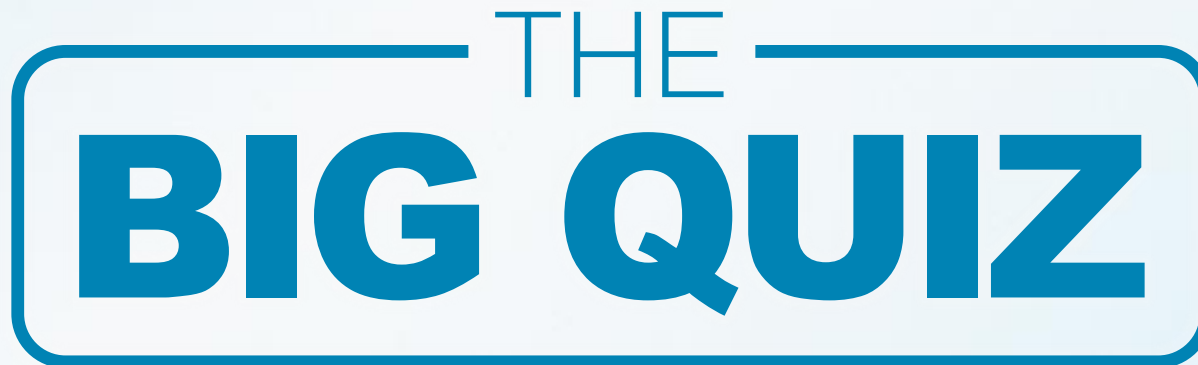


INSIDE THE BLACK BOX:
**What's really happening
in undergraduate education?**

John Nader
Farmingdale State College



“Economists have long treated technological phenomena as events transpiring inside a black box...the economics profession has a self-imposed ordinance not to inquire too strictly into what transpires inside that box.”

(Rosenberg)

Technological change is a little like religion:

Rejected by some

Worshiped by many

Understood by few

(Thomson)

Perhaps the same may be said of higher education?

Faith and confidence are declining

Crisis in public confidence in higher education - Gallup

What share of adults express "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education this year?

Answer: 48% down from 57% in 2015.

Which institution has had a larger drop in confidence?

Higher ed: "No other institution has shown a larger drop in confidence over the past three years..." (Jones, Gallup 10/9/18)

What's wrong?

- Affordability/student debt/access
- Free speech issues
- Politicized campuses
- Graduation rates stagnating
- Admissions scandals
- Value of some degrees
- Uneven outcomes



The critiques are not without merit

- Student debt: **\$1.5 trillion**
- Default rates: **17% on Fed Ed loans**
- Costs increased beyond the rate of inflation: **+67% public and 23% in private nonprofit since 2000-01** (*College Board*)
- Outcomes vary widely among groups
- Admissions process: **criticism from all sides**

Public views vs. those of college faculty and administrators may vary widely - take one important example:

Public view: considering race and ethnicity in admissions

On average, what share of all adult responders say race or ethnicity should not be a factor in college admissions? (*Pew Research Center*)

