



DATE: January 9, 2026
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Chancellor Dannel P. Malloy, University of Maine System
RE: **2026 Report on First-Generation Student Enrollment and Success**

[Public Law 2013, Chapter 166](#) requires public institutions of higher education in Maine to report annually to the Legislature on their **first-generation student enrollment and outcomes**, as well as strategies to improve both. To meet this expectation in a consistent manner, the University of Maine System (UMS), the Maine Community College System, and Maine Maritime Academy have established standard definitions, including that a first-generation student means neither parent has obtained the level of postsecondary degree primarily granted by that institution. For Maine's public universities, that is a bachelor's degree.

Driven by its region-leading affordability, high-quality academic programs, student success and retention initiatives, and innovations in access and admissions, UMS continues to make meaningful gains in both first-generation student enrollment and outcomes. In fact, **the bachelor's degree attainment rate of the System's first-generation students is more than double the national average for this population.**

UMS First-Generation Undergraduate Student Enrollment (Fall 2025)

As shown in the table below, among *all* new degree- and certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered UMS in Fall 2025 (first-time and transfer), 41.6% were considered first-generation, a modest increase from 40.8% in Fall 2024. There was also an increase in the percentage of *incoming full-time* undergraduate students who are first-generation (40.9%), though the percentage of *all* first-generation degree- and certificate-seeking undergraduate students enrolled has declined slightly (40.9%).

Percentage of UMS Undergraduates Who Are First Generation

	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
All Degree/Certificate-Seeking	40.2%	41.6%	40.9%
Full-Time, Degree/Certificate-Seeking	37.3%	39.3%	38.7%
All Entering (First-Time and Transfer)	40.4%	40.8%	41.6%
Full-Time Entering (First/Transfer)	39.3%	40.1%	40.9%

Key System-wide initiatives to **raise aspirations and reduce barriers to education and upward mobility** for all students, including first-generation students, include free UMS early college and direct admissions, through which our public universities proactively admit promising Maine high school students without requiring them to go through a traditional application process.

While the **University of Maine School Law** is not included in the undergraduate student data provided above, in 2023 the state's only and public law school began tracking the percentage of its students who are the first in their families to have earned a bachelor's degree. In Fall 2025, **20% of Maine Law students were first-generation**. Maine Law recently spotlighted one of these students, [Hailey Champagne](#), in profiles of members of its new 1L class (Class of 2028). Hailey, a native of Lewiston who graduated from the **University of Maine**, said learning to navigate higher education as a first-generation student led her to pursue a Juris Doctor (J.D.), and that she aspires to be an advocate for others.

UMS First-Generation Student Outcomes: 2019 Cohort Degree Attainment

When measuring student outcomes, the U.S. Department of Education typically considers the six-year college graduation rate for baccalaureate degree programs (or the three-year rate for associate degree programs). Our data reflect that while UMS first-generation student degree attainment rates lag those of non-first-generation peers, they are more than double the national rate.

Specifically, 50% of *all* first-generation, bachelor's-degree seeking students who started at UMS in Fall 2019 have earned their bachelor's degree within six years. While this is below the 65.3% bachelor's degree attainment rate of their non-first-generation UMS peers, it is **significantly higher than** [the national first-generation student degree attainment rate](#) of 24%. Meanwhile, 10.1% of *all* first-generation students in this Fall 2019 entering cohort remain enrolled but have not yet earned their bachelor's degree. The degree completion rate of 53.5% was **even higher for first-generation, bachelor's degree-seeking students who entered UMS** in Fall 2019 and maintained a *full-time* course load, while 10.6% of this cohort currently remains enrolled in postsecondary education.

UMS Undergraduate Student Outcomes (Fall 2019 Cohort)

	Attained Bachelor's Degree	Still Enrolled
First-Generation Students	50%	10.1%
Not First-Generation Students	65.3%	7.6%

Full-Time, First-Generation	53.5%	10.6%
Full-Time, Not First-Generation	67.4%	7.5%

Supporting System-wide Student Success

Consistent with our System's strategic plan and Maine's educational attainment and employer needs, UMS has implemented multiple targeted System-wide initiatives to **increase student success**, including for first-generation students. In Fall 2024, the System achieved its highest-ever fall-to-fall return rate, reflecting the positive impact of these interventions. These retention gains should result in higher graduation rates in future years.

Several of these efforts are supported through [**UMS TRANSFORMS**](#), a multi-year initiative funded by historic investment from the Harold Alfond Foundation, focused on four key areas — including **student success and retention** — to better position the System to meet the state's most pressing workforce and economic needs. For example, UMS TRANSFORMS **Research Learning Experiences** (RLEs) allow first- and second-year students to engage in hands-on discovery and foster meaningful relationships with peers and faculty, resulting in a greater sense of academic confidence, connection, and retention. More than one-quarter of all incoming first-year UMS students participated in RLEs in Fall 2025, including more than half of first-year **University of Maine** students — nearly 25% of whom identify as first-generation.

