



Knocking at the College Door Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication of *Knocking at the College Door* marks the 7th edition of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's projections of high school graduates. It updates forecasts of the number of high school graduates for public and nonpublic schools for the nation, four geographic regions, and all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and also includes projections of public school graduates by race/ethnicity. (In addition, we've posted individual state profiles on our website at www.wiche.edu/policy – follow the links to this publication's web page.) Projections for public school graduates cover the period 2005-06 through 2021-22 in this edition, while actual data are reported for preceding years back to 1991-92. The years of coverage for estimates and projections for nonpublic school graduates differ by state, although projections most commonly begin for that sector in 2002-03. Projections of school enrollments are also included, though they are not the central focus of the publication.

These projections provide a useful indicator of how the supply of high school graduates and the corresponding demand for postsecondary

education are expected to change in the years to come. As such, these data have many uses, especially in planning and policymaking in an era when education – and increasingly, postsecondary education – are essential for the success of individuals and society as a whole. These projections offer a view into the future, indicating ways in which the current “system” of education may need to adapt to accommodate rapidly changing demographic conditions. There are two main sets of findings to be drawn from these projections.

Changes in Total Production of High School Graduates

Predicted changes in total production of high school graduates for the nation and individual states account for the first set of findings. The overall demand for education is a central concern for policymakers and for planners at the state, school district, school, and postsecondary institutional levels. Demand helps determine how much space is needed to ensure each student has access to a quality education, both within the K-12 system and at colleges and universities.

Projections indicate that the nation can expect that:

- ✦ The rapid and sustained expansion in the number of high school graduates that began in the early 1990s will initially continue.
- ✦ This expansion will reach a peak in 2007-08, when total graduates from public and nonpublic schools will exceed 3.34 million.
- ✦ The production of high school graduates will slow moderately between 2008-09 and 2014-15.
- ✦ After 2007-08 overall production of high school graduates will become much more stable for the foreseeable future than it was during the expansion period, when it was growing by leaps and bounds.

Since the responsibility for providing education largely falls on the states, demographic data at the state level are especially valuable. These projections show that states face very different demographic futures. In terms of total production of high school graduates, states may be categorized into six groups, based on the projected change in high school graduates between the last year for which actual data were available, 2004-05, and a decade later.

- ✦ **Dwindling production (losses of 10 percent or more):** Kansas, Louisiana,¹ Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming (eight states).
- ✦ **Slowing production (losses of between 10 and 5 percent):** Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (10 states).
- ✦ **Stable production (changes falling between a loss of 5 percent and an increase of 5 percent):** Alaska, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New

Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington (17 states).

- ✦ **Manageable expansion (increases of between 5 and 10 percent):** Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Virginia (five states plus D.C.).
- ✦ **Rapid expansion (increases of between 10 and 20 percent):** Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, and North Carolina (four states).
- ✦ **Explosive growth (increases greater than 20 percent):** Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, Texas, and Utah (six states).

These categories highlight how very different the futures of individual states look. They also show that the bulk of the growth is concentrated in the South and in the West, and especially in states in the lower latitudes of those regions. But this categorization scheme oversimplifies and obscures considerable variation in how individual states' production of high school graduates will change in the time between 2004-05 and 2014-15 and beyond. Individual states' projections are available in the tables in Appendix A.

Escalating Diversification

The second key theme arising out of these projections relates to how the nation and most states are experiencing a shift in the racial/ethnic composition of their populations. In particular, the population of minority groups and especially Hispanics is increasing rapidly, while growth among White non-Hispanics is not projected to keep pace.

Among high school graduates, the story is much the same. The nation and more and more states are closing in on "majority-minority" status relative to public high school graduating classes, in which the number of graduates who are not White non-Hispanic exceeds the number

of graduates who are. Between 2004-05 and 2014-15, WICHE projects that the nation's public high schools will produce:

- ✦ Almost 207,000 more Hispanic graduates (an increase of 54 percent).
- ✦ Nearly 46,000 more Asian/Pacific Islander graduates (an increase of 32 percent).
- ✦ About 12,000 more Black non-Hispanic graduates (an increase of 3 percent).
- ✦ About 2,000 more American Indian/Alaska Native graduates (an increase of 7 percent).
- ✦ Nearly 197,000 fewer White non-Hispanic graduates (a decline of 11 percent).

