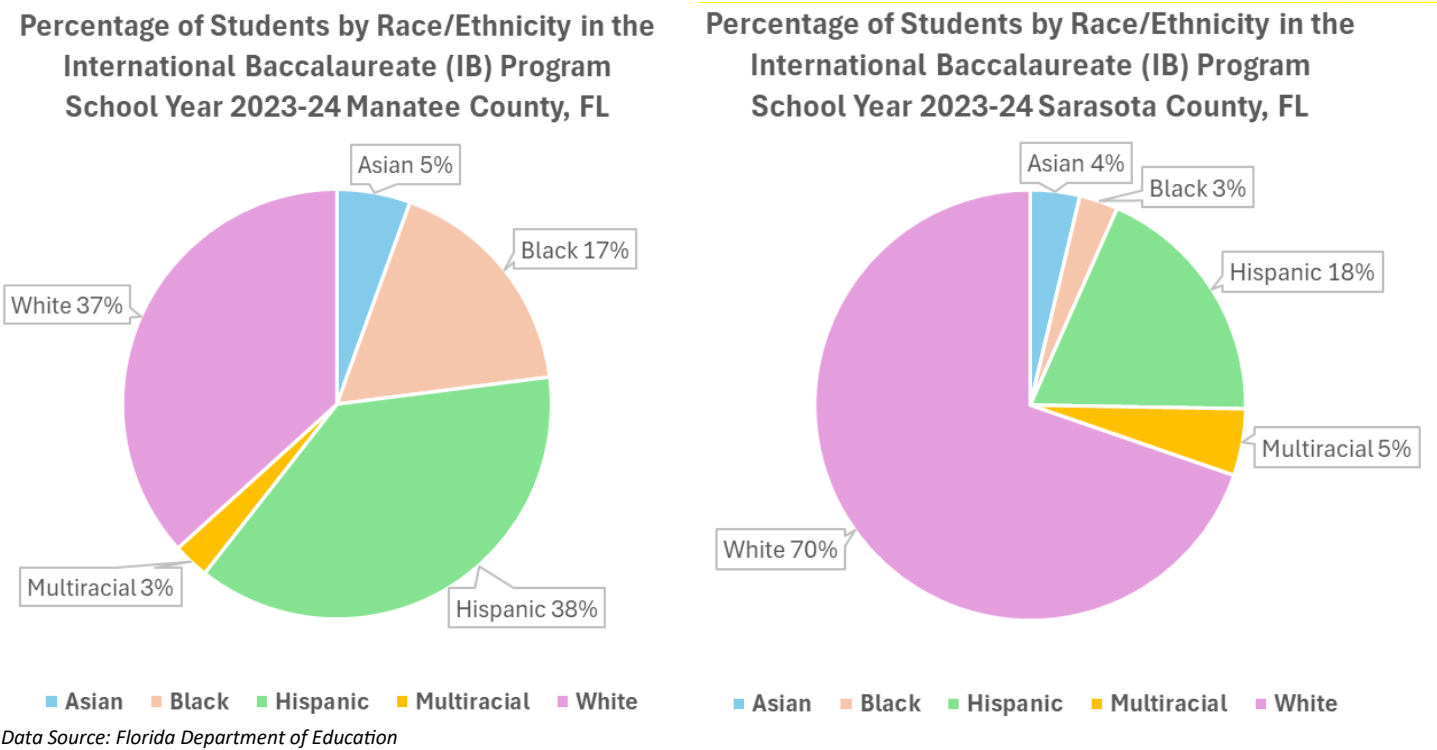
The **International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP)** is a rigorous, globally recognized educational program for high school students aged 16-19. It focuses on developing critical thinking, research, and writing skills, along with an international perspective. The program requires students to take courses across six subject areas: Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and the Arts. The IB DP is recognized by universities worldwide and is valued for its emphasis on academic rigor, cultural awareness, and holistic development, preparing students for success in higher education and beyond.

IB, Advanced Placement (AP), and Dual Enrollment programs offer advanced academic opportunities but differ in structure and focus. The IB program provides a holistic, internationally focused curriculum requiring a two-



year commitment and is globally recognized by universities. AP allows students to take flexible, subject-specific courses with college credit based on standardized exam scores. Dual Enrollment enables students to earn college credit directly through courses at partnering colleges, offering real college experience but with credit transferability often limited to specific institutions. Each program caters to different goals and student needs. Data for Charlotte and DeSoto counties was not available for this summary.

IB enrollment shows:



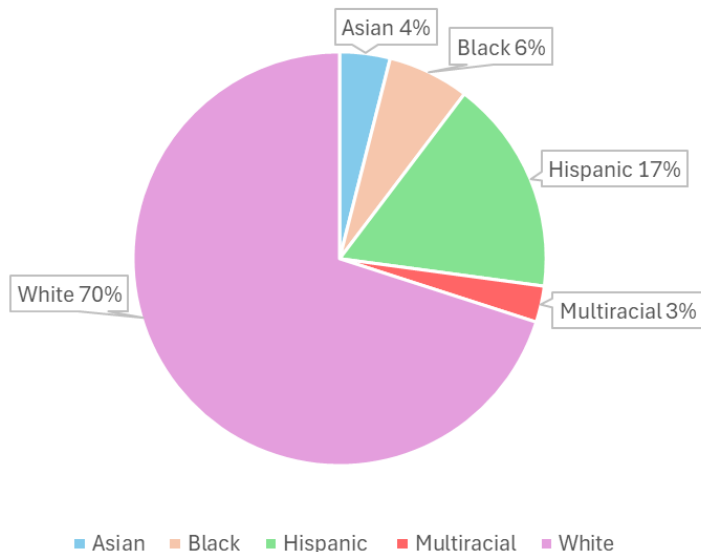
The IB participation data for the 2023-2024 school year reveals racial/ethnic disparities and opportunities to expand current equity and inclusion programs in Manatee and Sarasota counties. White students dominate enrollment, particularly in Sarasota, representing nearly 70%. Hispanic students are well-represented in Manatee at 38%, but their participation drops to 18% in Sarasota. Black students are underrepresented, with only 3% participation in Sarasota compared to 17% in Manatee. Asian and multiracial students also have small enrollment proportions in both counties.

**Dual enrollment** allows students to take college-level and technical college-level courses while earning both high school and college credit. Offered through partnerships with colleges and technical colleges, dual enrollment provides rigorous academic experiences, reduces college costs by earning credits early, and enhances college readiness. Data by county shows:

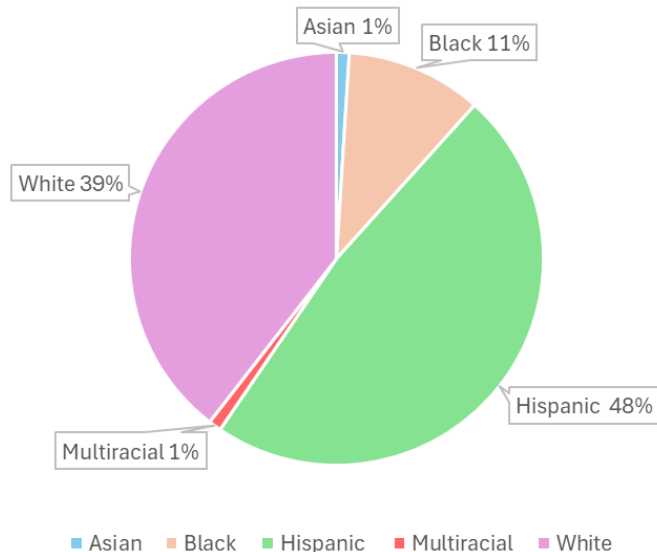




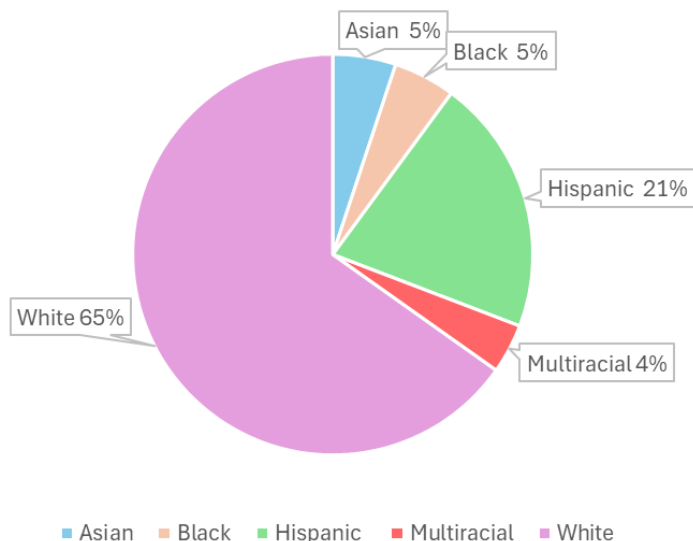
**Dual Enrollment Students by Race/Ethnicity  
School Year 2023-2024  
Charlotte County, FL**



