

Knocking at the College Door

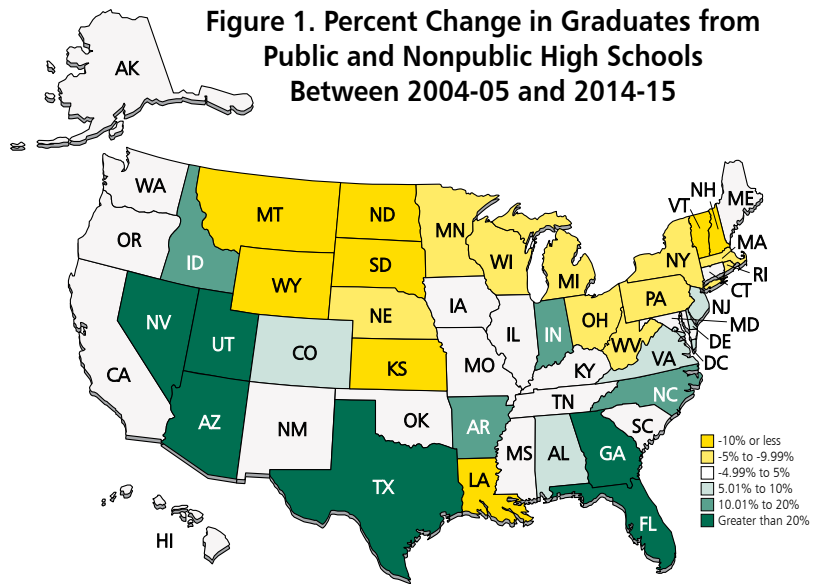
Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

SOUTH CAROLINA

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.

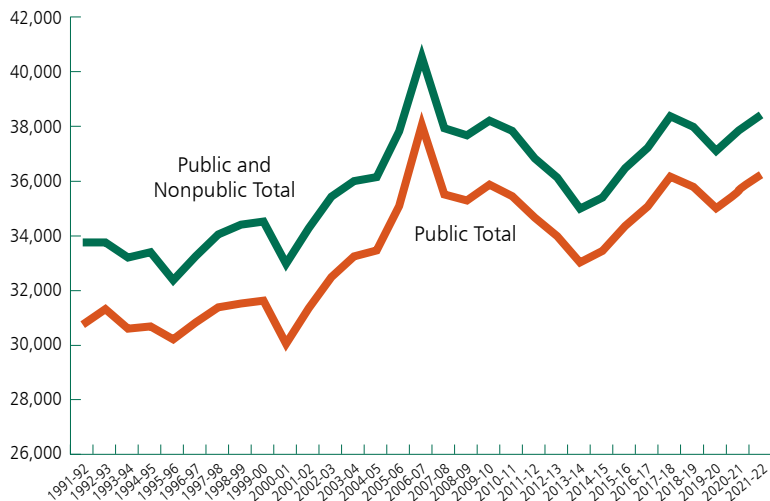
As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1).



South Carolina produced nearly 2,800 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 8.2 percent. Projections indicate that the state's number of graduates will grow rapidly through 2006-07 before falling back below its 2004-05 level by 2014-15. Assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue, the state projects to produce about 800 fewer high school graduates in 2014-15 than it did in 2004-05, a drop of about 2.2 percent.

The period 1991-92 through 2000-01 was marked by instability in South Carolina's production of high school graduates; but the following year, the state's production began growing substantially, through 2006-07 (Figure 2). In 2004-05 (the last year actual data were available), the state's public high schools graduated 33,439 students, which was 2,741 more than the 1991-92 level. Nonpublic schools added an estimated 2,722 graduates in 2004-05, but they also have experienced declines in production, which will continue for the foreseeable future. Of South

