SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS RE: K-12

NOTE: All of the highlights quoted below are direct quotes from the report. HEPC has not included all categories or all text. For complementary charts for most of the textual data, please refer to the complete report. HEPC has identified selected terms or sections in bold print to facilitate easier identification of items of potential interest to policy makers.

The indicators in this section of The Condition of Education measure aspects of elementary and secondary education in the United States. The indicators examine school characteristics and climate; principals, teachers and staff; elementary and secondary financial resources; student assessments; and other measures of the progress students make as they move through the education system, such as graduation rates.


Public School Enrollment

In school year 2010–11, some 49.5 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools. Of these students, 34.6 million were enrolled in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 8, and 14.9 million were enrolled in grades 9 through 12.

Public school enrollment declined during the 1970s and early 1980s and rose in the latter part of the 1980s. Enrollment continued to increase throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. By school year 1997–98, public school enrollment had reached 46.1 million students and had surpassed its early 1970s peak. Between 2000–01 and 2006–07, public school enrollment increased by 2.1 million students, reaching 49.3 million students in school year 2006–07 where it remained until 2008–09. Total public school enrollment reached 49.5 million in 2010–11. From 2010–11 to 2021–22, total public school enrollment is projected to increase by 7 percent to 53.1 million (2021–22 is the last year for which projected data are available).

Enrollment trends in grades preK–8 and 9–12 have differed over time as successive cohorts of students have moved through the public school system. For example, enrollment in grades preK–8 decreased throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, while enrollment in grades 9–12 generally decreased in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Enrollment in grades preK–8 increased from 1985–86 through 2003–04 and fluctuated between 34.2 million and 34.6 million between 2003–04 and 2010–11. Public school enrollment in grades preK–8 is projected to increase from 34.6 million in 2010–11 to an estimated 37.6 million in 2021–22, reflecting an increase of 9 percent in 2021–22. Public school enrollment in grades 9–12 increased from 1991–92 through 2007–08, but declined through 2010–11 and is projected to continue declining through 2012–13. From 2013–14 through 2021–22, enrollment in grades 9–12 is...
projected to increase, and it is projected to surpass its 2007–08 level by 2021–22. Overall, public school enrollment in grades 9–12 is projected to increase 4 percent between 2010–11 and 2021–22.

Public school enrollment in grades preK–12 increased in 41 states from 1989–90 to 2010–11, with the greatest increases occurring in Nevada and Arizona (134 and 76 percent, respectively). During that period, total enrollment declined in nine states and the District of Columbia. From 2010–11 to 2021–22, Alaska, Nevada, and Arizona are projected to see the greatest percentage increases in total enrollment (22, 21, and 20, respectively). The District of Columbia is projected to see the largest percentage decrease in total enrollment over the same time period (15 percent).

From 2010–11 to 2021–22, the changes in public elementary and secondary enrollments are projected to differ among the states. Reflecting the larger national enrollment increase expected at the preK–8 than at the grade 9–12 level, 43 states are expected to have enrollment increases at the preK–8 level between 2009–10 to 2021–22, while 36 states are expected to have increases at the grade 9–12 level. In grades preK–8, enrollment is projected to increase by more than 20 percent in Alaska, Nevada, Arizona, and Washington but decrease by 11 and 13 percent, respectively, in the District of Columbia and West Virginia. Enrollment in grades 9–12 in Texas is expected to increase by more than 20 percent, while enrollment in these grades in the District of Columbia is projected to decrease by 20 percent or more.

