

2012 REVISED EDITION

A  
PUBLIC EDUCATION  
PRIMER

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BASIC (AND SOMETIMES SURPRISING)  
FACTS ABOUT THE U.S. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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*Center on Education Policy*  
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## CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was written by Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, and Alexandra Usher, CEP research assistant. Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs, and Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, provided advice and assistance.

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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# INTRODUCTION

Public education matters, whether you're a student, parent, teacher, administrator, employer, or taxpayer. Although you undoubtedly know something about public education, you may be unaware of important facts about the U.S. educational system or may be surprised to learn how things have changed in recent years.

This edition of *A Public Education Primer* updates and expands on the version originally published by the Center on Education Policy in 2006. Like the first publication, this revised edition pulls together recent data about students, teachers, school districts, schools, and other aspects of elementary and secondary education in the U.S. Included are facts and figures on the distribution of students, student demographics, educational entities and their responsibilities, funding, student achievement, teachers, and other school services.

As much as possible, the data compiled here come from the federal government—primarily the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the data-gathering arm of the U.S. Department of Education. Where NCES data are not available, we've carefully chosen data from other reliable sources.

This primer is meant to give an overall snapshot of elementary and secondary education in the nation's public schools. In general, we've used data for the most recent year available. In many cases, these recent data are compared with data from ten years earlier or with future projections to show how things have changed or are expected to change. A few indicators, such as those relating to student achievement, show trends going back two or more decades to provide a historical perspective.

The data in this report represent national averages. The experiences, trends, and issues in your local community may vary somewhat from the broad picture presented here. We hope this primer will provide you with sufficient background information about public education to encourage your interest in education issues and your involvement in your local schools.

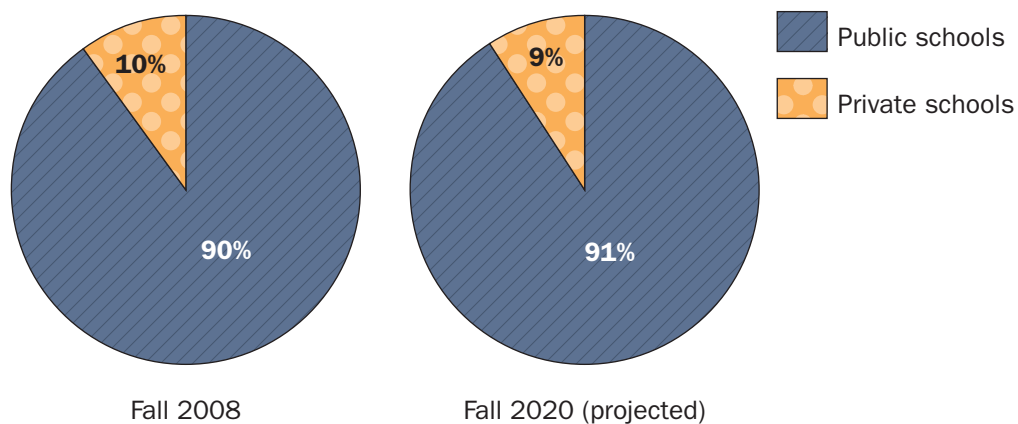


# I. WHERE ARE THE STUDENTS?

## Nine out of ten students in the U.S. are educated in public schools.

In the fall of 2008, the most recent year with actual data, U.S. public schools educated 90% of the nation's 55.0 million students in grades prekindergarten through 12, while private schools educated 10%. Total enrollments are projected to reach 57.9 million in the fall of 2020, with a slight increase in the public school share and a slight decrease in the private school share.

**PERCENTAGE OF U.S. STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

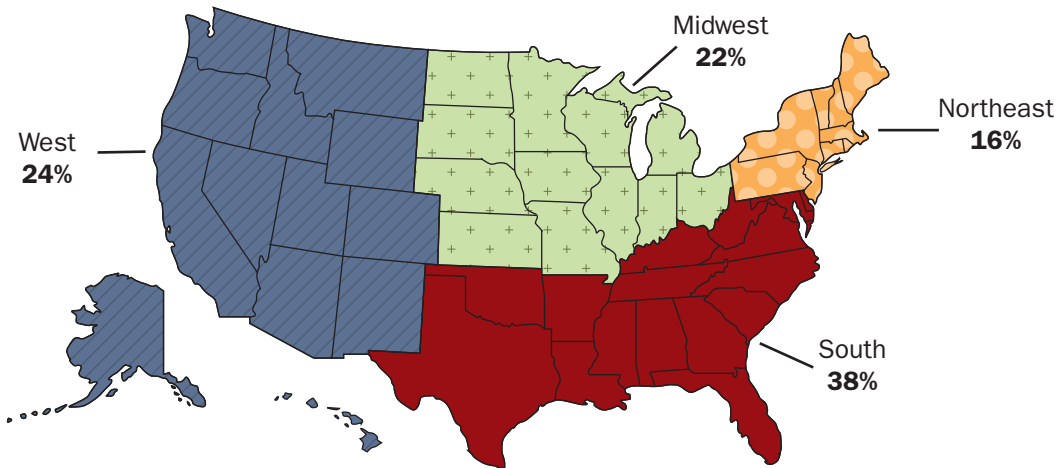


Source: NCES, *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020* (2011), table 1, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011026.pdf>

## More than three-fifths of the nation's public school students live in the South and West.

The southern states enroll the largest share of public school students in grades prekindergarten through 12, followed by the West, the Midwest, and the Northeast.

**PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS BY REGION, 2008-09**



| Northeast                             | Midwest  | South  | West   |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ,<br>NY, PA, RI, VT | IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN,<br>MO, NE, ND, OH, SD,<br>WI | AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA,<br>KY, LA, MD, MS, NC,<br>OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV | AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID,<br>MT, NM, NV, OR, UT,<br>WA, WY |

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-2-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-enl-1.asp>



The distribution of students among these four regions has shifted only slightly during the past decade and is expected to change little in the coming decade. Changes in enrollments among individual states are more common, however. While public school enrollments are projected to grow nationally by nearly 7% between 2008 and 2020, some states are looking at increases of 10% or more, while other states face declining enrollments. The table below shows the states with projected increases of more than 20% in preK–12 enrollments through school year 2020-21 and the states with projected decreases of at least 5%.

**STATES WITH GREATEST PERCENTAGE CHANGES PROJECTED IN  
PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS, 2008-09 THROUGH 2020-21**

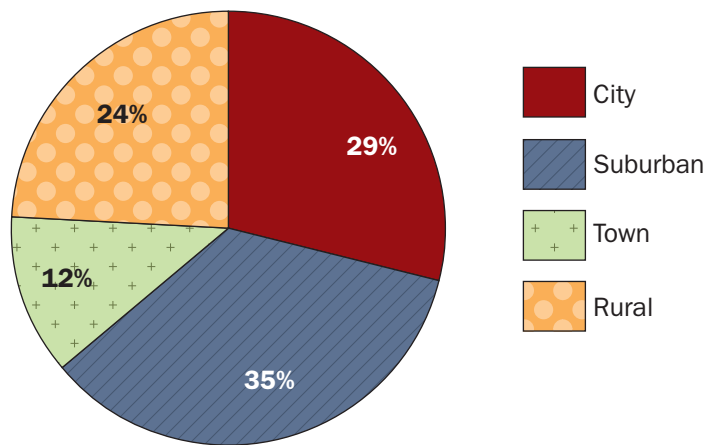
| States with gains | Percentage gain | States with declines | Percentage decline |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Nevada            | 28%             | Michigan             | -7%                |
| Arizona           | 26%             | West Virginia        | -6%                |
| Alaska            | 25%             | New York             | -5%                |
| Texas             | 23%             | Mississippi          | -5%                |

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-2-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-enl-2.asp>

Overall, more students attend public schools in suburban areas than in cities, towns, or rural areas. But more African American and Latino students attend schools in cities than in other types of communities.

Thirty-five percent of all public school students attend schools in suburban areas, compared with 29% in cities, 24% in rural areas, and 12% in towns.

**DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS BY TYPE OF COMMUNITY, 2008-09**



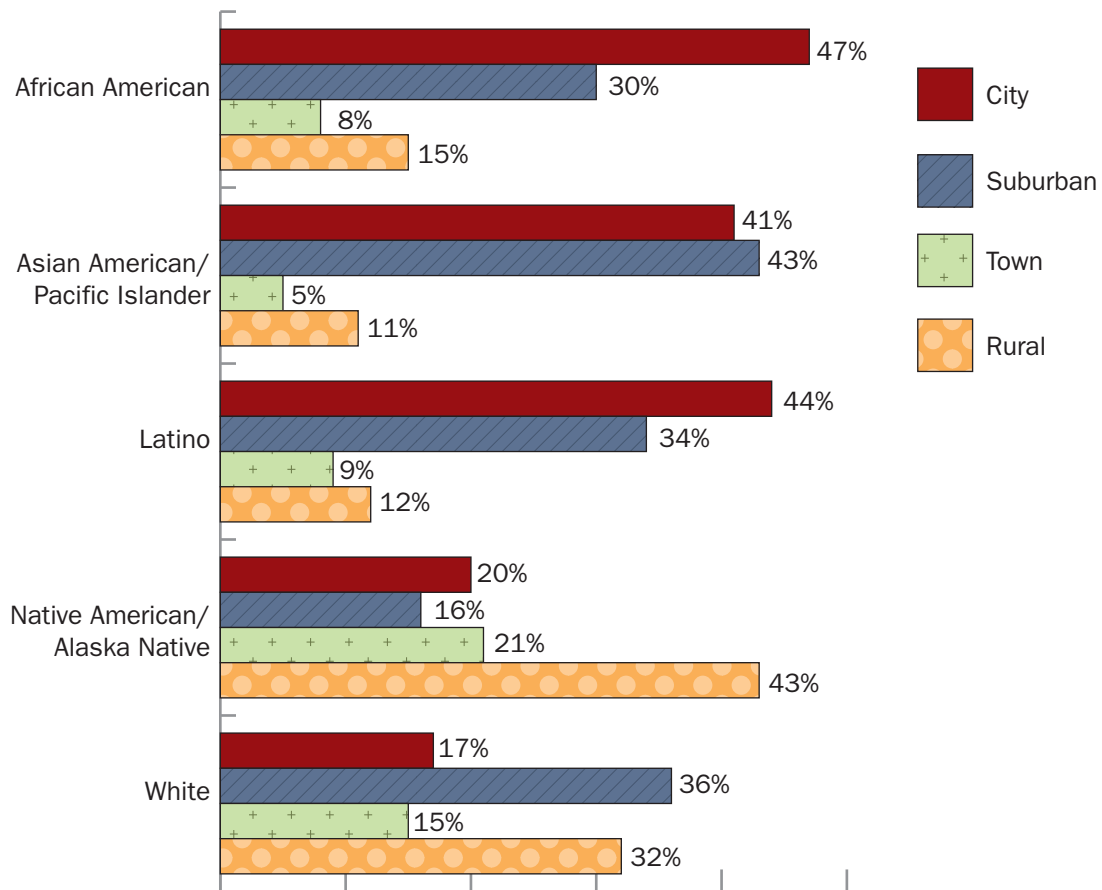
Percentage of all students

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Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-28-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-pec-2.asp>

Forty-seven percent of African American students and 44% of Latino students are educated in urban schools, compared with just 17% of white students. The majority of white students attend suburban and rural schools. Most Asian American students are concentrated in cities (41%) or suburban areas (43%). Native American students are more likely to attend schools in rural areas than in other types of communities.

**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ATTENDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN VARIOUS TYPES OF COMMUNITIES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2008-09**



Note: Percentages for Latino students do not total 100% due to rounding.

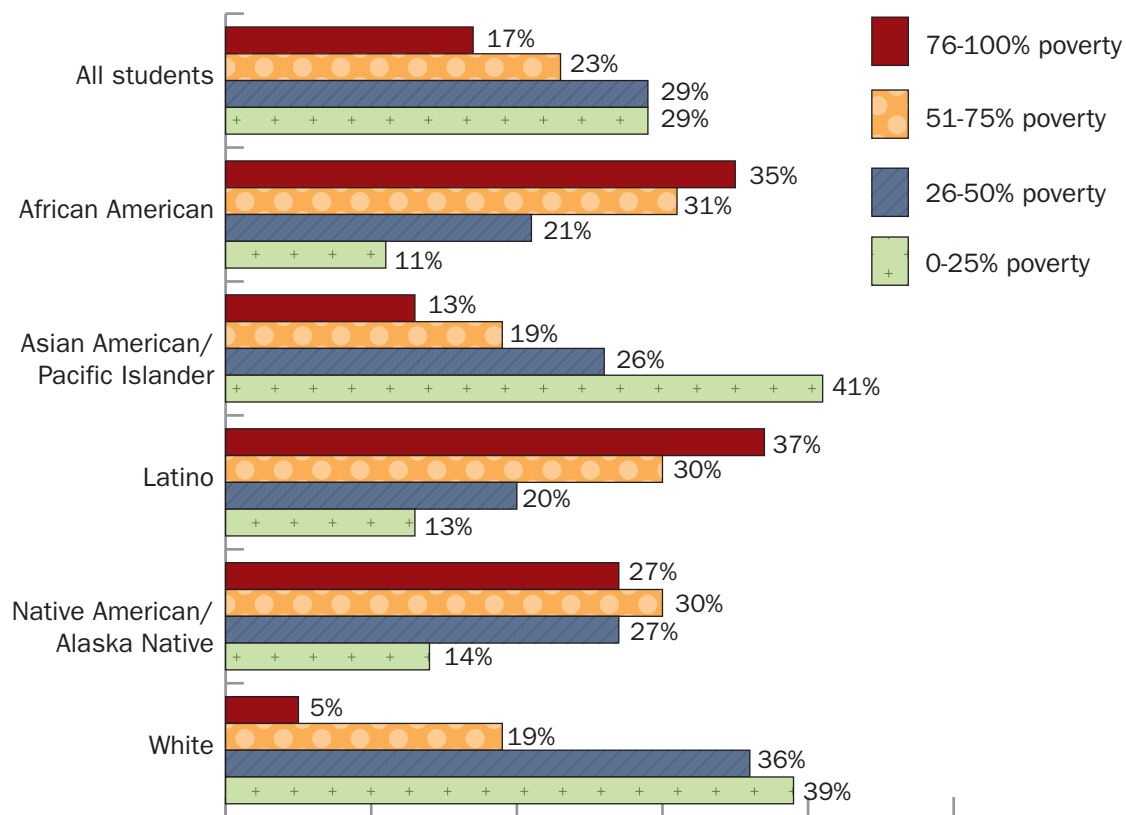
Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-28-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>

## Two-thirds of African American and Latino students attend schools in which more than 50% of the students are from low-income families. Less than one-fourth of white students attend schools with poverty rates this high.

Disparities in enrollments by race and ethnicity are especially striking among schools in which more than three-fourths of the students (76-100%) are from low-income families. Thirty-five percent of African American students, 37% of Latino students, and 27% of Native American students attend schools with this very high level of poverty, compared with just 13% of Asian American students and 5% of white students.

If the two highest poverty categories in the figure below are added together, then 66% of African American students, 67% of Latino students, and 57% of Native American students attend schools in which more than half of the students are poor, compared with 32% of Asian American students and 24% of white students.

**DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND POVERTY CONCENTRATION\* OF THEIR SCHOOL, 2008-09**



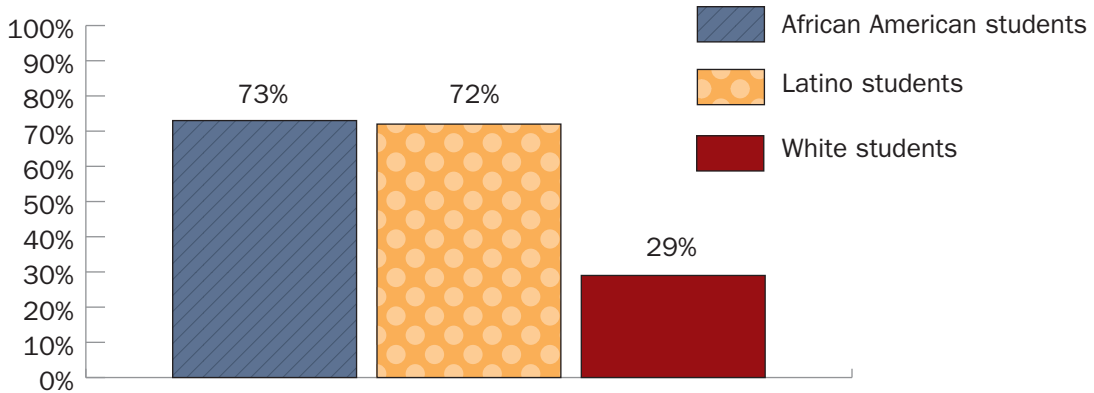
\*Poverty concentration is based on the percentage of students in the school who are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.

