

## Black Enrollment Declines, Gaps Increase

A new report details disparities in academic outcomes for Black community college students.

Sara Weissman September 21, 2022

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/09/21/black-community-college-students-face-stark-disparities>



Black community college students face significant disparities in academic outcomes, according to a new report.

While Black students disproportionately attend community colleges, their enrollment at these institutions has significantly dropped and gaps in their academic outcomes have more than doubled over time compared to their white peers, according to a new report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank focused on advancing Black communities.

The report, released today, examines student success metrics for Black community college students, mainly drawing on data from IPEDS, the primary federal data source for higher education; the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center; and the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population survey.

Community colleges are sometimes “heralded as almost silver bullets” by policy makers looking to reduce unemployment, but that isn’t the whole story for Black students, said Alex Camardelle, a co-author of the report and director of the workforce policy program at the Joint Center.

We believe in the power of community colleges,” he said. “But we know that given the overrepresentation of Black students at these institutions, it warrants a closer examination of how well they’re serving those students ... It’s one thing to improve diversity within these institutions, but that does not always guarantee or lead to positive outcomes.”

### Steep Enrollment Drops

The center’s analysis found staggering enrollment declines among Black community college students. Their enrollment at these institutions fell 44 percent over the course of a decade, from 1.2 million in 2010 to 670,000 in 2020. The pandemic didn’t help matters, according to the report. Enrollment among Black students fell 18 percent from fall 2019 to fall 2021, at the height of the pandemic,

with an even sharper decline among men. Black male enrollment dropped 23.5 percent, relative to a 15 percent drop for Black women over that same time period.

Camardelle noted that these enrollment declines during the pandemic sharply contrast with what happened during the Great Recession in 2008, when Black enrollment at community colleges rose.

Community colleges “were a place where workers who had lost their jobs could return to get additional skills and credentials and returned to the labor market in a fairly short amount of time, and it was especially that for Black workers,” he said. The economic downturn caused by the pandemic, however, didn’t yield similar enrollment surges.

The report highlighted that Black community college students faced particularly high rates of food and housing insecurity during the pandemic, and those financial hardships posed obstacles to students enrolling.

Shaun Harper, executive director of the University of Southern California Race and Equity Center, said community colleges have to proactively increase their outreach to Black prospective students, especially Black men, in light of the data

### **The share of Black students enrolled in community college fell over the last decade**

