Benchmarking Professional Master's Degree Athletic Training Program Enrollment Data

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ABOUT US:

This document was developed by three educators who are passionate about the future of the athletic training profession. This report was written independently from any organization. The authors have no financial conflict of interest. The interpretations of the data are our own.

Key Findings

- This analysis is based on 207 professional athletic training programs of 240 programs sampled (86.3% response rate) who responded to our information gathering request in September, 2023. [Jump]

- Programs were sorted by NCAA athletic division, and then NCAA Division I schools were further delineated to include the "Power 5" and "Group of 5" institutions. The Power 5 schools (n = 29) have a statistically significant higher average enrollment (28.4 students) than other athletic divisions (Group of 5 18.6, Division I 17.9, Division II 15.1, Division III 15.8, and NAIA 11.3); there was no difference between the other NCAA divisions in average program enrollment. This likely indicates prospective student interest in high profile athletics programs at specific types of institutions. [Jump]

- All Division 1 programs represented 56.5% of CAATE-accredited programs and account for 2416 students, representing 64% of all athletic training students. [Jump]

- Total enrollment per program ranged from 2 (n=5) to 70 students (n=1). The highest enrolled program was not a Power 5 institution. [Jump]

- 45.9% of programs reported stable or increasing enrollments; 8.2% reported decreasing enrollments; 24.6% of programs reported unstable enrollment; 21.3% reported it was too soon in their program's existence to assess enrollment stability. [Jump]

- There were no statistically significant differences in average program enrollment for programs who had an accelerated option (mean = 18.7 students) as compared to those who do not have an accelerated option (mean = 19.1). [Jump]

- The majority of programs are located east of the Mississippi River, accounting for 153 (63.8% of all programs) and 2330 students (61.7% of responses). [Jump]

- Based on the reported enrollments, we anticipate a reported increase of 22% more students eligible to sit for the BOC examination in 2025 (2082 students) than in 2024 (1706 students). Using return rate estimates to account for nonresponding programs, we project that student enrollment numbers will be 1939 students in 2024 and 2368 in 2025. [Jump]

Background and Methods

There has been conjecture about the shortage of new ATs entering the profession and the enrollment in professional master's degree programs (MAT and MSAT, collectively referred to as MSAT), and the stability of that enrollment. To guide our thinking for future research on how to separate fact from fiction, a quick, 5-question poll was distributed to all MSAT program administrators. We followed that up with a reminder and direct emails to program directors.

We received several requests to share our aggregate data. We also made some significant conclusions that we felt would assist program administrators in the strategic planning for their institutions. Based on this we again emailed the administrators requesting their permission to share their program's data in aggregate form. Concurrently we received IRB approval under the exempt category.

Data Management

We obtained a list of professional master's degree programs from the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education website's search page (https://caate.net/Search-for-Accredited-Programs). From here we extracted a list of 260 programs. Of these, 20 were removed from our tally because they were in their last year of operation, or they have not accepted their cohort by the Fall of 2023, leaving 240 in the analysis pool. From this group 207 (86.3%) responded to our poll.

Overall Response Rate: 86.3%

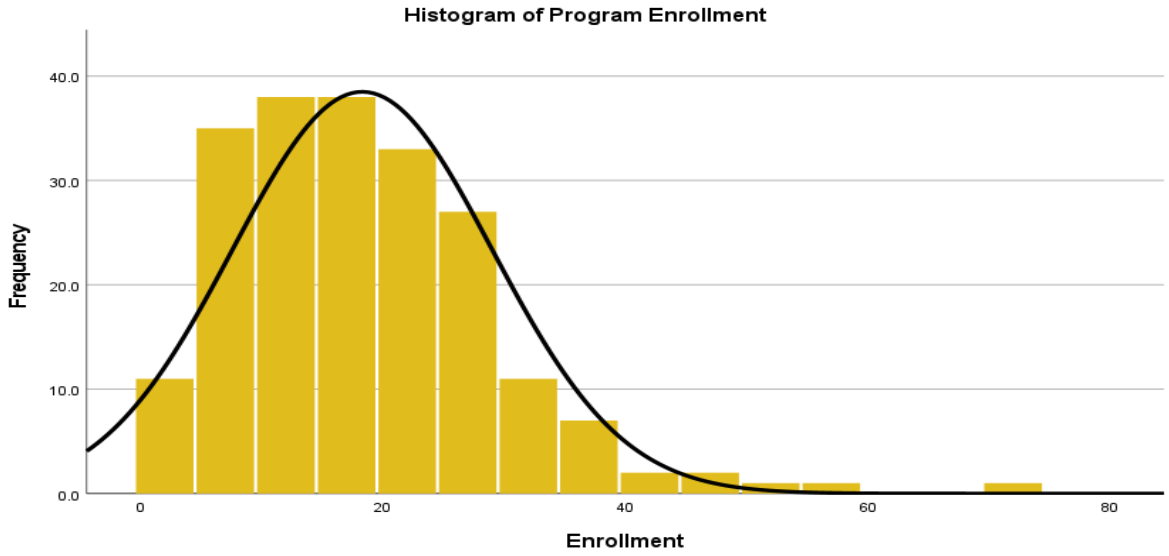
Response Rate by Athletic Division

Division	Count	Responding	Rate
NCAA Division 1* (D1)	76	67	88.2%
"Power Five" (P5)	34	29	85.3%
"Group of Five" (G5)	24	21	87.5%
NCAA Division 2 (D2)	46	40	87.0%
NCAA Division 3 (D3)	55	46	83.6%
NAIA	5	4	80.0%
Total	**240**	**207**	**86.3%**

* Division 1 institutions not classified as Power Five or Group of Five

DATA COLLECTED

- Students in the class of 2024
- Students in the class of 2025
- (2024+2025=Total Enrollment)
- Number of years the program has existed at the master's level
- If an accelerated track was offered by the institution
- Enrollment stability



