

## **Session 2.** Lessons Learned from COVID-19 for Enrollment Leaders

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GATES *foundation*

**CERPP CONFERENCE 2023**

**Standing on Shaky Ground: Leading  
Enrollment Management in 2023**

**February 5 - 7**

**Los Angeles, CA**

# Qualitative Methodology

## Focus Group Interviews

Spring 2021  
68 institutions  
17 Pub HS  
10 Pub LS  
13 Priv HS  
17 Priv LS  
11 CC



## Individual Interviews

1 Fall 2021  
1 Spring 2022  
38 institutions  
8 Pub HS  
8 Pub LS  
8 Priv HS  
7 Priv LS  
7 CC



## Concluding Survey

Summer 2022  
32 institutions  
8 Pub HS  
7 Pub LS  
7 Priv HS  
7 Priv LS  
3 CC

HS – Highly Selective based on Barron’s 1 & 2  
LS – Less Selective based on Barron’s 3+  
CC – Community College

## University of Michigan: Stephen Desjardins and Reuben Kapp

Data: National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP)

- First-time, degree seeking students enrolled at PDP institution in Fall 2020-21
  - 314,644 students
  - 263 institutions (two-year and four-year)
- Tracked for one full year (data from 2021-22)
- Student demographics include:
  - “College ready” in math and English
  - GPA (first term/year)
  - Course-level data
  - Degree and/or credential sought
- Limitation: Not nationally representative institutions

# Key Themes

- Enrollment Trends
- Financial Aid Strategies
- Test-Optional & Test-Free Policies
- Recruitment Strategies
- Retention & Graduation
- Lessons Learned

A person wearing a blue and white striped sweater and dark jeans stands in a library, holding a very tall stack of books. The stack is so high it reaches above their head and obscures their face. The background consists of dark wooden bookshelves filled with numerous books of various colors. The lighting is warm and focused on the person and their stack of books.

# Enrollment Trends

# Less Selective Public Four-Year

**“I think that we  
don't operate  
inside a vacuum.**

**We are often at  
the mercy of what  
other schools  
around us do...”**

- Losses to flagships and upticks in graduate students.
- Targeted outreach:
  - New markets of transfers and non-residents.
  - Enrolled students needing support.

# Highly Selective Public Four-Year

**“We've had our highest enrollments of Black students, of Latinx, of Pell, and our highest enrollments of first-gen students.”**

- Achieved or surpassed enrollment targets.
- More applicants and resources to increase diversity, Pell, and first-gen students.

# Less Selective Private Four-Year

**“If I look at where we lose our students-- in our top ten, probably eight of those are public schools.”**

- Enrollment losses to more affordable public schools, “trickle up” in the market, increases in gap years, and loss of ED students.
- Expanded top of funnel and increased admit rate to improve yield.



# Highly Selective Private Four-Year

**“We took more [incoming freshmen because]...we didn't know with continuing students, who would take a leave of absence, who would come back, and so it was a revenue protection model.”**

- Achieved or surpassed enrollment targets.
- More applicants and additional resources to increase diversity, Pell, and first-gen students; but only some did so.

**“[Students]  
were getting  
pretty good-  
paying jobs  
and thinking  
maybe...  
I don't need to  
go to school.”**

Dramatic enrollment declines attributed to jobs, family support, the economy, uncertainty, and the “Amazon effect” – well-paying jobs not requiring credentials.



# Financial Aid Strategies

## Moving merit to need

**“Over the last few years, we have been providing more grant or scholarship aid to support [low income] students and we continue to shift that gradually. I am a little concerned that I'm reaching a breakpoint where I'm taking too much merit away from the people who don't need it, but aren't going to come if they don't get it.”**

