























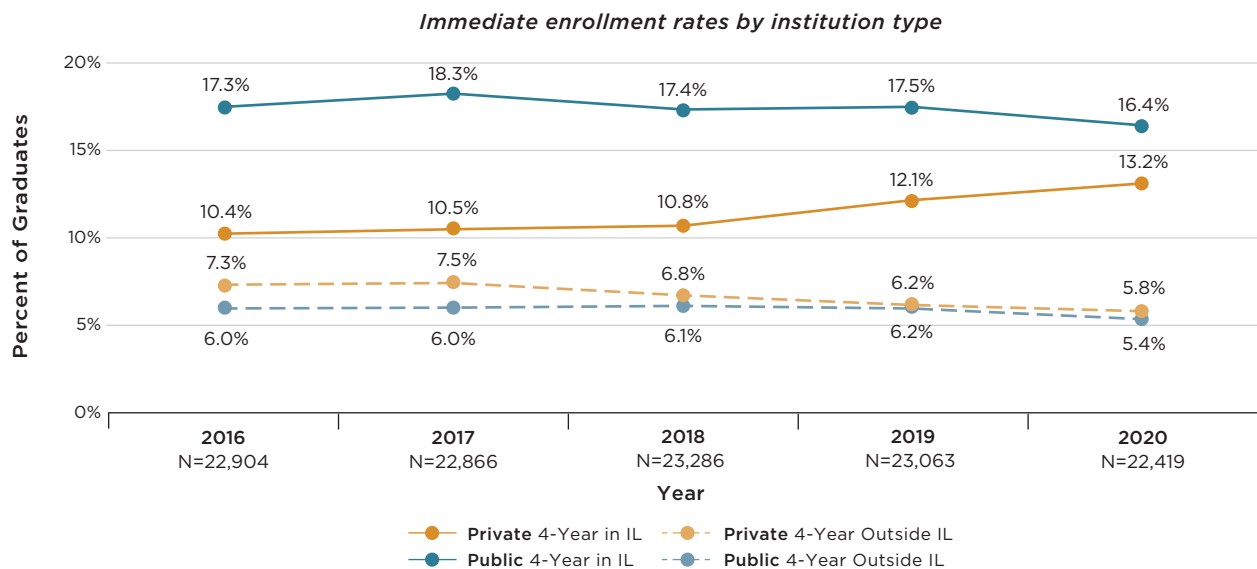


## How Did College Enrollment Rates Change by College Type and Across Colleges?

In this section, we look at enrollment rates for different categories of post-secondary institutions, as well as for specific colleges, to understand whether enrollment patterns varied for different groups of colleges. Some stakeholders may have anticipated that enrollment at

public colleges would be affected more than enrollment at private colleges, or that the extent to which colleges reopened in the fall would be closely tied to the change on their immediate enrollment rates. In this section, we show the actual rates of immediate enrollment at private and public colleges inside and outside of Illinois, and we provide data for specific two-year and four-year institutions commonly attended by CPS graduates.

**FIGURE 2**  
Immediate Enrollment at Private 4-Year Colleges in Illinois Increased Slightly in 2020



**Note:** If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

### Figure 2 Takeaways

- The percent of CPS graduates immediately enrolling into public four-year colleges in Illinois declined slightly from 17.5 percent in 2019 to 16.4 percent in 2020, while the rate for private four-year colleges in Illinois rose slightly from 12.1 percent in 2019 to 13.2 percent in 2020.
- The percent of CPS graduates immediately enrolling into private four-year colleges outside of Illinois remained stable, while the rate for public four-year colleges outside of Illinois declined slightly from 6.2 percent in 2019 to 5.4 percent in 2020.

TABLE 5

## Percent Change in Enrollment of CPS Graduates by College, for 4-Year Colleges

College Name	Group	Fall Reopening Status*	Change in Immediate Enrollees, 2019 to 2020	% Change in Immediate Enrollment, 2019 to 2020	2019 Immediate Enrollees	2020 Immediate Enrollees
Western Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily In-Person	101	66%	153	254
Columbia College Chicago	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	124	38%	323	447
DePaul University	Private Illinois	Fully Online	120	36%	332	452
Northern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Hybrid	109	33%	329	438
Saint Xavier University	Private Illinois	Primarily In-Person	53	29%	182	235
Illinois Institute of Technology	Private Illinois	Hybrid	0	0%	102	102
University of Illinois at Urbana	Public Illinois	Hybrid	3	0%	994	997
Northwestern University	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	-2	-2%	111	109
Loyola University Chicago	Private Illinois	Fully Online	-18	-6%	304	286
National Louis University	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	-31	-6%	498	467
University of Illinois at Chicago	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	-384	-25%	1,525	1,141
Eastern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily In-Person	-38	-26%	145	107
Northeastern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	-76	-26%	287	211
Illinois State University	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	-116	-33%	355	239
University of Michigan	Public Outside IL	Hybrid	-57	-36%	157	100

**Note:** Displayed in the table are the top 15 four-year colleges, by size of 2019 enrolling class of CPS graduates. Colleges, such as Dominican University, East West University, Lincoln College, and the University of Chicago, which had fewer than 100 first-year CPS graduates enrolled in 2019 and 2020 were not included on this table. If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

\* The reopening status information was collected by the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College. The categories for reopening status are: fully online, primarily online, hybrid, primarily in-person, and fully in-person. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/heres-a-list-of-colleges-plans-for-reopening-in-the-fall/> for a searchable website.