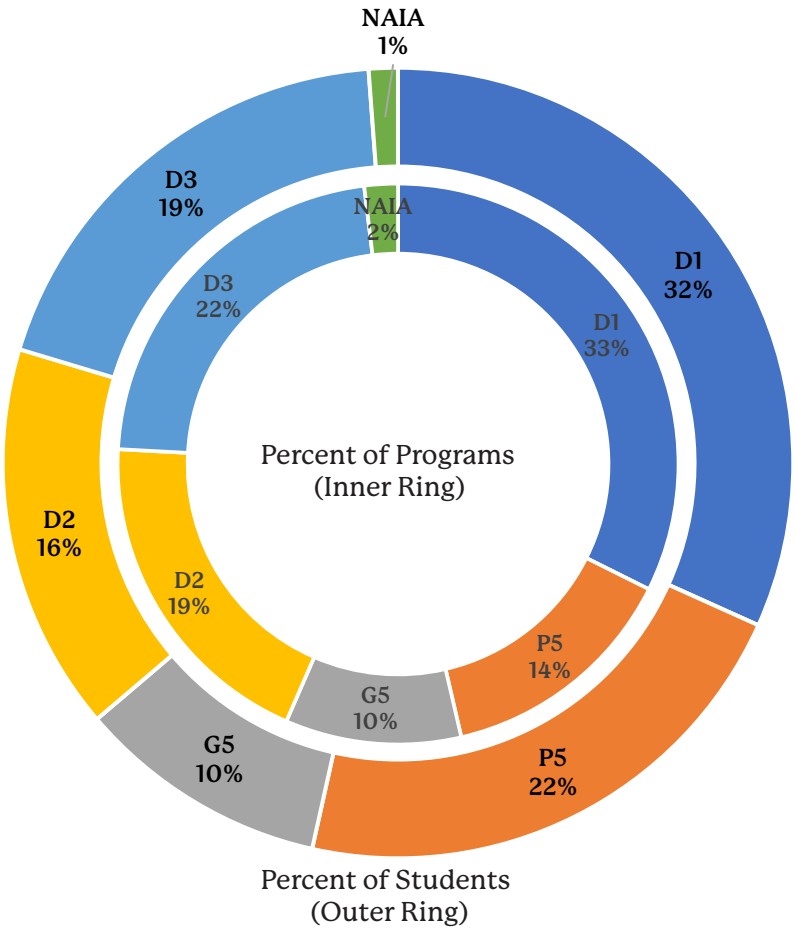
Program Enrollment By Athletic Division

	Total	D1	P5	G5	D2	D3	NAIA
Number	207	67	29	21	40	46	4
Total Students	3778	1202	824	390	591	726	45
% of All Students		31.8%	21.8%	10.3%	16.5%	19.2%	1.2%
Maximum	70	70	55	38	48	39	17
Average (95% CI)	18.3 (16.8-19.8)	17.9 (15.3-20.6)	28.4* (24.4-32.4)	18.6 (14.0-23.1)	15.1 (11.9-18.4)	15.8 (13.4-18.1)	11.3 ---
Std Dev	10.7	11.0	10.5	10.0	10.0	7.9	6.2
IQ Range	14	12	14	14	14	10	12
Minimum	2	2	6	2	2	2	3

* P5 programs have a statistically significant higher enrollment than other Divisions
There is no statistically significant difference between D1, G5, D2, and D3 enrollment
--- 95% CI for NAIA could not be calculated due to a low N

For ALL Division 1 programs (D1+P5+G5), there are a total of 117 programs with a total enrollment of 2416 students (mean = 20.7±11.5 students; 95% CI = 18.5-22.8). The median enrollment is 20 students. These institutions represent 56.5% of all CAATE-accredited programs in the US and 64% of all students.

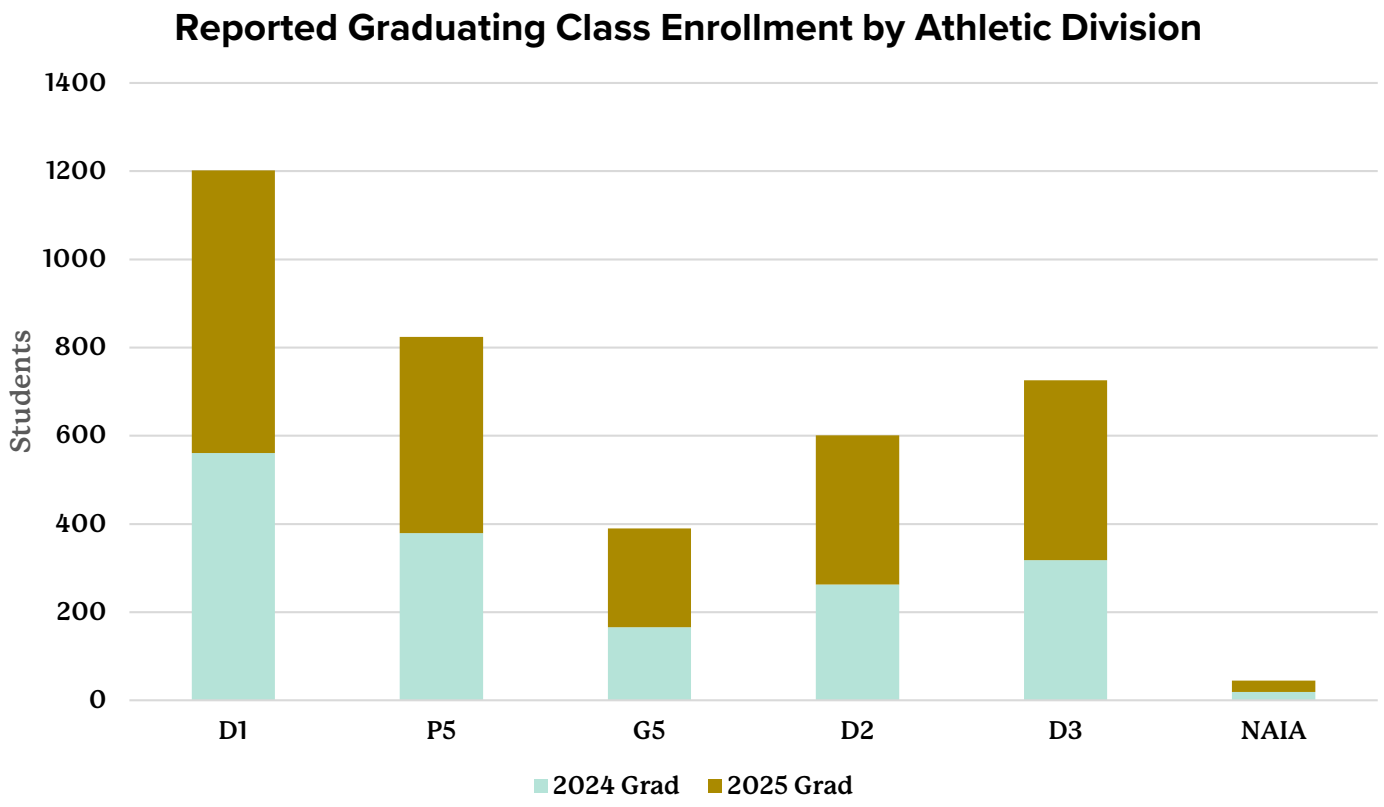
Distribution of Students and Programs by Athletic Division



