



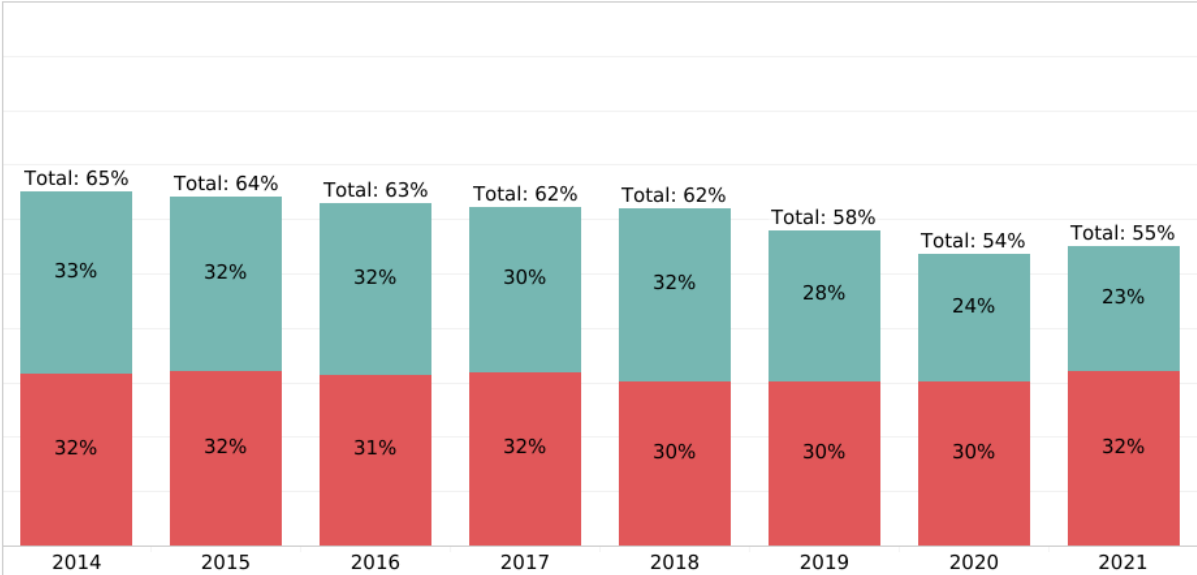
Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

Alabama’s College-Going Rate Begins Recovery; Still Below Pre-Pandemic Rates

By [Thomas Spencer](#) on January 26th, 2023 in , [College and Career Readiness](#), [College-Going Rates](#), [Higher Education](#) : in [Education](#), [Education & Workforce Development](#), [Public Education](#), [Workforce Development](#)

Alabama College-Going Percentages by year	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	2 and 4-year College Trend	4 Year College Trends	Alabama College-Going Numbers by year	College Enrollment Trends by Race	College-Going..
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Alabama High School Graduates' College Going Rates



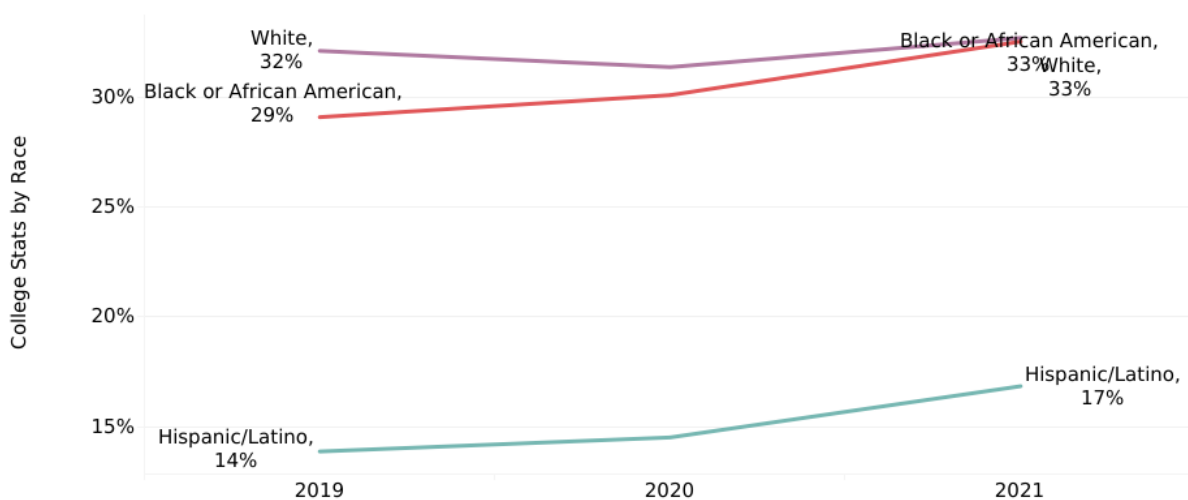
Alabama’s 2021 public high school graduates entered higher education at a slightly higher rate than the Class of 2020, according to new data from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. However, with only 55% of graduates entering higher education the year after graduation, the 2021 rate was still much lower than in the years before the pandemic.

