

How the Pandemic Affected College Enrollment: Findings from San Diego

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Executive Summary

This report studies how the pandemic has affected college enrollment for recent graduates from San Diego County public high schools. The report separately examines enrollment in two-year colleges (commonly known as community colleges) and four-year colleges. The report also examines which groups of students appear to have been affected the most by the pandemic. The main findings are as follows:

- A sharp deviation from historical trends appears with the class of 2020. Overall, compared to the pre-pandemic class of 2019, where 67.7% of the cohort enrolled in a four-year or two-year college, only 64.5%, 64.4% and 66.4% of the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022 enrolled in a postsecondary institution.
- Four-year college enrollment rates in fall after high school graduation dropped by 0.6 percentage points for the high school class of 2020. Enrollment in two-year colleges accounted for most of the drop in college enrollment, dropping by 2.6 percentage points for the class of 2020.
- The 2020 cohort did not simply postpone their enrollment in four-year colleges by a year. When we examined four-year college enrollment in the second year after high school graduation, the class of 2020 lagged the enrollment rate of the class of 2018 by two percentage points, at 32% versus 34% for the classes of 2020 and 2018 respectively.
- Four-year college enrollment rates in fall after high school graduation for the classes of 2021 and 2022 were higher than for the class of 2020, and matched or exceeded college enrollment rates from pre-pandemic graduating classes such as 2014-2018.
- Unlike four-year college enrollment, where the pandemic appears to have lowered enrollment rates only the class of 2020, the pandemic appears to have lowered enrollment rates in two-year colleges for multiple high school classes. Although there was a slight negative trend in community college enrollment rates before fall 2020, the decline accelerated and continued for the classes of 2020 and 2021, before the class of 2022 exhibited a partial recovery in two-year college enrollment rates.
- The report examines which student groups experienced the largest declines in postsecondary enrollment. Overall, we typically found that disadvantaged groups experienced greater drops in postsecondary enrollment. For two-year colleges, by almost all measures, it was the more disadvantaged groups whose enrollment rates fell more. For example, in the class of 2020, socioeconomically disadvantaged students' enrollment in two-year colleges dropped by 4.1 percentage points relative to the class of 2019, compared to a drop of only 2.0 percentage points for never disadvantaged students.
- Interestingly, for four-year colleges the drop in enrollment for the class of 2020 originated solely from high school graduates who had never been socioeconomically disadvantaged.
- The report outlines several areas of key concern for policymakers. Chief among these is the pattern of lower enrollment rates in two-year colleges for the three classes that graduated during and after the pandemic, with most of these losses concentrated among socioeconomically disadvantaged students. For four-year colleges, where enrollment rates recovered after the class of 2020, policymakers should be concerned about lost enrollment for the class of 2020.

1. The Focus of This Report

This study examines trends in postsecondary attendance among recent cohorts of high school graduates from public high schools across San Diego County. The central questions we ask are:

1. Did the pandemic lower postsecondary enrollment of recent high school graduates?
2. If so, was enrollment more affected in two-year colleges or in four-year colleges and universities?
3. For both two-year and four-year enrollment, for which groups of students did postsecondary enrollment rates change the most during the pandemic?

We already have learned a lot about what happened to test scores in public schools during the pandemic. One review of a patchwork of test score analyses during the first year of the pandemic showed that overall, both reading and mathematics test scores had declined, but drops were bigger for math. Several of the early studies pointed to greater learning losses for groups of students that had lower achievement to begin with.¹ These findings were borne out when California released spring 2022 test scores.²

Test scores are useful proxies for what students have learned, but test scores only weakly predict longer term measures of economic welfare, such as earnings. A person's level of education completed predicts earnings later in life much better than test scores. Over the last four decades the United States has experienced a large increase in the earnings of those holding bachelor's degrees relative to those with high school diplomas. See Juhn et al. (1993) for one account of this trend, and a more recent analysis by Autor (2014).

This naturally leads to the question: did the pandemic affect the probability that recent high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education, and if so, who has been most affected? Nationally, data analyses from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), which gathers data on postsecondary enrollment and degrees from postsecondary institutions representing over 90% of postsecondary enrollments nationwide, paints a sobering picture. Nationally, in 2020-21 enrollment in both four-year and two-year colleges fell, and the drop in two-year institutions was much more dramatic.³ The NSC reports are important because they raise the prospect that recent cohorts of high school graduates could have permanently lower college attainment.

While the NSC gathers race and ethnicity data from most schools, it does not have complete program-level characteristics on students such whether the student was ever an English learner,

¹ For a review of the early studies, see West et al., 2021. More systematic evidence is now emerging. For example, with the resumption of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the earlier findings of declining achievement have been confirmed for the nation as a whole. (See <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov>). Many but not all states showed statistically meaningful drops in reading, math and science between 2019 and 2022, when the test resumed.

² Between 2019 and 2022 the share of California public school students deemed proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and math fell from 51.1% to 47.1% and from 39.7% to 33.4% respectively. The year-by-year data can be found at [CAASPP Test Results - CAASPP Reporting \(CA Dept of Education\) \(ets.org\)](https://www.ets.org). 2019 is the last year of regular testing before the pandemic and 2022 is the first year of normal testing after the pandemic.

³ The National Student Clearinghouse regularly publishes reports on overall enrollment trends. But these data by themselves do not allow for analysis of trends by detailed student groupings. See <https://nscresearchcenter.org>.

socioeconomically disadvantaged, or had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in K-12. It is also hard to glean from NSC reports what has happened in individual cities or counties.

Our report aims to fill that gap in our knowledge by studying postsecondary enrollment of students graduating from San Diego County public schools. By merging student-level NSC data on college enrollment with student-level demographic data from the California Department of Education, this report pays particular attention to which student subgroups have missed out the most due to COVID. The subgroups studied are determined by English Learner status, special education status, socioeconomic disadvantage, and by race/ethnicity.

The focus of this first report is the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary institution by October 31 of the year in which they graduate from high school. This measure, known as "seamless" enrollment, holds two advantages. First, students who enroll in postsecondary education directly after high school are more likely to persist in their postsecondary enrollment. Second, given the data we currently have, we are able to measure seamless enrollment through the cohort graduating from high school three years after the pandemic, which allows us to say more about trends in enrollment.

The next section describes the data we gathered for the project, and limitations of the analysis. Section 3 discusses overall trends in postsecondary enrollment. Section 4 analyzes these trends by student subgroup. Section 5 draws policy implications and outlines how the research team expects to extend this analysis in its next report.

2. Data and Limitations of the Study

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) supports all public-school districts in San Diego County in their submission of high school graduates to the National Student Clearinghouse in order to obtain postsecondary enrollment information for these students. As part of a new researcher-practitioner partnership between the San Diego Education Research Alliance at UC San Diego (SanDERA) and the SDCOE, the research team obtained student-level demographic and outcome data for all public high school students in San Diego County through the California Department of Education. The team then matched records from these two data-sets.

The resulting data-set allowed the team to characterize trends in college attendance for San Diego County high school graduates as a whole and by student subgroups.

Who is included in the study and who is excluded? This report studies postsecondary enrollment of San Diego County students who have graduated from public schools, with the exception of some charter schools with enrollments of fewer than 30 students. Thus private school graduates are not included but graduates from non-charter high schools and many charter high schools (53%) are included.

The NSC is able to match high school graduates with postsecondary records from most postsecondary institutions not only in San Diego County but nationwide. In a typical year, the NSC gathers enrollment data from postsecondary institutions representing well over 90% of postsecondary institutions nationwide.

A main limitation of this study involves missing students who have obscured their data under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). About 11 percent of students statewide block their data

from use in the clearinghouse, which does not significantly skew college enrollment rates across districts. However, MiraCosta College offers applicants an option to block their information more easily, which has resulted in nearly 80% of MiraCosta students missing from the clearinghouse data. This abnormally high block rate impacts college going rates in some districts more disproportionately than other districts. For this reason, we have focused our analysis on aggregate countywide data in an effort to mediate the impact of FERPA block rates.

3. Overall Trends in Postsecondary Enrollment Before and During the Pandemic

Figure 3.1 below shows three lines. The top blue line shows, for each graduating cohort, the share of San Diego County public high school graduates who enrolled in either a two-year or four-year college anywhere in the US within the first academic year following high school graduation. The two lines below it show trends in the shares of high school graduates who enroll in a two-year or a four-year college only.

The figure includes a vertical line for the class of 2019 because this was the last class that graduated before the onset of the pandemic. Thus any impact of COVID on postsecondary enrollment in year 1 after high school should have occurred only for the classes of 2020 and later, which appear to the right of the dashed line.

