

Public School Enrollment

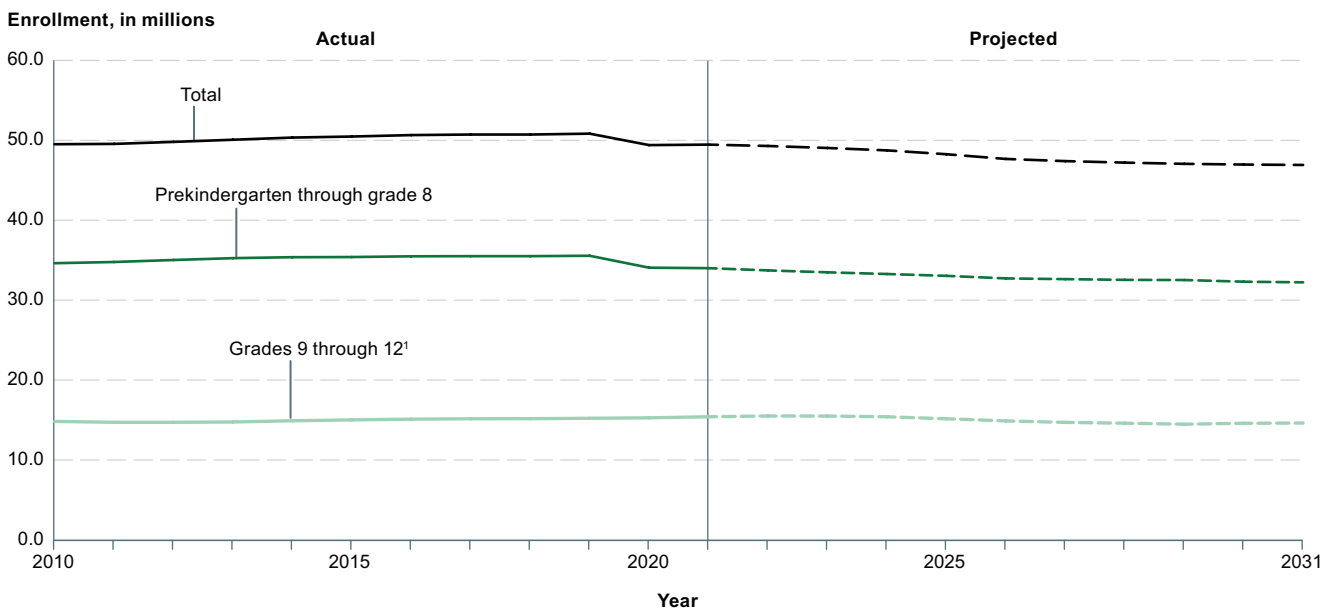
Between fall 2010 and fall 2019, total public elementary and secondary school enrollment increased by 3 percent, from 49.5 million to 50.8 million students. In the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, total enrollment dropped by 3 percent to 49.4 million students in fall 2020. In fall 2021, total enrollment remained at around 49.4 million students. Changes in public elementary and secondary school enrollment varied by state.

This indicator discusses overall changes in the number of students enrolled in public schools (including both traditional public schools and public charter schools), as well as changes by grade level and by state, over time. In fall 2021, more than a year since the onset of the

coronavirus pandemic, public elementary and secondary schools in the United States enrolled 49.4 million students in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12.^{1,2,3} Of these students, 34.0 million were enrolled in grades preK-8, and the remaining 15.4 million were enrolled in grades 9-12.

Public School Enrollment Over Time and During the Pandemic

Figure 1. Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by level: Fall 2010 through fall 2031



¹ Includes students reported as being enrolled in grade 13.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data include both traditional public schools and public charter schools. The total ungraded counts of students were prorated to prekindergarten through grade 8 and grades 9 through 12 based on the known grade-level distribution of a state. Includes imputations for nonreported prekindergarten enrollment in California for fall 2019 and 2021 and in Oregon for fall 2020 and 2021. Projections in this figure were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2010–11 through 2021–22; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 203.10.

Between fall 2010 and fall 2019, total public elementary and secondary school enrollment increased by 3 percent, from 49.5 million to 50.8 million students. In the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, total enrollment dropped by 3 percent to 49.4 million students in fall 2020. In fall 2021, total enrollment remained at around 49.4 million students.

