

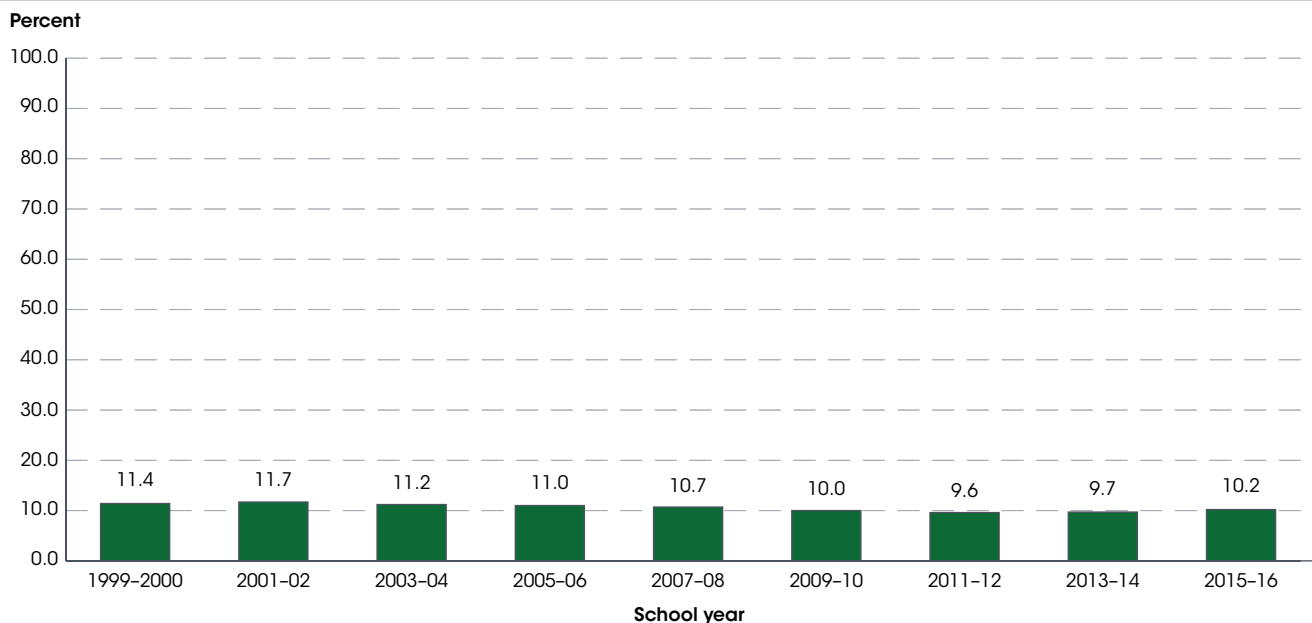
Private School Enrollment

In fall 2015, some 5.8 million students (10.2 percent of all elementary and secondary students) were enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools. Thirty-six percent of private school students were enrolled in Catholic schools, 39 percent were enrolled in other religiously affiliated schools, and 24 percent were enrolled in nonsectarian schools.

Private elementary and secondary schools are educational institutions that are not primarily supported by public funds.¹ In this indicator, private schools are grouped into the following categories: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian (not religiously affiliated). Catholic

schools include parochial, diocesan, and private Catholic schools. The other religious category includes conservative Christian schools, schools that are affiliated with other denominations, and religious schools that are not affiliated with any specific denomination.

Figure 1. Percentage of elementary and secondary students enrolled in private schools: Fall 1999 through fall 2015



