

Public School Enrollment

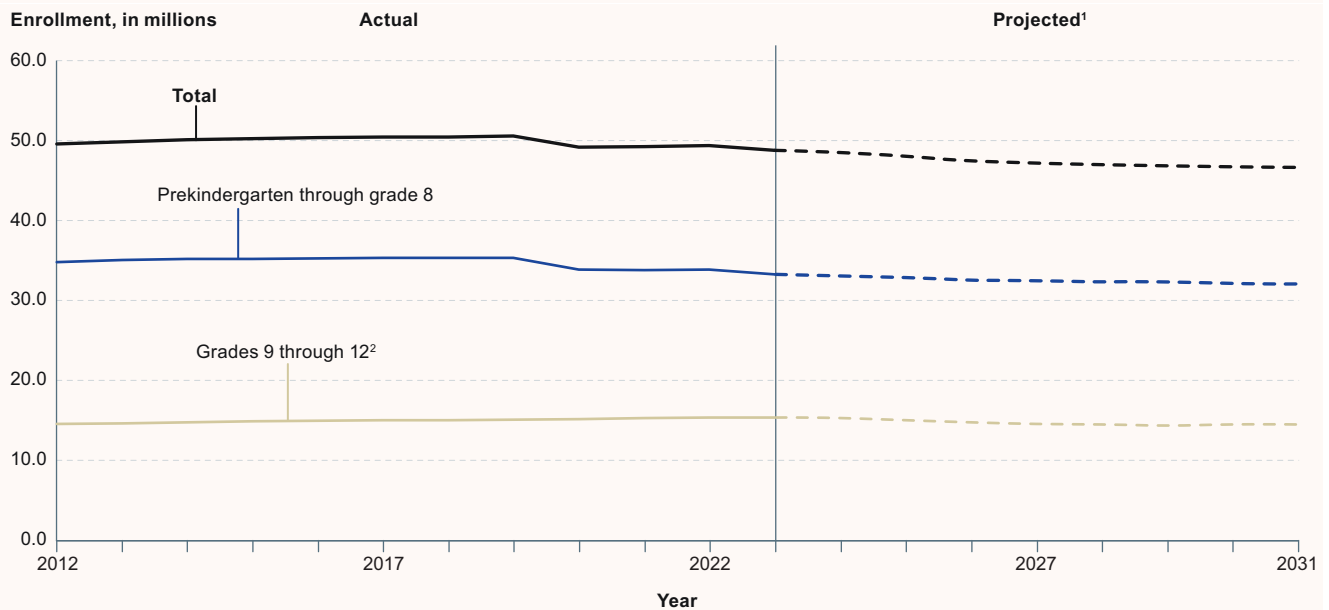
During the coronavirus pandemic, public school enrollment first fell from 50.8 million students in fall 2019 to 49.4 million students in fall 2020 and 2021 before rising to 49.6 million students in 2022. This rise in 2022 included an increase in prekindergarten enrollments, which had seen the largest decline of any grade in fall 2020.

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 over time by grade level and by state.¹ In fall 2022, more than 2 years after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, public elementary and secondary schools in the United States enrolled 49.6 million students in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12.^{2,3} Of these students, 34.1 million were enrolled in grades preK-8, and the remaining 15.5 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 2012 through fall 2031



¹ Projections for fall 2023 through fall 2031 are based on historical data through fall 2021, only.

² 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, 2021, and 2022 and in Oregon for fall 2020, 2021, and 2022. Projections in this figure were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Figures are plotted based on 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," 2012–13 through 2022–23; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 203.10.

Between fall 2012 and fall 2019, total public elementary and secondary school enrollment increased by 2 percent, from 49.8 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. Total enrollment remained at around 49.4 million students in fall 2021 before rising 0.4 percent to 49.6 million students in fall 2022.

Although enrollments in both grades preK-8 and 9-12 increased between fall 2012 and fall 2019, enrollments in these grade ranges had different patterns of change during the pandemic. Total 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 2022 (34.1 million students). In contrast, total enrollment in grades 9-12 continued to increase each year during the pandemic, reaching 15.5 million students in fall 2022. Generally, enrollment changes in grades preK-8 accounted for the decrease in total public enrollment in the first year of the pandemic.

