

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

NEBRASKA

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). Nebraska produced over 2,500 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 12.6 percent. Projections indicate that the state's number of graduates will spike in 2007-08 before beginning a sustained slide, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. Nebraska projects to produce about 1,300 fewer high school graduates in 2014-15 than it did in 2004-05, a decrease of about 6 percent.

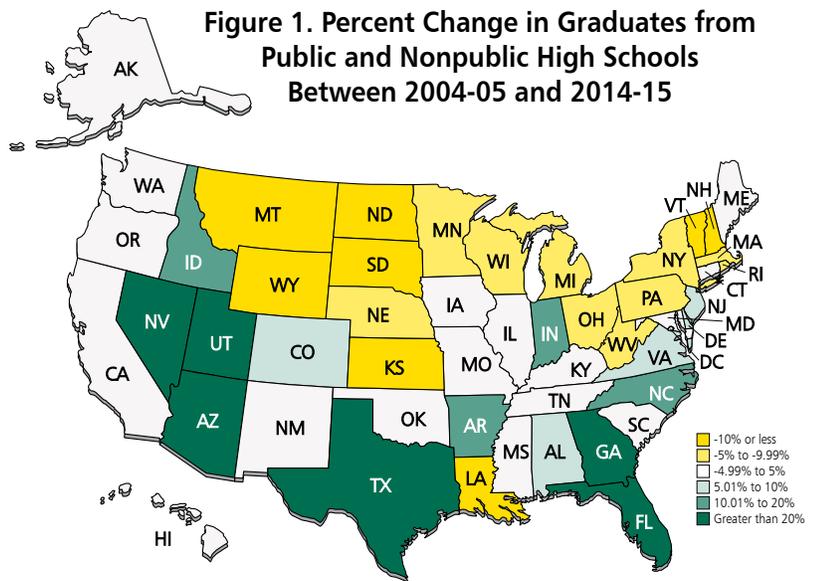
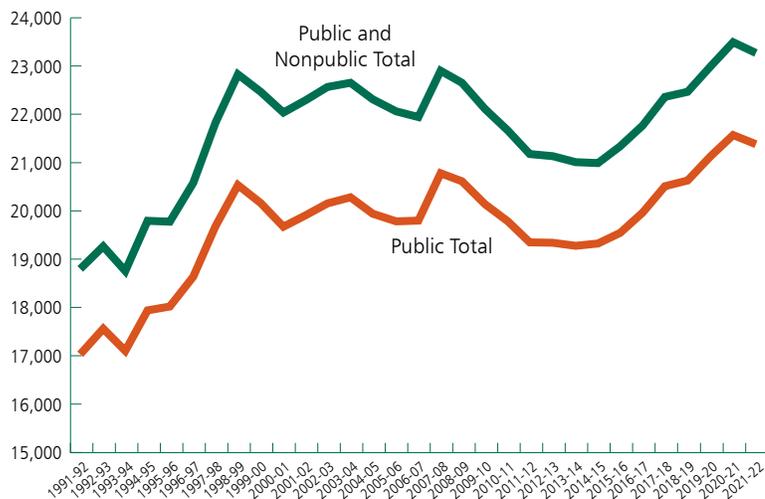


Figure 2. Nebraska High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Nebraska was among the states with rapid but uneven growth in its production of high school graduates between 1991-92 and 1998-99, during which time the number of graduates from its public schools climbed by nearly 3,500 (20.5 percent) (Figure 2). But by 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data, production had slipped slightly to 19,940 graduates, 2,883 more than were produced in 1991-92. Nonpublic schools in the state graduated an estimated 2,375 in 2004-05, which was about 600 more than graduated in 1991-92. Of Nebraska's total number of high school graduates each year, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 9 percent, on average.

However, along with much of the rest of the nation, Nebraska is poised to enter a new period characterized by much more stagnant growth or declines in the production of high school graduates. After spiking in 2007-08 at about 20,800, the state will see a consistent decline in the number of public high school graduates each year through 2014-15, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. During that timeframe, the number of high school graduates is forecast to drop by nearly 1,500 (7 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will recover, eventually reaching over 21,500 by 2020-21.