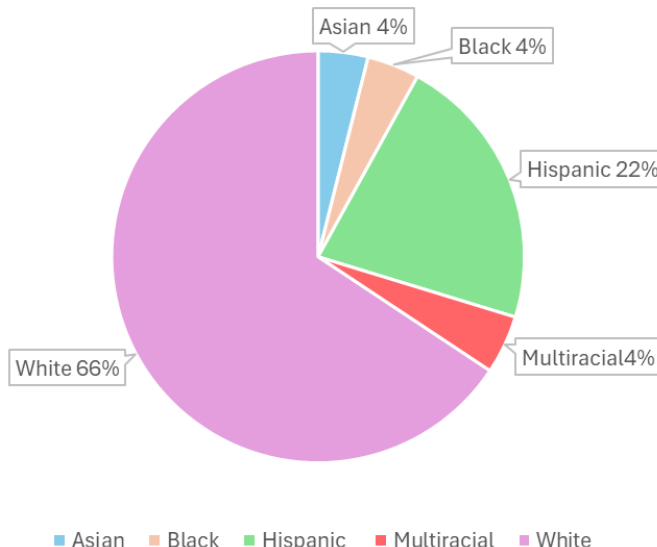
**Dual Enrollment Students by Race/Ethnicity  
School Year 2023-2024  
DeSoto County, FL**



**Dual Enrollment Students by Race/Ethnicity  
School Year 2023-2024  
Manatee County, FL**



**Dual Enrollment Students by Race/Ethnicity  
School Year 2023-2024  
Sarasota County, FL**



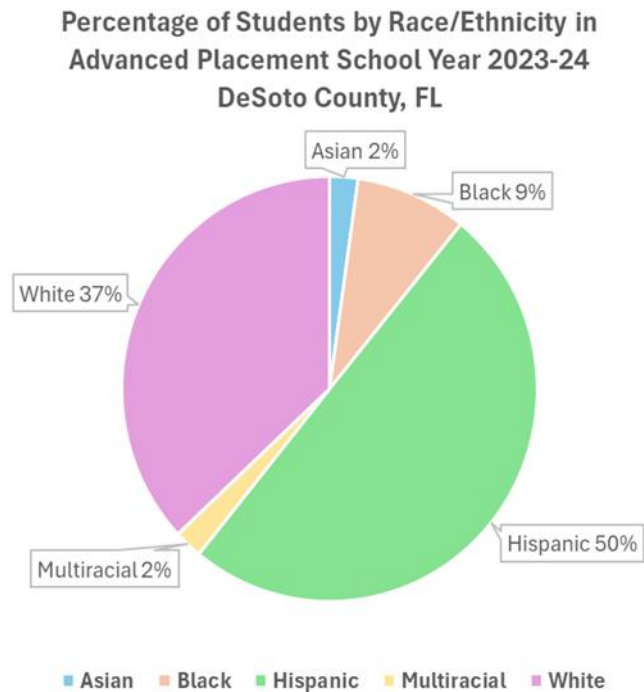
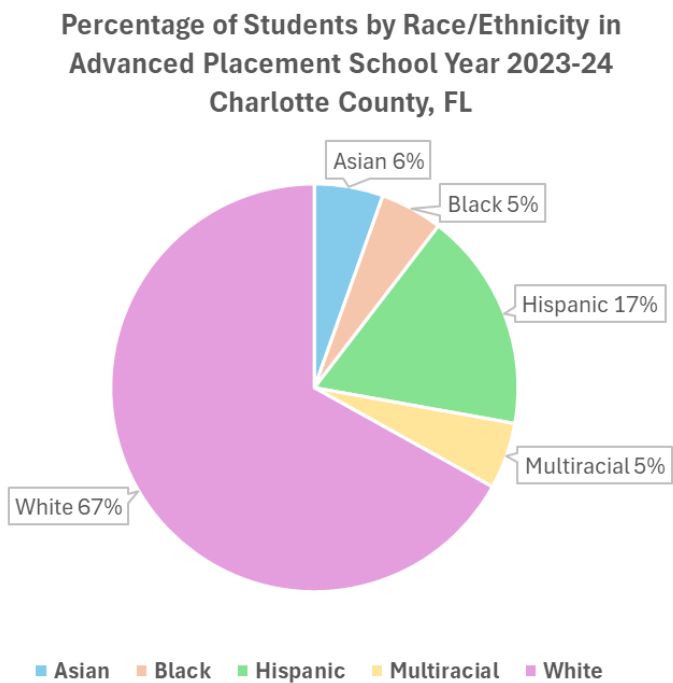
Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The race/ethnicity dual enrollment data for the 2023-2024 school year highlights disparities in participation across racial and ethnic groups in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. White students have the highest participation rates in most counties, while Hispanic students show significant representation, particularly in DeSoto County, where they account for nearly half of the participants. Black and Asian students have lower participation rates, and multiracial students are minimally represented. The data also reveals county-level variations, with DeSoto County standing out for its high Hispanic participation compared to other counties. Overall, there are opportunities and challenges in addressing equity in access to dual enrollment programs.

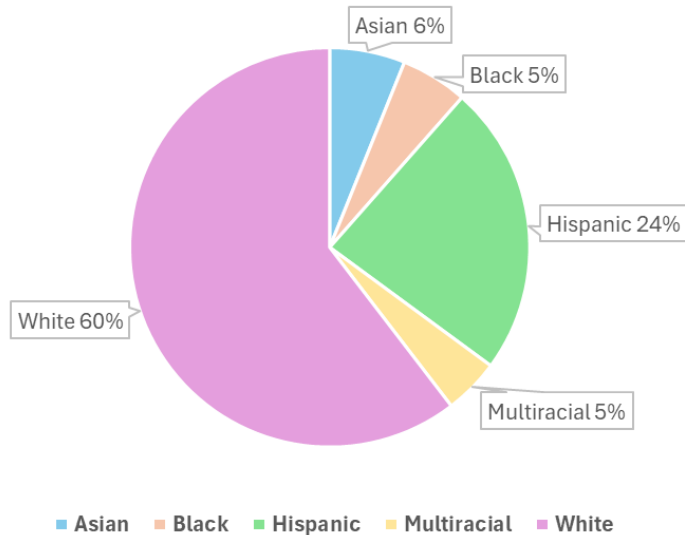


**Advanced Placement (AP)** is a program offered by the College Board that provides students with the opportunity to take college-level courses and exams while still in high school. AP courses cover a range of subjects, including math, science, history, literature, and the arts, and are designed to challenge students with rigorous, in-depth content. At the end of each course, students can take an AP exam, and high scores may earn them college credit or advanced placement at participating colleges and universities. The program helps students build critical thinking, time management, and study skills while enhancing their college readiness. Additionally, AP courses can strengthen college applications by demonstrating a student's ability to succeed in challenging academic environments.