A) > 60%

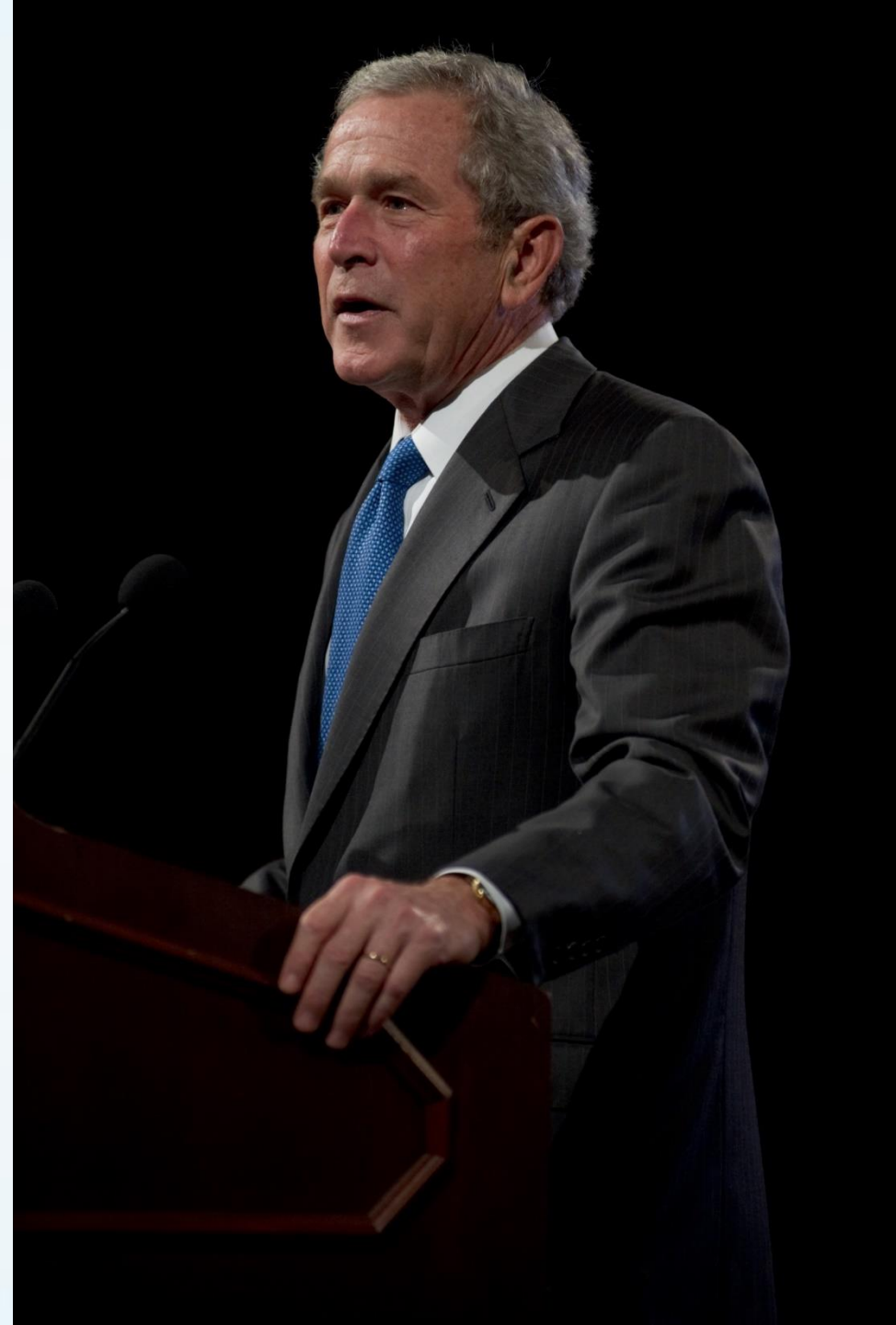
B) < 60%

C) > 70%

Majority of all groups sampled (white, Black, Hispanic, Asian, both parties)

**It seems fair to ask...
as President Bush did**

“Is our children learning?”



The headlines may not be *the trend lines*

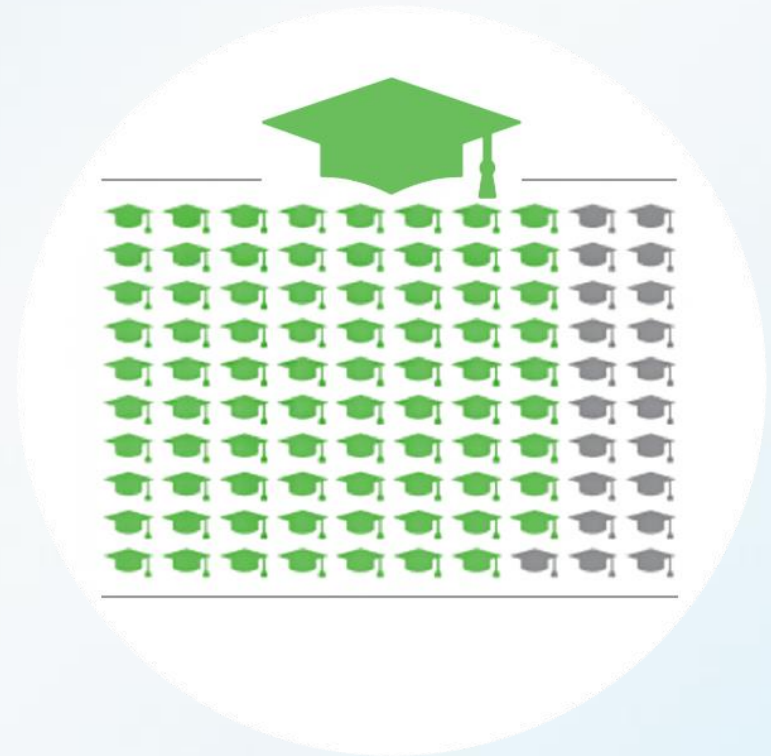
- Various efforts to improve affordability or contain debt
- Greater access and inclusion
- Returns to the college degree are high and increasing!
- Grad rates are improving-modestly
- Colleges are delivering *high impact practices*

Let's start with the debt issue

Many are graduating debt free:



SUNY
47% debt-free



CUNY
79% debt-free

The debt crisis in context...

