The Campaign for College Opportunity

December 2022

Illuminating Innovations:

Protecting Student Enrollment at California Community Colleges Amid A Pandemic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic fundamentally altered almost all aspects of daily life as people around the world grappled with a public health emergency, as well as unprecedented economic and social consequences. COVID-19's impact on our schools, colleges, and universities was far-reaching, forcing institutions to rethink their operations. Colleges and universities transitioned to online instruction almost overnight, as public health requirements forced campuses to close and stop in-person classes. College officials worked to ensure students had the tools they needed to complete their courses, in many instances providing laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots, and other resources to students who needed this support. Colleges and universities also enhanced basic-needs support, providing emergency grants for housing and food.

The pandemic's impact on college enrollment in California was dramatic, but this impact affected students and campuses unevenly. When comparing fall 2021 to fall 2019, the University of California (UC) saw an overall two percent increase in enrollments. The California State University (CSU) system showed a system-wide decline of about two percent. Mirroring national trends, most of the student enrollment losses in the state occurred at the California Community Colleges. Nationally, community college enrollments dropped by 15% when comparing fall 2019 to fall 2021. **Enrollment in the California Community Colleges plunged by 19% from fall 2019 to fall 2021, with losses concentrated among Black and Latinx students enrolled in or heading to the state's 116 community colleges.**

Within the community college system, enrollment declines for American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) students (25%); Black students (20%); and Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) students (20%) fell more than the systemwide average. Across all racial/ethnic groups, enrollment among men in the California Community Colleges fell more steeply than enrollment among women. Enrollment for Latino men dropped 22% compared to a 15% decline for Latina students. Enrollment for Black men declined

by 22%, while enrollment for Black women fell by 19%. Among white students, enrollment declined by 17% for men and 16% for women.

Nearly three years after the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, we are changing our routines to reflect a changed world. **One thing that has not changed is the importance of a college education.** Over a lifetime, a person with a bachelor's degree will earn double—$2.8 million vs $1.4 million—the earnings of a person with only a high school diploma.[1] Increased educational attainment also has important implications for the state, as a more educated population—with higher earnings—generates higher tax revenues while also decreasing needed spending on healthcare, social services, and incarceration.[2]

During the initial height of the pandemic, the unemployment rate among workers with a degree was less than half that of workers with a high school diploma.[3] Californians who possessed a high school diploma or less made up about 80% of initial unemployment insurance claimants when COVID-19 hit. College-educated workers, on the other hand, were more likely to be in positions that could transition to a telework or remote setup, and this group has been far less likely to require long-term unemployment benefits.[4]

About six in 10 college students in California are enrolled in a community college, including 64% of Black and 72% of Latinx students. **Ensuring that all students have an equitable opportunity to enroll or re-enroll in the California Community Colleges is an imperative for the state from both economic and racial/ethnic equity perspectives.**

This report provides a campus-by-campus analysis of enrollment changes from fall 2019 to fall 2021. In addition, we document the efforts and strategies employed by community college campuses where the loss of enrollment among Black and Latinx students over this period was kept to a minimum, in spite of nationwide and statewide trends.

Through interviews with 26 education leaders across nine community colleges, we captured some of the strategies they put in place during the pandemic to support students enrolling and re-enrolling in college, successfully completing their coursework and making progress towards earning their degrees.

Table 1: Community Colleges Selected for This Report

	REGION		
URBANICITY	**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**	**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**	**CENTRAL VALLEY**
Urban	Cosumnes River College Berkeley City College	San Diego Miramar College	Clovis Community College
Suburban or Small City	Folsom Lake College	Moorpark College	College of the Sequoias
Rural		Barstow Community College	West Hills College Coalinga

Colleges Are Using Multiple Strategies To Recruit and Retain Students

The colleges we included in the study are engaged in numerous efforts to increase their enrollment, including **three broad categories of activities**:

- Expanding outreach and marketing efforts to recruit new students, reengage those lost to the pandemic, and retain current students;
- Improving and expanding student services to provide more flexible, proactive, personalized, and holistic support to increase student success and retention; and
- Changing course schedules, curriculum, programs, and institutional policies to better meet student needs and demand.

To support these efforts, the colleges are **infusing these activities with four cross-cutting strategies**, including:

- Focusing on equity in access and outcomes for Black, Latinx and other underrepresented student populations;
- Upgrading technology and increasing the use of data;
- Deepening collaboration, both within their institutions and with external partners; and
- Creating a more supportive campus culture and leadership structure.

College officials spoke to us about expanding outreach and marketing efforts to recruit new students by being more flexible with the timings and formats of high school visits, building closer relationships with local high schools, and sending staff who not only had greater expertise on the transition to college, but whose own race/ethnicity matched the demographic profiles of the schools they were visiting. Interviewees also

"I encourage college and faculty leaders to continue to support [students] through online, digital services... Showing up for students not only in person, but making sure we show up online for those students who do not have the ability or flexibility to attend in-person, is essential in targeting the accessibility for students amid Covid-19."

Aaron Villareal, student at West Hills College Lemoore

described setting up call centers, and enlisting students, faculty, and staff in their efforts to reach out to students whose enrollment lapsed during the pandemic.

These college leaders recognized the need to enhance the student support services they offered on their campuses. They described efforts to provide more flexibility, adding components like online chats for items that might not need a full appointment, and adding online appointments with a greater range of hours for counseling, tutoring, or other services than were available pre-pandemic. They also found ways to be more proactive and personalized in their engagement with students, using software that tracks attendance and course performance to target outreach to students who may need additional support, and supplying more "wraparound" supports—support related to housing, food, transportation, childcare, or other basic needs assistance.

Some of these colleges are also offering alternative course schedules, including eight-week courses that allow students to progress through course sequences more quickly, and ensuring that courses are offered at a variety of times in online, in-person, and hybrid formats that include both in-person and online components. College leaders also noted the elimination of various financial or administrative hurdles, including eliminating registration holds for students who had not yet paid fees and distributing financial aid funds earlier so students had money to buy books and supplies before the semester started.

Colleges reported an **explicit focus on equity in access and outcomes** for Black, Latinx, and other underrepresented student populations, as well as the use of **upgraded technology** and an increased **use of disaggregated data** to guide efforts related to outreach, student support and success, and college policies. Interviewees also reported **deepening collaboration**, both within their institutions and with external partners to inform efforts across all three action categories. Finally, **supportive leadership and a supportive campus culture** were also important across all campus activities aiming to address enrollment amid the pandemic.

Colleges See Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Our conversations with campus officials at these nine colleges revealed sources for hope and opportunity. The pandemic has forced colleges and universities to reckon more closely with student needs and the ways in which students can be better supported to complete their degrees. Some officials noted that some of these changes, such as better access to financial aid or resources like laptops and technology, would outlive the pandemic. The way in which the pandemic forced colleges and universities towards online instruction led them to invest in electronic infrastructure and to enhance their online resources in ways that should benefit students going forward. Finally, though campus cultures can be entrenched, the pandemic made clear that change is possible, especially through collaboration and common commitments to student equity and success.

College officials also discussed challenges ahead as they work to recover enrollment and support students towards completion. Interviewees noted the stories and surveys around the public perception of the value of college, as well as declining K-12 populations, and the actions of some employers to use skills-based assessments instead of degree requirements for job applicants. Several college officials discussed capacity and resource constraints, as well as uncertainty regarding future funding as federal emergency funding ends, state funding potentially declines, and temporary flexibility in spending as significant challenges to be addressed. College officials also cited difficulty accessing evidence-based resources, and challenges related to administrative policies. While some campus-based policies can be changed or amended, policies like the "Fifty Percent Law"—a law that requires community colleges to spend 50% or more of their expenditures on classroom instructors—limit the ability of campus administrators to be nimble in their approaches.

Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic is a historic event that has created unique consequences for California's students and the colleges and universities that serve them. The nine colleges identified for this study, however, show that **better understanding student needs and challenges, improving technology and using more rigorous data analysis tools, partnering and collaborating within and across institutions, and being willing to reconsider longstanding policies can result in changes that enable students to enroll in college and succeed in their courses, even in the midst of a global pandemic.**

To better support colleges and administrators in their efforts to support students, state policymakers can engage in several potential actions related to improving resources and technical assistance for colleges, addressing funding and regulations considering new educational environments, and supporting better coordination among colleges to help meet student and state educational needs.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) can help campuses support students by **providing more robust and easy access to evidence-based resources and assistance.** Leaders appreciated the information provided, but they also reported wanting clear and consistent pathways to disseminate information containing evidence-based strategies and approaches, technical assistance, and professional development to ensure faculty are better able to effectively teach in online and hybrid course structures.

State policymakers should also **examine and reconsider funding and regulations in the context of the educational environment** — one in which more instruction is partly or entirely online. Regulations like the Fifty Percent Law are less appropriate in an educational context with greater online course delivery, and regulations requiring students to reapply to college after stopping out serve as unnecessary barriers to students seeking to return to college and complete their degrees.

Finally, policymakers must **ensure better coordination among the state's public higher education segments**, its K-12 sector, and the independent colleges and universities within the state. The college leaders

we spoke to discussed considerable uncertainty over the near-term future, with implications for public health and the economy. Issues requiring flexibility and nimble action require collaboration and coordination from the public colleges and universities in the state. California, however, has no formal coordinating body to bring the relevant stakeholders together. Even absent a formal body, the state must look to ensure the systems and segments are working with one another to better support California's students, close racial/ethnic equity gaps in college enrollment and success, and ensure the state's economic success for the next generation of Californians.

Enrollment Data

The Campaign gathered enrollment data from the CCCCO's DataMart in early March 2022. Given the schedule for data submission by the colleges to the CCCCO, which generally runs through mid-March for the prior fall term, the data shown in Table 2 may not be fully reflective of final enrollment figures for some colleges. The data in the table are sorted in order of the colleges' rank in the percentage change in underrepresented student enrollment from fall 2019 to fall 2021 (column 6). The nine colleges included in the interviews appear near the top of the table, as they were among those with the smallest percentage loss (or a gain) in underrepresented student enrollment over that period. Due to our efforts to include colleges of varied sizes, regions of the state, and urbanicity of the local communities (and not receiving contact names from one selected college), our sample does not precisely equate to the top nine on the list.

Courtesy of San Diego Miramar College

Table 2: College Enrollment Data

	Underrepresented Students					All Students				
College	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank
***Berkeley City**	2,468	2,667	199	8.1%	1	6,066	5,892	-174	-2.9%	3
***Folsom Lake**	2,292	2,446	154	6.7%	2	9,107	9,143	36	0.4%	1
City College of San Francisco	8,393	8,755	362	4.3%	3	25,196	24,791	-405	-1.6%	2
***San Diego Miramar**	4,666	4,755	89	1.9%	4	14,195	13,209	-986	-6.9%	6
***Moorpark**	5,526	5,366	-160	-2.9%	5	14,498	12,966	-1,532	-10.6%	18
***Clovis Community**	4,001	3,881	-120	-3.0%	6	8,607	7,898	-709	-8.2%	11
***Cosumnes River**	5,428	5,164	-264	-4.9%	7	14,640	14,087	-553	-3.8%	4
***College of the Sequoias**	9,426	8,958	-468	-5.0%	8	13,471	12,435	-1,036	-7.7%	9
Santiago Canyon	9,651	9,143	-508	-5.3%	9	17,664	15,282	-2,382	-13.5%	29
***Barstow Community**	1,912	1,799	-113	-5.9%	10	3,204	2,857	-347	-10.8%	20
***West Hills Coalinga**	3,063	2,879	-184	-6.0%	11	4,324	3,954	-370	-8.6%	12
Copper Mountain	816	760	-56	-6.9%	12	1,852	1,505	-347	-18.7%	63
Saddleback	6,776	6,286	-490	-7.2%	13	27,777	22,970	-4,807	-17.3%	51
Butte	3,729	3,456	-273	-7.3%	14	11,773	10,108	-1,665	-14.1%	32
Ohlone	2,507	2,317	-190	-7.6%	15	9,075	8,626	-449	-4.9%	5
West Valley	2,593	2,380	-213	-8.2%	16	9,849	7,906	-1,943	-19.7%	69
De Anza	5,691	5,207	-484	-8.5%	17	18,880	17,091	-1,789	-9.5%	13
Palo Verde	2,382	2,158	-224	-9.4%	18	4,716	4,269	-447	-9.5%	14
Bakersfield	19,703	17,828	-1,875	-9.5%	19	26,997	24,874	-2,123	-7.9%	10
Irvine Valley	3,460	3,125	-335	-9.7%	20	15,817	13,191	-2,626	-16.6%	45
Mission	2,479	2,233	-246	-9.9%	21	8,560	6,488	-2,072	-24.2%	90
Foothill	5,396	4,858	-538	-10.0%	22	16,768	13,837	-2,931	-17.5%	53
Yuba	2,493	2,225	-268	-10.8%	23	6,233	5,317	-916	-14.7%	35
Riverside City	14,816	13,222	-1,594	-10.8%	24	21,951	18,176	-3,775	-17.2%	49

