

Knocking at the College Door

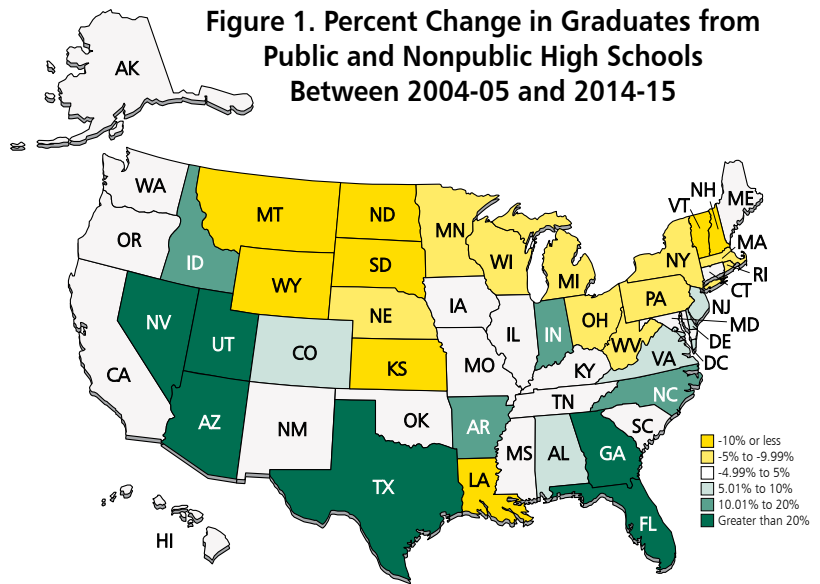
Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

KENTUCKY

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.

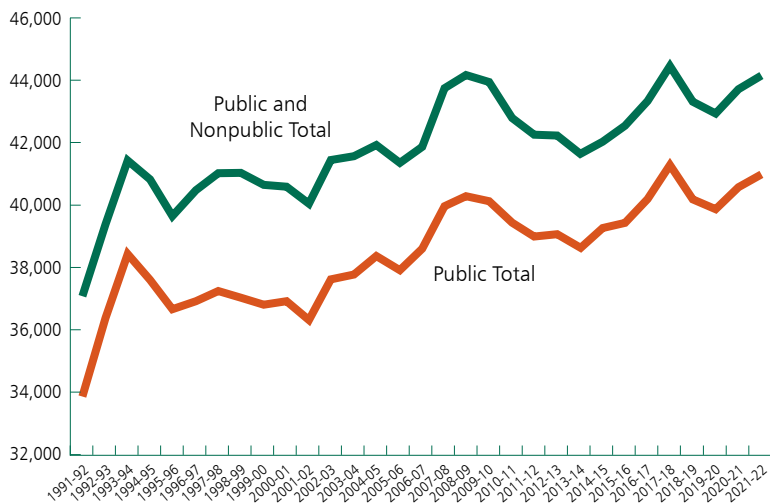
As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1).



Kentucky produced over 1,100 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 2.7 percent. Projections indicate that the state's number of graduates will grow rapidly though 2008-09 before falling back to its 2004-05 level, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. The state projects to produce about 2,240 more high school graduates in 2008-09 than it did in 2004-05, an increase equal to about 5.3 percent.

The period 1991-92 through 2004-05 was marked by instability in Kentucky's production of high school graduates, although numbers trended upward throughout the period (Figure 2). In 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data, the state's public high schools graduated 38,399 students. While that number was just 773 more than the 1994-95 level, it was 4,503 more graduates than in 1991-92. Nonpublic schools added an estimated 3,551 in 2004-05, which was about 360 more than graduated in 1991-92. Of Kentucky's total number of high school graduates each year, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 8 percent, on average.

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



However, along with much of the rest of the nation, Kentucky 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 2008-09 at 44,190, the state will see a sharp decline in the number of high school graduates each year through 2013-14, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. Between 2008-09 and 2013-14, the number of high school graduates is forecast to drop by over 2,500 (5.7 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will once again increase for several years.

The racial/ethnic composition of Kentucky's public high school graduating classes will begin to show more diversification over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 90.2 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped slightly to 88.5 percent. By 2014-15, that decrease will have accelerated and the proportion of White non-Hispanics will have fallen to under 83 percent.

