

# OUTMIGRATION CONTEXT

*College Enrollment  
Patterns of Recent  
Illinois Public High  
School Graduates*

April 2023

## OUTMIGRATION CONTEXT: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT PATTERNS OF RECENT ILLINOIS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

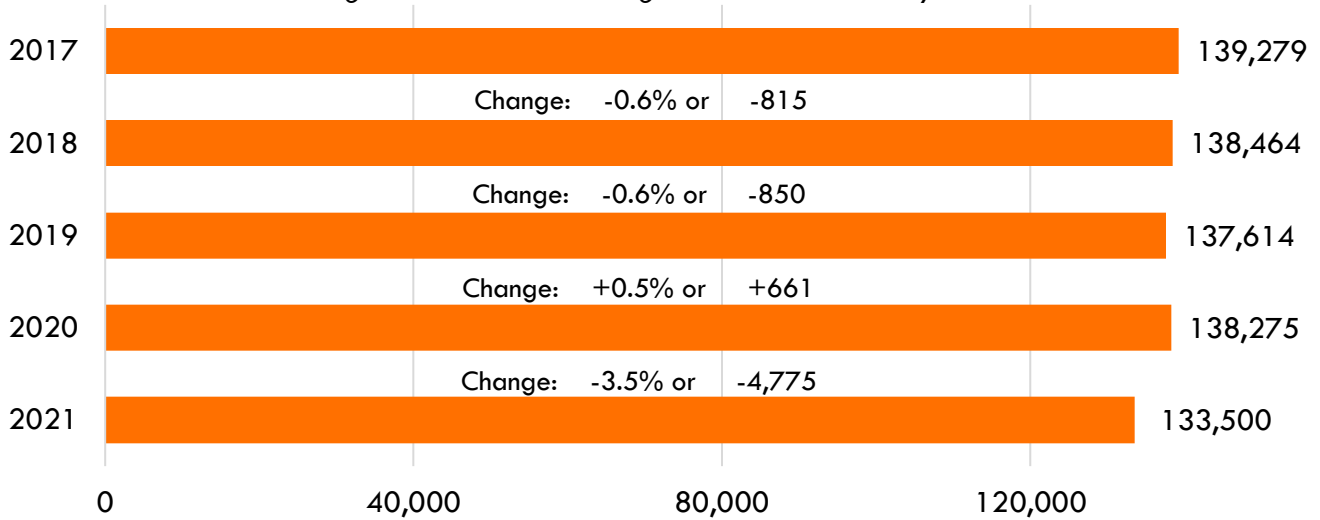
### KEY FINDINGS

- There was a noticeable decrease (-3.5%) in the number of Illinois public high school graduates in 2021, representing a loss of nearly 5,000 graduates.
- The overall rate of college enrollment increased slightly in 2021 when compared to 2020 as a higher percentage of 2021 high school graduates enrolled at four-year colleges.
- The slight annual increases in 2021 were not able to make up for the large decreases in enrollment during the first year after the pandemic (2020), and many student groups are still well below their pre-pandemic rates of enrollment from 2019, including Latino, African American, and white students.
- Although nearly four out of every five Asian and nearly two-thirds of recent white high school graduates were enrolled in college the fall semester following high school graduation in 2021, fewer than half of African American and Latino high school graduates met that same distinction.
- After a few consecutive years of movement in the right direction, the rate of high school graduates leaving Illinois to go to four-year colleges in 2021 increased to 47.6% and nearly reverted to the recent high of 47.7% from 2017.
- The top destination states for recent Illinois high school graduates have largely remained unchanged. Relative to 2020, the top six states – Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio – gained in their share of Illinois high school graduates (now at 54.5%, mostly due to large gains in colleges within Indiana and Wisconsin).
- In 2021, a few warm weather states – Florida, California, and Arizona – increased their share of recent Illinois high school graduates enrolling at four-year colleges within those states.
- Despite the rate of college enrollment for low-income high school graduates increasing in 2021 and slightly decreasing for their non-low-income peers, the college enrollment rate gap between those two groups remains considerably large, at 24.4 percentage points.
- When compared to low-income high school graduates, substantially higher proportions of not low-income students enroll at four-year institutions overall, and among those enrolling at four-year institutions, more continued to enroll outside the state of Illinois.