*Selected colleges

	Underrepresented Students					All Students				
College	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank
Diablo Valley	6,406	5,716	-690	-10.8%	25	20,015	17,528	-2,487	-12.4%	25
Allan Hancock	9,372	8,353	-1,019	-10.9%	26	14,592	12,193	-2,399	-16.4%	44
Cypress	8,222	7,320	-902	-11.0%	27	15,938	13,942	-1,996	-12.5%	27
San Diego Mesa	9,433	8,368	-1,065	-11.3%	28	20,780	18,203	-2,577	-12.4%	24
San Mateo	2,788	2,461	-327	-11.7%	29	8,405	7,062	-1,343	-16.0%	39
Solano Community	4,317	3,797	-520	-12.0%	30	9,541	8,298	-1,243	-13.0%	28
Cerro Coso Community	2,836	2,488	-348	-12.3%	31	5,702	4,931	-771	-13.5%	30
Monterey Peninsula	3,989	3,493	-496	-12.4%	32	8,630	7,271	-1,359	-15.7%	38
San Joaquin Delta	10,580	9,208	-1,372	-13.0%	33	18,871	16,898	-1,973	-10.5%	17
Cuyamaca	3,611	3,123	-488	-13.5%	34	8,790	7,895	-895	-10.2%	16
Skyline	3,161	2,730	-431	-13.6%	35	9,052	7,964	-1,088	-12.0%	22
College of Alameda	2,731	2,350	-381	-14.0%	36	6,080	5,204	-876	-14.4%	34
Long Beach City	18,157	15,577	-2,580	-14.2%	37	25,857	22,707	-3,150	-12.2%	23
Imperial Valley	8,299	7,114	-1,185	-14.3%	38	9,108	7,969	-1,139	-12.5%	26
Lake Tahoe Community	1,100	938	-162	-14.7%	39	3,083	2,338	-745	-24.2%	89
Santa Monica	13,997	11,928	-2,069	-14.8%	40	31,473	25,679	-5,794	-18.4%	59
Santa Barbara City	5,909	4,999	-910	-15.4%	41	14,874	13,827	-1,047	-7.0%	7
Fresno City	16,200	13,702	-2,498	-15.4%	42	25,507	20,993	-4,514	-17.7%	54
Woodland Community	1,990	1,683	-307	-15.4%	43	3,865	3,317	-548	-14.2%	33
Merced	7,814	6,586	-1,228	-15.7%	44	13,064	10,067	-2,997	-22.9%	82
Ventura	8,416	7,064	-1,352	-16.1%	45	12,986	11,018	-1,968	-15.2%	36
Napa Valley	2,815	2,360	-455	-16.2%	46	5,937	4,689	-1,248	-21.0%	76
Merritt	4,046	3,391	-655	-16.2%	47	7,281	6,570	-711	-9.8%	15
Victor Valley	9,227	7,695	-1,532	-16.6%	48	13,523	10,821	-2,702	-20.0%	72
Mt. San Jacinto	9,366	7,759	-1,607	-17.2%	49	17,413	15,451	-1,962	-11.3%	21
Oxnard	5,871	4,849	-1,022	-17.4%	50	7,614	6,544	-1,070	-14.1%	31
Evergreen Valley	4,490	3,708	-782	-17.4%	51	9,853	8,245	-1,608	-16.3%	42

	Underrepresented Students					All Students				
College	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank
Las Positas	3,023	2,492	-531	-17.6%	52	9,098	7,323	-1,775	-19.5%	68
West Hills Lemoore	3,220	2,649	-571	-17.7%	53	4,732	3,818	-914	-19.3%	67
Fullerton	13,526	11,123	-2,403	-17.8%	54	23,015	18,742	-4,273	-18.6%	62
Los Angeles Valley	10,025	8,243	-1,782	-17.8%	55	18,251	14,801	-3,450	-18.9%	65
San Diego City	8,812	7,233	-1,579	-17.9%	56	14,130	13,086	-1,044	-7.4%	8
Cerritos	18,438	15,115	-3,323	-18.0%	57	24,881	20,344	-4,537	-18.2%	57
Orange Coast	7,465	6,119	-1,346	-18.0%	58	20,530	17,238	-3,292	-16.0%	40
Los Medanos	5,416	4,435	-981	-18.1%	59	9,615	8,000	-1,615	-16.8%	47
Cabrillo	5,635	4,604	-1,031	-18.3%	60	11,687	9,485	-2,202	-18.8%	64
San Jose City	4,927	4,025	-902	-18.3%	61	9,291	7,775	-1,516	-16.3%	41
Chabot	6,963	5,656	-1,307	-18.8%	62	13,822	11,454	-2,368	-17.1%	48
Los Angeles Pierce	10,227	8,286	-1,941	-19.0%	63	20,975	17,174	-3,801	-18.1%	56
College of the Desert	10,483	8,486	-1,997	-19.0%	64	13,500	10,998	-2,502	-18.5%	60
Golden West	4,684	3,791	-893	-19.1%	65	13,047	10,695	-2,352	-18.0%	55
Porterville	3,679	2,975	-704	-19.1%	66	4,569	3,729	-840	-18.4%	58
American River	11,398	9,216	-2,182	-19.1%	67	31,652	26,372	-5,280	-16.7%	46
Sacramento City	9,211	7,437	-1,774	-19.3%	68	21,238	18,950	-2,288	-10.8%	19
Antelope Valley	10,290	8,271	-2,019	-19.6%	69	14,376	11,396	-2,980	-20.7%	75
Chaffey	17,071	13,670	-3,401	-19.9%	70	23,570	19,470	-4,100	-17.4%	52
Columbia	687	549	-138	-20.1%	71	3,020	2,189	-831	-27.5%	101
Santa Rosa Junior	9,897	7,907	-1,990	-20.1%	72	26,542	20,011	-6,531	-24.6%	91
Laney	4,715	3,762	-953	-20.2%	73	10,942	8,485	-2,457	-22.5%	79
Rio Hondo	16,821	13,399	-3,422	-20.3%	74	21,306	16,370	-4,936	-23.2%	86
College of the Canyons	11,304	8,989	-2,315	-20.5%	75	20,612	16,634	-3,978	-19.3%	66
Cuesta	4,642	3,691	-951	-20.5%	76	12,774	10,567	-2,207	-17.3%	50
Crafton Hills	3,660	2,904	-756	-20.7%	77	6,839	5,304	-1,535	-22.4%	78
Southwestern	15,495	12,285	-3,210	-20.7%	78	21,043	16,770	-4,273	-20.3%	73
Mt San Antonio	23,644	18,683	-4,961	-21.0%	79	40,037	30,077	-9,960	-24.9%	93

	Underrepresented Students					All Students				
College	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank
College of Marin	2,668	2,107	-561	-21.0%	80	6,571	5,015	-1,556	-23.7%	87
Hartnell	9,051	7,147	-1,904	-21.0%	81	13,251	10,217	-3,034	-22.9%	81
Cañada	2,764	2,166	-598	-21.6%	82	5,951	4,976	-975	-16.4%	43
Glendale Community	4,986	3,895	-1,091	-21.9%	83	17,569	14,062	-3,507	-20.0%	71
Contra Costa	4,551	3,553	-998	-21.9%	84	7,393	5,920	-1,473	-19.9%	70
Norco College	7,334	5,684	-1,650	-22.5%	85	11,831	8,846	-2,985	-25.2%	96
Moreno Valley	7,785	6,013	-1,772	-22.8%	86	10,720	7,753	-2,967	-27.7%	102
Modesto Junior	10,957	8,404	-2,553	-23.3%	87	19,028	14,916	-4,112	-21.6%	77
Los Angeles Mission	9,516	7,268	-2,248	-23.6%	88	11,671	9,284	-2,387	-20.5%	74
El Camino	13,854	10,559	-3,295	-23.8%	89	24,366	19,849	-4,517	-18.5%	61
Los Angeles Harbor	6,505	4,950	-1,555	-23.9%	90	9,289	7,169	-2,120	-22.8%	80
East Los Angeles	28,879	21,935	-6,944	-24.0%	91	40,086	30,889	-9,197	-22.9%	83
Citrus	9,222	6,990	-2,232	-24.2%	92	13,588	10,368	-3,220	-23.7%	88
Compton	4,965	3,752	-1,213	-24.4%	93	5,898	4,360	-1,538	-26.1%	99
Sierra	5,778	4,353	-1,425	-24.7%	94	19,151	16,188	-2,963	-15.5%	37
Grossmont	7,515	5,576	-1,939	-25.8%	95	17,197	13,232	-3,965	-23.1%	84
Shasta	2,257	1,663	-594	-26.3%	96	9,956	7,459	-2,497	-25.1%	95
Pasadena City	15,702	11,528	-4,174	-26.6%	97	29,966	22,542	-7,424	-24.8%	92
Taft	3,377	2,442	-935	-27.7%	98	5,144	3,549	-1,595	-31.0%	108
Mendocino	2,110	1,514	-596	-28.2%	99	4,428	3,404	-1,024	-23.1%	85
College of the Redwoods	1,635	1,168	-467	-28.6%	100	5,379	3,999	-1,380	-25.7%	97
San Bernardino Valley	12,117	8,509	-3,608	-29.8%	101	15,066	10,645	-4,421	-29.3%	106
Gavilan	4,305	3,000	-1,305	-30.3%	102	6,800	4,845	-1,955	-28.8%	105
MiraCosta	6,896	4,789	-2,107	-30.6%	103	15,804	11,403	-4,401	-27.8%	103
Los Angeles Trade Technical	12,694	8,789	-3,905	-30.8%	104	15,018	10,579	-4,439	-29.6%	107
West Los Angeles	9,737	6,723	-3,014	-31.0%	105	13,941	10,049	-3,892	-27.9%	104

	Underrepresented Students					All Students				
College	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank	Fall 2019 Head-count	Fall 2021 Head-count	Change (#)	Change (%)	Rank
Los Angeles City	12,494	8,577	-3,917	-31.4%	106	19,340	14,172	-5,168	-26.7%	100
Santa Ana	23,699	16,153	-7,546	-31.8%	107	37,281	27,994	-9,287	-24.9%	94
Palomar	13,347	8,845	-4,502	-33.7%	108	26,049	17,821	-8,228	-31.6%	109
Feather River	906	594	-312	-34.4%	109	1,874	1,386	-488	-26.0%	98
Los Angeles Southwest	7,052	4,516	-2,536	-36.0%	110	7,870	5,296	-2,574	-32.7%	110
Reedley	8,638	5,034	-3,604	-41.7%	111	11,682	6,565	-5,117	-43.8%	113
Coastline Community	4,724	2,735	-1,989	-42.1%	112	12,326	7,757	-4,569	-37.1%	112
Lassen Community	1,303	741	-562	-43.1%	113	2,568	1,625	-943	-36.7%	111
College of the Siskiyous	1,615	773	-842	-52.1%	114	3,371	1,875	-1,496	-44.4%	114

Courtesy of Clovis Community College

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES SAW A 19% ENROLLMENT DECLINE FROM 2019 TO 2021

The Pandemic Disrupted College Enrollment Patterns

The joint health and economic crises of the pandemic disrupted the typical relationship between college enrollment and economic growth. Recessions have generally led to increased enrollment, particularly in community colleges, as displaced workers seek education and training for new jobs, but the short recession that followed the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 coincided with dramatic declines in college enrollment. Nationally, enrollment declined more substantially at community colleges than at four-year institutions, with the most adverse effects on underrepresented and low-income students.[5,6] The larger decline reflects the populations served by community colleges—lower-income, first-generation, and part-time students—who were more likely to have been directly affected by the virus and to have suffered from the economic impacts like job loss, affordability concerns, lack of access to adequate health insurance and quality health care, and lack of access to technology to participate in online education.[7] Community college enrollment declines were more precipitous for men than women, exacerbating a longer-term trend showing women both enrolling in and completing college at higher rates.[8]