The top line shows that in the pre-pandemic cohorts, about seven out of ten students seamlessly enrolled in a postsecondary institution (that is, enrolled by October 31 in the year of their high school graduation.)⁴ A sharp deviation appears with the class of 2020. Overall, compared to the pre-pandemic class of 2019, where 67.7% of the cohort enrolled in a four-year or two-year college, only 64.5%, 64.4% and 66.4% of the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022 enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

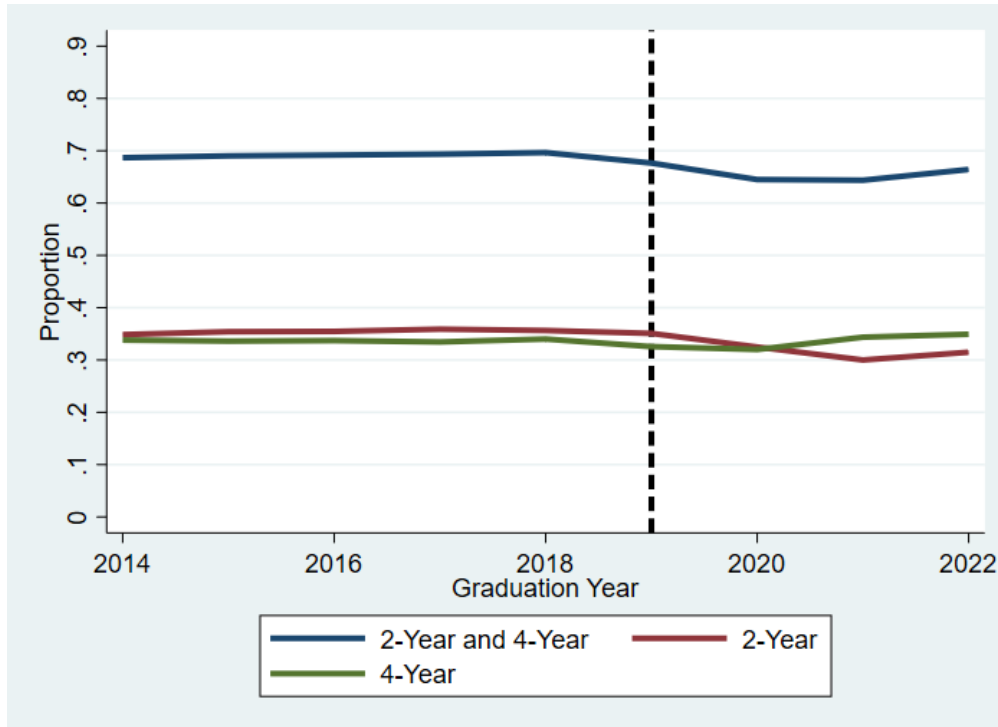
Based on our sample of high school graduates, these drops in seamless college enrollment rates imply that, in the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022, there were 1010, 1071 and 386 students, or a total of 2467 students, who graduated from San Diego County public high schools but did not enroll in postsecondary education due to the pandemic.

The two other lines further break down enrollment trends between two-year and four-year institutions. For the class of 2020, which was the first class to graduate after the onset of the pandemic, most of the 3.2 percentage point drop in college enrollment was due to a drop in two-year college enrollment (2.6 percentage points) rather than a drop in four-year college enrollment (0.6 percentage points). Trends for the two-year and four-year colleges for the class of 2021 diverge from each other. Enrollment in two-year colleges for the class of 2021, as for the class of 2020, continued to fall below the pre-pandemic level, and dropped even further below the level for the class of 2020. In contrast, enrollment shares at

⁴ In the pre-pandemic years, the percent enrolling at *any* time in the following year ranged between 74 and 80 percent. For instance, in the 2018-19 school year, the percentage of prior year high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary institutions at any time was 76.1 while the percentage seamlessly enrolling was 67.6, showing that seamless enrollees accounted for about 89% of all enrollees during that year.

4-year colleges for the class of 2022 rebounded, trending more positively and returning to and even slightly exceeding pre-pandemic rates by the classes of 2021 and 2022.

Figure 3.1 Seamless enrollment at any college, and at either 2 or 4-year colleges by end of year 1 by graduation year



A natural question is to ask what happened to college enrollment in the second year after the pandemic hit. As above in Figure 3.2 we draw a vertical through the 2019 graduating cohort. But we note that for this cohort their second year after high school was 2020-2021, at the height of the pandemic. So unlike in Figure 3.1, we should be looking for drops in college enrollment in the classes of 2019 and later, not 2020 and later. Figure 3.2 below shows a drop in overall college enrollment for the classes of 2019 and 2020, almost all of which is due to a drop in community college enrollments. The classes of both 2019 and 2020 lagged their 2018 counterparts in year two enrollments in two-year colleges by roughly seven percentage points.⁵ This is probably the most important finding from this figure. Looking at year 1 enrollments, it appeared that the postsecondary enrollment rate for the class of 2019 was not harmed by the pandemic. But by year 2 after high school graduation, this cohort as well had seen its enrollment rate drop substantially compared to the class of 2018.

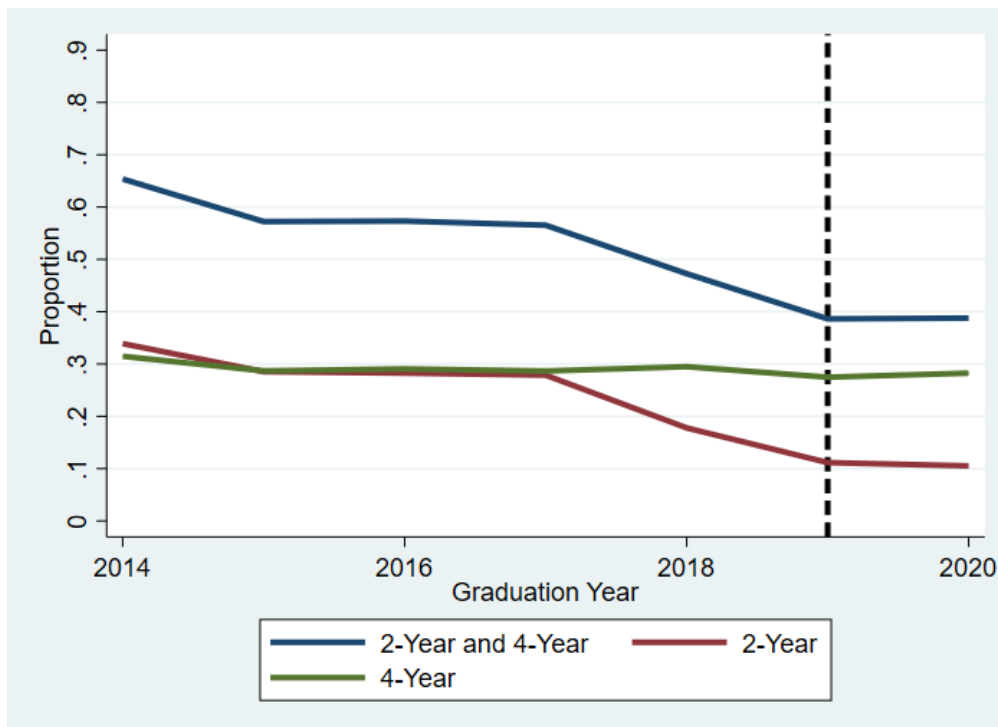
Importantly, for the class of 2020, students did not merely take a gap year at the start of the pandemic and then enroll as college freshmen in fall 2022. In fact, for all cohorts, enrollment rates in either type of college are lower two years after high school graduation than one year after graduation. In other words,

⁵ The graduating cohorts from 2018, 2019 and 2020 had second year enrollment rates in two-year colleges of 17.8%, 11.1% and 10.5% respectively, a stark difference.

students do drop out of college after their first year. Overall, we see a slight drop in year 2 enrollment rates in four-year colleges for the classes of 2019 and 2020. Compared to a four-year college enrollment rate in the class of 2018 of 29.5%, the classes of 2019 and 2020 had enrollment rates more than one percentage point lower, at 27.5% and 28.3% respectively.

Another way of assessing the dynamics of four-year college enrollment for the class of 2020 is to compare that cohort to the class of 2018, the latter of which had almost two full years after high school graduation before the pandemic hit. In the first year after high school, the classes of 2018 and 2020 had enrollment rates of 34.0% and 32.0%, creating a gap of two percentage points. In the second year after high school graduation, enrollment rates for the classes of 2018 and 2020 were 29.5% and 28.3%. So the class of 2020 was still lagging behind, but the gap in four-year college enrollment fell from 2.0 percentage points in year 1 to 1.2 percentage points in the second year after high school.

Figure 3.2 Proportion enrolling at any time in the second year after high school graduation, overall and at 2 or 4-year schools, by graduation year



4. Trends by Student Subgroup

Given high levels of inequality in education and earnings across the country, it is crucial to know whether some student groups in San Diego experienced bigger drops in college enrollment than others. This section studies groups in six different ways: by socioeconomic disadvantage status as calculated by the California Department of Education, by race/ethnicity, by English Learner status, by special education status, and by students' performance levels in their grade 11 math and English Language Arts (ELA) state tests. For each of these ways of grouping students, we show trends in the share of each

group enrolled in college in the first year after high school graduation, starting with overall enrollment and then separately for two-year and four-year college enrollment.

Because the picture that emerges about the impact of the pandemic on different groups, when ranked from the least to the most disadvantaged, is similar across the groupings, we focus first on the groupings by economic status and race/ethnicity.