### ILLINOIS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

As illustrated in *Figure 1*, there were similar decreases (-0.6%) in the number of Illinois public high school graduates from 2017 to 2018 and from 2018 to 2019. These decreases represented a loss of slightly more than 800 graduates each year. In 2020, the number of high school graduates nearly bounced back to 2018 levels with a 0.5% annual increase, representing 661 additional students. However, the 2021 information paints a bleaker picture with a 3.5% decrease in high school graduates, representing nearly 5,000 fewer graduates.

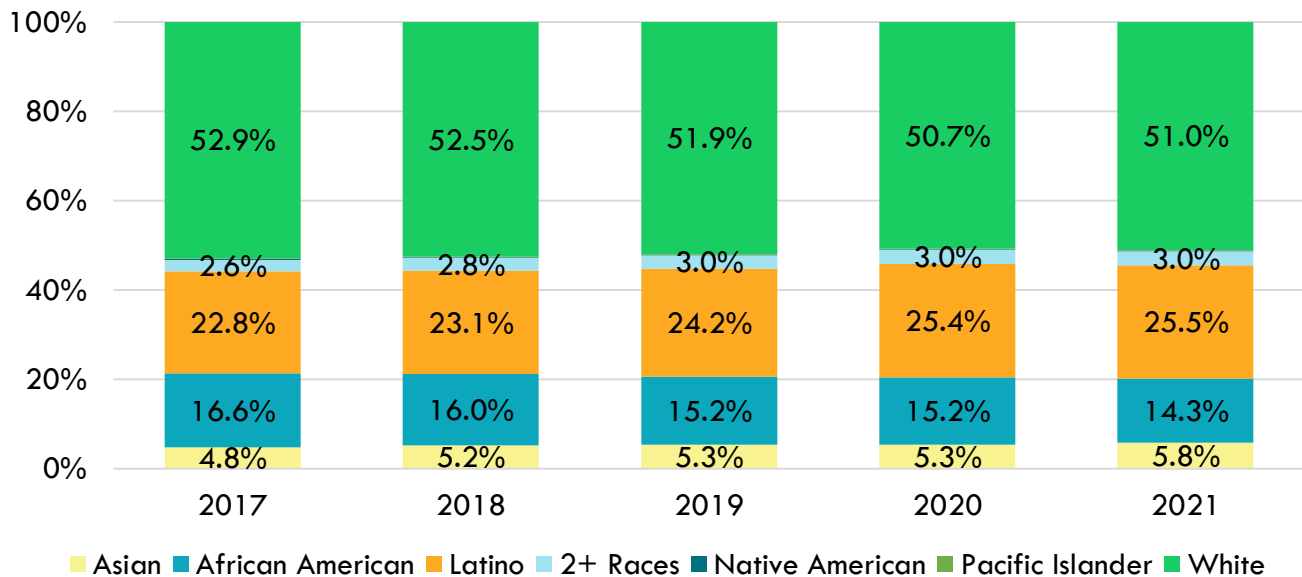
Figure 1: Illinois Public High School Graduates by Year



### CHANGE IN RACE/ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION OVER TIME

As shown in Figure 2, there have been some gradual shifts in the race/ethnicity distribution of Illinois high school graduates over time. The proportion of Illinois high school graduates who are African American has slightly decreased (16.6% in 2017 to 14.3% in 2021), while the proportions of Latino, Asian, and multi-racial high school graduates have increased or remained steady. The proportion of white high school graduates had been decreasing over the past few years but increased by 0.3 percentage points in 2021.

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Illinois Public High School Graduates by Year



### COLLEGE ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

The following analysis examines the college enrollment patterns of recent Illinois public high school graduates. As shown in Table 1, when comparing 2019 to 2020, there was a decrease of 5.5 percentage points in the proportion of students enrolling in college the fall semester following high school graduation as it went from 63.8% to 58.3%. From 2020 to 2021, there was a slight improvement in the overall rate of college enrollment as it increased to 59.1%. The overall improvement was the result of an increase in enrollment at four-year institutions as the proportion of high school graduates enrolling at two-year institutions (generally Illinois community colleges) decreased to 20.9%. The overall decrease from 2019, which was the last year before the COVID-19 pandemic,

to 2021 is mostly due to a parallel decrease at two-year institutions. In 2019, 24.9% of all graduates and in 2021, 20.9% of all graduates enrolled at two-year institutions the fall semester following high school graduation.