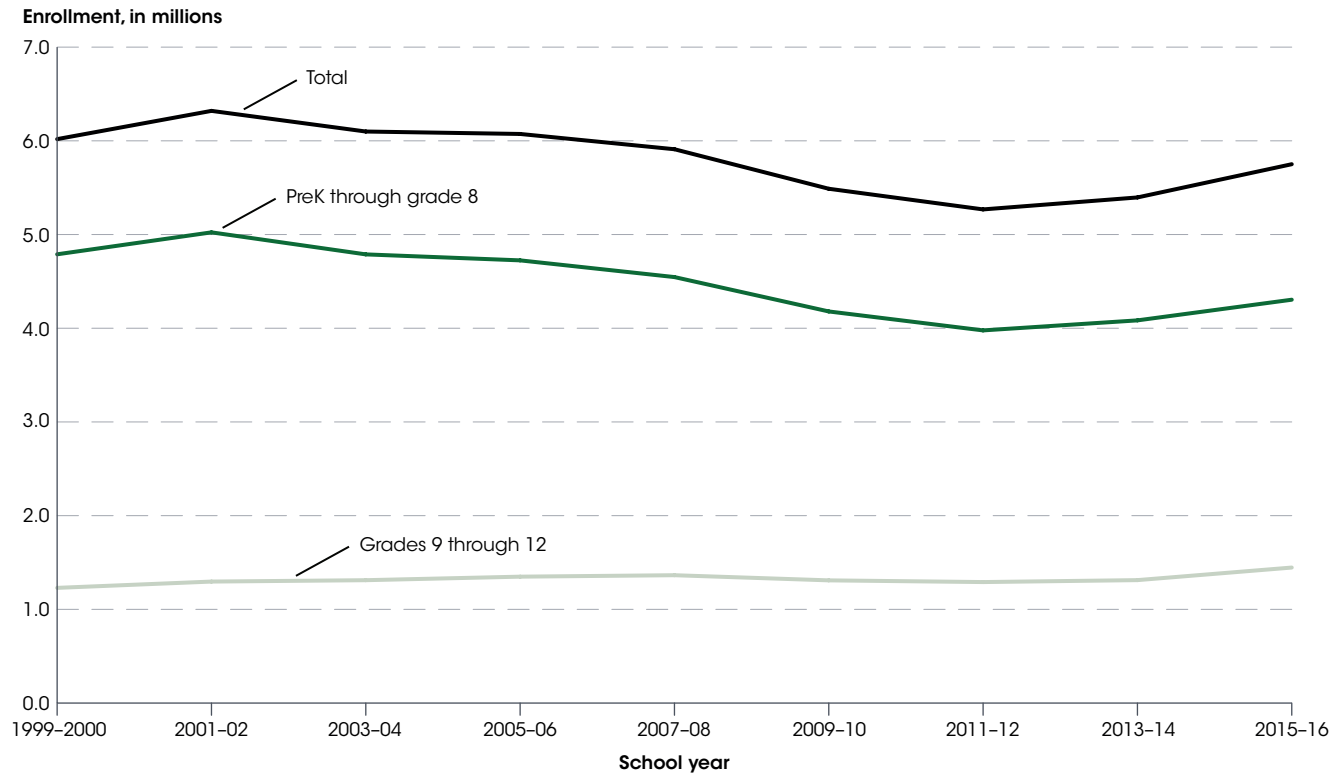
NOTE: Excludes prekindergarten students not enrolled in schools that offer kindergarten or higher grades.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), biennial, 1999-2000 through 2015-16; Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 1999-2000 through 2015-16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 105.30 and 205.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 203.40.

Between fall 1999 and fall 2015, the percentage of all elementary and secondary students who were enrolled in private schools fluctuated between 9.6 percent and 11.7 percent. During this time, the percentage of all elementary and secondary students who were enrolled in

private schools decreased from 11.4 percent in fall 1999 to 9.6 percent in fall 2011. In 2015, the percentage of students enrolled in private schools (10.2 percent) was higher than in 2011.

Figure 2. Private school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12, by grade level: Fall 1999 through fall 2015