Reported and Estimated Graduates

Division	Num	Reported 2024 Grads	Estimated 2024 Grads	Reported 2025 Grads	Estimated 2025 Grads	% Increase 2024-2025
Division 1	67	561	627	641	717	+14.3%
Power 5	29	379	435	445	510	+17.4%
Group of 5	21	166	187	224	252	+34.9%
Division 2	40	263	297	338	382	+28.5%
Division 3	46	318	370	408	475	+28.3%
NAIA	4	19	23	26	31	+36.8%
Total	207	1706	1939	2082	2367	+22.0%

The number of students reported to graduate in 2025 (2082 students) relative to 2024 (2367 students) increased by 376 students. Using estimated enrollments to account for nonresponding programs, we project an increase of 428 students from 2024 to 2025.



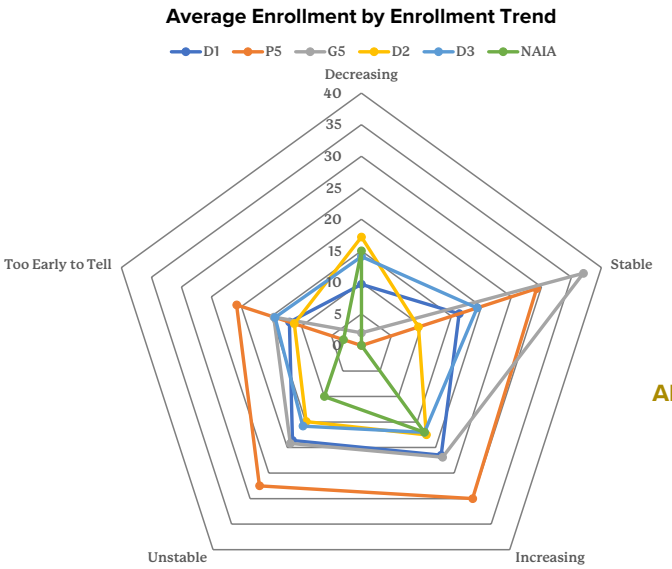
Enrollment Stability

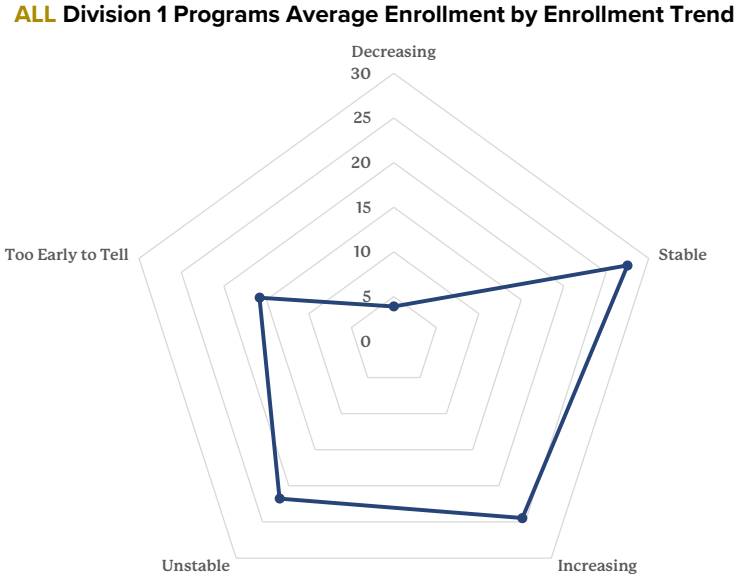
Division	Decreasing Enrollment	Stable Enrollment*	Increasing Enrollment	Unstable Enrollment	Too Early to Determine
Division 1	3	6	22	26	10
Power 5	0	6	17	2	4
Group of 5	1	1	7	5	7
Division 2	5	2	16	7	10
Division 3	7	3	14	10	12
NAIA	1	0	1	1	1
TOTAL	17 (8.2%)	18 (8.7%)	77 (37.2%)	51 (24.6%)	44 (21.3%)

* Due to an error in the early data collection process "Stable Enrollment" was not presented as an option; this affected approximately 100 responses.

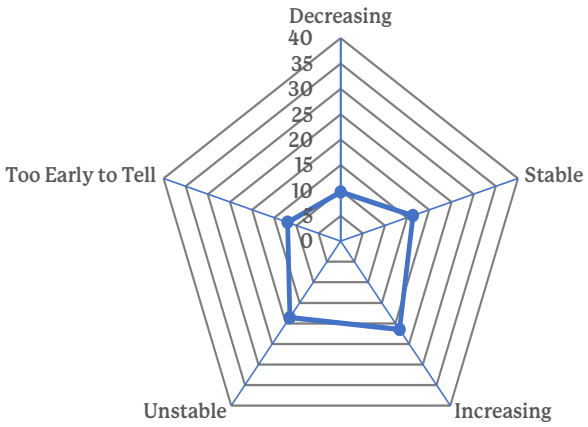
Interpretation:
45.9% of programs have stable or increasing enrollment
32% of programs have decreasing or unstable enrollment
21.3% of programs do not have enough data to make a determination on enrollment stability

Note: "Stable enrollment" does not necessarily imply that the program has reached its target enrollment (financial "breakeven point") or enrollment capacity. These will be topics of future surveys.