The “debt crisis” may be a completion and selection issue

“The highest default rates...do not involve college graduates with big debts. They involve students with small debts who never finish....” (Eisgruber, Princeton)

Highest default rates: non-graduates who borrowed little or students in for-profit institutions.

Students who complete baccalaureate degree—even with \$25,000 or more in debt have lower default rates
(Dynarski and US Dept. of Education)

Is higher education borrowing rising or falling?

- A trend you might not read about
- 2017-18- total annual educational borrowing fell in real \$ for the 7th consecutive year (*College Board Trends in Student Aid 2018*)

2017-
2018



A trend less reported?

Is state support per student greater or less than in 1987?

Less state money per higher ed student

Although states are spending more overall on higher education today than in 1987, these spending increases have not kept pace with student enrollment growth. State and local funding for higher education has declined to \$7,152 per student enrolled in a public two – or four – year school in 2015, down from \$9,489 per student enrolled in 1987.

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics,
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*



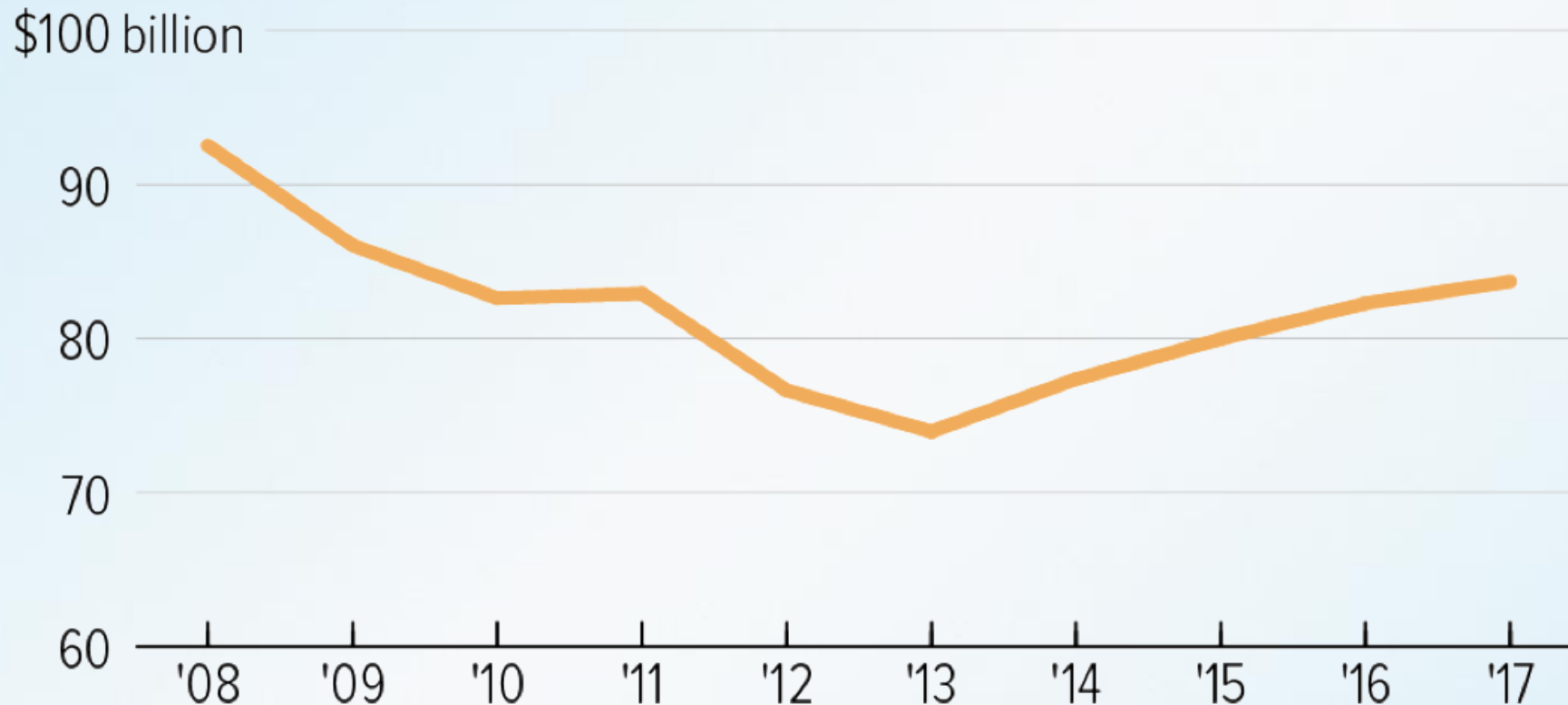
More students, less money

- College enrollment nationally increased from about 15 to 20 million 2000-2018 (NCES) while
- Levels of state and local direct support for higher education - not on pace with enrollment growth, or with inflation