Although enrollments in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 increased between fall 2010 and fall 2019, enrollments in these grade ranges had different patterns of change during the pandemic. Enrollment in grades preK-8 dropped 4 percent (from 35.6 million to 34.1 million students) between fall 2019 and fall 2020 and remained at a similar level in fall 2021 (34.0 million). In contrast, enrollment in grades 9-12 continued to increase each year during the pandemic, reaching an all-time high of 15.4 million students in fall 2021. Thus, enrollment changes in grades preK-8 accounted for the decrease in total public enrollment in the first year of the pandemic.

More specifically, declines in enrollment from fall 2019 to fall 2020 were largest in preK and kindergarten: preK

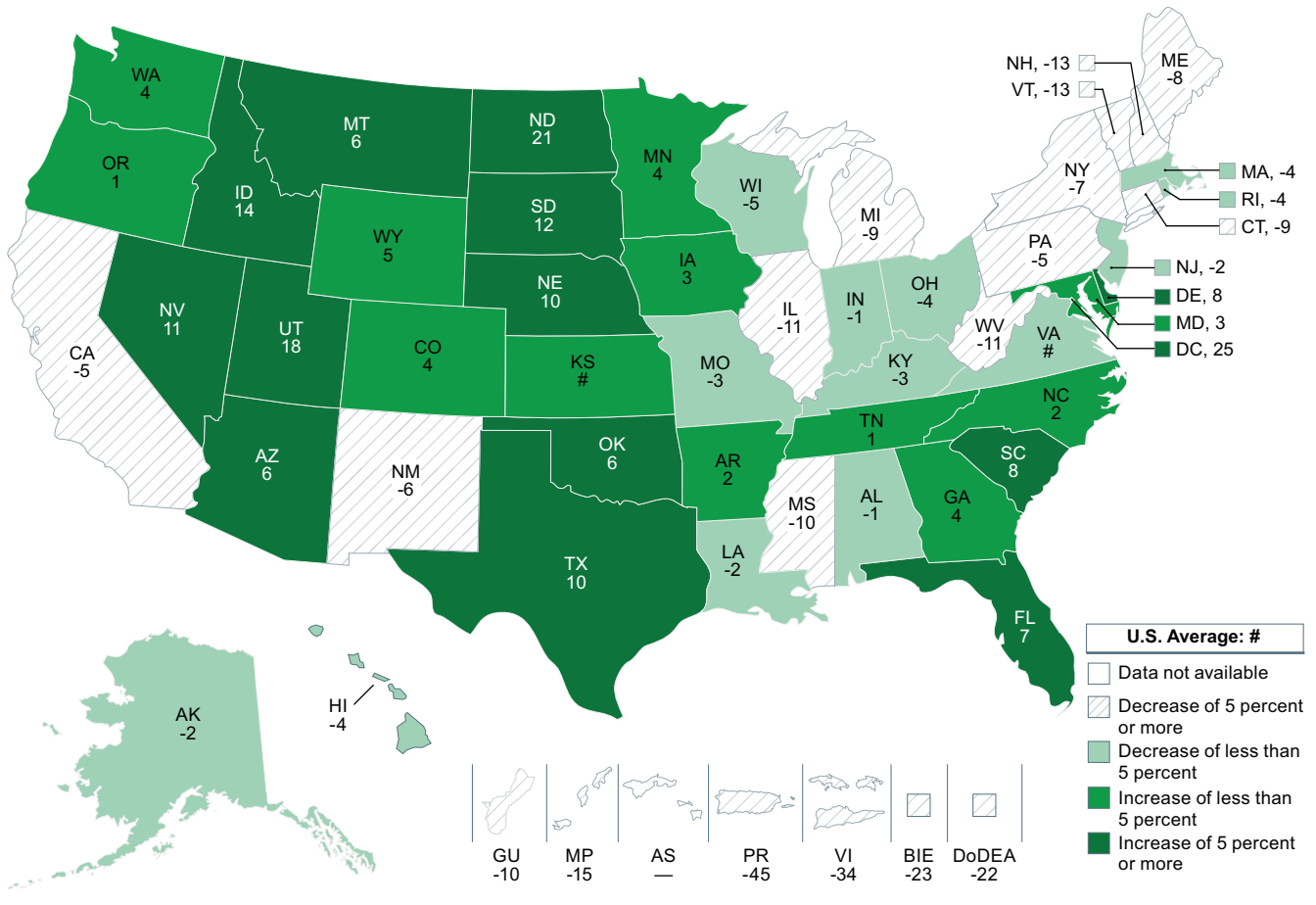
enrollment decreased by 22 percent (344,000 students) and kindergarten enrollment decreased by 9 percent (338,000 students). Collectively, enrollment declines in these two grades accounted for 46 percent of the total decrease at the preK-8 level between fall 2019 and fall 2020. In contrast, from fall 2020 to fall 2021, enrollment in preK and kindergarten both rebounded somewhat (increasing by 14 and 5 percent, respectively), while enrollment in grades 1-8 decreased by 1 percent.⁴ However, preK and kindergarten enrollments in 2021 remained lower than 2019 levels.