### Table 5 Takeaways

- There was wide variation across the top 15 enrolling colleges, with some seeing large increases in enrollment rates and others seeing large decreases.
- More private four-year colleges in Table 5 saw gains or held steady their enrollment between 2019 and 2020, while more public colleges in Table 5 saw decreases in enrollment.
- There was no clear pattern of enrollment according to schools' reopening models (though all of these colleges did offer some online component).

**TABLE 6****Percent Change in Enrollment of CPS Graduates by College, for 2-Year Colleges**

College Name	Fall Reopening Status*	Change in Immediate Enrollees, 2019 to 2020	% Change in Immediate Enrollment, 2019 to 2020	2019 Immediate Enrollees	2020 Immediate Enrollees
Triton College	Primarily Online	36	42%	86	122
Morton College	Primarily Online	3	7%	45	48
CCC Wright College	Primarily Online	-70	-7%	946	876
Oakton Community College	Primarily Online	-8	-13%	61	53
CCC Malcolm X College	Primarily Online	-223	-21%	1,051	828
CCC Harold Washington College	Primarily Online	-189	-21%	911	722
ALL City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)	Primarily Online	-865	-22%	3,990	3,125
CCC Richard J. Daley College	Primarily Online	-144	-30%	481	337
CCC Harry S. Truman College	Primarily Online	-104	-34%	305	201
Moraine Valley Community College	Primarily Online	-32	-40%	80	48
CCC Olive-Harvey College	Primarily Online	-49	-40%	122	73
CCC Kennedy-King College	Primarily Online	-86	-49%	174	88

**Note:** Displayed in the table are the top 11 two-year colleges, by size of 2019 enrolling class of CPS graduates. Morton College, Oakton Community College, and Moraine Valley Community College had smaller enrollment numbers overall and so their rates are more susceptible to fluctuations. If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

\* The reopening status information was collected by the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College. The categories for reopening status are: fully online, primarily online, hybrid, primarily in-person, and fully in-person. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/heres-a-list-of-colleges-plans-for-reopening-in-the-fall/> for a searchable website.

**Table 6 Takeaways**

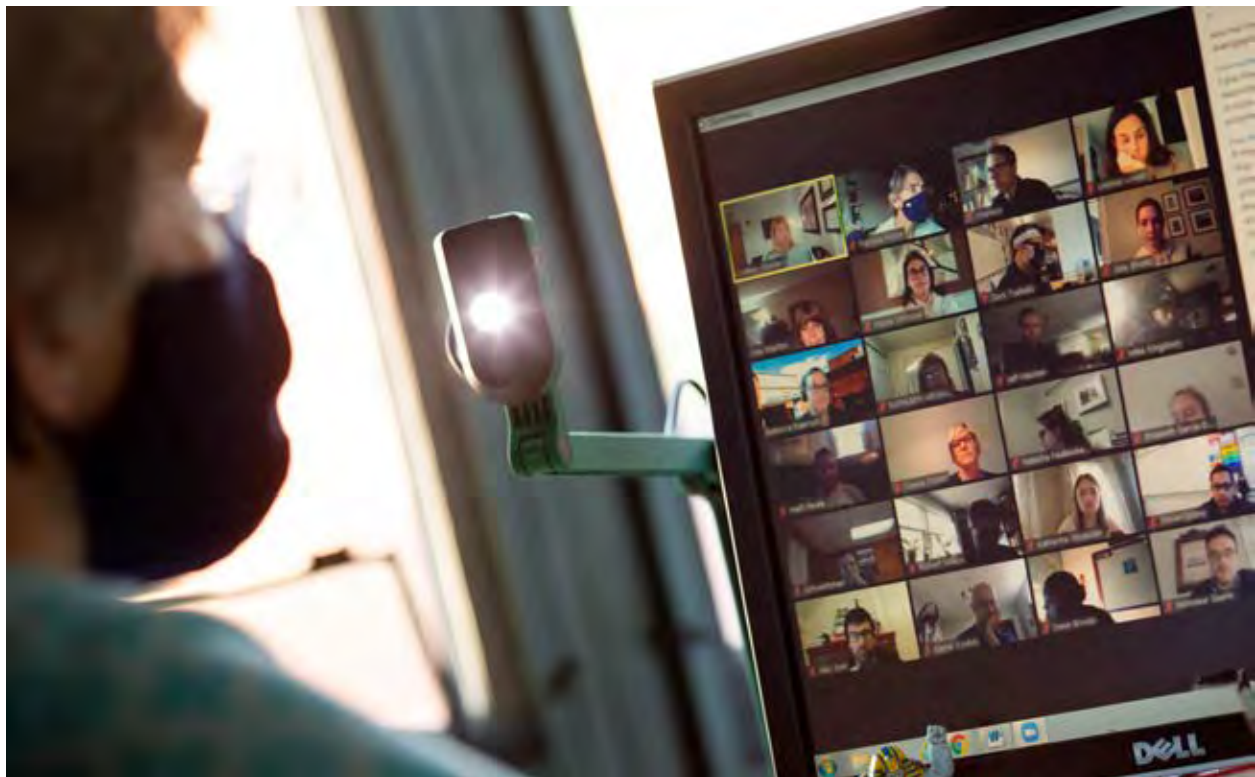
- Only one two-year college in Table 6 (Triton College) saw a large increase in enrollment from 2019 to 2020, and that was following dips in enrollment in the previous two years (not shown in this table).
- Almost all two-year colleges had declines in enrollment between 2019 and 2020. There were more declines in enrollment for the 11 most commonly attended two-year colleges than there were for the top 15 four-year colleges.
- Some campuses of City Colleges saw only minor decreases in enrollment, while others saw dramatic decreases.