Note: Percentages for each student group may total less than 100% because some schools do not participate in the National School Lunch Program or did not provide data.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-28-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-pec-1.asp>

These racial/ethnic disparities are more pronounced at the elementary level than at the secondary level because middle schools and high schools tend to draw their students from a wider attendance area.

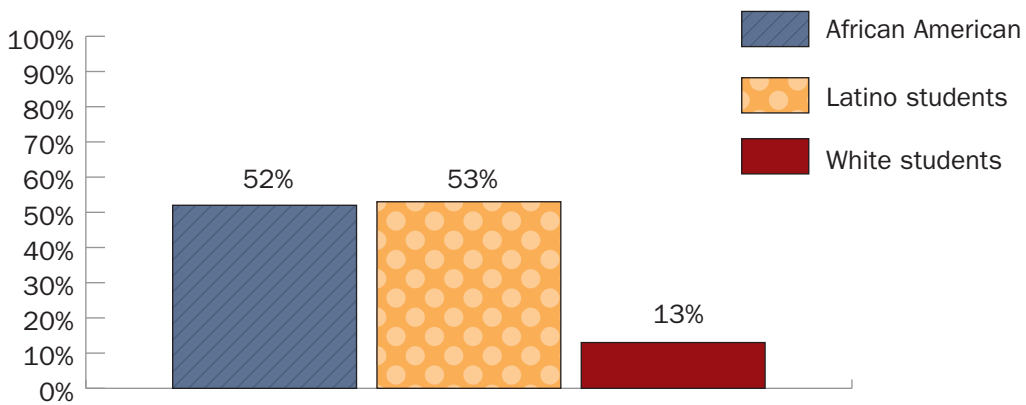
**PERCENTAGE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTENDING SCHOOLS WITH MORE THAN 50% LOW-INCOME\* STUDENTS, 2008-09**



\* Note: for this chart, low-income students are defined as those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-28-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-pecp-1.asp>

**PERCENTAGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTENDING SCHOOLS WITH MORE THAN 50% LOW-INCOME\* STUDENTS, 2008-09**



\* Note: for this chart, low-income students are defined as those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

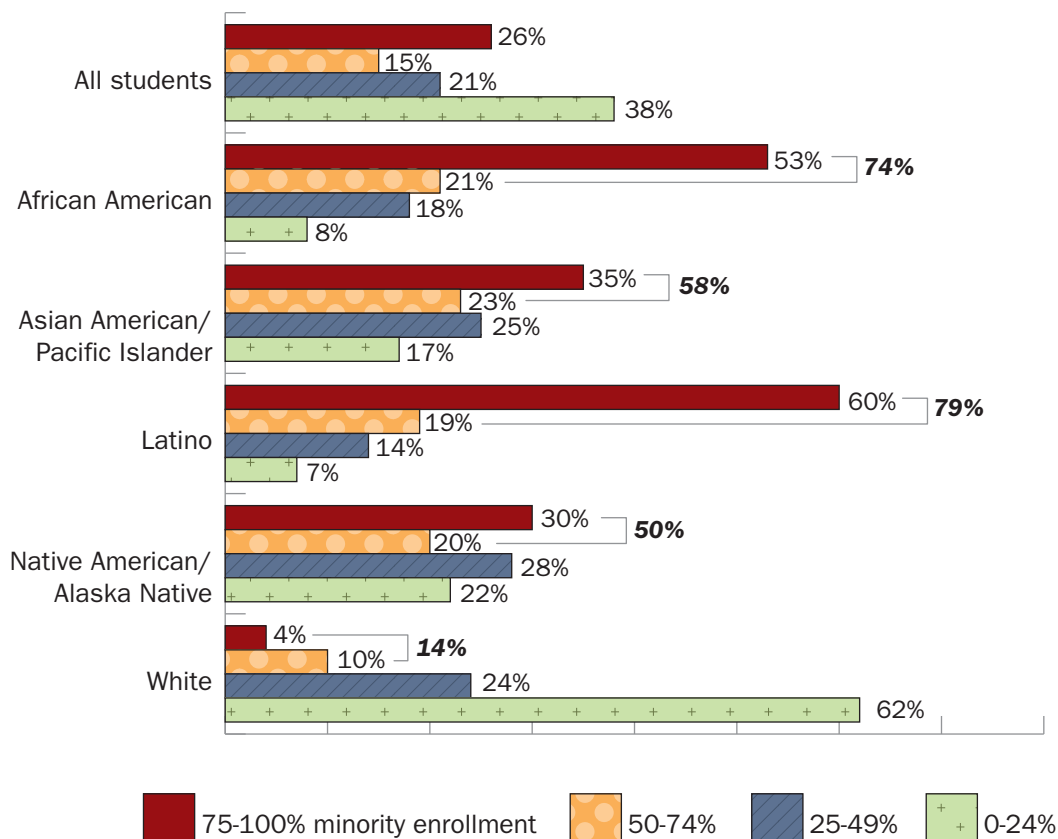
Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-28-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-pecp-1.asp>

## Roughly three-fourths of African American and Latino students attend schools in which children of color are the majority. Most white students attend schools with low enrollments of children of color.

Seventy-nine percent of Latino students and 74% of African American students—as well as 58% of Asian American students and 50% of Native American students—attend schools in which more than half the students are children of color (the highest two categories of schools in the figure below). Only 14% of white students attend schools with this high of a concentration of children of color. The percentage of African American and Latino students educated in “majority-minority” schools has increased slightly since 2000.

The disparities are even more striking for schools in which three-fourths or more of the students are children of color. A majority of African American (53%) and Latino (60%) students—but just 4% of white students—attend schools in this category.

**DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND PERCENTAGE OF MINORITY STUDENTS\* IN THEIR SCHOOL, FALL 2008**



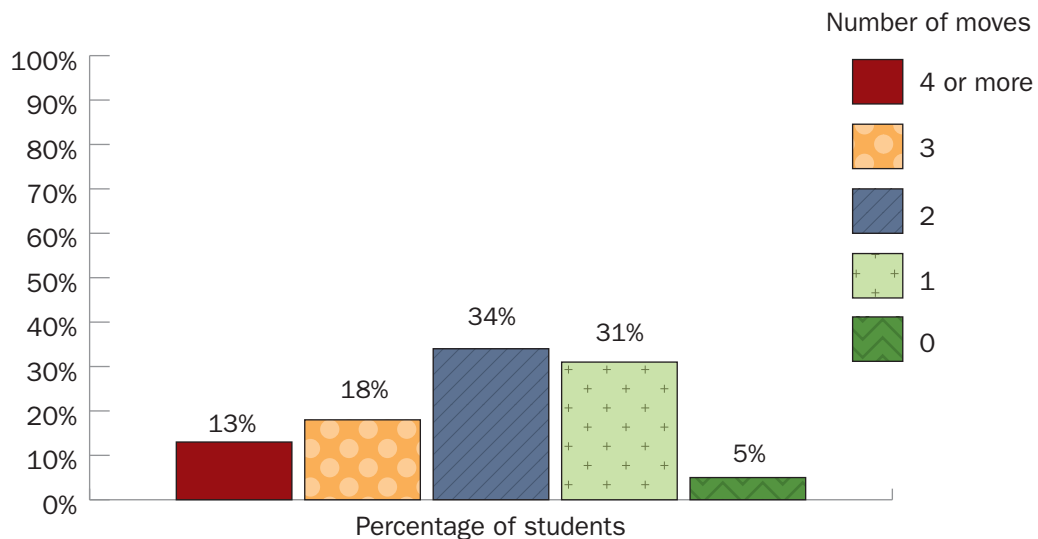
\*Percentages of minority students include African American, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American/Alaska Native students combined.

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010* (2011), table 101, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_101.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_101.asp?referrer=list)

## Thirteen percent of students change schools four or more times between kindergarten and grade 8.

Data on student mobility come from a Government Accountability Office analysis that followed a group of kindergarteners from 1998 through 2007. Students who transferred schools this often were disproportionately poor, African American, and from families that did not own their home or have a father in the household. Another 18% of students transferred schools three times between kindergarten and grade 8.

**NUMBER OF TIMES STUDENTS CHANGED SCHOOLS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**



Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Many Challenges Arise in Educating Students Who Change Schools Frequently* (2010), figure 1, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1140.pdf>

Nearly 12% of K–8 schools had high mobility rates, meaning that more than 10% of their students left by the end of the school year. Schools with high mobility enrolled larger percentages of poor children, students with disabilities, and English language learners than schools with lower mobility rates.

High mobility rates are a concern because studies have found that students who move frequently are at greater risk for academic and behavior problems, including dropping out of school.

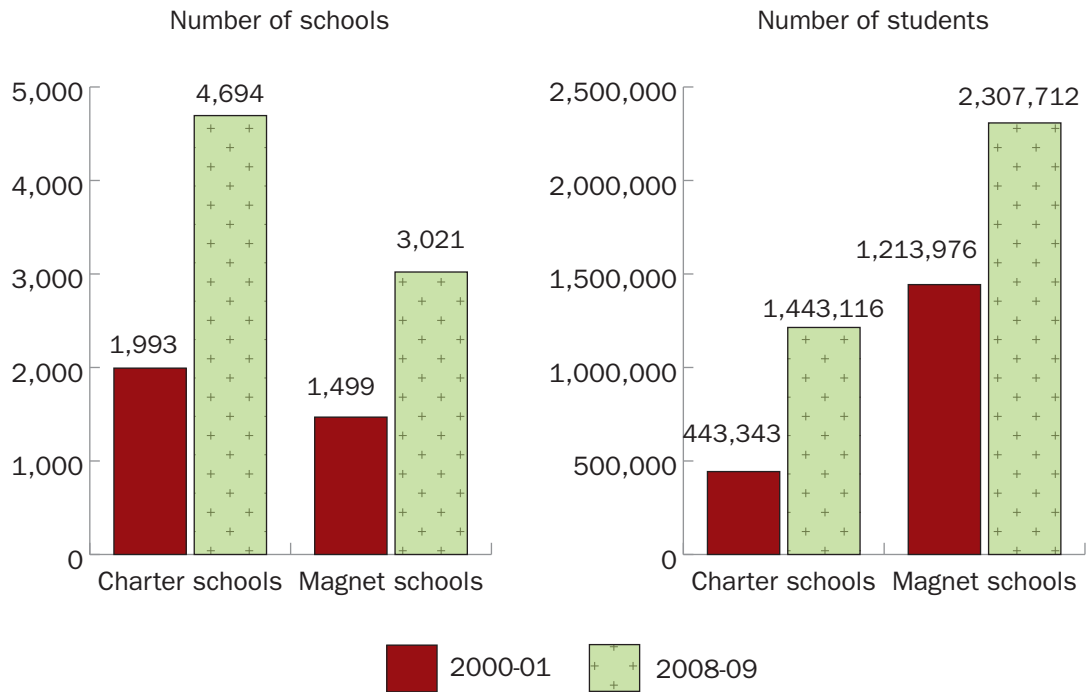
## Although enrollments in charter schools and magnet schools have grown, most public school students still attend traditional schools.

Two alternatives to traditional public schools—charter schools and magnet schools—have increased in popularity in recent years. Charter schools are publicly funded schools governed by a group under a charter or contract that exempts them from certain state and local regulations. Magnet schools have a specialized curriculum designed to attract a diverse student body from throughout a district.

From 2000-01 to 2008-09, both the number of public charter schools and the number of students enrolled in charter schools more than doubled. During this period, the percentage of all public schools that were charter schools grew from 2% to 5%. The share of public school students enrolled in charter schools rose from 1% to 3%.

The number of magnet schools and number of students enrolled in these schools also increased between 2000-01 and 2008-09. The percentage of all public schools that were magnet schools grew from less than 2% to about 3%, while the percentage of public school students enrolled in magnet schools rose from roughly 3% to 5%.

### GROWTH IN CHARTER SCHOOLS AND MAGNET SCHOOLS

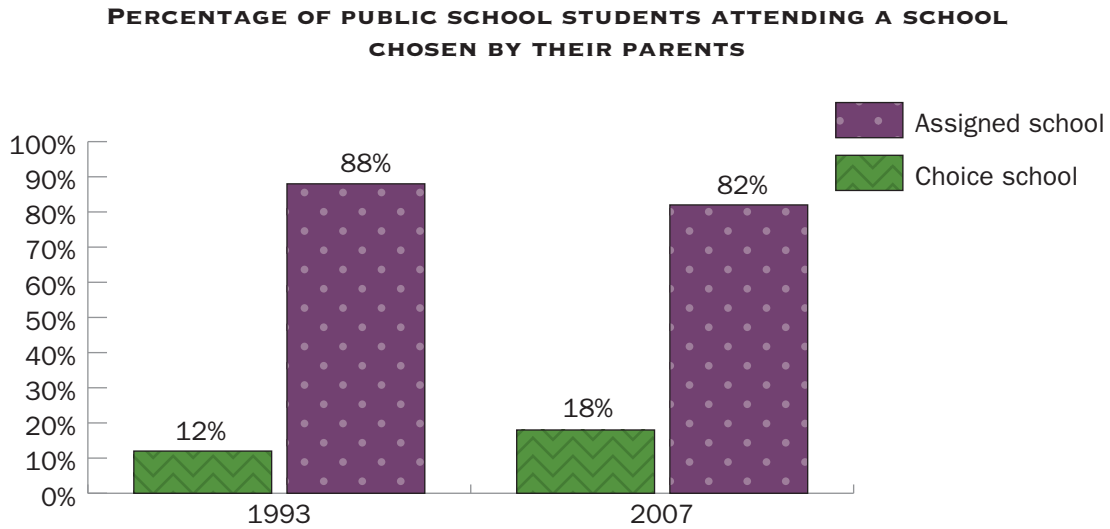


Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 100, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_100.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_100.asp?referrer=list)



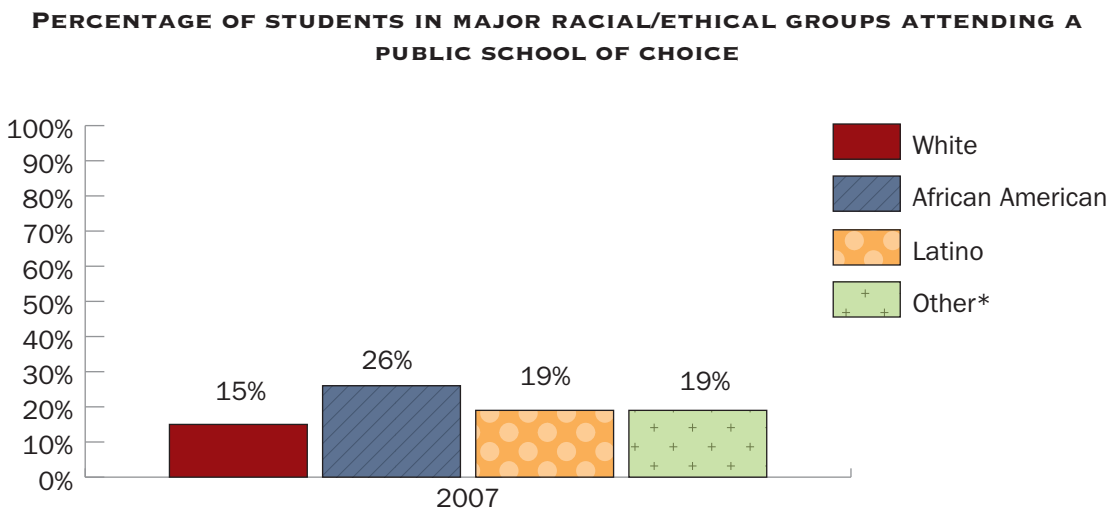
## Almost one-fifth of public school students attend a school chosen by their parents.

In 2007, 18% of public school students in grades 1-12 attended a public school chosen by their parents, while the remaining 82% attended their assigned school. This represents an increase from the 12% of students attending a school of choice in 1993.



Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2009*, table A-32-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009081.pdf>

Disproportionately larger shares of African American and Latino students than of white students attend a public school of choice.