- Private Less Selective

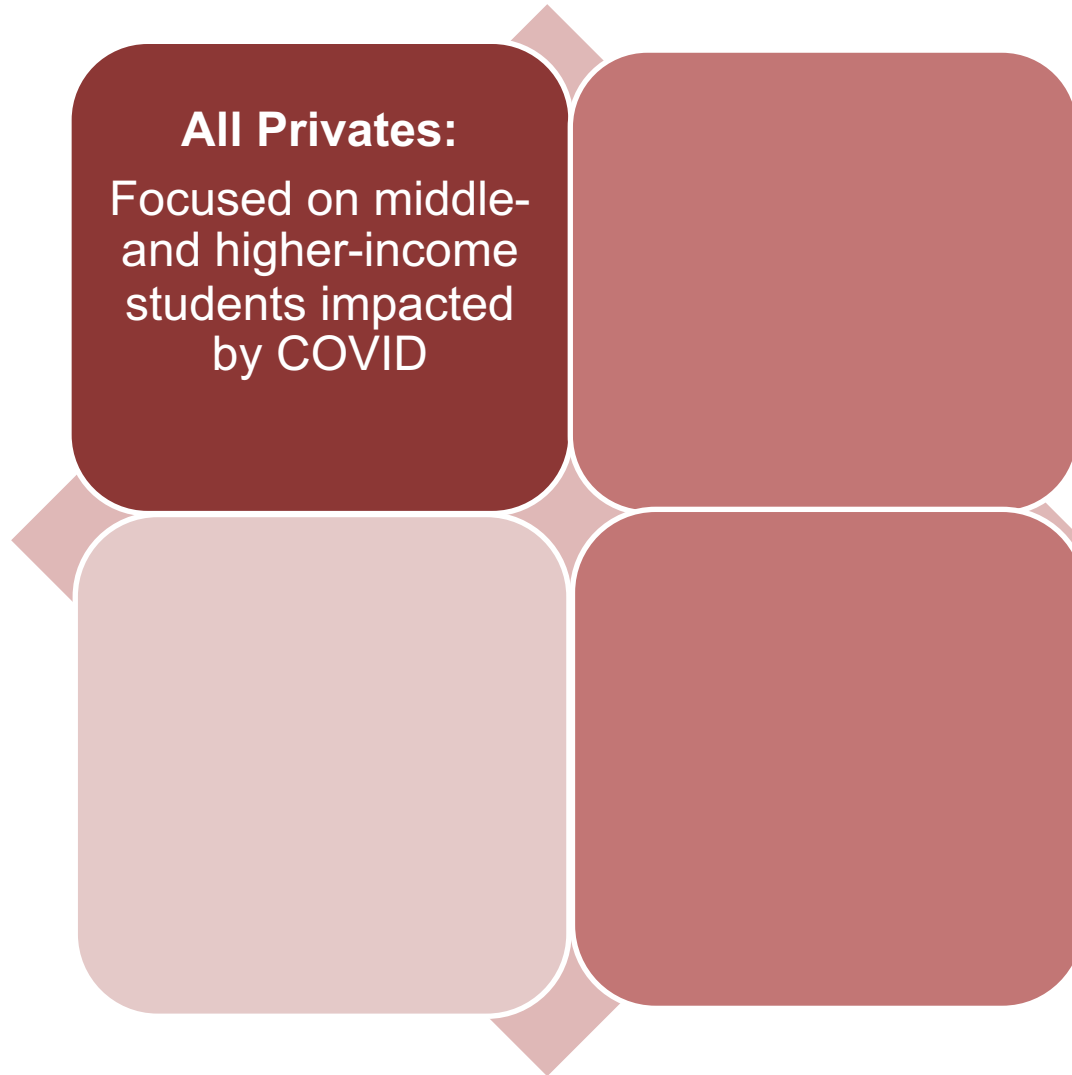
**“[Merit dollars are] going to support more students with need because we're providing merit to students who've never received it in the past, who have the high school academic performance that's equally high, but no tests.”**