Table 1: Initial College Enrollment\* Patterns for Recent Illinois Public High School Graduates

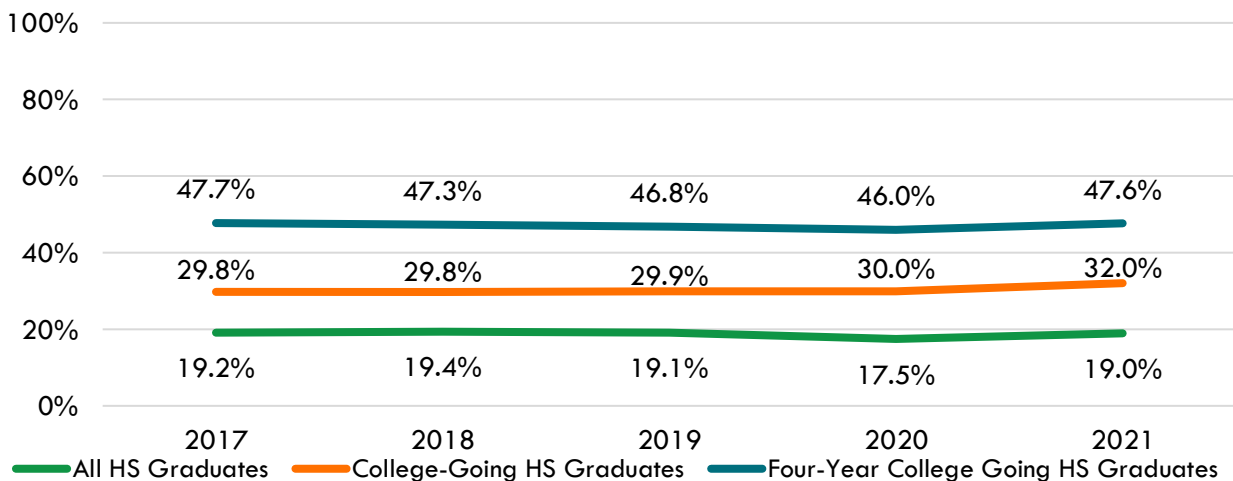
Sector**	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
4-Year	53,159	38.2%	53,847	38.5%	53,476	38.9%	50,287	36.4%	51,023	38.2%
2-Year	36,623	26.3%	36,080	26.1%	34,272	24.9%	30,265	21.9%	27,957	20.9%
Total Enrolled	89,782	64.5%	89,927	64.9%	87,748	63.8%	80,552	58.3%	78,980	59.1%
Not Yet Enrolled	49,497	35.5%	48,537	35.1%	49,866	36.2%	57,723	41.7%	54,570	40.8%
Total HS Graduates	139,279	100.0%	138,464	100.0%	137,614	100.0%	138,275	100.0%	133,550	100.0%

\*Initial college enrollment is operationalized as enrollment between July and December immediately following high school graduation.  
 \*\* See Definitions section.

### Out-of-State Enrollment

The trends presented in Figure 3 depict the rate of out-of-state enrollment among all Illinois public high school graduates, college-going high school graduates, and high school graduates initially enrolling at four-year institutions. From 2017 to 2020, there were marginal decreases in the proportion of four-year college-going students enrolling outside the state of Illinois (-1.7 percentage points) and the largest year-over-year decrease occurred in 2020 (-0.8 percentage points). However, the rate of out-of-state enrollment for that group nearly reached 2017 levels in 2021 (47.6%), wiping out the recent improvement in the balance of such students enrolling in Illinois. With fewer students enrolling at two-year institutions, which generally would be Illinois community colleges, an increased proportion of college-going students enrolled outside the state (nearly one-third). The state is starting to approximate the pattern of having 20% of all high school graduates, one-third of college-going students, and one-half of four-year, college-going students enrolling outside the state.