# College Retention of 2019 CPS Graduates

Given the unprecedented challenges and uncertainty faced by college students in 2020, in this chapter we turn to whether or not first-year students who were enrolled in spring 2020 continued their enrollment in college in the fall.<sup>9</sup> By narrowing the analysis to CPS graduates in their first-year of college who were enrolled in the spring and examining whether they returned in the fall (rather than looking at the traditional fall-to-fall measure of retention used by the U.S. Department of Education<sup>10</sup> and by colleges) we are able to better isolate the impact of the pandemic on similar students over time. We examine whether students from four CPS graduating classes 2015–19 who were enrolled in the

spring of their first year of college returned to college in fall. We also explore some common assumptions about: 1) how the likelihood of students enrolled in spring returning to college in fall would change when colleges turned to remote learning in 2020; and 2) how different types of students and schools would be differentially impacted.<sup>11</sup>

In this section we show the trends for whether CPS graduates enrolled in their first year of college in the spring returned to college in the fall and whether they returned to the same college, transferred to a college in the same sector (two- or four-year college), or transferred to a college in a different sector.



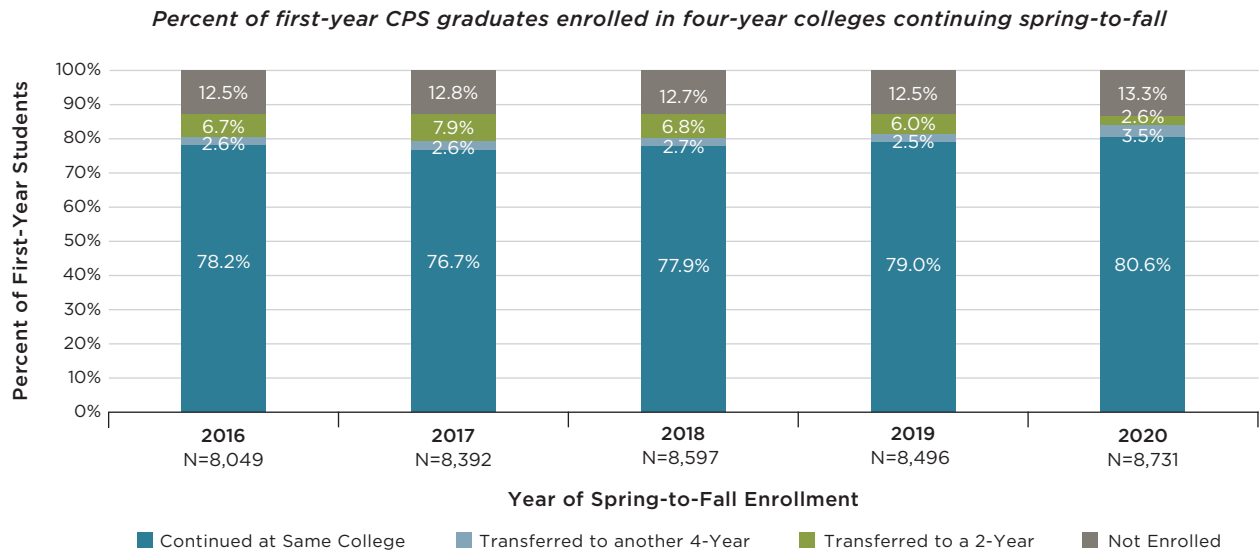
<sup>9</sup> This indicator differs from our indicator of persistence, which measures whether students are continuously enrolled in college for four terms after high school graduation.