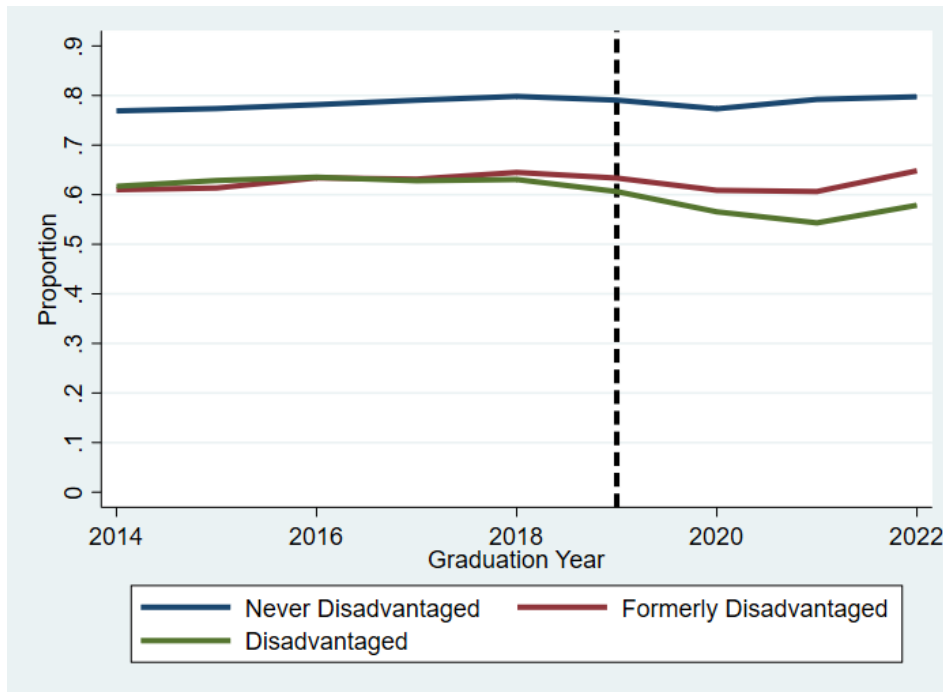
4.1 Trends by Economic Status

We now consider how the student transition to postsecondary education varied by socioeconomic status. The California Department of Education conceptualized the disadvantage measure which we use as a student who meets at least 1 of 6 criteria in a given school year: (1) the student is eligible for or participating in the Free Meal program or Reduced-Price Meal program, (2) the student is eligible for or participating in the Title I Part C Migrant program, (3) the student is considered Homeless, (4) the student is Foster Program Eligible, (5) the student is Directly Certified (as disadvantaged), (6) the student is eligible as Tribal Foster Youth.⁶

Figure 4.1a shows that for the class of 2020 overall postsecondary enrollment dropped both for students who were identified by the California Department of Education as socioeconomically disadvantaged (as of grade 12), those who in at least one earlier grade had been socioeconomically disadvantaged, and those who were never disadvantaged. But the drop was most pronounced for currently disadvantaged students. Furthermore, the class of 2021 showed an additional decline in college enrollment for those who were currently socioeconomically disadvantaged, a plateau for the previously disadvantaged, and a recovery to pre-pandemic levels for the never disadvantaged. By the class of 2022, all groups except the group for the students who had been disadvantaged in grade 12 had recovered to enrollment levels in the class of 2019. This pattern, in which the relatively more disadvantaged group showed a bigger drop in postsecondary enrollment and either further declines in the class of 2021, or less of a rebound, is generally what we found when grouping students by race, English Learner status and special education status as well.

⁶ See for example the CDE's definition at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/equitymultiplier.asp#Funding>

Figure 4.1a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by economic status



Figures 4.1b and c show results for two-year and four-year college enrollment by socioeconomic disadvantage. Two-year enrollment dropped much more for those who were disadvantaged in grade 12, and for all three groups of students, the class of 2021 saw a further decline in two-year college enrollment. Both currently and formerly disadvantaged groups exhibited a partial recovery in two-year college enrollment in the class of 2022.

In contrast, the entire drop in four-year college enrollment for the class of 2020 appears to have come from students who were never disadvantaged. By the class of 2022, all three groups showed a higher four-year college enrollment than in the pre-pandemic cohorts. This growth over the pre-pandemic levels was weakest, however, for the currently disadvantaged students.

Figure 4.1b Seamless enrollment at 2 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by economic status

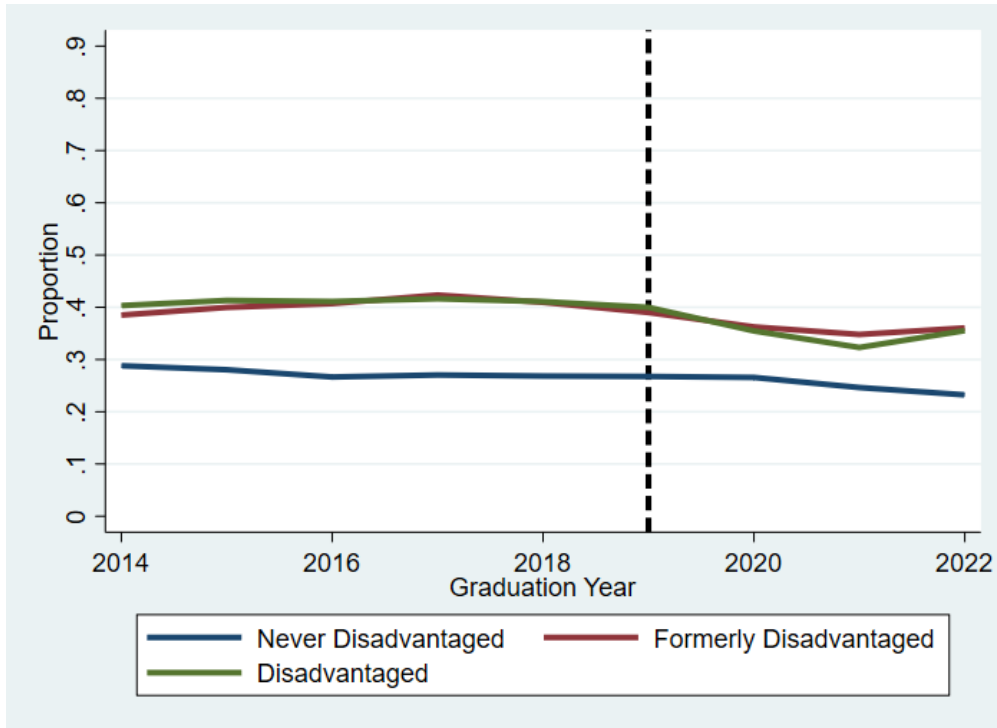
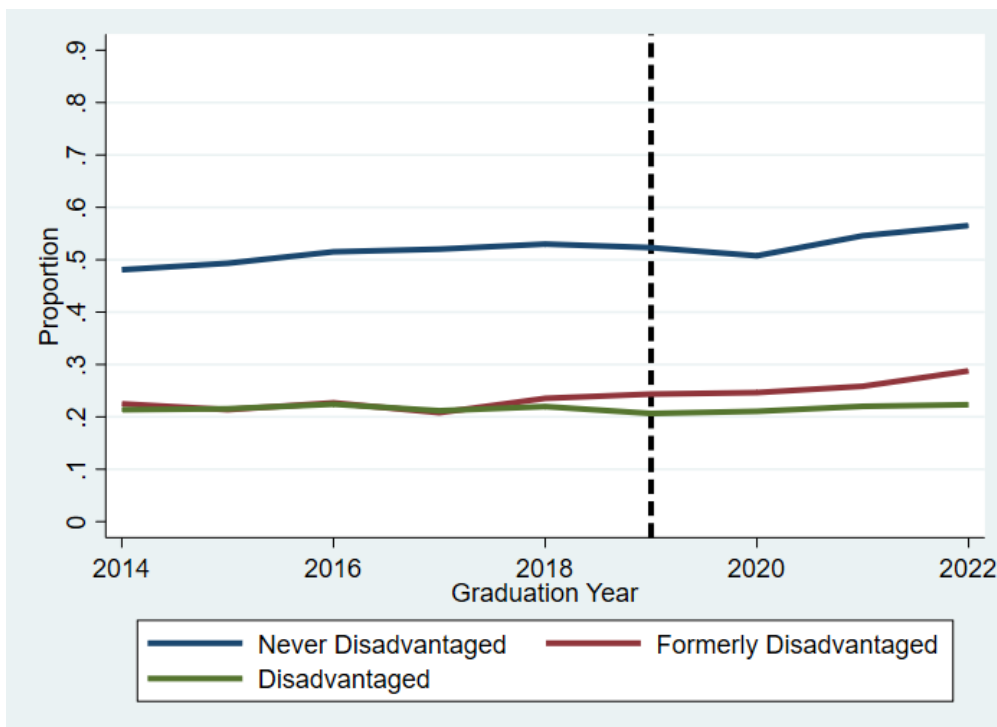