Due primarily to projected declines in the school-age population, total public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to decrease between fall 2021 and fall 2031 (the last year for which projected data are available). From fall 2021 to fall 2031,

- total enrollment is projected to decrease by 5 percent (49.4 million to 46.9 million students);
- preK-8 enrollment is projected to decrease by 5 percent (34.0 million to 32.2 million students); and
- 9-12 enrollment is also projected to decrease by 5 percent (15.4 million to 14.7 million students).

State-Level Enrollments Since 2010

Figure 2. Percentage change in public elementary and secondary school enrollment, by state or jurisdiction: Fall 2010 to fall 2021



— Not available.
 # Rounds to zero.

NOTE: U.S. average is for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data include both traditional public schools and public charter schools. Includes imputations for nonreported prekindergarten enrollment in California and Oregon for fall 2021. Percent changes are calculated and categorized using unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2010–11 and 2021–22; Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Data Center, Enrollment Data, 2010 and 2021, retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://www.dodea.edu/datacenter/enrollment.cfm>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 203.20.

Changes in public elementary and secondary school enrollment from 2010 to 2021 varied by state. Compared with 2010, total enrollment in grades preK-12 in 2021 was

- higher by 10 percent or more in 5 states (Nevada, South Dakota, Idaho, Utah, and North Dakota) and the District of Columbia;⁵
- higher by less than 10 percent in 20 states;
- lower by less than 10 percent in 21 states; and
- lower by 10 percent or more in 4 states (West Virginia, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Vermont).

In fall 2021, total enrollment ranged from fewer than 100,000 students in Vermont (84,000 students), the District of Columbia (88,900 students), and Wyoming (93,100 students) to 5.4 million students in Texas and 6.0 million students in California.

Focusing on the period during the coronavirus pandemic, all 50 states recorded lower enrollments in fall 2020 than in fall 2019. Percent changes in enrollment ranged from a decrease of less than one-half of 1 percent in South Dakota to decreases of 5 percent in New Hampshire, Washington, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, and Oregon. Between fall 2020 and fall 2021, enrollment continued to decrease in 20 states, with decreases of 1 percent or less in 16 states and the largest percent decrease in New York (a decrease of 2 percent). During the same period, enrollment increased in the other 30 states, with increases of 1 percent or less in 16 states and the largest percent increase in Montana (an increase of 3 percent). For 43 states, enrollment remained lower in fall 2021 than in fall 2019. In the District of Columbia, enrollment remained stable in the first year of the pandemic (89,900 students in both fall 2019 and fall 2020); enrollment then dropped by 1 percent in fall 2021 (to 88,900 students).

Compared with fall 2010, public school enrollment in fall 2021 was

- higher in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 for 20 states and the District of Columbia;
- lower in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 for 16 states; and
- lower in grades preK-8 but higher in grades 9-12 for the remaining 14 states.

For grades preK-8, changes in enrollment across states ranged from an increase of 29 percent in the District of

Columbia to a decrease of 13 percent in Vermont, New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Illinois from fall 2010 to fall 2021. For grades 9-12 over this period, changes in enrollment across states ranged from an increase of 32 percent in Utah to a decrease of 15 percent in Vermont.