<sup>10</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2021).

<sup>11</sup> Koenig (2020, March 26); Goldrick-Rab, Coca, Kienzl, Welton, Dahl, & Magnell (2020); Hartocollis (2020, April 15); Hess (2020, April 29).

**FIGURE 3**

The Rate for Students Continuing in a 4-Year College from Spring to Fall Rose Slightly in 2020



**Note:** If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

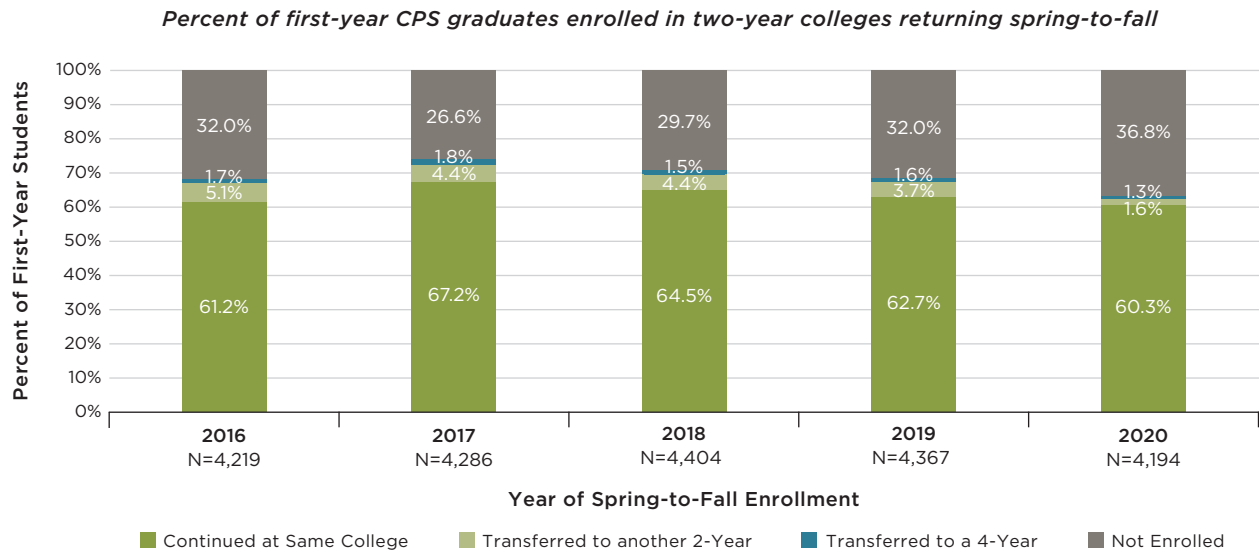
### Figure 3 Takeaways

- In fall 2020, the percentage of first-year students continuing at the same four-year college rose slightly, going from 79.0 percent in 2019 to 80.6 percent in 2020.
- A little more than 13 percent of the first-year students enrolled in spring 2020 in four-year colleges did not return to any two- or four-year college in the fall, a rate slightly higher than students enrolled in 2016 to 2019.
- In fall 2020, 2.6 percent of first-year students who were enrolled at a four-year college transferred to a two-year college, a rate 3 to 4 percentage points lower than previous years. If 2020 students had transferred to two-year colleges at the same rate as 2019 students, an additional 300 students would have transferred to two-year colleges.
- In fall 2020, first-year students were slightly more likely to transfer to another four-year college than in previous years (3.5 percent in 2020 compared to around 2.6 percent in previous years). If 2020 students had transferred to another four-year college at the same rate as 2019 students, around 100 fewer students would have transferred.



**FIGURE 4**

The Percentage of Students Continuing at 2-Year Colleges in the Fall Continued to Decline in 2020



**Note:** If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

#### Figure 4 Takeaways

- The percentage of first-year students enrolled in the spring at a two-year college who continued at the same college in the fall has been decreasing since 2017, a trend that accelerated slightly in 2020.
- In 2020, the percentage of students who transferred from a two-year college in the spring to a four-year college in the fall continued to be less than 2 percent.
- Each year, a small percentage (5 percent or fewer) of first-year students transferred to another two-year college in the fall, a rate that has been declining since 2016, with a slightly larger decline in 2020.

## How Did Rates of Students Returning to College Differ by Race/Ethnicity and Gender? <sup>12</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted communities of color and some college students had to balance financial and family responsibilities with

college enrollment. In this section, we take a closer look by race/ethnicity and gender at the extent to which first-year college students continued to be enrolled from spring to fall in any two- or four-year college.