The racial/ethnic composition of Nebraska's public high school graduating classes will continue to diversify over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 92.2 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped slightly to 86.5 percent. By 2014-15, the proportion of White non-Hispanics will have fallen to under 76.6 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 Nebraska, 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 3. Composition of Nebraska's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10, and 2014-15 (Projected)

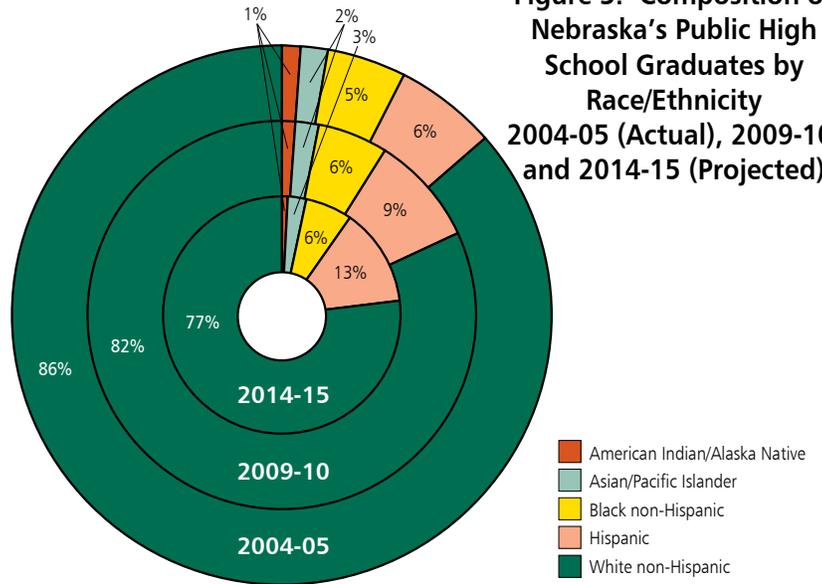
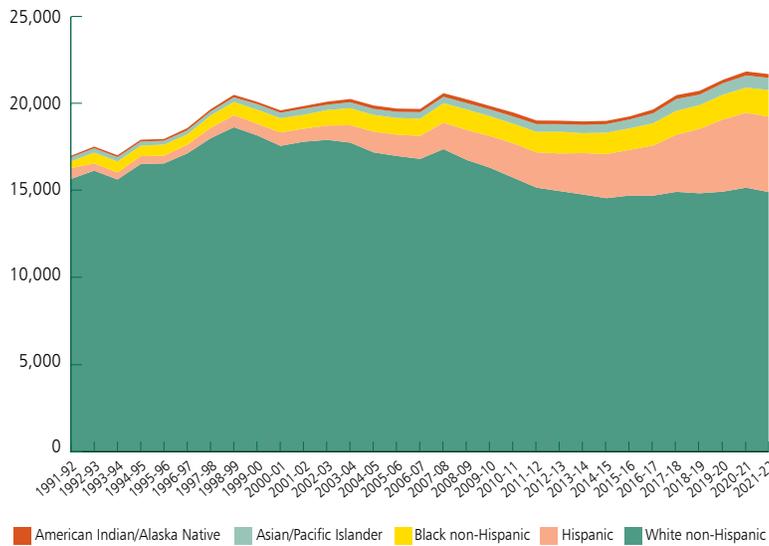


Figure 4. Nebraska High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in the state numbered 1,194 in 2004-05. But within a decade, Hispanic graduates are projected to increase by about 113 percent to about 2,546 (Figure 4). Growth among Asians/Pacific Islanders will also be substantial over the same time span, rising by 41 percent over the 2004-05 level of 346, though their numbers will remain relatively modest in the state. Black non-Hispanic graduate numbers will increase by 28 percent, adding about 270 to their 2004-05 total of 961. Meanwhile, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates will slip by more than 15 percent from its 2004-05 level of 17,242. Finally, American Indians/Alaska Natives, who accounted for just 197 graduates in 2004-05, are projected to see about the same number a decade later.

For more information, contact: Dolores Mize, Vice President, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0221, dmize@wiche.edu; or Brian Prescott, Senior Research Analyst, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0255, bprescott@wiche.edu. To view the full publication or to place an order for a bound copy, visit our website at www.wiche.edu/policy.