Selective four-year universities had begun to reverse their losses by fall 2021. Among highly selective private four-year institutions across the country, for example, a rebound in new freshman enrollment in fall 2021 more than erased losses seen in fall 2020, with a net growth of two percent over the level prior to the pandemic in fall 2019.[9] Highly selective public universities also saw gains in new freshman enrollment in fall 2021, though not sufficient to fully compensate for losses in fall 2020. In contrast, less selective

Courtesy of Berkeley City College

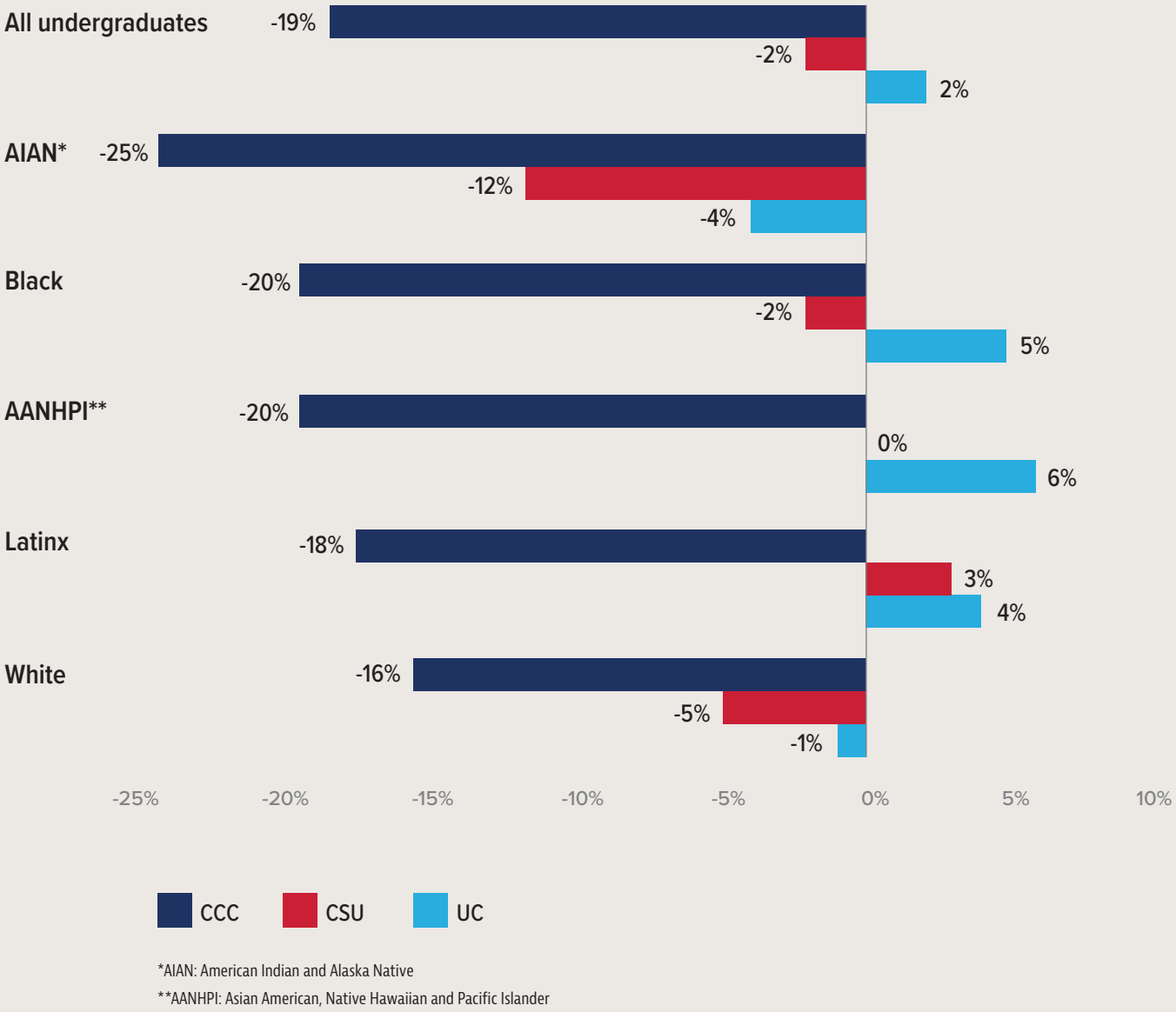
institutions continued to lose students, with an overall decline of nearly seven percent in undergraduate enrollment between fall 2019 and fall 2021.[10] Community colleges across the country saw a total enrollment loss of 13% over that two-year period. Early data for spring 2022 suggests a continued decline in overall undergraduate enrollment, although at a slower pace, especially for community colleges where enrollment of recent high school graduates and dually enrolled high school students has helped to mitigate continued losses among adult learners.[11] The substantial enrollment declines at community colleges worsened a trend that was occurring prior to the pandemic. Nationally, enrollment mostly grew in the first decade of this century, especially toward the end due to growth associated with the Great Recession, but enrollment declined every fall after it peaked in 2010.[12]

Enrollment Patterns In California Mirrored National Trends

As the largest community college system in the country, the California Community Colleges have experienced substantial enrollment declines, with total annual enrollment dropping from more than 2.2 million students in 2018-19 to 1.8 million in 2021-22.[13] The system experienced similar disparities in enrollment losses across race and gender as those seen nationally. As shown in Figure 1, enrollment in the California Community Colleges declined about 19% overall between fall 2019 and fall 2021, compared to a loss of two percent in the CSU and a gain of two percent at the UC. In the community colleges, enrollment declined by 16% among white students while the losses were larger for students of color. Enrollment declined by 18% for Latinx students; 20% for Black students; 20% for Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) students; and 25% for American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students. The losses were larger among men than women in every racial/ethnic group (see Figure 2).

Over the pandemic, enrollment declined by 19% in the community colleges, with disparities across racial groups. Enrollment in the CSU declined much less, while it actually grew at UC.

Figure 1. Percent Change in Student Enrollment, Fall 2019 to Fall 2021



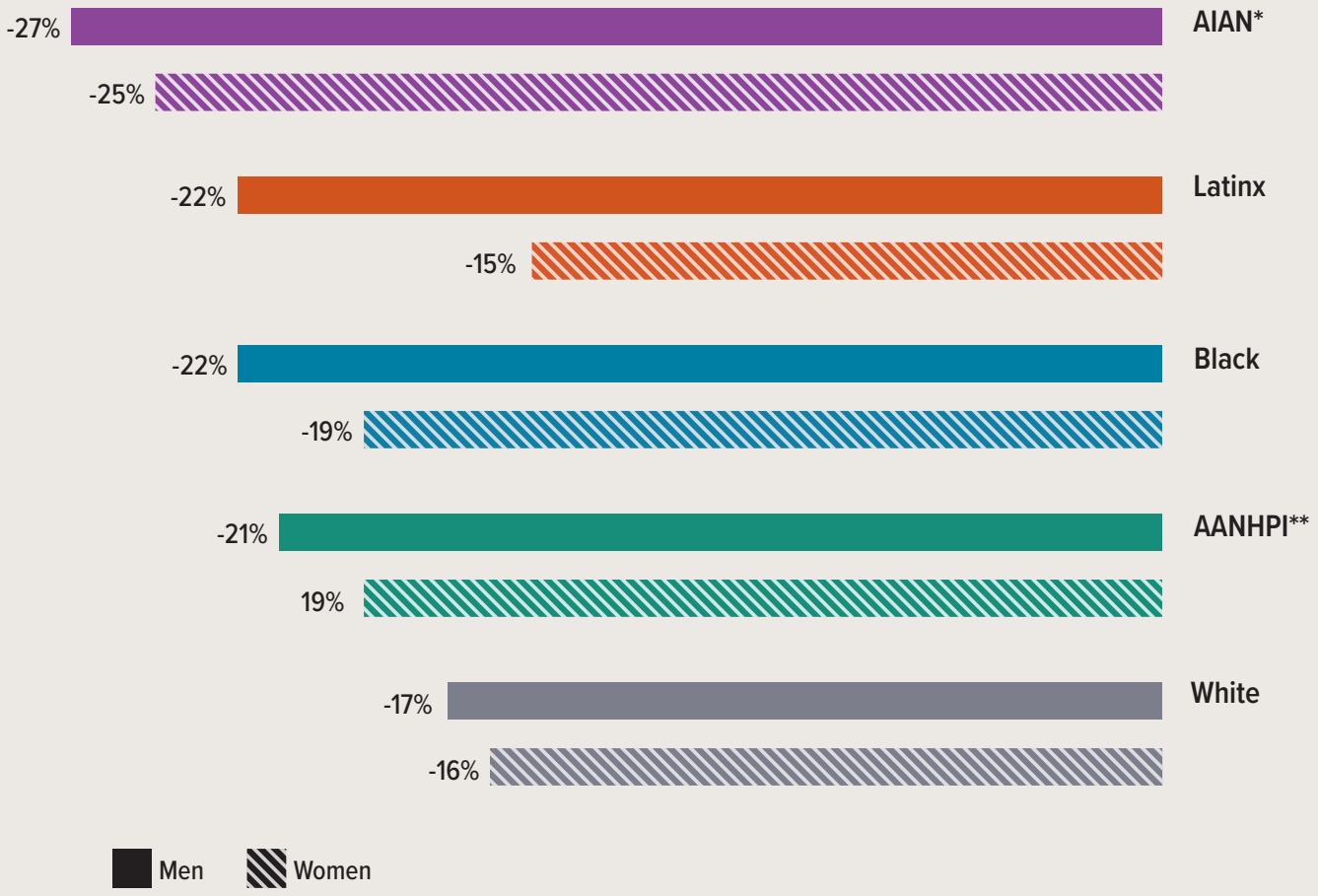
*AIAN: American Indian and Alaska Native

**AANHPI: Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander

Data Source: Author calculations using data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office DataMart, California State University Enrollment Dashboard, and University of California Infocenter (retrieved 7/18/2022)

Community college enrollment declined more among men than women in every racial/ethnic group, with the largest gender difference in the Latinx population.

Figure 2: Percent Change in Student Enrollment, Fall 2019 to Fall 2020.



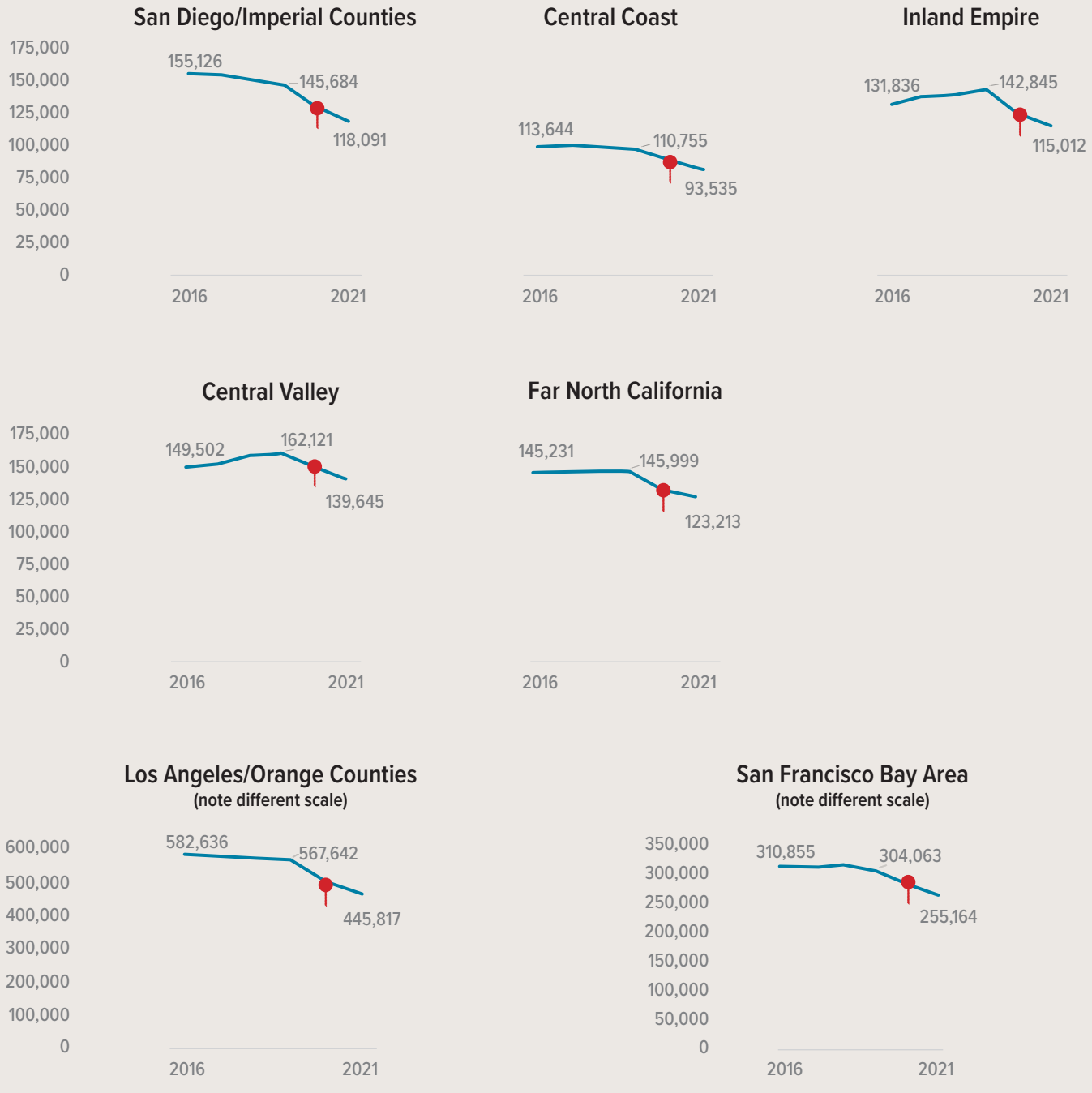
*AIAN: American Indian and Alaska Native

**AANHPI: Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander

Data Source: Author calculations using data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Datamart (retrieved 7/18/2022)

While enrollment at the California Community Colleges was growing in the Inland Empire and Central Valley, it was flat or declining in other regions of the state prior to the pandemic.