Figure 3: Percent of Recent Illinois Public High School Graduates Enrolled Out-of-State



For additional context, in 2002, only 29.3% of the four-year, college-going Illinois high school graduates enrolled outside the state (Smalley, Lichtenberger, and Brown, 2010). The rate of out-of-state enrollment is 18.4 percentage points higher than it was two decades prior.

### TOP STATES FOR OUT-OF-STATE FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

As shown in Table 2, the top six destination states for Illinois high school graduates have remained the same with some reordering. After consistently accounting for roughly six out of every ten out-of-state enrollments from Illinois, in 2020, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio only accounted for half of Illinois out-of-state enrollments. In 2021, those top six states regained some of that share and now account for a 54.5% share of recent Illinois outmigrants. The annual growth in share among the top six destination states was due to comparatively large growth in Indiana and Wisconsin. In 2021, a few warm weather states outside of the top six increased their share and number of recent Illinois high school graduates, such as Florida, California, and Arizona.

Table 2: Top 10 Destination States for Illinois Public High School Graduates Enrolling at Four-Year Colleges

2017			2018			2019			2020			2021		
State	#	Share	State	#	Share	State	#	Share	State	#	Share	State	#	Share
IA	3,230	12.7%	WI	3,218	13.4%	WI	3,172	12.7%	IN	2,800	10.3%	IN	3,144	12.4%
IN	3,156	12.4%	IN	3,190	12.4%	IN	2,846	11.4%	WI	2,692	9.9%	WI	2,873	11.4%
WI	3,058	12.1%	IA	2,968	12.2%	IA	2,799	11.2%	IA	2,624	9.7%	IA	2,693	10.6%
MO	2,544	10.0%	MO	2,638	10.2%	MO	2,746	11.0%	MO	2,351	8.7%	MO	2,233	8.8%
MI	1,915	7.5%	MI	1,901	6.8%	MI	1,942	7.8%	MI	1,633	6.1%	MI	1,653	6.5%
OH	1,406	5.5%	OH	1,435	5.7%	OH	1,422	5.7%	OH	1,358	5.0%	OH	1,182	4.7%
MN	749	3.0%	KY	662	2.8%	KY	720	2.9%	KY	827	3.0%	FL	937	3.7%
AL	726	2.9%	FL	650	2.8%	FL	653	2.6%	FL	652	2.4%	CA	874	3.5%
FL	660	2.6%	CA	630	2.6%	AL	611	2.4%	TN	602	2.2%	KY	760	3.0%
CA	603	2.4%	AL	629	2.6%	CA	608	2.4%	CA	568	2.1%	AZ	735	2.9%

Table 3 lists the top states for growth in enrollment of recent four-year, college-going Illinois high school graduates from 2017 to 2021. The states with the largest proportional growth were concentrated in the Mid-Atlantic (Maryland and North Carolina) and the South. As shown in Table 3, Maryland experienced the greatest proportional increase in the enrollment of recent Illinois high school graduates from 2017 to 2021 at 66.7%, followed by North Carolina (+54.9%), Georgia (+40.2%), Louisiana (+36.6%), and Florida (+36.0%). Florida also experienced the largest real number increase in recent Illinois high school graduates enrolled (+248), followed by Arizona (+185), and Georgia and Tennessee (+137).

Table 3: Top Five Destination States\*\*\* for Growth in Illinois Public High School Graduates Enrolling at Four-Year Colleges (2017 to 2021)

Percent Increase		Number Increase	
Maryland	66.7%	Florida	248
North Carolina	54.9%	Arizona	185
Georgia	40.2%	Georgia	137
Louisiana	36.6%	Tennessee	137
Florida	36.0%	Kentucky	134

