

# School Enrollment

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## Enrollment levels have fluctuated over the last two decades.

In 1993, 65.4 million students were enrolled in school: 68 percent of these students were enrolled in either elementary school (47 percent) or in high school (21 percent). Children enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten made up 11 percent of enrollees. College students accounted for 21 percent of enrollees.

In general, the number of students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12 mirrors the population 5 to 17 years old, because nearly all persons in that age group are enrolled in school. Nursery school and college enrollment trends reflect changes in the size of the age-eligible population and the rates of enrollment.

## In the 20-year period between 1973 and 1993, enrollment in kindergarten through high school declined by 3 percent, while nursery school enrollment more than doubled and college enrollment rose by 55 percent.

In the period, the number of children 3 and 4 years old

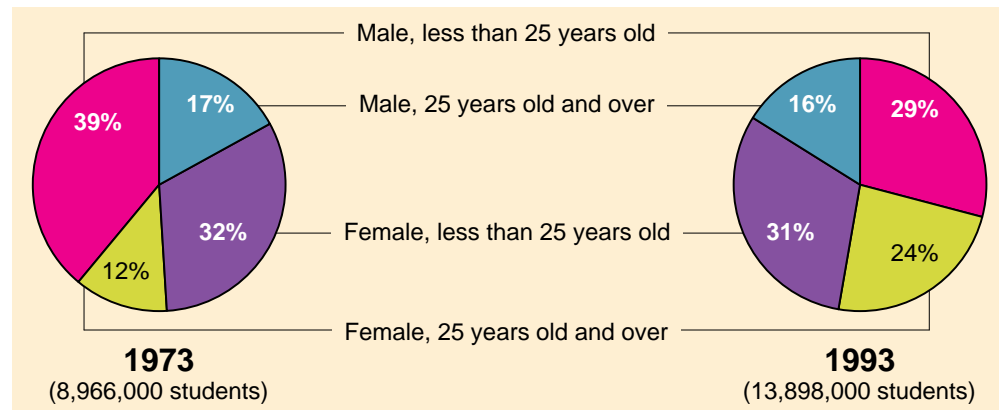
enrolled in nursery school increased from 1.2 to 2.7 million; the proportion enrolled increased from 18 percent in 1973 to 34 percent in 1993. At the same time, elementary school enrollment declined from 31.5 to 30.6 million students. This decline was in direct response to changes in the number of births that occurred 6 to 13 years before the enrollment estimates. So, just as the smaller birth cohorts that followed the end of the Baby Boom (1964) eventually resulted in a decline in elementary school enrollment in the 1970's and early 1980's, the gradual increase in the annual number of births during the 1980's ensures increases in elementary school enrollment during the 1990's. Elementary school enrollment reached a low of around 27 million in the mid-1980's (1985-87) and has increased since.

Changes in high school enrollment reflect shifts in the 14 to 17 age group. The number of persons in this age group declined during the 1980's, causing the number of students enrolled in high school to drop from 15.7 million in the mid-1970's to about 12.8 million in 1990.

As relatively larger birth cohorts began to move into the 14 to 17 age range in the early 1990's, high school enrollment grew to 13.7 million in 1993.

At the college level, 13.9 million students were enrolled in 1993, compared with 9.0 million in 1973. The percentage of full-time students declined from 70 percent in 1973 to 65 percent in 1993. Among students 25 years old and over, only 38 percent were enrolled full time in 1993, compared with 83 percent of younger students. The number of these "older" college students increased from 2.6 million in 1973 to 5.6 million in 1993 or from 29 to 40 percent of all college students. At the same time, the percentage of all college students who were women increased from 44 to 54 percent. Thus, during this 20-year period, there has been a shift in the age and sex distribution of the college population from majority male to majority female and a substantial gain for older students. The largest losses were among younger men and the largest gains among older women.

College Enrollment, by Age and Sex: 1973 and 1993



**With the exception of those in nursery schools, most students were enrolled in public schools in 1993.**

About 9 of every 10 students in kindergarten through grade 12 and nearly 4 out of every 5 college students were enrolled in public schools in 1993. Among children enrolled in nursery schools, 2 of every 5 were enrolled in public school. Only a modest change has occurred since 1973 in the percentages of students enrolled in public and private schools. Among students in kindergarten through 12th grade, the proportion in public school rose just 0.4 percentage points since 1973, while public nursery school enrollment has increased 10.4 percentage points.