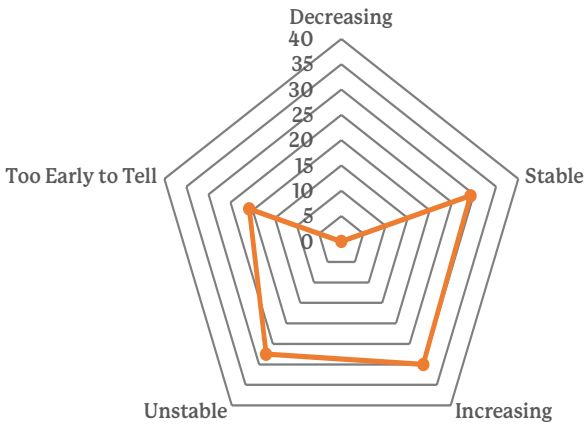




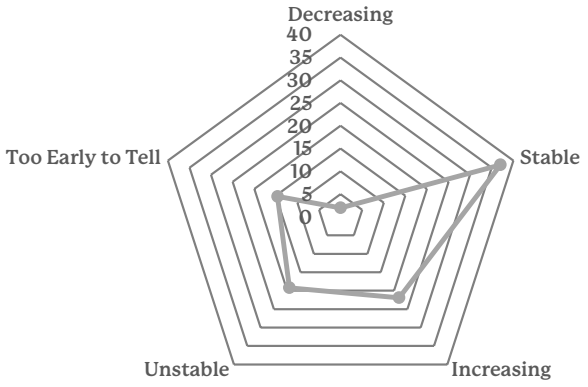
Division 1 Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



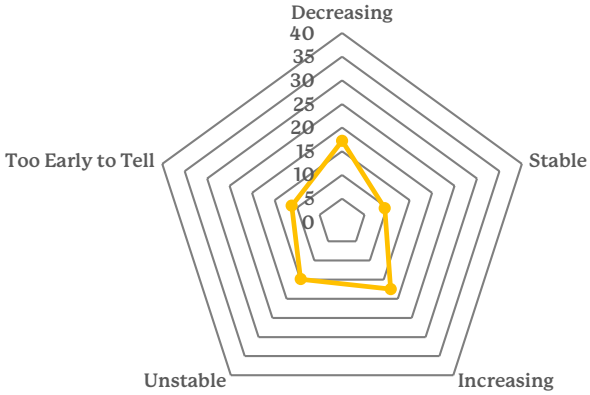
Power 5 Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



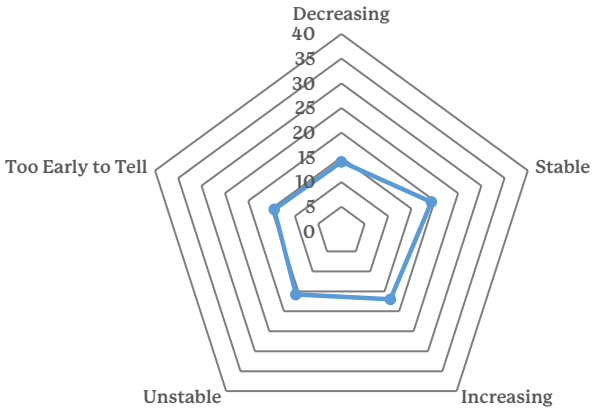
Group of 5 Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



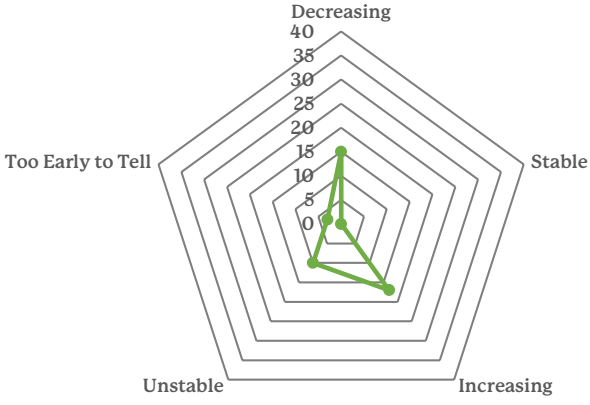
Division 2 Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