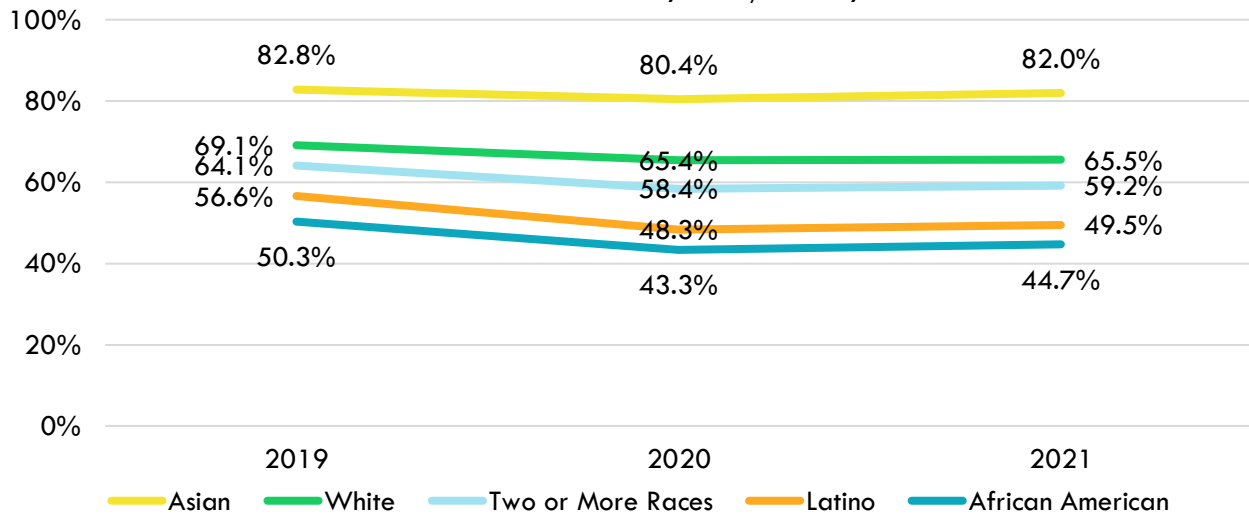
\*Only includes states that enrolled 100 or more Illinois HS Graduates from 2021

## RECENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

In comparing 2019 to 2020, all of the larger racial/ethnic groups experienced decreases in overall college enrollment the first full year after the pandemic began, 2020. The decreases were somewhat larger for Latino, African American, and white high school graduates. African American and Latino high school graduates had larger proportional growth in 2021 than their white peers. However, the overall college-going rates for those two groups had traditionally been lower. In 2021, all racial/ethnic groups were still experiencing lower overall enrollment

rates than the year immediately prior to the pandemic, 2019. In 2021, the number of Latino high school graduates decreased by 7.1 percentage points, the number of African American high school graduates decreased by 5.6 percentage points, and the number of white high school graduates decreased by 3.6 percentage points relative to 2019. All groups experienced slight increases in overall college-going rates from 2020, the first full academic year after the start of the pandemic.

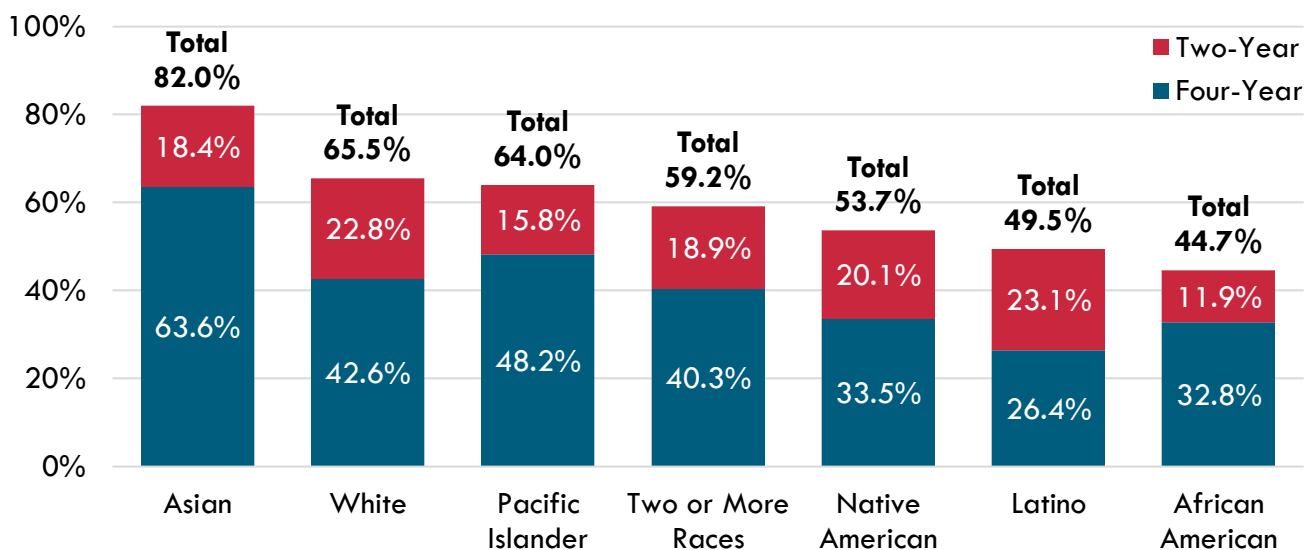
Figure 4: Overall College Enrollment for Recent Illinois Public High School Graduates from 2019 to 2021 by Race/Ethnicity