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



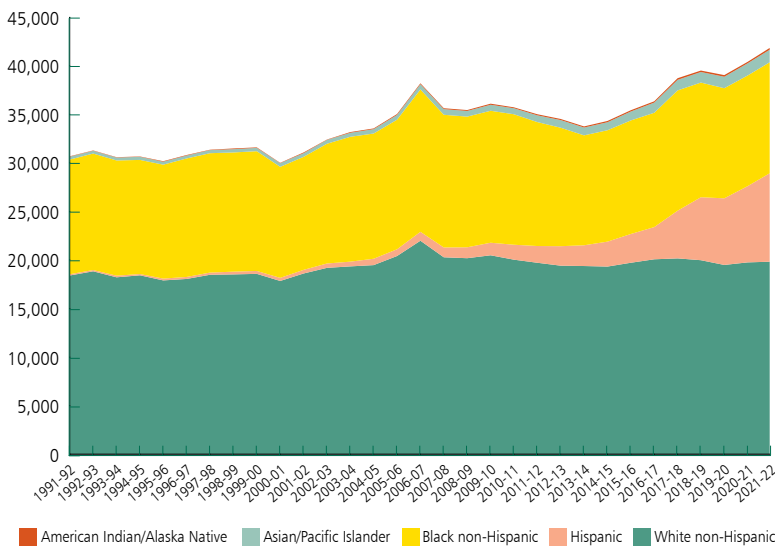
Carolina's total number of high school graduates each year, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 8 percent, on average, though that share is projected to fall as well.

Along with much of the rest of the nation, South Carolina is poised to enter a new period characterized by declines in the production of high school graduates. After reaching a peak in 2006-07, at 38,024, the state will see a sharp decline in the number of public high school graduates almost every year through 2013-14, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. Between 2006-07 and 2013-14, the number of public high school graduates is forecast to drop by nearly 5,000 (13.1 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will once again rise for several years.

The racial/ethnic composition of South Carolina'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 60.1 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped slightly to 58.1 percent. By 2014-15, that decrease will have accelerated, and the proportion of White non-Hispanics will have fallen to under 56.3 percent. The state's public graduating class is projected to become "majority-minority" (when minority graduates outnumber White non-Hispanic graduates) in 2019-20.

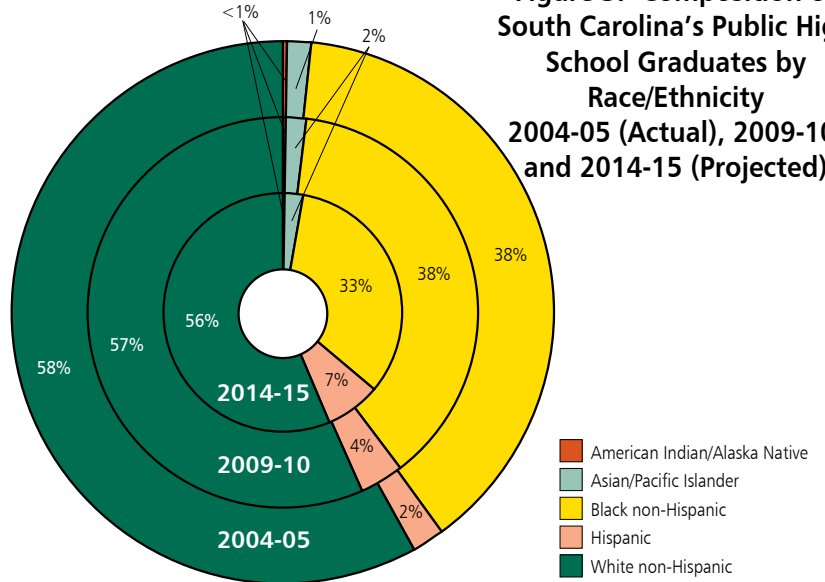
These changes are part of a national trend of sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. Changes in the make-up of graduating classes in most other states are largely due to rapid growth among Hispanics, coupled with a shrinking number of White non-Hispanics. South Carolina is projected to see large gains in Hispanics; and while their immediate effect on the racial/ethnic composition of the state's public graduates will be muted by their relatively small numbers at the outset of the projections, their impact will become more noticeable in the later years of these projections. White non-Hispanic graduates in South Carolina are not expected to see much change in their numbers. But projections for Black non-Hispanic graduates will fluctuate substantially in the coming years, and their variations are a big cause of the significant yearly swings in the overall production of graduates in the state.

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



Hispanic graduates from public schools in South Carolina numbered just 648 in 2004-05. Within a decade, Hispanic graduates are projected to increase by about 1,900 (294 percent), with the size of the annual increases growing in later years (Figure 4). Annual changes among Black non-Hispanic graduates over that same span will be inconsistent, with the class of 2015 projected to include 11 percent fewer Black non-Hispanics than the class of 2005, which counted 12,906 from that group. Asians/Pacific Islanders and American Indians/Alaska Natives are also projected to account for rapidly growing numbers of graduates by 2014-15, with increases of 378 (84 percent) and 62 (86 percent) over their 2004-05 levels, respectively. Meanwhile, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates is projected to be just 150 lower in 2014-15 than it was in 2004-05, when it equaled 19,489.

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



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