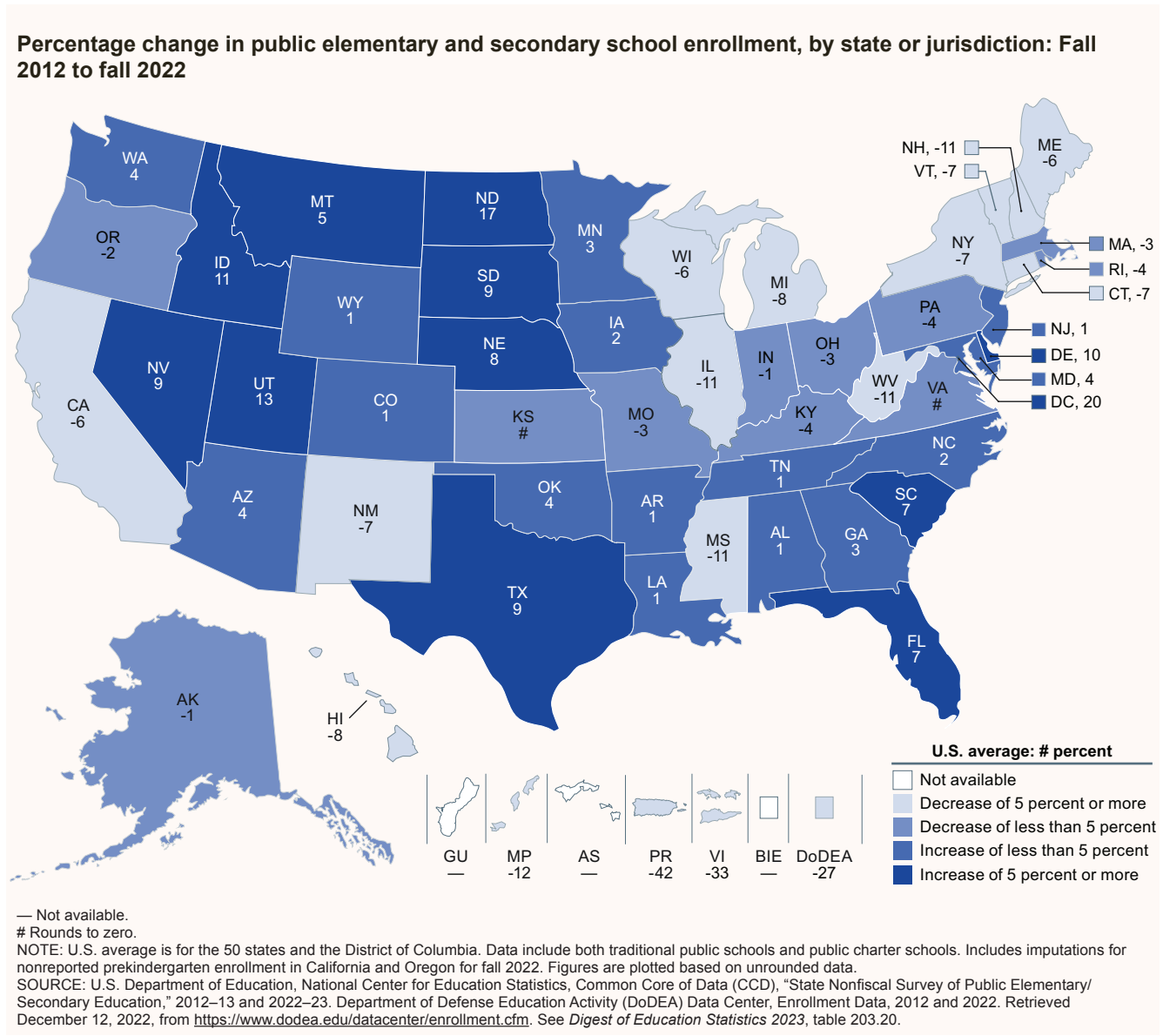
More specifically, declines in enrollment from fall 2019 to fall 2020 were largest in preK and kindergarten: preK enrollment decreased by 22 percent (344,000 students) and kindergarten enrollment decreased by 9 percent (338,000 students). However, the patterns for these grades since fall 2020 have differed. PreK enrollment increased in each year, while kindergarten enrollment increased from fall 2020 to fall 2021 but fell by 1 percent from fall 2021 to fall 2022. As a result, despite a larger decline in preK enrollment in the first year of the pandemic, preK and kindergarten enrollments in fall 2022 were 4 and 5 percent lower than their fall 2019 levels, respectively, which was similar to the percent difference between these two years for the combined enrollment in grades 1-8.