Division 3 Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



NAIA Average Enrollment by Enrollment Trend



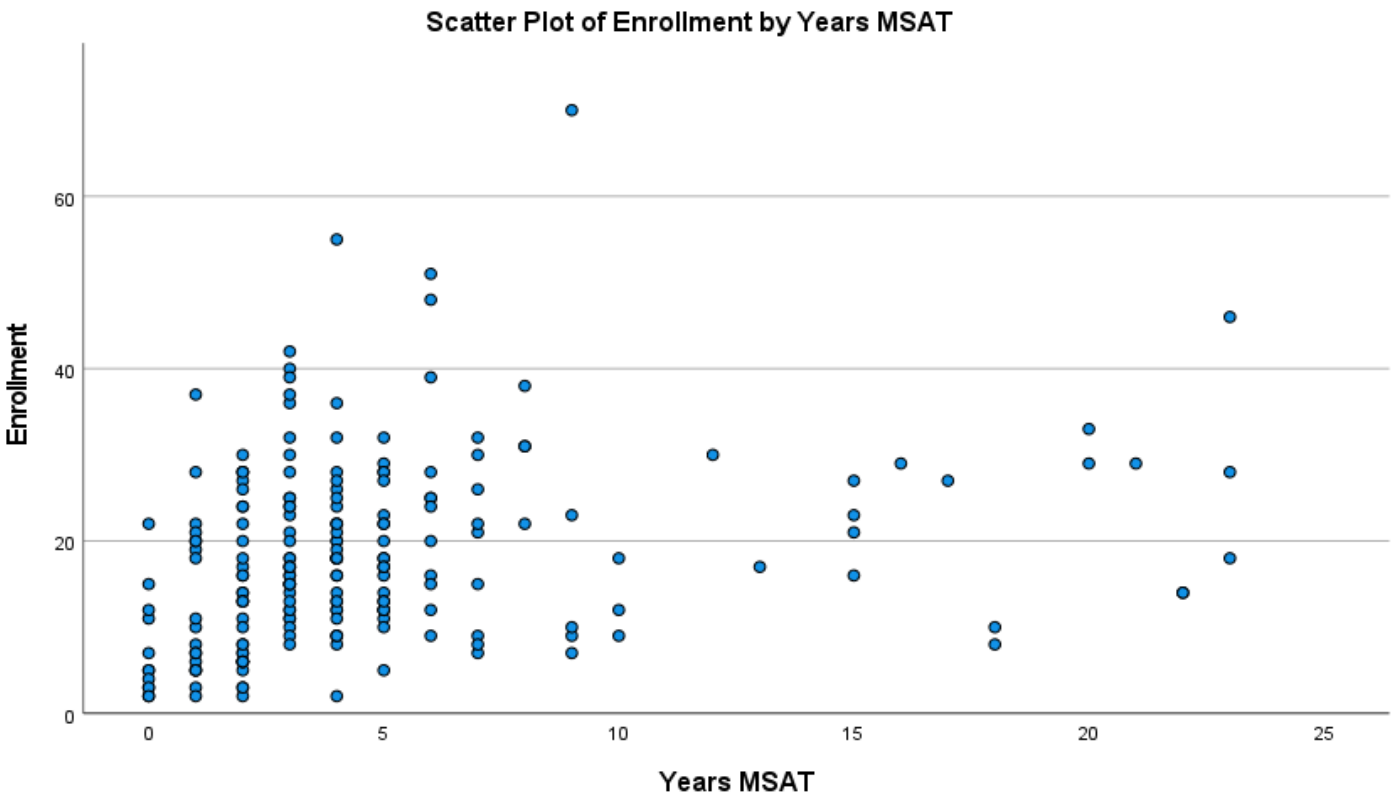
Accelerated Programs

	Accelerated Program		No Accelerated Program		
Division	Number	Enrollment	Number	Enrollment	Difference
Division 1	42 (62.7%)	18.1	25 (37.3)	17.7	0.4
Power 5	11 (37.9%)	29.7	18 (62.1%)	27.6	2.1
Group of 5	9 (42.9%)	20.1	12 (57.1%)	17.4	2.7
Division 2	30 (75.0%)	14.2	10 (25.0%)	17.5	-3.3
Division 3	41 (89.1%)	16.0	5 (10.9%)	31.4	-15.4
NAIA	3 (75.0%)	14.0	1 (25.0%)	3	11.0
TOTAL	136 (67.7%)	18.7	71 (32.3%)	19.1	-0.4

There is no statistically significant difference between the enrollment of programs that have an accelerated pathway and those who do not, either in total or by athletic division.

Although there are no differences in enrollment, this is not to imply that accelerated tracks are not useful. These results may be skewed by the relative youth of many MSAT programs.

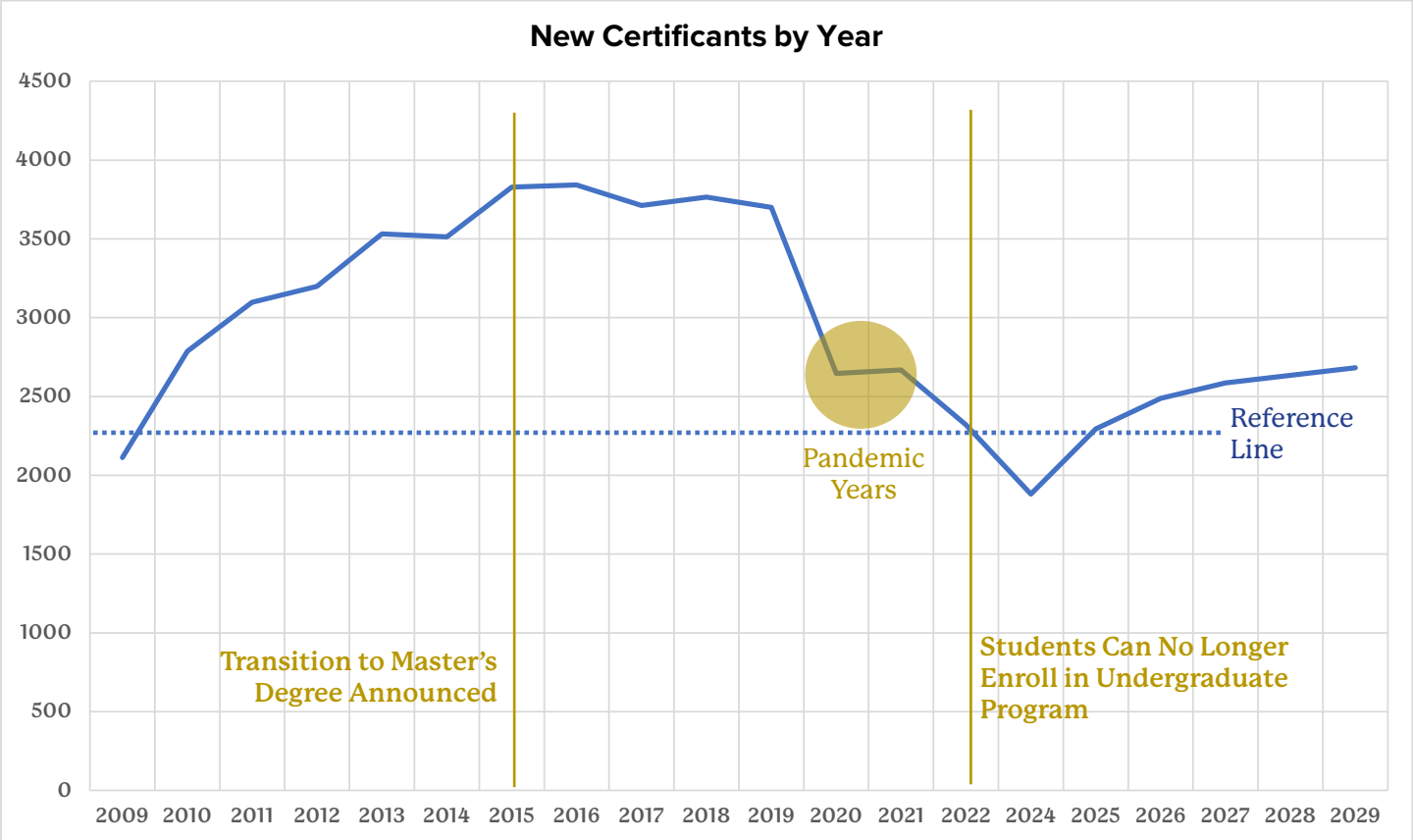
Program Age and Enrollment



Programs aged from 0 (first year) to 23 years, mean = 4.9±4.8 years.

