



**COLORADO**

Department of  
Higher Education

# College Admission Use of National Test Score Report (Test-Optional)

Report concerning a national assessment test score as an eligibility criterion for admission to a Colorado institution of higher education.



**2026**

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The Colorado Department of Higher Education

Report to the Education Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate, or any successor committees.

Statute: C.R.S. 23-1-113(10.5)(a)

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (DHE), under its own authority and through the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), oversees and coordinates policy for 31 public institutions of higher education (including community colleges, independent local district colleges and local area technical colleges) and authorizes and regulates private colleges, universities and occupational schools.

**Mission** – We support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all.

**Vision** – All Coloradans will have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities.



Prepared and submitted by the Colorado Department of Higher Education  
under the Executive Leadership of JB Holston  
Pursuant to the statutory authority of C.R.S. 23-1-113(10.5)(a)

July 2026

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# Executive Summary

In 2020 House Bill 20-1407 passed, temporarily allowing Colorado four-year institutions of higher education to determine whether to require a national assessment test score (NATS) as an eligibility criterion for admission for first-time freshman students who graduated from high school in 2021. On May 25, 2021, Governor Jared Polis signed House Bill 21-1067 into law. The legislation removed the requirement for NATS and made it optional for Colorado's public four-year colleges and universities to require test scores as part of the admissions process. As a result, four-year institutions were permitted to make admissions decisions without considering SAT or ACT scores, and applicants were given the option to determine whether their test scores would be included in their application materials. This admissions practice is commonly referred to as "test-optional." All 13 public four-year colleges and universities in Colorado confirmed adoption of a test-optional admissions policy. This legislation also required the Department to publish a report "intended to determine whether requiring or not requiring a national assessment test score as an eligibility criterion for the admissions process...provides greater diversity among institutions without causing negative student outcomes that are directly attributable to the change in the admissions process. (C.R.S. 23-1-113(10.5)(a)." This report presents the data related to student application submissions, admissions, enrollments, and retention comparing data from institutions prior to the policy adoption (academic year 2019-20) to data from four-year institutions after the policy adoption (academic year 2021-22). COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions likely influenced admissions and enrollment outcomes, making it difficult to isolate or directly attribute observed changes to the policy alone.

## Bottom Line

- **Access increased** at the application and admissions stages overall applications increasing from 134,748 to 153,441 (13.9%), though, this report does not attribute those results directly to test-optional policy
- **Gains present in admissions**, with first-time freshman acceptances increased from 101,208 in 2019 to 124,617 in 2021, an increase of 23,409 admitted students (23.1%)
- **Primary challenge** is converting expanded access into enrollment and retention, though students were not negatively impacted according to early success indicators such as retention

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# Introduction

House Bill 20-1407 temporarily authorized Colorado’s public four-year institutions to offer test-optional admissions for the high school graduating class of 2021 in response to widespread cancellations of SAT and ACT examinations at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> House Bill 21-1067 expanded upon this bill by removing the requirement for national assessment test scores and making it optional for Colorado’s public four-year colleges and universities to require test scores as part of the admissions process. All 13 public, four-year institutions in Colorado were test optional in 2021 while most required tests prior to the change in policy (with only MSU-Denver as an exception for some applicants). Today, all 13 public, four-year institutions in Colorado remain test optional.

Beginning with applicants for the fall of 2021, applicants at test-optional postsecondary institutions who elected not to submit national test scores were considered equitably alongside applicants who submitted test scores, as institutions relied on multiple academic and non-academic indicators to make informed admissions decisions. Colorado four-year institutions emphasized a holistic review process that considered a broad range of factors beyond standardized test performance, including but not limited to:

- High school grade point average;
- Number, sequence, and mix of academic coursework;
- Rigor of completed coursework, including honors and advanced mathematics courses;
- Completion of college-level coursework while in high school, such as Concurrent Enrollment;
- Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework and examination results;
- Relevant work experiences, including pre-apprenticeships and job shadowing opportunities;
- Volunteer and community engagement activities;
- Significant personal or life experiences;

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<sup>1</sup> Colorado General Assembly. (2020). HB20-1407: College admission use of national test score. <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb20-1407>.

- Demonstrated leadership experiences; and
- Alignment with institutional mission and programs, including interest in offered majors and evidence of institutional research.<sup>2</sup>

House Bill 21-1067 allows institutions to make ACT/SAT scores optional for admission while requiring ongoing state reporting to evaluate the policy's impact on access and student outcomes. The data elements presented in this report are intended to assess whether the inclusion or exclusion of national assessment test scores (NATS) as an admissions eligibility criterion for state-supported baccalaureate and graduate institutions of higher education was associated with increased student diversity, without resulting in adverse student outcomes directly attributable to changes in admissions practices.