Remarkably, though, the percentage of high school graduates enrolling at 4-year colleges is tied with its highest rate on record, with 32% of Alabama high school graduates enrolling at 4-year schools. Even more notable is that the 4-year college-going rate for Black and White high school graduates was equal among the Class of 2021: 33% of Black high school graduates and 33% of White high school graduates in Alabama enrolled in a 4-year college the year after graduation. Historically, there has been a gap between the rate of enrollment of Black and White students in college.

2 and 4-year College Trend	4 Year College Trends	Alabama College-Going Numbers by year	College Enrollment Trends by Race	College-Going Snapshot by Individual School	College-Going and Destination after High School by System	College-Going and Destination after High School by School
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College-Going Stats by Race
% 4 Year

% 4 Year: State



The new data comes from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), the state's higher education coordinating body. ACHE annually queries the National Student Clearinghouse of Data to check which of Alabama's high school graduates enrolled in college, either two-year or four-year, anywhere in the country in the year following their high school graduation. Maps, college-going destinations, and rates are available for high schools and public school systems by exploring the tabs in the visualization.

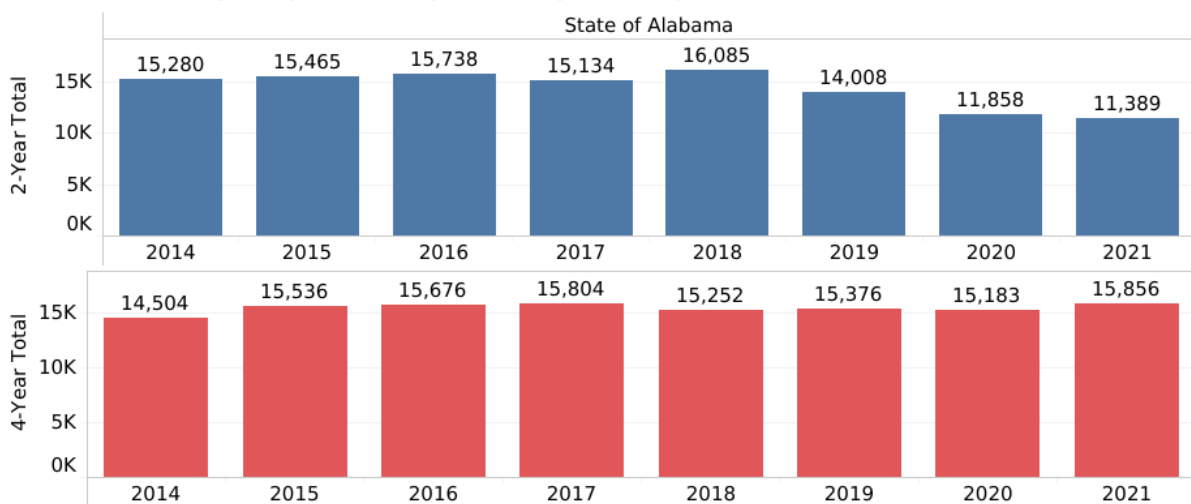
The figures for the Class of 2021 show a continuing decline in the number of recent high school graduates enrolling in two-year colleges. Only 11,389 or 23% of graduates enrolled at a community college compared to the more than 15,000 typically normally enrolled in community colleges in the years prior to 2018.

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High School and System

State of Alabama, State of Alabama

Number enrolling the year after graduating from high school



The number and percentage of students enrolling at 4-year colleges increased to 15,856 or 32% of recent high school graduates. Prior to 2019, the number and percentage of students who enrolled in four-year colleges and two-year schools were about equal.