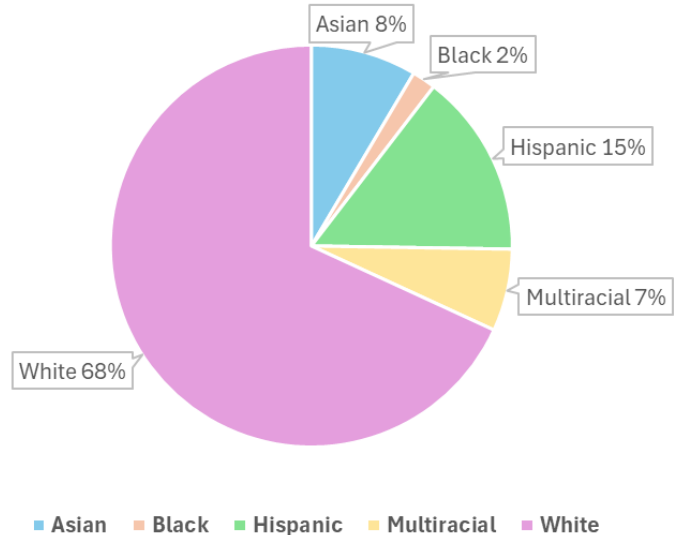
Enrollment data by county shows:



**Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity in  
Advanced Placement School Year 2023-24  
Manatee County, FL**



**Percentage of Students by Race Ethnicity in  
Advanced Placement School Year 2023-24  
Sarasota County, FL**



Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The AP participation data for the 2023-2024 school year reveals significant racial and ethnic disparities across Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. White students have the highest participation rates overall, particularly in Sarasota (68%) and Manatee (60%). Hispanic students are prominently represented in DeSoto County, accounting for 50% of AP enrollment, far surpassing their representation in other counties. Black and Asian students, along with multiracial students, show lower participation rates across the board, with Black student representation in Sarasota notably low at 2%. These trends highlight progress in certain areas and ongoing disparities in AP access and participation.

**Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE).** It is an internationally recognized, rigorous academic program developed by Cambridge Assessment International Education (part of the University of Cambridge). AICE offers advanced coursework similar to Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, allowing students to earn college credits while in high school. The AICE program includes a variety of subjects in Mathematics, Science, Languages, Arts, and Humanities and emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and in-depth learning. Students who complete the program and meet specific requirements may earn an AICE Diploma, which can qualify them for college scholarships and university credit, particularly in Florida where the program is widely recognized. In Florida, students who earn an AICE Diploma (and complete 100 hours of community service) automatically qualify for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship, covering 100% tuition at in-state public universities. Similarly, IB and AP students who meet certain criteria may also qualify for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship.

Complete data for AICE enrollment was not available via our data sources when this report was prepared. We are working to update and include AICE information in future reports and the Community Indicators Dashboard.

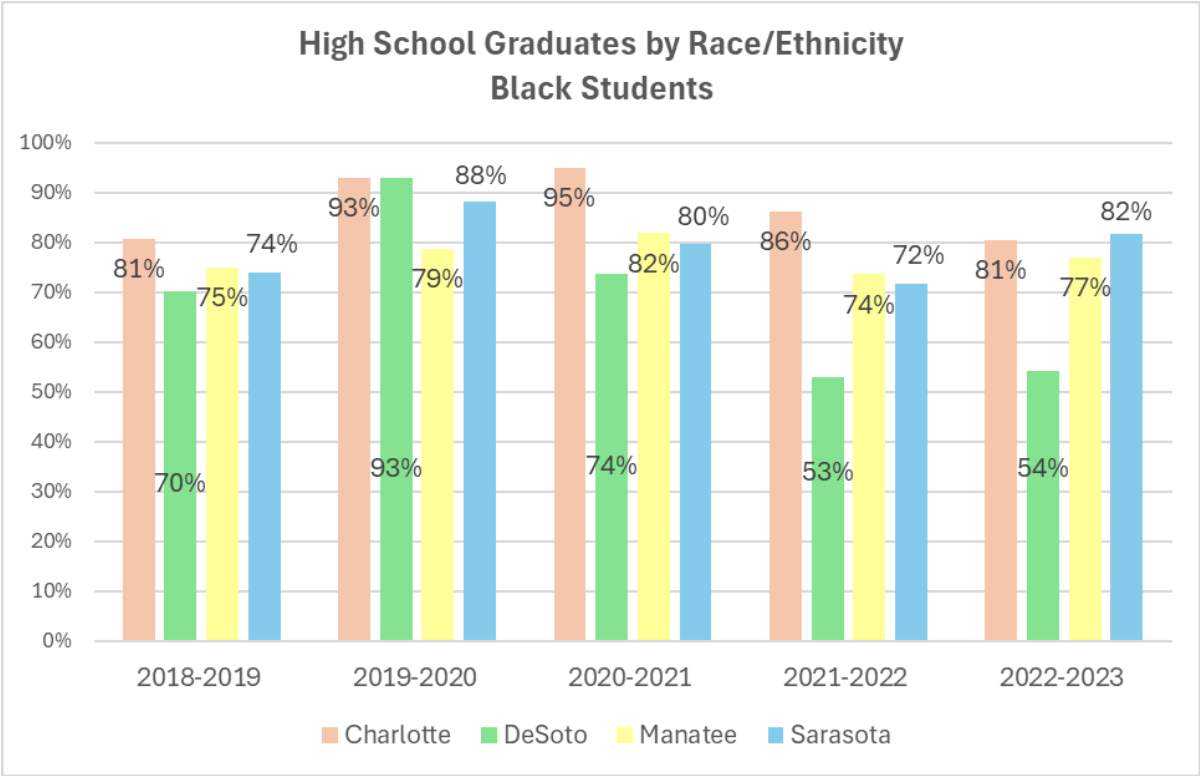
### High School Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity

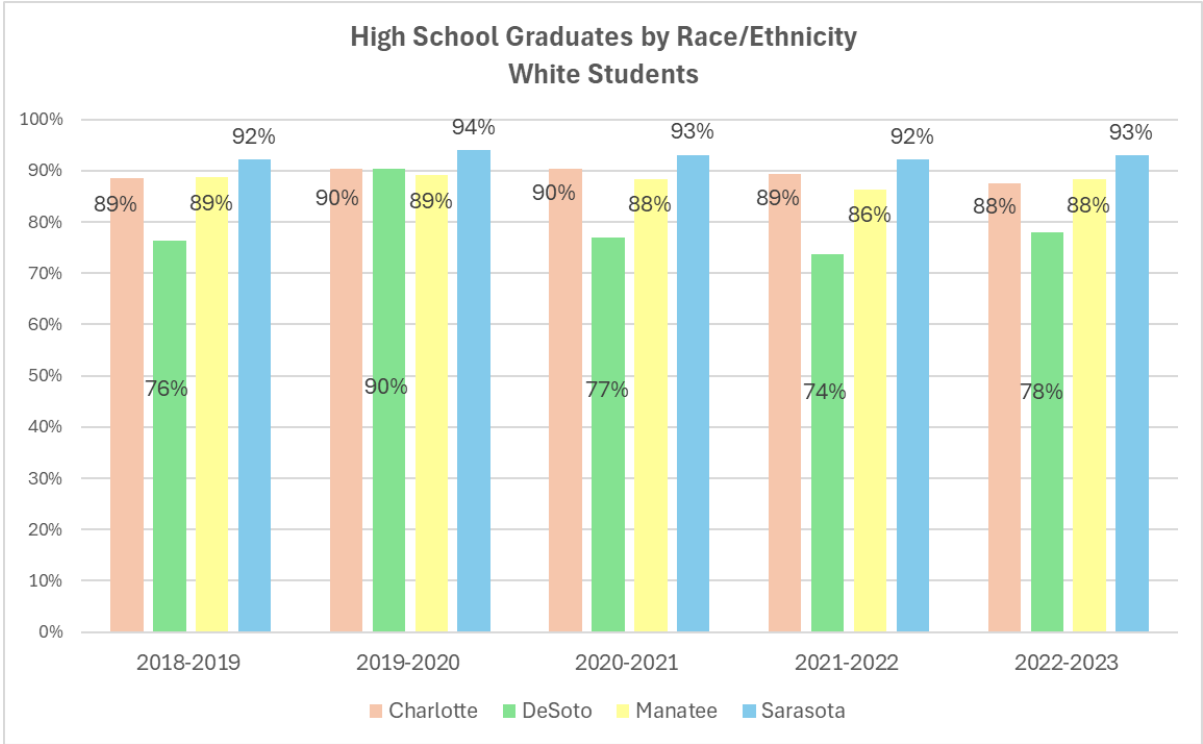
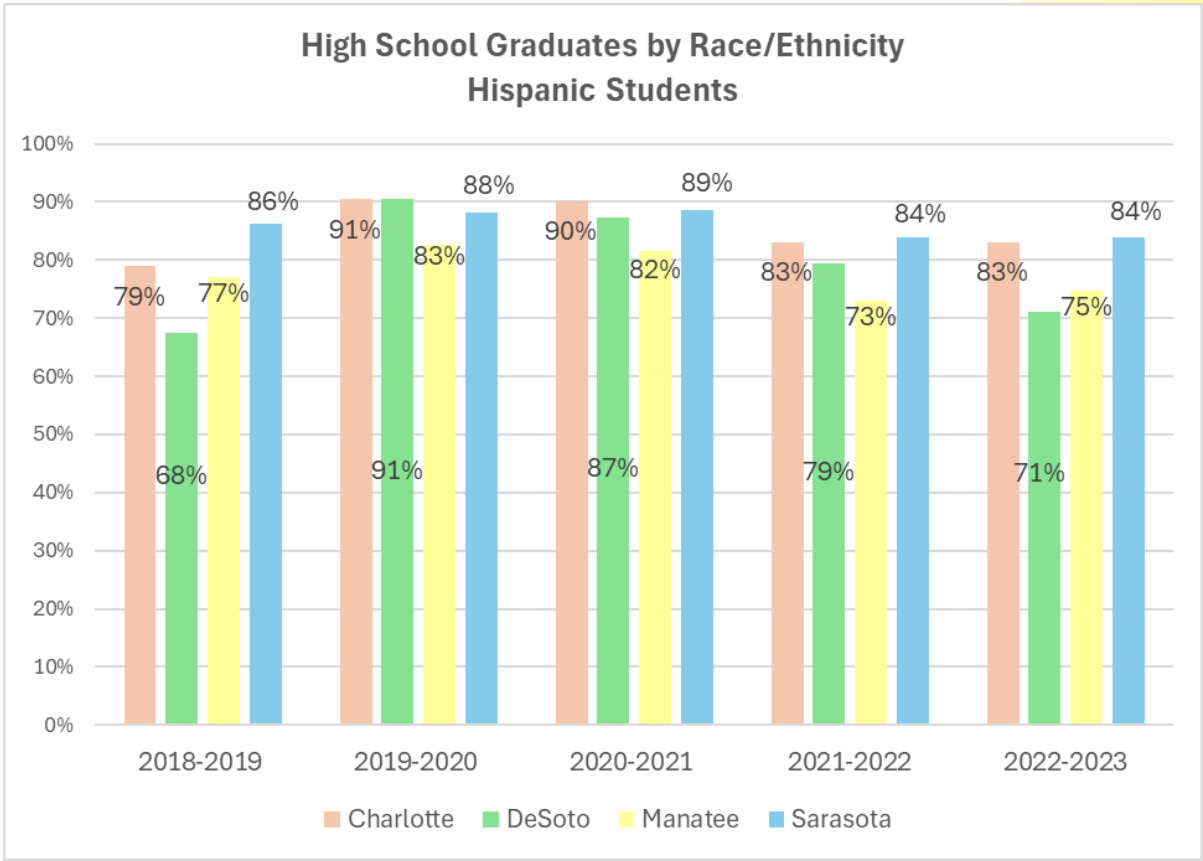
Tracking high school graduation data by race/ethnicity is essential for identifying and addressing disparities in educational attainment. It highlights systemic inequities, informs targeted interventions, and ensures

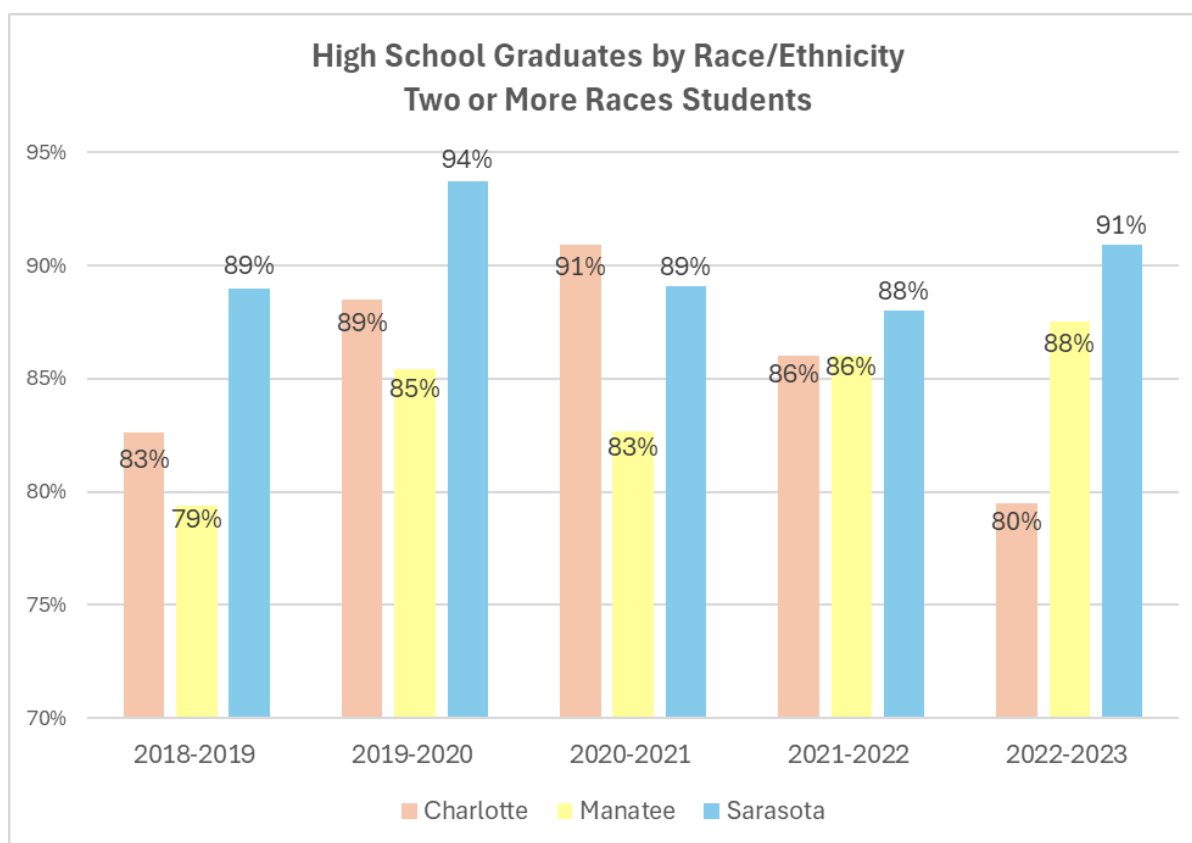
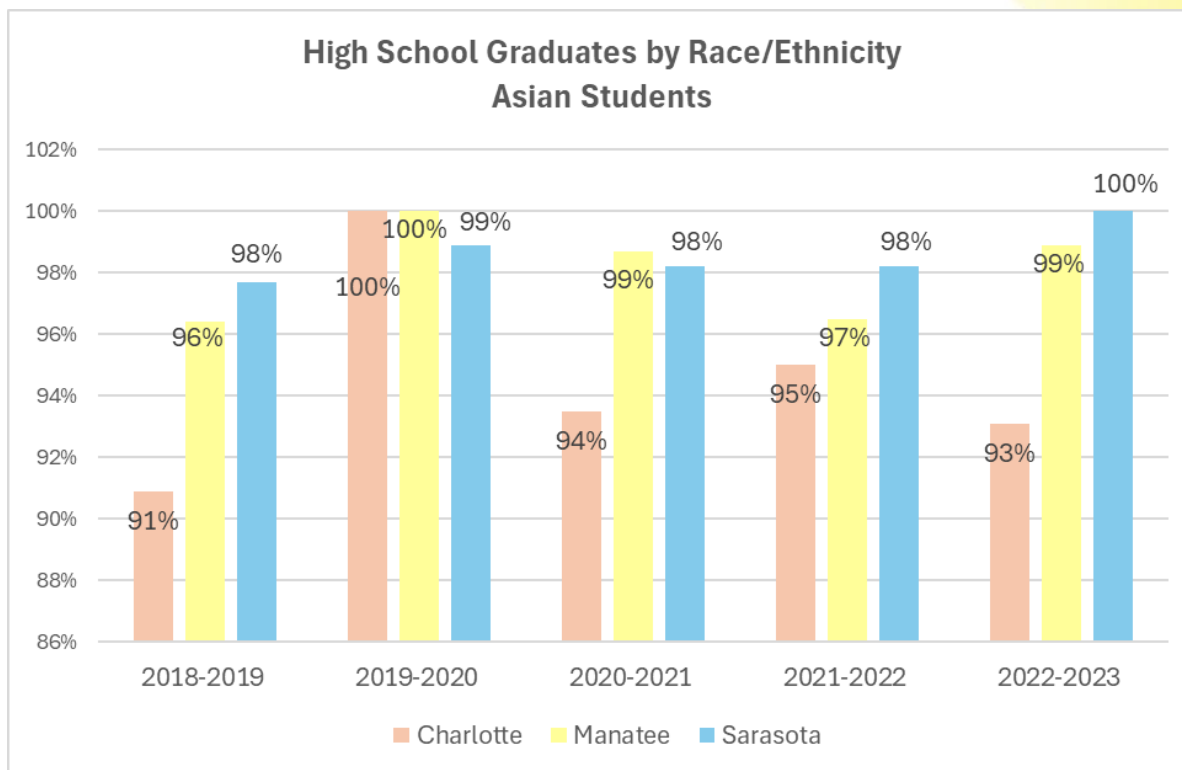


