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## **Higher Education Enrollment is Down but the Numbers are Encouraging**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

We knew the COVID-19 pandemic would affect enrollment at Idaho's public higher education institutions this fall. But now that the numbers are in, we at the State Board of Education are feeling rather optimistic.

When the public health crisis began last spring, early projections suggested college enrollment in Idaho and nationwide would plunge 20 to 40 percent. Such a precipitous drop would have been devastating for students and institutions.

Our institutions knew what was at stake and immediately began developing protocols and plans to safely bring students back to campus and resume in-person instruction. Students pay for and want personal interaction with their instructors. Our institutions worked collaboratively and tirelessly to make that happen wherever possible, and students responded.

System-wide, enrollment at all eight public institutions is down just 5 percent. Here are the numbers:

	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>
Enrollment Overall	78,918	74,779

Resident student enrollment is down 7 percent but nonresident enrollment actually grew by 2 percent, which indicates that more students came to Idaho and many told us it was specifically because they wanted in-person instruction.

	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>
Resident Students	64,913	60,535
Nonresident Students	14,005	14,244

The number of freshmen students enrolled seems to mirror this. Resident students seeking academic degrees are down 6 percent. Non-resident academic freshmen are up 2 percent. The difference is more profound for freshmen enrolled in career-technical programs (CTE). Resident CTE freshmen are down 12 percent. The number of nonresident CTE freshmen, while small, increased 5 percent.

	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>
Resident Academic Freshmen	9,837	9,228
Nonresident Academic Freshmen	2,519	2,576
Resident CTE Freshmen	1,548	1,357
Nonresident CTE Freshmen	112	118

There are likely multiple factors at play, but decreases in CTE enrollment may be due to many courses including necessary hands-on training, which makes appropriate physical distancing difficult. It's possible that at least some of the drop in resident freshmen numbers can be attributed to dual credits earned while in high school. We know some of these students enter college as sophomores or even juniors because they took several dual credit courses during high school. A definitive answer, requires more research.

“We will have a better understanding of what types of students were most affected by COVID in terms of their decision to go to college after high school once we receive and analyze fall 2020 go-on data,” State Board Chief Research Officer Dr. Cathleen McHugh said. “We should have this data in the next month.”

We do know that fewer high school students are taking dual credit courses this fall and it is causing the biggest drop in higher education enrollment – a 16 percent decrease overall.

	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>
Dual Credit Students	20,464	17,134

The K-12 school year has been difficult for everybody and the drop in dual credit enrollment can likely be attributed to that, but none the less, the State Board, and our institutions find it is very concerning.

It is likely COVID will continue to affect enrollment next year and Board staff is beefing up outreach to further help high school seniors apply for college.

“We are providing counselors with student level information that alerts them to students who have stopped out in the process,” said Sara Scudder, the Board’s career information senior program manager. “Among the many resources we have provided counselors are email templates to send to students and parents, informational and tutorial videos and expanded the Next Steps College Directory tools. In addition, we are using social media channels to ensure students and parents have the latest application, scholarship and financial aid deadlines.”

I want to commend our college and university presidents, their faculties and staffs for all they have done since last March to transform their campuses and their methods of instruction. Students responded and enrolled in numbers that frankly we could not imagine during the early days of the health crisis. Yes, we’ve seen a few spikes in campus COVID cases since the semester began, but fortunately they have been relatively short-lived because of how they have been managed. Our students are getting on with their lives and their education. The fall enrollment numbers bear that out.

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