\*Includes students who are Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaska Native, and of more than one race.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2009*, table A-32-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009081.pdf>

## About 3% of school-age children are schooled at home.

Roughly 1.5 million children were home-schooled in 2007. The home-schooled population has grown since 1999 but is still a very small share of the children ages 5-17.

**1.7%** Percentage of children ages 5-17 who were home-schooled, 1999.

**2.9%** Percentage of children ages 5-17 who were home-schooled, 2007.

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Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2009*, table A-6-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-hsc-1.asp>

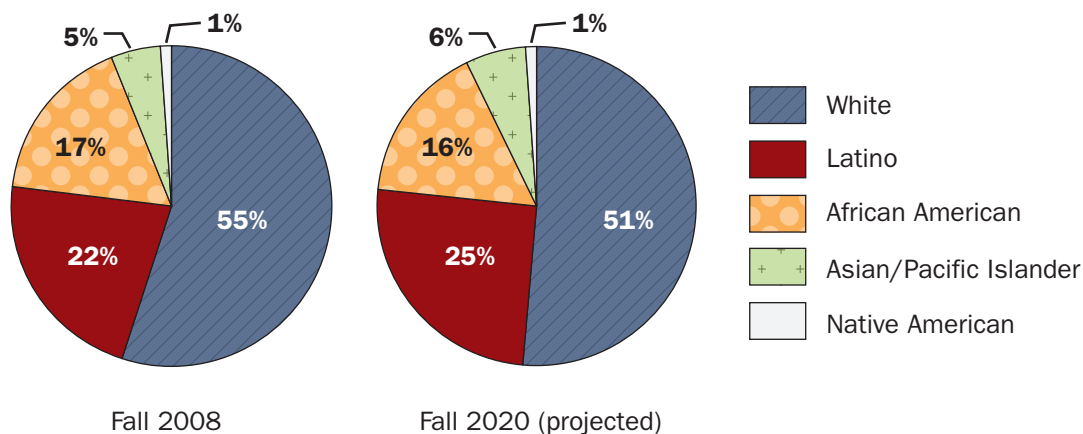
## II. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

About 45% of the nation's public school students are children of color. Latino children will make up a rising share of enrollments in the coming decades.

In 2008, about 55% of students in grades K-12 were white, 22% were Latino, 17% were African American, 5% were Asian, and 1% were Native American. Since 1999, the white enrollment has declined from 62%, the African American enrollment has remained at 17%, and the Latino enrollment has increased from 16%.

The proportion of public school students who are Latino is projected to continue growing through 2020, while the proportions of white and African American students are projected to decrease. The percentage of students who are Asian American is also expected to increase in the coming decade.

**RACIAL/ETHNIC ENROLLMENT IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



Note: Percentages for 2020 do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020*, (2011) table 3, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011026.pdf>

## Children of color comprise the majority of public school students in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

Latino, African American, Asian American, and other racial/ethnic minority students together constitute more than half of the public school enrollments in D.C. and 11 Southern and Western states.

**PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO ARE CHILDREN OF COLOR IN STATES WITH “MAJORITY-MINORITY” ENROLLMENTS, FALL 2008**

| State                | Percentage of public school students who are children of color |
|----------------------|--|
| District of Columbia | 94%  |
| Hawaii               | 81%  |
| California           | 72%  |
| New Mexico           | 71%  |
| Texas                | 66%  |
| Nevada               | 58%  |
| Arizona              | 56%  |
| Mississippi          | 54%  |
| Maryland             | 54%  |
| Florida              | 53%  |
| Georgia              | 53%  |
| Louisiana            | 51%  |

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 43, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_043.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_043.asp?referrer=list)

Children of color also comprise a majority of public school students in 70 of the nation's 100 largest school districts. In 14 of these districts, more than 90% of the students are from racial/ethnic minority groups. In 35 of these districts, students of color comprise more than 75% of the enrollment.

**LARGE SCHOOL DISTRICTS ENROLLING MORE THAN  
90% STUDENTS OF COLOR, 2008-09**

| District                                | Total student enrollment | Percentage of students who are children of color |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| Brownsville Independent, TX             | 48,587                   | 99%  |
| Santa Ana Unified, CA                   | 57,439                   | 97%  |
| Aldine Independent (Houston suburb), TX | 61,526                   | 97%  |
| Detroit City, MI                        | 97,577                   | 97%  |
| San Antonio Independent, TX             | 54,696                   | 97%  |
| Dallas Independent, TX                  | 157,352                  | 95%  |
| Prince George's County, MD              | 127,977                  | 95%  |
| Clayton County (Jonesboro), Georgia     | 49,508                   | 95%  |
| Memphis City, TN                        | 111,954                  | 93%  |
| Baltimore City, MD                      | 82,266                   | 92%  |
| Houston Independent, TX                 | 200,225                  | 92%  |
| Los Angeles Unified, CA                 | 687,534                  | 91%  |
| City of Chicago, IL                     | 421,430                  | 91%  |
| Dade County (Miami), FL                 | 345,525                  | 91%  |

Source: NCES, *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2008-09* (2011), table A-8, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011301.pdf>.

**Almost one-fifth of the nation’s school-age children are from families with an income below the federal poverty threshold. More than two-fifths of public school children are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.**

The Census Bureau defines poor families as those with annual incomes below the federal poverty threshold level of \$22,050 for a family of four. By this measure, 19% of school-age children are from poor families.

Another common indicator of poverty is eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches. Students are eligible for free lunch if their family income does not exceed 130% of the federal poverty level and for reduced-price lunch if their family income is above 130% but below 185% of the poverty level. By this measure, 45% of public school children are from low-income families.

**19%** Percentage of children ages 5-17 from families with incomes below the poverty level, 2009

**45%** Percentage of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2008-09.

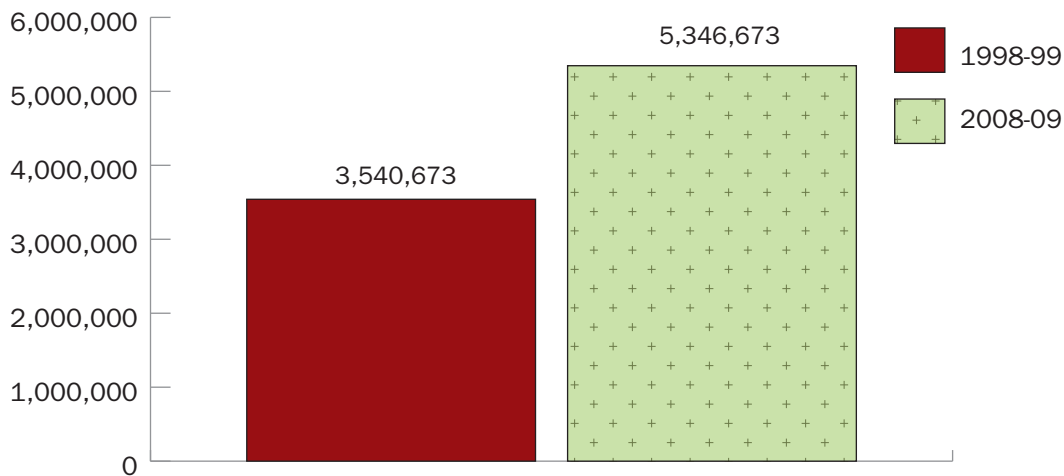
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Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 26, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_026.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_026.asp?referrer=list); and table 44, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_044.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_044.asp?referrer=list)

## One in ten public school students is an English language learner—a student whose first language is not English. Four out of five English language learners are native Spanish speakers.

The number of students who are English language learners has climbed by more than 50% over the past decade. In 2008-09, 11% of students in grades preK-12 were English language learners, up from 8% in 1998-99.

**NUMBER OF PREK-12 STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**



Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA), *The Growing Numbers of English Learner Students*, <http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/faqs/>

More than 400 languages are spoken by English language learners in U.S. schools. Spanish is the native language of 80% of ELL students. The next most common native languages are Vietnamese (spoken by 2% of ELLs), Chinese (2%), Hmong (2%), and Korean (1%).

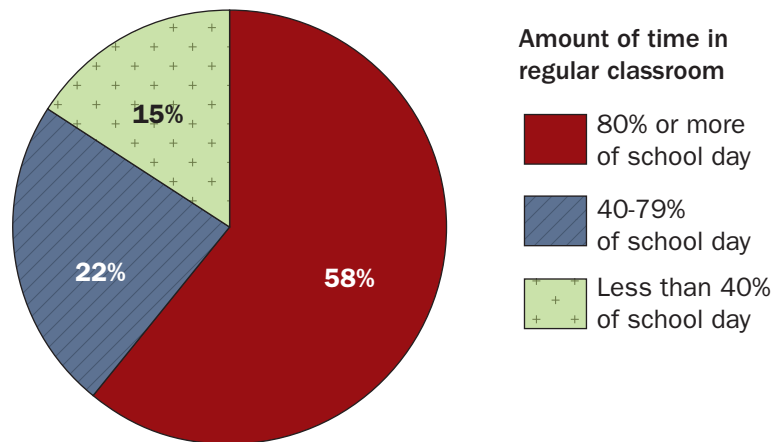
**80%** Percentage of all English language learners who are native Spanish speakers

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students, *The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program, School Years 2004-06* (2008), table 3, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/title3biennial0406.pdf>

## About one in eight public school students receives special education services because of a disability. Most of these students spend the majority of the school day in regular classrooms.

In school year 2008-09, 13% of public school children ages 3-21 received special education services. More than half (58%) of these students were integrated into regular classrooms with other children for 80% or more of the school day, and 22% were educated in regular classrooms for 40 to 79% of the school day.

**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATED IN VARIOUS CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS, 2008-09**



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Sources: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-7-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-cwd-2.asp>; and U.S. Department of Education, *Thirty-five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities Through IDEA* (2010), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/idea35/history/i-idea-35-history.pdf>

Most children with disabilities are now educated in regular public schools, but this was not always the case. After passage of the 1975 landmark federal law now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the percentage of children with disabilities ages 6-17 who were educated in public schools jumped dramatically—from 20% in 1970 to 95% in 2008-09.

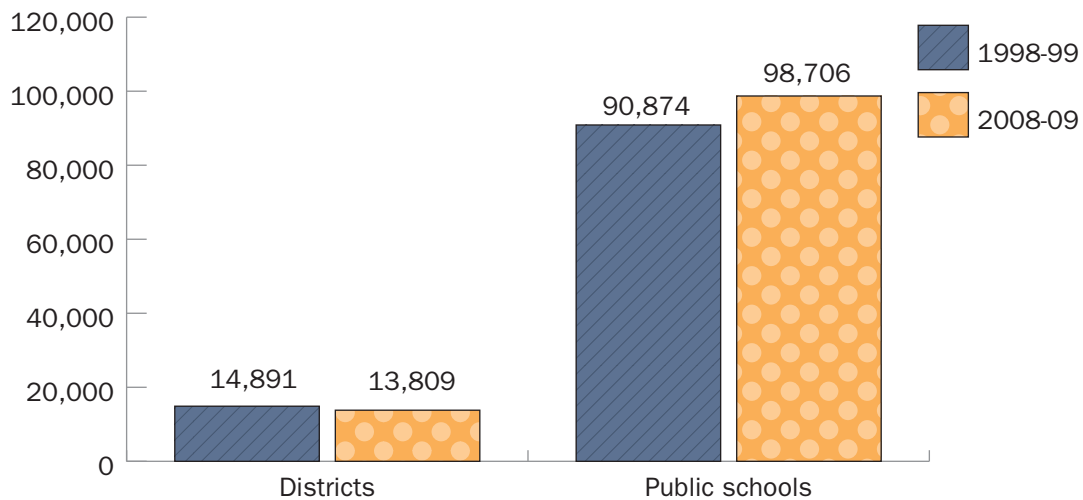


### III. WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE U.S. PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM?

The U.S. public education system consists of almost 14,000 local school districts and almost 99,000 schools.

Since 1998-99, the number of districts has decreased while the number of public schools has increased.

**NUMBER OF PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

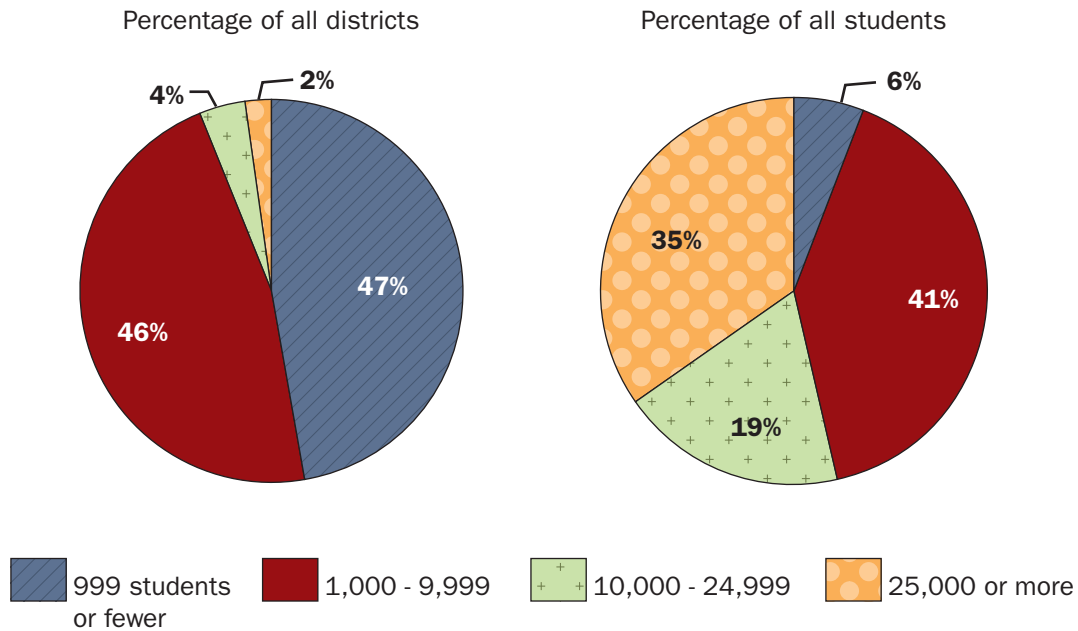


Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 90, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_090.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_090.asp?referrer=list)

The nation’s very largest school districts—those with enrollments of 25,000 or more—make up just 2% of all districts but educate 35% of the nation’s students.

Almost half of the nation’s school districts are small, enrolling fewer than 1,000 students. But these small districts educate just 6% of the nation’s students. The majority of students are in districts with enrollments of 10,000 or more.

**DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STUDENTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE, 2008-09**



Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 91, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_091.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_091.asp?referrer=list)

## The U.S. educational system is more decentralized than those of most industrialized nations.

Unlike most of the G-8 nations and many other countries, the U.S. has neither a national curriculum nor a national exam that all students must take. In many other nations, the results of national exams are used to make major decisions about students' educational careers, such as promotion to the next grade level, admission to particular types of secondary education programs, or awarding of diplomas and certifications.

The central governments of many countries also have more authority than the U.S. federal government does in areas such as credentialing and hiring of teachers, requirements for graduation, and rules for compulsory education.

**NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND EXAM POLICIES IN G-8 COUNTRIES**

| G-8 country    | National curriculum?                              | National exam?  |
|----------------|---|---|
| Canada         | No—provinces control curriculum                   | No  |
| France         | Yes   | Yes—to exit secondary school & for entrance to university   |
| Germany        | No—Länder (states) control curriculum             | Yes—for entrance to university  |
| Italy          | Yes, with some local discretion                   | Yes—for entrance to upper secondary school & to receive high school diploma                           |
| Japan          | Yes   | Yes—for entrance into and placement in an upper secondary school                                      |
| Russia         | Yes   | Yes—to exit lower secondary school & receive secondary school completion certificate                  |
| United Kingdom | Yes, with some local discretion                   | Yes—to receive general certificate of secondary education and for admittance to most higher education |
| United States  | No—states and school districts control curriculum | No  |

Sources: NCES, *Comparative Indicators of Education in the United States and Other G-8 Countries: 2011*, figures A-1 through A-9, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012007.pdf>; and European Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), *Summary sheets on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms, 2009 edition*, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic\\_studies\\_archives\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_archives_en.php)

## Most key education policies and functions in the U.S. are determined at the state and local levels.

States and school districts, rather than the federal government, make most of the major decisions about the content, assessment, teaching force, structure, and funding of elementary and secondary education.