Figure 3. Community College Enrollment by Region, 2016-2021



Data Source: California Community Colleges Datamart

Note: Regions as defined by the CCCO: San Diego Imperial, South Central Coast, Inland Empire Desert, Central Valley Motherlode, North Far North, Los Angeles Orange County, San Francisco Bay Area

According to another recent analysis, the rate of enrollment decline in the California Community Colleges was higher among first-time students (down 37% through spring 2021) than among continuing students (-13%), although the number of continuing students lost was greater, estimated at 181,000 by spring 2021.[15] The researchers found that persistence rates declined more for male than female students, and more for students of color than for white students, the same pattern we found for overall enrollment (shown in Figures 1 and 2).

Pandemic-related enrollment declines at community colleges varied across program types. Vocationally oriented courses and programs at community colleges experienced larger enrollment declines during the pandemic.[16,17] Programs in areas like health care and industrial technologies were more difficult to shift to online instruction due to the hands-on nature of the training and, to the extent that colleges could continue providing in-person components of the courses, the cost was significantly higher due to capacity limits for social distancing and frequent deep cleaning. The disruption to intensively hands-on career education programs like those in assembly, repair, and maintenance explained most of the greater decline in enrollment of men relative to women during the pandemic.[18] Having a higher share of enrollment in online courses at a college prior to the pandemic was not related to the amount of enrollment lost once it began.[19]

Reduced College Enrollment and Completion Could Have Dire Consequences For California and Its Residents

Surveys confirm that the pandemic posed a significant barrier to college enrollment and retention, as students dealt with disruptions to their economic, health, and family situations, a difficult shift to remote learning, and increased emotional stress.[20,21,22] Some surveys have shown an increase in skepticism about higher education, with a 2019 poll indicating that half of U.S. adults (51%) considered a college education to be "very important," down from 70% in 2013.[23] However, recent surveys found that interest in pursuing a college degree and the value attributed to doing so are high, and most students who left college during the pandemic want to return.[24,25] Ongoing stress and concerns about the cost of attending college were cited as factors preventing enrollment. Recent surveys of Californians mirror national findings, showing that state residents continue to value both four-year degrees and sub-baccalaureate credentials like those provided at community colleges, while being concerned about the cost of higher education.[26]

The persistence of recent enrollment declines is concerning given research showing that students who stop out of college often do not return, and efforts to reenroll them have had limited success.[27,28] Recent job growth and increases in wages for non-college jobs may be contributing to student choices about forgoing college enrollment, but at considerable risk for their future economic circumstances.[29] Given the known benefits of a college degree, the potential consequences of reduced college attendance could be severe for both individuals and California as a whole. Higher education is associated with both private and public benefits, including higher annual wages and lifetime earnings for individuals, and higher tax revenues and lower costs for social programs for the state.[30] While outcomes vary by undergraduate major and occupation,

bachelor's-degree recipients overall earn more than twice as much as those with a high school diploma over their lifetimes, and those with an associate degree have lifetime earnings more than 40% higher than those of high school graduates (see Table 1).[31] All racial/ethnic groups experience a significant benefit from college, and recent enrollment declines threaten to worsen educational equity in California. People of color are already less likely to earn a degree, and the community colleges serve as the entry point to a college education for the vast majority of California's students of color.[32]

As one recent summary of the potential future impact of reduced college going and completion put it, **"Slower economic growth. Continued labor shortages. Lower life expectancy. Higher levels of divorce. More demand for social services, but less tax revenue to pay for it."**[33]

A person with a bachelors' degree in California will earn $1.4 million more than someone with a high school diploma over the course of a lifetime.

Table 3: Lifetime Earnings by Educational Attainment in California

EDUCATION LEVEL	MEDIAN LIFETIME EARNINGS (IN MILLIONS)
High School Diploma/GED	$1.4
Some College, no degree	$1.8
Associate degree	$2.0
Bachelor's degree	$2.8

Data Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, The College Payoff (2021)

"COVID has been a lesson in disguise for our colleges to make our education more accessible and allow students to not only come back to school, but take the steps to support their family and support themselves through streamlined time to a degree, credential or career."

Devin Delgado,
student at West Hills College Coalinga

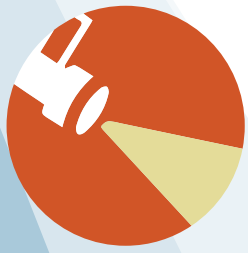
Courtesy of Moorpark College

CALIFORNIA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES WORK HARD TO RECOVER ENROLLMENT

To learn more about the response of California's community colleges to current enrollment challenges, we interviewed administrators, faculty, and staff at nine colleges with comparatively smaller enrollment losses, particularly among Black and Latinx students. Overall, the selected colleges lost five percent of their enrollment over the pandemic, compared to about a 20% loss at non-selected colleges. We asked the college officials about what practices they believed to show promise and support enrollment and retention of underrepresented students (see the appendix for a more detailed description of our research methods, including limitations). We collected examples of practices at the colleges that were perceived as supportive of enrollment, particularly for underserved students. Most people we spoke with had little data or evidence to determine what was working and pointed to the unknown impact of external factors like college location; students' work and family status and other characteristics; and local economic conditions. While these and other factors impacted enrollment declines, we share below the strategies that may help colleges as they try to increase enrollment.

"One thing I would recommend to anyone that serves any educational institution would be to let the students know that resources are available for their success and any decision they make, also reminding students that teachers are there to help them rather than being the person who passes or fails them."

Cristian Palomino, student at Cosumnes River College



Nine Colleges Share Their Strategies to Recover Enrollment

This report summarizes the findings from 26 interviews across nine colleges, selected because they had comparatively smaller losses (or even gains) in the enrollment of Black and Latinx students during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Barstow Community College
- Clovis Community College
- Cosumnes River College
- Moorpark College
- West Hills College Coalinga
- Berkeley City College
- College of the Sequoias
- Folsom Lake College
- San Diego Miramar College

See the appendix for more details on college selection and the interviews.

Colleges Are Using Multiple Strategies To Recruit and Retain Students

The colleges we included in the study are engaged in numerous efforts to increase their enrollment, including **three broad categories of activities:**

- Expanding outreach and marketing efforts to recruit new students, reengage those lost to the pandemic, and retain current students;
- Improving and expanding student services to provide more flexible, proactive, personalized, and holistic support to increase student success and retention; and
- Changing course schedules, curriculum, programs, and institutional policies to better meet student needs and demand.

To support these efforts, the colleges are **infusing these activities with four cross-cutting strategies,** including:

- Focusing on equity in access and outcomes for Black, Latinx, and other underrepresented student populations;
- Upgrading technology and increasing the use of data;
- Deepening collaboration, both within their institutions and with external partners; and
- Creating a more supportive campus culture and leadership structure.

Colleges are implementing a range of activities and cross-cutting strategies to address enrollment declines among current and prospective students.

Table 4: Summary of College Efforts to Increase Enrollment

Cross-Cutting Strategies	Categories of Activities		
	EXPANDING OUTREACH AND MARKETING	IMPROVING STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS	CHANGING SCHEDULES, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES
FOCUSING ON EQUITY	Focusing outreach on underrepresented, low-income, and other underserved student populations Targeting diverse schools and student groups for dual enrollment Conducting student focus groups and other efforts to identify challenges and needs for support	Implementing or expanding referral processes and expanding comprehensive and holistic services, with a focus on low-income and underrepresented students Expanding financial supports (e.g., emergency grants, book and transportation vouchers, food and housing supports) Sharing and discussing disaggregated data on student enrollment and success Engaging in campus-wide conversations on racial justice issues to increase belonging and support for underrepresented students	Streamlining administrative processes that are particularly burdensome for underserved student populations Requiring contact prior to course drops to offer supports Incentivizing full-time attendance Removing financial holds/ writing off debts Relaxing payment policies Offering alternative course and term schedules (e.g., eight-week courses, more evening/weekend courses, more online and hybrid courses) Increasing use of low- or no-cost course materials
UPGRADING TECHNOLOGY AND INCREASING DATA USE	Analyzing student data to identify those to contact Targeted contacts via email, text, phone, social media, postcards Student surveys to identify needs and preferences Online/virtual events in addition to in-person (e.g., high school visits, campus tours, registration fairs)	Improving websites to include interactive features (e.g., live chat, chatbots) Implementing online student services (e.g., online scheduling, open online meeting rooms, video appointments) Implementing or expanding use of early alert systems to identify students who may be struggling (e.g., Starfish) Supplying laptops and mobile hotspots to students and staff, and expanding WiFi to campus parking lots and other locations	Analyzing data to develop, monitor, and update course offerings, schedules and modalities Requiring or incentivizing professional development for faculty, staff, and students on use of new technology platforms

Cross-Cutting Strategies	Categories of Activities		
	EXPANDING OUTREACH AND MARKETING	IMPROVING STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS	CHANGING SCHEDULES, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES
INCREASING COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	Initiating or deepening partnerships with K-12 and/or adult schools Tabling and/or presentations at community events and organizations	Expanding collaborative student success models (e.g., student success teams, cohort programs, one-stop service centers) Working with K-12 and/or adult schools to better align curriculum Identifying community partners where students can be referred for services	Developing new programs tailored to the local labor market, with input from local employers Increasing formal and informal meetings and other opportunities for communication and collaboration across student services and instruction
DEVELOPING SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CAMPUS CULTURE	Matching outreach staffing to targeted student groups Expanding participation in outreach efforts (e.g., to include faculty, administrators, students/peer mentors) Training and resources for outreach staff	Emphasizing the importance of collaboration, flexibility and responsiveness to student needs Offering trainings for faculty and staff on equity and mental health issues	Requiring or incentivizing particular trainings for administrators, faculty and/or staff (e.g., equity-related, technology platforms, online educational resource options) Developing policies for flexible and alternative work schedules for some employees

"When the question was raised on whether we would be going back in person or not, Folsom Lake College called a town hall to hear what the students would have prefered and how the college could make sure the students feel prepared to go back in person. I will always remember this because it's not often the administration/staff actually hears what a student has to say."

- Jasmine Prasad, former student at Folsom Lake College

EXPANDING OUTREACH AND MARKETING

Colleges are working to expand and improve their outreach efforts, using new approaches and technologies and targeting new audiences, aiming to increase enrollment in three ways, through recruiting new students, reengaging students recently lost during the pandemic, and retaining currently enrolled students.

Colleges are trying to recruit new students. Community colleges have long fostered relationships with high schools to ease the enrollment of new graduates, and interviewees described efforts to improve and strengthen these partnerships. Examples included:

- Being more flexible in the timing and format of high school visits or other activities to meet the preferences of each high school;
- Assigning particular outreach staff to specific high schools to ensure consistency and build closer relationships;
- Sending staff with more specialized knowledge on high school visits when requested (such as from the financial aid office) to ensure students' questions could be adequately addressed; and
- Making efforts to match the race/ethnicity of outreach staff to the demographic profile of a school's student population to present a more welcoming face to historically underserved students.