accountability for equitable outcomes. This data helps guide resource allocation to underserved populations, reflects broader systemic trends, and supports advocacy for inclusive policies. Graduation rates directly impact opportunities for higher education, employment, and socioeconomic mobility, making a focus on graduation a critical approach to disrupting cycles of inequality and promoting fairness in education. By monitoring these metrics, schools and communities can work together to ensure all students have the support needed to succeed.

Graduation data by race/ethnicity reveals:







Data Source: Florida Department of Education

The high school graduation data by race/ethnicity reveals key trends and disparities across Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. Asian students consistently demonstrate high graduation rates, often nearing or reaching 100% in many counties and school years. White students also maintain high and stable graduation



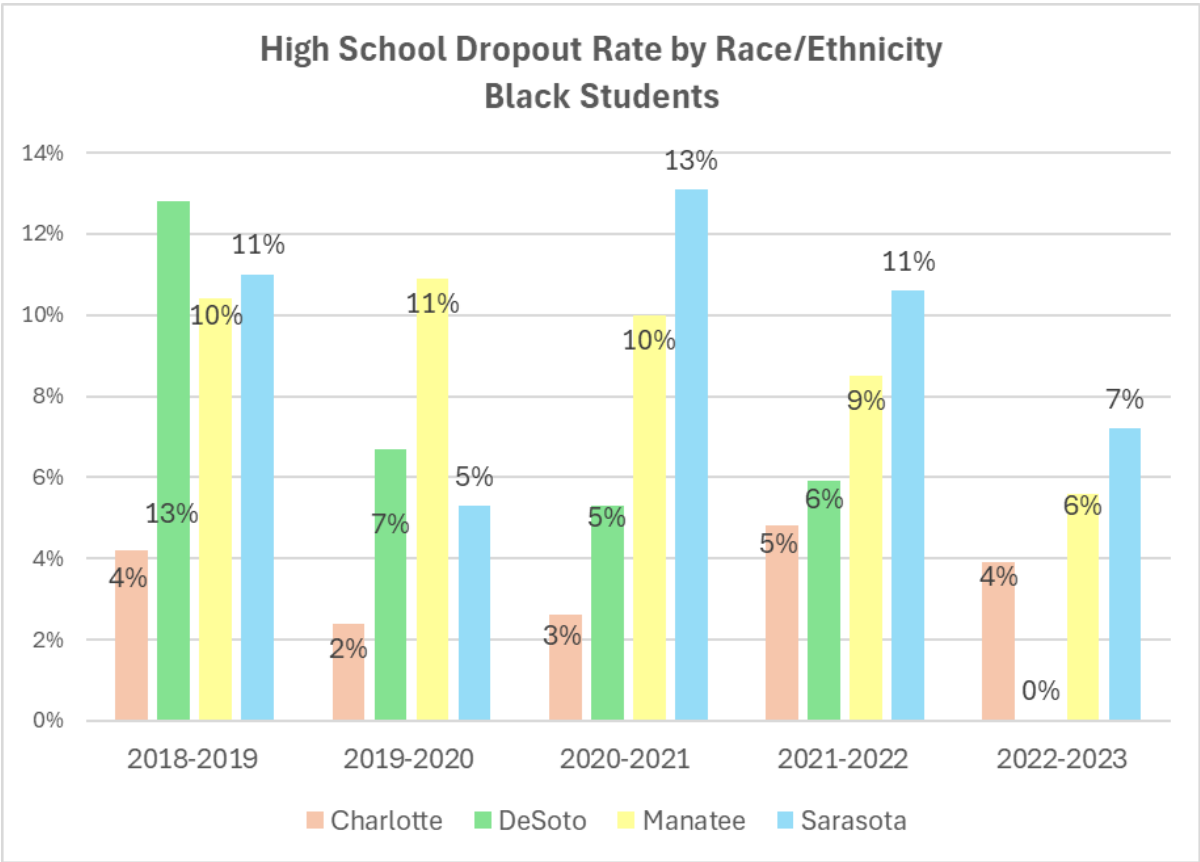
rates, while Hispanic students show steady improvements over time, reflecting progress in addressing potential barriers. Black students tend to have lower graduation rates compared to other groups, indicating persistent disparities that require targeted support. Multiracial students exhibit variability, with rates differing significantly between counties and years.