Decline in state support for higher education

State spending on higher education well below pre-recession levels

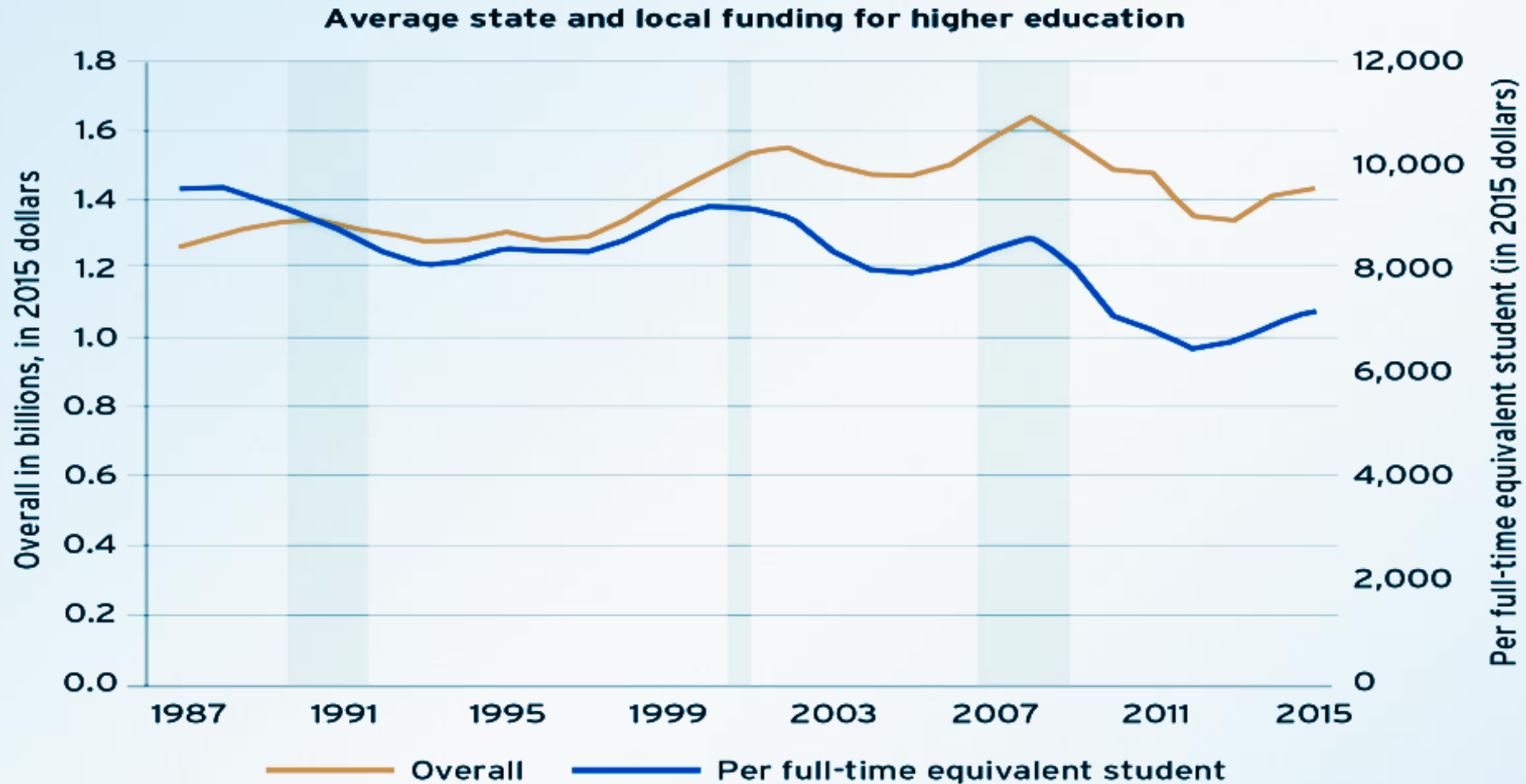
Total state spending, adjusted for inflation



Source: CBPP analysis of data from Grapevine Survey and State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2017. | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, CBPP.org

A trend less reported?