Some interviewees pointed to an increased focus on dual enrollment as a part of their outreach to high schools, and others noted new efforts to work with adult schools to recruit older students. Many colleges have expanded their outreach efforts to the general community, setting up tables at community events; giving presentations to community groups; advertising in local media or appearing on local television and

radio programs; and doing direct mailings of postcards with QR codes to ease connection to enrollment information. One college had staff drive an "outreach van" around the community during the pandemic, ensuring visibility of signage saying the college was open and offering classes, stopping to hand out information in locations frequented by local residents like parks, restaurants, and shopping centers.

> *"Rather than thinking we knew best, we let [the high schools] tell us what would work best for them. And if one site wants it this way and another site wants it [another] way, we do them differently. We're trying to be responsive to the needs of the community."*

Colleges are trying to reengage students recently lost during the pandemic. Interviewees described numerous efforts to connect with students who withdrew from the college during the pandemic and encourage them to reenroll. Some colleges set up call centers, hiring part-time staff (often including student workers) or enlisting administrators and faculty to supplement the outreach and student services staff assigned to the effort. Colleges have tried to be strategic in this outreach. Some interviewees described dividing student contact lists into groups by race/ethnicity or other demographic characteristics and assigning lists to callers of similar background. One interviewee said their college developed scripts for callers to use in their conversations, emphasizing messages that encouraged students to use the disruption of the pandemic as an opportunity to make progress toward their educational goals. Many interviewees referred to being careful and intentional in the messages they were communicating, focusing on the college being open and having many options for taking classes online, in person, or in a hybrid format, and emphasizing the new supports and resources available to students, such as financial support for basic needs, online tutoring programs, and the technology needed to access online classes and services. In addition to phone calls, the colleges have used email, text messaging, and social media to reach former students.

> *"A wellness check phone call is what we called it. Everyone is getting phone calls asking you to buy something, but we just wanted to check to see if you need any help. We gave students options of things since they might not know what to ask for, based on the kind of help we thought they probably needed."*

> *"We focused on empowering students to understand that finishing college was still within reach. We talked a lot about how everyone's priorities have changed due to the pandemic. We wanted to make sure students knew it was still a goal that's attainable."*

Colleges are trying to retain currently enrolled students. More intentional and intensive outreach and communication is also being used as a retention strategy, as colleges are recognizing the importance of student success and retention to their overall enrollment levels. Many interviewees referenced efforts to be more proactive in reaching out early to current students to offer support to those who may be struggling.

Many of the colleges have conducted online surveys or focus groups to learn about students' needs for support and their preferences in terms of course modality, dates and times for services to be offered, and other issues. Some colleges are doing considerable outreach through their support programs for underrepresented students and working to expand and improve these programs to make their campuses more welcoming to these communities.

> *"[Building targeted support programs and diversifying our hiring] are like the building blocks. You can tell students, 'Come to my school,' and they might believe you and come. But if they look around and think, 'There's nothing here for me and no one who looks like me,' they'll look around and go to another school…So we're building them a community."*

Interviewees were generally uncertain about the effectiveness of their marketing and outreach at generating enrollment. Many said they were unaware of efforts to track the impact of various efforts, although a few described "small bumps" in registration activity after a round of postcards or phone calls. A recent study illustrates the challenge colleges are facing, finding that offering encouragement and information about enrollment via text messages to previously successful students at Florida community colleges had no impact on the likelihood of re-enrollment (although adding a one-course tuition waiver increased enrollment).[34] A recent review of the literature on the efficacy of college outreach suggested that it can have an impact on enrollment of disadvantaged students if the effort offers active counseling or substantially simplifies the enrollment process, but not if it simply provides information.[35]

Interviewees at one college described using control group experiments to evaluate their marketing and outreach efforts, finding some impacts on web site hits and applications but no impact on actual enrollment. Even without evidence of an impact on enrollment, many interviewees across our sample of colleges indicated that current and former students expressed deep appreciation for the efforts to reach out to them, saying it made them feel valued and cared for, and some interviewees expressed hope that it would yield more enrollment when students' circumstances allowed.

Courtesy of Clovis Community College

West Hills College Coalinga Collaborates on Annual Outreach Plan

As part of its efforts to increase enrollment, West Hills College Coalinga worked collaboratively to create an annual plan for enrollment campaigns, primarily focused on current students. The plan grew out of its Student Success Committee's review of data on early indicators of success for first-year students. The committee used the data to develop a list of outreach activities and other interventions. Administrators in instruction and student services worked together to draw up an annual plan showing each outreach activity, the office responsible for leading the activity, the timing of the activity, and the targeted student groups. Some examples of activities in the plan include:

- Contacting students toward the end of a term who have at least 45 units completed but are not enrolled for future terms;
- Contacting students at the beginning of a term who are enrolled in three, six, or nine units to encourage them to add one more class; and
- Contacting students enrolled in a first nine-week course with grades indicating they may be on track to fail or withdraw to encourage them to re-enroll for the second nine-week term.

IMPROVING STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Colleges are also working to expand and improve the services and supports they provide as a means of increasing student success, thereby increasing retention and supporting college enrollment levels. Colleges are changing student services in several ways.

Colleges are offering services in more flexible ways. The restrictions imposed by operating during a pandemic forced colleges to bring student services into the online environment, something few of the colleges in our sample had done very extensively before. Some interviewees described the process as a "bigger lift" than that needed to expand online instruction, as most colleges had at least some prior experience and some faculty already prepared to do that. Colleges added chat functions to their websites to answer student questions that may not require actual counseling appointments. They acquired software to allow online scheduling of appointments with student services offices, and to conduct these appointments

virtually. Some colleges assigned staff to keep virtual drop-in hours open for students to get help with specific issues like admissions, financial aid, or technical support. Some produced videos about how to register for classes, how to see a counselor, how to change a password and other topics, and made them easily available online. Colleges found ways to streamline referrals and the processing of paperwork across student services offices via online forms and electronic signatures.

Many colleges have expanded the days and times that counseling, tutoring, or other services are available to students, particularly during busy times like enrollment periods. Having staff working remotely made it easier to implement more flexible approaches like evening appointment hours. One college went a step further and hired a company to offer late night tutoring after 11:00 PM, when college faculty and staff who generally provided the services were not willing to do it. Colleges have expanded options for counseling to include, for example, both 30-minute and one-hour appointments, as well as making staff available in various student services offices to answer quick questions from students as needed by email, phone, or online chat.

In their efforts to provide flexibility, many interviewees noted the importance of continuing to offer services in person as well as online. Some interviewees thought their college's enrollment was supported by its efforts to keep as many in-person services as possible. One college described hosting numerous drive-through events and outdoor sports and performing arts activities. The college made staff available to offer student services outdoors throughout the pandemic, using laptop computers and personal protective equipment. Another college focused on keeping its welcome center open and staffed since August 2021, to give students somewhere to come in person.[36]

> *"If a student lands in the admissions Zoom room, and they really need a counselor or they really need to see financial aid, we're making sure they get it that day, at least getting that booked. It may have taken them all day to figure out how to get to us, how to get in that Zoom room…We don't let them go without having something scheduled and knowing what to expect. If you have them, don't lose them until they have what they need."*

Colleges are providing more proactive and personalized services. In addition to making services more available and flexible, the colleges have made efforts to be more proactive in ensuring that students make use of those services. Rather than waiting for students to come to them, the colleges are reaching out to encourage students to seek help and providing information about the various options. Some interviewees pointed to efforts at better training service providers on the importance of being responsive to students' needs and preferences, and on delivering a more caring and personalized experience for students. These efforts to be more proactive and responsive, and to provide services that are personalized to students' needs and circumstances, reflect research on both what students want from their colleges and what makes them more likely to succeed.[37,38]

"We try to be proactive. We were never asking students, 'What do you need?' It was, 'In your question, I think I hear you saying you need help with financial aid.' That way it's a prompted conversation, because a lot of students don't know what they're asking for. There's so much language in the college that is coded, and students wouldn't even know what it is."

Some interviewees talked about the importance of improvements made to the way their colleges use data and technology to monitor students' progress and supply the support they need to succeed. Others pointed to adopting new software or other processes that allow staff to share information on particular students about their access and use of services to ease the burden on students to re-explain their needs. One college had adopted Starfish just before the pandemic, an early alert system that allows faculty to flag students they have some concern about (e.g., a student who had not yet logged in to an online class), which alerts student services staff to reach out to the student to offer help. The college worked to encourage increasing numbers of faculty to adopt its use over the last couple of years, in part by sharing data showing that faculty who used it had higher rates of success among underrepresented students—that is, higher course completion and grades—than faculty who did not. College interviewees said that adjunct faculty particularly appreciated the system for allowing them to flag students as needing help without having to know details about which office or staff member they should refer students to for assistance. Research on early alert systems has been somewhat mixed to date, but the strategy may be effective with historically underserved student populations by helping to connect them to their institution, as long as effective intervention services are actually provided.[39,40,41]

"We've implemented systems for tracking confidential student information so that students don't have to repeat their story every time. We type it into a confidential space, with different employees having different access to information as needed and appropriate."

Colleges are supplying more "wraparound" supports. Another common theme across the nine colleges reflected their efforts to expand the kinds of services they deliver to students, and to structure those services to provide a more seamless and holistic experience for students, an approach to reforming student services that is supported by research.[42] All the colleges noted expanded efforts to address students' basic needs, providing resources, services, or referrals related to nutrition, housing, transportation and child care, supported by temporary federal and state funds for pandemic relief and new ongoing state funds for basic needs.[43] Colleges are expanding mental health services to deal with the disruptions and challenges of the pandemic and the ongoing needs for mental health support faced by students who must overcome numerous barriers and challenges to enroll and succeed in college, also supported by recent state investments.[44]

"In the last couple of years, we have used some of our Student Equity and Achievement and Guided Pathways funds for gas cards, book vouchers, and other things students need, which has been phenomenal for these students because it doesn't mess with their unmet need or Pell grant qualification."

"We're taking a holistic approach, because every student matters. We're being more hands-on and proactive in providing services. And we're trying to create a culture of not just recruiting students but retaining them and ensuring their success."

Many interviewees said their college has expanded tutoring services, peer mentoring, learning communities, and special programs aimed at supporting underrepresented student populations. Interviewees at one college spoke of the benefits of having recently centralized various student services into a one-stop center, while those at another pointed to targeted learning communities as a significant factor in supporting underserved students (page 31). Interviewees at five of the colleges referenced the importance of their student success teams or coaches to their efforts to retain students, which they said were related to implementation of Guided Pathways (page 32).[45] These cross-divisional teams are typically organized around meta majors—collections of academic majors that have common foundational skills and courses and may lead to related careers. The teams may include a dean, instructional faculty, counseling faculty, and a classified professional "success coach" who collaborate on tracking student progress, finding gaps in services, and addressing systemic barriers to success. The teams are essentially tasked with providing case management to a specific group of students. They develop course taking guidance, manage embedded counseling and tutoring supports, and supply resources and referrals as needed for the students under their purview. This type of model of providing integrated student supports has been growing across community colleges and has shown promise in research examining its impact on retention and success for underrepresented student populations.[46,47]

"I wasn't going to let anyone say they couldn't get here. I was driving Chromebooks to students… because we made that commitment to students. If you stayed in school with us, we were going to get you all those resources."

Courtesy of San Diego Miramar College

Berkeley City College Expands Learning Communities

Berkeley City College's Society of Scholars (SOS) offers cohort-based learning communities for first-time, full-time, first-generation students, including programs targeted at Black students, Latinx students, and underrepresented Southeast Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander students. The focus of the program is on student retention and success, with a strong commitment to supporting students all the way through to transfer or degree completion, even if a student stops out due to events out of their control. The programs offer benefits that include:

- A designated counselor who supplies proactive and holistic supports to students in the cohort;
- Two years of free tuition and free books for core classes;
- Collaborative learning with a supportive community of peers and dedicated tutors;
- Priority registration; and
- Special events such as workshops, field trips, and cultural and team-building activities.