Department staff acknowledge this analysis is subject to several important limitations related to the structure and timing of House Bill 21-1067. First, the question of whether test-optional policies affect access and student outcomes cannot be fully isolated because there is no academic year in which Colorado public institutions can be compared under mixed conditions (i.e., some requiring ACT/SAT and others not). Next, although the legislation contemplates use of prior-year data for comparison, this approach is not feasible because all public four-year institutions have operated under test-optional policies in recent years, eliminating a comparison group. Finally, this report relies on a comparison between 2019 (pre-policy) and 2021 (initial implementation). It is important to note this period coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is widely known to have significantly disrupted application, enrollment, and retention patterns, limiting the ability to attribute observed changes solely to the policy.<sup>3</sup> See limitations section for further detail.

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<sup>2</sup> Colorado Revised Statute § 23-1-113(1)(b)(III) (2025). Commission directive—admission standards for baccalaureate and graduate institutions of higher education. <https://codes.findlaw.com/co/title-23-postsecondary-education/co-rev-st-sect-23-1-113/>.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Fall Plans for Postsecondary Education. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved [date], from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/tpb>.

# Statewide Test Score Requirements

Prior to the passage of House Bill 21-1067, heterogeneity existed among institutional policies regarding the requirement of NATS as part of the admissions process. To understand how the bill changed institutional practices, staff surveyed Colorado institutions to understand their internal policies regarding the requirements for applicants to provide NATS. The table below shows institutional policies and how they have (or have not) shifted since the passage of the bill.

## Survey Results

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To supplement the data in this report, the Department surveyed institutions to determine if test scores were or were not required, and if there were any exceptions for specific programs, majors, or pathways (e.g., engineering, honors programs) or if submitted test scores were used for other purposes.<sup>4</sup> Staff administered a survey asking institutions the following: During the 2021–22 admissions year, did your institution review national assessment test scores (e.g., ACT or SAT) as an eligibility criterion for first-time, degree-seeking freshman applicants? The following institutions were included in the survey (all confirmed NATS were not required after the implementation of HB21-1067):

- Adams State University
- Colorado Mesa University
- Colorado School of Mines
- Colorado State University
- Colorado State University - Pueblo
- CSU-Global Campus
- Fort Lewis College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado Boulder
- University of Colorado - Colorado Springs

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<sup>4</sup> Colorado Department of Higher Education 2026 Survey of State Admissions Council Members.

- University of Colorado - Denver
- University of Northern Colorado
- Western Colorado University

For respondents who replied to open ended prompts, admissions representatives consistently indicated that currently, test scores play a limited and largely optional role in the admissions process. When submitted, scores may be considered as part of a holistic review or for specific purposes, most commonly course placement (especially math or composition) and occasionally scholarships. However, scores are generally not weighted heavily and are rarely used as a deciding factor in admission outcomes. Several respondents also noted that test-optional policies have prompted greater reliance on other academic indicators (e.g., grades, particularly in math) and internal collaboration to identify alternative measures of student readiness, while reinforcing a broader shift toward more holistic and flexible review practices.

# Applications, Admissions, Enrollment & Retention Comparisons 2019 & 2021

## Purpose and Analytical Framework

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This analysis evaluates whether eliminating the requirement to submit a national standardized test score as part of the admissions process: *“...provides greater diversity among institutions without causing negative student outcomes that are directly attributable to the change in the admissions process.”* The analysis compares first time freshman applicants, admits, enrollees, and retained students across pre-policy (2019) and post-policy (2021) cohorts. Because the policy was implemented statewide during the COVID-19 pandemic and we were unable to compare enrollment and outcomes across institutions within the same year, results are reported at the statewide and institutional level, emphasizing directional trends rather than direct attribution.

## Methodology

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This report presents a descriptive analysis of application, admissions, enrollment, and early student success outcomes (retention) before (from 2019) and after (2021) the implementation of a statewide test-optional admissions policy at Colorado public four-year institutions. The analysis compares cohorts of first-time freshman applicants and enrolled Colorado students from 2019 (pre-policy) and 2021 (post-policy). Graduation outcomes are not included because students who enrolled for the first time in 2021 were still within the normal 150% (six year) graduation rate period for four-year institutions during the latest year of completions data available. Because the data examined coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic, readers should consider the substantial influence of pandemic-related factors on admissions and enrollment patterns when interpreting these findings. The data do not allow for the separation of policy effects from broader pandemic impacts.

