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# Enrollment declines at Miami Dade College, Broward College, Palm Beach State College - South Florida Business Journal

*Liliana Mora*

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By [Brian Bandell](#)

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An economic downturn usually means more students enroll in state colleges as people who lost their jobs learn new skills. But the downturn spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic has had the opposite effect. South Florida's state colleges have all suffered double-digit enrollment declines, resulting in a hit to their budgets.

Miami Dade College, Broward College and Palm Beach State College are three of the region's four largest universities. Their combined enrollment in fall 2019 was nearly 140,000, and they play a crucial role in preparing students for in-demand jobs and welcoming first-generation college students.

All three colleges have lost students during the pandemic, mirroring a national trend. About half of their funding comes from

tuition and fees, so that has put a financial strain on them. In addition, state officials asked state colleges to reduce their budgets by 8.5% in the current academic year in response to the pandemic.

Funding from the CARES Act has helped the colleges make ends meet this year. The question is whether they can bring students back quickly enough to bounce back financially and help employers fill skilled jobs.

### **Miami Dade College sees steady recovery**

Enrollment at Miami Dade College was down 12% at the start of the fall 2020 term, and it's now down about 6.5%, said President [Madeline Pumariega](#), who started at MDC in January.

She introduced more online courses that are taught live, with interaction between students and teachers. Prior to that, very few of the online courses were live. Now, MDC has live online courses and classes that mix online instruction with in-person learning. That's a big reason enrollment has improved for the spring, Pumariega said.

About 40% of the courses at MDC have an in-person component, while the others are online-only, she added.

"While some students love online, most of our students are first-generation college students and many are low-income students – and they love in-person or live instruction," Pumariega said. "A lot of students missed live interaction with their peers and faculty."

Concerns about safety are a big reason many students didn't enroll at MDC, she said. Its average student is age 26, and many of them are caregivers for seniors or children. Many have jobs,

and the pandemic caused their work hours to change; unpredictable schedules made it hard to find time for classes, she said.

MDC, along with many other state colleges, partnered with the Florida Department of Education for a rapid credentialing program to help students pivot to new careers. There was an uptick in enrollment in digital marketing, cloud computing and health care. Miami-Dade County has nearly 300,000 residents between ages 24 and 65 with some college, but no credential, so that's a growth market, she said.