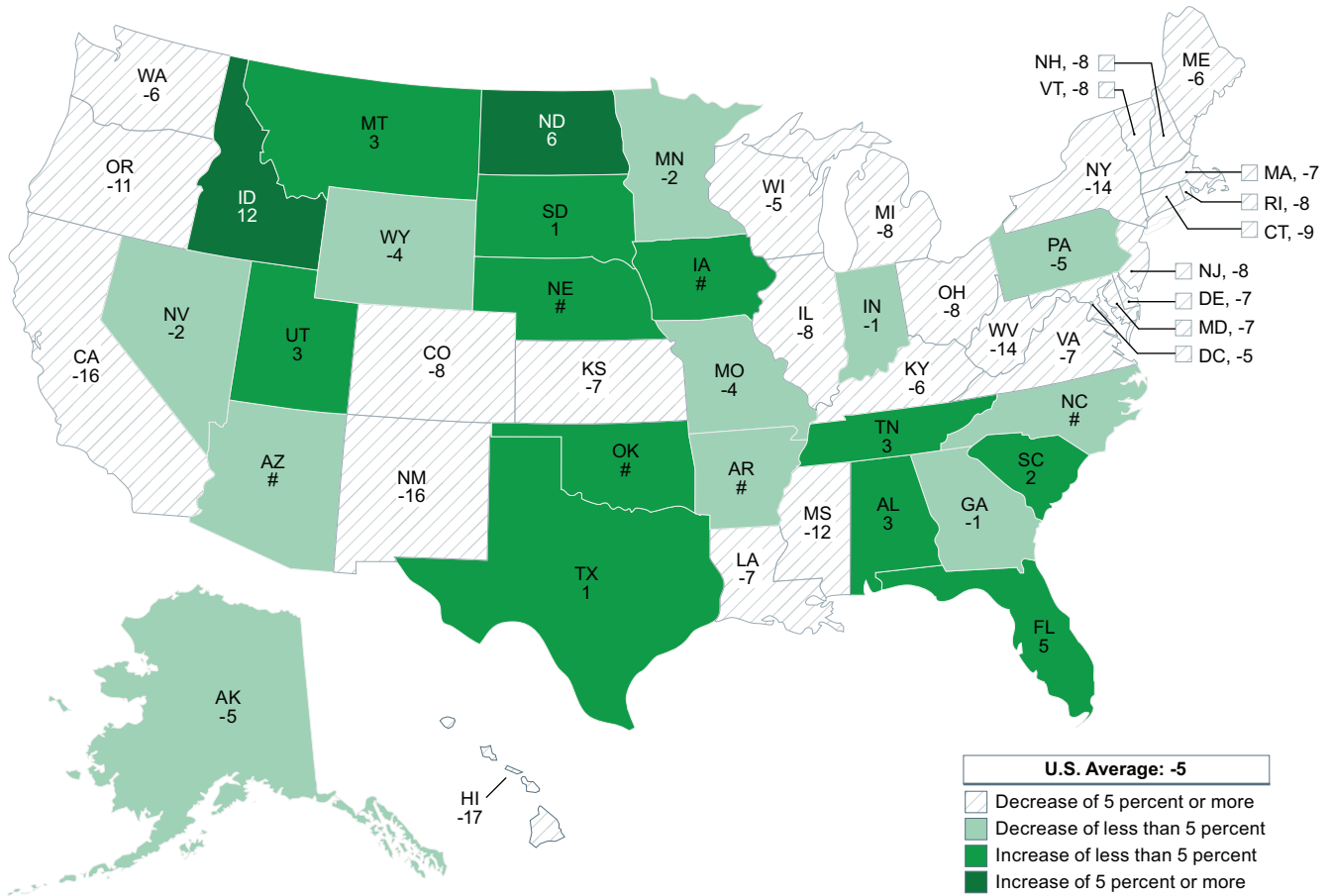
Data on public elementary and secondary school enrollment are also available for some U.S. jurisdictions other than the District of Columbia. Between fall 2010 and fall 2021, total public school enrollment decreased in

- Puerto Rico by 45 percent (from 473,700 to 259,500 students);
- Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) domestic and overseas schools by 22 percent (from 86,200 to 67,000 students);
- Guam by 10 percent (from 31,600 to 28,400 students);
- the U.S. Virgin Islands by 34 percent (from 15,500 to 10,200 students); and
- the Northern Mariana Islands by 15 percent (from 11,100 to 9,500 students).

