

Washington Public Enrollment Trends

Report Snapshot

September 2023 (Updated January 2024)



Monitoring Fall Enrollment at Public Postsecondary Institutions in Washington Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

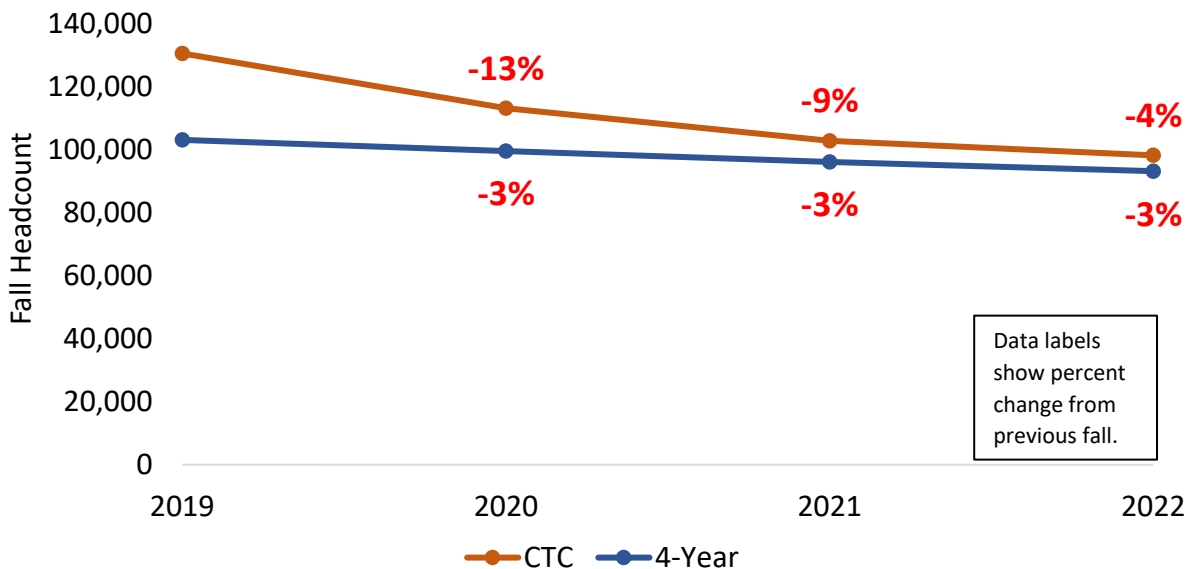
The precipitous drop in postsecondary enrollment at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed at public institutions in Washington. Nevertheless, the decline has continued, and enrollment remains significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. Ongoing enrollment decline poses a threat to educational attainment in the state, particularly for students who have been historically underserved by the higher education system including students from families with low incomes and students of color. To recover from enrollment losses related to COVID-19 and progress towards Washington's postsecondary credential attainment goals, the state must continue to monitor enrollment patterns and provide effective supports to ensure students can access postsecondary education and obtain credentials.

Since 2019, undergraduate enrollment in Washington has declined substantially.

Between Fall 2019 and Fall 2022, enrollment dropped by



Enrollment decline has slowed since the beginning of the pandemic, but still continues to drop.



Further examination of enrollment trends during the pandemic across various student sub-groups reveals differences by financial aid status, racial group, new student status, and enrollment intensity. Understanding these differences can help identify opportunities to address barriers for student sub-groups that could bolster equitable enrollment efforts in the future.

Financial aid had a positive impact on enrollment during the pandemic.

Enrollment declines at public CTCs and 4-year institutions were mitigated for students who received need-based financial aid during the pandemic. Receiving need-based financial aid is an indicator of low-income status, however, it is likely an undercount of low-income students because not all students with financial need apply for aid. At CTCs, pandemic enrollment decline was lower for students who received financial aid (-11%) than those who did not (-32%). At 4-year institutions, enrollment increased for students who received need-based aid (+10%) but decreased for those who did not (-15%). This may also reflect the expansion of the Washington College Grant that began in Fall 2020.

Enrollment Change (Fall 2019 to Fall 2022*) by Financial Aid Status at Public Institutions in Washington During the Pandemic		
	CTC	4-Year
Received Need-Based Aid	-11%	+10%
No Need-Based Aid	-32%	-15%

Note: Table shows percent difference in enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022 for CTCs and Fall 2019 to Fall 2021 for 4-year institutions. Need-based aid at CTCs includes a variety of financial aid and waiver programs. Need-based aid at public 4-year institutions includes Pell and/or Washington College Grant.