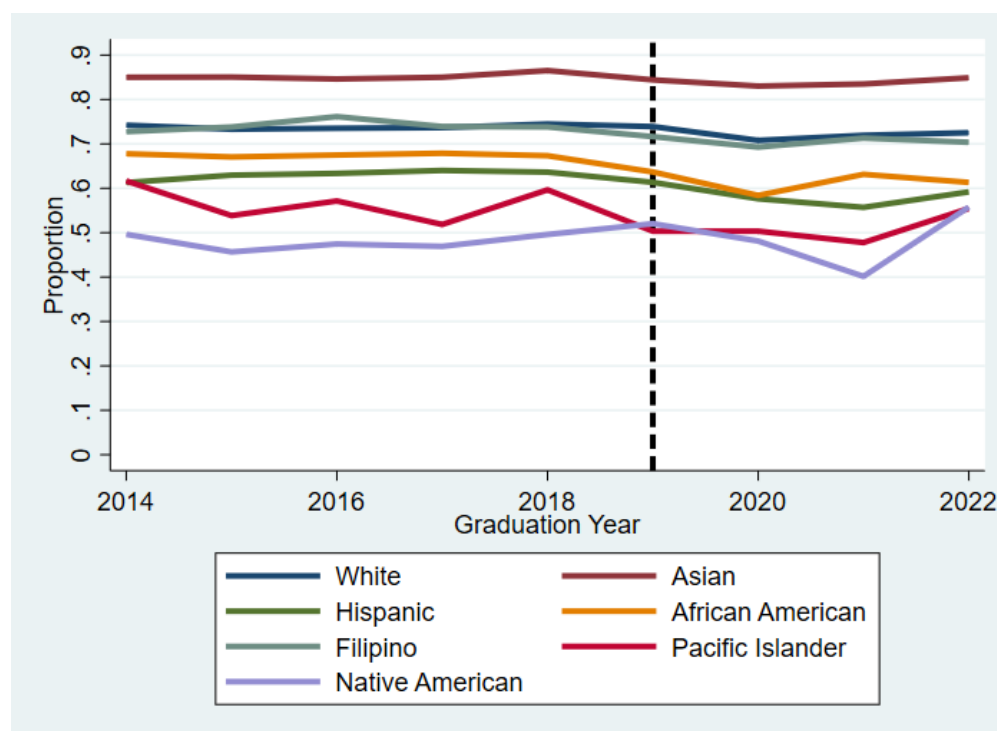
Figure 4.1c Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by economic status



4.2 Trends by Race/Ethnicity

Trends for groups defined by race/ethnicity mirror what is seen above, when students were grouped by economic disadvantage: in most cases, traditionally more disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups showed a larger drop in postsecondary enrollment at the start of the pandemic, and less rebound in the class of 2021, than other groups. In the class of 2022 most groups showed improvements in enrollment rates, although African American enrollment rates dropped slightly. By the class of 2022 enrollment rates for each racial/ethnic group were broadly similar to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 4.2a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by race/ethnicity



Figures 4.2b and c show trends for two-year and four-year college enrollment respectively. Figure 4.2b shows declines for all racial/ethnic groups in the class of 2020 and further declines for the class of 2021 for two-year college enrollment. Declines were biggest for the groups that initially had the highest two-year-college enrollment rates, such as Hispanics and African-Americans. Despite some rebound in the two-year college enrollment rate in the class of 2022, cohort enrollment rates for most groups lagged behind the corresponding pre-pandemic enrollment rates.⁷

Seamless enrollment in four-year colleges shows a drop in the class of 2020 and a rebound in the class of 2021 for all racial and ethnic groups, with the exception of Hispanics, for whom enrollment rates rose very slightly for both of the pandemic cohorts. The drop in 2020 was greatest, in percentage point terms, for the groups that had the highest enrollment rates in the pre-pandemic years. The classes of 2021 and 2022 had higher enrollment than the class of 2020.

⁷ The two exceptions were Native American and Pacific Islander groups, which by the class of 2022 had two-year college enrollment rates above those in the class of 2019.

In summary, the impact of the pandemic on 4-year college enrollment was restricted mostly to the class of 2020 for all racial/ethnic groups. This stands in contrast to 2-year college enrollment which for some racial/ethnic groups continued to fall in the class of 2021 as well. Even in the class of 2022 there are signs of diminished enrollment in two-year colleges.

Figure 4.2b Seamless enrollment at 2-year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by race/ethnicity

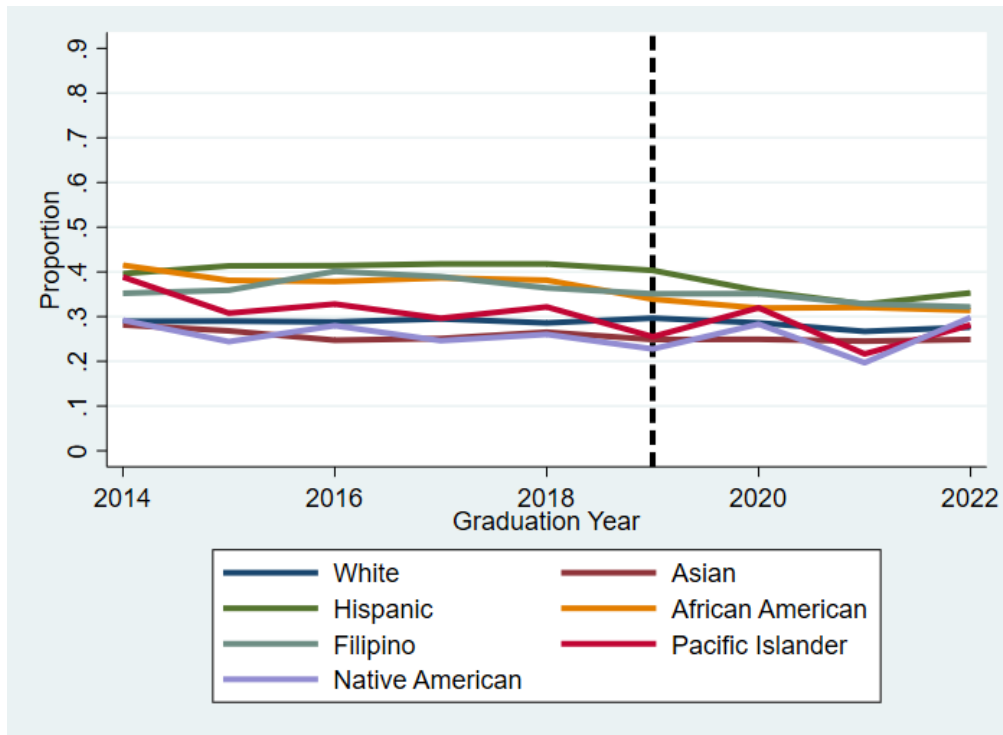
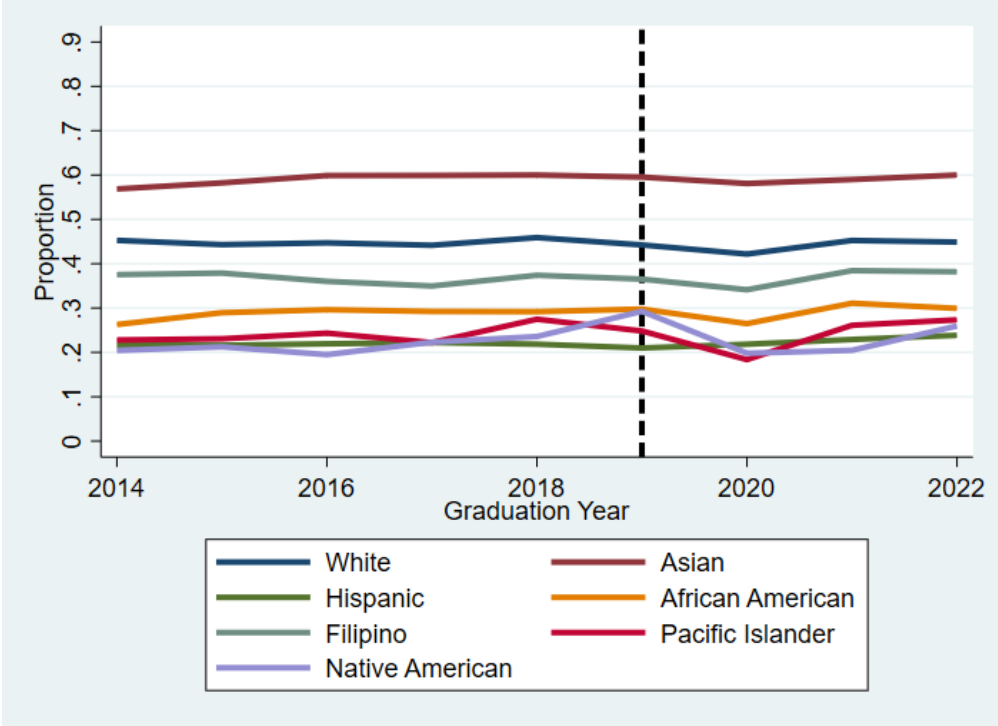


Figure 4.2c Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year by race/ethnicity



4.3 Trends by English Learner Status

We distinguished between students who were English Learners (ELs) in grade 12, those who were former ELs, and never ELs. As shown in Figure 4.3a, current ELs, who in pre-pandemic years had the lowest college enrollments, also exhibited the largest drops in college enrollment for the cohorts of 2020 and 2021. One striking finding: High school graduates who were English Learners showed a very large drop in postsecondary enrollment right after graduation, from 50.2% in the class of 2019 to just 41.3% in the class of 2021. All three language proficiency groups experienced a recovery in enrollment rates in the class of 2022, close to pre-pandemic levels. English Learners' postsecondary enrollment rate was still two percentage points below 2019 levels in 2022, though.

The two following figures show that almost all the drop in overall college enrollment for each group came in the form of lower two-year-college enrollment. All three language groups showed lower enrollment in all three post-COVID classes relative to the class of 2019. Those who were still English Learners in grade 12 showing the largest initial drop in enrollment, although the losses evened out across groups over time.