These data show that minorities account for all the growth in the our public high schools' production of graduates.² Especially noteworthy is that the projected increase in Hispanic graduates alone more than offsets the decrease in White non-Hispanic graduates. In fact, if minority students completed high school at the same rate that White non-Hispanic students do, this shift would be even more dramatic.

Clearly, the composition of our schools is changing. State policymakers and officials in school districts, K-12 schools, and postsecondary institutions need to be aware of these changes and how they might impact curriculum and preparation, the demand for support services, the demand for postsecondary education, affordability, and other issues.

The national trends are playing out in many states as well. The number of Hispanic graduates from public schools is expected to rise in all states except Hawaii by 2014-15, with the largest increases in the southern parts of the West and the South. In percentage terms, however, states all over the country will need to educate substantially more Hispanic students – and will be producing more Hispanic graduates

– than they did previously. And Hispanics are not the only group that can expect to grow: the number of Asian/Pacific Islander graduates will climb in virtually all states, with rapid growth rates seen in many of them. Conversely, by 2014-15 only six states will graduate more White non-Hispanic students than they did in 2004-05, while the majority of states outside the South can expect average annual declines in their production of White non-Hispanic graduates. Appendix A contains detailed tables for each state, including actual and projected data for graduates by race/ethnicity.

How These Data Might Be Used

Demographic data such as these projections are vital to crafting effective policy solutions to the challenge of providing high-quality educational opportunities to all students. One of the most important implications that arises from these projections is that the stark differences in individual states' overall production of high school graduates present entirely different challenges to educational planners and policymakers and necessitate carefully tailored policy approaches. In other words, states, school districts, schools, and postsecondary institutions should carefully examine demographic data and projections such as these before adopting any policy solution (especially a policy enacted by one of its counterparts), to ensure that it fits its own needs and conditions.

Beyond that, these data have many potential uses for a variety of audiences. A few examples of how they might be effectively employed follow.

- ✦ *State policymakers* may use the projections to adjust accountability schemes, to give schools, school districts, and postsecondary institutions incentives to reach out to and serve traditionally underrepresented student populations more effectively. In states anticipating a large expansion of high school graduates, for example, policymakers may

use the projections to estimate the scope of the capacity challenge ahead of them and to craft solutions that leverage proven technology to deliver education more efficiently. Policymakers in states expecting a downturn may rely on the projections to implement changes in the nonresident tuition rate for their postsecondary institutions, as one way to appeal to neighboring states with a surplus of graduates; or they may use them as a rationale for committing more resources to programs, like WICHE's Western Undergraduate Exchange (<http://wue.wiche.edu>), that help facilitate student mobility across state lines.

- ✦ Given the rapid increase in the number of traditionally underrepresented students, combined with projected stagnation in the supply of high school graduates, *college presidents* may respond by adjusting the ways in which they reach out to minority students and adults. Such adjustments may influence the curricula, as well as the times when and the locations where courses are taught; or they may affect institutional tuition and financial aid policies.
- ✦ *Researchers* can employ the data to forecast additional data points of use to public policymakers. They may also make the data a central element of an argument for increased attention to issues of postsecondary access, success, and equity.

These projections indicate that our nation's schools have big but varied challenges ahead of them. Those challenges are about assuring adequate capacity, preserving or enhancing educational quality, and responding to rapidly changing student bodies. The 50 states' educational policies will have a crucial effect on how well schools are able to respond to those challenges. Our ability to meet these challenges will go a long way in determining whether all individuals have an equal opportunity to obtain a good education, get a decent job, and be productive contributors to our society and economy. It will also play a pivotal role in whether our states and our nation can remain competitive in a global, knowledge-based economy that is dependent upon our improving the educational attainment levels of all citizens, including those minority populations that are clearly growing the fastest in our society.

Endnotes

¹ Louisiana's projections were substantially influenced by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. More information and analysis on how the state's projections were affected is available in Chapter 4.

² A complete picture of the racial/ethnic composition of the high school graduate cohort is not possible because data on race/ethnicity are insufficient for nonpublic schools and homeschools, although public schools account for a large majority of enrollments nationally.

The logo for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) features the word "WICHE" in a blue, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized blue line graphic that resembles a mountain range or a series of peaks and valleys.

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The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is an interstate compact created by formal legislative action of the states and the U.S. Congress. Its mission is to work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. Member states are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity was prepared by WICHE's Public Policy and Research unit, which conducts research and policy analysis on current and emerging issues in higher education and communicates this information and analysis to education and government policymakers.

This report is available online at <http://www.wiche.edu/policy/Knocking>

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