

Knocking at the College Door

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

TENNESSEE

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).

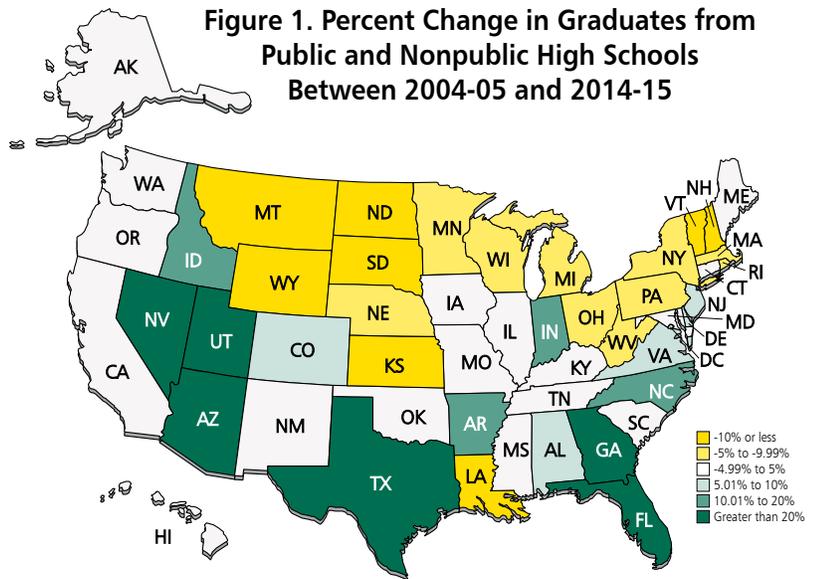
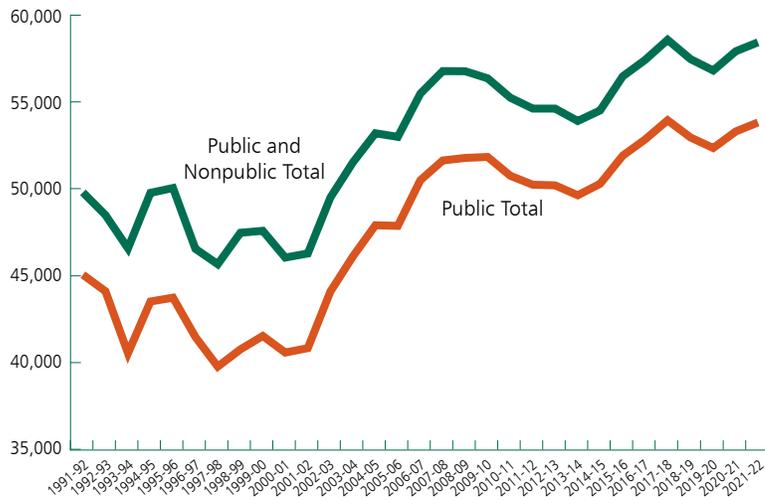


Figure 2. Tennessee High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Tennessee produced about 3,400 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 6.8 percent. Projections indicate that Tennessee's number of graduates will continue growing rapidly through 2007-08 before it begins its next period of decreases. Assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue, the state projects to produce 1,300 more high school graduates in 2014-15 than in 2004-05, an increase equal to about 2.5 percent.

The period 1991-92 through 2000-01 was marked by instability in Tennessee's production of high school graduates. But the state entered into a period of rapid growth beginning in 2001-02 and counted 47,967 public school graduates in 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data (Figure 2). That amount was 4,411 more graduates than in 1994-95. Nonpublic schools in the state showed considerable change over that time span. They graduated an estimated 5,288 in 2004-05, which was over 1,000 fewer than a decade earlier. In fact, the number of graduates from nonpublic schools