- Public Highly Selective

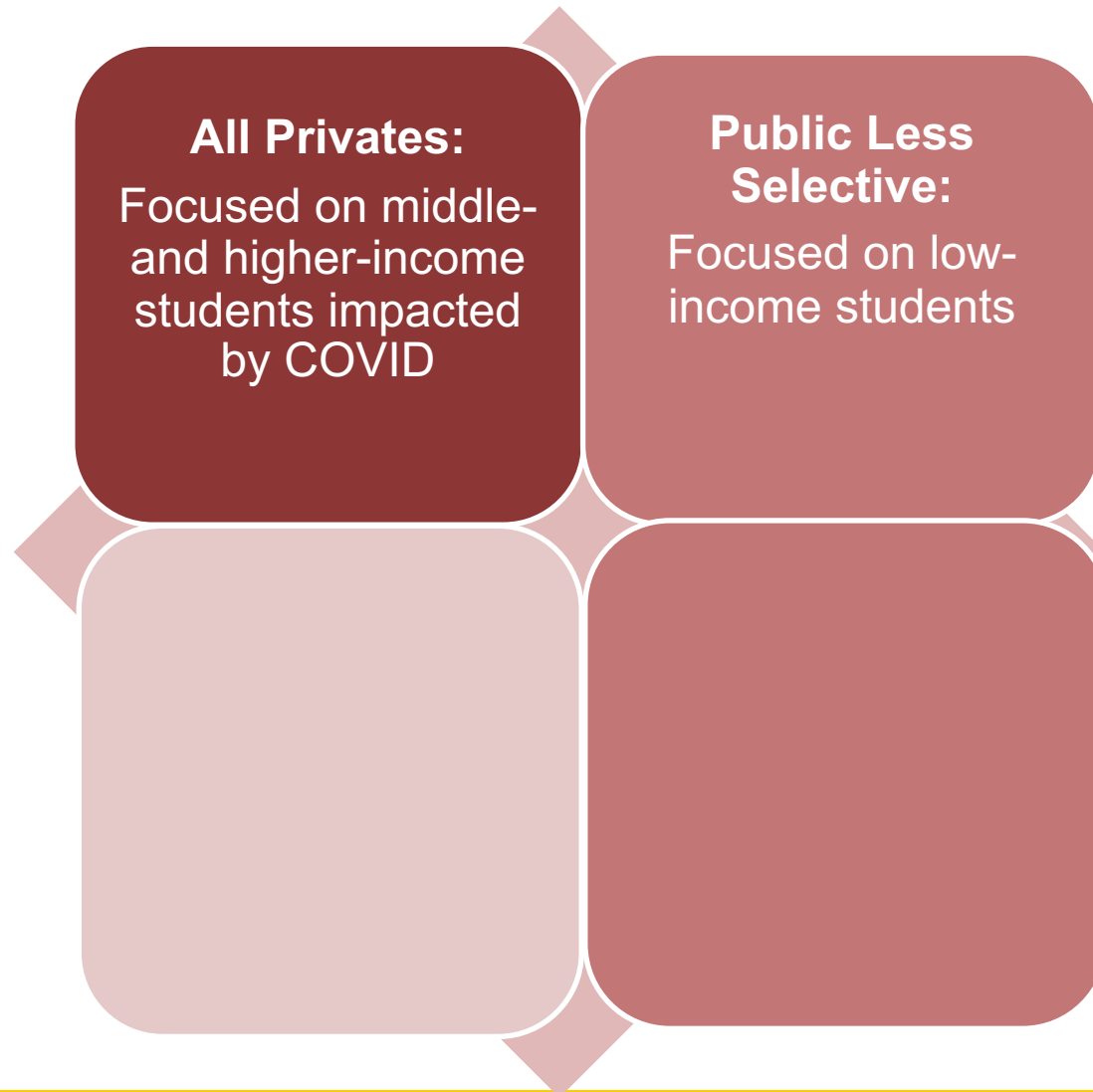
# Targeted aid was more deliberate during the pandemic

## All Privates:

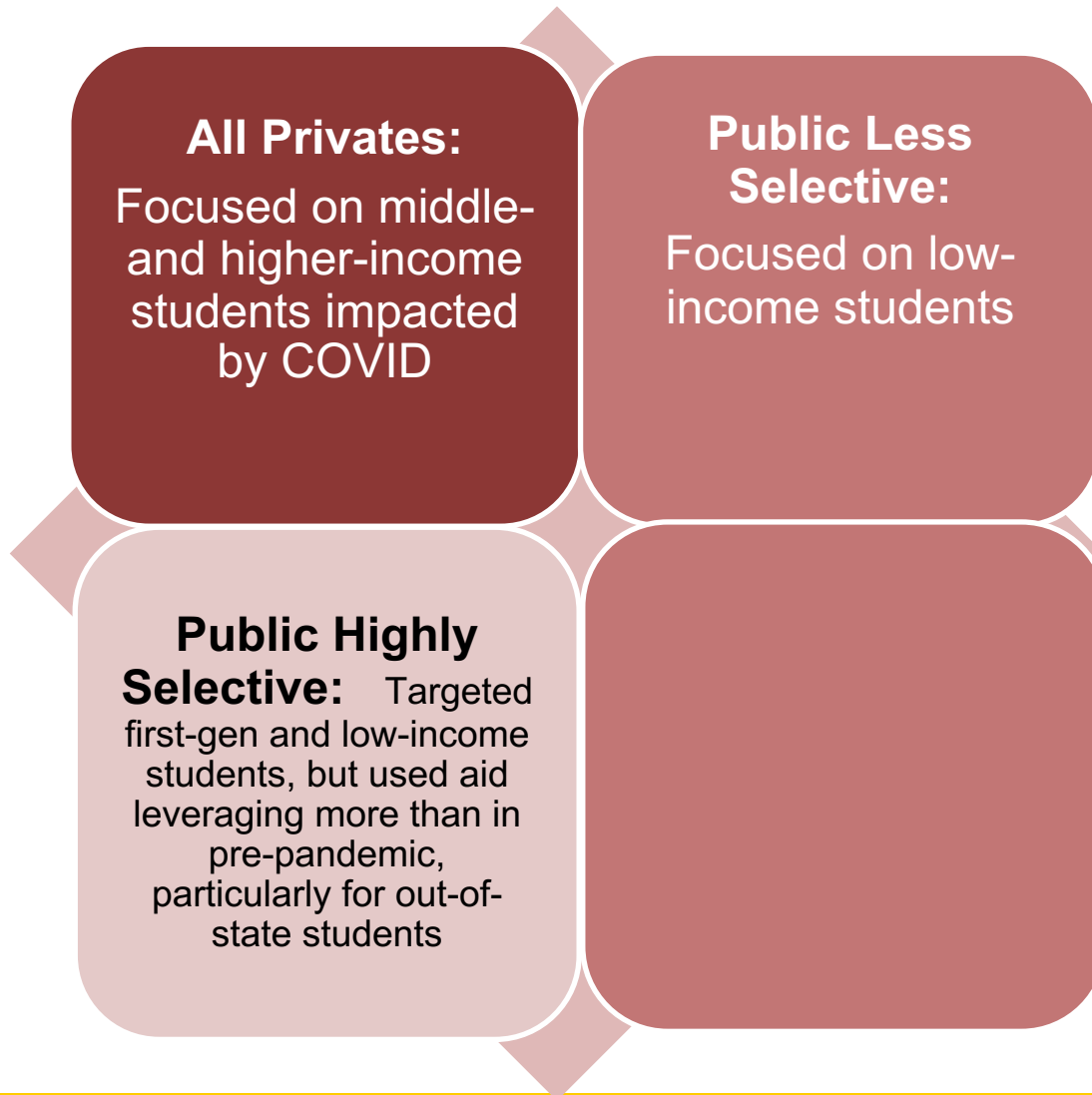
Focused on middle- and higher-income students impacted by COVID