If students are listed as having submitted a test score, this report assumes the score was available for use in the admissions process. Institutions do not report whether or how a submitted test score is factored into an individual admission decision. Staff have attempted to capture this information in the supplemental survey included in this report (see supplemental institutional survey results on page 8 of this report). However, this analysis cannot determine the precise decision-making criteria used by institutions and does not establish direct relationships between test submission status and admissions decisions.

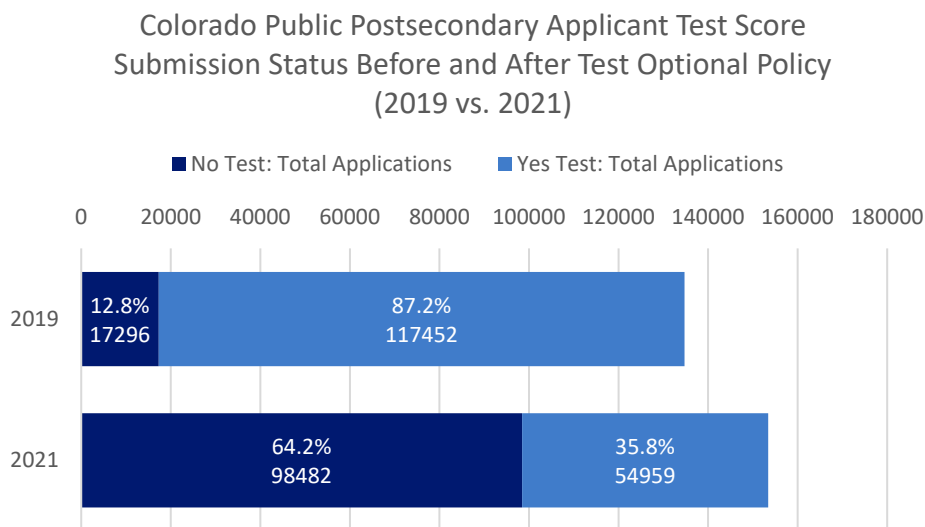
Outcome metrics include application volume, acceptance, enrollment, and first-year retention. These metrics are reported at both the statewide and institutional level and disaggregated by selected demographic characteristics where available and unsuppressed. The analysis is intended to identify directional trends and equity-relevant patterns following the implementation of the statewide test-optional admissions policy rather than to attribute impacts directly to any individual institution or admissions practice. Because the policy was implemented statewide and contemporaneously with the pandemic, results are interpreted as associated trends rather than direct effects.

## Access & Applicant Behavior

This section examines changes in application volume and test submission between 2019 and 2021 following adoption of test-optional admissions at four-year institutions.

- **Test optional policies removed application barriers:** With large growth across all demographic groups, no-test applicants increased from 17,296 in 2019 to 98,482 in 2021 (469.4%), with overall applications increasing from 134,748 to 153,441 (13.9%).

**Figure 1:** Colorado Public Postsecondary Applicant Test Score Submission Status Before and After Test Optional Policy (2019 vs. 2021)



Source: CDHE Student Unit Record Data System, Undergraduate Applicant Files for public postsecondary institutions, 2019 and 2021.<sup>5</sup>

### Overall Application Trends

Total applications increased from 134,748 to 153,441 (13.9%). This growth was driven by non-test applicants, which increased from 17,296 to 98,482 (469.4%), while test-submitting applicants declined from 117,452 to 54,959 (53.2%). The test submission rate dropped from 87.2% to 35.8% (–51.4 percentage points).

<sup>5</sup> Note: “No test” refers to students who elected not to submit a test score when applying for admission. “yes test” refers to students who elected to submit a test score. All 13 public, four-year institutions in Colorado were test optional in 2021 while most required tests prior to the change in policy (with only MSU-Denver as an exception for some applicants).

**Finding:** Applications to public postsecondary institutions increased, driven by applicants who did not submit test scores.

### **Demographic Shifts in Applications**

Application growth varied by group. Increases in volume were observed among Asian (24.7%), Black or African American (4.6%), multiracial (13.6%), and unknown race/ethnicity (21.7%), white (21.3%), applicants. American Indian or Alaska Native applicants declined (–16.0%) while Hispanic or Latinx applicants remained flat (–0.1%). The COVID-19 pandemic also led to demographic shifts in applications and may be the driving reason behind these changes.<sup>6</sup>

**Finding:** Growth was uneven. Some underrepresented groups increased modestly, while others saw flat or declining participation. These changes may be due to COVID-19 or could be due to the policy.

### **Test Submission Behavior by Group**

Test submission declined sharply across all groups (approximately 50-70% relative declines), including Black or African American (–51.7 percentage points), Hispanic or Latinx (–56.5), and White (–50.2).

**Finding:** As expected with all public postsecondary institutions moving from requiring testing to test optional, the shift away from test submission was broad and consistent across all populations.