Charter School Enrollment

A public charter school is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract or charter with the state or jurisdiction. The charter exempts the school from selected state or local rules and regulations. In return for funding and autonomy, the charter school must meet the accountability standards articulated in its charter. A school’s charter is reviewed periodically (typically every 3 to 5 years) by the group or jurisdiction that granted its charter and can be revoked if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the standards are not met. The first law allowing the establishment of charter schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991. In school year 2010–11, charter schools legislation had been passed in 41 states and the District of Columbia. In Maine, no charter schools were operational in 2010–11, even though the establishment of them had been approved. In the following states, charter school legislation has not been passed: Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

From 1999–2000 to 2010–11, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 0.3 million to 1.8 million students. During this period, the percentage of all public schools that were public charter schools, based on schools that reported enrollment, increased from 2 to 5 percent, comprising 5,300 schools in 2010–11.

In addition to the increase in the number of charter schools, the enrollment size of charter schools has grown over time. The percentage of charter schools with enrollments under 300 students decreased from 77 percent in 1999–2000 to 59 percent in 2010–11. The percentage of charter schools with enrollments of 300–499 students increased from 12 to 22 percent during this period; the percentage with 500–999 students increased from 9 to 15 percent; and the percentage with 1,000 students or more increased from 2 to 4 percent.

In 2010–11, California enrolled the most students in charter schools (364,000), and the District of Columbia enrolled the highest percentage of public school students in charter schools (38 percent),
representing 27,000 students. In that same year, more than 10 percent of public school students in Arizona were enrolled in charter schools. In 15 additional states, between 4 and 9.9 percent of public school students were enrolled in charter schools. Of the states with 4 percent or more public school students enrolled in charter schools, eight were in the West; three, plus the District of Columbia, were in the South; four were in the Midwest; and one was in the Northeast.

**English Language Learners**

*The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners (ELL) was higher in 2010–11 (10 percent) than in 2002–03 (9 percent). In 2011, the achievement gaps between ELL and non-ELL students in the NAEP reading assessment were 36 points at the 4th-grade level and 44 points at the 8th-grade level.* English language learner (ELL) refers to students being served in appropriate programs of language assistance (e.g., English as a Second Language, High Intensity Language Training, bilingual education). The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in 2010–11 (10 percent, or an estimated 4.7 million students) than in 2002–03 (9 percent, or an estimated 4.1 million students).

In 2010–11, states in the West had the highest percentages of ELL students in their public schools. In 8 states, 10 percent or more of public school students were English language learners—Oregon, *Hawaii*, Alaska, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, and California (California data were imputed from 2009–10 data)—with ELL students constituting 29 percent of public school enrollment in California. Thirteen states and the District of Columbia had percentages of ELL public school enrollment between 6 and 9.9 percent. In addition to the District of Columbia, these states were Oklahoma, Arkansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Carolina, Virginia, Arizona, Utah, New York, Kansas, Illinois, Washington, and Florida. The percentage of ELL students in public schools was less than 3 percent in 13 states; this percentage was between 3 and 5.9 percent in 16 states.

The percentage of ELL students in public schools was higher in 2010–11 than in 2002–03 in all but 12 states, with the largest percentage-point increases occurring in Kansas, South Carolina, *Hawaii*, and Nevada (all with 4 percentage points) and the largest percentage-point decreases occurring in Arizona (8 percentage points) and New Mexico (6 percentage points). The percentage of ELL students in public schools was higher in 2010–11 than in 2009–10 in just over half of the states (28 states), with the largest increase in percentage points occurring in Nevada (3 percentage points) and the largest decrease in percentage points occurring in Minnesota (2 percentage points).

In 2011 and in all previous assessment years since 2002, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores for non-ELL 4th- and 8th-graders were higher than their ELL peers’ scores. This disparity is known as an achievement gap—in NAEP reading scores, the achievement gap is seen by the differences between the average scores of two student subgroups on the standardized assessment. In 2011, the achievement gap between non-ELL and ELL students was 36 points at the 4th-grade level and 44 points at the 8th-grade level. At grade 4, this achievement gap was not measurably different from that in any assessment year since 2002. At grade 8, the achievement gap between non-ELL and ELL students in reading scores was 3 points smaller in 2011 than in 2009 (47 points), but not measurably different from the achievement gap in 2002.