**TABLE 7**

**Percentage of CPS Graduates in the Spring of Their First Year at a 4-Year College Who Returned to College in the Fall, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Asian/Pacific Islander Young Men	95.2%	94.9%	94.5%	94.4%	91.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander Young Women	97.9%	98.1%	95.9%	96.3%	97.7%
Black Young Men	79.8%	77.5%	76.1%	77.1%	77.4%
Black Young Women	85.0%	85.3%	83.8%	85.6%	84.5%
Latino Young Men	84.0%	85.4%	86.6%	85.5%	82.6%
Latina Young Women	89.4%	90.4%	90.6%	89.5%	89.7%
White Young Men	93.7%	92.2%	94.8%	92.3%	92.3%
White Young Women	96.0%	95.2%	96.2%	96.1%	94.5%

**Note:** If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. In 2020, Latinx students made up 43 percent of CPS graduates in their first year at a four-year college. Black students made up 34 percent, White students made up 14 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islander students made up 7 percent. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

### Table 7 Takeaways

- In 2020, across race/ethnicity and gender groups, four-year college students returned to a two- or four-year college in the fall at rates similar to previous years. Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino young men had the largest changes, about a 3 percentage point decline.
- Between 2018 and 2020, about three-quarters of Black young men returned to college in the fall, about 85 percent of Black young women and Latino young men returned, and the rate was more than 90 percent for all other groups by race/ethnicity and gender.

<sup>12</sup> We do not include retention rates for students with disabilities because of the small number of students enrolled in college.

**TABLE 8**

**Percentage of CPS Graduates in the Spring of Their First Year at a 2-Year College Who Returned to College in the Fall, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Asian/Pacific Islander Young Men	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Asian/Pacific Islander Young Women	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Black Young Men	55.1%	62.1%	57.6%	50.3%	52.5%
Black Young Women	58.2%	64.0%	58.1%	59.9%	58.4%
Latino Young Men	69.2%	73.3%	72.1%	66.0%	59.0%
Latina Young Women	72.6%	78.8%	78.3%	74.9%	68.2%
White Young Men	81.5%	82.6%	73.2%	74.5%	75.1%
White Young Women	84.1%	81.4%	81.8%	81.2%	76.2%

**Note:** Rates for Asian/Pacific Islander students are suppressed due to the low number of Asian/Pacific Islander two-year college students. If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. In 2020, Latinx students made up 62 percent of CPS graduates in their first year at a two-year college, Black students made up 26 percent, White students made up 8 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islander students made up 4 percent. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

### Table 8 Takeaways

- Among spring two-year college students, the rates of returning to a two- or four-year college in the fall differed across race/ethnicity and gender.
- Among spring two-year college students, Latinx students' rates of returning to college in the fall declined most, falling from 66.0 percent in 2019 to 59.0 percent in 2020 for Latino young men, and from 74.9 percent in 2019 to 68.2 percent in 2020 for Latina young women.
- White young women enrolled at two-year colleges were less likely to return to college in the fall in 2020, from 81.2 percent in 2019 to 76.2 percent in 2020.
- The rate of returning to college from spring to fall for Black young men increased slightly between 2019 to 2020 but remained low, at 52.5 percent.

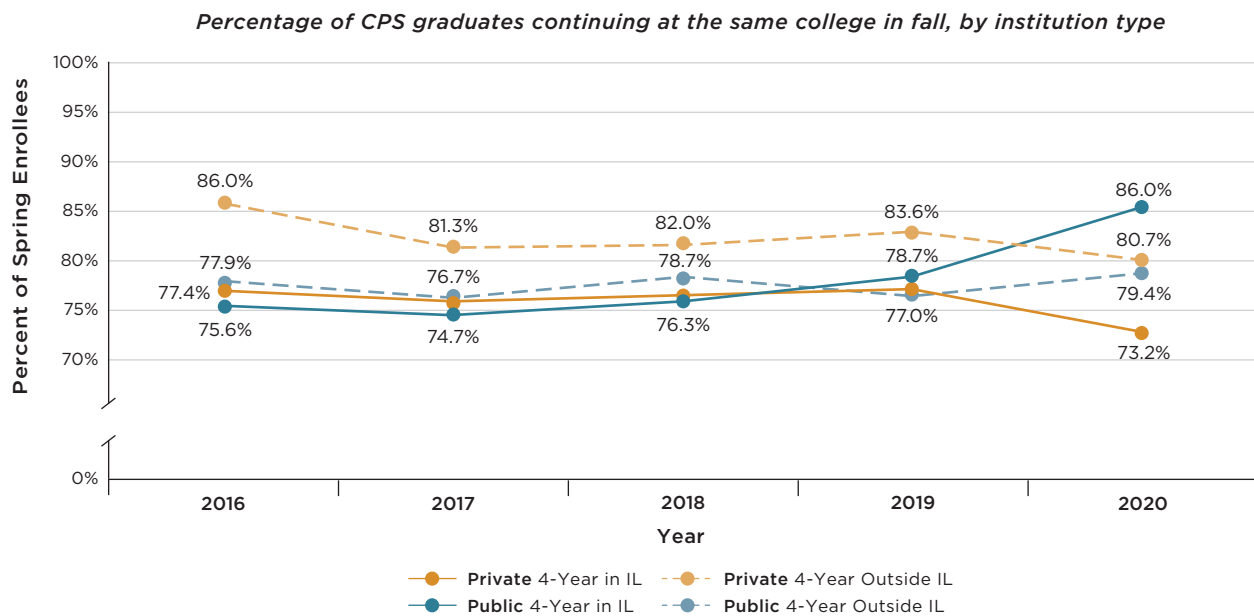
## How Did Retention Rates Differ by College Type?