In contrast, all three language groups had higher four-year college enrollment in the classes of 2021 and 2022 than in the class of 2019. In the class of 2020, it was solely students who had never been English Learners who exhibited a drop in four-year college enrollment.

Figure 4.3a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by English Learner status

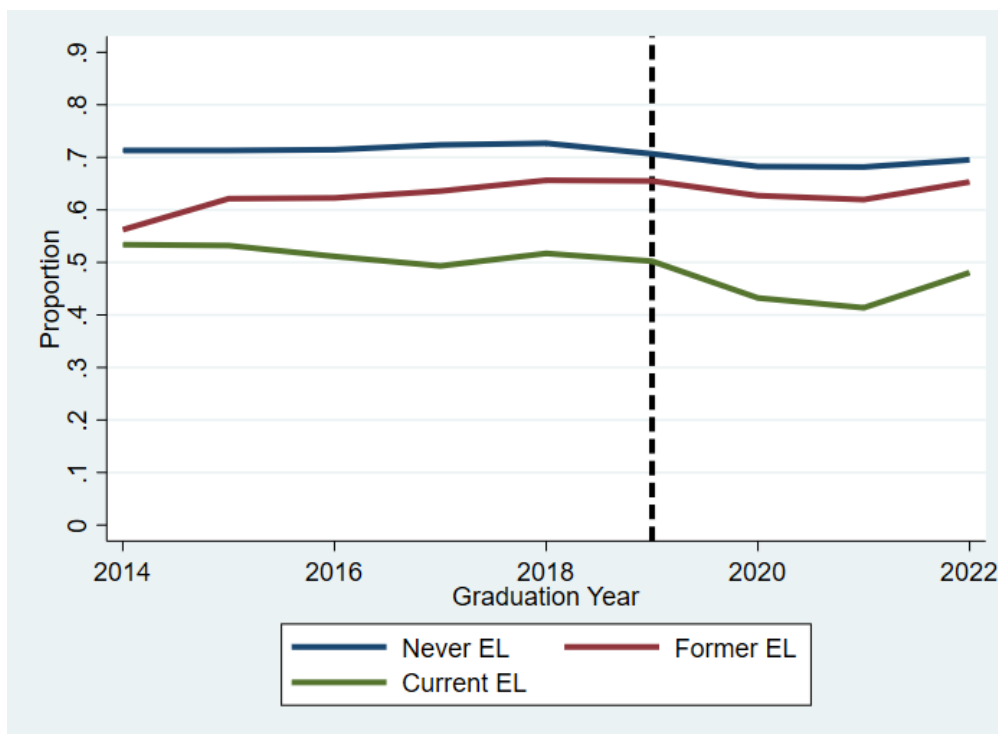


Figure 4.3b Seamless enrollment at 2 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year by English Learner status

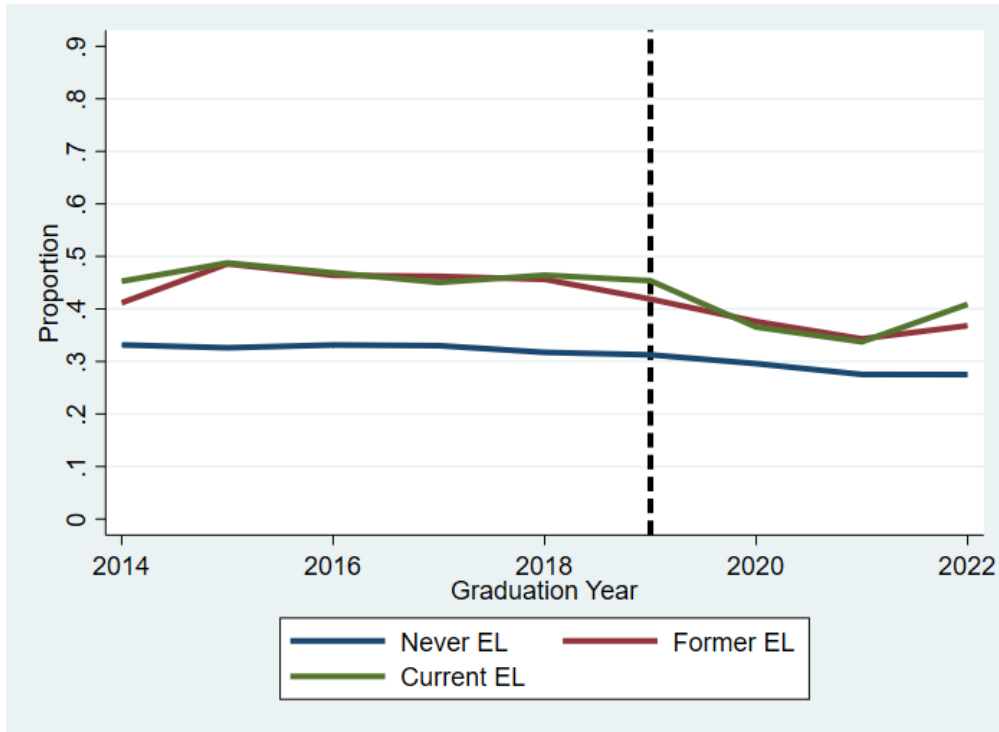
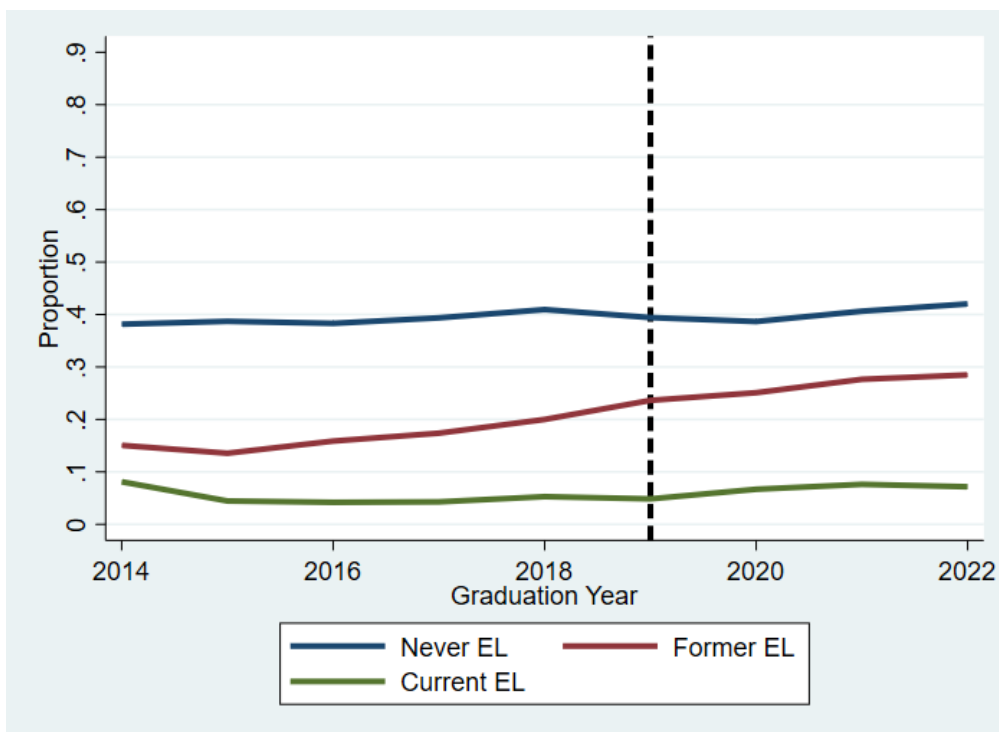


Figure 4.3c Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by English Learner status



4.4 Trends by Special Education Status

When we disaggregated students into those receiving special education services and those not receiving such services, we found that overall college enrollment dropped considerably more for students receiving special education services (Figure 4.4a). Both groups showed an improvement in college enrollment rates in the class of 2022, getting close to pre-pandemic rates.

As shown in Figure 4.4b, both groups showed a drop in two-year-college enrollment for all three of the post-pandemic cohorts, with a larger drop for students who had received special education services while in high school. Enrollment rates did improve in the class of 2022 for both groups though.

Both groups showed drops in four-year college enrollment for the class of 2020. (Figure 4.4c).

Additionally, both groups showed higher enrollment by the classes of 2021 and 2022 relative to pre-pandemic years. So again, using a different subgrouping, we see that the pandemic enrollment impact for four-year college enrollment was contained to one cohort, unlike for two-year college enrollment.