### KEY DECISIONS MADE AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

#### Standards and curriculum

- Setting standards for what children should learn in core subjects
- Determining specific curriculum content
- Choosing textbooks and other curriculum materials

#### Testing and accountability

- Developing and administering tests to measure student progress
- Determining whether students must take and/or pass an exit exam to graduate
- Determining what constitutes proficient performance or a passing score on state tests
- Establishing systems to hold schools and districts accountable for students' academic progress

#### Staff hiring, evaluation, and compensation

- Establishing requirements for the preparation, licensing, certification, and evaluation of teachers and administrators
- Making decisions about staff hiring and teacher collective bargaining
- Determining salaries, benefits, and job requirements for teachers, administrators, and other staff
- Providing professional development

#### Structure of schooling

- Setting requirements for years and ages of compulsory schooling and attendance
- Determining the length of the school year, school day, and school schedules
- Determining grade configurations
- Determining school attendance zones
- Establishing charter school requirements
- Setting requirements for class size
- Determining student graduation, promotion and retention policies

#### School finance and facilities

- Providing the vast majority of funding for public education
- Determining education financing systems, budgets, and taxing policies
- Supporting construction and renovation of school facilities
- Setting rules for use of school facilities

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Sources: Education Commission of the States, *What Governors Need to Know: Highlights of State Education Systems* (2010), <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/85/69/8569.pdf>; *State Collective Bargaining Policies for Teachers* (2008), <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/77/27/7727.pdf>; and *The Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents* (2002), <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/41/26/4126.pdf>

## The federal government plays a limited but influential role in elementary and secondary education. This influence often takes the form of requirements attached to the receipt of federal funds.

The federal government influences elementary and secondary education through requirements attached to specific grant programs and through statutes intended to ensure civil rights.

### MAJOR AREAS OF FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

#### Requirements tied to participation in federal grant programs

States and school districts that participate in federal programs must comply with the program's specific requirements. Examples included the following:

- Providing additional educational services to *low-achieving children in low-income schools* and to *migrant, neglected and delinquent*, and *homeless* children
- Providing services to help *English language learners* achieve proficiency in English
- Setting *standards for what all students* should learn in core academic subjects and establishing testing and accountability systems aligned to these standards
- *Testing virtually all public school students* in grades 3–8 and once during high school
- Determining whether districts and schools are making *progress in raising achievement for all students* and whether achievement gaps are narrowing for racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities
- Ensuring *teachers* are highly qualified in the subjects they teach
- Offering *career and technical education* to prepare high school students for jobs and postsecondary technical education
- Providing *free or reduced-price meals* at school to children from low-income families

#### Civil rights requirements

All educational institutions must ensure equal educational opportunities for students of all races and genders; provide services to help children who are not native English speakers learn English; and ensure access to an appropriate education for individuals with disabilities.

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Sources: Center on Education Policy, *A Brief History of the Federal Role in Education: Why It Began and Why It's Still Needed* (1999); *Get the Federal Government out of Education? That Wasn't the Founding Fathers' Vision*, (2011); and *Public Schools and the Original Federal Land Grants*, (2011), <http://www.cep-dc.org>; and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to U.S. Department of Education Programs: Fiscal Year 2010*, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gtep/index.html>

Federal support for public education began in 1785, when the new national government granted federal lands to the states on the condition states set aside a portion of these lands to fund public schools. Later federal laws, spanning from the Jefferson through the Eisenhower Administrations, continued these educational “land grants” and required states to establish free public schools as a condition for admission to the union.

Over the past fifty years, the federal role in education has expanded with enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the No Child Left Behind Act, and other notable laws. Although the federal government provides only a small percentage of total funding for education, it significantly influences education policies by requiring states, districts, and schools that accept specific federal program funds to abide by certain requirements. Many of these programs focus on broadening educational opportunities for minority and low-income students, women and girls, English language learners, children with disabilities, and other underserved groups. Other federal programs and requirements are aimed at raising the academic achievement of all students and improving teaching. Various provisions of the tax code, most notably the deduction for state and local taxes, also provide a sort of indirect federal subsidy to public education.

In addition to shaping education policy through federal grant programs, the federal government has an impact on education through its enforcement of the civil rights protections contained in the Constitution and articulated in various federal laws. These civil rights requirements prohibit discrimination against and ensure equal educational opportunities for minority students, women and girls, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

## Fundamental aspects of education vary across states.

Individual states have set different policies and requirements for compulsory school attendance, high school graduation, education finance, testing systems, and other areas. Below are only a few examples of state differences in fundamental aspects of public education.

### RANGE AMONG STATES IN KEY EDUCATION POLICIES (FROM LOWEST STATE TO HIGHEST), 2010

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Minimum number of years children must attend school                      | 9 to 13 years     |
| Minimum age for compulsory education                                     | Ages 5 to 8       |
| Maximum age for compulsory education                                     | Ages 16 to 18     |
| Minimum number of instructional days per school year                     | 160 to 182 days   |
| Number of credits (in Carnegie units) required for a high school diploma | 13 to 24 credits* |

\*Two states require a minimum number of credit hours rather than Carnegie units: Idaho requires 42 credit hours and Indiana requires 40. Nebraska requires a minimum of 200 credit hours rather than Carnegie units.

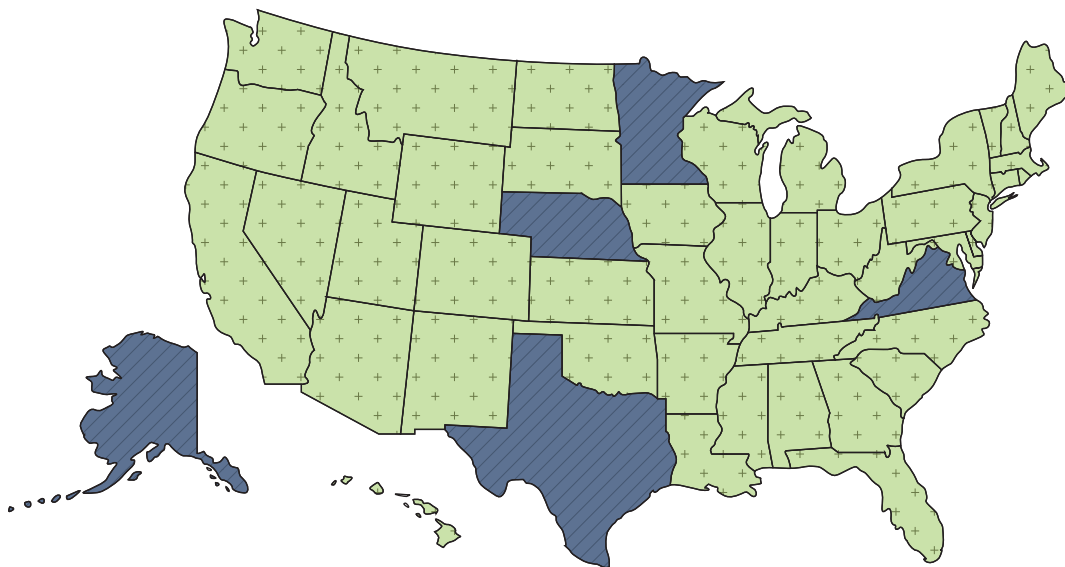
Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, tables 174, 175 and 176, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011015.pdf>

States also differ in their high school assessment policies. In school year 2010-11, 25 states required or planned to require their students to pass a state high school exit exam in order to receive a high school diploma. Five additional states required students to take exit exams but students did not have to pass the exam to graduate. Eleven states, including some states with their own exit exams, required high school students to take the SAT or ACT college entrance exam. (Center on Education Policy, *State High School Tests: Changes in State Policies and the Impact of the College and Career Readiness Movement*, 2011, <http://www.cep-dc.org>).

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have agreed to adopt the Common Core State Standards for what children should learn in English language arts and mathematics. Most of these states have also agreed to implement common assessments to measure students' progress in learning the material in the standards.

To help ensure that children across the nation receive a comparable, high-quality education, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2010 released a set of common academic standards outlining the knowledge and skills students at each grade should learn in English language arts and math. States can voluntarily decide whether to adopt these standards, which were developed by the states with input from a variety of constituencies. As of December 2011, 45 states and the District of Columbia have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards.

**STATES ADOPTING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**



**Adopted**

|                      |          |               |                |                |               |
|----------------------|----------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Alabama              | Florida  | Louisiana     | New Hampshire  | Oklahoma       | Washington    |
| Arkansas             | Georgia  | Maine         | Hampshire      | Oregon         | West Virginia |
| Arizona              | Hawaii   | Maryland      | New Jersey     | Pennsylvania   | Wisconsin     |
| California           | Idaho    | Massachusetts | New Mexico     | Rhode Island   | Wyoming       |
| Colorado             | Illinois | Michigan      | North Carolina | South Carolina |               |
| Connecticut          | Indiana  | Mississippi   | North Dakota   | South Dakota   |               |
| Delaware             | Iowa     | Missouri      | New York       | Tennessee      |               |
| District of Columbia | Kansas   | Montana       | Nevada         | Utah           |               |
|                      | Kentucky |               | Ohio           | Vermont        |               |

**Not yet adopted**

Alaska, Minnesota (adopted the English language arts standards only), Nebraska, Texas, Virginia

Source: Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states>



Many states have also joined one or both of two consortia that are developing assessment systems aligned to the new common core state standards.

**24** Members of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), as of January 13, 2012:

|                             |                      |                     |                       |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Alabama</i>              | <i>Georgia</i>       | <i>Mississippi</i>  | <i>Pennsylvania</i>   |
| <i>Arizona</i>              | <i>Illinois</i>      | <i>New Jersey</i>   | <i>Rhode Island</i>   |
| <i>Arkansas</i>             | <i>Indiana</i>       | <i>New Mexico</i>   | <i>South Carolina</i> |
| <i>Colorado</i>             | <i>Kentucky</i>      | <i>New York</i>     | <i>Tennessee</i>      |
| <i>District of Columbia</i> | <i>Louisiana</i>     | <i>North Dakota</i> |                       |
| <i>Florida</i>              | <i>Maryland</i>      | <i>Ohio</i>         |                       |
|                             | <i>Massachusetts</i> | <i>Oklahoma</i>     |                       |

**28** Members of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, as of January 13, 2012:

|                    |                 |                       |                      |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Alabama</i>     | <i>Iowa</i>     | <i>Nevada</i>         | <i>South Dakota</i>  |
| <i>California</i>  | <i>Kansas</i>   | <i>New Hampshire</i>  | <i>Utah</i>          |
| <i>Colorado</i>    | <i>Kentucky</i> | <i>North Carolina</i> | <i>Vermont</i>       |
| <i>Connecticut</i> | <i>Maine</i>    | <i>North Dakota</i>   | <i>Washington</i>    |
| <i>Delaware</i>    | <i>Michigan</i> | <i>Oregon</i>         | <i>West Virginia</i> |
| <i>Hawaii</i>      | <i>Missouri</i> | <i>Pennsylvania</i>   | <i>Wisconsin</i>     |
| <i>Idaho</i>       | <i>Montana</i>  | <i>South Carolina</i> | <i>Wyoming</i>       |

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Sources: Achieve, Inc. PARCC states (2012), <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-states>; and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington, SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (2011), <http://www.k12.wa.us/smarter/>



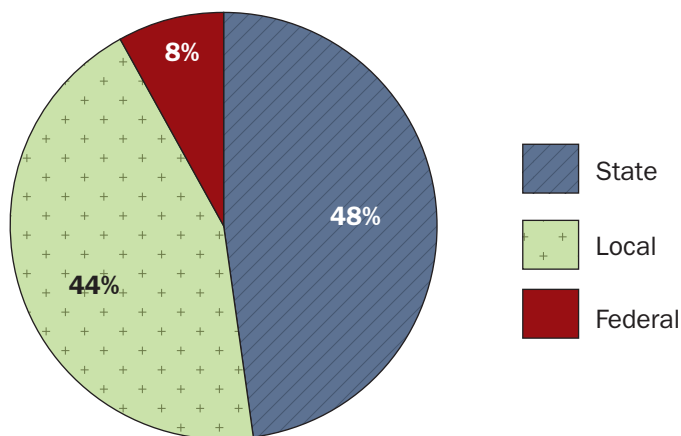
## IV. HOW ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FUNDED?

### More than 90% of funding for public schools comes from state and local sources.

In school year 2007-08, 48% of all revenues for public elementary and secondary education were provided by the states, while 44% came from local sources. More than three-fourths of this local portion was derived from local property taxes.

The federal government contributed a relatively small share, just 8%, of total revenues for elementary and secondary education.

**PERCENTAGE OF REVENUES FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION BY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT, 2007-08**



Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-35-1, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe\\_sft.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_sft.pdf)

## The share of total revenues for public elementary and secondary education from state sources varies greatly among states.

Many states provide a much smaller or greater than average share of the total revenues for public education, as illustrated by the range between Nevada and Illinois on the low end and Vermont on the high end.

**31%** Lowest percentage of elementary and secondary education revenues from state sources in 2007-08 (Nevada and Illinois)

**86%** Highest percentage of elementary and secondary education revenues from state sources in 2007-08 (Vermont)

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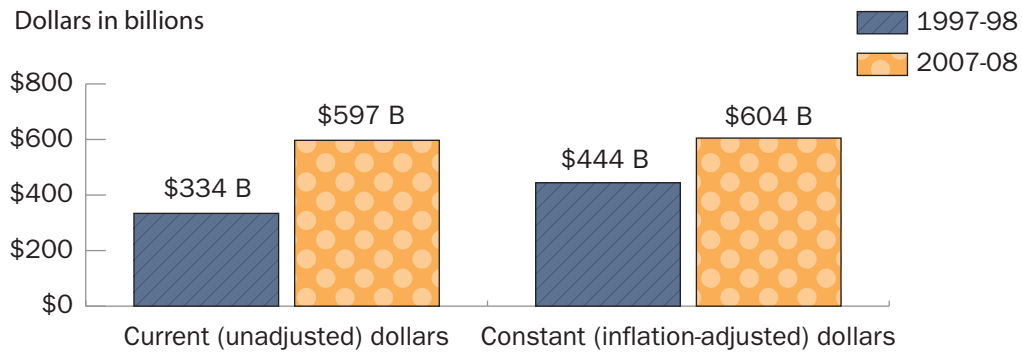
Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-35-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-sft-2.asp>

The percentage of revenues coming from *local* sources also varies across states, ranging from 16% in New Mexico to 63% in Nevada.

## Expenditures for public elementary and secondary education went up between 1997-98 and 2007-08, even when adjusted for inflation.

Without taking into account inflation, total expenditures for public elementary and secondary education rose from about \$334 billion in 1997-98 to roughly \$597 billion in 2007-08, an increase of 79%. When adjusted for inflation, expenditures still increased by 36% during this period. It is likely, however, that state and local educational expenditures have decreased since 2007-08, as a result of the economic downturn. A majority of states and school districts reported declining budgets in school years 2010-11 and 2011-12, according to CEP surveys published in 2011. Although federal economic stimulus funds helped to compensate for a portion of these budget cuts, the long-term outlook for education spending is uncertain.

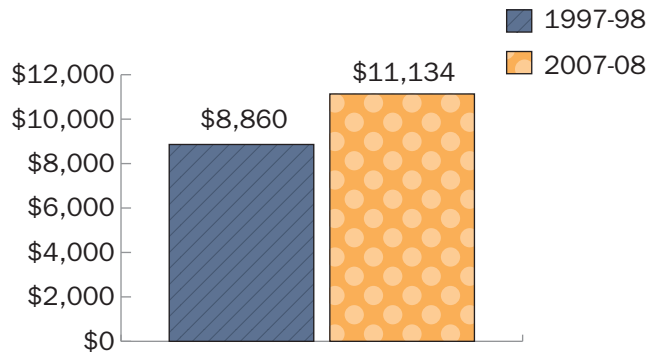
**TOTAL EXPENDITURES FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 29, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_029.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_029.asp?referrer=list)

Data on total expenditures do not take into account that the number of students has increased and education costs have gone up since 1997-98. Another way of comparing expenditures is to look at *per pupil* expenditures, adjusted for inflation. By this measure, expenditures for public education increased by about 26% between 1997-98 and 2007-08.

**PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION,  
ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION**



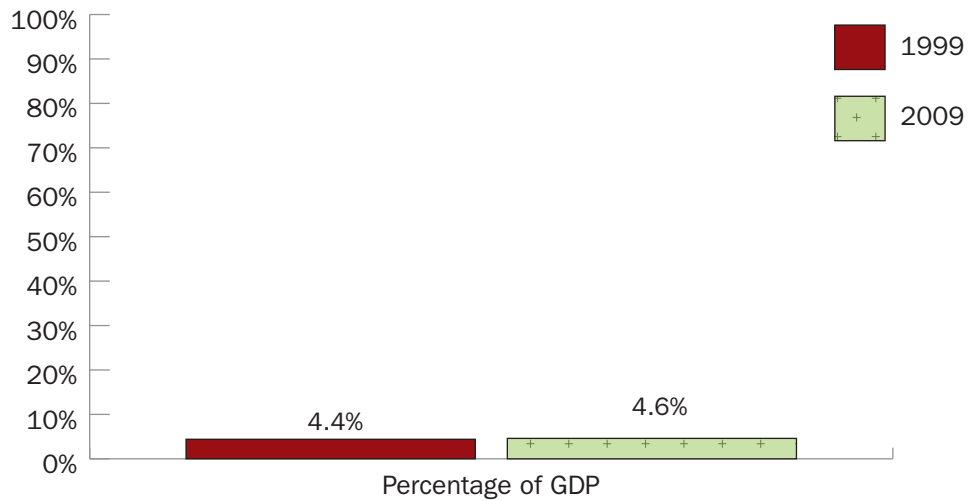
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Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 190, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_190.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_190.asp?referrer=list)

Although education spending has increased, the level of public investment in education has changed very little over the past decade compared with the nation's total economic output.

The Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, refers to the market value of all goods and services produced in the domestic economy and is often used as an indicator of a nation's economic health. Comparing education spending to total GDP is one way to determine the level of public effort to finance education.

**EXPENDITURES FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP**

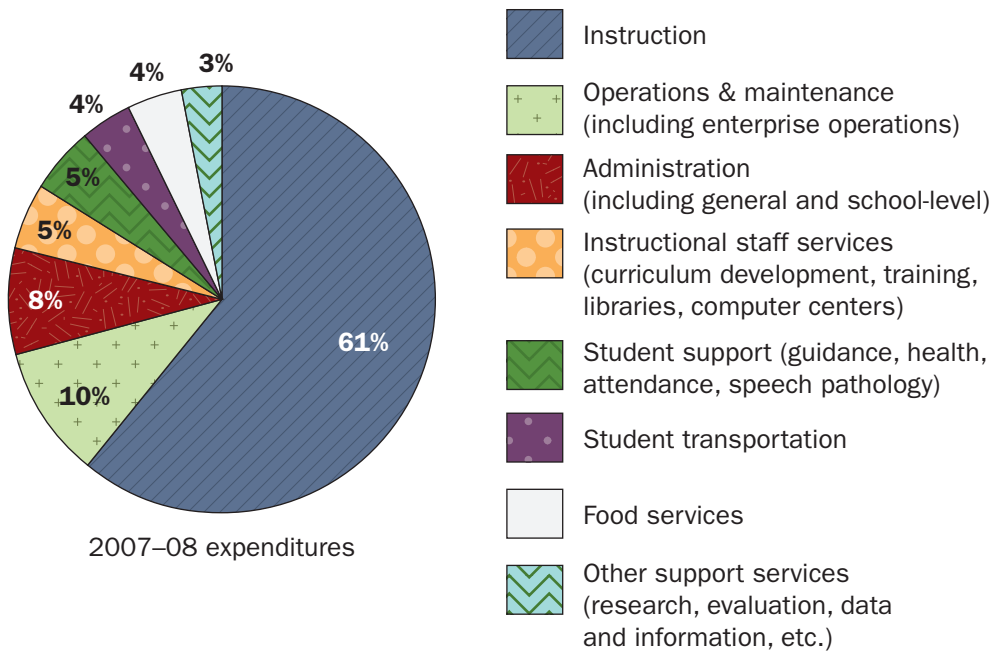


Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 28, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_028.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_028.asp?referrer=list)

## About three-fifths of the money spent on public elementary and secondary education goes toward instruction.

The largest share of spending for public education, about 61%, goes toward instruction, including teachers' salaries and benefits and supplies. Operations and maintenance, the second largest category, accounts for 10% of spending, and administration accounts for 8%.

**SPENDING ON PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
BY FUNCTION, 2007-08**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 188, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_188.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_188.asp?referrer=list)



## Large gaps in education spending exist between states. Some, but not all, of these disparities can be explained by regional variations in costs.

The national average per pupil expenditure for school year 2008-09 was \$10,499, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, but many states spend well above or well below this average.

**\$18,126** Average per pupil spending for public elementary and secondary education in New York State (highest-spending state), 2008-09

**\$6,356** Average per pupil spending for public elementary and secondary education in Utah (lowest-spending state), 2008-09

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Public Education Finances: 2009* (2011), table 8, <http://www2.census.gov/govs/school/09f33pub.pdf>

## Huge differences in education funding also exist between high-spending and low-spending school districts, even within the same state.

Because most local revenues for education come from property taxes, school district budgets are closely tied to the wealth of the surrounding community. It is not uncommon for the wealthiest district in a state to spend twice as much per pupil as the poorest district. Some districts also spend more per pupil because they enroll large numbers of low-income or special needs children and receive additional state and federal aid for these students.

The table below highlights examples of wide disparities in per pupil spending between large school districts (those enrolling 10,000 or more students) within the same state. Similar disparities in per pupil expenditures can also be found among smaller districts and in other states. Although several states have sought to make their school finance systems more equitable, large gaps remain in most states.

**EXAMPLES OF GAPS IN PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES BETWEEN HIGH-SPENDING AND LOW-SPENDING LARGE\* DISTRICTS, 2008-09**

| State      | Highest-spending large district | Per pupil expenditure | Lowest-spending large district | Per pupil expenditure | Difference between highest- and lowest-spending districts |
|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| New Jersey | Camden                          | \$23,356              | Toms River                     | \$12,005              | \$11,351  |
| Virginia   | Arlington County                | \$18,452              | Bedford County                 | \$8,657               | \$9,795   |
| Missouri   | Kansas City                     | \$15,849              | Mehlville                      | \$7,476               | \$8,373   |
| Texas      | Deer Park                       | \$15,126              | Pearland                       | \$7,018               | \$8,108   |
| Illinois   | Arlington Heights               | \$16,141              | Cicero                         | \$8,109               | \$8,032   |
| California | Palo Alto Unified               | \$13,733              | Upland Unified                 | \$6,574               | \$7,159   |

\*Only districts enrolling at least 10,000 students are shown in the table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Public Education Finances: 2009* (2011), table 17, <http://www2.census.gov/govs/school/09f33pub.pdf>

## V. HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS ACHIEVING?

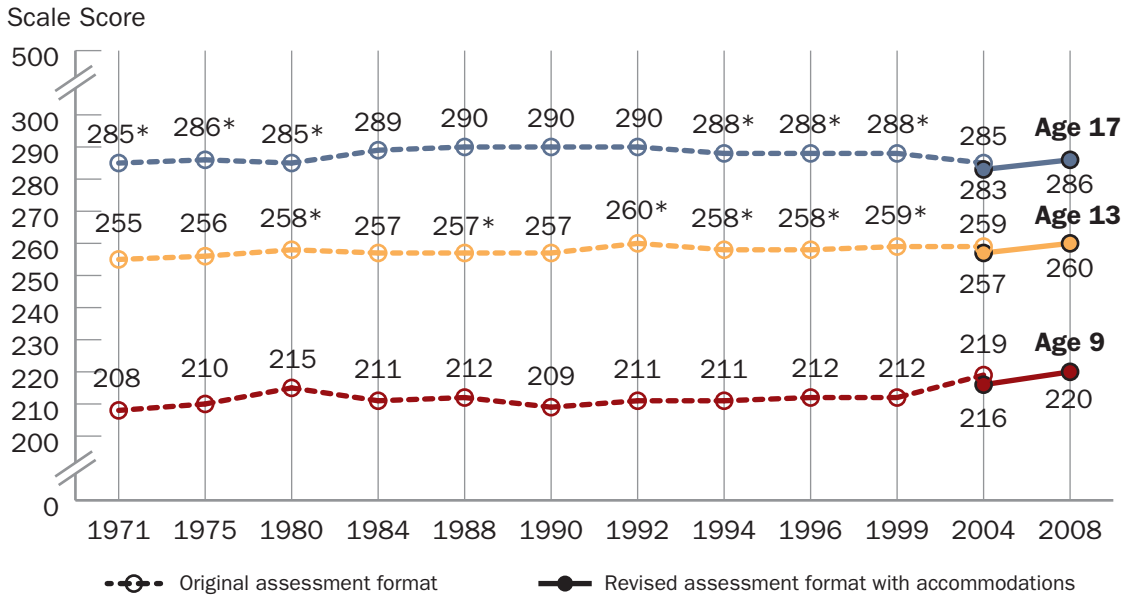
Since the early 1970s, reading and math achievement has increased for younger students but has not improved significantly for high school students, according to long-term data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, is the largest source of national data on what U.S. students know and can do in core academic subjects. The U.S. Department of Education oversees NAEP, but an independent governing board makes policy and technical decisions about NAEP assessments. NAEP includes two major assessment programs: the *long-term trend assessment* and the *main NAEP*. These two programs differ somewhat in design and purpose, although both are administered to nationally representative samples of students rather than to all students. Each provides distinct information about student achievement.

The *long-term trend assessment* is administered every four years to 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds in reading and mathematics only. Results go back to the 1970s and are reported only for the nation as a whole. To ensure that results are comparable over the decades, the knowledge and skills assessed on the long-term trend tests have remained relatively unchanged, although in 2004 procedures were introduced to allow for test accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners. (Accommodations are special testing procedures, such as one-on-one testing or bilingual dictionaries in subjects other than English, designed to enable students with disabilities and ELLs to participate meaningfully in testing.)

As shown in the graphs on the next page, average scores in reading on the long-term NAEP have increased significantly for 9- and 13-year-olds between the early 1970s and the most recent long-term assessment in 2008. For 17-year-olds, however, the 2008 average score in reading was not significantly different from the 1971 average.

**READING: TRENDS IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE LONG-TERM NAEP, 1971-2008**

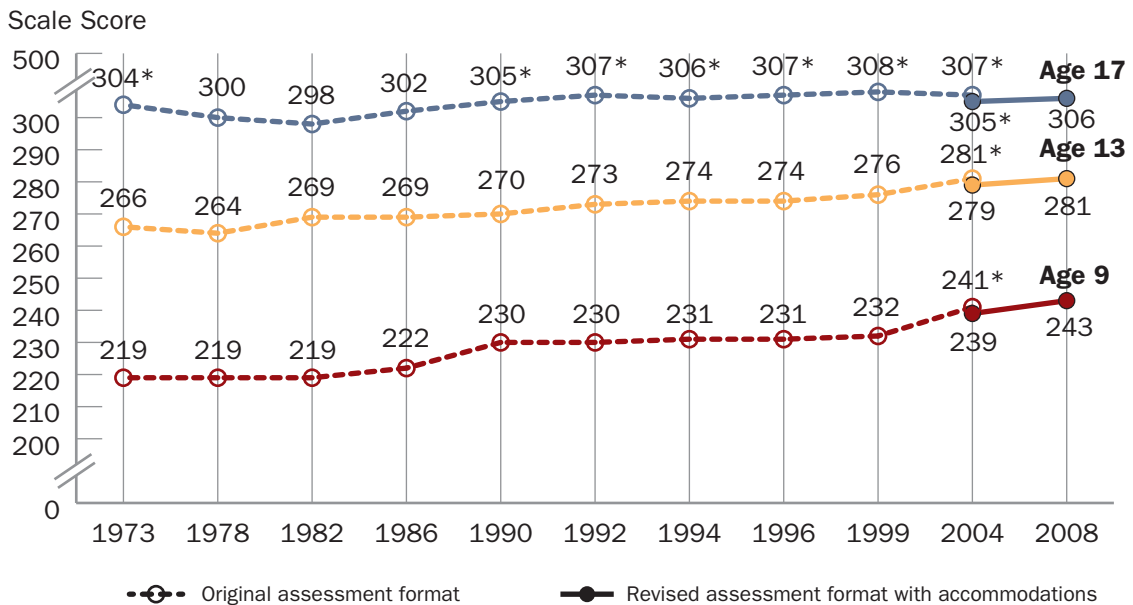


\*Not significantly different from 2008

Source: NCES, *NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress (2009)*, figure A, [http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2008/2009479\\_1.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2008/2009479_1.pdf)

In math, average scores have improved since 1973 for 9- and 13-year-olds but have not increased significantly for 17-year-olds.

**MATH: TRENDS IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE LONG-TERM NAEP, 1973-2008**



\*Not significantly different from 2008

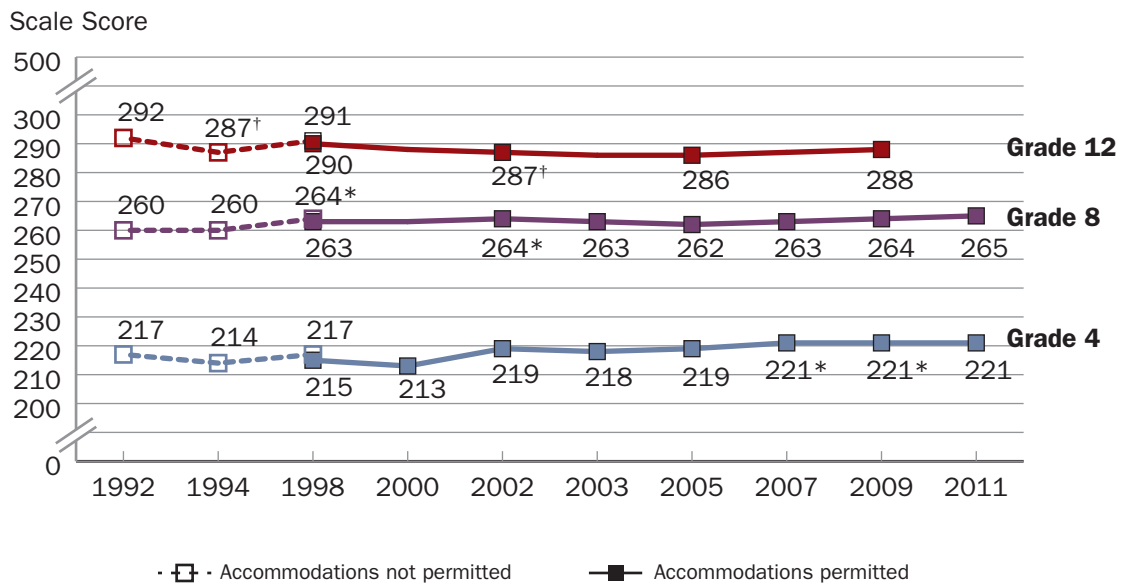
Source: NCES, *NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress (2009)*, figure B, [http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2008/2009479\\_1.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2008/2009479_1.pdf)

Since the early 1990s, reading and math achievement has improved for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, according to the main NAEP tests. For 12<sup>th</sup> graders, average reading scores have risen since 2005 but are still lower than in 1992.

Unlike the long-term trends NAEP, which tests a relatively stable body of knowledge, the *main NAEP assessment* is revised every decade or so to reflect current views about the knowledge and skills that students should learn in school. The main NAEP is administered every two years in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 and less frequently in science, writing, and other subjects. Grade 12 achievement is also assessed periodically. Results on the main NAEP are reported for the nation and for each state. Trends extend back to the early 1990s, except in grade 12 math, where the test was substantially changed in 2005.

In reading, average scores on the main NAEP have risen somewhat at grades 4 and 8 since 1992, although the average grade 4 score has remained flat since 2007. The average reading score at grade 12 has increased since 2005 but is lower than in 1992.