(Webber, Temple)



Note: Shaded areas in chart space denote periods of contraction in the business cycle. There is a clear relationship between state and local financial support for higher education and the business cycle, with money shifted away from higher education during recessions and typically restored (although not completely) once the economy has recovered.

**Question: how many
faculty members does
it take to change a
light bulb?**

**Answer: Change? ...
Who said anything about change?**

**But there have *many* important
changes for the better....**





My hypothesis?

“Our children is learning.”

(Nader 2019)

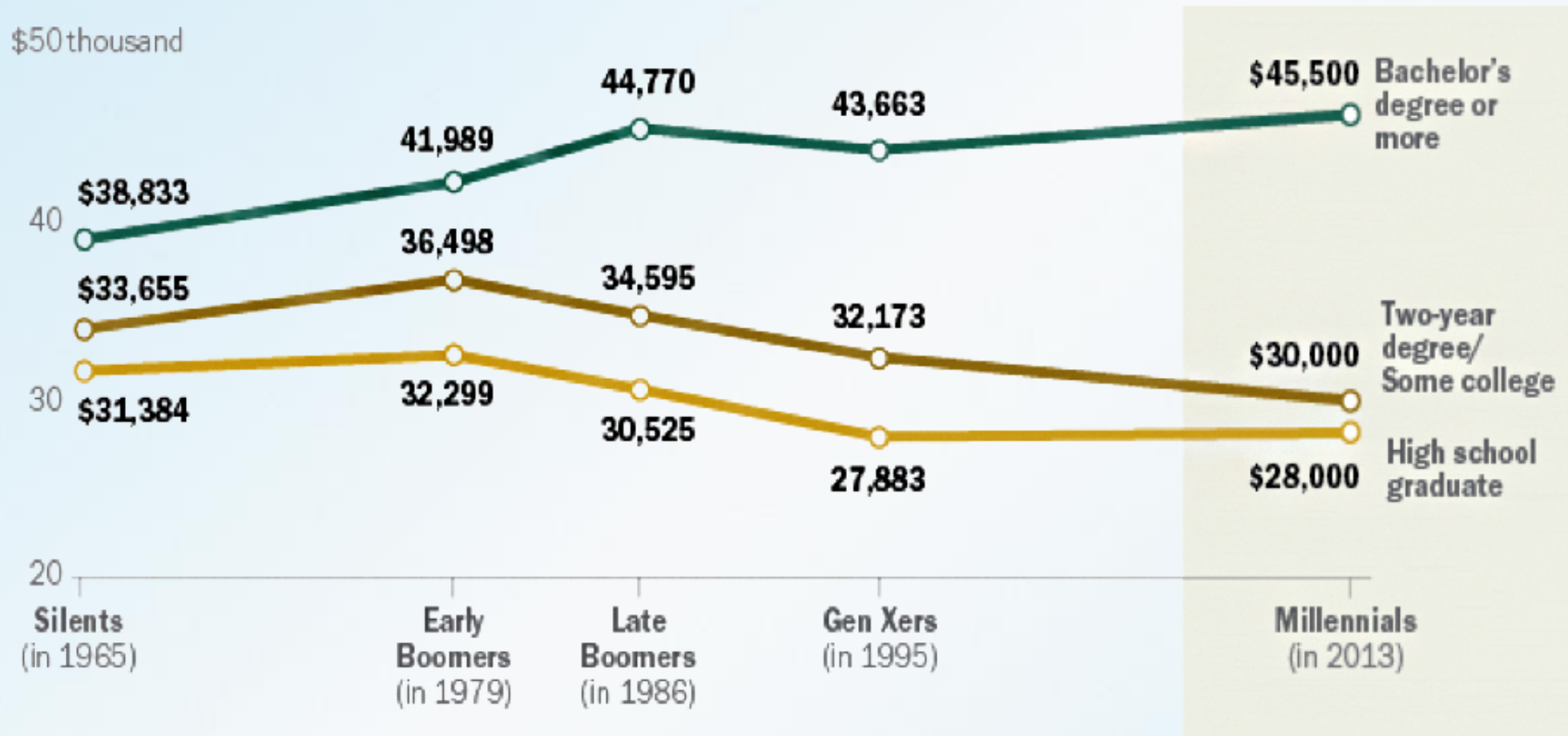
Oops! Wrong Nader

The returns to education

- Average college graduate earned \$1 million more than the average high-school graduate over the course of a working life.
(Georgetown)
- \$114,640 median family income for families headed by a four-year college graduate was more than twice the median for families headed by a high school graduate- 2016
(Trends in College Pricing, 2017. College Board)
- Gap is growing

The growing worth of a college degree

Median annual earnings among full-time workers ages 25 to 32, in 2012 dollars



Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2013, 1995, 1986, 1979 and 1965 March Current Population Survey (CPS) IPUMS

Rewarding experience

- Yellen: annual earnings for college grads ('15) were on average about 70 percent higher than those with only a high school diploma. In 1980 difference was about 25 percent.
- Increasing demand for people with college and graduate degrees reflected the need for higher technological skills and the impact of globalization.... Trends is likely to continue.



