

Impact of COVID on First-Year Postsecondary Performance in North Carolina's Community Colleges

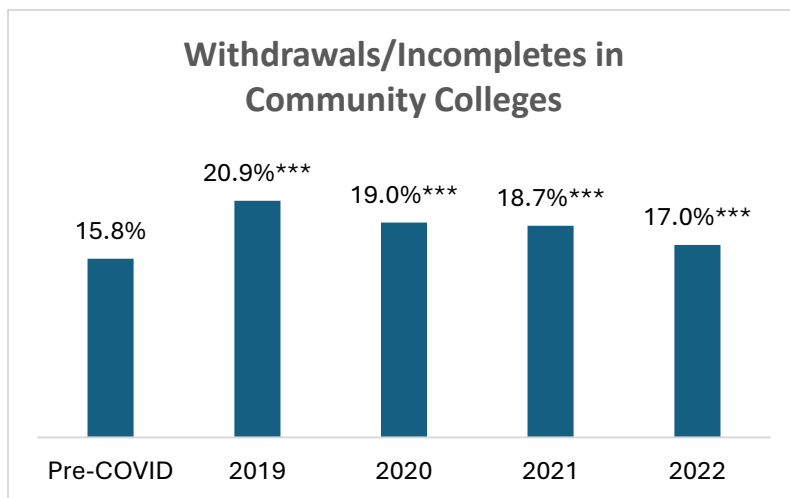
Key Takeaways and Implications:

- Withdrawals and incompletes in community colleges increased for students graduating from high school in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. These results were worse for female students, economically disadvantaged students, Black students, students with disabilities, and students with lower high school GPAs.
- Community colleges may want to focus their interventions on reducing withdrawals and incompletes, particularly for those populations that were disproportionately impacted.

Context and Study Overview: The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant changes in students' educational experiences. This study uses statewide administrative data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Community College System to look at the extent to which students' performance in community colleges was impacted by COVID. We looked at outcomes for students who graduated high school in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022; and enrolled in community college in their first year after high school. We compared the performance of those cohorts to the academic performance trends for students in the 2015-2018 high school graduation cohorts. The outcomes were successful completion of courses, withdrawals and incompletes, and the percentage of Ds and Fs in their first year of college.

Results:

- When compared to pre-COVID trends, we saw that students in the 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 cohorts had statistically significantly lower rates of successful course completion. This was driven primarily by a significant increase in withdrawals and incompletes (see chart). The percentage of Ds and



Fs for those cohorts were similar to pre-COVID levels, with the exception of a decrease for the 2019 cohort, which was likely driven by the fact that many colleges had policies making it easier for students to pass in the spring of 2020 as the pandemic was getting started.

***statistically significant

- Impacts were generally worse for students who were female, Black, or economically distressed; as well as students with lower high school GPAs. These negative outcomes persisted through the 2022 cohort for all groups.

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Julie Edmunds, Director, [Early College Research Center](#) at UNC Greensboro, jedmunds@serve.org.

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Dora Gicheva, Professor, UNC Greensboro Economics Department, d_gichev@uncg.edu.

