

Knocking at the College Door

Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

CALIFORNIA

At over 3.3 million, the nation's graduating class of 2007-08 is projected to be history's largest. In fact, 2007-08 will mark the last year in an era of continuous growth in the nation's production of high school graduates, a period that reaches back to 1994. Over that time, the number of graduates swelled by 35.7 percent. In 2008-09, however, our country will begin a protracted period during which its production of high school graduates is expected to stagnate, assuming existing patterns persist. The number of graduates nationally will dip slightly over the next several years before growth resumes at a slower pace around 2015. Ultimately, projections indicate that between 2004-05 (the last year of available actual data) and 2021-22, the number of high school graduates will grow by approximately 265,000, or 8.6 percent.

The national data obscure significant variations in this picture at the regional and state levels, however. Regionally, in the decade leading up to 2004-05, the number of high school graduates grew the fastest in the West at 34 percent, with the South growing by 23.5 percent, the Northeast by 20.7 percent, and the Midwest by 14.2 percent. But the regions face very different futures in the years to come. The South will see the most growth in its production of high school graduates, at about 9 percent by 2014-15; and the West's numbers will climb by 7.1 percent. But the number of graduates produced in the Northeast and the Midwest will decline – by 6.1 and 3 percent, respectively.

As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1).

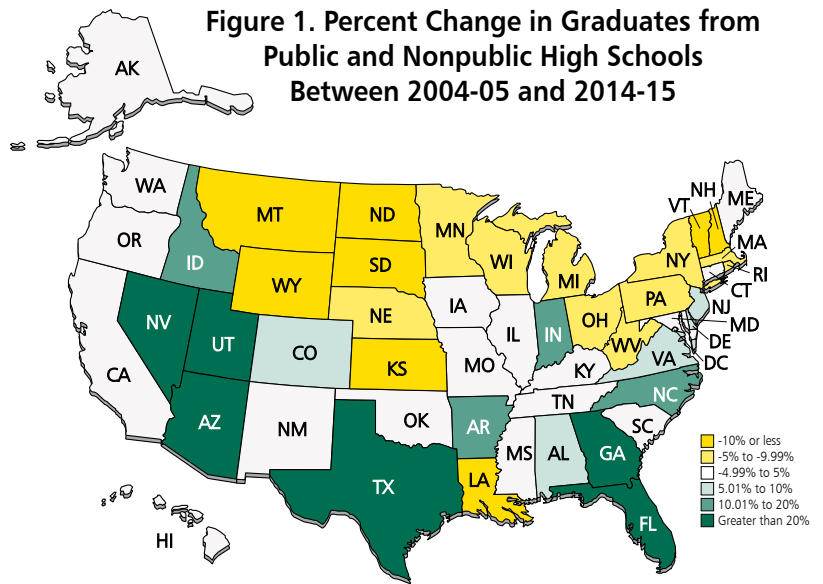
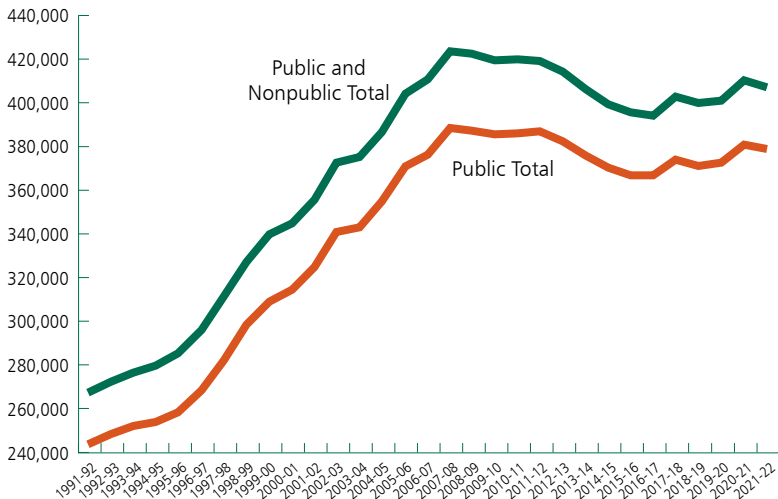


Figure 2. California High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



California produced over 107,000 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 38.3 percent. Projections indicate that California will continue growing, though at a slower pace. Assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue, the state projects to produce nearly 12,000 more high school graduates in the decade after 2004-05, an increase equal to about 3 percent.

California was among the states that saw rapid growth in its production of high school graduates between 1991-92 and 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data from public schools (Figure 2). In 2004-05, 355,217 students graduated from public high schools in California, a number that included 119,731 more graduates than were produced in 1991-92, representing growth of 44.7 percent. Nonpublic schools in the state added an estimated 32,474 in 2004-05, over 9,000 more than graduated in 1991-92. Of the state's total number of high school graduates each year throughout the actual and projected timeframe, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 8 percent, on average.