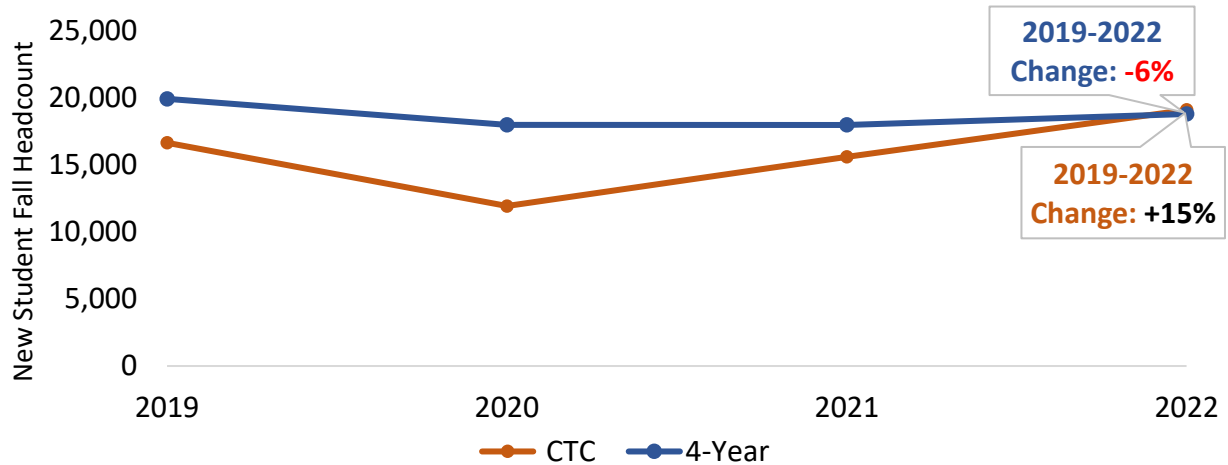
Enrollment trends during the pandemic varied by race.

At CTCs, enrollment declined for all racial groups during the pandemic, with the largest drops among American Indian/Alaska Native students (-38%), white students (-31%), and Asian students (-24%). At public 4-year institutions, enrollment declined most for American Indian/Alaska Native students (-23%) and white students (-15%). However, enrollment increased for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (+21%) and Black/African American students (+20%).

Enrollment Change (Fall 2019 to Fall 2022) by Race at Public Institutions in Washington During the Pandemic		
	CTC	4-Year
American Indian/Alaska Native	-38%	-23%
Asian	-24%	+1%
Black/African American	-4%	+20%
Hispanic/Latino	-22%	-7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-18%	+21%
White	-31%	-15%
Two or More Races	-6%	-6%

Fewer new students enrolled at public 4-year institutions during the pandemic, but more enrolled at CTCs.

Examining new student enrollment trends provides a sense of how many students enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time during the pandemic. At CTCs, there was a stark drop in new student enrollment at the onset of the pandemic that quickly reversed, leading to a considerable increase in new student enrollment between Fall 2019 and Fall 2022 (+15%). New student enrollment declined between Fall 2019 and Fall 2022 at public 4-year institutions (-6%) overall, despite a slight rebound from the drop at the beginning of the pandemic.



Enrollment intensity affected enrollment trends differently in each sector during the pandemic.

At CTCs, enrollment trends did not differ considerably for students with different enrollment intensity. The enrollment decline for full-time students (-25%) was roughly the same as the enrollment decline for part-time students (-24%) between Fall 2019 and Fall 2022. At public 4-year institutions, enrollment decline was much more substantial for students that were enrolled full-time (-10%) than those enrolled part-time (-3%) during the pandemic.

Enrollment Change (Fall 2019 to Fall 2022) by Enrollment Intensity at Public Institutions in Washington During the Pandemic		
	CTC	4-Year
Full-Time	-25%	-10%
Part-Time	-24%	-3%

Public institutions in Washington continue to experience declines in enrollment that largely began at the onset of the pandemic. Trends have appeared to stabilize or rebound for some students, but enrollment remains down relative to pre-pandemic levels. Importantly, enrollment patterns differed across student sub-groups and sectors, with CTCs generally experiencing greater declines than public 4-year institutions. Monitoring trends and understanding differences among student sub-groups can help target effective, equitable supports that help revitalize enrollment and recover from pandemic losses.