High School Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity

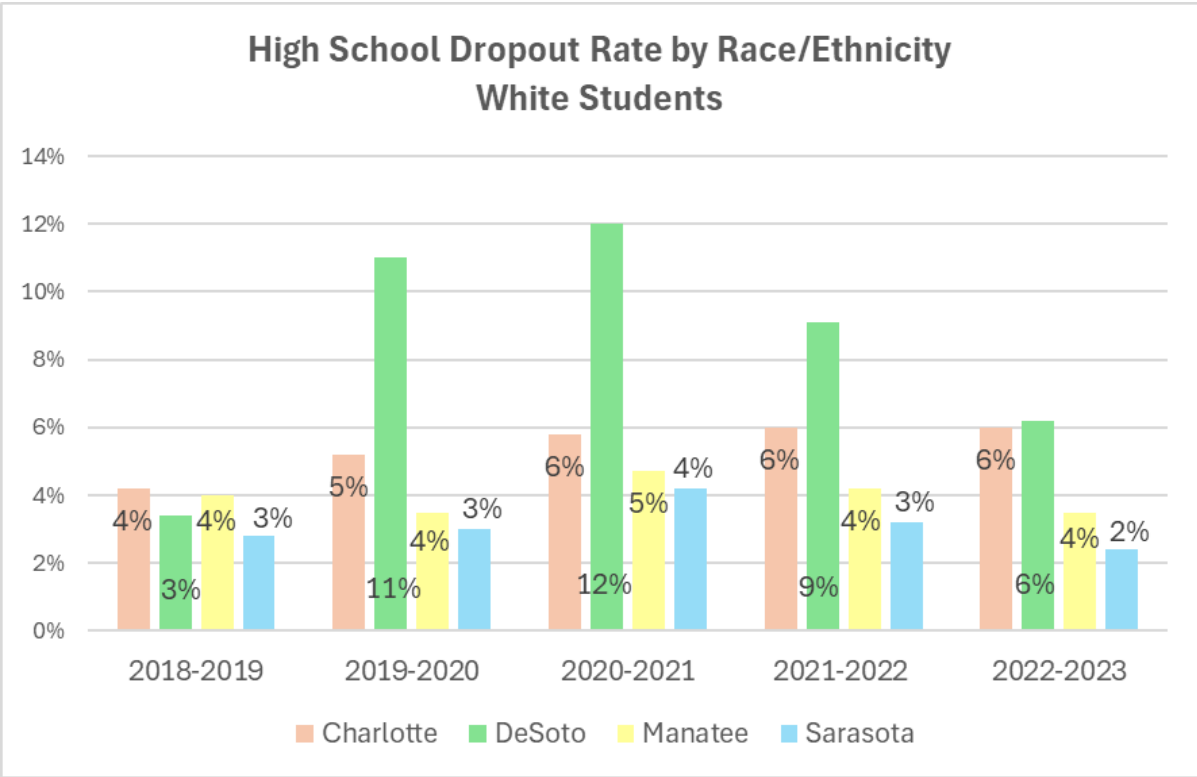
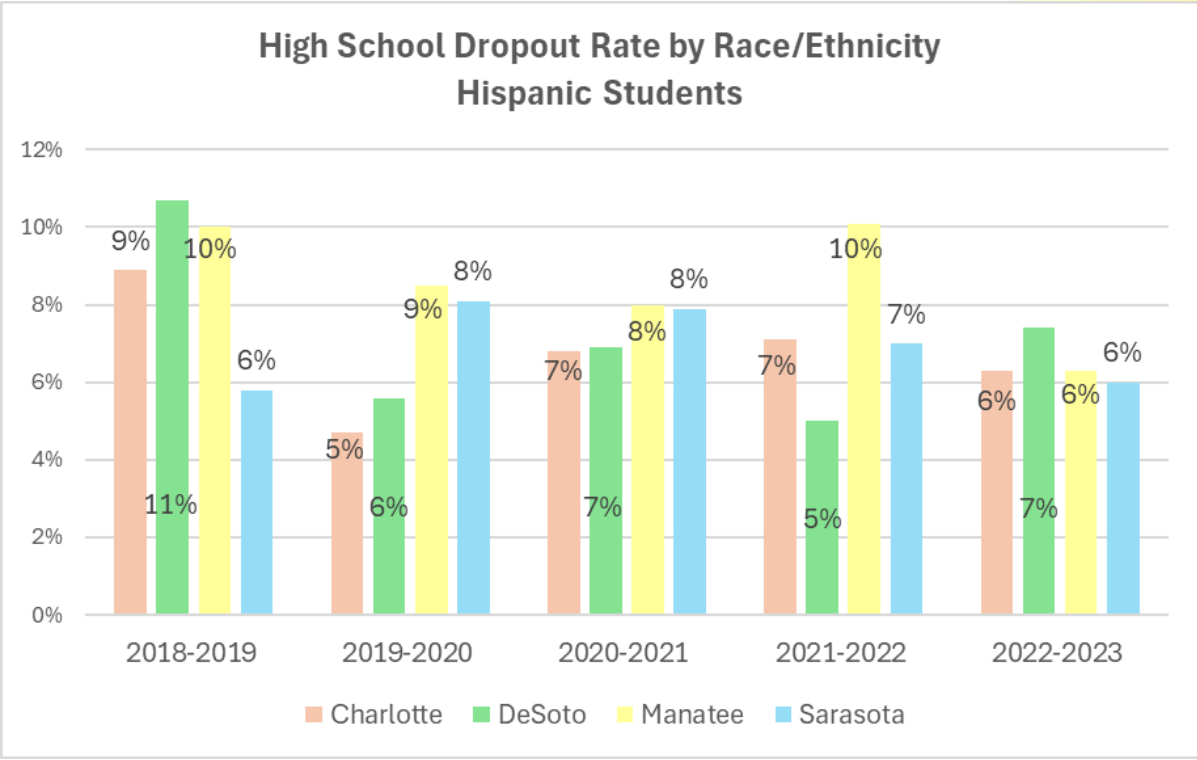
High school dropout rate data provides critical insights into systemic barriers, equity gaps, and resource disparities. It reflects student engagement, school climate, and the effectiveness of retention policies and programs. Disparities in dropout rates by race, ethnicity, gender, or income level may highlight inequities, and opportunities for targeted interventions, while trends over time can reveal the impact of external factors such as pandemics, climate challenges, economic difficulties, or other issues.

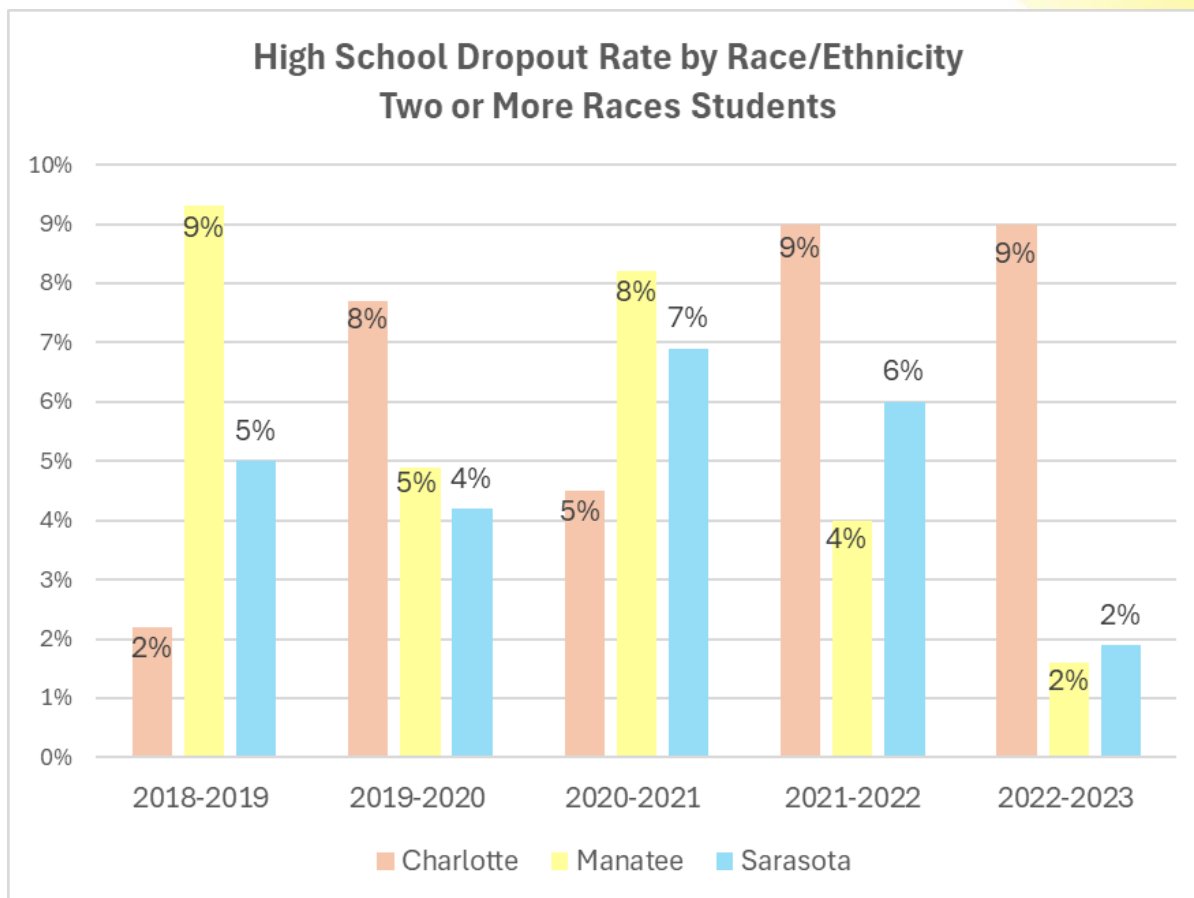
Dropout rates and graduation rates do not always add up to 100% because some students take alternative paths, such as earning GEDs, completing high school beyond the standard timeframe, or transferring to other educational programs. Analyzing this data helps educators and policymakers address disparities, allocate resources effectively, and develop strategies to improve student retention and success.