### **Gender and Residency Patterns**

Applications increased for female (15.4%) and male (12.0%) applicants. Non-resident applications

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<sup>6</sup> Cohn, J., Cook, B. J., & Nelson, V. (2025, July 9). College enrollment patterns are changing: New data show applicant and admit pools are too. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/college-enrollment-patterns-are-changing-new-data-show-applicant-and-admit-pools-are-too>.

increased more rapidly (16.9%) than resident applications (10.3%), deviating from national trends.<sup>7</sup> Both groups experienced large declines in test submission applicants.

**Finding:** Growth in public postsecondary applicants was strongest among female and non-resident applicants.

### Key Takeaways

Application access expanded statewide (13.9%), driven by a major shift to non-test applications. However, impacts at the application stage were uneven, with limited or no growth among some demographic groups.

## Admissions Outcomes (Acceptance)

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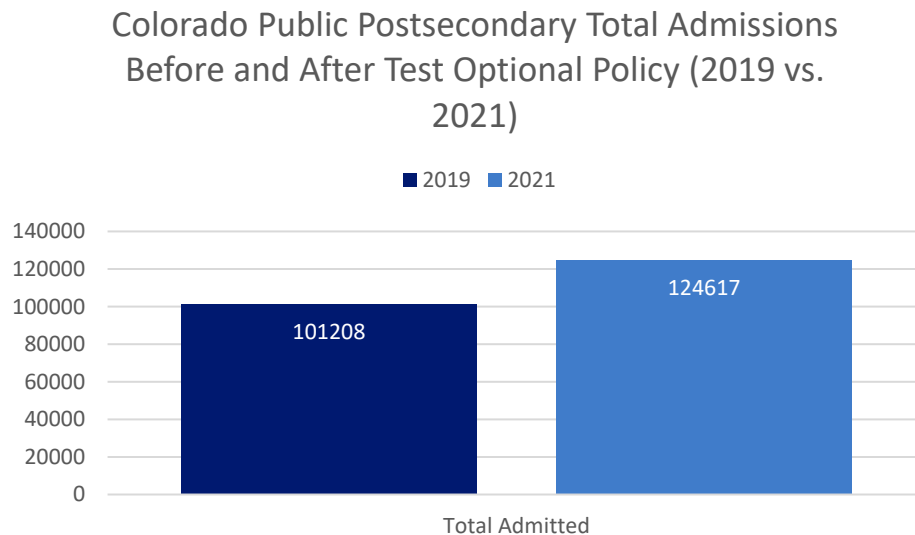
This section examines acceptance rates and the number of accepted students between 2019 and 2021 following statewide adoption of test optional policies.

- **Test optional policies increased admission volume:** First-time freshman acceptances increased from 101,208 in 2019 to 124,617 in 2021, an increase of 23,409 admitted students (23.1%), with growth distributed across many demographic groups. For historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups combined, first-time freshman acceptances increased by 5,656 students (17.0%) from 2019 to 2021.

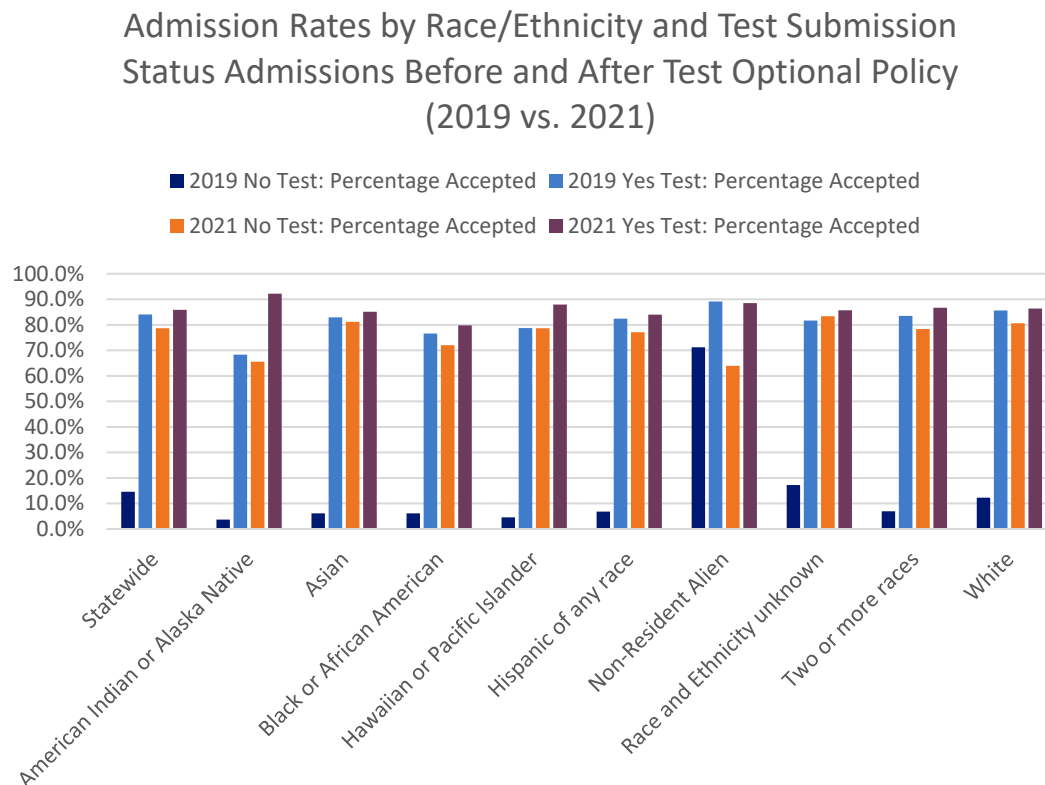
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<sup>7</sup> College Board. (2024, October). Beyond your campus: In- and out-of-state enrollment trends.  
<https://higher.ed.collegeboard.org/recruitment-admissions/policies-research/beyond-your-campus/state-migration>.

