

Mass. public colleges, universities chart 1st undergrad enrollment spike in nearly a decade

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Driven by a “substantial headcount” increase at the commonwealth’s 15 community colleges, Massachusetts’ public colleges have logged their first spike in undergraduate enrollment in nearly a decade, new state data show.

Public undergraduate enrollment across the state rose nearly 3%, or nearly 4,000 students, from last fall, the Healey administration said Tuesday, reversing a 9-year trend, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

That brings the total undergraduate enrollment across all three segments of the state’s public education system to nearly 153,000 students, according to the administration.

The findings were made public during Tuesday’s meeting of the state [Board of Higher Education](#) at [Quinsigamond Community College](#) in Worcester.

Read More: The full data report can be found [here](#).

“Expanding access to higher education is critical for connecting students with the skills that are in demand by employers today and setting them on a path toward success in their future careers,” Gov. Maura Healey said in a statement.

“We are particularly excited to see a boost in enrollment at our 15 incredible community colleges following the launch of [\[the free community college program\] MassReconnect](#). We’re grateful for the partnership of the Legislature and our colleges and universities to expand these opportunities for our students,” Healey continued.

The state’s community colleges gained 5,000 students, an 8% expansion, to their enrollment this fall, the administration said in its statement.

Read More: [MassReconnect free community college tuition program ‘revolutionary;’ one student explains why](#)

Among new community college students, those described as either new first-time or new transfer students, the increase was higher at an additional 12.2%, officials said. All 15 of the community colleges logged some kind of enrollment growth.

Other top-line findings:

Undergraduate enrollment at the nine state universities was down by 192 students, or 0.6%, this fall, after five years of more significant declines, the administration said. New first-time student enrollment

jumped by 3.5% percent at the state universities, “a sign that students are making their way back onto college paths,” the administration said.

At the four UMass campuses, undergraduate enrollment was down by 1% percent from the prior fall, or 538 students. That year-over-year change was “driven by small undergraduate enrollment declines at the largest, flagship campus of UMass Amherst, where enrollment has generally been growing steadily for 20 years,” the administration said.

The other three UMass campuses (UMass Boston, UMass Lowell, and UMass Dartmouth) all showed increases in either overall undergraduate enrollment or new first-time undergraduate enrollment or both, the administration said.

The data “supports anecdotes that I’ve been hearing from students, faculty, staff, and families across the Commonwealth—students are already taking advantage of the historic new opportunities available to them under the Healey-Driscoll administration,” state Education Secretary Dr. Patrick Tutwiler said.

Higher Education Commissioner Noe Ortega said the data was “good news” but only “represents a first step,” adding that his office “remains committed to ensuring that all students who enroll in college complete their education.”

Read More: [UMass chancellor to speak at White House affirmative action strategy unveiling](#)

On Tuesday, the Democratic administration highlighted some of the education spending it has undertaken, in partnership with the Legislature, since coming to power earlier this year.

That includes the \$20 million MassReconnect program, which makes [community college free for Massachusetts residents aged 25 and older](#); an \$18 million appropriation in this year’s state budget underwriting [community college nursing scholarships and program support](#); \$25 million in financial aid for students “pursuing in-demand careers,” and a \$62 million plan to [expand financial aid at Massachusetts public institutions of higher education](#).

“Opening the doors for more students to access higher education puts them on a path to build meaningful careers, meets the workforce needs of our industries, and strengthens our state’s economy as a whole,” Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, a Salem State University graduate, said. “As an alumna of one of our incredible state universities, it’s even more meaningful to see this rebound in enrollment across our entire public education system.”