**READING: TRENDS IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP, 1992-2011**



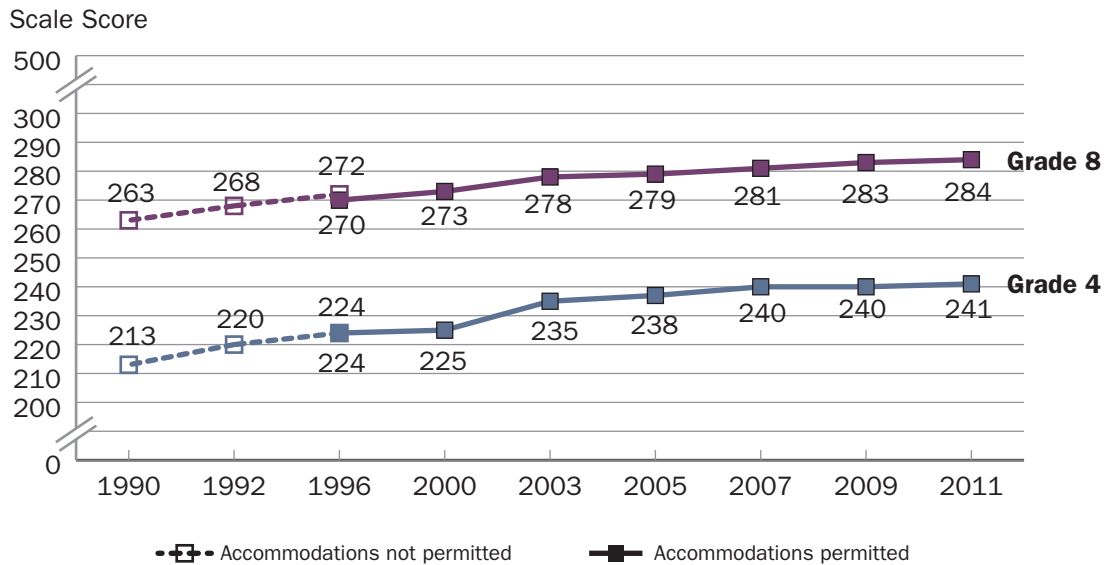
\*Not significantly different from 2011

†Not significantly different from 2009

Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2011*, figure A, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012457.pdf>; and *Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 National Pilot and State Results* (2011), figure A, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>

In math, average scores for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders on the main NAEP have increased since 1990.

**MATH: TRENDS IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP, 1990-2011**



Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2011*, figure A, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012458.pdf>.

The overall increases in achievement at grades 4 and 8 have occurred even as more English language learners are taking NAEP assessments. The percentage of ELLs being tested has more than doubled at grades 4 and 8 since NAEP began allowing accommodations for ELLs in math (1996) and reading (1998). ELLs now comprise about 10% of test-takers in grade 4 and 5% in grade 8.

Results for 12<sup>th</sup> graders are not shown in the figures above because the grade 12 math test uses a different scoring scale of 0-300. The average math score for 12<sup>th</sup> graders rose from 150 in 2005 to 153 in 2009, the only two recent years with comparable data (figure B, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>).

Since the 1990s, most racial/ethnic groups have made gains on NAEP in reading and math at grades 4 and 8, but not in grade 12 reading. Moreover, progress in narrowing achievement gaps has been inconsistent.

At grades 4 and 8, average scores on the main NAEP have gone up for African American, Latino, and white students since 1992 in reading and since 1990 in math. Much of this improvement occurred before 2005. Asian American students have also made gains in both subjects since the 1990s, except in grade 8 reading. Native American students have not made significant progress in either subject compared with 1994.

In grade 12 reading, the average 2011 scores for all major racial/ethnic groups did not differ significantly from their 1992 scores. In grade 12 math, average scores for all groups increased from 2005 to 2009.

**READING: TRENDS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP**

| Grade and group                  | 1992              | 1994              | 1998                                | 2000 | 2002             | 2003 | 2005             | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                   |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| White                            | 224 <sup>†</sup>  | 224 <sup>†</sup>  | 226 <sup>†</sup> /225               | 224  | 229              | 229  | 229              | 231* | 230* | 231  |
| African American                 | 192 <sup>†</sup>  | 185 <sup>†</sup>  | 193 <sup>†</sup> /193               | 190  | 199              | 198  | 200              | 203  | 205* | 205  |
| Latino                           | 197 <sup>†</sup>  | 188 <sup>†</sup>  | 195 <sup>†</sup> /193               | 190  | 201              | 200  | 203              | 205* | 205* | 206  |
| Asian American                   | 216 <sup>†</sup>  | 220 <sup>†</sup>  | 221 <sup>†</sup> /215               | 224  | 224              | 226  | 229              | 231* | 230* | 231  |
| Native American                  |                   | 211*              |                                     | 214* | 207*             | 202* | 204*             | 203* | 204* | 202  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                   |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| White                            | 267 <sup>†</sup>  | 267 <sup>†</sup>  | 271 <sup>†</sup> /270               |      | 272              | 272  | 271              | 272  | 273  | 274  |
| African American                 | 237 <sup>†</sup>  | 236 <sup>†</sup>  | 243 <sup>†</sup> /244               |      | 245              | 244  | 243              | 245  | 246  | 249  |
| Latino                           | 241 <sup>†</sup>  | 243 <sup>†</sup>  | 245 <sup>†</sup> /243               |      | 247              | 245  | 246              | 247  | 249  | 252  |
| Asian American                   | 268 <sup>††</sup> | 265 <sup>†</sup>  | 267 <sup>††</sup> /264*             |      | 267              | 270  | 271              | 271  | 273  | 274  |
| Native American                  |                   | 248*              |                                     |      | 250*             | 246* | 249*             | 247  | 251* | 252  |
| <b>Grade 12 (scale of 0-500)</b> |                   |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| White                            | 297 <sup>†‡</sup> | 293 <sup>†</sup>  | 297 <sup>†‡</sup> /297 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 292              |      | 293              |      | 296  |      |
| African American                 | 273 <sup>†‡</sup> | 265 <sup>†‡</sup> | 271 <sup>†‡</sup> /269 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 267 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 267 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 269  |      |
| Latino                           | 279 <sup>†‡</sup> | 270 <sup>†‡</sup> | 276 <sup>†‡</sup> /275 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 273 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 272 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 274  |      |
| Asian American                   | 290 <sup>†‡</sup> | 278 <sup>†</sup>  | 288 <sup>†‡</sup> /287              |      | 286              |      | 287              |      | 298  |      |
| Native American                  |                   | 274 <sup>†‡</sup> |                                     |      |                  |      | 279 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 283  |      |

\*Not significantly different from 2011

†Accommodations not permitted

‡Not significantly different from 2009

Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2011*, figures 4, 5, 6, 7, 20, 21, 22 and 23,

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012457.pdf>; and *Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 National Pilot and State Results* (2011), figure 4, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>

**MATH: TRENDS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP IN AVERAGE SCORES  
ON THE MAIN NAEP**

| Grade and group                  | 1990             | 1992             | 1996                  | 2000 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| White                            | 220 <sup>†</sup> | 227 <sup>†</sup> | 231 <sup>†</sup> /232 | 234  | 243  | 246  | 248  | 248  | 249  |
| African American                 | 188 <sup>†</sup> | 193 <sup>†</sup> | 199 <sup>†</sup> /198 | 203  | 216  | 220  | 222  | 222  | 224  |
| Latino                           | 200 <sup>†</sup> | 202 <sup>†</sup> | 205 <sup>†</sup> /207 | 208  | 222  | 226  | 227  | 227  | 229  |
| Asian American                   | 225 <sup>†</sup> | 231 <sup>†</sup> | 226 <sup>†</sup> /229 |      | 246  | 251  | 253* | 255* | 256  |
| Native American                  |                  |                  | 217*                  | 208  | 223* | 226* | 228  | 225* | 225  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| White                            | 270 <sup>†</sup> | 277 <sup>†</sup> | 281 <sup>†</sup> /281 | 284  | 288  | 289  | 291  | 293* | 293  |
| African American                 | 237 <sup>†</sup> | 237 <sup>†</sup> | 242 <sup>†</sup> /240 | 244  | 252  | 255  | 260  | 261* | 262  |
| Latino                           | 246 <sup>†</sup> | 249 <sup>†</sup> | 251 <sup>†</sup> /251 | 253  | 259  | 262  | 265  | 266  | 270  |
| Asian American                   | 275 <sup>†</sup> | 290 <sup>†</sup> |                       | 288  | 291  | 295  | 297  | 301* | 303  |
| Native American                  |                  |                  |                       | 259* | 263* | 264* | 264* | 266* | 265  |
| <b>Grade 12 (scale of 0-300)</b> |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| White                            |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 157  |      | 161  |      |
| African American                 |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 127  |      | 131  |      |
| Latino                           |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 133  |      | 138  |      |
| Asian American                   |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 163  |      | 175  |      |
| Native American                  |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 134  |      | 144  |      |

\*Not significantly different from 2011

<sup>†</sup> Accommodations not permitted

Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2011*, figures 4, 5, 6, 7, 21, 22, 23 and 24,

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012458.pdf>; and *Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 National Pilot and State Results* (2011), figure 14, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>

At grades 4 and 8, progress has been made in narrowing the achievement gap between African American and white students, except in grade 8 math. Latino-white gaps have not narrowed significantly, except in grade 8 reading. Native American-white gaps have not narrowed in either grade or subject.

In grade 12 reading, achievement gaps have not narrowed significantly since the 1990s for any racial/ethnic group.



## Students from low-income families have lower average test scores than students from higher-income families.

To compare achievement among different income groups, NAEP uses students' eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches. Students are eligible for free lunch if their family income does not exceed 130% of the poverty level and for reduced-price lunch if their family income is above 130% but below 185% of the poverty level. Students with family incomes above 185% of the poverty level are not eligible for either free or reduced-price lunches. NAEP trends based on family income go back to 2003.

On the main NAEP, higher-income students outperform lower-income students. At grades 4 and 8, both reading and math scores are highest for students not eligible for subsidized lunch and lowest for students in the free lunch group. Scores for students eligible for reduced-price lunch fall in between.

### READING: TRENDS BY INCOME GROUP IN SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP

| Grade and group                 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b> |      |      |      |      |      |
| Not eligible                    | 229  | 230  | 232  | 232  | 235  |
| Reduced-price lunch             | 211  | 212  | 215  | 216  | 218  |
| Free lunch                      | 199  | 201  | 203  | 204  | 206  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b> |      |      |      |      |      |
| Not eligible                    | 271  | 270  | 271  | 273  | 275  |
| Reduced-price lunch             | 258  | 255  | 255  | 256  | 261  |
| Free lunch                      | 244  | 245  | 246  | 247  | 250  |

Source: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2011*, figures 11 and 27, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012457.pdf>

### MATH: TRENDS BY INCOME GROUP IN SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP

| Grade and group                 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b> |      |      |      |      |      |
| Not eligible                    | 244  | 248  | 249  | 250  | 252  |
| Reduced-price lunch             | 230  | 234  | 236  | 235  | 239  |
| Free lunch                      | 220  | 224  | 225  | 226  | 228  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b> |      |      |      |      |      |
| Not eligible                    | 287  | 288  | 291  | 294  | 296  |
| Reduced-price lunch             | 271  | 270  | 274  | 276  | 279  |
| Free lunch                      | 256  | 260  | 263  | 265  | 268  |

Source: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2011*, figures 11 and 28, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012458.pdf>

Similar data by student income groups are not available at grade 12. But NAEP does compare the average grade 12 scores in high-poverty and low-poverty schools, based on the percentage of students in the school who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Since 1998, low-poverty schools have done better on the grade 12 NAEP than high-poverty schools.

As all of these data indicate, large achievement gaps exist between higher-income and lower-income students.

**AVERAGE GRADE 12 SCORES BY SCHOOL POVERTY ON THE MAIN NAEP, 2009**

| School poverty<br>(percentage of students<br>in school eligible for<br>free or reduced-price lunch) | Average grade 12 reading score<br>(scale 0-500) | Average grade 12 math score<br>(scale 0-300) |
|---|---|--|
| 0–25% (low-poverty)   | 299   | 166  |
| 26–50%  | 286   | 150  |
| 51–75%  | 276   | 140  |
| 76–100% (high-poverty)  | 266   | 130  |

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, tables A-11-2 and A-12-2, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>

At grades 4 and 8, reading and math achievement has increased for boys and girls since the early 1990s, but at grade 12, average reading scores have decreased for both genders. Girls continue to outperform boys in reading.

In reading, girls have higher average scores on the main NAEP than boys at all three grade levels.

**READING: TRENDS BY GENDER IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP**

| Grade                            | 1992             | 1994              | 1998                                | 2000 | 2002             | 2003 | 2005             | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| Female                           | 221 <sup>†</sup> | 220 <sup>†</sup>  | 220 <sup>†</sup> /217               | 219  | 222              | 222  | 222              | 224* | 224* | 225  |
| Male                             | 213 <sup>†</sup> | 209 <sup>†</sup>  | 214 <sup>†</sup> /212               | 208  | 215              | 215  | 216              | 218* | 218* | 218  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| Female                           | 267 <sup>†</sup> | 267 <sup>†</sup>  | 270* <sup>†</sup> /270*             | 269* | 269              | 267  | 268              | 269  | 270  |      |
| Male                             | 254 <sup>†</sup> | 252 <sup>†</sup>  | 257 <sup>†</sup> /256               | 260* | 258              | 257  | 258              | 259  | 261  |      |
| <b>Grade 12 (scale of 0-500)</b> |                  |                   |                                     |      |                  |      |                  |      |      |      |
| Female                           | 297 <sup>†</sup> | 294 <sup>†‡</sup> | 298 <sup>†</sup> /298               |      | 295 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 292 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 294  |      |
| Male                             | 287 <sup>†</sup> | 280 <sup>†‡</sup> | 283 <sup>†‡</sup> /282 <sup>‡</sup> |      | 279              |      | 279              |      | 282  |      |

\*Not significantly different from 2011

<sup>†</sup>Accommodations not permitted

<sup>‡</sup>Not significantly different from 2009

Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2011*, figures 9 and 25,

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012457.pdf>; and *Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 National Pilot and State Results* (2011), figure 6, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>

In math, the performance of boys and girls is more similar. At grades 4 and 8, boys scored 1 point higher than girls, on average, in 2011. At grade 12, boys scored 3 points higher than girls, on average, in 2009.

**MATH: TRENDS BY GENDER IN AVERAGE SCORES ON THE MAIN NAEP**

| Grade                            | 1990             | 1992             | 1996                  | 2000 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Grade 4 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Male                             | 214 <sup>†</sup> | 221 <sup>†</sup> | 226 <sup>†</sup> /224 | 227  | 236  | 239  | 241  | 241  | 241  |
| Female                           | 213 <sup>†</sup> | 219 <sup>†</sup> | 222 <sup>†</sup> /223 | 224  | 233  | 237  | 239  | 239  | 240  |
| <b>Grade 8 (scale of 0-500)</b>  |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Male                             | 263 <sup>†</sup> | 268 <sup>†</sup> | 272 <sup>†</sup> /271 | 274  | 278  | 280  | 282  | 284* | 284  |
| Female                           | 262 <sup>†</sup> | 269 <sup>†</sup> | 272 <sup>†</sup> /269 | 272  | 277  | 278  | 280  | 282  | 283  |
| <b>Grade 12 (scale of 0-300)</b> |                  |                  |                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Male                             |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 151  |      | 155  |      |
| Female                           |                  |                  |                       |      |      | 149  |      | 152  |      |

\*Not significantly different from 2011

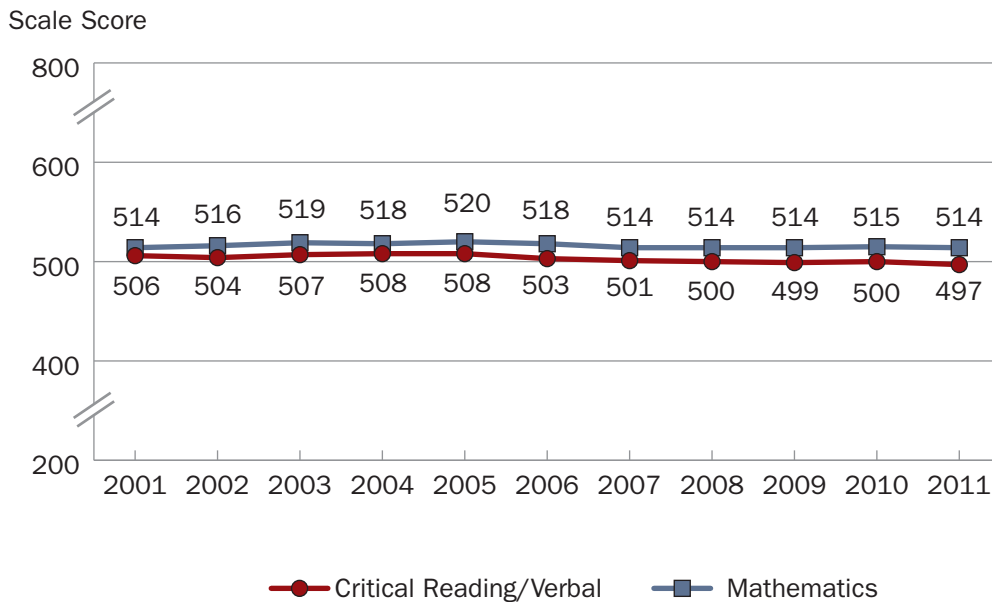
<sup>†</sup>Accommodations not permitted

Sources: NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2011*, figures 9 and 26, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012458.pdf>; and *Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 National Pilot and State Results* (2011), figure 16, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011455.pdf>

Average scores on the SAT college entrance exam have varied little over the past decade in reading but have declined somewhat in math. During this period, the number and diversity of students taking the tests have grown.