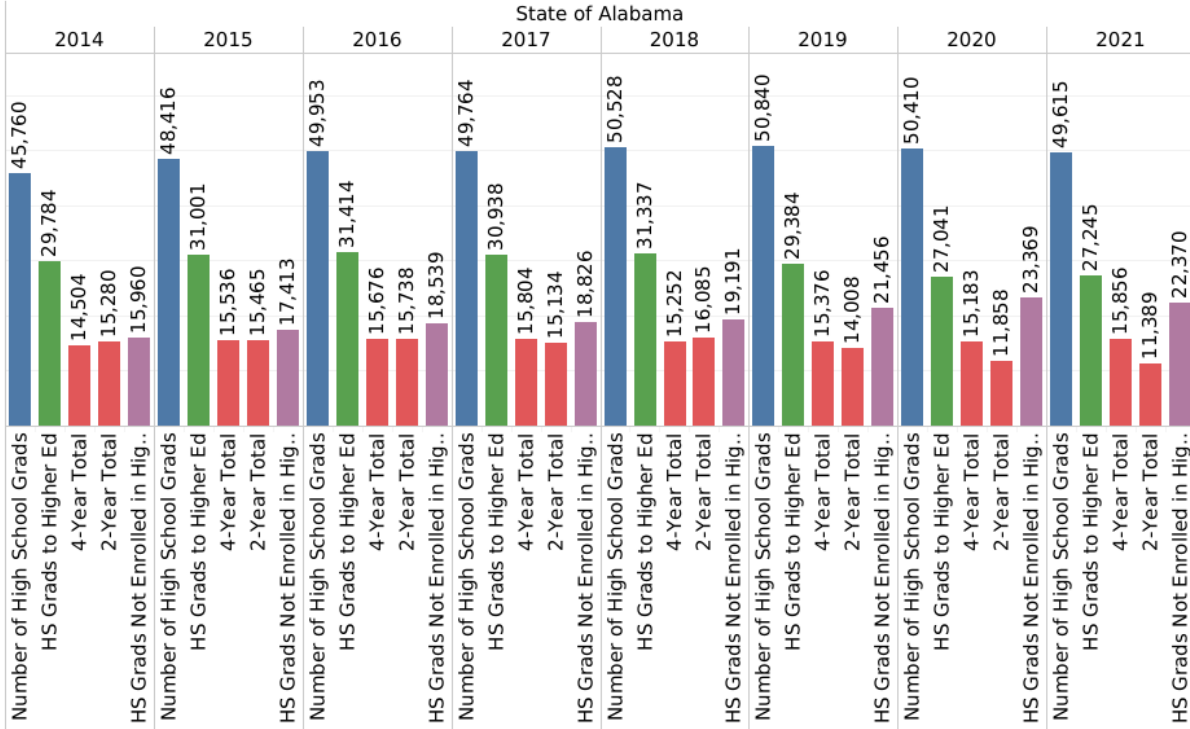
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High School and System State of Alabama, State of Alabama

Measure Names

■ Number of High School Gra.. ■ HS Grads to Higher Ed ■ 4-Year Total ■ 2-Year Total

Alabama High School to College Going Numbers



Trends

College-going rates have been affected by multiple factors over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2020, as Alabama’s high school graduation rate climbed from 72% to over 90%, the percentage of those high school graduates going immediately into college declined. Some of those additional graduates likely lacked the academic preparation to go straight into college.