There is a statistically significant (r^2 .263, $p < .001$) correlation between the age of the MSAT program and total student enrollment.

Workforce Implications



Using our estimated enrollments to account for nonresponding programs and assuming a 97% retention rate from admission to sitting for the exam (based on individual institution's rates), we will continue to see a decrease in candidates sitting for the BOC examination in 2024.

We should see an uptick in the number of candidates sitting for the examination in 2025, bringing us back to the 2022 decline level and to 2009 when we started seeing an influx of exam takers (reference line).

To develop a conservative estimate of the number of students who will be eligible to sit for the BOC examination beyond 2025, we took the 285 student increase seen between the classes of 2024 and 2025, and decreased that increase by half each year. More datapoints are required to make a more accurate projection.

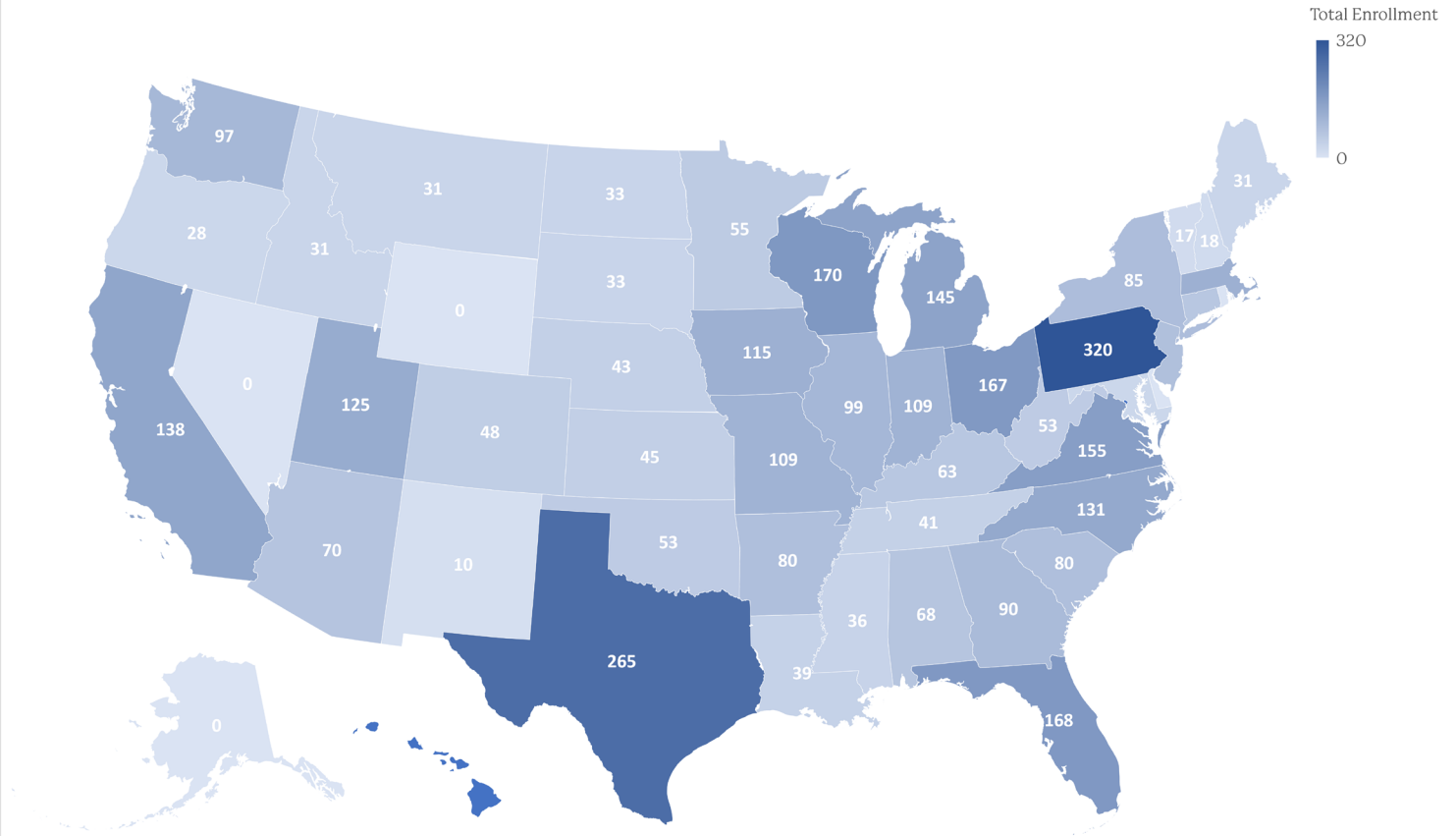
From a more aggressive viewpoint, the gap between the number of jobs available and the number of ATs to fill them should also boost enrollments in the near future. We anticipate that the number of open positions will lead to improved salaries (read: supply and demand). In turn, the ability to obtain a reasonably well-paying position upon graduation should lead to a continued uptick in program enrollments.

We recommend that the projected trend data be matched against data from the BOC regarding the number of ATs who give up their credential to determine a net increase or decrese in the number of ATs in the workforce.