Figure 4.4a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by special education status

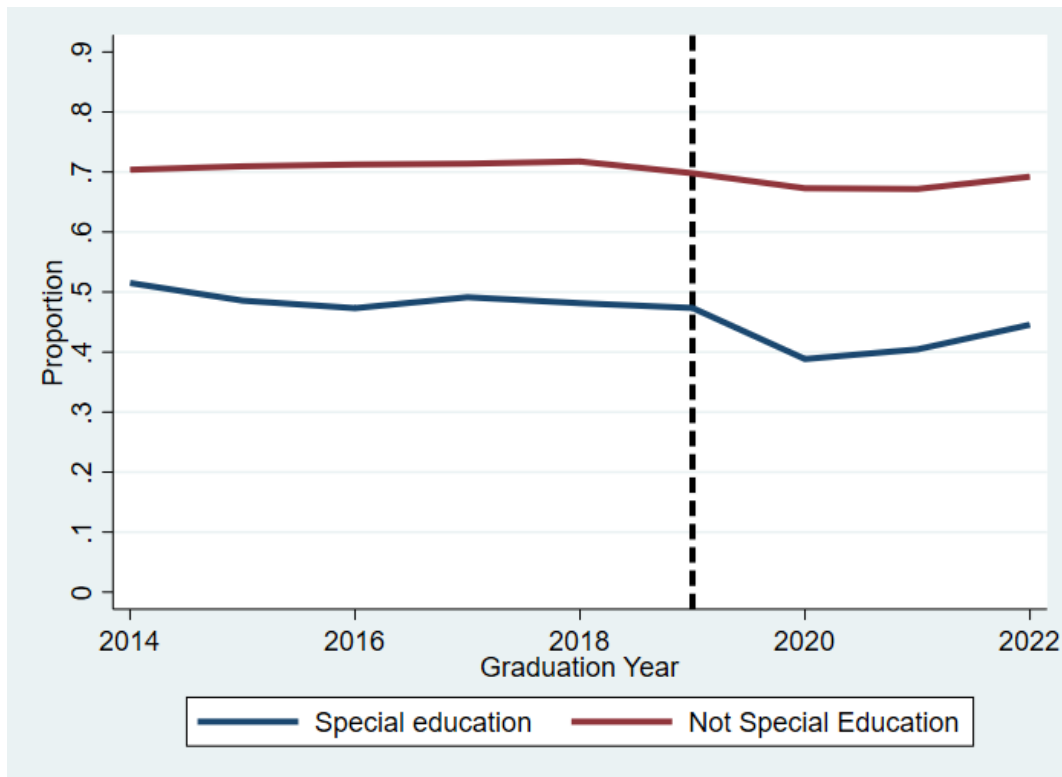


Figure 4.4b Seamless enrollment at 2 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year by special education status

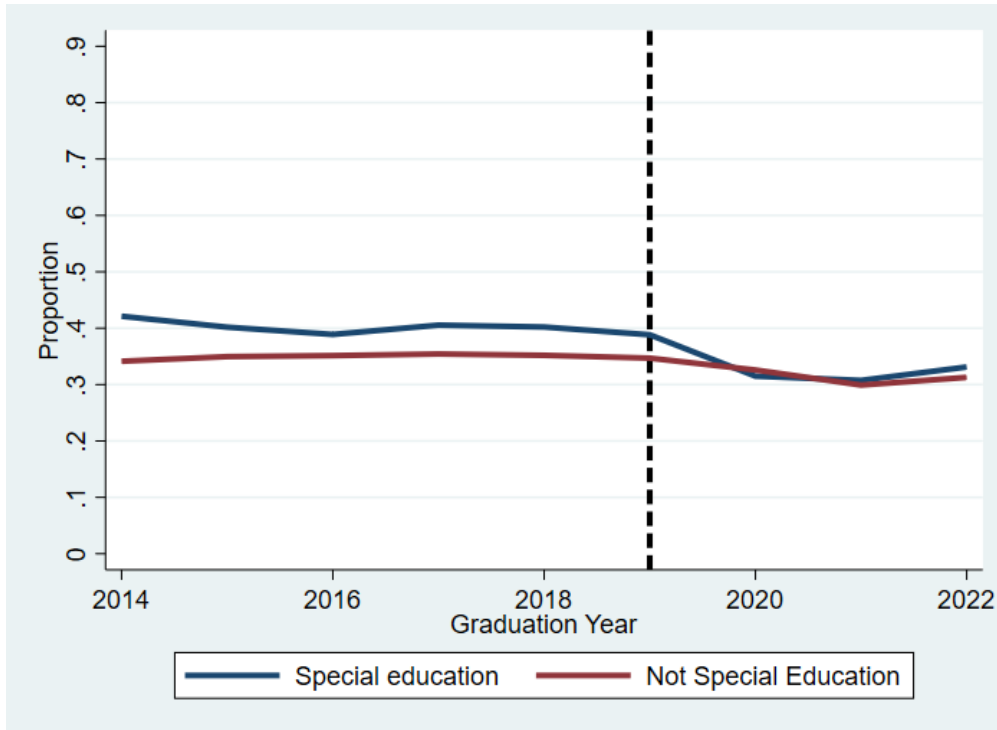
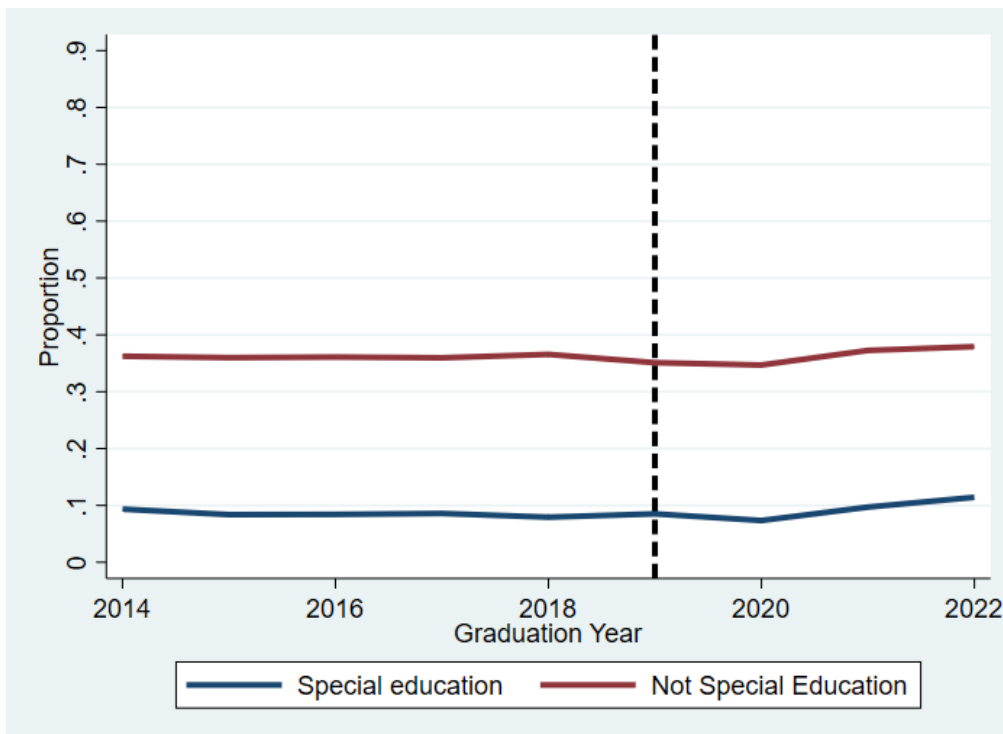


Figure 4.4c Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year 1 by graduation year, by special education status



4.5 Trends by Grade 11 Achievement Level

We also examined changes in college enrollment when we grouped high school graduates by their performance level in the state test in math and English Language Arts (ELA) in grade 11 (which is the highest grade in which California tests students). A drawback of this approach is that the classes of 2021 and 2022 did not take this test. Therefore, we can only examine the impact of the pandemic by comparing the class of 2020 with earlier "pre-pandemic" classes.

We begin by grouping students by math achievement in grade 11. As shown in Figure 4.5a, students who met or exceeded the proficiency standard in grade 11 showed no drop in overall college enrollment in the class of 2020. However, those who nearly met the standard, and especially those who did not meet the standard, rates of overall college enrollment fell by roughly five percentage points relative to their counterparts in earlier cohorts.

For the class of 2020, enrollment in two-year colleges dropped the most for students not meeting the math proficiency standards, followed by students nearly meeting the standards (Figure 4.5b). Four-year college enrollment dipped slightly for the class of 2020 for both those meeting the math standards and nearly meeting the standards. Among those not meeting the standards, there was virtually no change from longstanding low enrollment rates of about 10 percent.

Some details differ, but college enrollment rates showed similar changes for the class of 2020 when students were grouped by their ELA proficiency in grade 11, rather than their math proficiency. Figures 4.6a-c illustrate.

