



The Impact of COVID-19

on Education & Employment in Racine County

March 31, 2022

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Two years ago, K12 schools & college campuses first shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We settled in for several weeks of staying home, but those weeks turned into two full years of fighting a pandemic. From education to employment to childcare, adjusting to a transformed education environment and dealing with the loss of life caused by COVID-19 has caused a deep disruption in the lives of our children and families.

The pandemic is still here, but the economy is rebounding, and students are now back to in-person learning. At the request of our Leadership Table, Higher Expectations for Racine County has begun to look at the impact of COVID-19 on the students and families in our own community. As a caveat, much of the data we need to fully understand the pandemic's impact are still not available. Delays in implementing the 2020 census mean that population-level data around overall employment, educational attainment, housing, etc are still lagging. We have pulled the data that are currently available from federal, state, county, school district, and local college sources.

What these data do show us is that our systems weren't prepared to cope with the amount of illness and death caused by COVID-19. This does not mean institutions were unable to adjust. One example is the Racine Unified's critical work to provide Chromebooks for each student. This allowed remote learning to take place while schools remained closed.

We have bounced back quickly in some areas. Unemployment is now extremely low and the size of the workforce has returned to pre-pandemic levels. There are still questions about how workforce demographics may have changed, but those data are not yet available.

In other areas, the data are suggesting lasting impacts. The number of Racine Unified students enrolling in a post-secondary institution has decreased substantially. Student attendance numbers at Racine Unified schools haven't yet returned to their normal levels, despite school being back fully in-person this school year.

As new data become available, we will continue to analyze and share our findings about the scope of the pandemic's impact on our community. Critically, we will use this analysis to guide our work and engage with the community. Those most impacted by our systems must guide us as we work to address the challenges caused by COVID-19.



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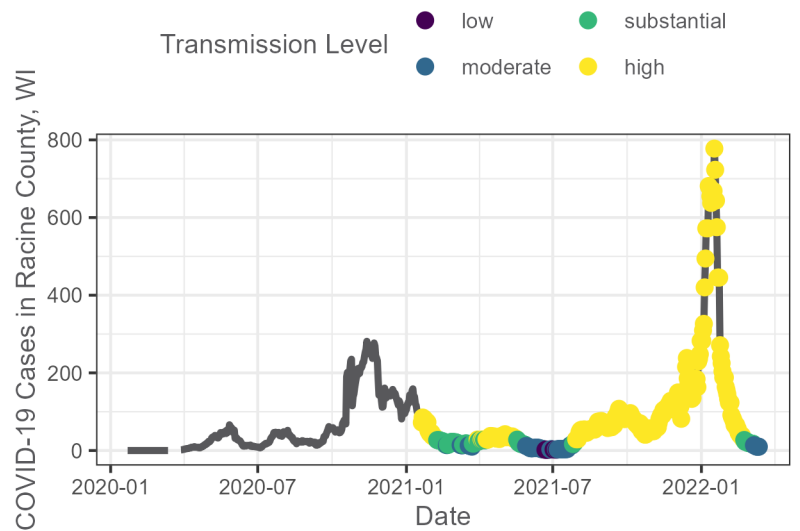
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The Pandemic

Covid-19 Transmission

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control,¹ infections from the Omicron variant seem to have passed their peak. The number of cases that Racine County is currently experiencing meets the CDC guideline for “Low Transmission” status.

Nevertheless, COVID-19 persists. Previous drops in the number of cases have turned out to be lulls between spikes, rather than endpoints. Spikes are caused by variants that are more infectious, if proportionally less lethal, than their predecessors.

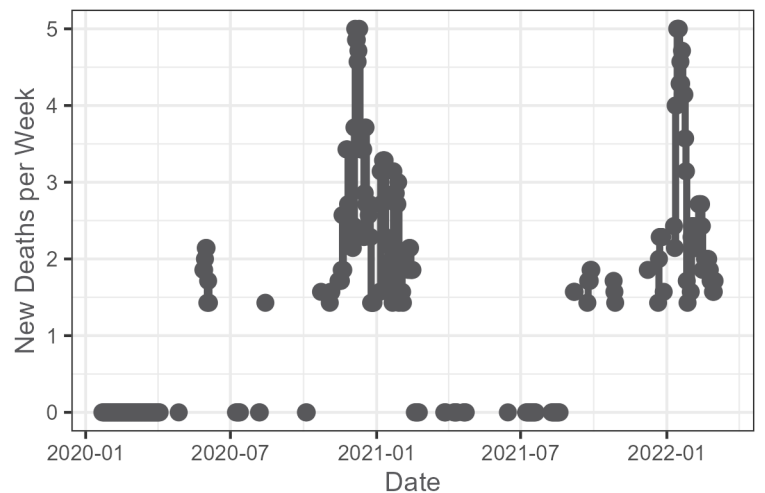


A time series of COVID-19 cases in Racine County, WI (black line). Transmission levels, as per 2021 CDC guidelines, are shown with colored points.

COVID-19 Death Rates

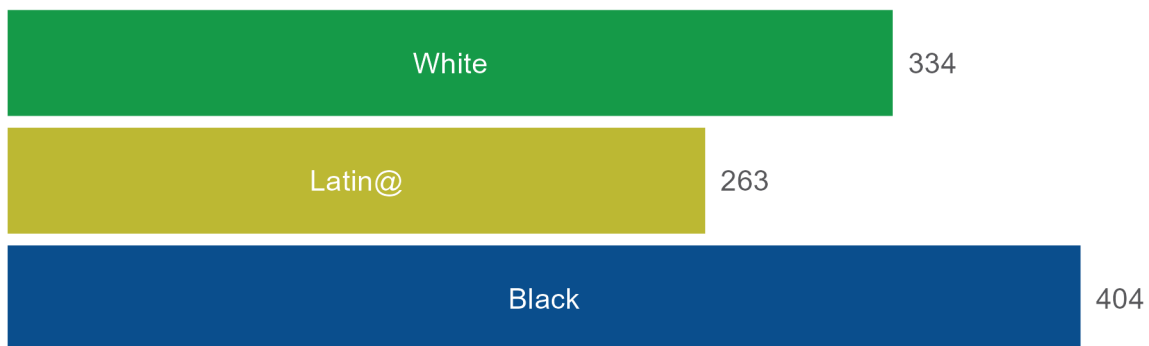
It is important to note that “proportionally less lethal” is from the perspective of people who have contracted COVID-19. Fewer people may have died once they contracted Omicron, but the total number of deaths in this wave was just as high as in previous waves because the absolute number of cases was so high.