**Figure 2:** Colorado Public Postsecondary Total Admissions Before and After Test Optional Policy (2019 vs. 2021)



**Figure 3:** Colorado Public Postsecondary Total Admissions Before and After Test Optional Policy (2019 vs. 2021)



Source: CDHE Student Unit Record Data System, Undergraduate Applicant Files for public postsecondary institutions, 2019 and 2021

## Overall Acceptance Trends

Total admissions at public postsecondary four-year institutions in Colorado increased from 101,208 to 124,617 (23.1%). Non-test admits rose from 2,520 to 77,437 (2,972.9%), while test-based admits declined from 98,688 to 47,180 (-52.2%). The share of admitted students submitting test scores dropped from 97.5% to 37.9% (-59.6 percentage points).

**Finding:** As expected, admissions expanded and shifted decisively toward non-test applicants.

## Acceptance Rate Patterns

Non-test acceptance rates increased from 14.6% to 78.6% (64.0 percentage points), while test-submitter rates remained high and stable (84.0% to 85.8%). Total acceptance rates statewide changed from 75.1 to 81.2 over the time period. Overall, students who opted to submit test scores were more likely to be accepted (85.8% compared to 78.6% for non-submitters). However, we cannot say with certainty that the submission of test scores improved these students chances; students may be more likely to opt-in to submitting a test score if they are more academically prepared in other ways that could be demonstrated on an application (such as a GPA).

**Finding:** More non-test applicants were admitted given the increase in applications and change in admissions criteria rather than changes in selectivity.

## Admissions by Demographic Group

The number of students admitted increased across most race/ethnicity groups, including American Indian or Alaska Native (12.2%), Asian (38.3%), Black or African American (34.3%), Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (46.3%), Hispanic and Latinx (12.7%), multiracial (23.8%) students, race/ethnicity unknown (40.7%), and white (26.8%). Only American Indian or Alaska Native (-16.0% applications; 12.2% admissions) and Hispanic and Latinx (-0.1% applications; 12.7% admissions) students experienced increased admissions despite flat or declining application volume, indicating improved conversion into admission for these groups.

**Finding:** Admissions growth occurred across racial/ethnic groups, including those with limited application growth.

### Gender and Residency

Admission rates increased for all, with female students admitted at higher rates than males (77.6% vs. 72.1% in 2019; 84.5% vs. 77.2% in 2021) and resident students admitted at higher rates than non-residents (82.8% vs. 68.7% in 2019; 87.2% vs. 76.5% in 2021).

**Finding:** Admissions growth reflects increases among female and non-resident students.

### From Applications to Admission

Admissions grew faster than applications (23.1% vs. 13.9%). Nearly all demographic groups saw stronger gains in admissions than applications. This includes: American Indian or Alaska Native: +12.2% admissions vs. -16.0% applications, Asian: 38.3% vs. 24.7%, Black or African American: 34.3% vs. 4.6%, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 46.3% vs. 2.9%, Hispanic and Latinx: 12.7% vs. -0.1%, Race/Ethnicity Unknown: 40.7% vs. 21.7%, Two or More Races: 23.8% vs. 13.6%, white: 26.8% vs. 21.3%).

**Finding:** Access expanded more at the point of admission than at application for several underrepresented groups. Admissions expanded significantly and became less dependent on test scores. Equity gains were more evident at this stage, with increased representation among several historically underrepresented populations.