“But they’re not like students when I was in college...!” Right?

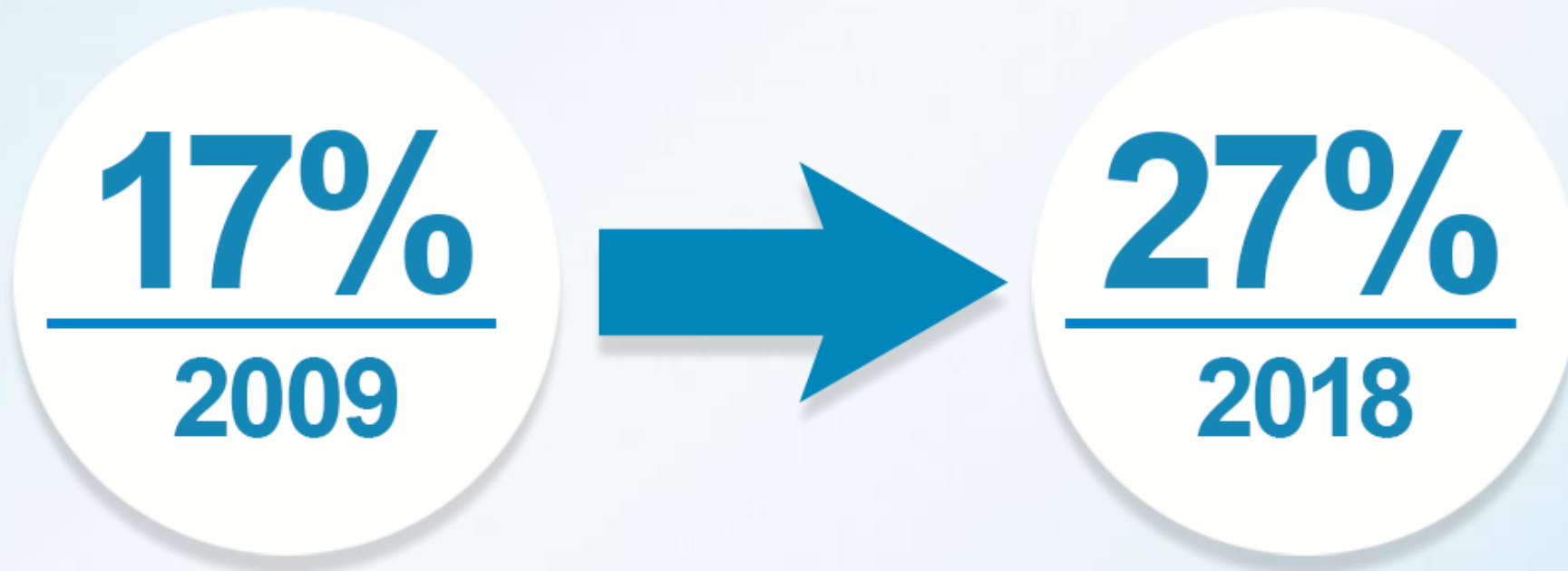


And it's a good thing, too!



Broader access and greater inclusion:

- Share of African American, Hispanic men and women enrolling in college grew 2000 to 2016 and gaps in enrollment closed modestly
- SUNY: share of underrepresented minority students grow from 17% to 27% from 2009 to 2018



Reversing an imbalance – but a new gender problem...?