Data collected by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services² show that the deaths in our community were not distributed evenly. The Black community experienced a per-capita³ death rate that was 21% higher than the already high rate experienced by the white community.



A time series of COVID-19 deaths in Racine County, WI. Some weeks have missing or redacted data, leading to breaks in the line.

COVID-19 Deaths per 100,000 People



Overall COVID-19 death rates by race in Racine County, WI.

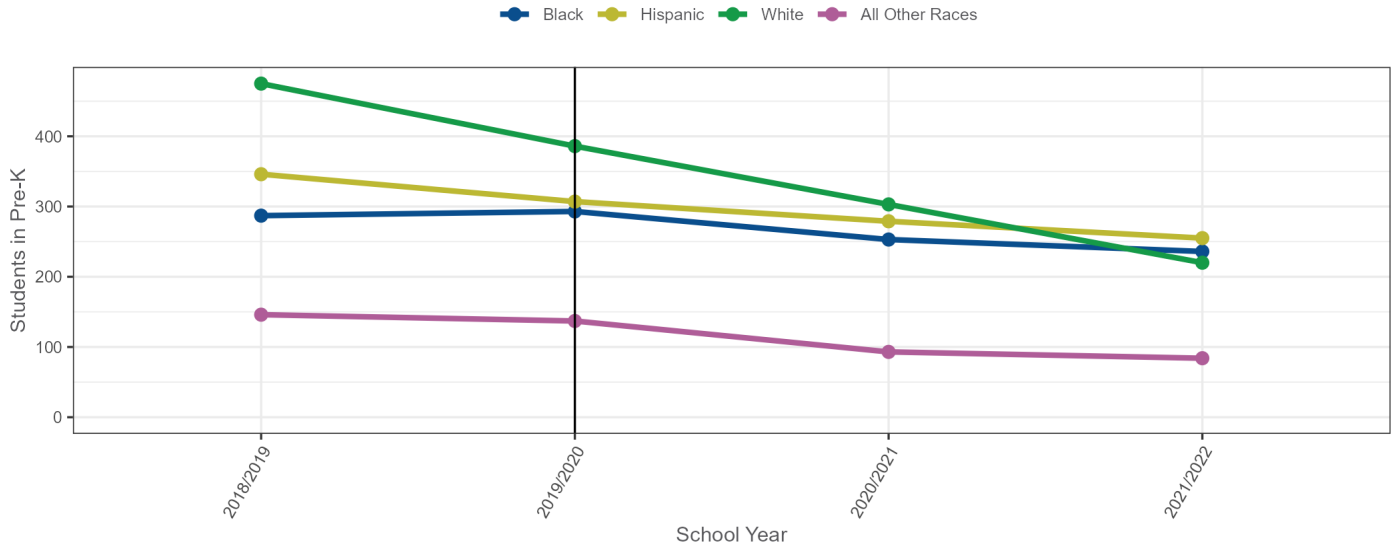
Racine Unified

Students

The pandemic has had a harsh impact on Racine’s students, across all levels of education. We will describe its effects on enrollment, attendance, and internet access, as well on the key indicators of our outcome areas. We want to acknowledge that this analysis is only part of the picture of the impact of the pandemic on our students.

Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment

The pandemic may be the cause of a decrease in 4K enrollment.⁴ As we will see later, the noticeable drop in the enrollment of white-identifying students is a long-term trend, rather than an impact of the pandemic.

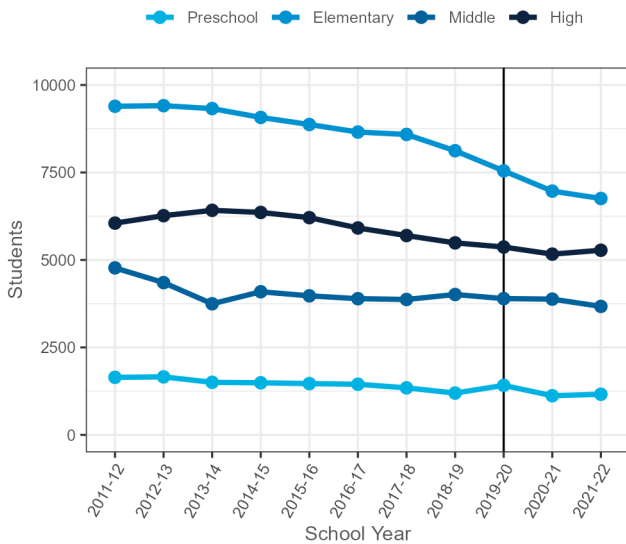


Student enrollment numbers for RUSD’s 4K programs. Solid lines show specific races/ethnicities.