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## All Privates:

Focused on middle- and higher-income students impacted by COVID

## Public Less Selective:

Focused on low-income students

**Public Highly Selective:** Targeted first-gen and low-income students, but used aid leveraging more than in pre-pandemic, particularly for out-of-state students

## Private Less Selective:

*I'm worried about NTR and discount rates...it seems to be no matter how we set our awards and what percentage of need we set out to meet, increasingly it's never enough.*



# Stimulus money was critical – but need to plan beyond

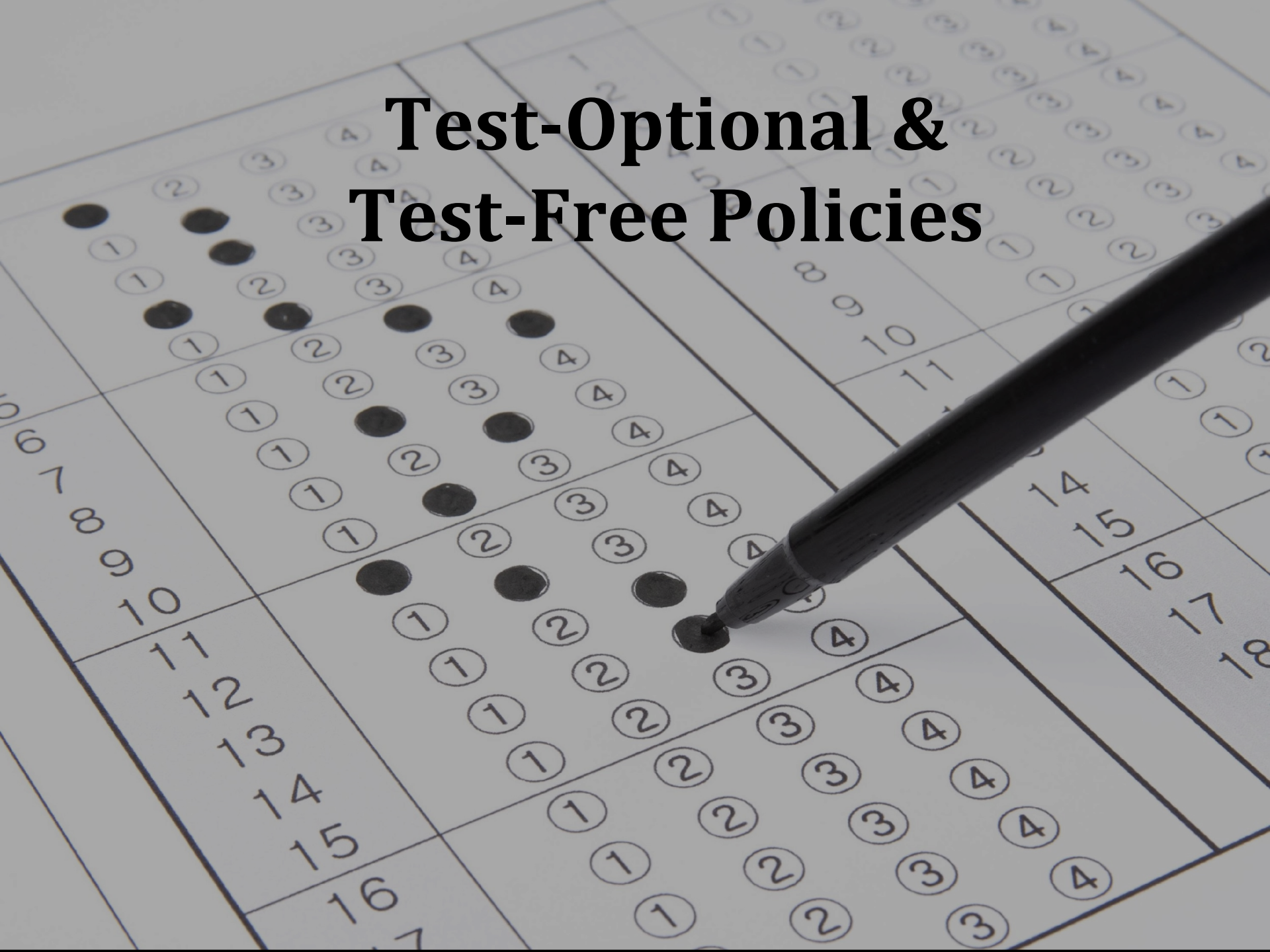
**“75% of [students] asked for the HEERF money in a check and not applied to their balance. I think they needed it more immediately for their lives, even though it might have been an impediment to them continuing their enrollment...”**