## Enrollment Outcomes

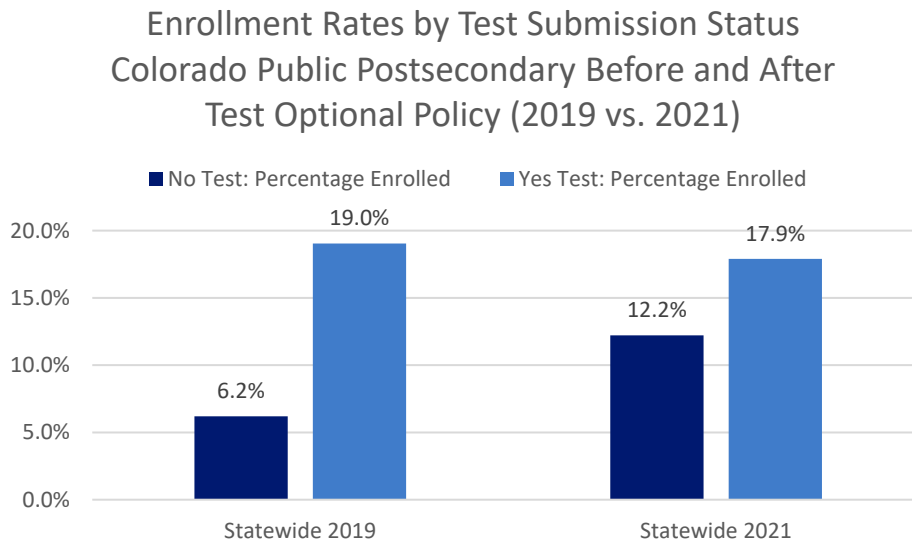
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Enrollment rates did increase for no-test submitters due to the increase in no-test applicants. However, despite gains in earlier stages of the admissions process, total enrollment declined overall, reflecting a drop in yield (admitted students who choose to enroll at a particular institution). This is consistent with national trends during this same period.

- **Enrollment patterns shifted despite increased admissions:** Total enrollment declined from 23,442 in 2019 to 21,866 in 2021 (-6.7%), and enrollment rates decreased from 23.2% to 17.5%, as gains in non-test enrollment rates (6.2% to 12.2%) were offset by declines among test

submitters (19.0% to 17.9%), resulting in lower overall yield despite growth in admitted students.

**Figure 4:** Enrollment Rates by Test Submission Status Colorado Public Postsecondary Before and After Test Optional Policy (2019 vs. 2021)



Source: CDHE Student Unit Record Data System, Undergraduate Applicant Files for public postsecondary institutions, 2019 and 2021

### Overall Enrollment Trends

Total enrollment declined from 23,442 to 21,866 (–6.7%). This trend mirrors national changes in enrollment during this period.<sup>8</sup> Non-test enrollment increased (1,022.3%), while test-based enrollment declined (–56.0%). The share of enrollees submitting test scores dropped from 95.4% to 45.0% (–50.4 percentage points). These trends in test vs. non-test enrollment are expected because all Colorado public four-year postsecondary institutions adopted test-optional policies during this timeframe.

### Enrollment Yield Patterns

Enrollment rates increased for non-test students (6.2% to 12.2%) but declined slightly for test-

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<sup>8</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021, October). Current term enrollment estimates: Fall 2021 (CTEE Report). [https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE\\_Report\\_Fall\\_2021.pdf](https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2021.pdf)

submitters (19.0% to 17.9%). Non-test yield improved but remained below that of test-submitters; small declines among test-submitters contributed to overall losses which appears to be consistent with national trends according to National Student Clearinghouse Data.

**Finding:** Enrollment declined overall, despite a large increase in non-test enrollment. Enrollment declines were likely impacted by external factors beyond test-optional policies during this period.

### **Enrollment by Demographic Group**

Enrollment patterns by race and ethnicity varied between 2019 and 2021. Among non-test students, enrollment rates increased across most groups, including American Indian or Alaska Native (2.3% to 19.6%), Asian (1.6% to 10.4%), Black or African American (1.9% to 11.4%), Hispanic or Latinx (4.1% to 12.4%), unknown race/ethnicity (3.7% to 8.6%), two or more races (3.8% to 12.0%), and white (8.8% to 12.7%). Consistent with national trends, other groups saw flat or declining enrollment in the fall of 2021.<sup>9</sup> Among test submitters, enrollment rates were more stable, increasing for American Indian or Alaska Native (20.8% to 34.0%), Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (13.8% to 13.0%), Hispanic or Latinx (18.2% to 18.9%), and unknown race/ethnicity (9.9% to 11.3%), while declining slightly for Asian (15.9% to 13.2%), Black or African American (17.0% to 15.8%), two or more races (19.9% to 18.0%), and White students (20.3% to 18.1%).