Dropout rate by race/ethnicity shows:









Data Sources: Florida Department of Education

Data for Asian students and some races/ethnicities in certain counties was either negligible or unavailable, so it is not displayed in these data sets.

The high school dropout rate data for Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties highlights significant disparities by race and ethnicity. Black students consistently have the highest dropout rates, while Hispanic and multiracial students face moderate rates, and White and Asian students show the lowest, underscoring inequities revealed in educational support and access. Dropout rates for Black students have fluctuated but show slight declines in recent years, particularly in Charlotte and Sarasota, indicating some progress. Hispanic and multiracial rates vary, suggesting unevenly effective interventions. Sarasota generally has higher dropout rates for Black and Hispanic students compared to Charlotte and Manatee, while DeSoto shows year-to-year variability, emphasizing opportunities for targeted strategies to address disparities.

Overall, average dropout rates for the analyzed period reveal that Manatee County had the highest rate at approximately 7%, reflecting systemic challenges that may require additional resources. Sarasota follows with 6%, while DeSoto and Charlotte counties show slightly lower averages at 5% and slightly above 5%, respectively. Charlotte County demonstrates the most consistent performance. These trends highlight the importance of equitable and county-specific strategies to reduce dropout rates and ensure all students have the support needed to succeed.

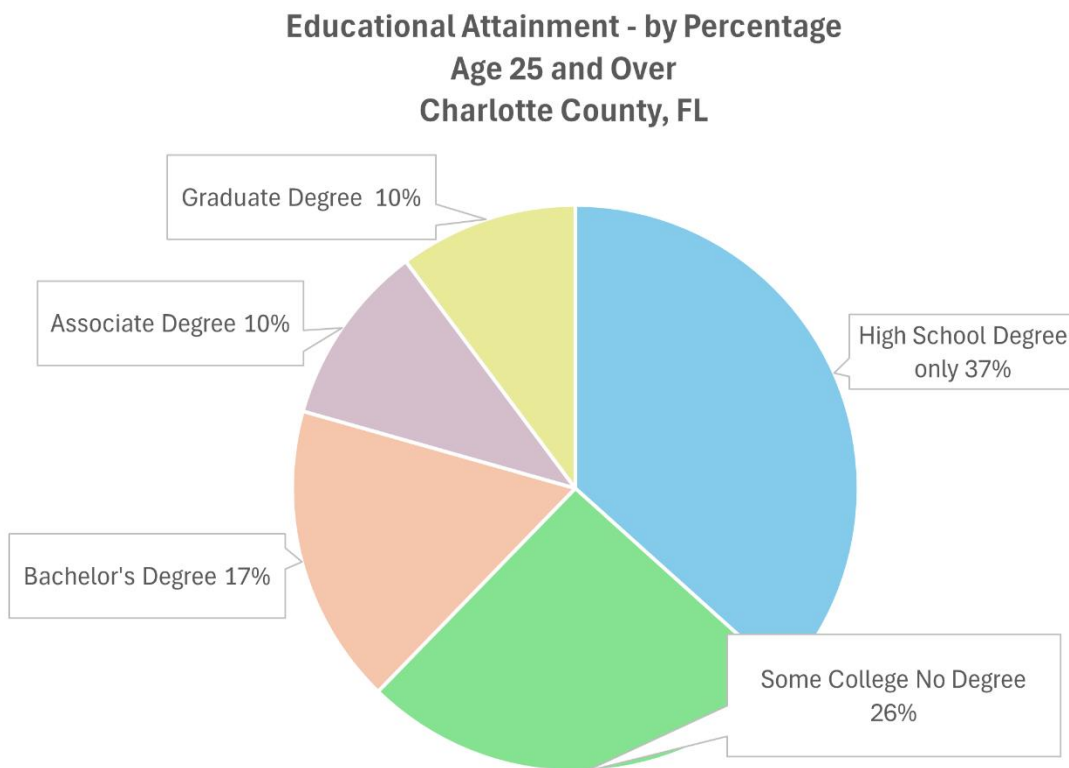


## Educational Attainment

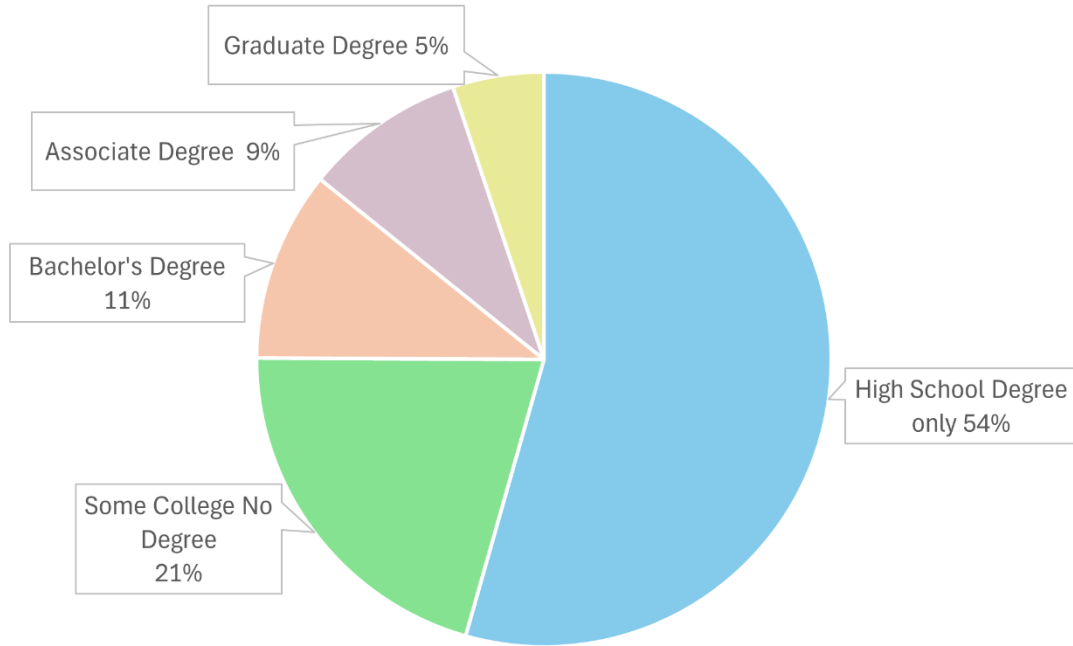
Reviewing postsecondary attainment is essential when analyzing regional education data because it connects education outcomes to workforce readiness, economic growth, and community well-being. It highlights disparities in access to opportunities, informs targeted community interventions to support underrepresented groups, and reveals gaps in the education pipeline. Postsecondary attainment data also helps align regional educational goals with economic objectives, attract businesses, and foster innovation. Additionally, it provides motivation for students and families by highlighting success stories and demonstrating pathways to upward mobility.