- Private Less Selective

**We're building an expectation for students to having this kind of money and resources, and it's going to dry up. I think the question to ask, can we defer some institutional money at some point for years two and three if we have to use all the HEERF 3 money now.**

- Public Highly Selective

# Test-Optional & Test-Free Policies



# Test-optional policy came quickly...

**“Very quickly [the leadership] jumped on board and said, “This can't be a barrier anymore.”**

– Private Less Selective

**“We knew it was coming with UC's, knowing that was likely going to be eliminated from their requirement. The market was going to force us to really start to be able to either really justify it and understand the casualties we would get if we were still requiring it.”**

- Private Highly Selective

# Test-optional changed recruitment

**“We did a specific campaign for students who had a GPA above 3.7 and sent repeated messages about being test-optional.”**

– Private Less Selective

**“We were able to buy certain names because we were test-optional...1300 SAT student names we would've never bought in the past or 1200 SAT's for that matter. Now we bought names that are not usually in our average test score ranks.”**

– Private Highly Selective

# Diversity & equity under test-optional

**“We saw a nice bump, certainly numerically and percentage-wise in our underrepresented...[student] population. I think part of that was, we like many other schools went test-optional for this entering class.”**

– Public Less Selective

**“Test optional increased the number of students of color. We have a record percentage of students of color this year. We got the second-highest number of Black students, we saw a big spike in Latino students as well.”**

– Private Highly Selective

# We should not expect a wave of test-free policies

**Last year [in 2020-21], we were more like test-free. We didn't even look at test scores, but this year we're more test-optional.**

– Public Highly Selective

**I'm not convinced I want to be test-blind. I want students to have the choice... some students want to show us the test score, and it could be helpful for some kids.**

– Private Highly Selective

**We're looking at the infrastructure and the wraparound services to be able to meet students where they are if we opt to go test-blind. Those are the things that we're considering, beyond just saying, "Let's just go test-blind."**

– Private Less Selective

## ..but expect a lot of research

**“As a research university, we think it's important to do a lot of research to reach our conclusions, and then look at the effects of that and try to figure out the pros and cons...”**

– Public Less Selective

**“We're going to do a pretty comprehensive study on this.”**

– Public Highly Selective

**“We are actively considering right now whether we will continue to be test-optional for 2023. I am recommending that we continue the practice. We don't really have outcome data yet after two years. *You really need specific eight years of practice to actually know retention and graduation rates in any meaningful way.*”**

– Private Highly Selective



# Recruitment Strategies



# Institutions tried new approaches

**“We have provided far more opportunities for students, not only to have on-demand content, but also live content and opportunities to connect with faculty, with key staff members and partners across campus, and most importantly students. That has been a significant change in how we operate...”**

– Private Less Selective

**“I think there are a bunch of places that found out they can be really, really successful with very different ways of recruiting...There's a phrase, ‘Don't let a good crisis go to waste.’”**

– Public Highly Selective

## Virtual tools helped both broaden and target outreach

**"The virtual recruitment is here to stay. Colleges are going to be looking at the equity aspect of virtual recruitment—you can reach a much broader swath of people, you can level the playing field a bit with virtual recruitment.**

– Private Highly Selective

**"The other thing that really helped with Zoom is we could reach, we did, we're able to target more specific audiences."**