Figure 4.5a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1, by grade 11 math proficiency

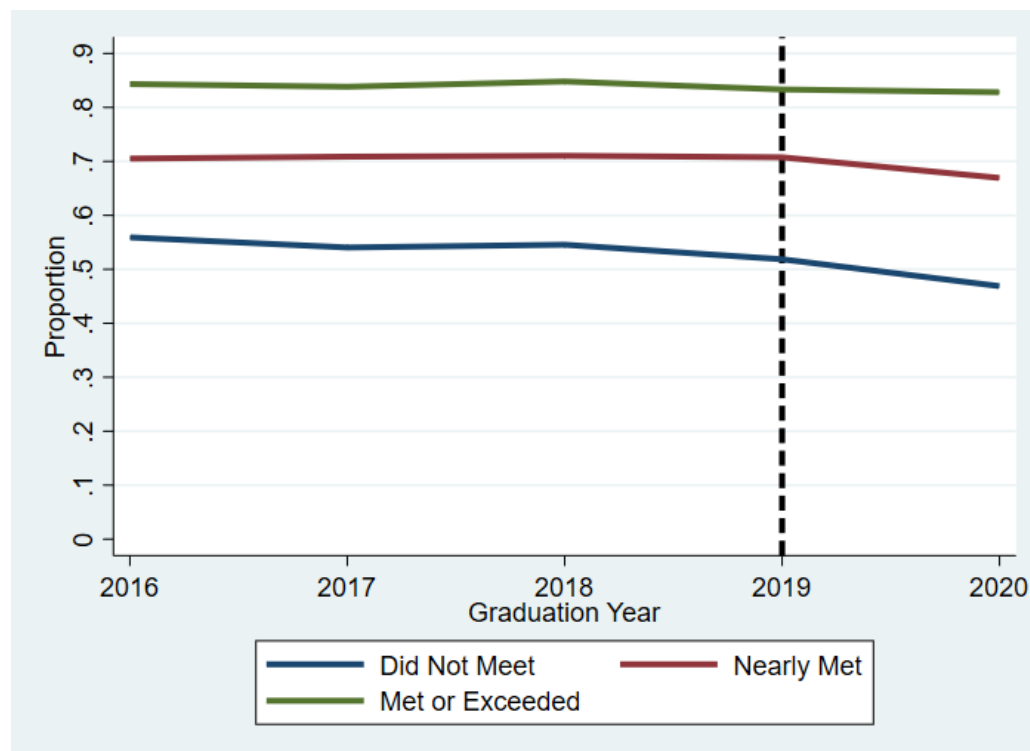


Figure 4.5b Seamless enrollment at 2 -year school by end of year 1, by grade 11 math proficiency

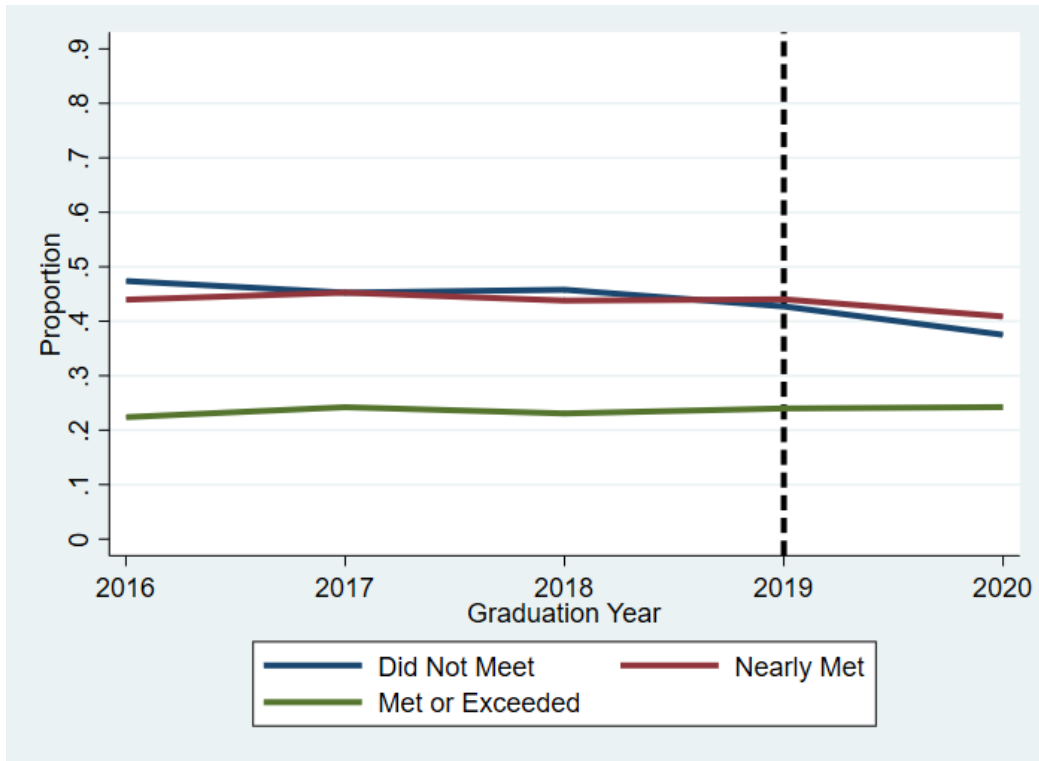


Figure 4.5b Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year 1, by grade 11 math proficiency

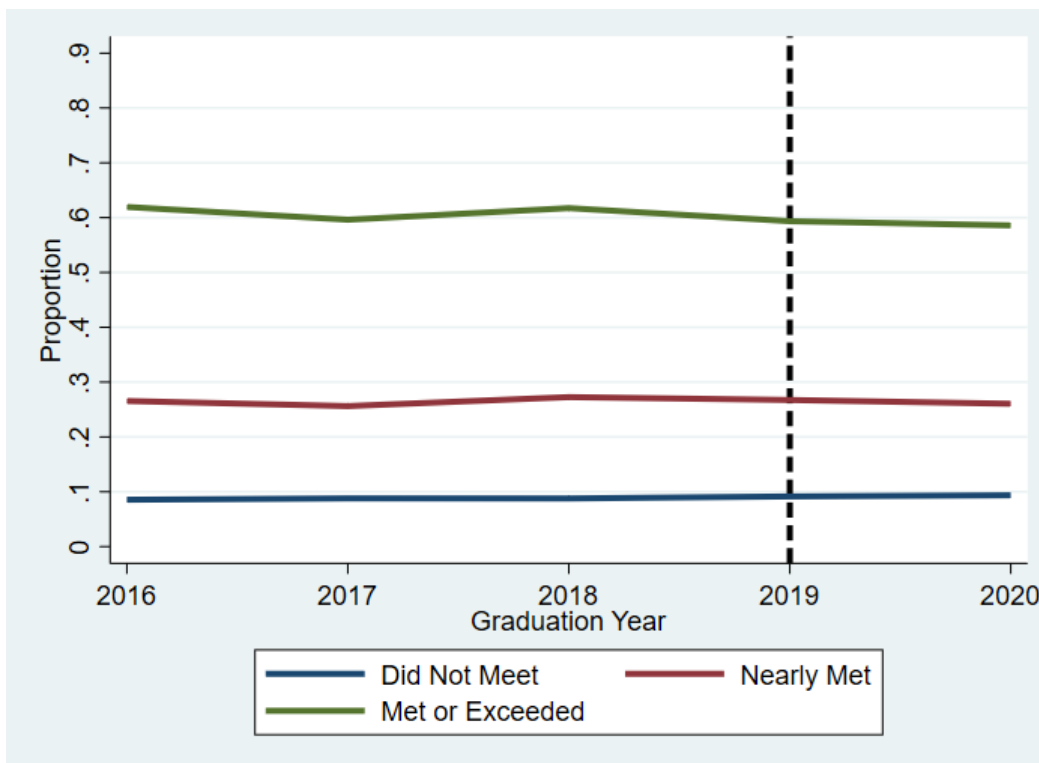


Figure 4.6a Seamless enrollment at 2 or 4-year school by end of year 1, by grade 11 ELA proficiency b

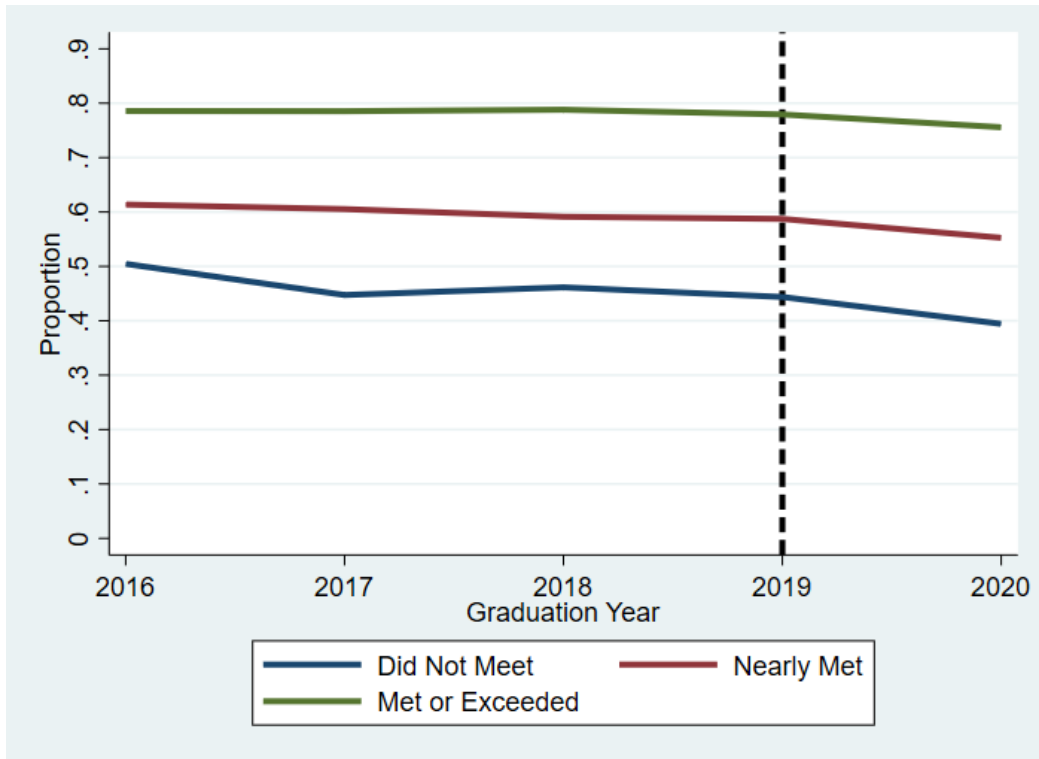


Figure 4.6b Seamless enrollment at 2-year school by end of year 1, by grade 11 ELA proficiency

