

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

DELAWARE

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).

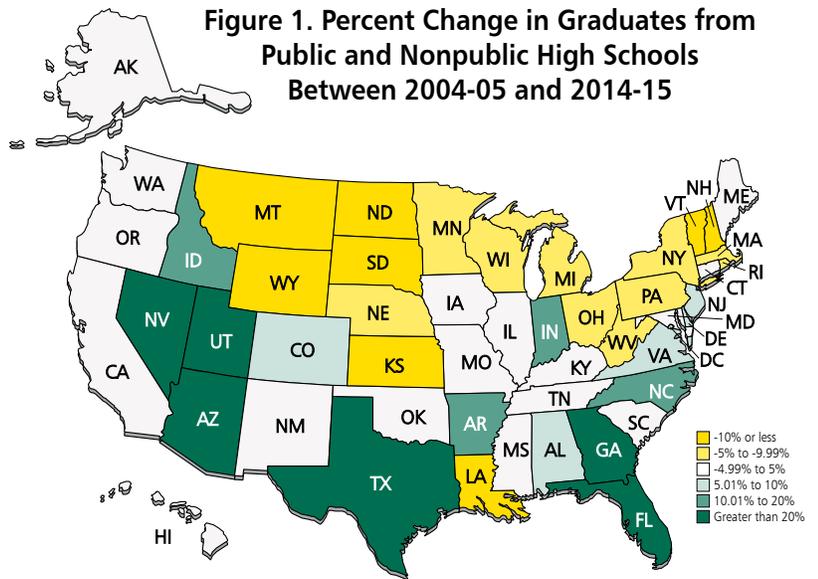
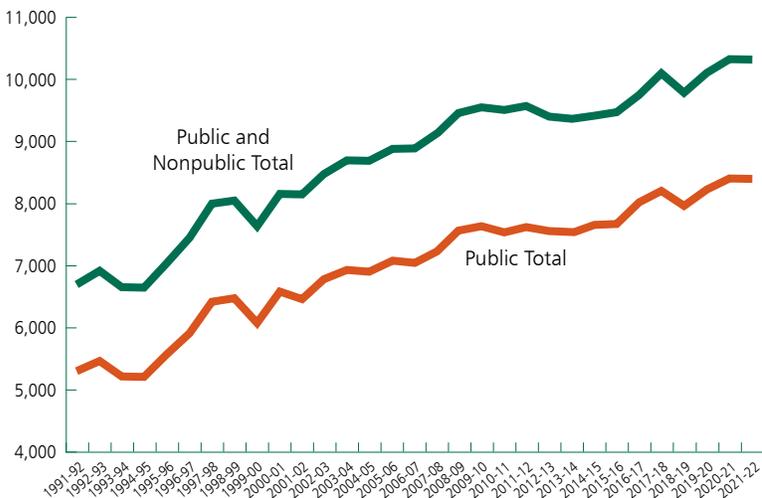


Figure 1. Percent Change in Graduates from Public and Nonpublic High Schools Between 2004-05 and 2014-15

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



Delaware produced over 2,000 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 30.5 percent. Projections indicate that Delaware will continue growing, though at a slower pace, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. The state projects to produce a little more than 700 additional high school graduates a decade after 2004-05, an increase equal to about 8 percent.

Delaware experienced 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, 6,934 students graduated from public high schools in the state, a number that included 1,609 more graduates than were produced in 1991-92, representing growth of 30.2 percent. Nonpublic schools contribute a substantial number of Delaware's high school graduates; they added an estimated 1,780 in 2004-05, which was 382 more than graduated in 1991-92. Of the state's total number of high school graduates each year, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 20 percent, on average.

However, along with much of the rest of the nation, Delaware is poised to enter a new period characterized by much more stagnant growth in the production of high school graduates. After reaching over 9,500 in 2009-10, Delaware will see little change in the number of high school graduates each year through 2015-16, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the number of high school graduates is forecast to climb by 9.8 percent, but it is projected to change very little over the six years after that. Growth will resume beginning in 2016-17, with total graduates exceeding 10,300 at the end of the projected period.