In this section, we show the trends in continuing enrollment in the same college. We divide colleges by location (inside vs. outside of Illinois) and private vs. public. We also show the rates for the 15 most commonly attended four-year colleges for CPS graduates and 11 most commonly attended two-year colleges and compare the 2019

rates to the 2020 rates. Rates in previous years were similar to 2019 rates. In addition to the rate of continuing enrollment, we also show the learning model used by four-year colleges in fall 2020 (fully online, primarily online, hybrid, primarily in-person, or fully in-person) according to information collected by the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College.

**FIGURE 5**

The Rate for First-Year Students Continuing at Public 4-Year Colleges in Illinois Increased in 2020



**Note:** If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3.

### Figure 5 Takeaways

- Between 2016 and 2019 among first-year students attending in-state public and private colleges and out-of-state public colleges, about 78 percent returned to the same college in the fall.
- In 2020, the percentage of first-year students returning to the same college in the fall diverged for these three types of colleges.
  - The percentage of students returning to public colleges in Illinois rose by 7 percentage points from 78.7 percent in 2019 to 86.0 percent in 2020.
  - The percentage of students returning to private colleges in Illinois declined from 77.7 percent in 2019 to 73.2 percent in 2020.
  - The percentage of students enrolled in public colleges outside of Illinois returning to the same college increased slightly from 77.0 percent in 2019 to 79.4 percent in 2020.
- The rate for students returning to the same private out-of-state college in the fall was 83.6 percent in 2019, compared to 80.7 percent in 2020.

**TABLE 9**

**Percentage Point Change in Students Retained in Fall at Same College for the 15 Most-Attended 4-Year Colleges**

College Name	Group	Fall Reopening Status*	Number of Students in 2019	2019 Continuing at Same College	Number of Students In 2020	2020 Continuing at Same College	Change in College Continuing Rate
Illinois State University	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	352	59% (207)	330	83% (273)	24%
Northern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Hybrid	248	59% (147)	283	82% (232)	23%
Western Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily In-Person	150	62% (93)	131	79% (103)	17%
National Louis University	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	437	63% (276)	471	69% (323)	5%
Northeastern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	225	69% (156)	237	74% (175)	5%
University of Illinois at Chicago	Public Illinois	Primarily Online	1,292	84% (1,081)	1,360	87% (1,189)	4%
University of Illinois at Urbana	Public Illinois	Hybrid	954	91% (872)	962	94% (904)	3%
Illinois Institute of Technology	Private Illinois	Hybrid	90	89% (80)	93	90% (84)	1%
Saint Xavier University	Private Illinois	Primarily In-Person	171	80% (136)	155	81% (125)	1%
Eastern Illinois University	Public Illinois	Primarily In-Person	114	75% (86)	113	75% (85)	0%
Loyola University Chicago	Private Illinois	Fully Online	282	81% (228)	277	81% (224)	0%
Northwestern University	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	141	98% (138)	113	97% (110)	-1%
Columbia College Chicago	Private Illinois	Primarily Online	100	79% (79)	283	76% (214)	-3%
DePaul University	Private Illinois	Fully Online	263	84% (220)	311	81% (252)	-3%
University of Michigan	Public Outside IL	Hybrid	112	98% (110)	157	95% (149)	-3%

**Note:** Displayed in the table are the top 15 most-attended four-year colleges. Colleges, such as Dominican University, the University of Wisconsin - Madison, East West University, and the University of Chicago, which had fewer than 90 first-year CPS graduates enrolled in 2019 and 2020 were not included on this table. If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3. The change in the college continuing rate in the last column may vary from the difference between the 2019 and 2020 continuing rates due to rounding.