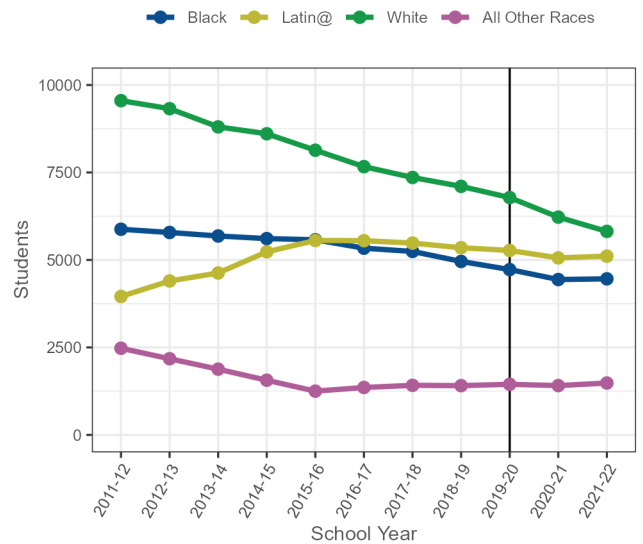
Student Enrollment

The following enrollment data are drawn directly from Racine Unified’s internal database,⁶ which is called “Infinite Campus.” The pandemic did not change preexisting trends in enrollment among the different levels of schools in Racine Unified.

The pandemic also did not change preexisting trends in enrollment among races/ethnicities.



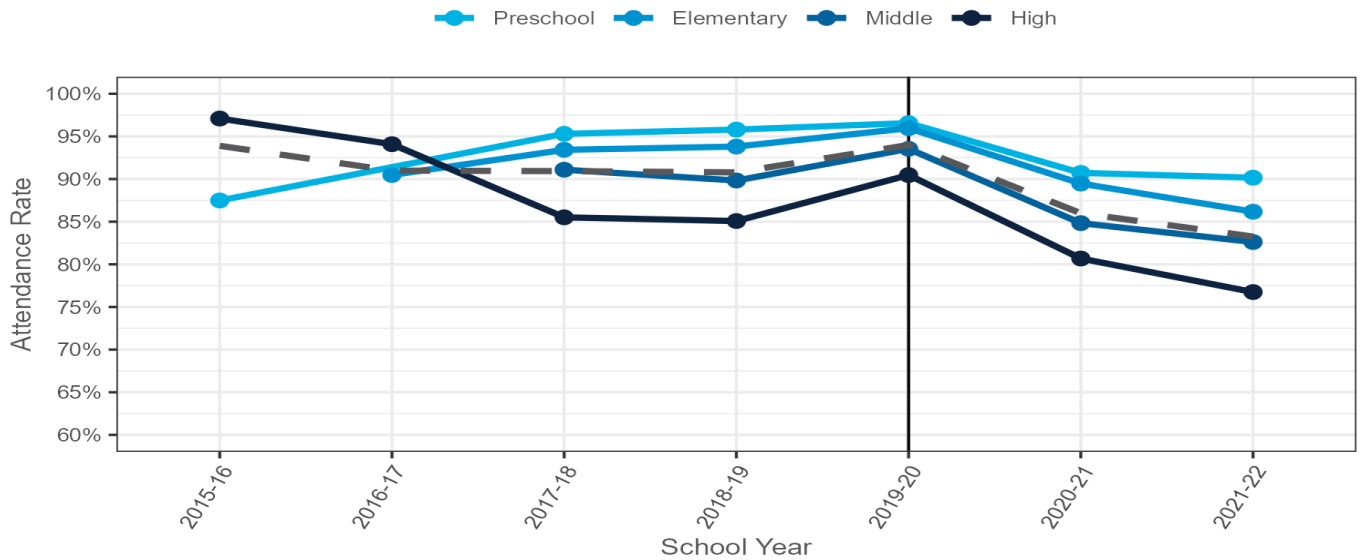
Annual enrollment at RUSD by school level.



Annual enrollment at RUSD by race/ethnicity.

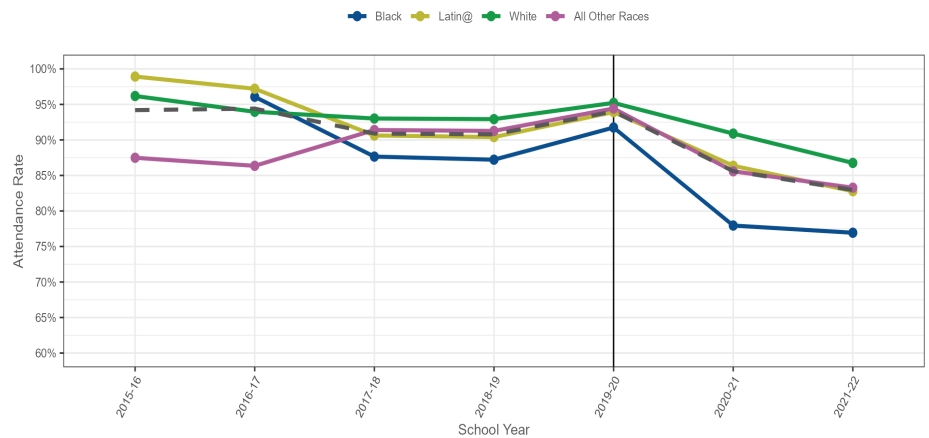
Attendance

The pandemic resulted in reduced attendance at Racine Unified schools of every level. These attendance data are also drawn from Infinite Campus.⁶ Attendance data for the 2021-22 school year are as of February 14, 2022.



Annual attendance rates at RUSD by school level. The dashed line shows the district average.

Attendance dropped across all racial and ethnic groups. The pandemic had a particularly negative impact on attendance by Black students. Part of the explanation for this may be that the Black community in Racine has experienced more grief and loss because of its higher COVID-19 Death rate (see page 3).



Annual attendance rates at RUSD by race/ethnicity. The dashed line shows the district average.

Internet Access

Before the pandemic, no one in Racine County was looking at internet access as an equity issue. The WI DPI is now tracking the availability of internet access for students. Currently, based on that report, 8.6% of student households in Racine Unified lack high-speed internet.⁸

Access to the Internet at Students' Primary Residences



Internet access at student homes in RUSD.