The dedicated counselors for these learning communities engage in outreach visits to local high schools, targeting schools and classes with large populations of underrepresented students. During the pandemic, the counselors worked hard to transition their outreach efforts to a virtual format, working with high school teachers and counselors to schedule Zoom presentations, and inserting videos, music, and interactive features to engage students. They closely watched an interest form on the SOS webpage to identify potential students and responded quickly to any inquiries. They held initial meetings with students who did not meet program criteria (e.g., those enrolling part time), serving as a bridge to the general counseling office, which does not have staff capacity to engage in individual outreach. Interviewees believed the learning communities were a significant factor in helping the college hold onto enrollment among underrepresented students over the pandemic, which increased by eight percent from fall 2019 to fall 2021 (see Table 2 on page 8).

Colleges Use Student Success Coaches and Teams to Provide Holistic Support

Five of the colleges included in the study have implemented success coaches, in some cases as part of cross-divisional student success teams to provide holistic support to students. Interviewees at those colleges pointed to this approach as helpful during the pandemic, often indicating the efforts have been expanded over the last few years and targeted toward supporting underrepresented and underserved student populations.

- At Clovis Community College, success coaches provide one-on-one coaching sessions to help students identify their goals and monitor progress toward achieving them; offer collaborative workshops to help students build academic skills; and make referrals to campus and community support programs.
- College of the Sequoias' Student Success Program includes counselors, success coordinators, and peer mentors who conduct outreach to ensure students are aware of programs and benefits, provide workshops, make referrals to resources, and help students develop goals and educational plans.
- At Cosumnes River College and Folsom Lake College, each meta major has a student success team with counselors, success coaches, faculty, and other staff who collaborate to support students in that pathway. Success coaches focus high-touch supports on first-year students to ensure they are on track to meet important milestones.
- Moorpark College's First-Year Experience and Second-Year Experience programs include dedicated success coaches and counselors who collaborate to provide holistic supports. Students in the programs are required to attend a certain number of appointments, and are offered workshops and referrals to peer mentors and other resources.

CHANGING SCHEDULES, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES

Colleges are also trying to increase enrollment by offering more class options and new programs aimed at preparing students for local employment opportunities. They are changing policies to remove financial and administrative barriers that could prevent or discourage students from enrolling.

Colleges are offering new class schedule options. Interviewees at some of the colleges pointed to the expansion of shorter-term course offerings as an approach that helped them maintain enrollment. One interviewee pointed out that students like the possibility of taking two, eight-week courses, which allows them to complete both a prerequisite and its follow-up course in the same semester. Others said that working adults often prefer shorter terms, and that closely watching registration can allow colleges to capture more enrollment by adding shorter courses over time. One interviewee said that being thoughtful about the combination and sequencing of short-term courses can allow faster student progress. Some limited research shows that community college students in short-term courses may have higher success rates.[48]

In addition to shorter-term options, the colleges said it was important to offer courses at multiple times and in multiple formats and modalities (e.g., in person, online, and hybrid; synchronous and asynchronous approaches to online; and allowing both online and in-person participation in a course). Monitoring registration activity and maintaining flexibility allowed colleges to make changes in response to student behavior by, for example, converting courses planned as in person to online.

> *"Shorter classes meant we could get students enrolled for more units, and allowed us to have goals for the January classes, the February classes, etc. If a student only enrolled in three units in January, we could have them enrolled in 12 by February and they hadn't missed a single day of class. It gave us time to intervene and hugely affected enrollment overall."*

Colleges are adding or changing programs. Some of the colleges pointed to efforts to add new programs to increase enrollment and meet both student demand and local workforce needs. For example, one college had been focused on expanding transfer-focused programs prior to the pandemic but has started to build and advertise more workforce programs in the last few years. Other colleges indicated intensified efforts to work with local employers to better align the college's programs with their needs; to collaborate with local high schools on building dual enrollment programs; to build pathways from dual enrollment and adult education courses into certificate and degree programs; to ensure certificate and degree programs are better aligned into stackable options; or to provide better career advising for students.

Reducing students' cost to complete programs is part of the enrollment efforts at some colleges, by lowering the cost of course materials. Some colleges are focused on increasing the use of open educational resources (OER), with some interviewees saying they had seen data showing that courses designated as using OER filled faster during registration periods. One college described buying out 40% of a faculty member's time with grant funds to be an "advocate" who helps other faculty members convert to OER, and another college

offers grants to faculty to work on adoption. Other colleges pointed to significant efforts to give textbook grants to students to reduce their costs.

Some colleges are trying to increase retention by improving the teaching and learning experience, offering more professional development for faculty on how to better serve underrepresented student populations and how to update teaching methods to incorporate new pedagogy and technologies. One college appointed a "teaching and learning lead" for each meta major, whose role is to engage with faculty about professional development needs, curriculum design, student interaction and communication, equity outcomes, syllabus design, and other issues. It is a significant investment, as the leads are compensated through buy-out of some teaching responsibilities to take on the role.

> *"We are doing more collaboration with instructional faculty to focus on retaining the students we do get back and supporting them to finish. We're trying to connect students to faculty to [ensure that students have] access to more than just classes, but to a career trajectory, so they can see the value of coming back."*

Colleges are removing financial and administrative barriers. Many of the colleges have focused on changing policies to reduce barriers to enrollment, including eliminating registration holds for nonpayment of fees and removing or changing requirements for prompt fee payment. Some are focused on using financial or other incentives for students to enroll in more units. One college encourages higher unit loads by requiring new students to opt out of a schedule of 15 units (see page 35). Another college used some of its federal COVID-19 relief funds to incentivize more enrollment, distributing more emergency grant aid to students who enrolled in more units. The college also distributed the grants in a way that allowed students to be more prepared for class, giving them half of their allocation before school started so they would have funds to cover textbooks. While most of these policy changes were intended as emergency measures during the pandemic, some colleges are considering making them permanent.

> *"We used to require students to pay fees within two weeks or they would be dropped, but now we have given a lot more time so that those who will later qualify for financial aid won't ever have to pay when they would have been required to do so up front. It's an effort not to unnecessarily harm students and also to maintain enrollment for those waiting for a financial aid package to be processed."*

Some of the colleges have also changed non-finance related policies to encourage enrollment, such as requiring a success coach to contact students requesting an emergency withdrawal (EW) from a course to help overcome the problem leading to the withdrawal request. Interviewees at one college reported asking faculty to contact students before dropping them from a class for not showing up, and those at several colleges reported encouraging faculty to be more vigilant about sending early alerts to counselors. Some colleges have tried to recapture in-person enrollment by allowing courses to go ahead with smaller numbers of students than had been their practice, over-enrolling somewhat in other classes or using temporary state

and federal funding to subsidize the higher cost. Some interviewees said that efforts to reduce or end the use of remediation as required by Assembly Bill 705 (Chapter 745, Statutes of 2017) helped remove barriers for underrepresented students and may have encouraged enrollment and retention.

"In the old days, you used to have to bring your paper in and we had to sign it, I don't care if it's Friday at 5:00 and we're closed, you have to come back. Now we've figured out how to do it online, allow electronic signatures, and move requests from one place to another rather than making the student do that. Every department figured out how to make it easy for students."

"We were just conditioned by the idea that 12 units equals full time, but that can't get students through on time. AB 705 has helped by eliminating semesters of remedial prior to transfer level, and Guided Pathways emphasizes timely completion. It's a real change in culture, we really want timely completion."

Cosumnes River College Uses Opt-Out Scheduling Support

In 2019, Cosumnes River College initiated an effort to encourage full-time attendance, with a goal of increasing student progress and timely completion and reducing excess credit accumulation.[49] The college developed pre-filled course schedules of 15 units for first-time students based on their major, allowing students to opt out of taking 15 units or change classes on request. Counselors developed the pre-filled schedules by major and instructional faculty reviewed them; all schedules include appropriate English and math courses in the students' first semester. Interviewees reported that the schedules have both increased unit loads (thereby increasing overall enrollment) and allowed the college to better plan its course schedules.

The college evaluated the impact of the policy for fall 2020, finding that students who followed the opt out schedule were twice as likely to return in spring 2021 and 2.4 times as likely to enroll in 15 units in the spring.[50] There was no significant difference in course withdrawal or GPA between students who did and did not follow the opt out schedule, indicating that taking 15 units was not detrimental to course success. While there was a slightly lower rate of completing 15 units in fall 2020 than in fall 2019 when the program started, the rate remained higher than it had been in fall 2018 despite the significant disruptions of the pandemic.

COLLEGE EFFORTS MIRROR NATIONAL TRENDS AND EXPERT ADVICE

The enrollment efforts described by the colleges in our sample largely mirror those being implemented in community colleges across the country and reflect the guidance of national experts on ways to address barriers to enrollment, particularly for underserved student populations. A recent report summarizing the strategies recommended by scholars, advocates, and community college leaders in response to pandemic-related enrollment declines includes many of those described by our sample colleges.[51] The recommendations include:

- Implementing more targeted outreach efforts, including to students outside the traditional source of recent high school graduates, such as adult schools and dual enrollment programs.
- Expanding student supports to include basic needs and mental health, offering services in more times and formats, and being more proactive in providing student services.
- Implementing Guided Pathways, to include streamlined programs, reduced bureaucracy, better monitoring of student progress, and reconsideration of program offerings to best meet student and labor market needs.
- Building better partnerships with K-12, universities, and employers.
- Embracing flexibility and increasing options in scheduling and modalities for both courses and services, particularly useful in catering to working adult populations.
- Focusing on equity in access and outcomes for underrepresented, low income, and first-generation students through fostering a sense of belonging and supplying sufficient support.
- Looking for leadership that is open to rethinking and reconsidering long-standing practices and focused on fostering inclusive institutional cultures.

Other reports have emphasized that students' "basic needs" should be understood to include technology support and meeting their academic needs must include improvement of teaching and learning approaches.[52,53] Taken together, these recommendations largely mirror the activities and strategies we heard in our interviews, as summarized in Table 4 on page 22.

"During the pandemic, basic services such as the library were essential as I found it difficult to find a study space at home and on campus. Programs like EOPS [Extended Opportunity Programs and Services] also assisted with my textbook costs and made academic counseling more accessible. Even the ability to get involved in Associated Students was also helpful as it made me more aware of the resources on campus and find my community."

-Ranemme Abu Hajar, student at Pasadena City College

Courtesy of Moorpark College

Resources Help Community Colleges Implement Holistic Student Supports

Community colleges across the country are working to implement more integrated and holistic approaches to student services and supports. Recently developed resources are intended to help, incorporating the results of research and lessons from discussions with college officials and students into guidance for colleges looking to implement similar approaches.

- One guide supports efforts to implement structures that provide strategic, sustained, integrated, proactive, personalized (SSIPP) services. Putting SSIPP into Practice at Scale: Questions to Ask as You Build Campus Systems for Holistic Student Support
- Another document provides guidance on implementing student success teams. Student Success Teams: An Implementation Guide for Community Colleges

COLLEGES SEE CHALLENGES AHEAD TO RECOVER ENROLLMENT

An Uncertain Environment Makes Planning Difficult

Many interviewees cited uncertainty around the changing higher education environment and worries about the ongoing pandemic as significant challenges to their efforts to regain lost enrollment.

Colleges are concerned about limited student demand and increased competition. Many interviewees shared their concerns about students' interest in and intent to enroll in college, generally, and how much demand will exist for community college enrollment in particular. In part, this concern is related to recent media attention to surveys suggesting growing public skepticism about the value of college, as well as moves by some states and corporations to replace college degree requirements for job applicants with skills-based assessments.[54,55] The concern also reflects the declining enrollment in K-12, increasing competition from a tight labor market, and growing options for students to access education and training through employers or online education providers.[56]

> *"We're trying to be forward thinking; this is going to be our new normal now. The walls are all down, everything is wide open. It's like the universe, and they can go and take courses in any realm."*

Colleges worry about the ongoing and evolving pandemic. Most interviewees pointed to continuing challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, including the possibility of future waves in outbreaks and how to plan course offerings and services amid uncertainty. They particularly cited challenges with deciding on

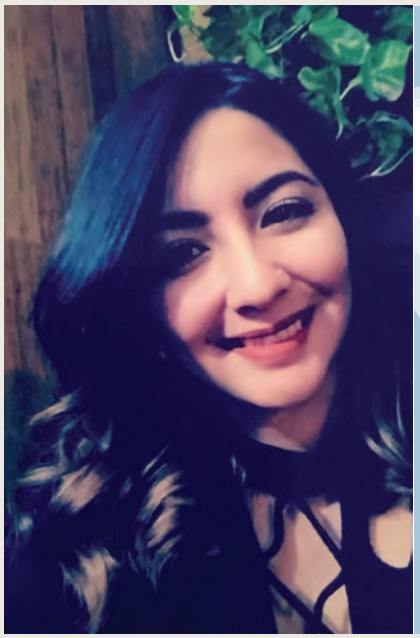
their course schedule—how to balance online and in-person course offerings. The challenge was expressed both in terms of uncertainty about student and faculty preferences for various modalities, and the need to ensure that offerings do not just meet demand but reflect what is best for ensuring good student outcomes.