– Public Less Selective

## Hybrid is here to stay...

**“The comment I made to my director of admissions was shame on us, like why weren't we doing this before we had to?”**

– Private Less Selective

**“We continued [virtual] through and we think that that probably has a lifespan well into the future.”**

– Private Highly Selective

...but it comes with a cost

**“We know this virtual world works, we have a bigger and wider reach, which is great.**

**It also means juggling more, and it doesn't mean that we're going to get more staff.**

**It just means you're going to be on the road, and at nighttime, you're going to be in a hotel doing virtual events.”**

-Public Highly Selective

# Retention and Graduation



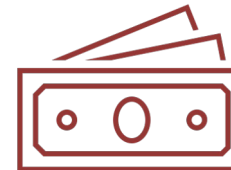
# Initial impact of pandemic on retention/graduation

## Across all sectors

Increase in retention with some institutions reporting historic highs



HEERF money was critical especially for Community Colleges and Less Selective four-year institutions



# Divergent retention trends emerged across sectors

**By 2021-22**

**Issues with retention**



Community Colleges  
Less Selective Public & Private

**Fewer issues with retention**

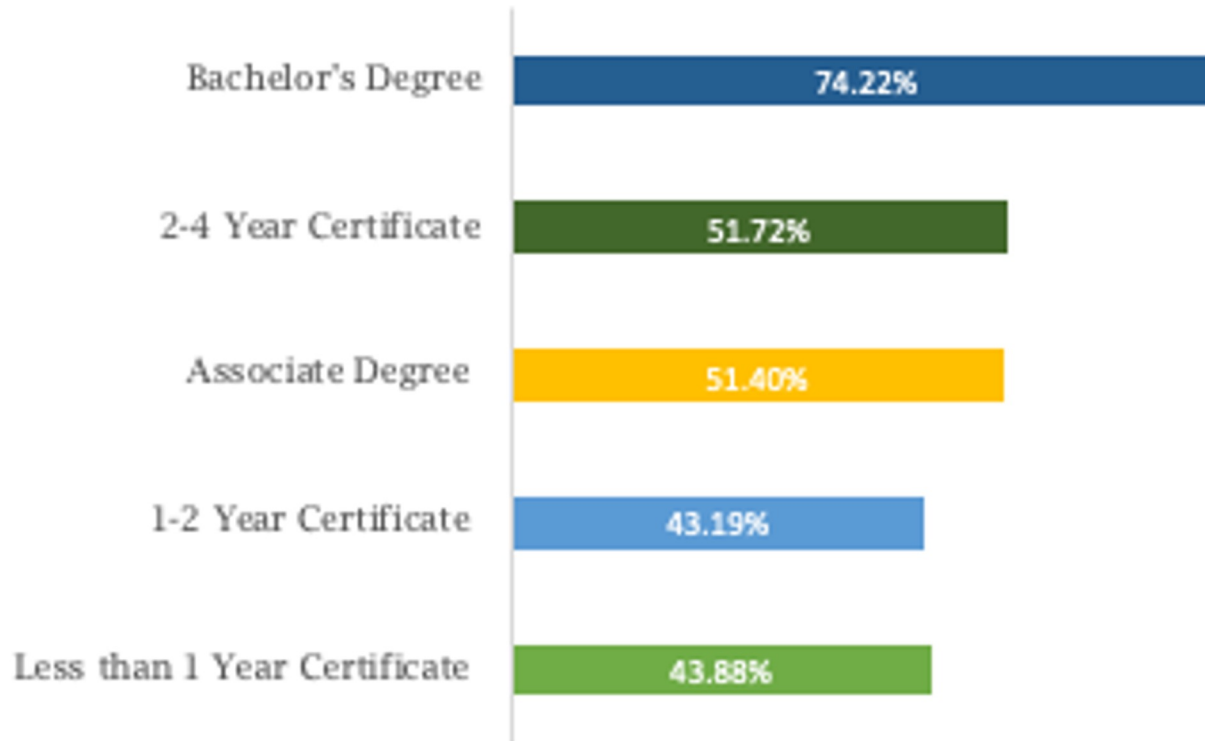


Highly Selective Public  
Highly Selective Private

# Retention by degree type PDP data

Among first-time, degree-seeking students in PDP's fall 2020-21 cohort, retention rates differed by degree type:

- 74% for students enrolled in **bachelor's** degree programs
- 51% for students pursuing an **associate** degree