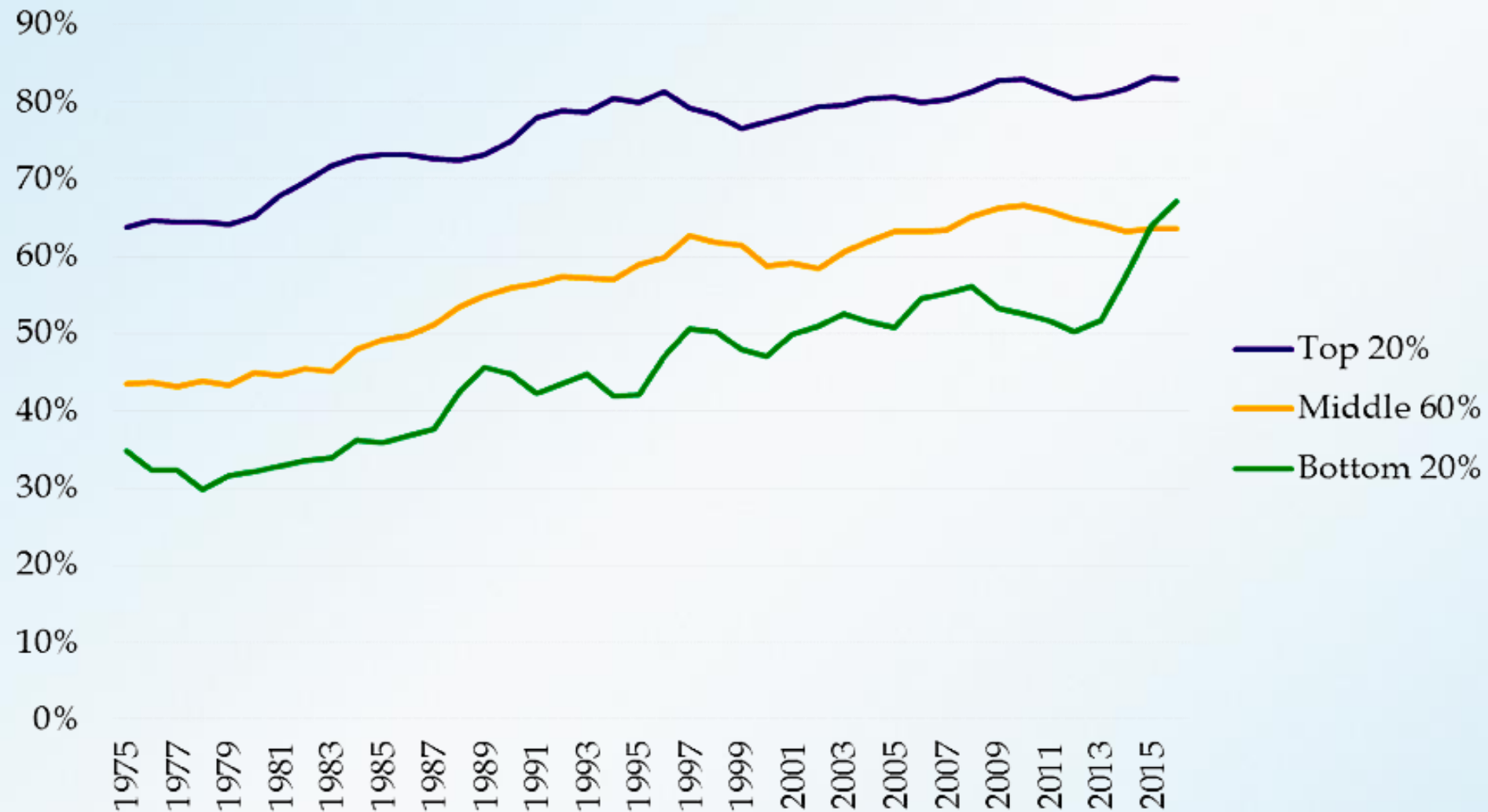
- Men attended college in proportions far higher than women – 58 percent to 42 percent as recently as the 1970s – has almost exactly reversed.
- Fall 2017 women comprised more than 56 percent of students on campuses nationwide (*US Dept. of Education*)(NCES)
- By 2014 a higher share of women than men possessed a four year college degree (*US Census Bureau*)

Access and inclusion II

- Total Federal, state, institutional grants for higher education increased about \$10B in real \$\$ 2011-12 vs. 2017-18
- Chancellor Johnson: University at Buffalo alone serves as many students from low to moderate income families as the entire Ivy League – all eight schools
- Nearly 70% of HS grads are attending college. Up from about 50% 40 years ago.