> *"Our goal is not content and comfortable faculty, and our goal is not even content and comfortable students. Our goal is successful students. So, we're trying to look at the data on where students are succeeding, not just what do faculty and students say they want, and it's creating some hard conversations."*

Resources May Be Inadequate To Meet Student Needs

Another often mentioned challenge was uncertainty around funding and other resources to continue some of the new and expanded efforts colleges have implemented to recover lost enrollment and support students to successful outcomes.

Colleges are experiencing significant staffing issues. Employee burnout was a common concern, reflecting the challenges college faculty and staff have faced over the course of the pandemic to adapt to the online environment and support students struggling amidst all the disruption. Interviewees pointed to issues with high turnover and difficulties finding qualified staff in the tight labor market. Many people pointed out that the strategies they have used to attract and retain enrollment are highly labor intensive, such as more frequent and individualized outreach to current and prospective students, and more proactive and intensive student supports.



"One of the biggest difficulties I faced during the pandemic was the drastic and quick change to a remote learning system. Most of my teachers had no experience with remote learning and I feel like I did not receive the right preparation for the change. I am a student who learns better in person and always goes to tutoring during the week but I had no access to tutoring online and my GPA ended dropping after my first semester online."

- Lidia Valencia, student at City College of San Francisco

"I think my biggest concern for our [college] community, including the students, is just that people are tired. And it doesn't look like things are going to get easier any time soon. In fact, it might get harder. Change is hard, and until it's not change anymore, until it's the norm, it continues to be hard. I think that's going to happen for a few years."

Colleges are uncertain about future funding. Federal emergency funding was extremely helpful in keeping colleges (and students) afloat and supporting the transition to an online and hybrid environment. One-time state funding to provide pandemic relief and support enhanced retention and enrollment strategies have increased flexibility, and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) allowed more flexibility in the colleges' use of some categorical funds. The state also extended the "hold harmless" provisions related to the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) to avoid revenue declines for colleges related to enrollment losses.[57] Interviewees expressed concern about the end of the temporary funding and flexibility, the possibility of a decline in state revenues, and the potential negative impact on resources needed to continue their efforts to regain enrollment.

"At some point, the stock market is going to crash and state revenue will go down. And we're going to have to decide, do we keep paying for [more students than the college is actually serving]?...So the greatest challenge is going to be when the other shoe drops and it's time to pay the bill, and decisions are going to have to be made about what this college is going to look like and who is going to staff it."

Colleges Lack Easy Access To Evidence-Based Resources

While state and system reform efforts like Guided Pathways and AB 705 were cited as helpful, and college efforts largely reflect national trends and expert recommendations, most interviewees reported that their activities and strategies came about by happenstance more than design. When asked where they had learned about the various strategies they were using to recapture enrollment, most people gave very general answers like, "We heard about another college doing it" or "We saw something like it at a conference." While many interviewees expressed appreciation for the efforts of the CCCCO and partner organizations to host webinars and other means of sharing practices, they said there is a need for more curation and better organization of the resources. Some people expressed a desire for more research to support the practices being shared, questioning the value of promoting "best practices" that have little data or evidence to support them. Interviewees at several colleges said that regional organizations are a good platform for sharing evidence-based information across the system (e.g., Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, San Diego & Imperial Counties Community Colleges Association).

"We kind of piecemealed here and there [from other colleges we heard about], and just kind of 'plugged and chugged' as we went along. So, if something didn't work out, we tried something different."

Policies and Processes Impede Change

Attracting and retaining students in an uncertain and increasingly competitive environment requires that colleges quickly adapt and remain flexible. Interviewees pointed to barriers posed by state, systemwide, and local policies, administrative processes, and entrenched college cultures that can impede change.

Colleges experience policy and administrative barriers. Interviewees pointed to several policy and administrative barriers of particular concern in the context of their efforts to attract and serve underrepresented students. The "Fifty Percent Law" requires community colleges to spend at least half of the "current expense of education" for "salaries of classroom instructors" (Education Code § 84362), a restriction that some interviewees said is increasingly a barrier. Some research has outlined the challenge posed by the law to providing the kinds of student services required to support success for underrepresented and low-income students, impeding colleges from providing the number of counseling faculty and staff advisors (e.g., success coaches) to implement holistic approaches to student support.[58] The increase in online education increases the challenge, as providing online classes with quality can involve substantial assistance from instructional designers, technical support staff, and tutors, the costs of which fall outside those allowable for instruction under the Fifty Percent Law.[59] The definition of "the classroom" has changed in this new environment.

> *"In this time, the importance of wraparound services was especially critical to ensuring we kept our students. We clearly can't go out and spend 75% in the support services and only 25% in the instruction, I get that. But I think that [law] deserves a re-look."*

Interviewees also pointed to barriers for students in the application, financial aid, and enrollment processes, such as the requirement for students to reapply after stopping out, which can pose a barrier to college efforts to get students to reenroll. They also pointed to misalignment with K-12 and university partners around curriculum, calendars, and other issues; local union contracts and hiring procedures; and the development and implementation of policies related to pandemic safety and vaccines as challenges to regaining enrollment.

> *"Right now, it's the transition to the college—all this activate your student id number, re-do your CCCApply, you're non-active, you're missing data, we need a social security card—those are the things that are really hurting us right now. Because when the student has to come back, we lose the enrollment."*

Colleges struggle with entrenched cultures and practices. While many interviewees spoke positively about their colleges' ability to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic, some worried that resistance to change might continue to pose a barrier to enrolling and supporting underrepresented students. Some interviewees spoke of resistance to changing counseling and support models, such as assigning counselors

to specialized rather than generalist roles (e.g., to support a particular meta major) or using classified professionals in a "success coach" role. Others spoke of changes to the teaching and learning environment as the primary challenge, citing a lack of willingness or flexibility among instructional faculty to adopt new pedagogy, innovative technology, and more equitable classroom policies and practices.

> *"What's really interesting is that, when there's enrollment decline, everyone is interested in outreach and recruitment. But our incoming student numbers have not declined, and in some cases have even increased. The problem is the numbers reenrolling has dropped. But no one is talking about retention and what's happening in the classroom, which is a much more difficult and complex conversation to have. That's the elephant in the room and the conversation that's missing."*

New State Budget Addresses Some College Concerns

California's budget for 2022-23 includes items that address many of the concerns and challenges expressed by the colleges as they continue their efforts to recover, including:

- A significant base increase to apportionments through the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF), a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the base, and a modified version of the current hold harmless protections;[60]
- Significant augmentations and COLAs to student support programs, including those serving targeted underrepresented student groups, and creation of new categorical programs targeting the AANHPI and AIAN populations;
- An increase in funding for Student Success Completion Grants, which provide students with financial support for full-time enrollment and timely completion;
- One-time funds to support implementation of common course numbering and the Associate Degree for Transfer, to smooth pathways across colleges and systems;
- One-time funds for flexible block grants to support colleges' recovery from the pandemic, and more funds to support retention and enrollment strategies;
- One-time and ongoing funds to support technology upgrades; and
- Funding for more staff at the CCCCO to better coordinate systemwide reform efforts and provide more effective guidance to the colleges.

Taken together, these (and other) provisions of the latest budget should provide the colleges with more time to implement and refine their approaches to recruiting and retaining enrollment, and to make a smoother transition as temporary state and federal COVID-19 relief funds expire and the system moves toward full implementation of the SCFF.

COLLEGES RECOGNIZE SOME POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

While the pandemic continues to pose some significant challenges for community colleges, many interviewees have noticed some benefits coming out of the crisis, and some opportunities to better serve their students going forward.

Colleges Have Increased Understanding Of Student Needs

The pandemic magnified the extensive personal and financial challenges facing community college students, raising awareness about the scope of services students need to persist and succeed in college. Some interviewees hoped that increased faculty understanding of student needs would lead to more support for flexible course times and modalities, more inclusive and supportive teaching approaches, and more flexibility in classroom policies around attendance, grading, and other issues. Others expressed hope that policymakers and system leaders would recognize the ongoing nature of student needs revealed by the pandemic, including access to technology, such as laptop computers and internet service. They expected to see lasting changes in institutional policies and practices to remove unnecessary administrative barriers and to reflect more generous assumptions about student intentions and behavior.

> *"Our [district] business office…had some mindset changes, it changed the assumptions about students. There isn't this amount of financial aid fraud that you think exists. [Students are] not going to take the money and run, they really do use it to buy books. Imagine that! They came to class with their supplies ready, and their first quiz scores showed that."*

Colleges Have Better Online Technology

The forced shift to online education during the pandemic accelerated the acquisition and implementation of technology to support online education, student services, and administrative processes. The CCCCO aided colleges with bulk-price purchases of mobile devices and provided them with free or reduced-price access to software platforms that support online education, meetings, and communication through the system's California Virtual Campus-Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI).[61] Interviewees at several colleges pointed to their prior participation in CVC-OEI as having provided a good foundation for implementing technology platforms to support online learning and services. Interviewees expected many of their colleges' online services and procedures to continue, improving the speed and efficiency of many college processes. They perceived significant benefit to students of having streamlined processes and online options. Nearly all interviewees described the expansion of student services to the online environment as one of the most promising things to come out of the pandemic.

> *"Another good thing that came out of the pandemic is that now almost all our student services are online. Counseling appointments are online, disabled students' assessments are online. It's hard to be a fully online student if you can't get your support services online, so now we can really offer both sides of the house online, [instruction and student services]."*

Willingness To Change May Have Increased

While entrenched cultures and practices were identified as an ongoing challenge, interviewees said that the constraints imposed by operating during the pandemic forced colleges to respond quickly and try new approaches. Some interviewees hoped that the experience would help overcome the inertia that makes it difficult to change long-standing college practices. This hope was expressed in several ways, including "thinking outside the box," "shifting our perspective," and "overcoming resistance."

> *"We can point to 2020 and say, 'We do have the ability to do things quickly, look at the quick switch to remote. Maybe we really don't need 20 committee meetings before we implement, maybe we just do it.' It let us know that we do have the ability to do what feels impossible."*

Colleges Have Enhanced Collaboration

To quickly shift to online learning and services, expand student supports, and implement new technology and processes, college administrators, faculty, and staff had to work together across divisions and departments

in new ways. Even among those that perceived their college culture to be supportive and collaborative prior to the pandemic, interviewees often pointed to increased collaboration related to the crisis and hoped to see that carry forward.

> *"All of a sudden, those [offices and departments] start to see their inter-connectedness. And it's marriage by proximity, they're all working better together. It allowed us to be more coordinated in our efforts. They don't see themselves as individual and competing teams. They may have different roles, but they're all on the same team."*

Community college is the most financially resilient route to take after high school. Our campuses should continue lessening the barriers, remedial classes, and pre-requisites blocking students from achieving their career goals and getting their education."

- Devin Delgado, student at West Hills College Coalinga

Courtesy of Clovis Community College

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pandemic has been a uniquely challenging experience for California's community colleges and for their students, who represent the populations most negatively affected by the crisis. But **the colleges included in our study pointed to some positive aspects, including an increased understanding of students' needs and challenges; improved technology to support online learning and services; enhanced collaboration and partnerships; and more willingness to reconsider long-standing policies and practices. They are working hard to recover lost enrollment by increasing outreach and marketing; expanding and improving student services; and making changes to schedules, programs, and institutional policies.** Across these efforts, they are increasing the focus on equity in access and outcomes for underrepresented and underserved students, using better data and technology, deepening collaborations, and developing a more supportive campus culture. The colleges lack data to clearly identify the effectiveness of their efforts, **although across the colleges and the various strategies, a focus on working to retain current students and encourage their success was viewed as important to supporting college enrollment.**

The colleges perceive **challenges ahead for maintaining their efforts at recovering lost enrollment, including uncertainties about the ongoing pandemic, changes in student demand that could persist, difficulty in accessing evidence-based resources, and possible changes in the state's economy and budget resources.** They see several policy and administrative barriers to implementing evidence-based practices, particularly efforts to supply the kind of proactive and holistic student services that increase retention and success among underserved student populations.

Below are some recommendations to improve state and systemwide policies to better support community colleges in their efforts to provide educational opportunities for Californians.