**Finding:** Enrollment gains (total count of enrollment) did not follow admissions growth but enrollment rates for non-test submitters experienced growth.

### **Gender and Residency**

Enrollment rates by gender shifted between 2019 and 2021, with increases among non-test students and slight declines among test submitters. Among female students, non-test enrollment increased

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<sup>9</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021, October). Current term enrollment estimates: Fall 2021. [https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE\\_Report\\_Fall\\_2021.pdf](https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2021.pdf)

from 4.9% to 11.3%, while test enrollment declined from 18.6% to 17.2%. Among male students, non-test enrollment increased from 7.8% to 13.5%, while test enrollment declined from 19.6% to 18.5%. Overall (combined), enrollment rates declined for both groups, from 21.6% to 15.6% for female students and from 25.1% to 20.1% for male students. Rates remained higher for resident students than non-residents (13.6% vs. 11.4% in 2019; 17.5% vs. 11.2% in 2021).

### Pell and First-Generation Students

Enrollment rates for Pell and First-Generation students showed similar shifts to those observed by gender, with increases among non-test students and more limited changes among test submitters. Among Pell-eligible students, non-test enrollment increased from 33.2% to 59.3%, while test enrollment increased from 60.7% to 62.1%. Overall (combined), enrollment increased from 61.6% to 61.0%. Among First-Generation students, non-test enrollment increased from 38.4% to 62.6%, while test enrollment remained similar (66.4% to 66.0%). Overall (combined), enrollment declined from 64.7% to 65.4%.

### From Admissions to Enrollment

Gains in admissions did not translate into enrollment. Admissions rates increased from 75.1% to 81.2% (6.1 percentage points) and 101,208 to 124,617 admits (+23.1%), while enrollment declined from 23.2% to 17.5% (–5.7 percentage points) and 23,442 to 21,866 students (–6.7%). It is not clear what challenges are present in converting access into enrollment as several variables exist independent of the test optional policy.

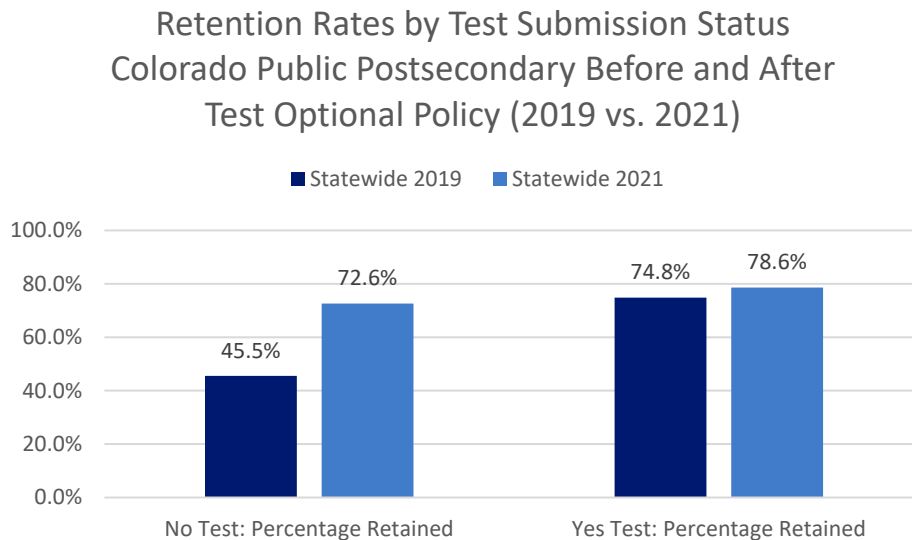
## Retention & Early Student Success Indicators

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Retention outcomes largely mirror enrollment trends, with modest declines in total counts but improvements in rates. The improvements in non-test submitters appeared more dramatic due to the larger volume of non-test applications submitted and admitted.

- **Retention remained stable as enrollment declined:** Overall retention rates increased slightly from 73.5% in 2019 to 75.3% in 2021, while the number of retained students declined from 17,231 to 16,472 (–4.4%), reflecting stable persistence among a smaller enrolled population.

**Figure 5:** Retention Rates by Test Submission Status Colorado Public Postsecondary Before and After Test Optional Policy (2019 vs. 2021)



Source: CDHE Student Unit Record Data System, Undergraduate Applicant Files for public postsecondary institutions, 2019 and 2021

### Overall Retention Trends

The share of retained students that submitted test scores fell from 97.2% to 47.0% (due to large amount of no-test submitters). Total retained students declined from 17,231 to 16,472 (–4.4%). Non-test retention increased substantially (1,690.6%), while test-based retention declined (–53.8%). Again, this is due (in part) to a larger volume of non-test applications submitted and admitted. National retention rates during this same period were around 67.2%, a rate 0.5 percentage points above the pre-pandemic average.<sup>10</sup> This data is not organized by test-submitters and non-test submitters.

