



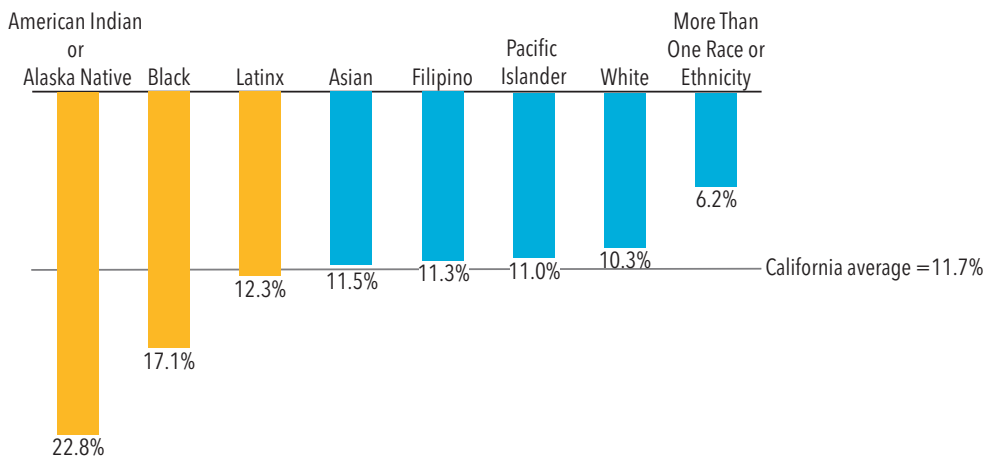
Curbing Enrollment Decline & Investing in California's Community College Students

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COVID-19 has disrupted California Community College (CCC) students' higher education plans, causing many to reduce their course loads or pause their education altogether. The CCCs serve high percentages of students of color and students with low incomes, and drops in enrollment can further narrow educational opportunities and undermine workforce development priorities statewide. While state and federal leaders have enacted policies to mitigate the pandemic's effects on CCCs, the path forward for community college students requires more long-term investments that address their broader educational and economic needs.¹

American Indian, Black, and Latinx California Community College Students Experienced the Largest Drops in Enrollment

Percent Decrease in Full-Time Equivalent Students by Race and Ethnicity, Fall 2019 to Fall 2020



Note: This analysis includes all 116 community colleges. Due to a statewide coding error affecting fall 2019 applicants, the "unknown" race and ethnicity category is not included. This error may slightly overstate drops in FTES for all race and ethnicity categories.

Source: Budget Center analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

The number of full-time equivalent students (FTES) at the CCCs declined steeply compared to pre-pandemic levels — nearly 12% overall from fall 2019 to fall 2020, the largest year-over-year decrease in over a decade.² An FTES represents one student who takes a full course load during an academic year.³ The decline in FTES reflects a drop in the number of students, a reduction in student course loads, or both. While all racial and ethnic groups experienced declines, American Indian or Alaska Native students had the largest drop (23%) followed by the drop in Black students (17%). Latinx students fell by 12%, representing over half of the total decline. Reductions from fall 2019 to fall 2020 vary across campuses and student groups. All but six colleges saw declines and ten colleges had drops greater than 25%, and the 19-or-under and the 20-to-24 age groups had declines of approximately 10% and 15%, respectively.

Research shows that the pandemic affected students' decisions to cancel or delay their education plans.⁴ Loss of income due to job losses has particularly affected community college students.⁵ The added financial stress on students' budgets has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx students, with many reporting increased food insecurity and having missed rent, mortgage, or utility payments.⁶ Moreover, online education challenges such as inequitable access to broadband have also made it more difficult for students to continue their enrollment.⁷

Policymakers can support community college students of color and those with low incomes by pursuing policies centered on robust retention, housing, food, health, access to technology, child care support, completing transfer requirements, and developing career training. State investments in community college students now will pay off as they continue building their careers, futures, and lives across the state, and ensure that a skilled workforce is available to support the California economy.

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¹ The 2021-22 budget agreement allocated one-time funds for student emergency financial aid, to increase retention and enrollment rates, and also to extend protections to ensure enrollment reductions do not affect funding for college districts. In early 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act provided colleges with funding for student financial aid and institutional funds to address the impacts of COVID-19.

² Data were downloaded from the CCC Chancellor's Office Data Mart on July 7, 2021, and updated on August 23, 2021. Some student count data available through the Data Mart have limitations that may affect FTES reports; however, the Chancellor's Office did not dissuade the Budget Center (BC) from using FTES data. The BC will revise data in this publication if updated FTES data become available for fall 2019 or fall 2020.

³ An FTES represents one enrolled student, or a group of students together, who attends classes 15 hours each week during an academic year. Because all students may not attend classes full time, FTES provide a comparable measurement of student attendance over time. FTES are one of the main components of the Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF), the primary funding mechanism for CCCs.

⁴ Nancy Wong, *The Uneven Cost of COVID-19 on College Completion in California* (The Institute for College Access & Success, May 24, 2021), <https://ticas.org/california/the-uneven-cost-of-covid-19-on-college-completion-in-california/>.

⁵ Clive Belfield and Thomas Brock, *Behind the Enrollment Numbers: How COVID Has Changed Students' Plans for Community College* (Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, November 2020), <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/covid-enrollment-community-college-plans.html>.

⁶ The Institute for College Access & Success, *The Impact of COVID-19 on California's College Students* (January 2021), 2, <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-Impact-of-COVID19-on-CA-College-Students.pdf>.

⁷ The Institute for College Access & Success, *Impacts of COVID-19*, 2.