However, along with much of the rest of the nation, California is poised to enter a new period characterized by much more stagnant growth in the production of high school graduates. After reaching a peak in 2007-08 at 388,697, California will see little change in the number of public high school graduates each year through 2012-13, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. Between 2004-05 and 2007-08, the number of public high school graduates is forecast to climb by 9.4 percent, but between then and 2016-17, it is projected to slide by about 5.5 percent. For the remainder of the projected period, California's public schools' production of high school graduates will hover around 375,000.

The racial/ethnic composition of California's public high school graduating classes will continue to show substantial diversification over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). As a state where the public high school graduating class was "majority-minority" (where minority graduates outnumber White non-Hispanic graduates) in 1994-95, California will see the proportion of graduates who are from minority backgrounds continue to climb. In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 47.2 percent of the graduates from public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped to 40.2 percent. By 2014-15, it will reach 28.9 percent.

These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country. Although the magnitude may differ substantially, the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. While only a few states like California already produce graduating classes that are majority-minority, as in other states, the big changes in California are the result of rapid growth in the number of Hispanic high school students and graduates, coupled with a shrinking number of White non-Hispanics in the educational pipeline. While immigration has contributed to the growth of the Hispanic population, signs of the continuing demographic shift are evident in data showing a dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic births, which is due in part to a higher fertility rate among Hispanic women.

Figure 3. Composition of California's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10 and 2014-15 (Projected)

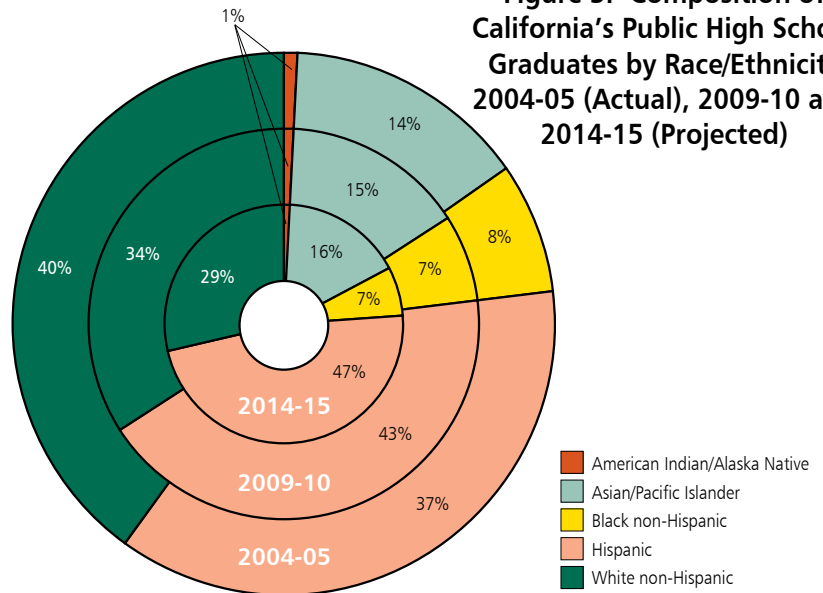
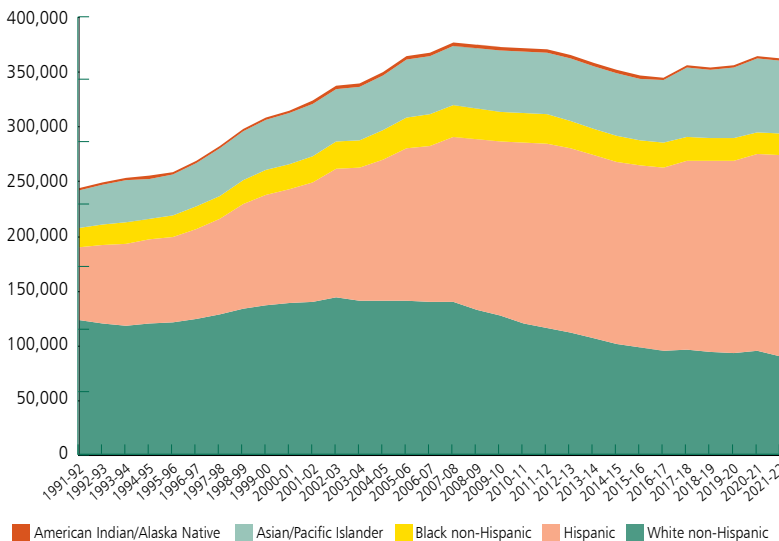


Figure 4. California High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in California numbered 129,671 in 2004-05, which nearly equaled the 140,807 graduates from White non-Hispanic backgrounds. Within a decade Hispanic graduates are projected to number 166,765, an increase of 28.6 percent, while White non-Hispanic graduates will fall 27.7 percent to 101,734 (Figure 4). Asians/Pacific Islanders are the only other racial/ethnic group in the state that is projected to increase its number of public high school graduates, adding almost 7,500 between 2004-05 and 2014-15 (14.4 percent). Meanwhile, despite initial growth, the number of Black non-Hispanic graduates will wind up decreasing by nearly 4,000 (13.9 percent) over that same span; and American Indians/Alaska Natives are projected to fall by about 12.5 percent.

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