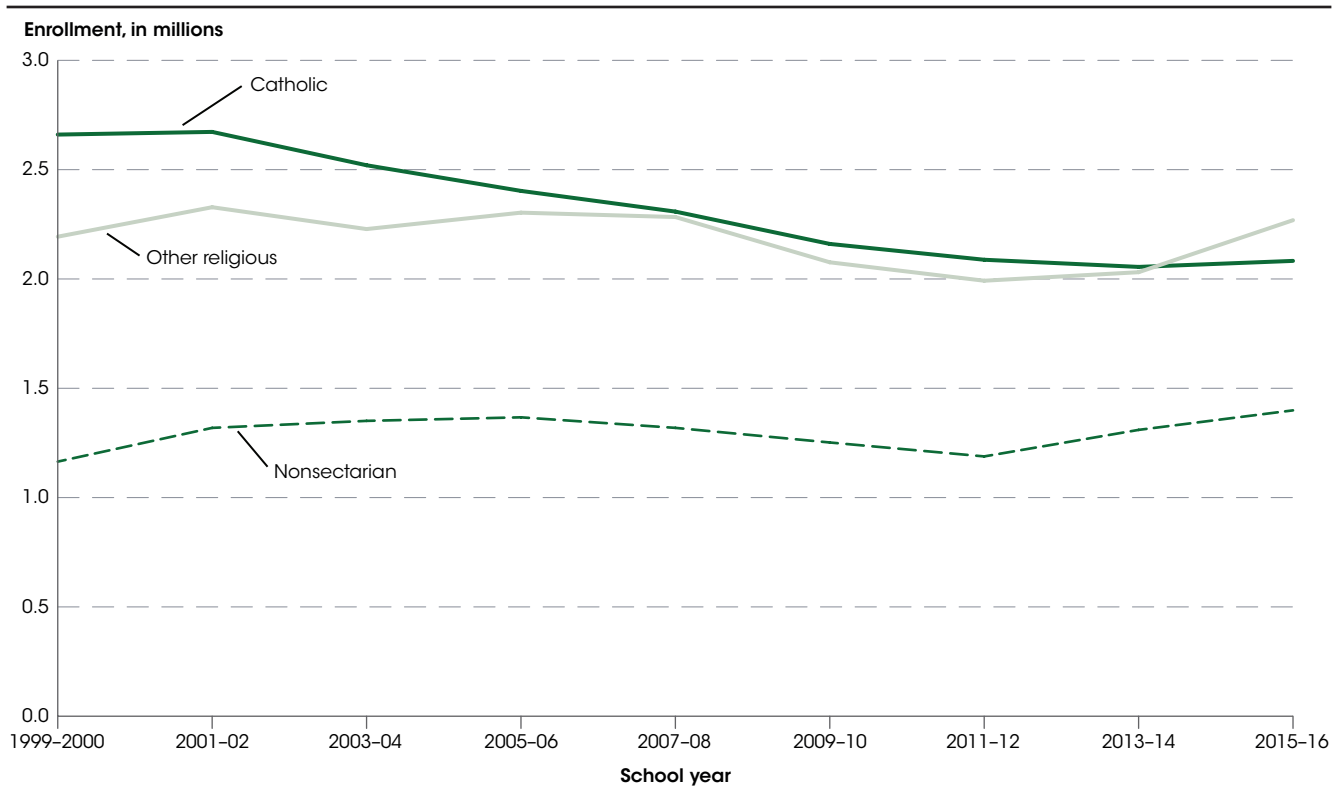
NOTE: Excludes prekindergarten students not enrolled in schools that offer kindergarten or higher grades. Ungraded students are prorated into prekindergarten through grade 8 and grades 9 through 12.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), biennial, 1999-2000 through 2015-16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 205.20.

Private school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12 was lower in fall 2015 (5.8 million students) than in fall 1999 (6.0 million students). During this time, private school enrollment was highest in fall 2001, at 6.3 million students, and decreased to 5.3 million in fall 2011. Private school enrollment then increased in each of the most recent years for which data are available, to 5.4 million students in fall 2013 and 5.8 million students in fall 2015.

peaking at 5.0 million students in fall 2001, decreasing to 4.0 million students in fall 2011, and increasing in each of the two most recent years for which data are available (to 4.1 million students in fall 2013 and to 4.3 million students in fall 2015). Private school enrollment in grades 9 through 12 was higher in fall 2015 (1.4 million students) than in fall 1999 (1.2 million students), but showed no clear trend during this period.

Private school enrollment in preK through grade 8 followed a similar pattern during this time period,

Figure 3. Private school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12, by school orientation: Fall 1999 through fall 2015