### Retention Rates

Retention rates improved for both groups, with larger gains among non-test students (45.5% to 72.6%; 27.1 percentage points) compared to test-submitters (74.8% to 78.6%; 3.8 percentage points).

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<sup>10</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2023, October). Nearly 76% of fall 2021 freshman class returned to college by fall 2022. <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/news/nearly-76-of-fall-2021-freshman-class-returned-to-college-by-fall-2022/>.

Statewide retention increased from 73.5% in 2019 to 75.3% in 2021. Non-test students experienced improvements, narrowing gaps and overall retention rates.

### **Retention by Demographic Group**

Retention patterns by race and ethnicity varied between 2019 and 2021. Non-test retention increased across all groups with available data, including American Indian or Alaska Native (30.0% to 53.3%), Asian (45.5% to 80.4%), Black or African American (13.8% to 61.3%), Hispanic or Latinx (32.1% to 65.4%), unknown race/ethnicity (33.3% to 63.6%), two or more races (37.1% to 72.7%), and white (38.5% to 77.2%). Among test submitters, retention increased for Asian (83.3% to 85.6%), Hispanic or Latinx (67.8% to 71.7%), two or more races (73.4% to 75.1%), and white students (77.6% to 81.4%), remained similar for Black or African American students (64.9% to 63.5%), and declined for American Indian or Alaska Native (65.1% to 55.3%), Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (73.0% to 50.0%), and unknown race/ethnicity (79.3% to 69.4%).

**Finding:** Across race and ethnicity groups, retention gains from 2019 to 2021 were driven primarily by increases among non-test students, while retention among test submitters remained high with modest changes and some group-level variation.

### **Gender and Residency**

Retention increased across both groups of females, rising from 46.3% to 74.1% among non-test students and from 76.3% to 79.4% among test submitters, reflecting overall gains. Retention increased for both groups of males as well, from 45.2% to 70.9% among non-test students and from 73.2% to 78.0% among test submitters, with larger gains among non-test students. Retention rates were similar across residency groups but higher for non-residents in both years, increasing from 76.5% vs. 74.1% in 2019 to 79.3% vs. 78.3% in 2021 (non-resident vs. resident).

### **Pell and First-Generation Students**

For Pell eligible students, retention improved for both groups, increasing from 60.7% to 62.1% among test submitters and from 33.2% to 59.3% among non-test students, driven again by non-test students.

For first generation students, retention was stable among test submitters (66.4% to 66.0%) and increased among non-test students (38.4% to 62.6%), resulting in overall improvement driven by non-test gains.

### **From Enrollment to Retention**

Retention (defined as from those enrolled, the number of students that are enrolled the following fall at the same IHE) increased slightly from 73.5% to 75.3% (1.8 percentage points), while the number of retained students declined from 17,231 to 16,472 (–4.4%).

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## **Conclusion**

The statewide test-optional admissions policy made it easier for more students to apply to college and helped create a larger group of applicants and admitted students. Importantly, early signs of student success—such as staying enrolled from year to year—did not decline as a result. In other words, not requiring a national test score (NATS) for admission does not appear to harm student outcomes.

However, this policy shift occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had major effects on student application, enrollment, and retention patterns, and the data presented in this report should be interpreted with caution.

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## **Limitations**

This report is subject to limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. These limitations are detailed below for the purposes of transparency and data report interpretation.

Although statute asks whether outcomes are “directly attributable” to the test-optional admissions policy, this report cannot establish direct attribution. The analysis is descriptive and does not control for confounding variables such as changes in tuition rates and financial aid, economic shifts, a global pandemic, or institutional policy changes unrelated to test submission requirements. This analysis does not include four-year or six-year graduation rate data. Graduation outcomes for the Fall 2021 cohort

are not yet observable at the time of reporting. Also, First-Generation and Pell Grant eligibility is only collected at the point of enrollment, not application.

# Appendix

## A. Individual Institution Data Tables

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The appendix to this report provides institution-level detail to support transparency and is available on the Department website (see “Test Optional Report Suppressed Data File”). For each Colorado public four-year institution, the appendix includes:

- Application, admission, enrollment, and retention metrics
- Results disaggregated by test submission status
- Selected demographic breakdowns where data are available and unsuppressed

Additional links and URLs available at: [College Admission Use of National Test Scores | Colorado Department of Higher Education Home](#).