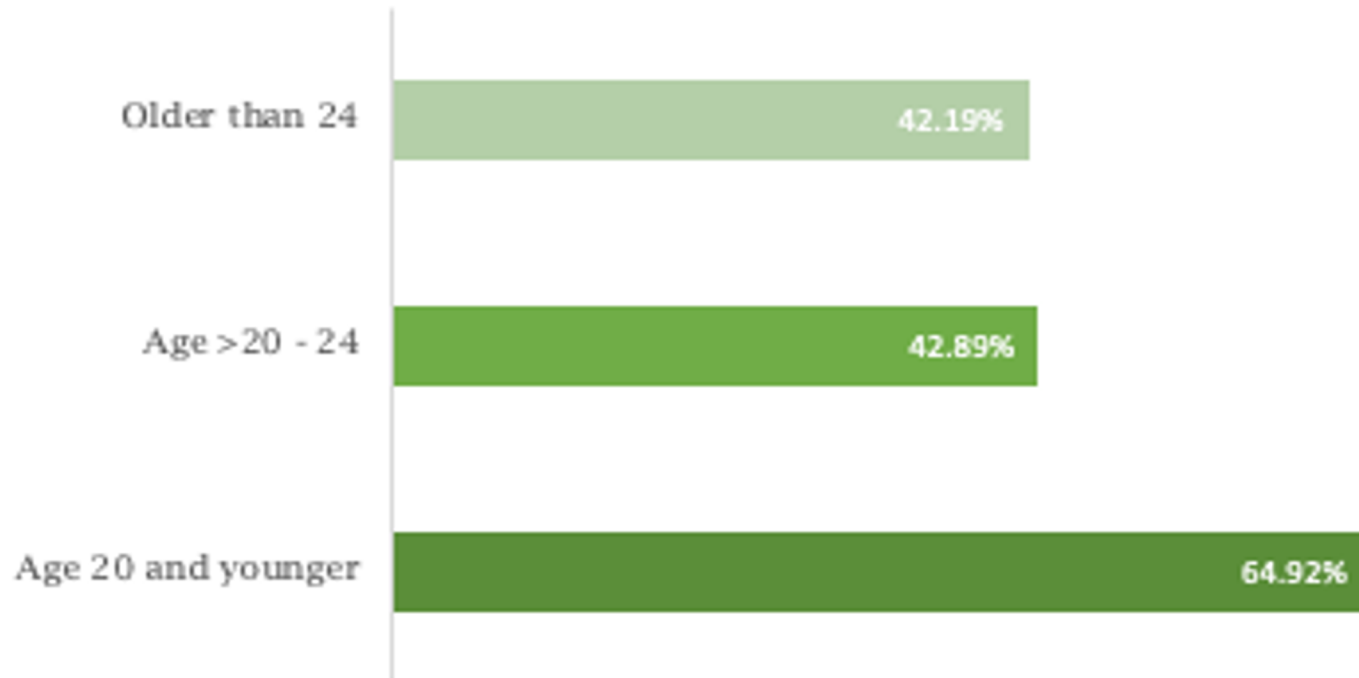




# Retention by age PDP data

Among first-time, degree-seeking students in PDP's fall 2020-21 cohort, some variation in retention among age groups:

- Youngest group of students (age 20 and younger) were retained at a rate of 65%
- Students older than 24 were the lowest among the three groups at 42%
- Students in the middle group (over 20 and up to 24 years old) were retained at 43%