Reasons for No Internet at Students' Primary Residences

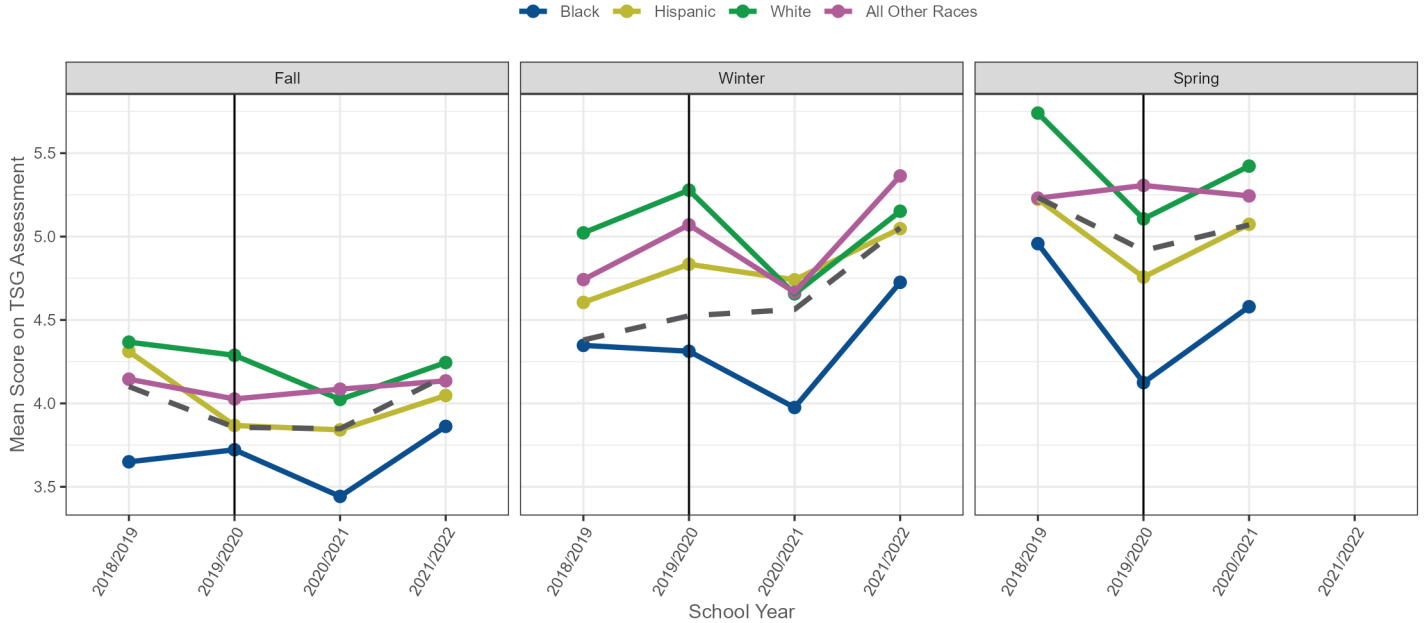


Selected reasons for lack of internet at RUSD students' primary residences.

Of these households that lack internet, 53% (4.4% of student households in Racine Unified) say that internet access is not available at their primary residence. In contrast, only 7.7% of the households (0.007%), reported that they cannot afford internet access at their primary residence.

Kindergarten Readiness

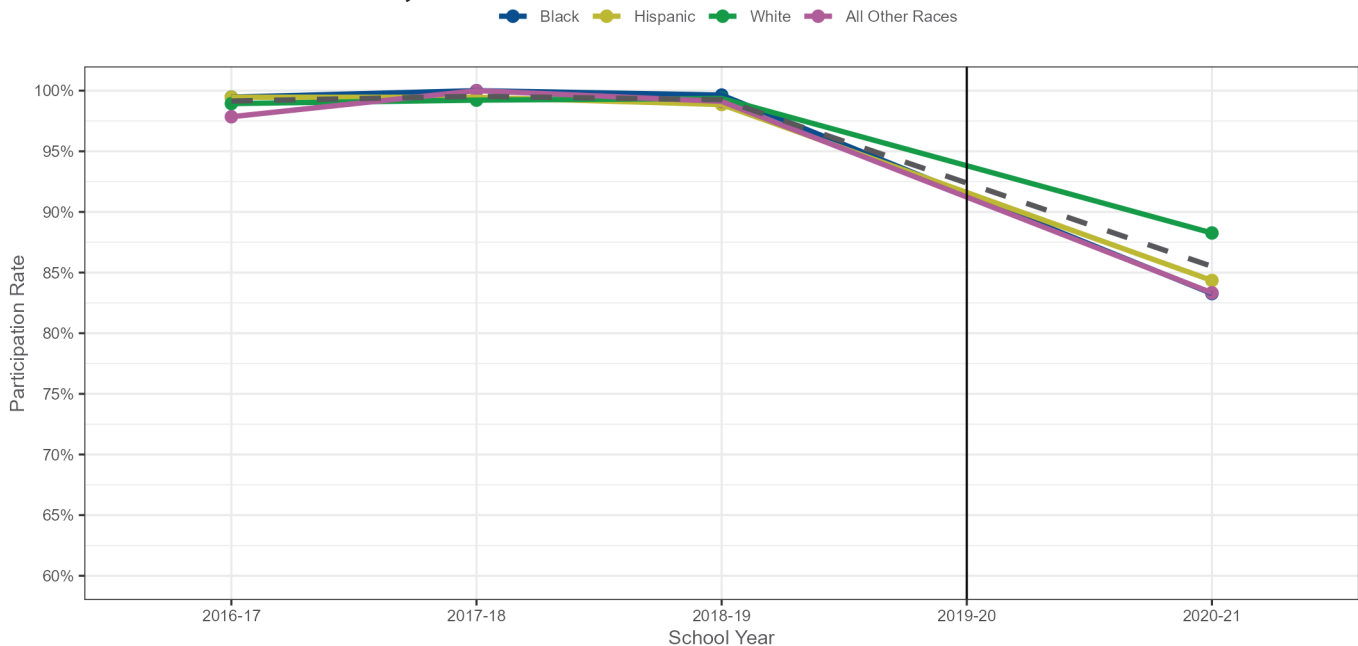
The pandemic had a negative impact on the 4K students who will be in the graduating class of 2034. Students' scores on the 2020 Spring TSG (Teaching Standards Gold) assessment, as well as their Fall and Winter scores in the 2020-21 school year, were unusually low.⁴ TSG scores for students in the subsequent two years of 4K seem to be recovering. Racial disparities in TSG scores seem to have been amplified by the pandemic, and the dramatic pattern of disparities seems to be continuing.