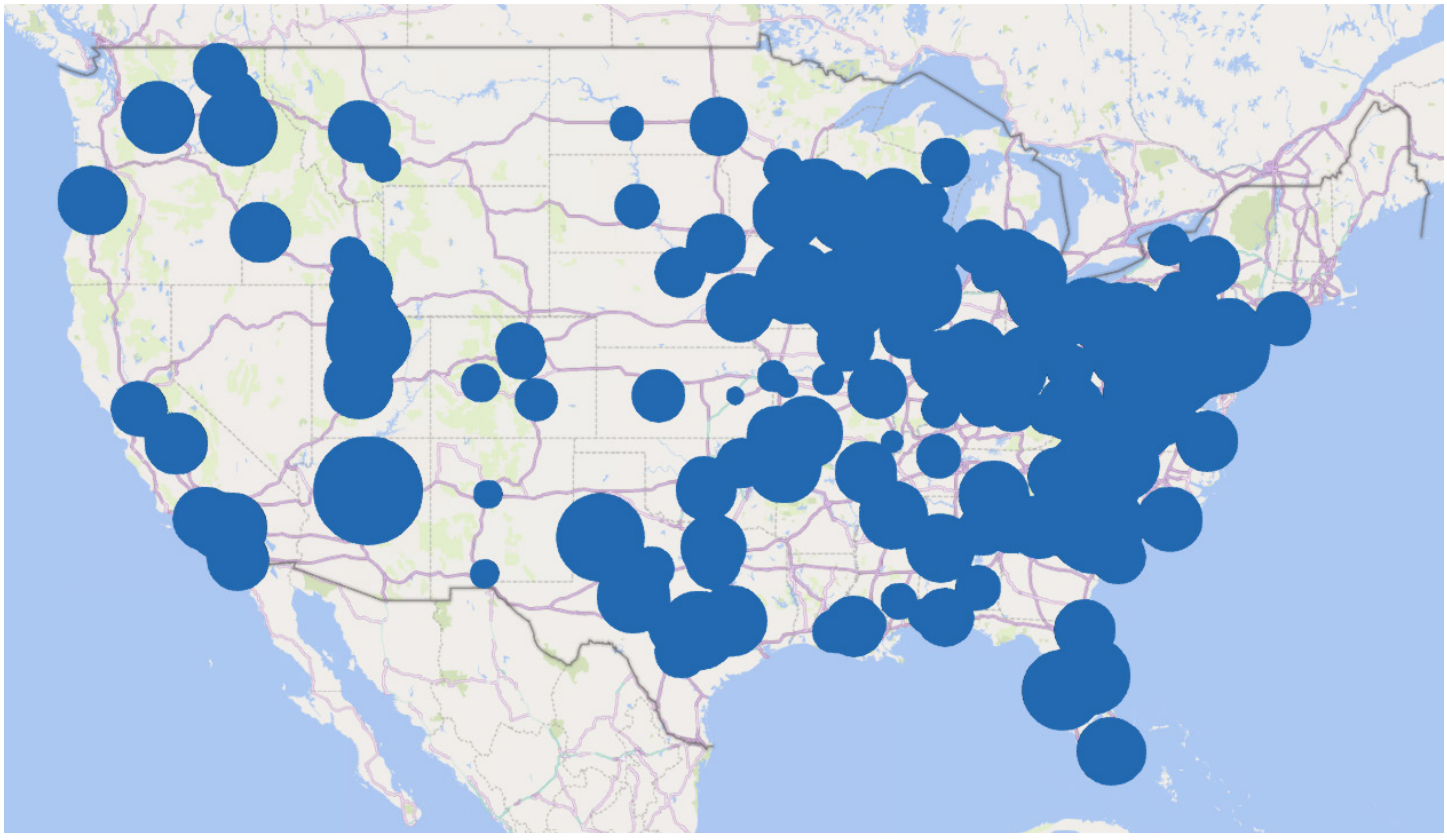
Note: Data for certificants by year from 2009 to 2022 were obtained from the BOC's website (https://bocatc.org/about-us/reports/annual-reports/archive).