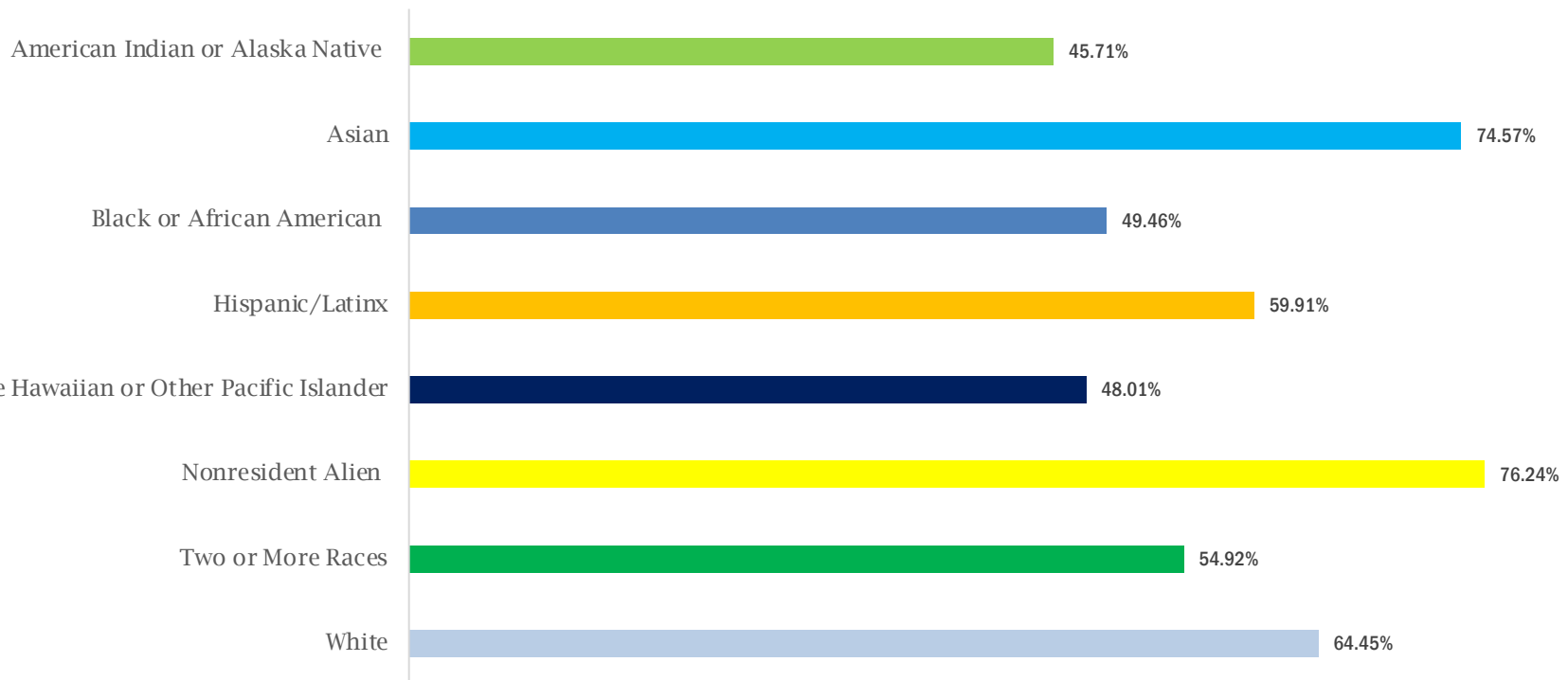


# Retention by race/ethnicity

## PDP data

Retention ranged across racial/ethnic groups for students in PDP's first-time, degree-seeking students fall 2020-21 cohort:

- Highest among nonresident students (76%) and Asian students (75%)
- American Indian/Alaska Native (46%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (48%), Black/African American (49%), Two or More Races (55%) had the lowest



# Academic preparation and socialization were concerns

**“...You're starting to see differences in just the rigor that the students have been through.”**

- Community College

**“That kind of opened that conversation—what kind of [interventions and services] should we be creating for the students so that they can be successful?”**

- Public Less Selective

**“[They were] robbed of many other things too that come with that—social development, their learning, the level of curriculum that is typical in a senior year.”**

- Private Highly Selective

## Proactive outreach was key

**“We adopted a new approach with persistence. We...repurposed to make scripted calls to students, and it had a dramatic impact. Just more aggressive effort on retention than had been in the past, but also something we will keep intact from this point forward...Retention has been our savior.”**

- Community College

**“For returning students, if they missed their registration appointment, we immediately called them to try to figure out why they missed the registration appointment—if they had a financial hold, or if they had a block, or if they were struggling with something. We tried to connect them to the right place on campus to get them registered.”**

- Public Highly Selective

# Integration across campus units was common

**“...It's no longer, ‘Bring me a new student to replace the new student I lost’; it’s, ‘How can we keep the current student we have on campus as well as replicate what we brought last year?’ ...It's a collaborative approach.”**

- Public Less Selective

**“We revamped our services completely, we've gone away from individual offices. There's no more Financial Aid, or Student Accounting, or cashiers, or registers. You just see one person now, empowered to make decisions in Financial Aid, and Records, and Registrations, and Student Accounting. “**

- Public Less Selective

**“We've developed a new position in financial aid that is a shared position between recruitment and retention....at least half their time, if not more, will be retention-focused.”**

- Private Less Selective

# Increasing need-based financial aid to retain students

**“Part of my moving more merit to need is very much a retention strategy—because those are the people who can't persist, the people who have too large of a need gap.”**

- Private Less Selective

**“HEERF money let us leverage emergency aid like we never had before. If a student had some barrier to getting to class or some financial challenge preventing them from continuing, we could typically address those acute things, and at least get the student through the eight-week term.”**

- Community College

A high-angle photograph of a classroom. The floor is made of light-colored wood planks. Several black plastic chairs with attached wooden desks are arranged in a grid pattern. The text "Lessons Learned" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

Lessons Learned

# Lessons Learned – Importance of Enrollment Management (EM)

**“We have got to have a different conversation other than one class at a time—how much money you can make—the discount rate—the bean counting business—to what is the paradigm we want to be?**

**How do we want to engage students?”**

**Crisis highlighted the centrality of EM to institutional health.**



# Lessons Learned – Integrating Equity

**“A good lesson for future enrollment managers is not to wait for the external pressure, to continually reinvent yourself.**

**To really focus on: how do I reach those low-socioeconomic kids and make it more of a level playing field?”**

**Equity must be built into the strategy rather than viewed as a by-product.**

# Lessons Learned – Staff Matter!

**“It will be important for enrollment managers to think about how they train their teams to become more nimble, more agile, become people broadly respected across the academy, across their organization.”**

**You need your staff!  
Be flexible in how you prepare,  
engage, and keep them.**

## Contact Us

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