The racial/ethnic composition of Delaware's public high school graduating classes will continue to show substantial diversification over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanic graduates accounted for 70.9 percent of the graduates from public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped to 63.3 percent. The next decade will see further declines in the share of the state's public high school graduates who are White non-Hispanic, with projections indicating that this number will reach 53.4 percent by 2014-15. The graduating class is projected to become "majority-minority" (where White non-Hispanics are outnumbered by minorities) in 2017-18.

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. In Delaware, as in other states, the big changes are the result of rapid growth in the number of minority high school students and graduates, especially Hispanics, 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 Delaware's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10, and 2014-15 (Projected)

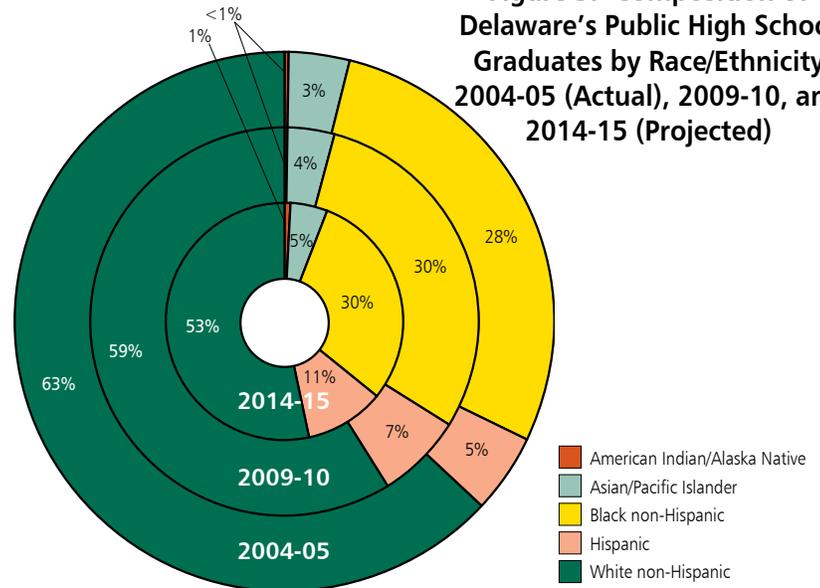
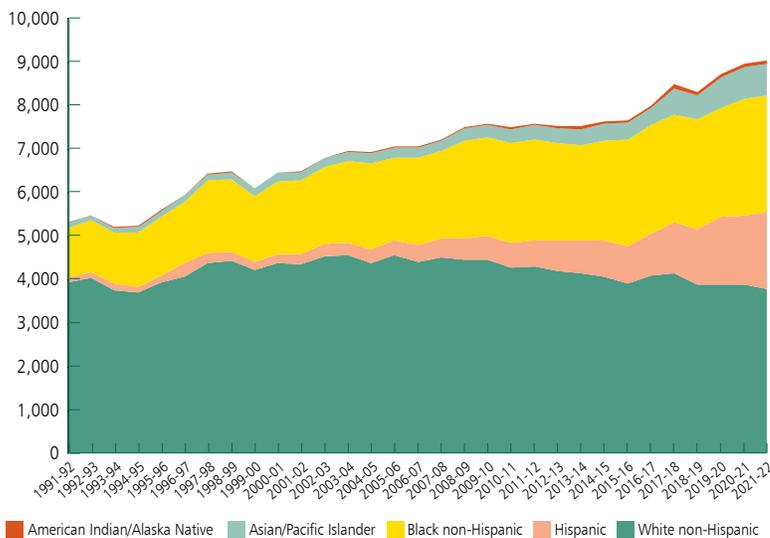


Figure 4. Delaware High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Projecting changes in the numbers of minority graduates in Delaware is especially prone to potential error given the small size of these groups; a slight change can make an apparently large difference in the projected percentage change. Nevertheless, Hispanic graduates from public schools in Delaware numbered 322 in 2004-05, but within a decade they are projected to number over 800, an increase of greater than 150 percent (Figure 4). Meanwhile, White non-Hispanics will likely see their numbers fall over the same timeframe, with projections showing a decline from 4,386 in 2004-05 to 4,078 in 2014-15, a 7 percent drop. Asians/Pacific Islanders are also projected to see considerable growth over the same period, at 73.2 percent. Black non-Hispanic graduates will increase by 16.4 percent (adding nearly 500 graduates); and American Indian/Alaska Native graduates are projected to climb by 24 (an increase of 80 percent).

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