UMS TRANSFORMS is also underwriting the **redesign of gateway STEM courses** that have historically been barriers to academic progress as well as peer tutoring services and pathways to careers through paid internships and other work-based learning.

Maine's public universities are increasing **intrusive advising**, including by using educational technology to reach students where they are — on their phones — and keep them connected and accountable. Through text messages, alerts can be sent to remind students they missed a class or are behind on their assignments, and to invite them to advising and counseling appointments. These tools benefit all students but are especially helpful to first-generation students who may not feel comfortable navigating more formal university support systems. Students can also access 24-7 support, including through AI chatbots like **UMaine's "Bananas T. Bear"** and the System used one-time investment income to make **telemental health services available to students at all UMS universities** in the 2025-26 academic year.

Recognizing that retention and graduation rates are higher for students who take 30 credits each year, Maine's public universities have **expanded summer, winter, and May term offerings**. This enables students, including first-generation students, to better balance their academic obligations with work and family commitments while remaining on track to timely

degree completion. As a result, students took 33% more credit hours in Summer 2025 than five years prior. Similarly, expanded online courses and degree programs, including through the **University of Maine at Presque Isle's fully online competency-based YourPace**, ensure students who are place-bound or busy can still earn a door-opening degree.

Additionally, UMS serves 80% of all TRIO students in the state, leveraging competitive federal funding administered by the U.S. Department of Education to support more than 6,000 Mainers each year work toward achieving a door-opening postsecondary degree and upward mobility, while also meeting critical state workforce needs. For example, Maine's public universities recently secured a total of \$3.2 million through TRIO to **improve the postsecondary success and workforce readiness of students** who are low-income, the first in their family to attend college, or have disabilities. These grants for the 2025-26 academic year are part of an anticipated \$16.3 million in total new TRIO Student Support Services funding to UMS expected over the next five years. Funds will support high-impact advising, resource navigation, and peer mentoring for eligible students across all UMS undergraduate universities.

Maine's public universities also continue to **expand access to emergency financial assistance and other basic-needs supports** that are important to first-generation students, who are more likely to have financial need. For example, as of November 2025, all UMS universities have **on-campus food pantries**, and some also have **professional clothing closets** so students can participate in internships and other professional work-learning experiences regardless of their financial means. Additionally, through the UMS/Sodexo Swipe Out Hunger program, **unused meal “swipes” are made available** to UMS students who are food insecure.

Below are examples of student success and retention initiatives at each UMS university that are positively impacting the outcomes of first-generation students:

University of Maine/University of Maine at Machias

UMaine and its regional campus, **UMaine Machias**, continue to strengthen support for first-generation students through aligned academic, advising, and engagement strategies. Central to the flagship's efforts has been the recent **establishment of the Office of Student Academic Success**, which provides both professional and peer academic coaching to UMaine's most vulnerable students, including first-generation and/or Pell-eligible students. This proactive, opt-out support model ensures early connection to coaching, consistent check-ins, and targeted academic skill development before challenges escalate.

Since 2023, faculty participation in **Black Bear Early Alert**, UMaine's faculty-driven early intervention system, has more than doubled, with more than 75% of faculty participating in

Fall 2025. These alerts trigger personalized outreach, academic coaching, tutoring referrals, and coordinated follow-up, strengthening students' sense of belonging and connection to the institution.

Additional targeted supports, including TRIO programs, expanded tutoring, and student success workshops through the Office of Student Academic Success, and partnerships such as with JMG and tribal student mentorship initiatives, further strengthen students' support networks. Access and navigation continue to be enhanced through **UMaine's Virtual Student Success Hub and AI-enabled student support tools**, reducing institutional complexity and normalizing help-seeking behaviors.

University of Maine at Augusta (UMA)

In Fall 2025, **UMA implemented EdSights**, an AI-powered two-way texting platform ("Auggie") that enables 24/7 support, proactive check-ins, and direct connections to academic, financial, wellness, and student life resources. Especially effective for first-generation and distance learners, this student persistence tool captures real-time student feedback, flags emerging barriers to success, and prompts targeted staff outreach. Auggie is an especially important tool for first-generation students who are more likely to need the in-the-moment information and support Auggie provides. Auggie also promotes student persistence by capturing authentic student voices, providing insight into potential barriers to success for first-generation and other **UMA** students, and connecting students in need of academic, financial, social, and wellness support to campus resources and caring staff. **UMA** expanded this initiative by hiring dedicated student outreach staff.

UMA was also selected to participate in the **National Institute of Student Success**, which is helping the university improve proactive advising, address high-risk courses, streamline financial aid, and provide financial wellness resources to students, and better connect incoming students to **UMA's** support resources. Through EAB's Navigate 360, **UMA** now averages more than 3,000 advising appointments per semester, simplifying access to support for first-generation students.

University of Maine at Farmington (UMF)

At **UMF**, first-generation students are using the on-campus **Student Learning Commons** to access peer tutoring, academic coaching, goal-setting and accountability partnerships, and other student success services. Peers offer guidance on strategies for academic success, adjusting to campus life, and effective time management, and encourage students to reach out early in the semester to address small challenges before they become larger obstacles. In Fall 2025, more than 1,000 appointments — a record — were scheduled at the Student Learning Commons, demonstrating that a growing number of **UMF** students are accessing and finding value in these supports.

