



21 Talcott Notch Road
Farmington, CT 06032
860.678.0005
theccic.org

**Testimony for the
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
Thursday, March 8, 2018**

On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), I am submitting testimony on two bills before you today: **S.B. 352, An Act Extending the Moratorium on Approval of Programs of Independent Institutions of Higher Education** and **H.B. 5371, An Act Establishing the Free 2 Start Scholarship Program and the Free 2 Finish Scholarship Program.**

CCIC Strongly supports S.B. 352, which seeks to extend the temporary moratorium from academic program approval by the Office of Higher Education (OHE) for **non-profit independent colleges** that meet specific criteria. This moratorium only applies to non-profit independent institutions of higher education that:

- have been operating in Connecticut and accredited as degree-granting institutions for at least 10 years by a regional accrediting association recognized by the U. S. education secretary (i.e., NEASC);
- are eligible to participate in federal student aid programs; and
- have a financial responsibility composite score greater than 1.5 as determined by the U.S. Department of Education.

Presently, eleven institutions of higher education meet these criteria in Connecticut. They are: Albertus Magnus College, Fairfield University, Goodwin College, Mitchell College, Quinnipiac University, Sacred Heart University, St. Vincent's College, University of Bridgeport, University of Hartford, University of New Haven and University of St. Joseph. Four of Connecticut's sixteen independent colleges have always been exempt from oversight by OHE because of the date of their charter (Yale, Wesleyan, Connecticut College and Trinity). The OHE has determined that Rensselaer at Hartford is not eligible for the moratorium.

Albertus Magnus College
Connecticut College
Fairfield University
Goodwin College
Mitchell College
Quinnipiac University
Rensselaer at Hartford
Sacred Heart University
St. Vincent's College
Trinity College
University of Bridgeport
University of Hartford
University of New Haven
University of Saint Joseph
Wesleyan University
Yale University

The moratorium is critically important to these eligible institutions. While OHE has made efforts over the years to streamline the program approval process, the process consumed considerable time and resources and added costs and delays to curriculum development and reform. These costs diminished the opportunity for independent institutions to respond promptly to student demand and to the needs of our state's employers.

In fact, over the last eighteen months, the new programs that have come online at these eligible institutions are exactly what are needed as employers continue to complain about the lack of talent available in critical areas identified for economic growth. They include degree programs in Biochemistry, Computer Engineering, Cybersecurity, Data Analytics, Health Sciences and Manufacturing Technology.

In addition, the moratorium levels the playing field for these eligible institutions. Thirty-five states have no oversight over academic program approval for private, non-profit institutions. Eight states exempt the bulk of non-profit institutions that meet certain standards, like the criteria laid out in this moratorium. No other state has an academic program approval process in place for non-profit colleges but not for the public colleges, as Connecticut did before this moratorium was adopted. Our state's public colleges must only seek approval of their own board for new programs -- no outside review is required.

Having this moratorium in place does not diminish program quality. Each eligible institution has a rigorous and extensive internal review process for creating new programs, as delineated in the testimony of many of the eligible institutions. There is no correlation between completion rates and state oversight (see Figures 1, 2 & 3 below).

CCIC Member Institutions are committed to being partners with the state in educating our future workforce and collaborating with our state's employers to develop programs that will fill and grow higher paying jobs. Extending this regulatory barrier will help us continue to do so.

CCIC is opposed to **H.B. 5371, An Act Establishing the Free 2 Start Scholarship Program and the Free 2 Finish Scholarship Program** which will make tuition free for eligible Connecticut residents at our state's public colleges.

CCIC recognizes that providing access to quality higher education is critical to a healthy state economy that requires a highly educated workforce, however, we are very concerned that if adopted HB 5371 will have negative consequences for Connecticut students, institutions and the state's economy.

Connecticut's independent colleges play a significant role in educating our state's citizenry. We enroll nearly 50,000 undergraduate students, just shy of 30% of the total, and award nearly 45% of the bachelor's degrees earned. We award the bulk of degrees earned in STEM fields – which we desperately need more of to grow our economy—and we award more than half of the bachelor's degrees earned by minority students.