As illustrated in Figure 5, there were wide variations in the overall rates of college enrollment by race/ethnicity. Although 82.0% of recent Asian high school graduates and nearly 65.5% of recent white high school graduates were enrolled in college the fall semester following high school graduation, 49.5% of Latino high school graduates and 44.7% of African American high school graduates met that same distinction.

The patterns in terms of enrolling at four-year or two-year institutions (generally community colleges) also varied by race and ethnicity. Latino (23.1%) and white (22.8%) high school graduates had the highest proportions enrolled at two-year institutions, which was nearly two times the proportion of African American high school graduates (11.9%) initially enrolling at two-year colleges.

Figure 5: Initial College Enrollment Patterns by Race/Ethnicity (Class of 2021)

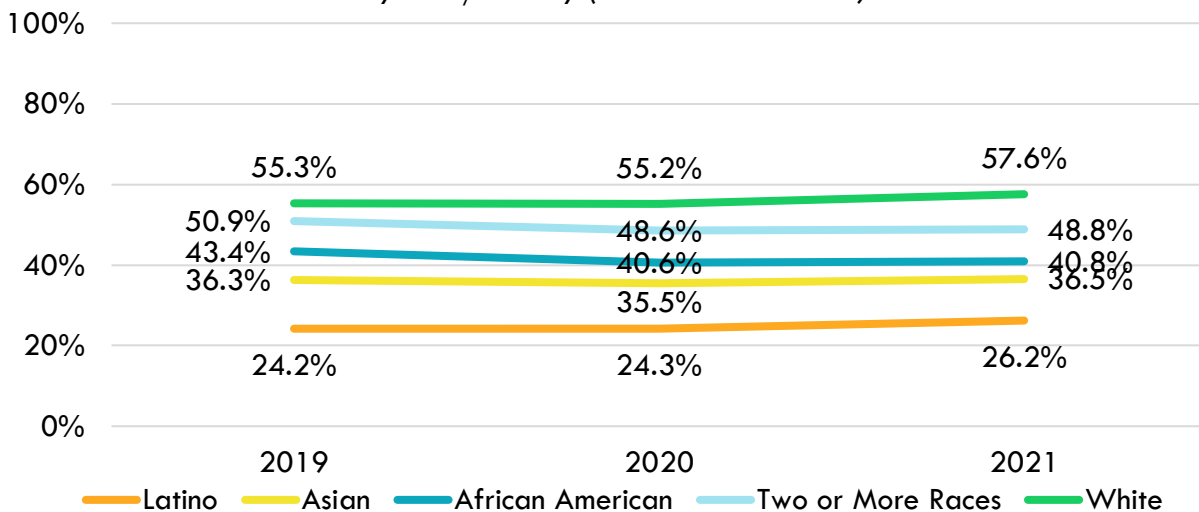


The rates of out-of-state enrollment at four-year institutions are presented in Figure 6. There was significant variation across the racial/ethnic groups. More than half (57.6%) of white students, nearly half (48.8%) of students

who identified as belonging to two or more racial groups, and four out of every ten African American (40.8%) recent high school graduates enrolling at four-year institutions enrolled outside the state. There was a recent increase in the percentage of white four-year, college-going students enrolling outside the state (55.3% in 2019, 55.2% in 2020, and 57.6% in 2021).