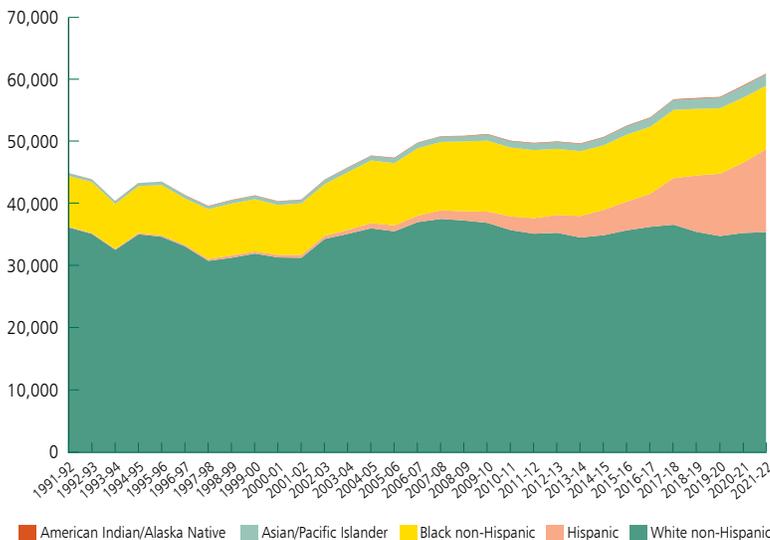
appears to have shrunk in recent years, and the projections indicate that this pattern will continue. Between 1997-98 and 2004-05, the estimated share of Tennessee's total high school graduates from nonpublic schools fell from 14 percent to 10 percent.

Along with much of the rest of the nation, Tennessee is poised to enter a new period characterized by much less rapid growth in the production of high school graduates. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the number of graduates from state's public high schools will continue to climb rapidly. But after reaching a peak in 2009-10 at 51,910, the state will see a 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 those years, the number of high school graduates is forecast to drop by about 2,200 (4.2 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will once again rise for several years.

The racial/ethnic composition of Tennessee'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 81.1 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped to 75.6 percent. By 2014-15, it will reach 68.9 percent.

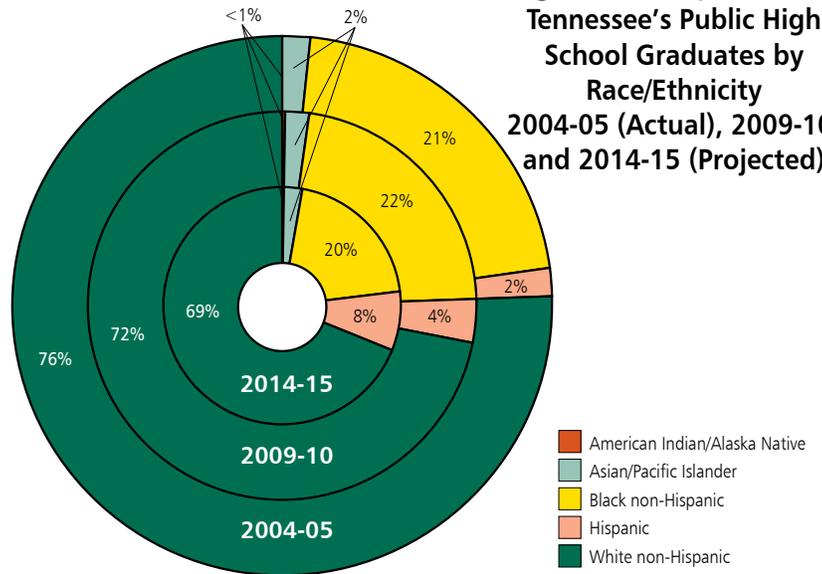
These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country. Although the magnitude may differ substantially, the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Tennessee, as in other states, the big changes are the result 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. 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 4. Tennessee High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in the state numbered 840 in 2004-05. But within a decade, Hispanic graduates are projected to climb by close to 400 percent to about 4,100. (Figure 4). Meanwhile, despite initial growth, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates will wind up decreasing by nearly 1,100 graduates (3.1 percent) to nearly 35,150 over that same span. The projected number of Black non-Hispanic graduates will increase initially before sliding back slightly, leaving that group with about 300 more graduates in 2014-15 than were counted in 2004-05, when they numbered 10,086. Both Asians/Pacific Islanders and American Indians/Alaska Natives are expected to see rapid growth over that same span, with increases of about 530 (72 percent) and 37 graduates (78 percent), respectively.

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



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