Seasonal performance of RUSD 4K students on TSG assessments. Solid lines show specific races/ethnicities. The dashed line shows the district average.

Participation in Standardized Testing by 3rd Graders

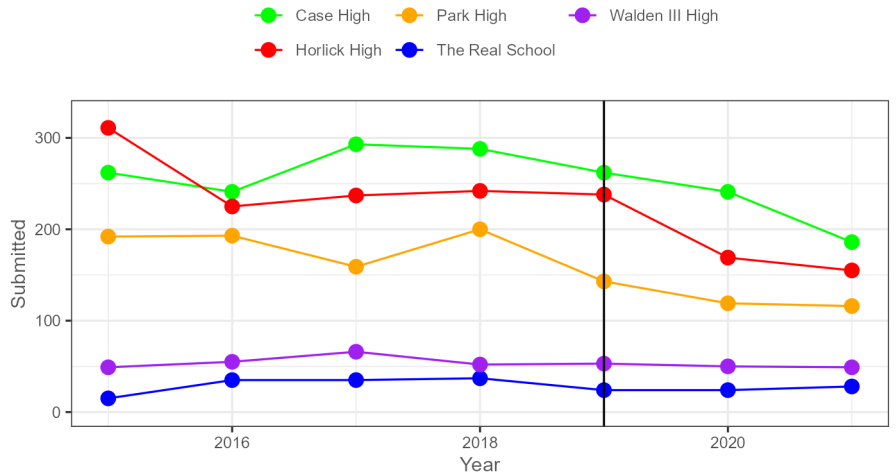
Forward Exam data from WISEDash⁵ show that participation has dropped dramatically. Fewer than 90% of the 3rd graders in Racine Unified took the Forward exam in 2021, a drop of more than 10 percentage points from the 2018-19 school year.



Annual participation on the Forward exam by RUSD 3rd graders. Solid lines show specific races/ethnicities. The dashed line shows the district average.

Submitted FAFSA Applications

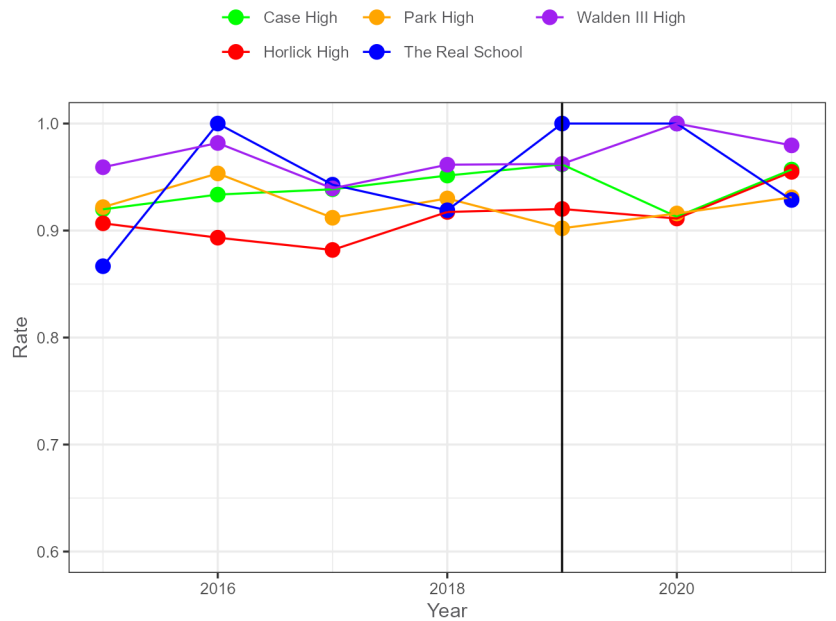
According to the Office of Federal Student Aid,⁸ the disruption of education by COVID-19 has led to a drop-off in FAFSA applications by Racine Unified high school students. The impact was most notable at Case and Horlick, which each had a decrease of about 80 applications between 2019 and 2021. The drop at Horlick High occurred mostly between 2019 and 2020, with 69 fewer applications that year. Case's biggest drop occurred between 2020 and 2021, with 55 fewer applications.



Annual FAFSA submissions at RUSD high schools

Completed FAFSA Applications

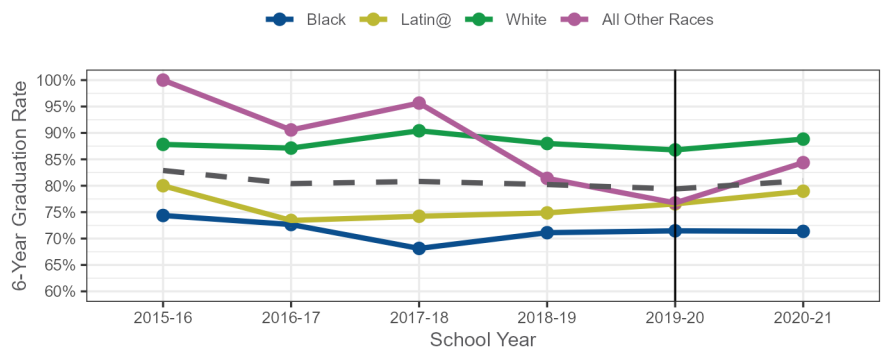
In contrast to the number of FAFSA submissions, completion rate did not change during the pandemic.⁸ This supports the idea that completion rate is more a measure of schools' project management than it is of students' interest in college. The much smaller school sizes at the REAL School and Walden III is apparent in the greater degree of variation in their completion rates. The only large school that may have shown a pandemic dip is Case. If so, it was a transient reduction. Case's completion rate in 2020 was lower than its rate in 2019, but by 2021 the completion rate had already returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Annual FAFSA completion rates at RUSD high schools