Roughly a quarter of Latino four-year, college-going students and slightly less than 37% of Asian four-year, college-going students enrolled outside the state. Most student groups experienced decreases or flat out-of-state enrollment in comparing 2019 to 2020: African Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. However, this was not the case in 2021 as most groups were either flat or increased. The nearly two percentage point increase in Latino four-year, college going students enrolling outside the state was noticeable.

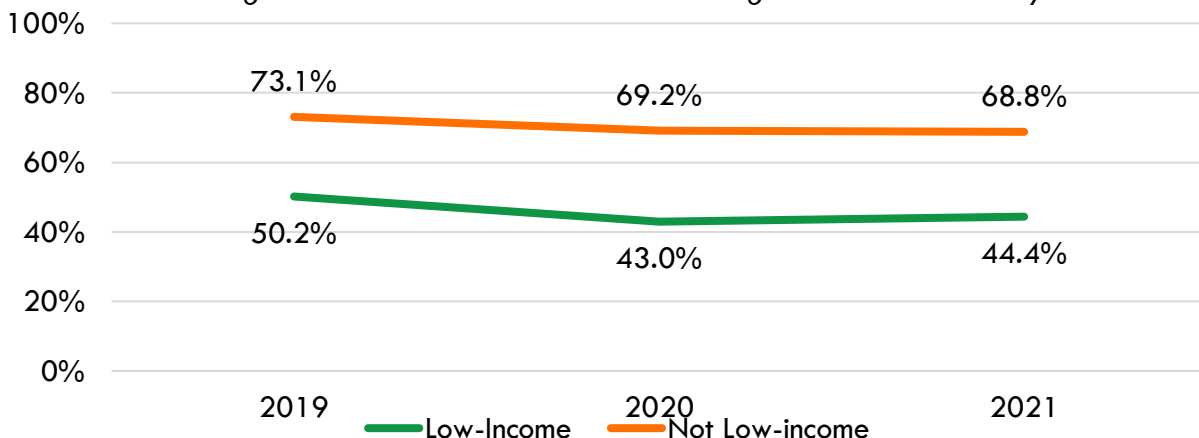
Figure 6: Out-of-State Enrollment among Four-Year College-Going Illinois High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity (Class of 2019-2021)



### LOW-INCOME STATUS

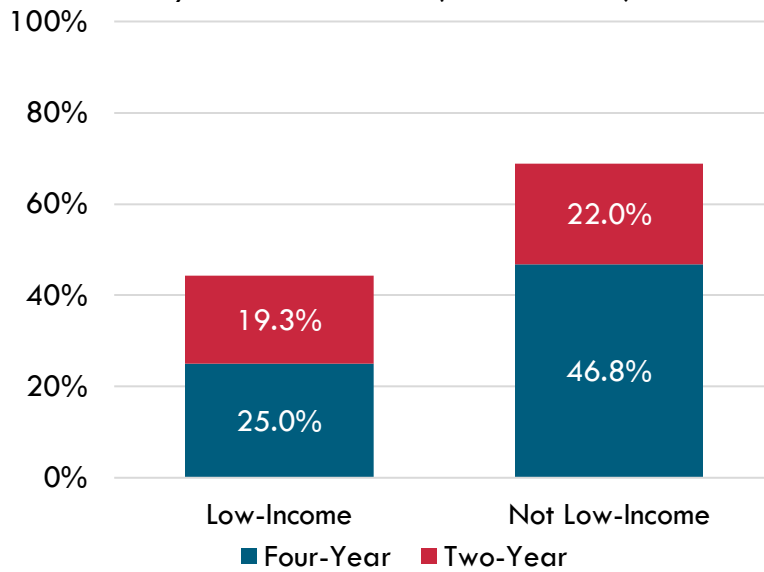
There were also differences in college enrollment patterns among recent Illinois high school graduates based on income in addition to year-over-year shifts in the patterns. The college enrollment gap between low-income high school graduates and their non-low-income peers remained. In fact, the gap widened from 22.9 percentage points in 2019 to 26.2 percentage points in 2020. However, the gap decreased slightly in 2021 to 24.4 percentage points as college-going rates increased for low-income high school graduates and slightly decreased for their non-low-income peers. Despite the year-over-year increase among low-income high school graduates, the current rate is still well below the pre-pandemic rate of 50.2%.