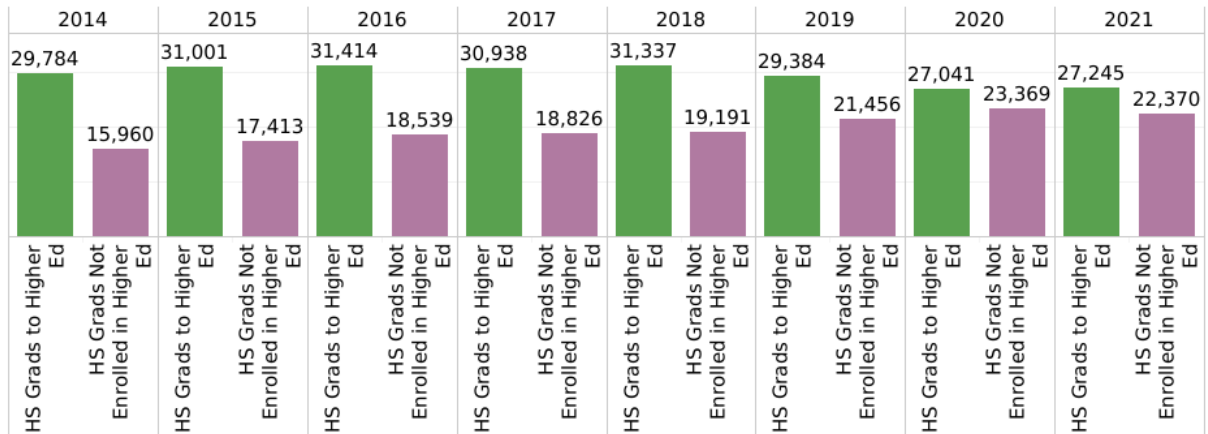
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High School and System

State of Alabama, State of Alabama

■ HS Grads to Higher Ed ■ HS Grads Not Enrolled in Hi..

Alabama High School Graduates, Enrolled in Higher Ed vs. Not Enrolled Numbers



Two-Year Colleges

Also, in the current economy, demand for workers is at historic highs. Low unemployment and a strong economy typically drive down two-year college enrollment. And statistics support the idea that more high school graduates are entering the workforce rather than pursuing education. According to U.S. Census Bureau surveys, 32.6% of individuals between the age of 16-19 were in the labor force in Alabama in 2014. By 2021, 39% of 16 to 19-year-olds were in the labor force, according to Census.

The Covid-19 pandemic also disrupted college enrollment, particularly at two-year colleges. For graduates of the Class of 2020, two-year enrollment fell under 12,000, marking the lowest total since 2014, the earliest year in the dataset. And for the Class of 2021, the numbers were lower still, 11,389.

While those recent high graduates may be delaying entry to community college, other enrollees have begun to return to two-year colleges. At the height of the pandemic, overall Alabama community college enrollment dropped by 10,000, from approximately 80,000 to 70,000. Recovery began in 2021, and preliminary overall fall enrollment was above 75,000. Some students who didn't immediately enter may now be returning to pursue a degree.

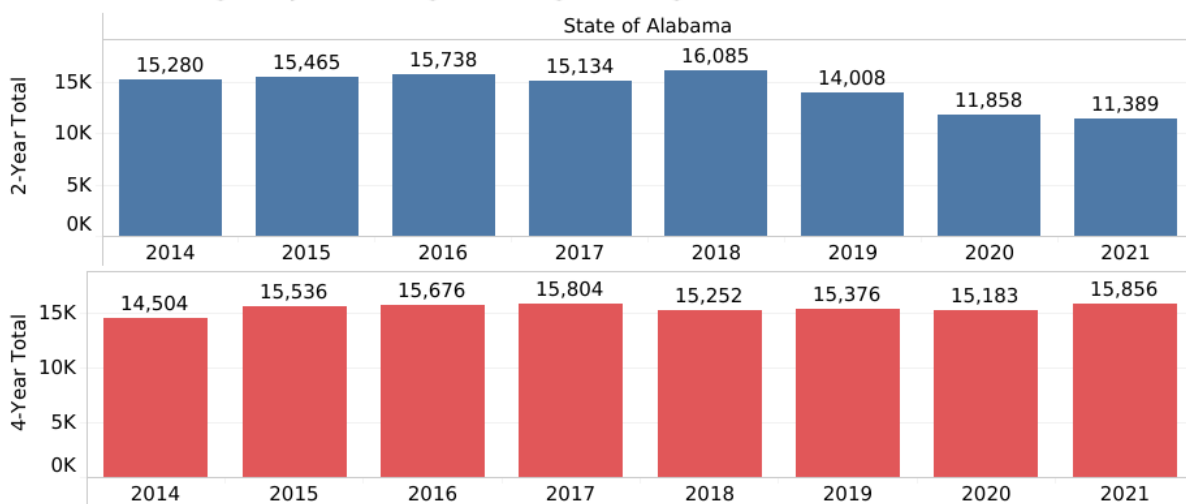
A final factor appears to have some bearing on the equation. An increasing number of high school students are also enrolled at community colleges, which is known as dual enrollment. In 2018, only 15,372 students took dual enrollment courses. By the 2021-2022 school year, 23,483 students were dually enrolled. Students taking dual enrollment classes can graduate high school with college credit, with an industry-recognized credential, or even with an associate's degree. That will increase the chances the student will enroll at a four-year college after graduation or flow into the workforce. Those dual enrollment students aren't captured in the college-going rate data which tracks high school graduates in the year after their high school graduation.