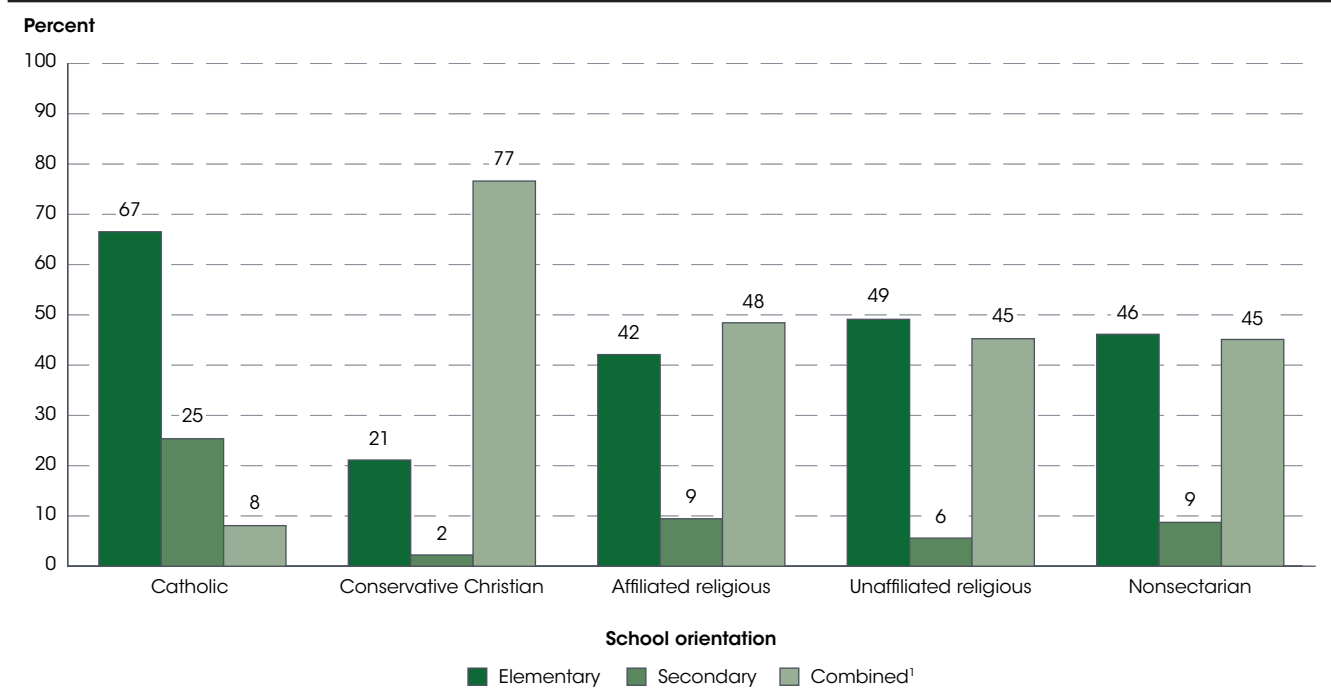


NOTE: Excludes prekindergarten students not enrolled in schools that offer kindergarten or higher grades. Catholic schools include parochial, diocesan, and private Catholic schools. Other religious schools include conservative Christian, affiliated religious, and unaffiliated religious schools. Nonsectarian schools do not have a religious orientation or religious purpose.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), biennial, 1999-2000 through 2015-16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 205.20.

In fall 2015, some 36 percent of all private school students were enrolled in Catholic schools, while 39 percent were enrolled in other religious private schools, and 24 percent of students were enrolled in nonsectarian private schools. The number of private school students enrolled in Catholic schools decreased from 2.7 million in fall 1999 to 2.1 million in fall 2015. This decrease was primarily due to a decline in the number of students

enrolled in Catholic parochial schools (1.4 million in fall 1999 compared to 716,000 in fall 2015). The number of students enrolled in other religious schools in fall 2015 (2.3 million students) was not measurably different from the number enrolled in fall 1999 (2.2 million students). The number of students enrolled in nonsectarian schools was higher in fall 2015 (1.4 million students) than in fall 1999 (1.2 million students).

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of private school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12, by school orientation and level: Fall 2015