The number of SAT test-takers reached an all-time high of nearly 1.65 million students in 2011.

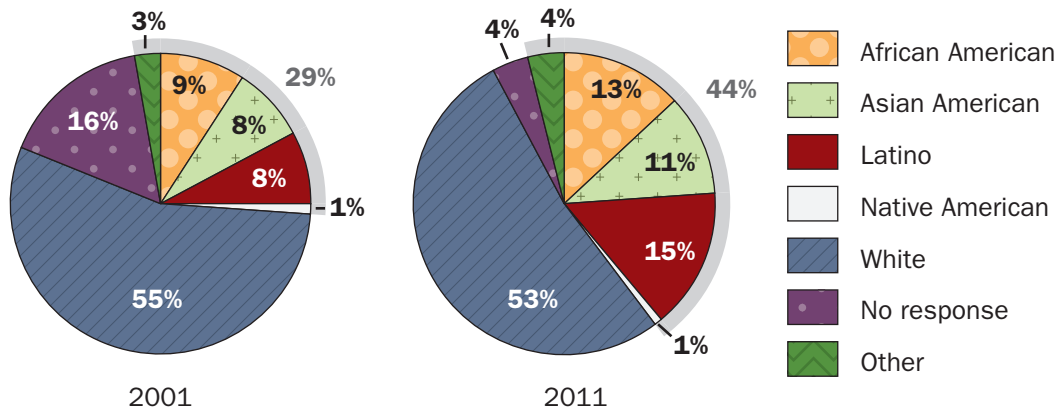
**AVERAGE SAT SCORES FOR COLLEGE-BOUND SENIORS**



Sources: College Board, *College Bound Seniors 2011: Total Group Profile*, [http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/cbs2011\\_total\\_group\\_report.pdf](http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/cbs2011_total_group_report.pdf); and *43% of 2011 College-Bound Seniors Met SAT College and Career-Readiness Benchmarks*, [http://media.collegeboard.com/pdf/cbs\\_2011\\_nat\\_release\\_091411.pdf](http://media.collegeboard.com/pdf/cbs_2011_nat_release_091411.pdf)

In 2011, 44% of SAT test-takers were students of color, the most diverse test-taking pool ever. An increase in the size and diversity of the test-taking group can lead to a decline in average scores, according to the College Board, because the group includes more students of varying academic ability and a greater share of students from historically lower-scoring groups.

**PERCENTAGE OF SAT TEST-TAKERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY**

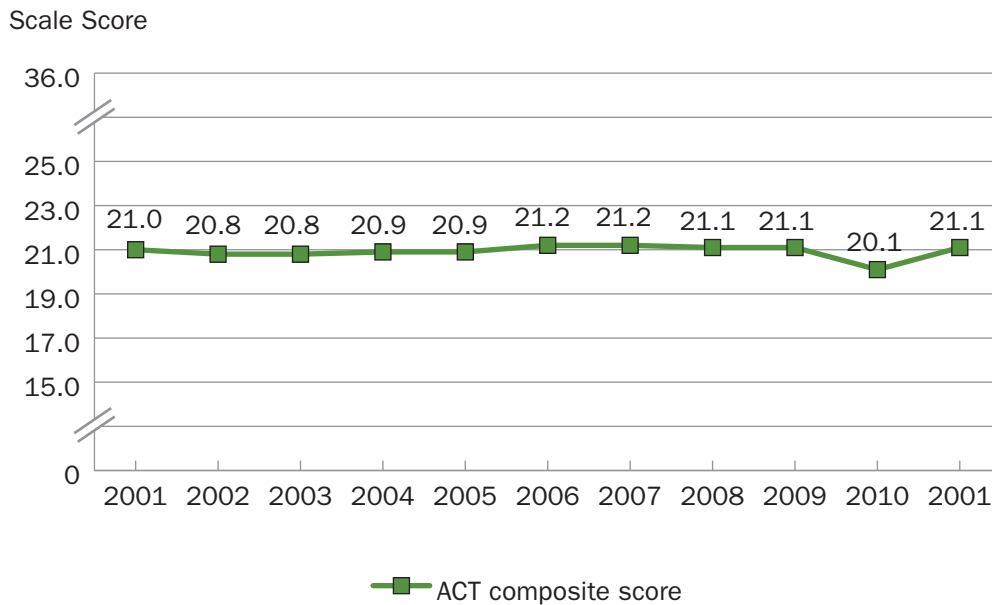


Source: SAT, *How Have College-Bound Seniors Changed in Ten Years?* (2011), <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/sat/cb-seniors-2011/tables>

## Average composite scores on the ACT college entrance exam have held relatively steady over the past decade, even as the pool of test-takers has grown larger and more diverse.

A record high of more than 1.6 million students took the ACT in 2011. The average score for 2011 was higher than that for 2010 but similar to the average scores for earlier years.

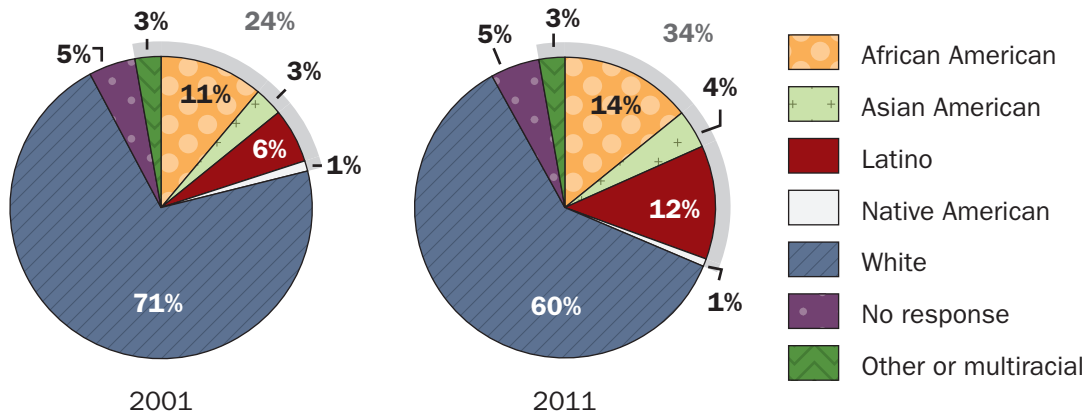
**AVERAGE ACT SCORES FOR COLLEGE-BOUND SENIORS**



Sources: ACT, *ACT Profile Report—National: Graduating Class 2011*, <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2011/pdf/profile/Section1.pdf>; *ACT High School Profile: Executive Summary, High School Graduating Class of 2006, National Report*, <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2006/pdf/one.pdf>; and *Selections from the 2001 National Score Report*, <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2001/tsum.html>.

About one-third (34%) of ACT test-takers were students of color in 2011, an increase compared with a decade ago.

**PERCENTAGE OF ACT TEST-TAKERS WHO ARE STUDENTS OF COLOR**



Note: percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Sources: ACT, *ACT Profile Report—National: Graduating Class 2011*, <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2011/pdf/profile/Section1.pdf>; and *2001 National and State Scores*, table 11, <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2001/data.html>



**On major international assessments, U.S. students perform in the middle or upper middle range in reading, math, and science. But U.S. performance lags behind that of several of our global competitors.**

The **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study** (PIRLS) exam is administered every five years by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The test assesses the reading comprehension of students in various nations in their fourth year of schooling (grade 4 in the U.S.).

U.S. students scored near the average of the PIRLS scoring scale and were in the middle of the pack of participating nations. The performance of U.S. students did not change measurably between 2001 and 2006.

**RELATIVE ACHIEVEMENT OF U.S. STUDENTS ON THE PIRLS 2006 EXAM**

| PIRLS 2006       | Total # of countries participating | Average score | U.S. average score | # of countries with statistically higher scores | # of countries with statistically similar scores | # of countries with statistically lower scores |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Reading, grade 4 | 45                                 | 500*          | 540                | 22  | 12   | 10   |

\*Average score on scoring scale for exam

Source: NCES, *The Reading Literacy of U.S. Fourth-Grade Students in an International Context: Results from the 2001 and 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* (2008), table 2 and p. iii, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008017.pdf>

The **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study** (TIMSS), also administered by the IEA, measures the math and science achievement of students in grades 4 and 8 in various countries every four years. TIMSS seeks to assess curricular topics in math and science that are deemed important by experts in many countries.

At grades 4 and 8 in both math and science, U.S. students performed above the average on the TIMSS scoring scale and better than students in most other participating countries. But U.S. students still lagged behind those in the highest-scoring nations and municipalities, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Chinese Taipei, and others. The average U.S. math and science scores on TIMSS have improved since 1995 at both grades assessed.

**RELATIVE ACHIEVEMENT OF U.S. STUDENTS ON THE TIMSS 2007 EXAM**

| TIMSS 2007       | Total # of countries participating | Average score | U.S. average score | # of countries with statistically higher scores | # of countries with statistically similar scores | # of countries with statistically lower scores |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Math, grade 4    | 35                                 | 500*          | 529                | 8   | 4  | 23   |
| Math, grade 8    | 47                                 | 500*          | 508                | 5   | 5  | 37   |
| Science, grade 4 | 35                                 | 500*          | 539                | 4   | 6  | 25   |
| Science, grade 8 | 47                                 | 500*          | 520                | 9   | 3  | 35   |

\*Average score on scoring scale for exam

Source: NCES, *Highlights From TIMSS 2007: Mathematics and Science Achievement of U.S. Fourth and Eighth-Grade Students in an International Context* (2009), pp. ii-iv, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009001.pdf>

The **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** exam is administered every three years in nations around the world by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The test is given to 15-year-olds, an age near the end of compulsory schooling in many countries. PISA measures students' skills and competencies in reading, math, and science, including how well they can apply these skills to real-world contexts.

In reading and science, the U.S. average scores on PISA were not statistically different from the OECD averages, but in math, the U.S. average was below the OECD average. Several Asian nations, as well as Finland, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, among others, outperformed the U.S. in all three subjects.

**RELATIVE ACHIEVEMENT OF U.S. STUDENTS ON THE PISA 2009 EXAM**

| PISA 2009       | Total # of countries participating | Average score    | U.S. average score | # of countries with statistically higher scores | # of countries with statistically similar scores | # of countries with statistically lower scores |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Reading, age 15 | 65                                 | 493 <sup>†</sup> | 500                | 9   | 16   | 39   |
| Math, age 15    | 65                                 | 496 <sup>†</sup> | 487                | 14  | 21   | 29   |
| Science, age 15 | 65                                 | 501 <sup>†</sup> | 502                | 18  | 13   | 33   |

<sup>†</sup>Average of OECD nations

Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Programme for International Student Assessment, *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do, Student Performance In Reading, Mathematics and Science, Volume I*, (2010), figures 1.2.15, 1.3.10, and 1.3.21, <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/10/61/48852548.pdf>

## Too many young people, particularly African American, Latino, and Native American students, fail to graduate from high school.

There are several methods for calculating high school dropout and graduation rates. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and each produces different estimates. Collecting accurate data is difficult, in part because many states and school districts lack adequate systems for tracking what happens to students who leave a particular school.

One such method is the status dropout rate, which indicates the percentage of youth ages 15-24 who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school diploma, GED, or other equivalent. By this measure, about 1 in 10 out-of-school youth in this age group lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent.

**HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2008**

|   | All students | African American | Asian American | Latino | Native American | White |
|---|--------------|------------------|----------------|--------|-----------------|-------|
| Percentage of youth aged 16-24 who were not enrolled in high school and lacked a high school credential | 8%           | 10%              | 4%             | 19%    | 15%             | 5%    |

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2011*, table A-20-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-sde-1.asp>

Another way of looking at high school completion is the averaged freshman graduation rate, which estimates the percentage of public high school students who graduate with a regular diploma on time—that is, four years after starting 9<sup>th</sup> grade. By this measure, about one-quarter of public school students fail to graduate on time.

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2008-09**

|  | All students | African American | Asian American | Latino | Native American | White |
|--|--------------|------------------|----------------|--------|-----------------|-------|
| Percentage of public school students who graduated “on time” | 76%          | 64%              | 92%            | 66%    | 65%             | 82%   |

Source: NCES, *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008–09, First Look*, (2011), tables 1 and 2, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011312.pdf>

Regardless of which method is used, dropout rates are higher and high school completion rates are lower for African American, Latino, and Native American youth than for other racial/ethnic groups.

## High school students are earning more credits and completing more challenging courses than they did a decade ago.

Students who graduated in 2009 earned one credit more, on average, than their 2000 counterparts—the equivalent of about 120 additional hours of instruction during high school in 2009.

**26.2** Average credits earned by U.S. high school graduates in 2000

**27.2** Average credits earned by U.S. high school graduates in 2009

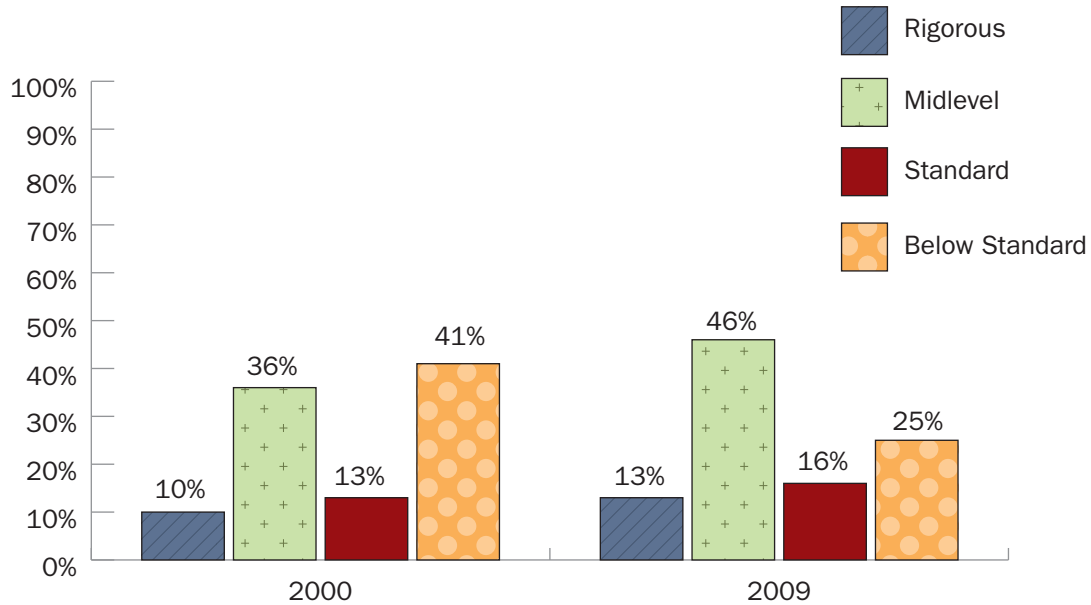
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Note: Each Carnegie unit of credit represents 120 hours of classroom instruction.

Source: NCES, *America's High School Graduates: Results of the 2009 NAEP High School Transcript Study* (2011), figure 1, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2011462.pdf>

A greater percentage of 2009 graduates also completed a more challenging curriculum than their counterparts in the class of 2000. More than half (59%) of the 2009 graduates took a “midlevel” or “rigorous” curriculum that included algebra and geometry and at least two years of biology, chemistry, and/or physics.

**PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES COMPLETING VARIOUS CURRICULUM LEVELS\***



\*The NAEP High School Transcript Study categorizes high school curricula according to four levels of rigor:

Standard— Four years of English and three years each of social studies, math, and science

Mid-level— Four years of English; three years each of social studies, math (including geometry and algebra I or II), and science (including at least two years of biology, chemistry, and physics); and one year of a foreign language

Rigorous— Four years of English; three years of social studies; four years of math (including pre-calculus or higher); three years of science (including biology, chemistry, and physics); and three years of a foreign language

Source: NCES, *America's High School Graduates: Results of the 2009 NAEP High School Transcript Study* (2011), figure 2, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2011462.pdf>

## More students are taking Advanced Placement courses than did a decade ago, but a smaller percentage are doing well enough on AP exams to earn college credit.