Total enrollment in Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools was 23 percent lower in fall 2021 than in fall 2010 (32,500 vs. 42,000 students). During this period, enrollment in BIE schools peaked in fall 2017 (46,300 students),⁶ before decreasing by 30 percent to fall 2021.⁷

Projected State-Level Enrollments

Figure 3. Projected percentage change in public elementary and secondary school enrollment, by state: Fall 2021 to fall 2031



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: U.S. average is for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Projected enrollment data are not available for the other U.S. jurisdictions. Data include both traditional public schools and public charter schools. Includes imputations for nonreported prekindergarten enrollment in California and Oregon for fall 2021. Projections in this figure were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Percent changes are calculated and categorized using unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 2021–22; and State Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 203.20.

Although total public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to be lower nationally in fall 2031 than in fall 2021, it is projected to be higher in 13 states. Idaho is projected to have the largest percent increase in total enrollment (12 percent), followed by North Dakota (6 percent). Total enrollment is projected to be lower in fall 2031 than in fall 2021 in 37 states and the District of Columbia, including all of the 9 states located in the Northeast. Hawaii, California, and New Mexico are projected to have the largest percent decreases in total enrollment (17, 16, and 16 percent, respectively). In fall 2031, Vermont (77,300 students), the District of Columbia (84,300 students), and Wyoming (89,300 students) are projected to still have fewer than 100,000 students. Texas is projected to have the largest total enrollment in fall 2031 (5.5 million students), followed by California (5.0 million students).

Compared with public school enrollment in fall 2021, public school enrollment in fall 2031 is projected to be

- higher in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 in 8 states;
- lower in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 in 32 states; and
- lower in grades preK-8 but higher in grades 9-12 in the remaining 10 states and the District of Columbia.

Considering the size of these changes in enrollment between fall 2021 and fall 2031, enrollment in grades preK-8 is projected to be

- at least 15 percent lower in California, New Mexico, and Hawaii; and
- at least 10 percent higher in Idaho.

Meanwhile, enrollment in grades 9-12 is projected to be

- at least 15 percent lower in Mississippi, California, and New York; and
- at least 10 percent higher in North Dakota, Idaho, and the District of Columbia.⁸

Endnotes:

¹ In this indicator, public elementary and secondary school enrollment includes ungraded students for all years. This also includes a small number of students reported as being enrolled in grade 13 who were counted as being enrolled in grades 9 through 12.

² Unless otherwise noted, this indicator presents public elementary and secondary school enrollment in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

³ For data on instructional mode during the 2021-22 school year, see experimental data from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) 2022 Learning Mode, Masking, and Social Distancing Dashboard](#) and the [2022 School Pulse Panel \(SPP\)](#).

For example, data from SPP show that 97 to 100 percent of public schools reported offering full-time in-person instruction throughout the first half of calendar year 2022. Experimental data may not meet all NCES quality standards and should be interpreted with caution.

⁴ The population of 7- to 13-year-olds (common ages for students in grades 1-8) in the United States also decreased by about 1 percent from 2020 to 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, [table 101.10](#).

⁵ Throughout this indicator, percent changes are calculated and categorized using unrounded data.

⁶ Enrollment data for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools are not available for fall 2011 through fall 2015. Therefore, these years are not included in the analysis.

⁷ Fall 2021 public school enrollment data are not available for American Samoa. In fall 2020, public elementary and secondary schools in American Samoa enrolled 10,200 students.

⁸ Projected enrollment data are not available for the other U.S. jurisdictions.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 203.10, 203.20, 203.25, and 203.30

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [English Learners in Public Schools](#); [Homeless Children and Youth in Public Schools](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]; [Private School Enrollment](#); [Public Charter School Enrollment](#); [Students With Disabilities](#)

Glossary: Enrollment; Geographic region; Prekindergarten; Public school or institution