Our state's need-based aid program has been cut by 50% over the last eight years (see Figure 4). Rather than picking winners and losers, the state should support access and choice to all sectors of higher education institutions by investing in the state's need-based financial aid program, which lags the national average in both average grant and investment per student enrolled. A robust student aid program will incentivize Connecticut students to stay and allow them access to the institution that fits them best. Contrary to popular belief, it is not whether an institution is public or private which determines what

percent of graduates stay in-state, but what percentage of Connecticut students are enrolled at that institution (see figure 5).

Further, we caution legislators about the unintended consequences that a Free Public College program may have for some of the smaller private colleges in your communities that would most certainly be devastated by this proposal. Our neighbors in New York [have reported](#) that many private, non-profit institutions that enroll a majority of New Yorkers have faced enrollment declines causing employment reductions after just one year of Free College in that state.

Prior to making such a significant, new investment the state needs to look at what degrees, in which fields, are truly needed over the next ten years and make investments across all sectors of higher education to ensure our system is accessible and affordable for Connecticut residents.

Figure 1

State oversight over academic program approval has no correlation with high graduation rates at private, non-profit colleges and universities.

Six-Year Total Completion Rate for Students Who Started at Four-Year Private Nonprofit Institutions, by Origin State

Source: National Student Clearing House

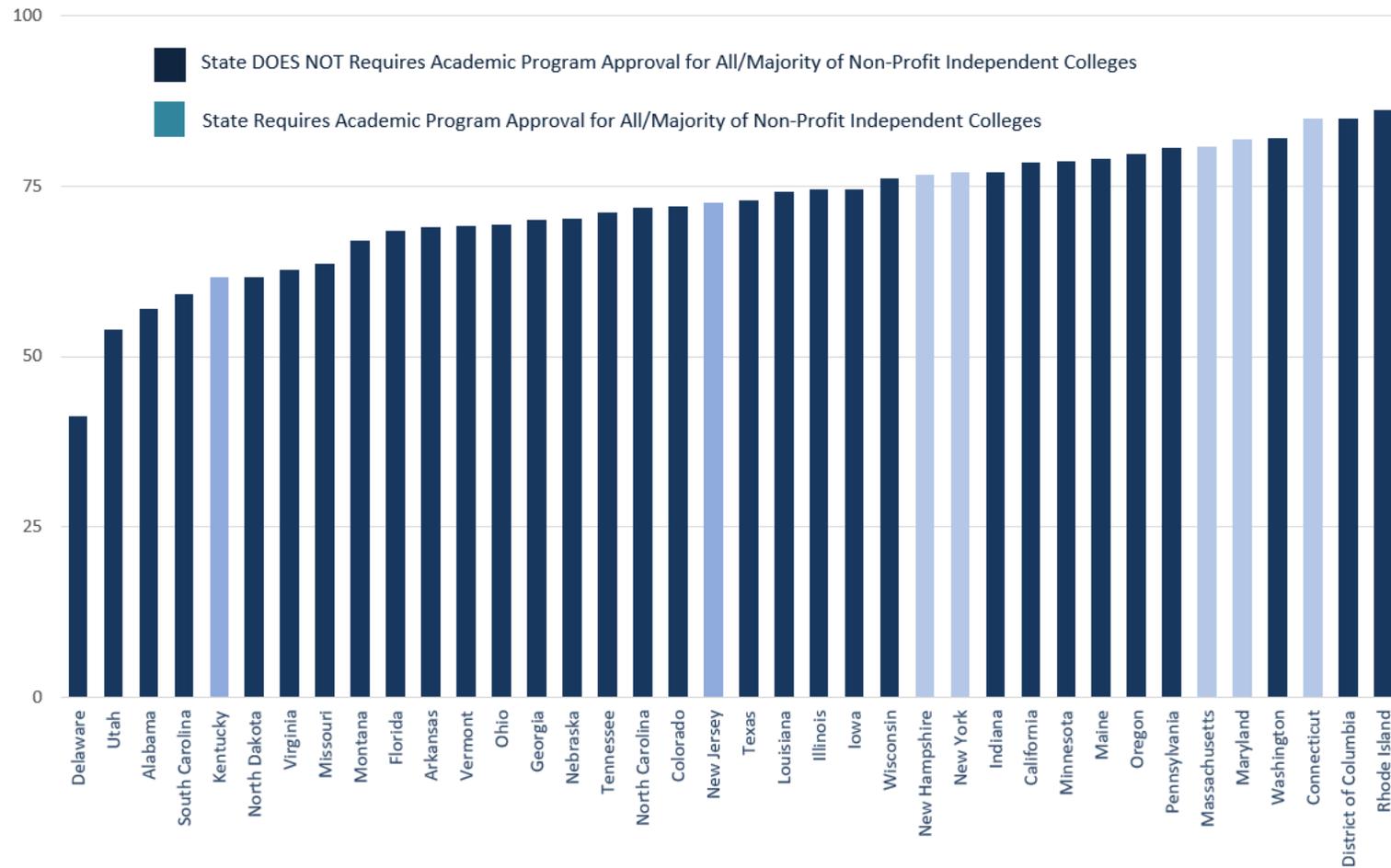


Figure 2

2015-16 Completion rates for first-time, full-time students at CT 4-year institutions

Source: IPEDS

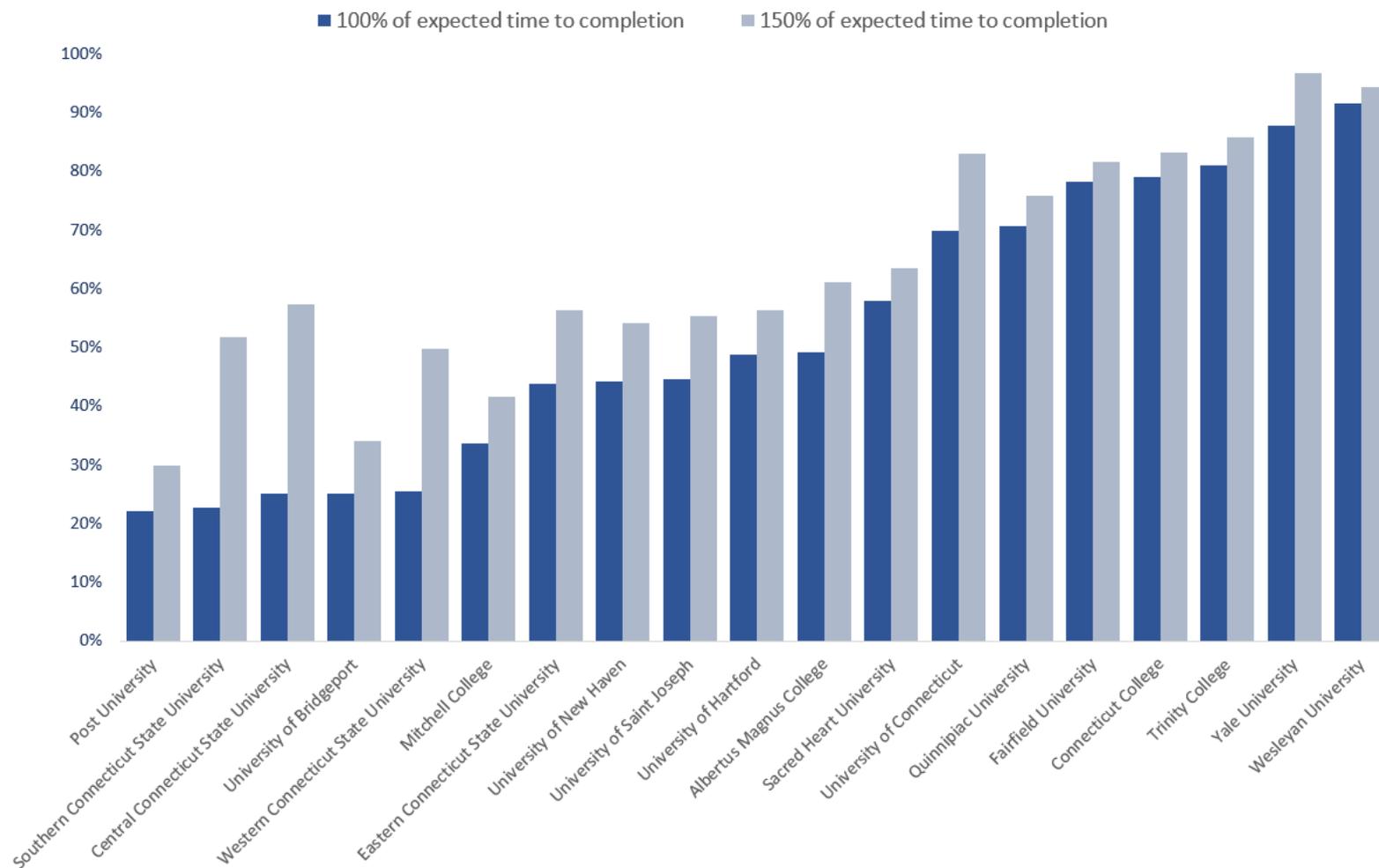


Figure 3

2015-16 Completion rates for first-time, full-time students at CT 2-year institutions