\* The reopening status information was collected by the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College. The categories for reopening status are: fully online, primarily online, hybrid, primarily in-person, and fully in-person. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/heres-a-list-of-colleges-plans-for-reopening-in-the-fall/> for a searchable website.

**Table 9 Takeaways**

- Most of the 15 most commonly attended four-year colleges had similar rates of students returning in fall 2019 and fall 2020.
- Three public Illinois colleges outside the Chicago area had increases of more than 15 percentage points in the rate of students continuing at that college in the fall: Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University. Each of the three colleges with the largest increases used a different reopening model in fall 2020.
  - These three colleges also had the lowest 2019 rates of students returning and their 2020 rates were similar to other four-year colleges commonly attended by CPS graduates.

**TABLE 10**

**Percentage Point Change in Students Retained in Fall at Same College for the Most-Attended 2-Year Colleges**

College Name	Fall Reopening Status <sup>*</sup>	Number of Students in 2019	2019 Continuing at Same College	Number of Students In 2020	2020 Continuing at Same College	Change in College Continuing Rate
Triton College	Primarily Online	89	58% (52)	66	70% (46)	11%
CCC Kennedy-King College	Primarily Online	173	43% (74)	148	46% (68)	3%
CCC Harold Washington College	Primarily Online	1,089	61% (669)	866	62% (535)	0%
Moraine Valley Community College	Primarily Online	82	68% (56)	77	66% (51)	-2%
CCC Harry S. Truman College	Primarily Online	277	62% (173)	278	60% (166)	-3%
CCC Richard J. Daley College	Primarily Online	408	63% (256)	440	60% (265)	-3%
All City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)	Primarily Online	3,743	63% (2,369)	3,639	60% (2,207)	-3%
CCC Malcolm X College	Primarily Online	721	64% (459)	868	60% (525)	-3%
CCC Wright College	Primarily Online	931	70% (656)	912	64% (586)	-6%
Oakton Community College	Primarily Online	72	68% (49)	53	62% (33)	-6%
CCC Olive-Harvey College	Primarily Online	144	57% (82)	127	49% (62)	-8%
Morton College	Primarily Online	44	75% (33)	41	61% (25)	-14%

**Note:** Displayed in the table are the most-attended two-year colleges. If students had concurrent enrollments at a two-year college and a four-year college, the four-year enrollment was prioritized. This figure uses the November 2020 NSC data, which has some limitations and exclusions. See the box titled *Methods, Data Limitations, and Data Definitions* for more information on p.3. The change in the college continuing rate in the last column may vary from the difference between the 2019 and 2020 continuing rates due to rounding.

<sup>\*</sup> The reopening status information was collected by the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College. The categories for reopening status are: fully online, primarily online, hybrid, primarily in-person, and fully in-person. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/heres-a-list-of-colleges-plans-for-reopening-in-the-fall/> for a searchable website.

**Table 10 Takeaways**

- At most of the commonly attended two-year colleges, the percentage of students who returned to the same two-year college in fall 2020 was similar to the percentage who returned in 2019.
- Of the most commonly attended two-year colleges, Triton College was the only two-year college that had an increase greater than 10 percentage points in their retention rate.
- Four of the most commonly attended two-year colleges had declines in their retention rate more than 5 percentage points between 2019 and 2020: two CCC colleges (Wright College, and Olive-Harvey College) and two suburban community colleges (Oakton Community College and Morton College).

# Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented situation for high school and college students as education abruptly switched from an in-person experience to a virtual setting, amidst immense health, financial, and emotional challenges, particularly for students of color. Despite these challenges, locally the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the immediate enrollment and retention rates of CPS graduates appeared to be smaller than the national impacts that have been reported by the NSC.

Graduates in the class of 2020 were about as likely to enroll in a four-year college as previous cohorts and CPS graduates were actually slightly more likely to remain in four-year colleges between spring and fall 2020. In contrast, fewer students enrolled in two-year colleges in 2020 than in previous years, and CPS graduates from the class of 2019 were less likely than previous cohorts to remain in two-year colleges between spring and fall 2020. The experience of 2020 provides some insights for how Chicago communities, educators, and nonprofits can better support CPS graduates in enrolling and persisting in college in the future.

### **Students who plan to enroll or are enrolled in two-year colleges may need different supports and policies from students at four-year colleges.**

At two-year colleges, enrollment, retention, and transfers from four-year colleges all declined significantly in fall 2020, particularly for students of color. Two-year college students may have borne more of the direct financial impacts of the pandemic and may also have been disproportionately impacted by increased caregiving responsibilities and family health concerns. According to a national survey commissioned by New America on

community college students, not being able to afford the program and needing to work were cited as top reasons for not enrolling or not returning to college in the fall.<sup>13</sup> The steep decline in two-year college enrollment in 2020 underscores the need for additional supports and institutional changes for the groups of students who may have been most affected by the pandemic, including two-year college students.