Alabama College-Going Percentages by year	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	2 and 4-year College Trend	4 Year College Trends	Alabama College-Going Numbers by year	College Enrollment Trends by Race	College-Going
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High School and System

State of Alabama, State of Alabama

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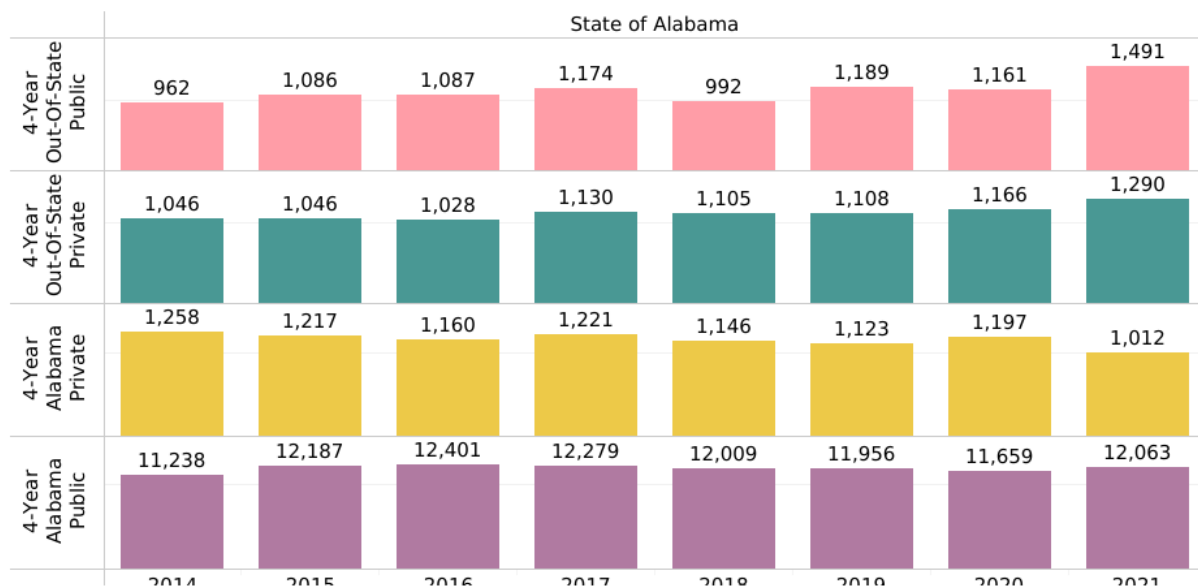
4-Year Colleges

Meanwhile, recovery was more rapid at four-year schools, with 15,856 graduates of the Alabama public high school Class of 2021 enrolling at 4-year colleges. That's more 4-year enrollees than any year in the dataset, and it comes in a year when there were fewer high school graduates.

In terms of destination, the Class of 2021 sent more students to Alabama 4-year colleges but also increased the number of students going to out-of-state public and private schools. Enrollment at Alabama private colleges was slightly lower for the Class of 2021.

Alabama College-Going Percenta.	Enrolled and Not Enrolled	2 and 4-year College Trend	4 Year College Trends	Alabama College-Going Numbers by year	College Enrollment Trends by Race	College-Going Snapshot by Individual School
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Trends in 4-Year