A comprehensive definition of attainment includes postsecondary certifications, career education training, other training, associate degrees, and college or advanced degrees.

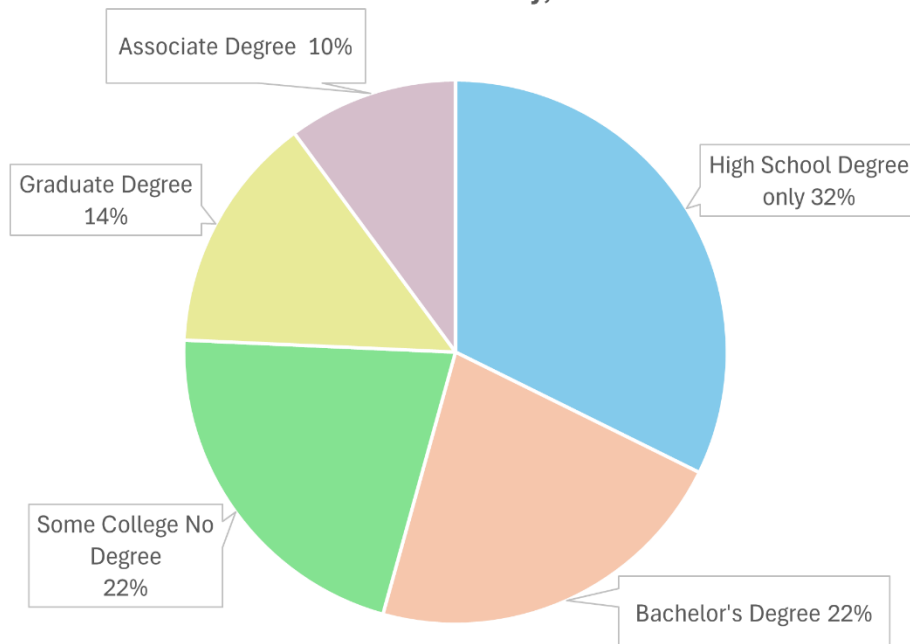
The data available for this report shares high school through advanced degree data provided by the US Census Bureau. Data regarding the population attaining certifications, career education training, or similar training was not easily accessible for the preparation of this report. The attainment data is organized by county:



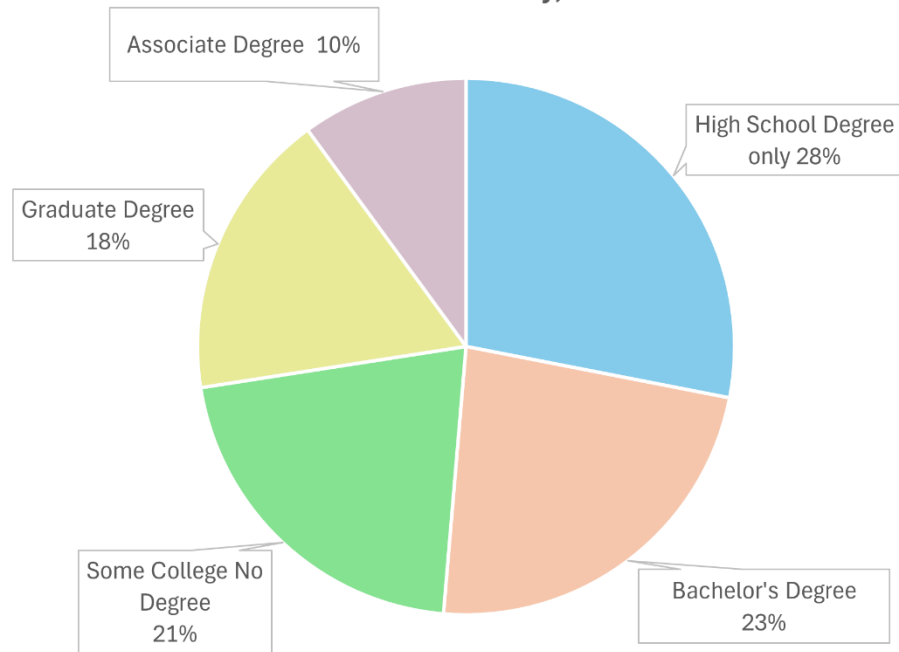
**Educational Attainment - by Percentage  
Age 25 and Over  
DeSoto County, FL**



**Educational Attainment - by Percentage  
Age 25 and Over  
Manatee County, FL**



**Educational Attainment - by Percentage  
Age 25 and Over  
Sarasota County, FL**



The educational attainment data reveals notable differences in the levels of education among residents aged 25 and older in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. Sarasota County stands out with the highest proportion of residents holding bachelor's (23%) and graduate degrees (18%), indicating a highly educated population. Manatee County follows with a substantial percentage of residents holding bachelor's (22%) and graduate degrees (14%). In contrast, DeSoto County has the largest proportion of residents with only a high school diploma (54%) and the lowest percentage of bachelor's (11%) and graduate degrees (5%). An interesting data point is that each county has 9-10% of the population over age 25 with an associate degree.

The counties with higher levels of education, such as Sarasota and Manatee, are likely to attract industries requiring skilled labor, foster innovation, and experience greater economic growth. Additionally, a well-educated population often correlates with better health outcomes, civic engagement, and quality of life. On the other hand, DeSoto County's lower levels of higher education may signal challenges in workforce development, economic diversification, and access to opportunities. These insights underscore the importance of targeted education initiatives and workforce development programs to address disparities and promote sustainable growth across all four counties.



## Summary & Opportunities

### Summary

- Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) and Kindergarten Readiness: The data shows opportunities to expand on existing programs and outreach to share access, awareness, and affordability. DeSoto County lags significantly in kindergarten readiness (26% in 2024), compared to Sarasota and Charlotte county's higher rates (57%).
- Reading and Math Attainment: Sarasota leads in literacy and math metrics, while DeSoto faces persistent challenges. Black and Hispanic students consistently show lower proficiency levels across all counties, highlighting equity gaps.
- Academic Achievement: Accelerated course participation (AICE, AP, IB, dual enrollment) and high school graduation rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity, with minority students underrepresented in advanced programs.
- Postsecondary Attainment: Sarasota and Manatee have higher proportions of residents with college and advanced degrees, whereas DeSoto and Charlotte show greater reliance on high school and associate-level education, signaling workforce disparities.

### Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Support Existing Early Education Program Access: Support existing school district, nonprofit, and community partnership efforts to increase VPK enrollment through awareness campaigns, bilingual outreach, and subsidized programs. Partner with nonprofits and local businesses to improve transportation and provide wraparound services.
- Enhance Literacy and Numeracy Support: Support expanding existing tutoring and mentoring initiatives for at-risk students, focusing on culturally responsive instruction and after-school programs, and peer-to-peer mentoring to bridge proficiency gaps.
- Support Existing Programs Strengthening Family Engagement: Support existing programs and services that host parent workshops on literacy, numeracy, and college readiness. The programs provide resources and training to empower families as active participants in their children's education.
- Expand Existing Programs Promoting Equity in Accelerated Learning: Support school, nonprofit, and community programs that actively recruit and prepare underrepresented students into AICE, AP, IB, and dual enrollment programs through targeted outreach, mentoring, and academic preparation workshops.
- Improve Postsecondary Pathways: Expand existing partnerships with local industries to create internships, apprenticeships, and career training programs. Share success stories to inspire and encourage students and expand these partnerships.
- Tackle Systemic Barriers: Participate in community partnerships that address socioeconomic challenges such as food insecurity, transportation, and mental health support through community partnerships and public funding.

Getting involved and supporting conversation, engagement, and collaborative efforts between schools, nonprofits, local businesses, and community leaders sustains and expands equitable, robust education opportunities that prepare all students for success.





COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  

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of Sarasota County

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