These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country, though the magnitude may differ substantially, as the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Kentucky, as in other states, the big changes 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. These trends are actually somewhat delayed in Kentucky, since the number of White non-Hispanics is projected to continue growing initially in the projections while growth among Hispanics will increase ever faster as time goes by. 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 Kentucky's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10, and 2014-15 (Projected)

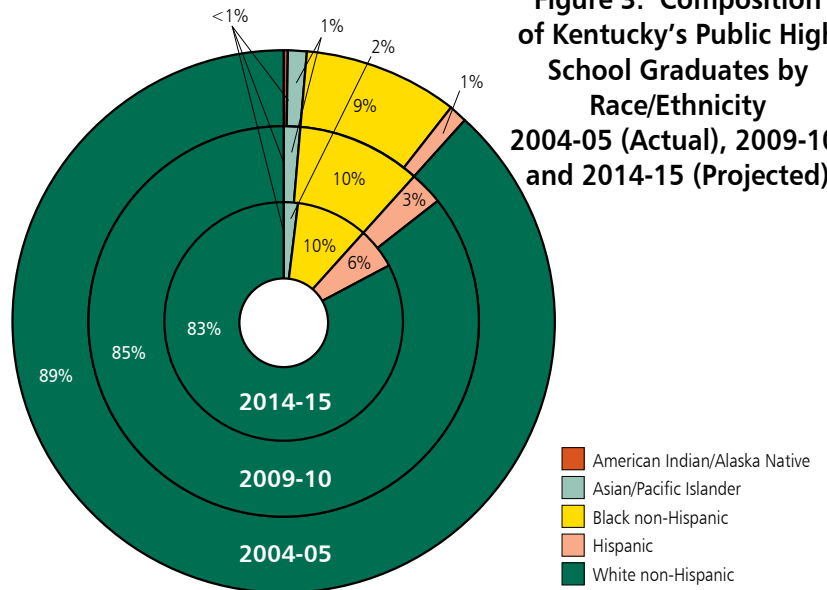
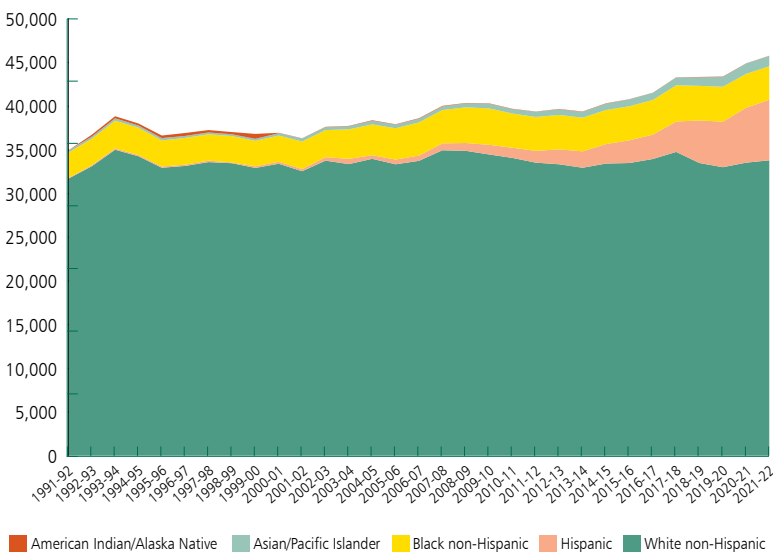


Figure 4. Kentucky High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in Kentucky numbered just 406 in 2004-05. But within a decade Hispanic graduates are projected to increase by more than 450 percent to about 2,200, with the size of the annual increases growing in the later years (Figure 4). Growth among Black non-Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders will also be substantial over the same time span, with increases of 10.4 percent and 81 percent, respectively. By 2014-15, Kentucky's public high schools are forecast to graduate 3,900 Black non-Hispanics and 740 Asians/Pacific Islanders. Meanwhile, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates will slip by about 1.6 percent from its 2004-05 level of 33,984. Finally, American Indians/Alaska Natives, who accounted for just 60 graduates in 2004-05, are projected to see their numbers fall by half.

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