



MAGNIFIED  
STATS

SPRING 2022 VS.  
SPRING 2021

↓ **6.7%**

Decline in NJ  
postsecondary  
enrollment

↓ **13.5%**

Decline in  
enrollment in NJ  
public two-year  
institutions

↑ **4.2%**

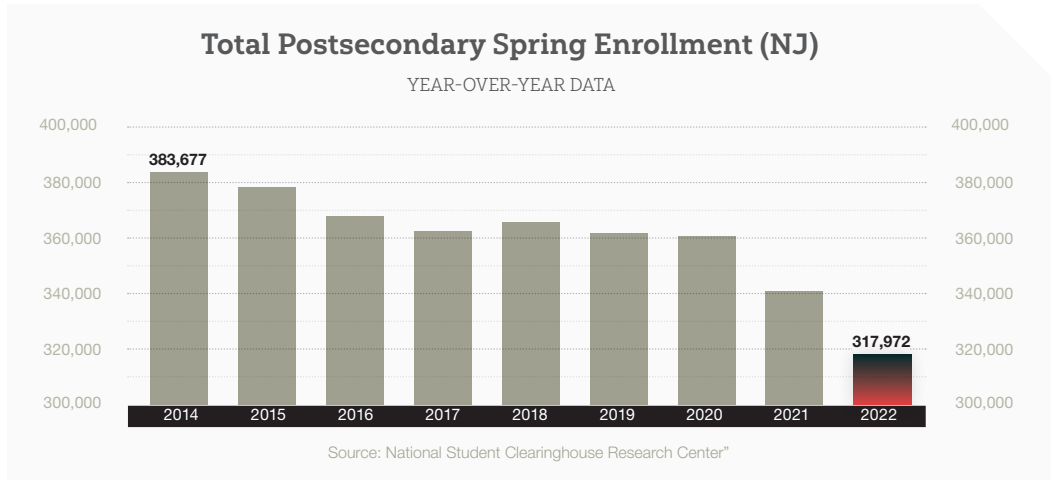
Increase in NJ  
first-year student  
enrollment



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# College Enrollment Decline Continues Post-COVID

**DECLINES IN HIGHER** education enrollment continued to accelerate through the most recent term, according to new estimates released by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCR) this summer.

Prior to the pandemic, total postsecondary enrollment in New Jersey had already fallen in four out of five years from 2014 to 2019, though year-over-year declines had exceeded 3% only once (2018-2019). Now two years after the onset of COVID-19, enrollment has fallen by nearly 42,500 students (11.8%) since the Spring 2020 term, suffering annual losses of 5.5% and 6.7% in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

While public four-year institutions suffered enrollment declines this year exceeding 4%, New Jersey’s community colleges continue to be hit even harder. Enrollment in

public two-year institutions declined 13.5% over the past year – more than any other state. Enrollment in the Garden State’s public two-year schools has fallen approximately 25% in the past two years alone.

Declining postsecondary enrollment is not unique to New Jersey, however, and students across the country appear to be rethinking the value of their education while faced with various forms of economic uncertainty as well as rising wages and open jobs.

According to Gallup’s 2022 State of Higher Education Report, 59% of adults who had been enrolled in degree or credential programs prior to the onset of the pandemic reported that the cost of the program was a “very important” reason why they were no longer enrolled. Other “very important” reasons included family responsibilities (36%), and work conflicts (24%), among others.

Even more recently, the Federal Reserve’s 2022 Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households report found that one in five respondents believed the costs of their higher education outweighed the benefits. Additionally, although the financial position of student loan borrowers has improved over the pandemic thanks to the ongoing repayment freeze, only 40% of borrowers with outstanding debt said the benefits exceeded the cost of their education.

One potential cause for optimism amidst so much sour news is that first-year student enrollment increased 4.2% this year after suffering a 3.5% decline from 2020 to 2021. If the pandemic has in fact pushed a segment of the potential students to reconsider the value of continuing their education, the most recent class of high school graduates may be making a different calculation. ●

– Kyle Sullender  
Executive Director, Focus NJ