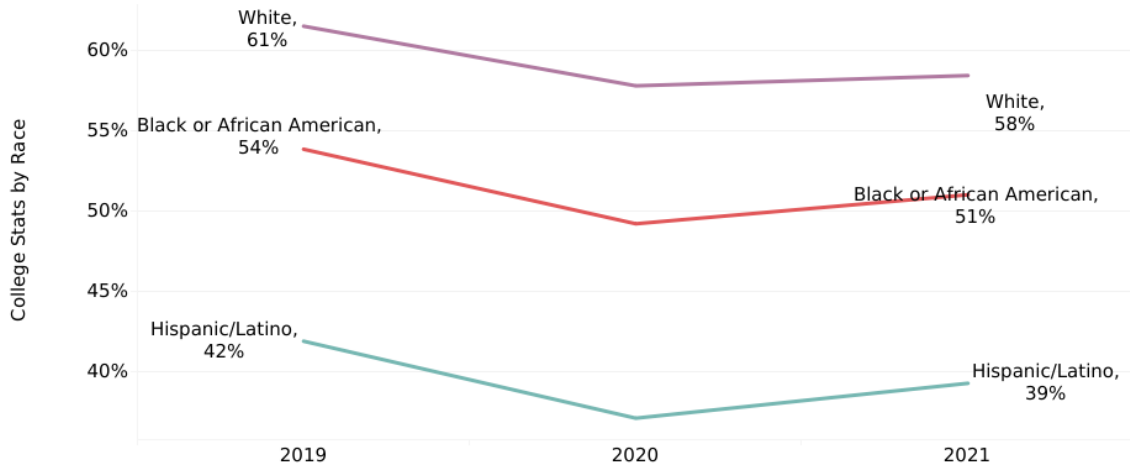


Interesting patterns emerge when college-going statistics are broken down by race. White public high school graduates are more likely to enroll in higher education than Black and Hispanic/Latino graduates: 58% of whites compared to 51% of blacks and 39% of Hispanics.

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College-Going Stats by Race
% Enrolled in Higher Education

% Enrolled in Higher Education: State

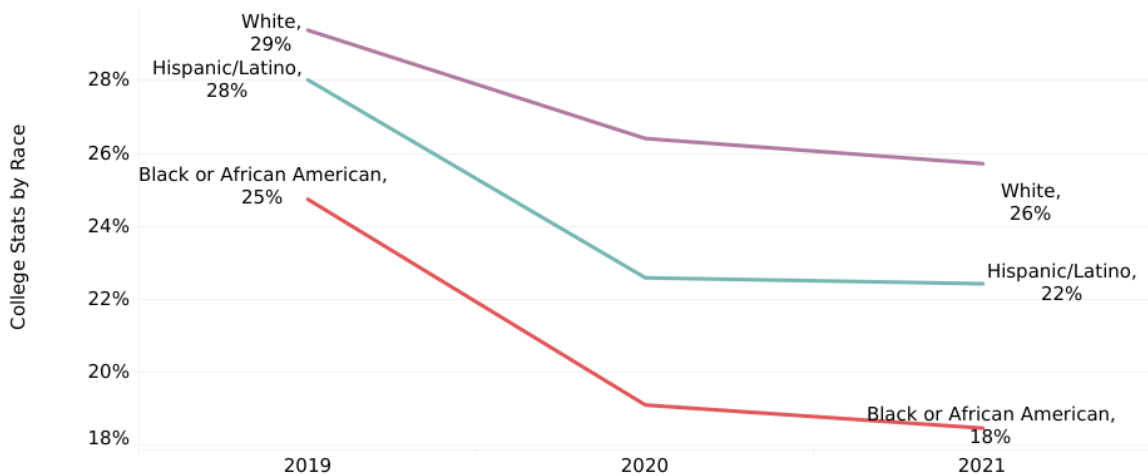


As mentioned above, White and Black high school graduates are enrolling in equal proportions at 4-year schools. But there has been a significant shift at 2-year colleges. In 2019, 25% of Black high school graduates enrolled at a 2-year school in the year after graduation. In 2021 only 18 percent did.

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College-Going Stats by Race
% 2 Year

% 2 Year: State



And among all groups, there has been an uptick in the percentage of recent high school graduates who did not enroll in college the year after graduating. According to the statistics cited above, these individuals are likely finding employment. It's also possible that some of these high school graduates earned certificates that will allow them entry into a career with plenty of upward mobility. However, state policy should ensure these individuals have ready access to return to the education and training system if and when they need more advanced skills to pursue a more promising career path.

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College-Going Stats by Race
% of Grads Not Enrolled

% of Grads Not Enrolled: State