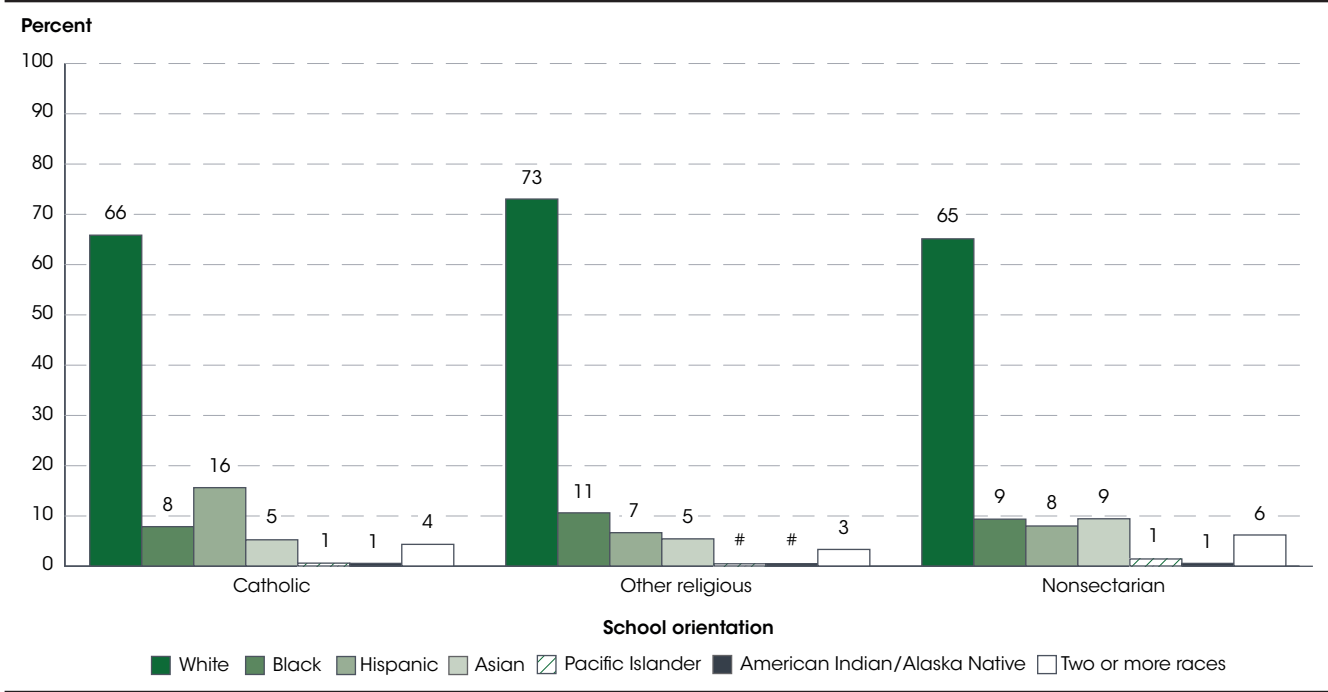


¹ Combined schools are those that have grades lower than 7 and higher than 8, as well as those that do not classify students by grade level.
 NOTE: Excludes prekindergarten students not enrolled in schools that offer kindergarten or higher grades. Elementary schools are classified by state and local practice and are composed of any span of grades not above grade 8. Secondary schools have no grade lower than 7. Both junior high schools and senior high schools are included. Catholic schools include parochial, diocesan, and private Catholic schools. Affiliated religious schools belong to associations of schools with a specific religious orientation other than Catholic or conservative Christian. Unaffiliated religious schools have a religious orientation or purpose but are not classified as Catholic, conservative Christian, or affiliated religious. Nonsectarian schools do not have a religious orientation or religious purpose. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 205.30.

In fall 2015, half of all private school students (50 percent) were at elementary schools, 13 percent were at secondary schools, and 36 percent were at combined elementary and secondary schools. The share of private school students at elementary schools was highest at Catholic schools (67 percent) and lowest at conservative Christian schools

(21 percent). A quarter of Catholic school students (25 percent) attended secondary schools, while 9 percent or less of students at any other private school orientation did so. The share of private school students at combined schools was lowest at Catholic schools (8 percent) and highest at conservative Christian schools (77 percent).

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of private school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through grade 12, by school orientation and race/ethnicity: Fall 2015



Rounds to zero.
 NOTE: Prekindergarten students who are enrolled in private schools that do not offer kindergarten or higher grades are not included in this analysis. Catholic schools include parochial, diocesan, and private Catholic schools. Other religious schools include conservative Christian, affiliated religious, and unaffiliated religious schools. Nonsectarian schools do not have a religious orientation or religious purpose. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Percentage distribution is based on the students for whom race/ethnicity was reported. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 205.30.

White students constituted the largest share of enrollment among Catholic (66 percent), other religious (73 percent), and nonsectarian schools (65 percent) in fall 2015. Black students made up the second-largest share of enrollment in other religious schools (11 percent), and Hispanic students made up the second-largest share of enrollment at Catholic schools (16 percent). A larger percentage of students were Asian at nonsectarian schools (9 percent)

than at Catholic and other religious schools (5 percent each). Similarly, the percentage of students who were of Two or more races was larger at nonsectarian schools (6 percent) than at Catholic schools (4 percent) and other religious schools (3 percent). Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students constituted 1 percent or less of enrollment at Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian schools.

Endnotes:

¹ For the purposes of this indicator, private schools exclude organizations or institutions that provide support for homeschooling.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 205.20 and 205.30

Related indicators and resources: [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Public Charter School Enrollment](#)

Glossary: Catholic school, Combined school, Elementary school, Enrollment, Nonsectarian school, Other religious school, Prekindergarten, Private school, Racial/ethnic group, Secondary school