Geographic Enrollment

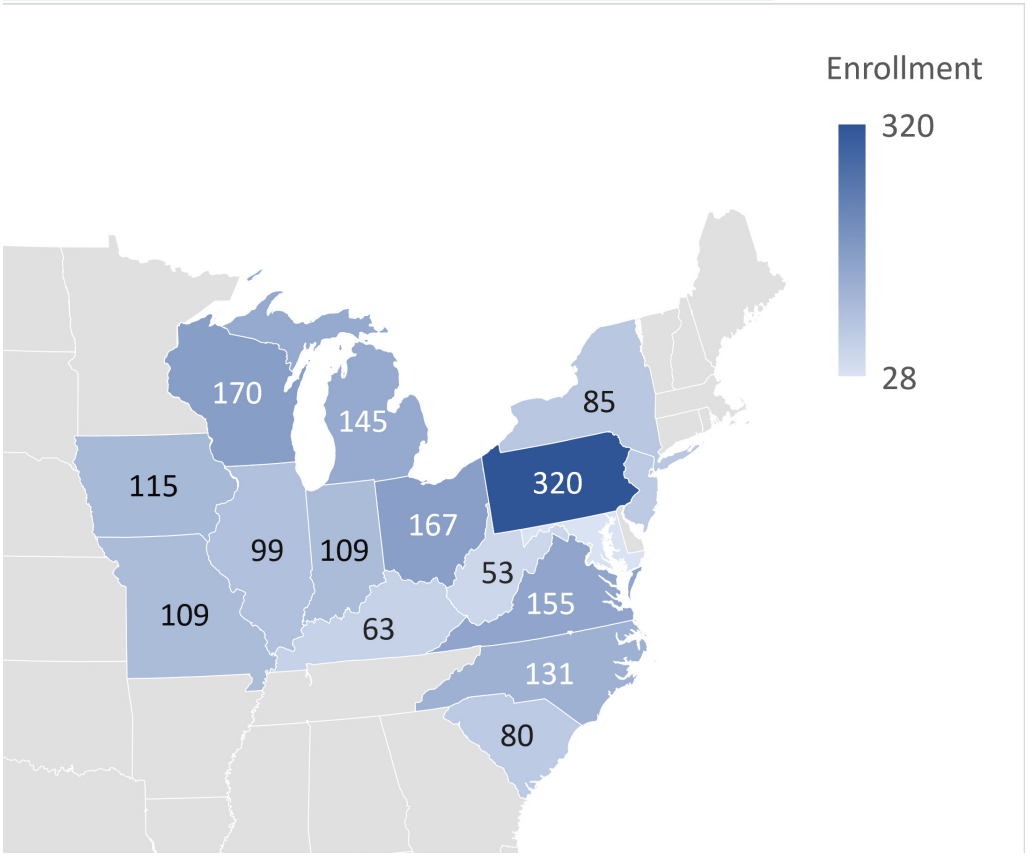
Total Student Enrollment by State



Student Enrollment Heat Map by State



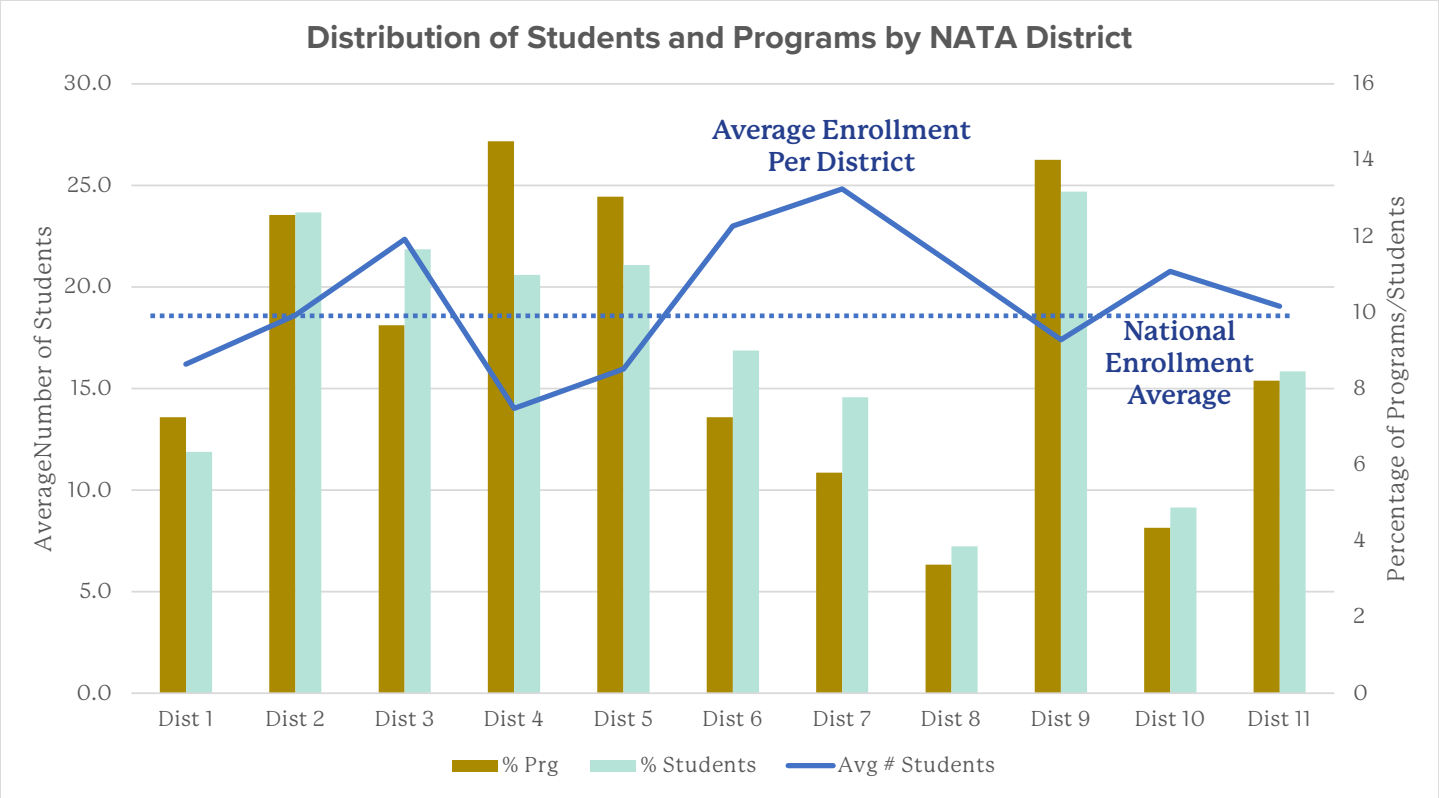
Student Enrollment Density



The rolling contiguous 16 states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin account for 1,908 students or 50.4% of all students represented in this analysis.

Student Enrollment by NATA District

District	Programs	Total Students	Avg # Students	% Programs	% Students
District 1	15	243	16.2	7.2%	6.3%
District 2	26	484	18.6	12.6%	12.6%
District 3	20	447	22.4	9.7%	11.7%
District 4	30	421	14.0	14.5%	11.0%
District 5	27	431	16.0	13.0%	11.2%
District 6	15	345	23.0	7.2%	9.0%
District 7	12	298	24.8	5.8%	7.8%
District 8	7	148	21.1	3.4%	3.9%
District 9	29	505	17.4	14.0%	13.2%
District 10	9	187	20.8	4.3%	4.9%
District 11	17	324	19.1	8.2%	8.5%
Total	207	3833	18.5	100%	100%



Interpretation: Districts 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10 have a greater percentage of students than they do programs, and have a higher average enrollment; likely indicating an adequate number of programs per student. Programs in Districts 1, 4, 5,9 have a greater percentage of programs than they do students, and these programs tend to be lower enrolled; likely indicating an excess of programs per student. District 2 has a proportional distribution of programs and students, but a lower average enrollment. District 11 has proportional program and student distribution, but a higher average student enrollment.

Thank You and Future Directions

We would like to thank the program administrators who responded to our survey. We plan on conducting this survey annually and address other questions that arise on an ongoing basis.

If you have questions regarding MSAT enrollment and/or trends, please email us or submit a request via www.athletictrainingdata.com and we will do our best to answer it.

We appreciate your support!