Source: IPEDS

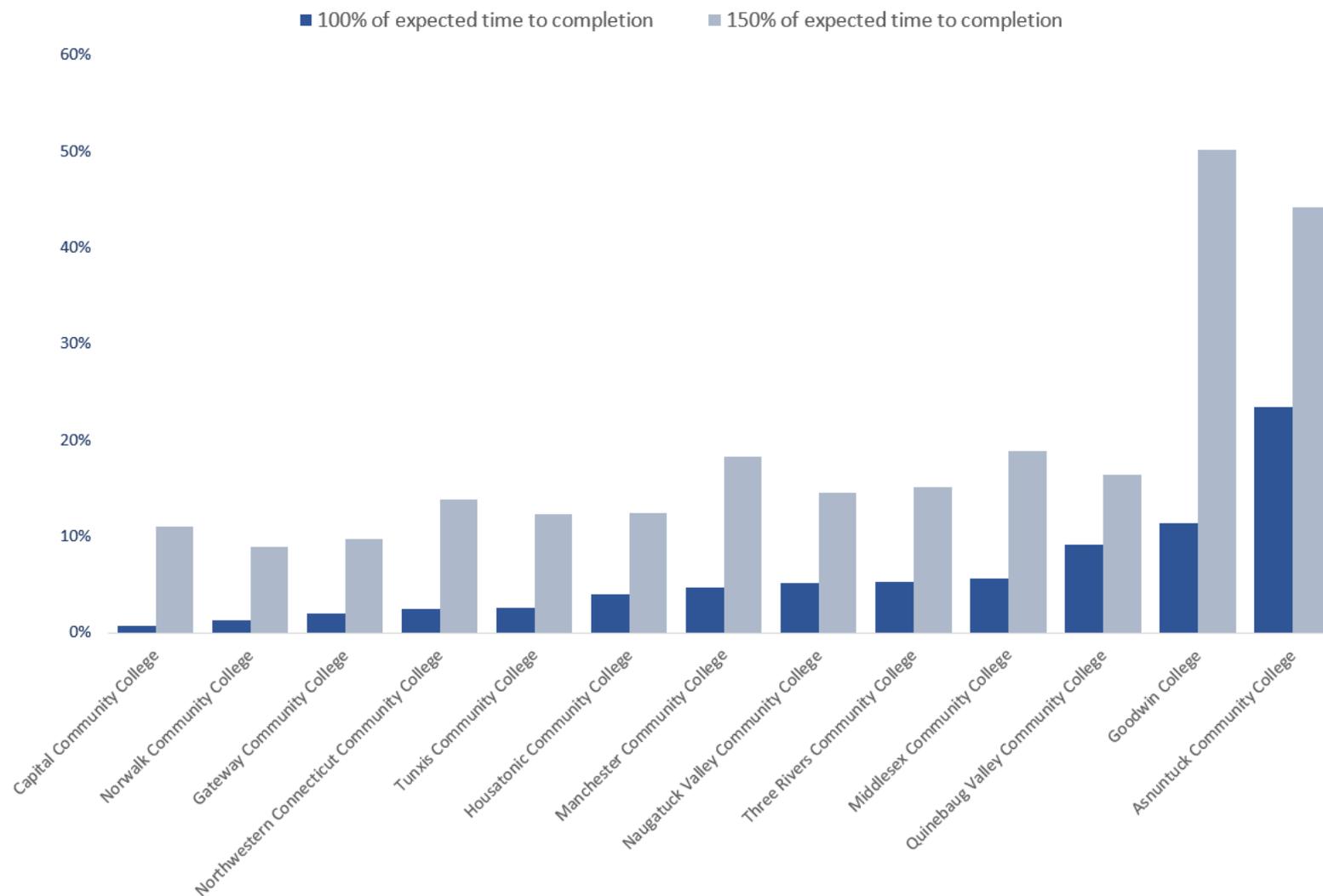


Figure 4

Funding for State Financial Aid Programs: FY 07 - FY 17

Source: OFA Budget Books & OHE

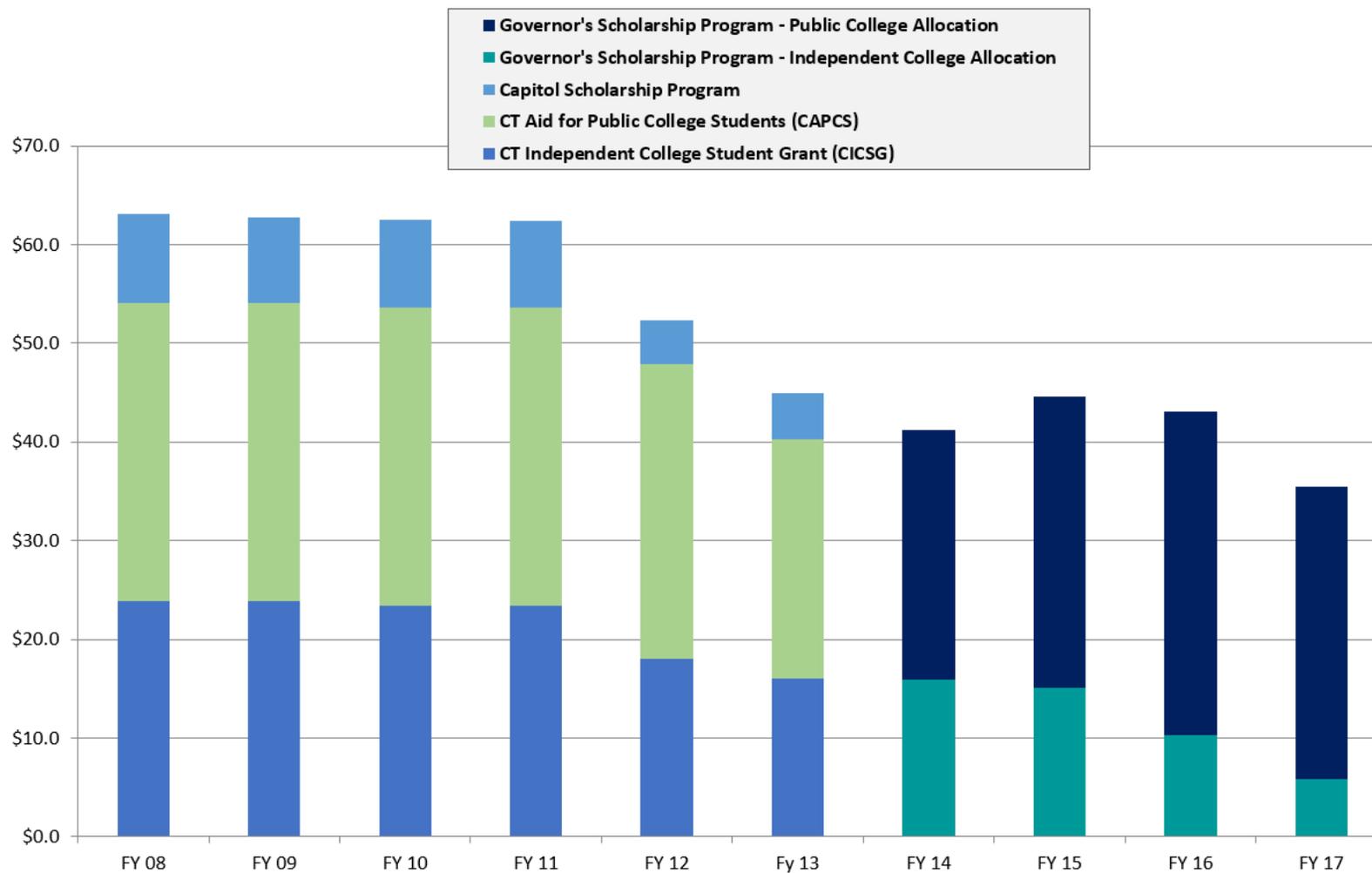


Figure 5

Percent of CT Residents Enrolled in an Institution Compared to Percent of Graduates from that Institution Working in CT 3 Quarters After Graduation

Source: cicu-IRPS, CT Dept. of Labor 2015 Legislative Report Card & P20 WIN