**Nearly one-third (32 percent) of persons 15 to 17 years old were enrolled below the modal grade for their age in 1993.**

The cohort of persons 15 to 17 years old in 1993 was 6 to 8 years old in 1984; 16 percent were below the mode in 1984. Thus, 15 percent were

retained in grade in the intervening 9 years. In 1993, about 18 percent of the youngest elementary age students (6 to 8 years old) was enrolled below the modal grade. The youngest may have started late (State laws vary) or may have been retained in early grades.

**The annual high school dropout rate has declined.**

During the 1-year period from October 1992 to October 1993, about 382,000 or 4.2 percent of all students in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade dropped out of high school. This overall national dropout rate is considerably lower than the level of 6.3 percent in 1973. In 1993, there was limited variation among different subpopulations. The high school dropout rates of the White, Black, and Hispanic populations were not statistically different from each other.<sup>1</sup> The rates for men and women, at 4.4 and 4.1 per-

cent, respectively, were not statistically different from each other.

However, there were differences in the dropout rate across family income groups in 1993. Whereas, 7.5 percent of high school students from families with incomes below \$20,000 dropped out of high school in the past year, just 1.5 percent of those from families with incomes of \$40,000 or more left high school before graduation.

Declines in the dropout rate occurred for Whites and Blacks in the 1973-93 period: the rate for Whites fell from 5.7 to 4.1 percent; for Blacks, it dropped from 10.1 to 5.4 percent. For Hispanics, there was not a statistically significant change; in 1993, the dropout rate was 6.4 percent.

**College enrollment rates of high school graduates varied by sex, race, and Hispanic origin.**

In 1993, 41 percent of all high school graduates 18 to 24 years old were enrolled in college. For young men

and women, the proportions were not statistically different (42 and 41 percent, respectively). The rate for women, however, represents an increase of 16 percentage points since 1973, while the rate for men rose 7 percentage points in the same period.

By race, 42 percent of White graduates 18 to 24 years old were enrolled in college in 1993, compared with 33 percent of Blacks. For Hispanics, 36 percent were enrolled in college. (There is no statistically significant difference between the percentages shown for Blacks and Hispanics.)

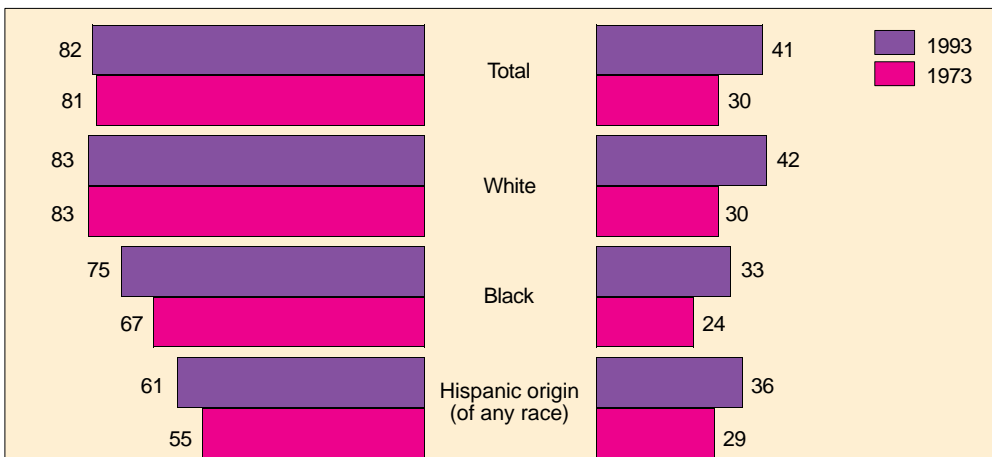
During the past 20 years, while the gap in high school graduation rates narrowed for Blacks and Whites, the gap in college attendance of those graduates has not narrowed. There has been an increase in high school graduation rates for Blacks in the past 20 years, but there has been no change for Whites. At the same time, there has been an increase in college enrollment of high school graduates for Blacks and Whites, but significant differences remained. For Hispanics, there was not a significant change.

**Percent High School Graduates: 1973 and 1993**

(Persons 18 to 24 years old)

**Percent Enrolled in College: 1973 and 1993**

(High school graduates 18 to 24 years old)



<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. These data do not include the population of Puerto Rico.

**For Further Information**

See: Current Population Reports, Series P20-479, *School Enrollment — Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1993.*

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