Improve Resources and Technical Assistance For Colleges

According to our interviewees, current college efforts to recruit and retain enrollment are largely a result of chance, dependent on whether a college official had the time and resources to attend a particular meeting, conference or webinar, or to find and review a particular report; whether the information provided was well organized and supported by convincing evidence; and whether that official had the opportunity or authority to put the learnings into practice at their own campus. The inclusion in the state's 2022-23 budget of one-time funding of $150 million for retention and enrollment strategies and $650 million for COVID-19 recovery block grants places new urgency on helping the colleges understand how to effectively use these substantial new resources.

With new staffing and resources at the CCCCO, also included in the 2022-23 state budget, there are opportunities to improve its efforts to spread promising practices across the colleges, such as:

- Ensuring the practices featured in webinars, conferences, and other resources are based on evidence of their effectiveness in supporting student enrollment, retention, and success, through reviews of the research literature or systemwide studies (e.g., analysis of patterns in systemwide enrollment data; conducting student surveys and focus groups, or summarizing results of such efforts by colleges; review and analysis of colleges' Guided Pathways Scale of Adoption Assessments in the context of enrollment changes);
- Focusing on technical assistance to help colleges understand how to support innovation and change in instruction to ensure that faculty are adopting approaches to pedagogy, technology, and classroom policies that will attract and retain diverse student populations through achievement of their educational goals;
- Increasing the coordination of technical assistance the CCCCO provides, as well as better coordination with assistance provided through partner organizations;
- Improving the organization of resource materials on CCCCO web pages and on the Vision Resource Center; and
- Ensuring that guidance provided to colleges through the CCCCO's various divisions and communication channels is clear and consistent.

Reconsider Funding and Regulations In The Context Of New Teaching and Learning Environment

The dramatic and sudden expansion of online and hybrid education and services calls for a review of the continuing relevance of existing statutes and regulations to determine the need for changes in this new environment. One example that came up repeatedly in our interviews was the Fifty Percent Law, which

interviewees noted impedes college efforts to maintain the mix of staffing needed to provide the kind of proactive and holistic student services that support retention and completion. Another frequently cited example was regulations that require students to reapply for admission after stopping out. A comprehensive review and evaluation of Title 5 regulations is called for in the context of new educational approaches and the ambitious goals outlined in the 2022-23 state budget's Roadmap.

State and system-level approaches to funding should also be reevaluated in the current context, with possible questions to include:

- How can the CCCCO use its funding allocation authority to incentivize colleges to adopt, maintain, and expand flexible and evidence-based approaches to student support (e.g., expanded service hours, online options for all services, student success teams)?
- Which aspects of the expanded flexibility the CCCCO has temporarily provided to colleges in the use of funds can and should be continued?
- How might the recent expansion of categorical funding affect the ability of the SCFF to spark innovation in practices to improve student outcomes and increase equity? Does more use of categorical funding undermine the state's commitment, through adoption of the formula, to providing flexible resources that incentivize achievement of state goals?
- What are the implications of increased online education and services for future funding needs, in terms of equipment, facilities, and ongoing college operations? How can the state continue to support student access to the computers and internet services that are now essential to access and success in college?
- What elements of current funding mechanisms might impede efforts to increase enrollment? For example, would differential funding by program offer opportunities to better accommodate the higher costs—of equipment, competitive faculty salaries, smaller class sizes, and other specialized needs—for programs that offer high value to students and are in high demand by employers?

Support Better Coordination Of Education To Meet Student and State Needs

We encountered considerable uncertainty about whether and when pre-pandemic enrollment patterns might return for California's community colleges. While some early reports point to higher enrollment for fall 2022, at least at some colleges, final data will not be available for several months.[63] If current efforts by the Federal Reserve to reduce inflation lead to a recession, will students return to community colleges to re-train for better job opportunities as they have in pre-COVID recessions?[64] Will community colleges be sufficiently nimble to meet students' new expectations for access to flexible, responsive, and personalized opportunities to obtain the education and training required for success in an evolving workforce and economy? These questions raise issues for the state and the CCCCO about community college governance, coordination

of online offerings, program development and approval processes, adoption of technology systems, and other issues.

Ideally, such issues would be considered in the larger context of the state's education needs and its segmented K-12 and higher education systems. The Campaign and other research and advocacy organizations have long recommended the formation of a coordinating body to better plan for adequate higher education capacity and to address systemic barriers to student progress and success across the education systems.[65] All but one other state has a coordinating entity, and these states seem better able to consider and implement cross-system efforts to address broad state needs.[66] In some states, business and education stakeholders have come together in coalitions to build support for cross-system policy and practice changes to benefit students, the workforce, and the broader society, providing recommendations to state leaders about policy changes to improve college access and completion of certificates and degrees.[67]

Whether through a new higher education coordinating body or a strong coalition of stakeholder groups, California needs better coordination and planning to meet the challenges posed by declining community college enrollment. The pandemic has permanently changed the landscape for higher education, and California's existing structures and policies are likely not sufficient to ensure that its education systems adapt quickly enough to achieve its ambitious goals for increasing educational attainment and reducing equity gaps.

Courtesy of Moorpark College

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We are grateful to the administrators, faculty, and classified professionals at the nine participating colleges for giving generously of their time, expertise and opinions to help us understand the many efforts the colleges are making to enroll and serve Californians to achieve their educational goals.

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APPENDIX

Research Methods

The information synthesized in this report was gathered through:

- Collection and analysis of enrollment data;
- 26 semi-structured interviews across nine California Community Colleges, as summarized in Table A-1; and
- Review of a variety of documents and reports, including research reports, media articles, college websites, and the websites of various state and national higher education organizations.

Table A-1: Summary of College Interviews

BY COLLEGE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES
Barstow Community College	2
Berkeley City College	3
Cosumnes River College	3
Clovis Community College	3
College of the Sequoias	4

BY COLLEGE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES
Folsom Lake College	4
Moorpark College	3
San Diego Miramar College	2
West Hills College Coalinga	2
BY INTERVIEWEE ROLE	**NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES**
Senior Administrators (Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents)	10
Mid-Level Administrators (Deans, Associate/Assistant Deans, Directors)	10
Front-line Faculty and Classified Professionals (Instructional Faculty, Counseling Faculty, Success Coaches)	6

We selected colleges based largely on their change in enrollment among underrepresented student groups (defined as Black, Latinx, and AIAN) over the period of the pandemic, from fall 2019 to fall 2021. We selected from among the colleges with lower percentage losses (or, in a few cases, gains) among these populations over the two-year period, while ensuring variation by region of the state, urbanicity of the service area, and enrollment size, selecting the 10 colleges shown in Table 1 on page 3. Table 2 on pages 8-12 shows enrollment data for each California community college, used as the basis for selection. In most cases, the colleges were among those with lower enrollment losses overall, not just among underrepresented student populations. We requested permission from the president of each college to include the college in our sample. While all 10 presidents agreed, we never received names of people to interview from San Francisco City College, leaving us with nine colleges in the sample.

Interviewees were suggested by the presidents of each college, based on our request for the names of several people who would be most familiar with any challenges the college faces around enrollment; campus efforts to retain enrollment; uses of state and federal funds targeted for student reengagement; and any state/systemwide policy barriers or college needs for support to address enrollment declines. We assured the anonymity of interviewees to facilitate the free sharing of information and perspectives, so we do not name individual interviewees or attribute quotes to specific people or colleges. The recorded interviews lasted approximately an hour.

The scope of the project did not allow for full interview transcripts and complete coding; rather, the interviewer took detailed notes during the interviews and used the recordings to flesh out the notes where necessary to ensure clarity and to gather illustrative quotes. Therefore, the analysis is based on review and coding of the notes to find overall themes, rather than the more detailed and complete coding of transcripts that is often done in qualitative research of this type. The findings represent interviewees' beliefs about what efforts seem promising, as few were able to offer data on effectiveness. In addition, it is possible that colleges that suffered larger losses in enrollment among underrepresented students during the pandemic have been implementing similar strategies, so the practices discussed may not distinguish the selected colleges from others in the system. Reasons for variation in enrollment losses during the pandemic could be many, including pre-existing local trends in enrollment (including in K-12); the level of COVID-19 spread, mitigation efforts, and community concern; and institutional resources and support for reforms to policies and practices.

For research purposes, findings and analyses are based solely on interviews with administrators, faculty, and staff at our selected colleges. The report also includes student perspectives, displayed in boxes throughout the text, that illustrate the relevance and the importance of the actions and intentions discussed in the findings. These student perspectives were sought after analyses were complete in order to add important context to these findings. They are not, however, part of the research data that yielded the conclusions discussed above.

Interview Protocol

Context:

My name is Colleen Moore, and I'm a higher education research and policy consultant. I have been asked by the Campaign for College Opportunity to study enrollment changes at community colleges over the course of the pandemic, and the efforts colleges are making to retain and reenroll students and support them in achieving their educational goals. The goal of the project is to identify some colleges that appear to have been more successful at maintaining enrollment, particularly among Black and Latinx students, and to understand perspectives about what is working for those colleges that could be helpful to share more widely across the system. We have identified [Name of College] as one that would be valuable to learn from, so I will be talking with a few people that were recommended by President [Name] as having good information to share about challenges your college faces around enrollment, campus efforts to retain enrollment, uses of state and federal funds targeted for student reengagement, and any state- or system-level policy barriers or college needs for support to address enrollment declines.

To better focus on our conversation and ensure I capture all your comments, I would like to record this interview. The recording will be for my use only, to flesh out the notes I'll be taking during the interview. [If

concerned, note that the recording will only be heard by the interviewer, the conversation is confidential, and the recording will be destroyed when the research concludes.] Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Background:

1. Let's start with a little background. Without getting into too much detail at this point, briefly describe how your responsibilities relate to campus efforts to retain or grow student enrollment. What vantage point does your current or a previous role give you for understanding enrollment challenges and efforts to support students to enroll and persist (e.g., related to instruction, student support, budgets and funding, etc.)?

Existence of Enrollment Challenges:

2. Community colleges faced many challenges related to the pandemic, including addressing health and safety concerns of students and staff, shifting nearly all of instruction and student services online, and maintaining enrollment amid all the changes and disruptions students have encountered. Many colleges have experienced substantial enrollment declines over the last couple of years. From your vantage point, how big a challenge has your college been facing to maintain enrollment?

   Probe: If you don't see enrollment as a significant problem for your college, why do you think that is the case? [e.g., population served, location/setting, types of programs?]

   Probe: If you do see enrollment as a challenge, how does the problem vary across your student populations, program areas, or in other ways? [e.g., by racial/ethnic groups, by discipline or by CTE vs transfer focus of program?]

Exploring Efforts or Innovations to Maintain Enrollment:

3. What do you see as the primary efforts your college has made to maintain enrollment? This might include changes to instruction, student services, administrative procedures, technology, or other efforts aimed at retaining or growing enrollment.

4. [If not already brought up] How has your college used state and federal funds targeted for student reengagement?

5. To what extent are any of your college's efforts intended to target enrollment of historically underrepresented or underserved student populations?

   Probe for which student populations are targeted, by which types of efforts/innovations

6. What do you think are the two or three most promising or effective approaches to maintaining or growing enrollment, ones that could have the most significant impact on enrollment of [historically underrepresented or underserved students, using their framing]?

   Probes: Why do you believe these approaches are effective? What evidence do you have for these perceptions?

   Were these new efforts or were you scaling up existing efforts?

   How did your college learn about these approaches?

Exploring Barriers, Needs Related to Adoption of Innovations:

7. Are there challenges or barriers your college faces to initiate or continue what you perceive to be the most effective approaches?

   Probe for issues around state policy, systemwide regulations, funding (e.g., one-time nature of reenrollment funds, time limits on use of federal/state funds), technology, communications, staffing, collaboration with universities or other partners

   Probe: How might those barriers be alleviated? What kinds of support does your college need to better address the challenges you face to maintain or grow enrollment, especially for [historically underrepresented or underserved students, using their framing]?

8. What do you think would be effective ways to help more community colleges in California learn about and adopt what you perceive to be effective approaches?

   Probe for both means of facilitating the spread of innovative practices and for what level/type of organization would be involved or responsible (e.g., policy makers, CCCCO, philanthropy/funders, researchers, advocates, etc.)

   What kinds of support would be needed? Who should provide that support?

   Would the appropriateness of the practices or the types of support needed vary for different types of colleges?

Wrapping Up

9. Thank you for your insights. Is there anything else I should understand about addressing community college enrollment challenges that we have not talked about?

Thank you again for your time.

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