Due primarily to projected declines in the school-age population, total public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to decrease between fall 2022 and fall 2031 (the last year for which projected data are available).⁴ From fall 2022 to fall 2031,

- total enrollment is projected to decrease by 5 percent (from 49.6 million to 46.9 million students);
- preK-8 enrollment is projected to decrease by 5 percent (from 34.1 million to 32.2 million students); and
- 9-12 enrollment is projected to decrease by 6 percent (from 15.5 million to 14.7 million students).

State-Level Enrollments Since 2012

FIGURE 2.



Changes in public elementary and secondary school enrollment from 2012 to 2022 varied by state. Compared with 2012, total enrollment in grades preK-12 in 2022 was

- higher by 10 percent or more in 3 states (Idaho, Utah, and North Dakota) and the District of Columbia;⁵
- higher by less than 10 percent in 23 states;
- lower by less than 10 percent in 20 states; and
- lower by 10 percent or more in 4 states (New Hampshire, Illinois, Mississippi, and West Virginia).

In fall 2022, total enrollment ranged from fewer than 100,000 students in Vermont (83,700 students), the District of Columbia (91,000 students), and Wyoming (92,500 students) to 5.5 million students in Texas and 5.9 million students in California.

Focusing on the period since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, all 50 states recorded lower enrollments in fall 2020 than in fall 2019.⁶ 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. By fall 2022, enrollment was higher than the fall 2020 pandemic levels in 34 states and the District of Columbia and exceeded fall 2019 levels in 11 states and the District of Columbia. Of the 16 states with lower enrollment in fall 2022 than in fall 2020, the largest percent changes were in Hawaii (4 percent lower) and New York (3 percent lower).

Compared with fall 2012, public school enrollment in fall 2022 was

- higher in both grades preK-8 and grades 9-12 for 16 states and the District of Columbia;
- lower in both grades preK-8 and grades 9-12 for 13 states; and
- lower in grades preK-8 but higher in grades 9-12 for the remaining 21 states.

For grades preK-8, changes in enrollment across states between fall 2012 and fall 2022 ranged from an increase of 20 percent in the District of Columbia to a decrease of 14 percent in Mississippi and West Virginia. For grades 9-12 over this period, changes in enrollment across states ranged from an increase of 27 percent in Utah to a decrease of 12 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 2012 and fall 2022, total public school enrollment decreased in