### **Some colleges actually enrolled or retained significantly more CPS graduates in 2020 than they had in prior years, and there may be valuable lessons for how to support students in the future.**

For example, Western Illinois University had a 66 percent increase in its enrollment rate, and Illinois State University and Northern Illinois University both increased their spring-to-fall retention rates by more than 20 percentage points. For some students, it may have become easier to continue to stay enrolled at their college than in the past. Rates of spring-to-fall retention increased most at regional public four-year universities, where tuition is generally lower than private colleges, but where students often face additional costs related to travel and housing. The option

<sup>13</sup> Fishman & Nguyen (2021).

for continuing remotely may have been helpful to students who otherwise might have returned to Chicago for financial or personal reasons. Many colleges have also implemented changes to financial, academic, and admissions policies that may have enabled more CPS students to enroll or remain enrolled. Northern Illinois University temporarily suspended financial holds on enrollment for returning students,<sup>14</sup> and many colleges, including Illinois State University, received funds from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to provide emergency grants to students.<sup>15</sup> Many colleges, including Western Illinois University, implemented test-optional admissions policies, and some, including Northern Illinois University and Saint Xavier University, implemented test-blind admissions policies.<sup>16</sup> Columbia College awards all CPS graduates with a GPA of at least 3.0 a merit scholarship, and saw a continued significant increase of students from CPS in 2020.<sup>17</sup>

**The class of 2020 continued to enroll in four-year colleges at similar rates to previous classes, but we cannot assume that this trend will continue for the class of 2021.**

By March 2020, many students would have been nearing the end of their college application and had opportunities to meet in person with their guidance counselors as they explored their college options, submitted applications, and completed the FAFSA. This year's twelfth-graders, by contrast, have been learning remotely for almost a full year, and are likely facing many other challenges during the pandemic, and many students may not have been able to access the same level of support in the college application process that they would have received in-person at school. We need to take a whole-of-city approach to supporting this group of graduating students, including support from the philanthropic and non-profit sectors. We will also need further research to understand these students' experiences and outcomes when more data becomes available.

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## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought enormous challenges for students to enroll and continue in college. At the same time, practitioners and leaders in high schools, colleges, non-profits, and the community rose to the challenge and brought innovation and resources to ensure that the students continued to pursue their educational aspirations. Going forward, it is critical that we learn from this period in order to make changes to policy and practice that support students in pursuing their educational aspirations.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.niu.edu/bursar/payments/past-due.shtml>

<sup>15</sup> <https://financialaid.illinoisstate.edu/cares/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.fairtest.org/sites/default/files/Optional-Growth-Chronology.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.colum.edu/columbia-central/scholarships/columbia-cps-award>



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**ALEX SEESKIN** leads the To&Through Project, which aims to significantly increase high school and post-secondary completion for under-resourced students of color in Chicago and around the country by providing education stakeholders with research-based data on students' educational experiences and facilitating dialogue on its implications for adult practice. Previously, he served as the Director of Strategy of the UChicago Charter School, and as a Resident at UChicago Impact. Prior to coming to UEI, Seeskin taught high school English in Chicago Public Schools for seven years, serving as the English Department Chair at Lake View High School from 2008-12. He earned a BS in communications from Northwestern University and an EdLD from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



**The To&Through Project** In collaboration with educators, policymakers, and communities, the To&Through Project aims to significantly increase high school and postsecondary completion for under-resourced students of color in Chicago and around the country by providing education stakeholders with research-based data on students' educational experiences and facilitating dialogue on its implications for adult practice. At the To&Through Project, we:

- Conduct research and publish data on what matters for the attainment of Chicago Public Schools students (in collaboration with the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research).
- Design data tools and resources for education stakeholders that make data meaningful and actionable, including the publicly available To&Through Online Tool.
- Foster conversations about what matters most for students' high school and post-secondary success.
- Facilitate a network of middle grades educators committed to building more equitable and supportive educational environments that promote the success of middle grades students in high school and beyond.

The To&Through Project is located at the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute in the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice.

*This report reflects the interpretation of the authors. Although the UChicago Consortium's Steering Committee provided technical advice, no formal endorsement by these individuals, organizations, the full Consortium, or the To&Through Project, should be assumed.*

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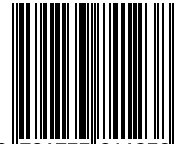
**OUR MISSION** With the goal of supporting stronger and more equitable educational outcomes for students, the UChicago Consortium conducts research of high technical quality that informs and assesses policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families, and communities as we support the search for solutions to the challenge of transforming schools. We encourage the use of research in policy action and practice but do not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for systemic school improvement by identifying what matters most for student success, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.



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