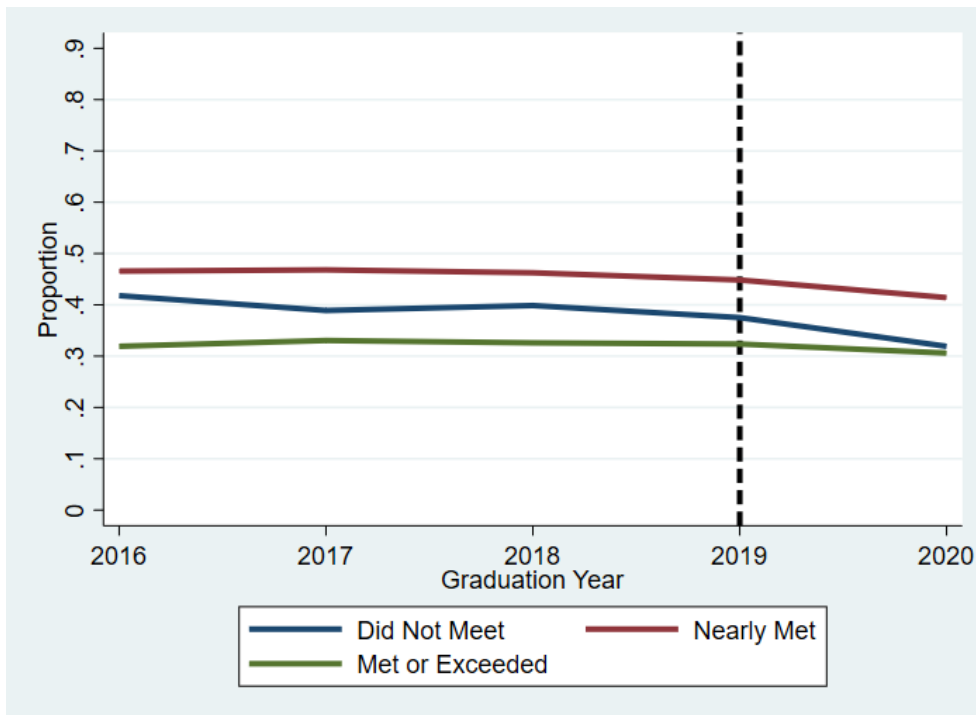
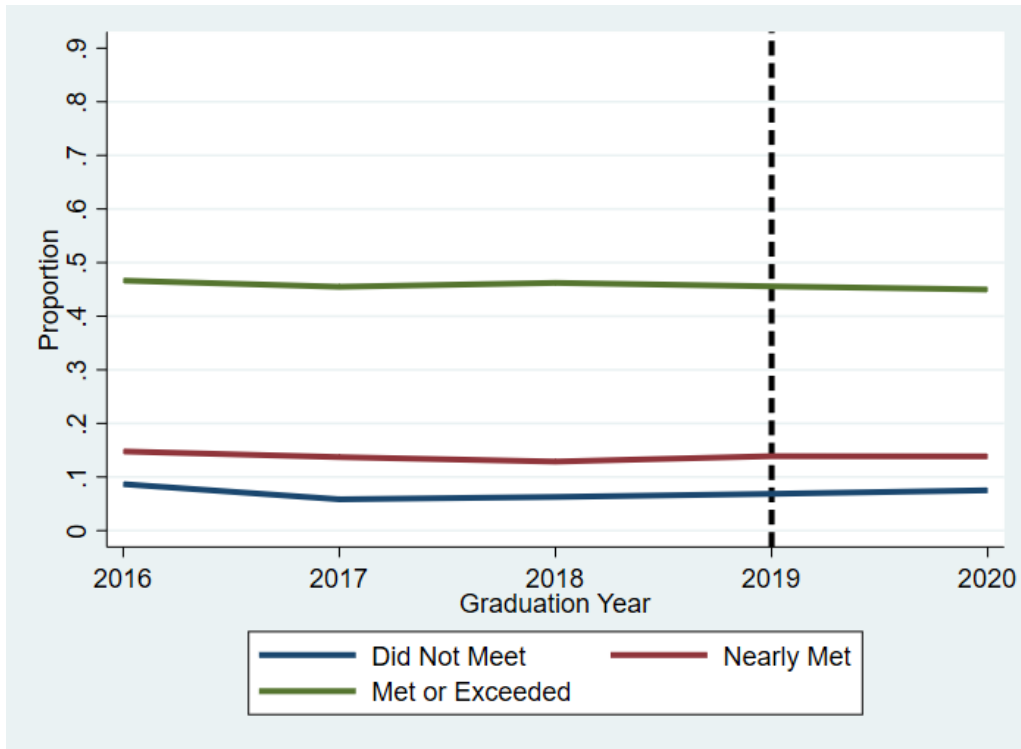


Figure 4.6b Seamless enrollment at 4 -year school by end of year ,1 by grade 11 ELA proficiency



5. Policy Implications and Next Steps

The drop in college enrollment for both the classes of 2020 and 2021 relative to enrollment for earlier cohorts is of great policy concern, given the strong link between college education and labor market outcomes. The drops are of even greater concern when seen in the context of rising inequality in the United States: the pandemic worsened inequality in college enrollment. Specifically, overall college enrollment dropped more for more disadvantaged groups, whether defined by economic status, race/ethnicity or language or special education status.

There were considerable differences in the apparent impact of the pandemic on postsecondary enrollment in two-year colleges compared to four-year colleges. Two-year college enrollment rates fell for the class of 2020 and fell further for the class of 2021, before partially recovering for the class of 2022. But for four-year college enrollment, only the class of 2020 showed a drop, while for the classes of 2021 and 2022 enrollment rates exceeded enrollment rates of recent pre-pandemic cohorts. The good news about the class of 2021 and especially the class of 2022 should not diminish concern about the class of 2020. Also, the remarkable recovery of four-year college enrollment must not be allowed to overshadow the enrollment drops in two-year colleges, which apply to all three graduating classes from 2020, 2021 and 2022. And even though the class of 2022 had a higher two-year college enrollment rate than the class of 2021, its enrollment rate still lagged that of the class of 2019 by 3.6 percentage points. This represents a major drop-off in community college enrollment that has persisted.

Furthermore, the class of 2019 experienced almost a seven percentage point drop in enrollments in the second year after high school graduation in two-year colleges, compared to the class of 2018. So this earlier cohort is of concern as well.

We obtained further evidence on the pandemic's impact on college enrollment for San Diego high school graduates by following the high school class of 2020 through the end of the 2021-22 academic year. One clear possibility is that this cohort merely took a "gap year" before enrolling in a four-year college. Our findings suggest otherwise. Second-year college enrollments were lower for the class of 2020 relative to the class of 2018.

What do we know about the characteristics of students in the classes of 2020 and 2021 who were most affected by the pandemic? Concerning overall postsecondary enrollment, in general more disadvantaged groups showed the largest adverse impacts of the pandemic. This raises major equity concerns.

But when we disaggregate postsecondary enrollment into enrollment in two-year and four-year colleges, impacts on equity diverge between two-year and four-year colleges. In two-year colleges, which enroll a disproportionate share of disadvantaged postsecondary students, typically it was the more disadvantaged groups for which enrollment dropped more. But for four-year college enrollment, which enroll a disproportionate share of more advantaged student groups, it was the *less* disadvantaged groups which experiences drops in enrollment in the classes of 2020 and 2021.

What are the policy takeaways from this research?

First, interventions designed to get more of the classes of 2020 and 2021 to "drop in" to postsecondary education may be needed. For example, publicity campaigns about the advantages of postsecondary

education, targeted to students who graduated from high school in 2020 and 2021, might encourage some to enroll for the first time and reduce any fear and anxiety about attending college. For four-year colleges, this publicity could be designed to eliminate any stigma students who graduated from high school in 2020 might feel about applying several years after graduating from high school.

Second, enrollment at two-year colleges has remained depressed for all three classes that have graduated from high school since the pandemic. This is quite distinct from four-year college enrollment. Campaigns to boost community college enrollment should extend as far back as the class of 2020.

Third, efforts are needed to reverse enrollment declines in two-year colleges among the most disadvantaged groups. In addition to targeted publicity campaigns, community colleges might consider reaching out to local employers to find promising workers from the high school classes of 2020 and 2021 who could benefit from add-on courses at community colleges that they might otherwise have taken had the pandemic not occurred. Outreach to relatively disadvantaged communities especially to families of recently graduating seniors might help to boost enrollment rates for disadvantaged groups back to their pre-pandemic levels.

Fourth, although the data show a recovery in both two-year and especially four-year college enrollment by the high school class of 2022, we should not be complacent about that cohort and latter cohorts. Students in the graduating class of 2022 were in grade 11 during 2020-21, the year when high schools taught most of the year online. Even though these students are entering postsecondary institutions at pre-pandemic rates, we do not know if they will persist and graduate at the same rates as pre-pandemic cohorts, given the quite extraordinary learning losses that occurred in California high schools during the pandemic. Administrators at two-year and four-year colleges should closely watch how recent entrants cope with coursework compared to earlier cohorts.

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