Access and inclusion III: by income level*

Share of recent high school graduates enrolling in college, by income group

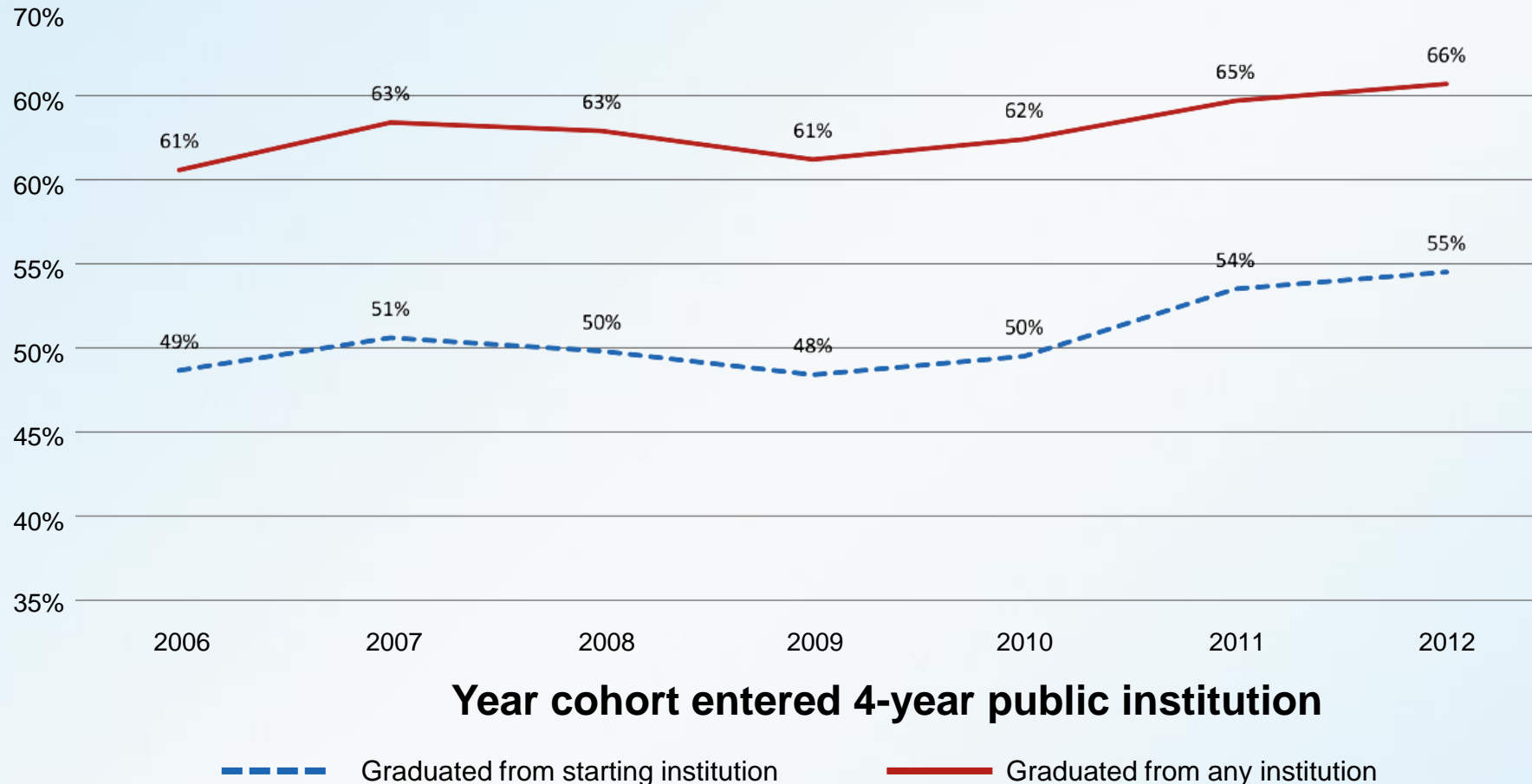


*(NCES)

Modest uptick in completion rates

Six-year graduation rate

First-time, degree-seeking students starting a 4-year public institutions nationwide



Source: Student Tracker and Degree Verify services, administered by the National Student Clearinghouse

Student success:

“What students do in college seems to matter much more than where they go.” (Pope, WSJ)

Have we lost sight of this?



The growth of “high impact” practices

- Applied learning
- Undergraduate research
- Internships
- Service learning
- Capstone courses and projects
- Micro credentials
- Cooperative education



Internships

“33% of graduates who finished school between 2000 and 2009 held an internship during college as compared with 24% of those who graduated between 1970 and 1979. Just 22% of those who finished school before 1959 held one.” *(Gallup/Purdue)*

Internship or field experience



Service learning

Seniors who reported that at least 'some' of their courses included a community-based project (all participating baccalaureate institutions nationwide). *(Gallup/Purdue)*

Service learning experience





Undergraduate research opportunities

Seniors who responded to the 2018 NSSE survey and responded that they have or are working with a faculty member on a research project is 23%.

Is higher education still *the* engine of opportunity?: Yes! But..

- A leaky pipeline
- Highly unequal access to institutions with the strongest outcomes



Defining ourselves by who we include... and how we engage

- Greater opportunity to a broader array of students from more diverse backgrounds
- Devoting much more attention to their success
- Investing in practices and experiences that add appreciably to the value of the degree
- Forging connections to business and industry

Now, if only we could get the message out

THANKS!