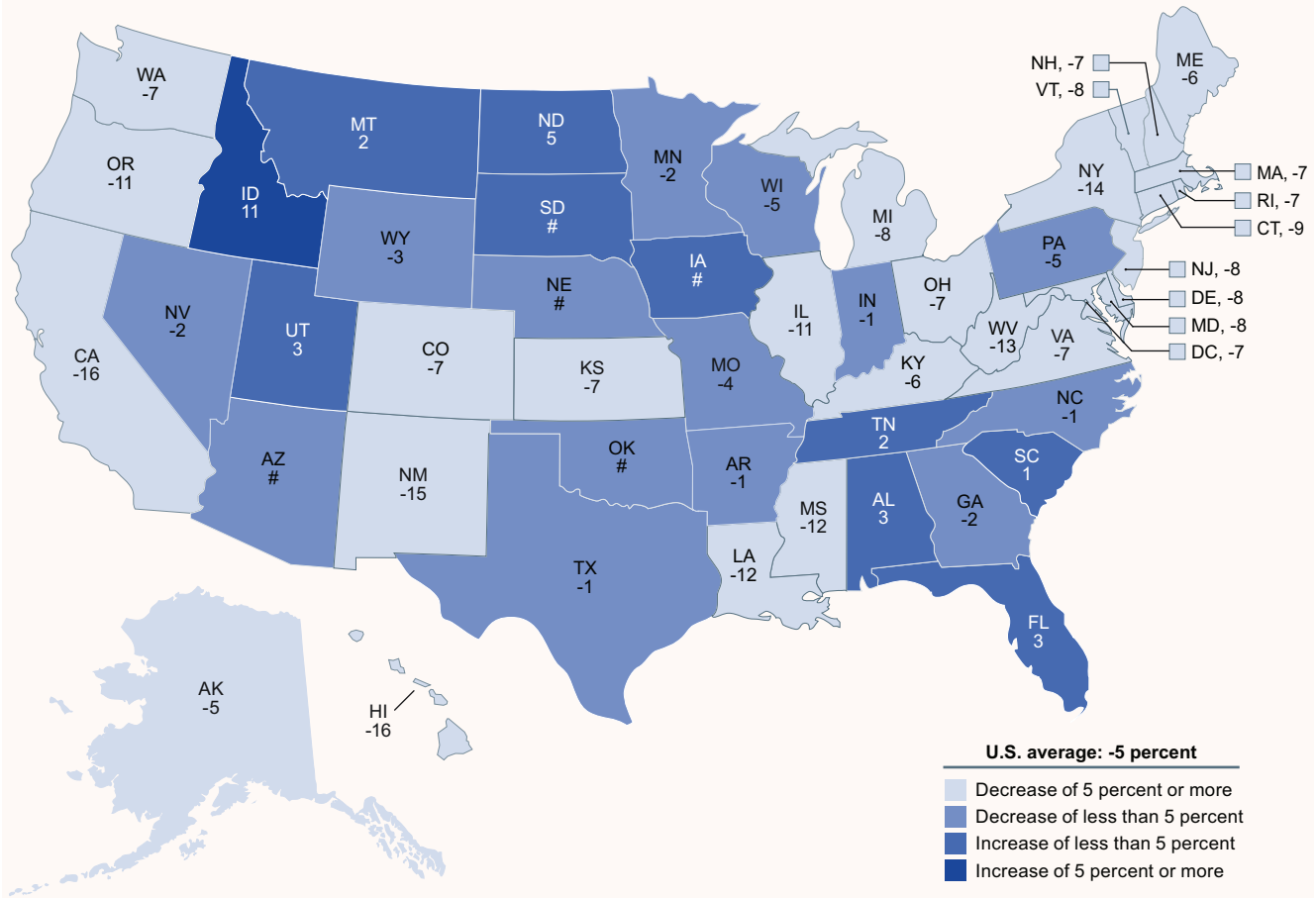
- Puerto Rico by 42 percent (from 434,600 to 250,700 students);
- the U.S. Virgin Islands by 33 percent (from 15,200 to 10,200 students);
- Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) domestic and overseas schools by 27 percent (from 85,000 to 61,900 students); and
- the Northern Mariana Islands by 12 percent (from 10,600 to 9,400 students).

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools enrolled 36,700 students in fall 2022.^{7, 8}

Projected State-Level Enrollments

FIGURE 3.

Projected percentage change in public elementary and secondary school enrollment, by state: Fall 2022 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 2022. Projections in this figure were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Projections for fall 2023 through fall 2031 are based on historical data through fall 2021, only. Figures are plotted based on 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," 2022–23; and State Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 203.20.

Although total public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to be lower in fall 2031 than in fall 2022 nationally, it is projected to be higher in 10 states.⁹ Idaho is projected to have the largest percent increase in total enrollment over this period (11 percent), followed by North Dakota (5 percent). Total enrollment is projected to be lower in fall 2031 than in fall 2022 in 40 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 over this period (16, 16, and 15 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 enrolled. 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 2022, public school enrollment in fall 2031 is projected to be

- higher in both grades preK-8 and grades 9-12 in 8 states;
- lower in both grades preK-8 and grades 9-12 in 35 states;
- lower in grades 9-12 but higher in grades preK-8 in 1 state, Iowa; and
- lower in grades preK-8 but higher in grades 9-12 in the remaining 6 states and the District of Columbia.

In terms of the size of these changes in enrollment between fall 2022 and fall 2031, enrollment in grades preK-8 is projected to be

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

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

- at least 15 percent lower in New Mexico, Mississippi, California, and New York; and
- at least 10 percent higher in North Dakota and Idaho.

Endnotes:

¹ For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

² 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.

³ Unless otherwise noted, this indicator presents public elementary and secondary school enrollment in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

⁴ Projections for fall 2023 through fall 2031 are based on historical data through fall 2021, only.

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

⁶ Enrollment in the District of Columbia rose by 0.01 percent in this time period.

⁷ Fall 2012 through fall 2015 public school enrollment data are not available for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. Between fall 2016 and fall 2022, enrollment in BIE schools decreased by 19 percent (from 45,400 in fall 2016) to 36,700 students in fall 2022.

⁸ Fall 2021 and fall 2022 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. Fall 2022 public school enrollment data are not available for Guam. In fall 2021, public elementary and secondary schools in Guam enrolled 28,400 students.

⁹ Projected enrollment data are not available for the other U.S. jurisdictions.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, 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](#)