High School Graduation

Graduation data from WISEDash⁷ suggest that the pandemic did not negatively impact 6-year graduation rates for Racine Unified. In fact, graduation rates seem to be increasing within most races and ethnicities. Unfortunately, that is not the case for graduation rates among Black students in the school district, which held steady. On the one hand, holding steady during the pandemic is good. On the other hand, this represents an increase in an achievement gap.



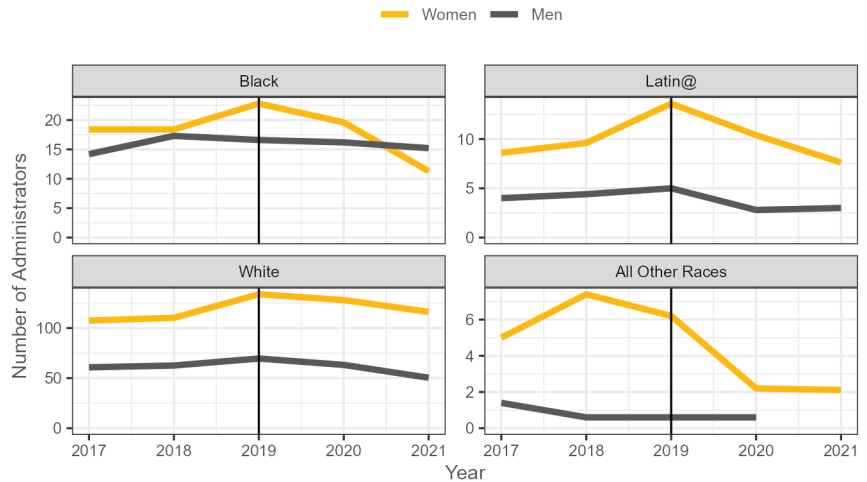
Annual graduation rates from RUSD by race/ethnicity. The dashed line shows the district average.

Racine Unified Staff

The coronavirus pandemic has also had a profound effect on Racine Unified's staff.⁷

Administrators

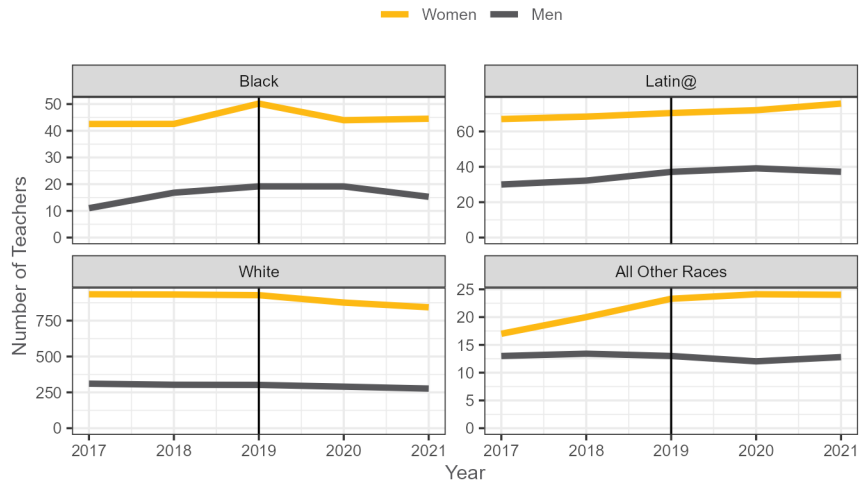
Administrators are employees that have neither teaching nor a support staff role. These employees are majority white. The number of administrators who are women has decreased during the pandemic. This decrease has been particularly clear among women administrators who do not identify as white.



Annual numbers of administrator employees at RUSD, by race/ethnicity and sex.

Teachers

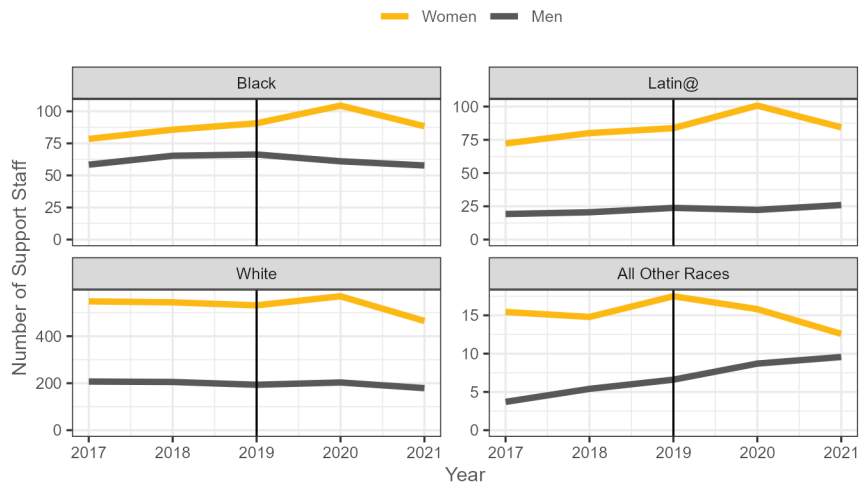
Before the pandemic, most teachers at Racine Unified identified as white. The pandemic did not change this. However, the number of non-white teachers in Racine Unified has stayed the same or increased, compared to pre-pandemic numbers. Among teachers at Racine Unified, the demographic group whose numbers fell most quickly during the pandemic were white women.