UMF also has an **Academic Success Team** that includes representatives from the Student Learning Commons, TRIO, student life, disability services, field services, and advising and provides coordinated support to students, with a focus on those who are first-generation. This team receives and acts on progress reports provided by faculty regarding students with academic or attendance issues and missing or late work patterns. The team received 946 progress reports in the Fall 2025 semester, a 51% increase from the prior year. In response, team members proactively reached out to students to offer support, make referrals to tutors and academic coaches, or initiate a withdrawal or late-withdrawal discussion when recovery is no longer realistic.

University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK)

UMFK supports the success of its first-generation students by providing tailored academic, personal, and financial support through **TRIO Student Support Services and the JMG program**. By pairing students with dedicated mentors for accountability and guidance, UMFK ensures they have the resources needed to reach degree attainment.

The System's northernmost university promotes its first-generation commitment by showcasing its inclusive support system, beginning at admissions open houses. Continued engagement of first-generation students throughout their time at **UMFK** is designed to foster a strong sense of community and promote retention and includes unique events such as financial literacy escape rooms and study skills workshops.

UMFK also hosts an annual **First-Gen Week**, a celebration kicked off with a supportive message from the university's president, herself a first-generation student, that includes a FAFSA assistance booth, a "Cash-Cab" financial literacy trivia event focused on car buying, and professional headshots.

University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI)

UMPI advances first-generation student success through a comprehensive, campus-wide approach that combines academic support, engagement, and clear pathways to completion. For example, **faculty development initiatives** promote instructional clarity and inclusive teaching practices that benefit first-generation learners. **UMPI** fosters belonging and visibility by celebrating **First Generation Student Day** and amplifying student voices through storytelling initiatives that recognize first-gen identity and achievement.

Robust TRIO Student Support Services and College Access Services assist students with college readiness, persistence, and degree completion. Focused on academic skill-building, motivation, and navigation of higher education systems — key needs for first-generation students — these programs serve hundreds of first-generation and low-income students annually from pre-college preparation to bachelor's degree completion.

Recently, **UMPI** launched **Degree Planner**, which is an interactive visual tool that further supports first-generation students by providing transparent degree maps, progress tracking, and clear pathways to graduation.

Like other UMS universities, **UMPI** is leveraging Harold Alfond Foundation funding through UMS TRANSFORMS to **support student success and pathways to careers**. Academic support in high-enrollment gateway courses includes embedded student tutors to improve confidence, course completion, and retention.

University of Southern Maine (USM)

USM's Promise Scholarship is designed to help disadvantaged young achievers referred by Maine youth-serving organizations overcome financial, academic, social, and cultural barriers, remain in school, and graduate in four years with minimal student loan debt and prepared to make their own contributions to Maine. Preference is given to first-generation students who demonstrate financial need.

Since 2018, the Promise Scholarship has transformed the futures of 170 Maine students and their families. Of those scholarship recipients, 79% identified as being a first-generation college student, 71% were eligible for a federal Pell grant, and 100% could not afford college without significant scholarship support. In addition to financial aid, Promise Scholars also receive wrap-around support and participate in cohort-based activities that promote college, career, and civic success.

Over **94% of first-year Promise Scholars entering the university in Fall 2024 were retained** to Fall 2025 compared to the university's 74.2% first-year retention rate — marking the seventh consecutive year that the program's first-year retention rate has outpaced the university's overall.

Recommendations Regarding First-Generation Students

UMS welcomes the opportunity to review our **first-generation student success initiatives** in greater detail with the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee and to discuss how the Legislature can best support our proven efforts to serve all students and drive educational attainment and economic mobility.

In the meantime, consistent with past years' reports, UMS recommends increased State appropriation as the surest way to improve first-generation student access and achievement. At one time, the State funded 72% of our public system's operation. However, State funding for UMS has decreased since the Great Recession when adjusted for inflation and Maine currently appropriates less than the national average for public higher education per full-time equivalent. Despite this, since FY13, UMS has held tuition flat seven times and

limited any increases to the rate of inflation while also expanding institutional financial aid for students with need. All UMS undergraduate universities offer some form of free tuition program that is focused on those with financial need and not directly subsidized by the Legislature. As a result of this commitment, **more than 30% of our Maine undergraduate students paid no tuition or fees last year.**

Additionally, Maine should explore implementing a universal FAFSA policy through which completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or opt-out form is a high school graduation requirement. More than a dozen other states have done so to ensure students and families understand that higher education is accessible to them, thus increasing college-going and the growth of a skilled workforce.

First-generation students are especially sensitive to tuition prices. Ongoing and increasing investment in UMS, the Maine State Grant, and public early college will promote college aspirations and achievement, maintain postsecondary affordability, and expand navigational and other support for vulnerable learners so they can **enroll, persist, earn their degrees, and achieve economic mobility.**