Figure 7: Overall College Enrollment for Recent Illinois Public High School Graduates by Low Income Status



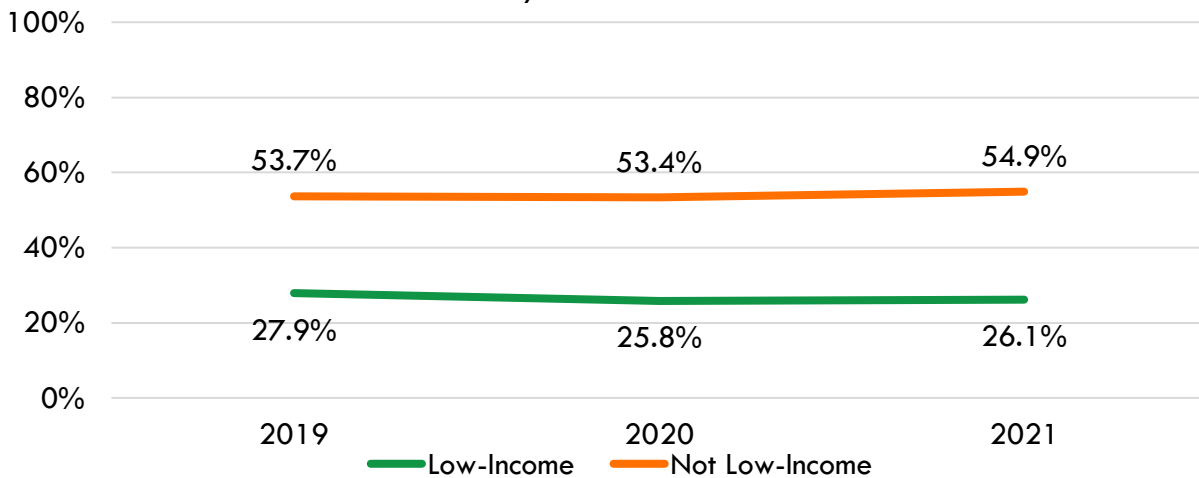
In 2021, the overall college enrollment gap between low-income students and their non-low-income peers was attributable to low-income graduates enrolling at four-year colleges at significantly lower rates (25.0% compared to 46.8%) and at two-year colleges at slightly lower rates (19.3% compared to 22.0%).

Figure 8: Initial College Enrollment Patterns for Recent Illinois Public High School Graduates by Low-Income Status (Class of 2021)



As shown in Figure 9, conditional upon enrolling at four-year institutions, there were also large differences in the rates of out-of-state enrollment by income status. In 2020 and again in 2021, the rate of out-of-state enrollment continued to be slightly more than twice as high for the non-low-income group when compared to their low-income peers.

Figure 9: Out-of-State Enrollment among Four-Year, College-Going Illinois Public High School Graduates by Income Status





## DEFINITIONS

(Adapted from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational System)

**Four-Year sector:** includes postsecondary institutions that offer programs of at least four years duration or offer programs at or above the baccalaureate level.

**Two-Year sector:** includes postsecondary institutions that offer programs of at least two but less than four years duration.

**Not Yet Enrolled:** recent Illinois high school graduates who had not yet enrolled in college during the fall semester immediately following high school graduation.

**Low Income:** as defined by the Illinois State Board of Education. Includes students who received or live in households that receive SNAP or TANF; are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets the USDA income guidelines to receive free or reduced-priced meals.

*The initial college enrollment measure differs from what ISBE provides on their School Report Card, which includes enrollment within 12 months and 16 months of high school graduation. Over the past three years, the 12-month enrollment rates were between 70% and 75% and the 16-month enrollment rates were between 71% and 76% (ISBE, 2021).*

Illinois State Board of Education. (2021). Illinois School Report Card 2018-2020: Postsecondary Enrollment. Springfield, IL. Retrieved from: [ILLINOIS | Postsecondary Enrollment \(illinoisreportcard.com\)](https://illinoisreportcard.com)

Smalley, D. J., Lichtenberger, E. J., & Brown, K. S. (2010). *A Longitudinal Study of the Illinois High School Class of 2002: A Six-Year Analysis of Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion*. Policy Research: IERC 2010-3. Illinois Education Research Council.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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