Annual numbers of teacher employees at RUSD, by race/ethnicity and sex.

Support Staff

Overall employment among support staff at Racine Unified declined for every race, driven by falling numbers of support staff who are women.



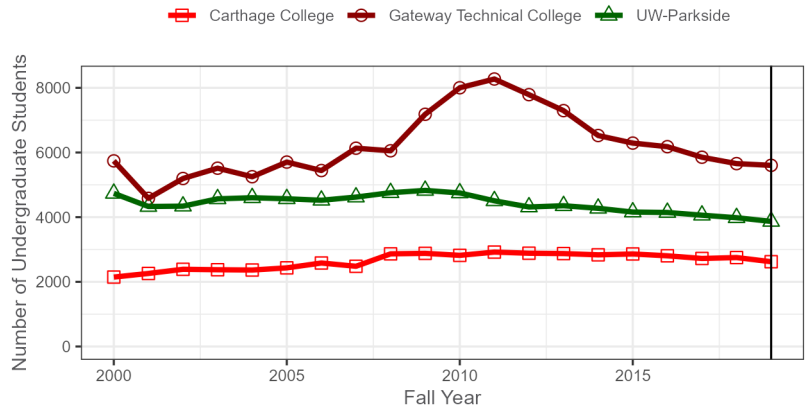
Annual numbers of support staff employees at RUSD, by race/ethnicity and sex.

Higher Education

Comprehensive reports about 2- and 4-year colleges and universities are available from the U.S. Department of Education.⁹ This report focuses on three institutions that are particularly important to Racine County: Carthage College, Gateway Technical College, and the University of Wisconsin - Parkside.

Enrollment

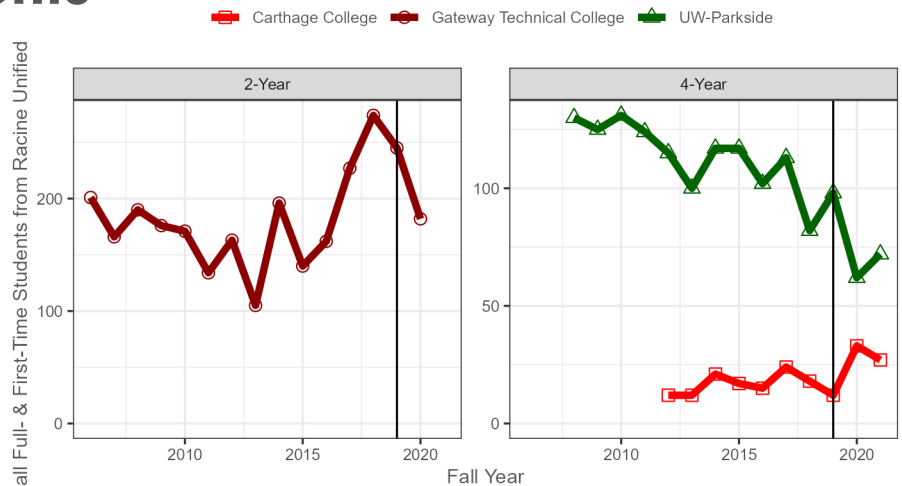
Currently available data do not include pandemic years, but trends are heading down. We will update our findings when those data are released.



Annual undergraduate enrollment numbers at Higher Expectations for Racine County's partner post-secondary institutions.

First-Year Fall Students

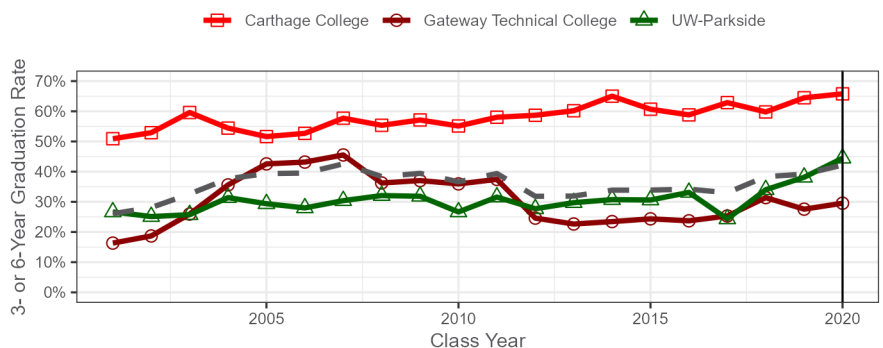
Our post-secondary partners gave us data on the number of students in their institutions who have come from Racine Unified as fall first-time undergraduate students. The number of Racine Unified students at Carthage has increased during the pandemic. Enrollment numbers for first-years from Racine Unified were already declining at both Gateway and Parkside. They continued to drop during the pandemic.



Annual fall first-year undergraduate enrollment at Higher Expectations for Racine County's partner post-secondary institutions.

Graduation

Undergraduate graduation data are not up to date with the pandemic's effects.⁹ We will monitor this data point and release the findings when that data is released.

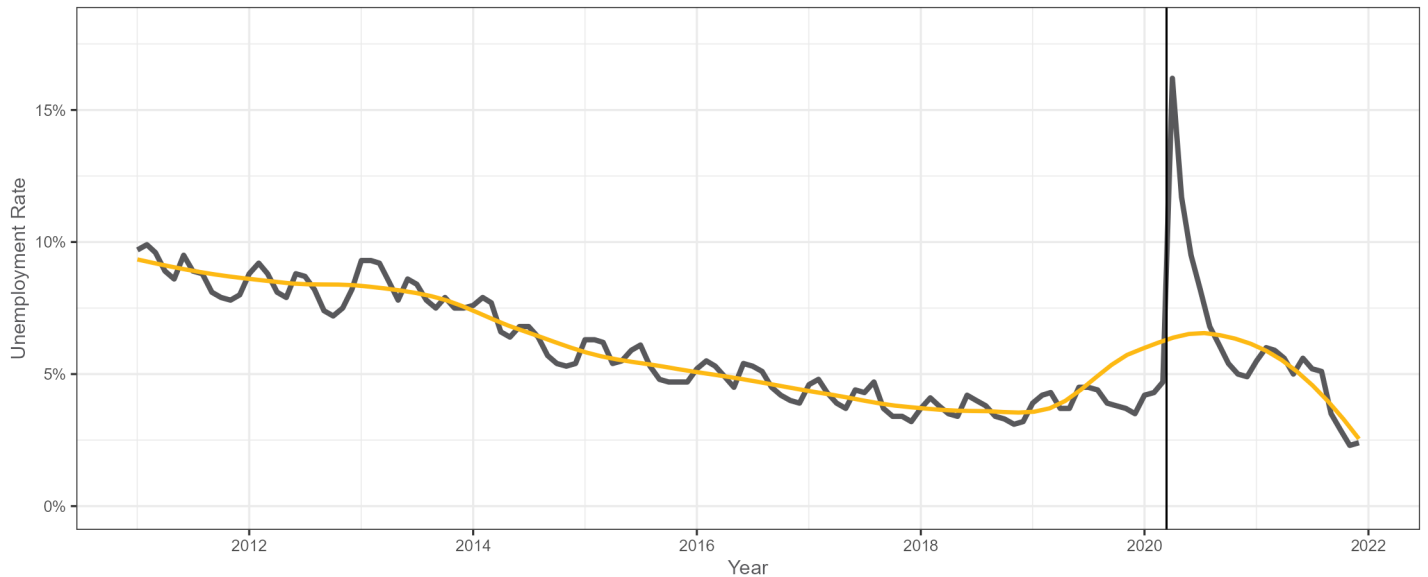


Annual graduation rates at Higher Expectations for Racine County's partner post-secondary institutions. Solid lines represent individual schools. The dashed line is the overall mean.

Workforce

Unemployment

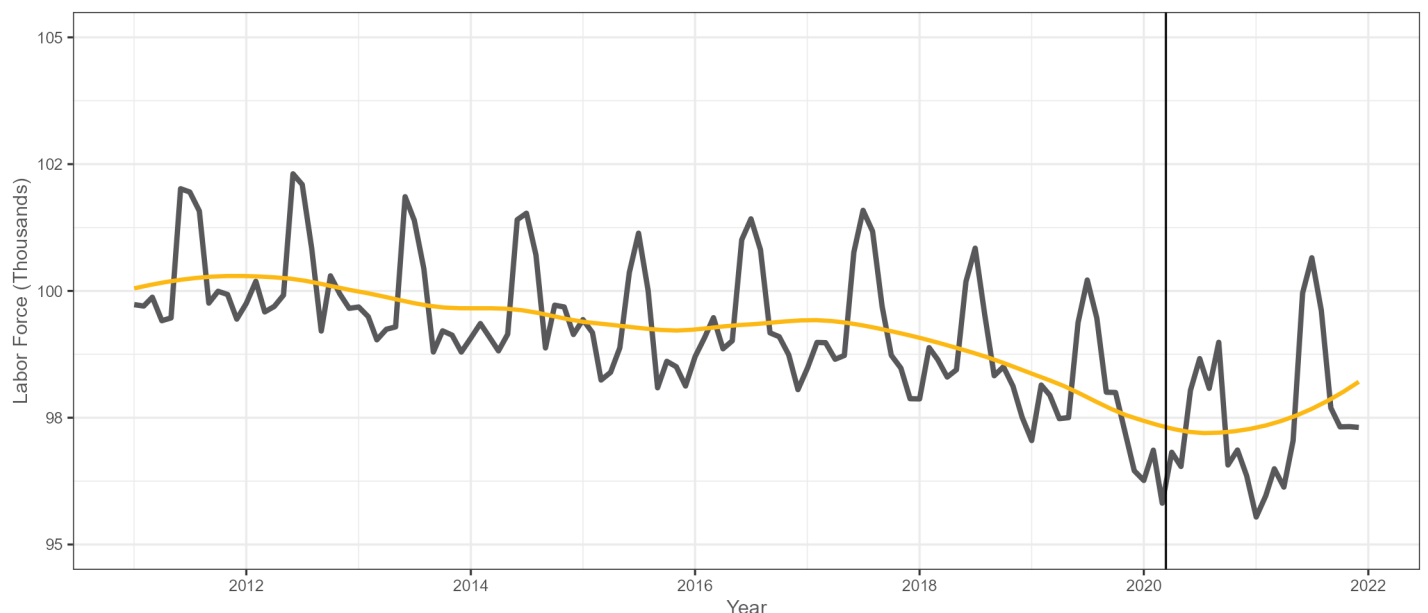
The impact of the pandemic, and the lock-down in particular, was intense but brief. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in Racine County has now reached historic lows.¹⁰ This recovery suggests that the pandemic had a transient, rather than game-changing, effect on our unemployment rate.



A decade of unemployment rates in Racine County, WI. The black line shows monthly data. The yellow line shows a LOESS smooth, not a moving average.

Workforce Participation

At the time scale that we are looking at, it is important to note that this low unemployment rate is not a result of a shrinking labor force. In fact, the labor force is also on the rebound from the pandemic.¹⁰ Labor force trends at a longer time scale than this are beyond the scope of this report.



A decade of labor force sizes in Racine County, WI. The black line shows monthly data. The yellow line shows a LOESS smooth, not a moving average.

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Appendix

This document was created using the tidyverse,¹¹ a dialect of the R language for statistical computing¹² and designed by Elizabeth Erickson, Higher Expectations staff.