The number of students participating in the Advanced Placement program has more than doubled over the past decade.

### PARTICIPATION IN THE AP PROGRAM

| Year    | Number of schools* | Number of students | Number of exams taken† |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 2000-01 | 13,680             | 844,741            | 1,414,387              |
| 2010-11 | 18,340             | 1,973,545          | 3,456,020              |

\*Number of schools offering AP exams to one or more students

†Some students take AP classes and exams in multiple subjects in the same academic year.

Source: College Board, *AP Data 2011, Annual AP Program Participation 1956-2011*,

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/data>

The percentage of exams that received a high enough score to qualify for college credit (usually a 3, 4 or 5) has fallen since 2001, as has the average score.

### PERCENTAGE OF AP EXAMS RECEIVING QUALIFYING SCORES AND AVERAGE (MEAN) SCORE

| Year | Qualifying score (3, 4, or 5) | Non-qualifying score (1 or 2) | Average score |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 2001 | 61.7%                         | 38.4%                         | 2.97          |
| 2011 | 58.0%                         | 42.0%                         | 2.86          |

Note: Scores of 3 or higher generally qualify for college credit.

Note: Percentages for 2001 do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Source: College Board, *AP Data 2011, AP Score Distributions – All Subjects 1990-2010*,

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/data>





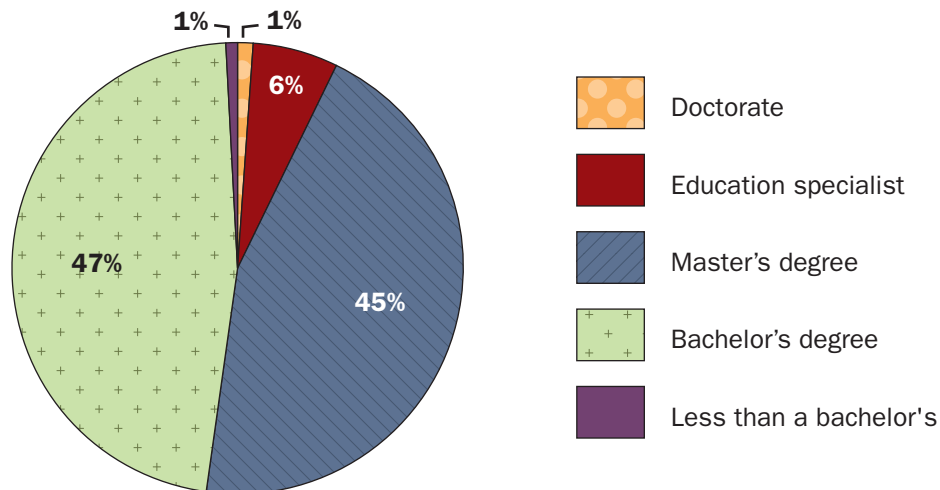
## VI. WHAT IS THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING FORCE LIKE?

More than half of all public school teachers have advanced degrees, and more than half have at least ten years of teaching experience.

About 52% of public school teachers have a master's degree or higher. (By comparison, 38% of private school teachers have an advanced degree.)

**HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED BY PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, 2007-08**

Percentage of public school teachers



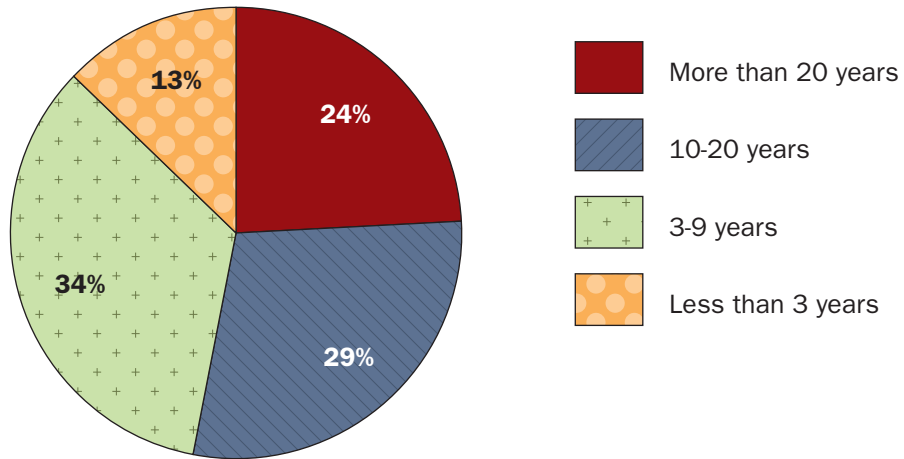
Note: An education specialist is a degree beyond the master's level in fields such as school counseling or psychology, advanced curriculum and instruction, and education leadership or administration.

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 72, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_072.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_072.asp?referrer=list)

Public school teachers also tend to be an experienced group; 53% have 10 or more years of full-time teaching experience.

**YEARS OF FULL-TIME TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF  
PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS, 2007-08**

Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers



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Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 72, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_072.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_072.asp?referrer=list)

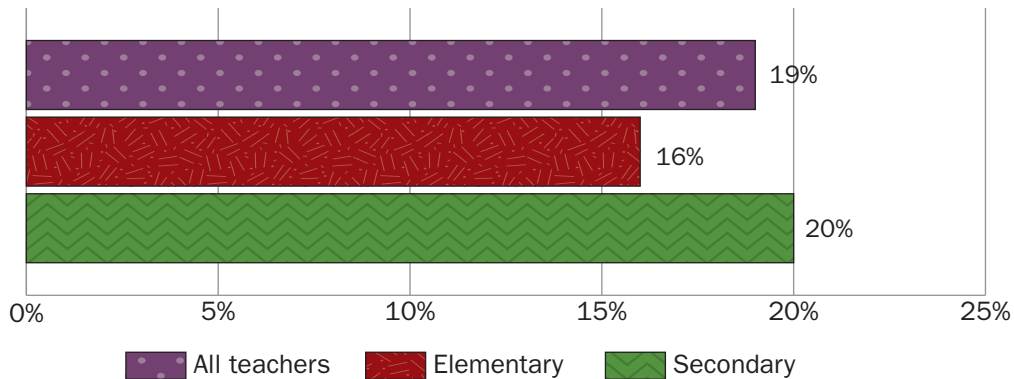
## About one-fifth of all teachers spend at least some of their time teaching grades or subjects outside their field of preparation.

A greater percentage of teachers at the secondary level than at the elementary level teach a grade or subject outside their field of college preparation. The percentage of “out-of-field” teachers was roughly the same in 2006 as it was a decade earlier in 1996.

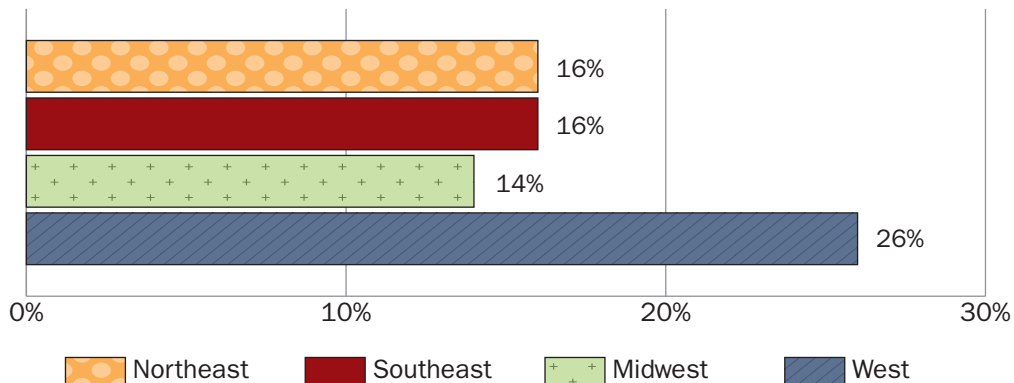
Out-of-field teaching is more prevalent in the West than in other regions. There is little variation by school size, however.

### PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO SPENT SOME PORTION OF THEIR TEACHING TIME IN A GRADE OR SUBJECT OUTSIDE THEIR FIELD OF COLLEGE PREPARATION, 2006

#### By level of teaching



#### By region



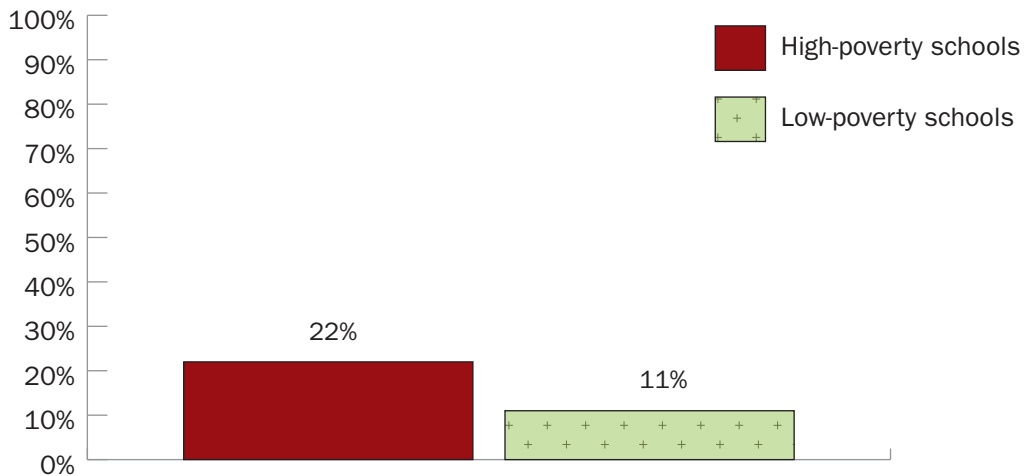
Source: NEA, *Status of the American Public School Teacher 2005-2006* (2010), tables 14 and 15, <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/2005-06StatusTextandAppendixA.pdf>

## Students in high-poverty schools are more likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher or a first-year teacher than students in low-poverty schools.

A 2010 study by the Education Trust compared the prevalence of out-of-field teachers—those who have neither specific certification nor a college major in the field they are teaching—in high-poverty and low-poverty schools in grades 7-12. High-poverty schools were defined as those with low-income enrollments of 55% or more, while low-poverty schools had low-income enrollments of 15% or less.

According to this study, more than one in five classes in high-poverty schools are taught by out-of-field teachers—roughly twice the rate of out-of-field teaching found in low-poverty schools. Out-of-field teaching is more common in high-poverty schools, regardless of whether they are located in urban, suburban, small town, or rural districts.

**PERCENTAGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSES TAUGHT BY OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHERS, 2007-08**

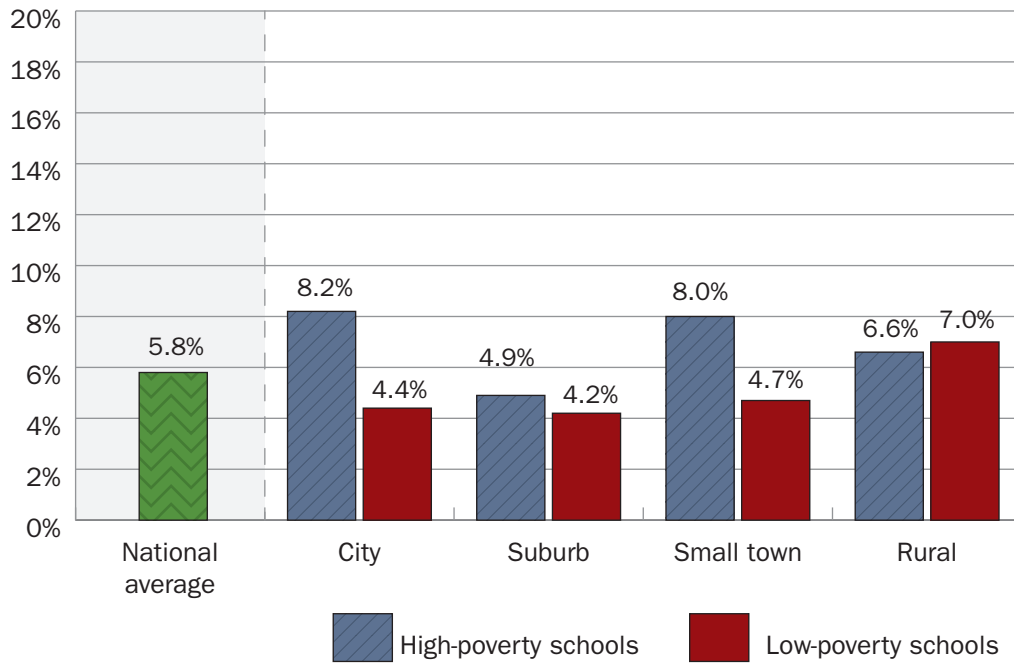


Note: For this study, schools were considered high-poverty if 55% or more of their students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Schools were considered low-poverty if 15% or fewer students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Source: The Education Trust, *Not Prepared for Class: High-Poverty Schools Continue to Have Fewer In-Field Teachers* (2010), figure 1, <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/Not%20Prepared%20for%20Class.pdf>

High-poverty schools in all types of communities except suburbs also employ a greater than average share of first-year teachers, according to the same Education Trust study.

**PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO ARE FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS, 2007-08**



Note: For this study, schools were considered high-poverty if 55% or more of their students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Schools were considered low-poverty if 15% or fewer students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

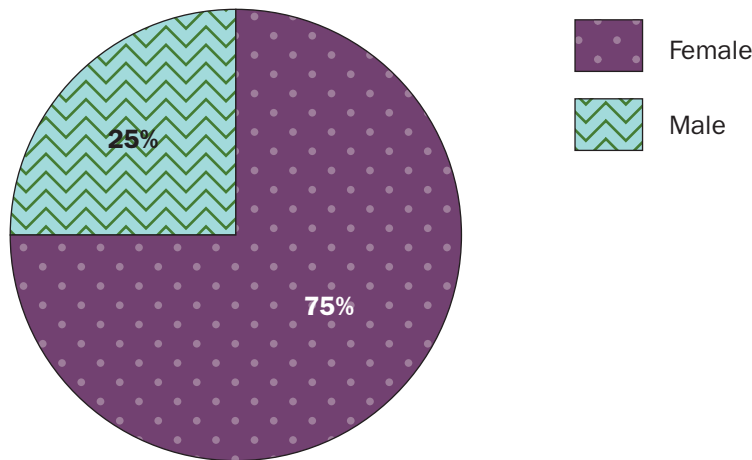
Source: The Education Trust, *Not Prepared for Class: High-Poverty Schools Continue to Have Fewer In-Field Teachers* (2010), figure 4, <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/Not%20Prepared%20for%20Class.pdf>

## Public school teachers are a far less diverse group in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity than the students they teach.

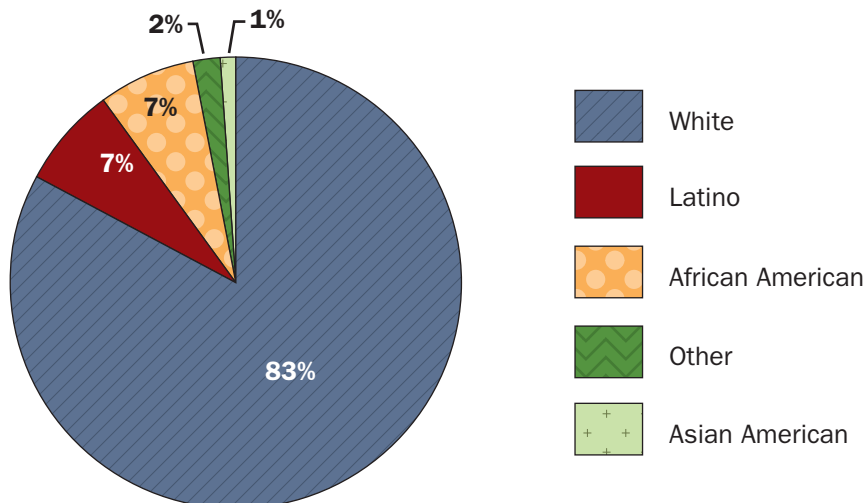
Three-quarters of all teachers are female, and more than four-fifths are white. These demographic characteristics of the teaching force have remained relatively constant since 1999.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS, 2007-08

Percentage of teaching force by gender



Percentage of teaching force by race/ethnicity



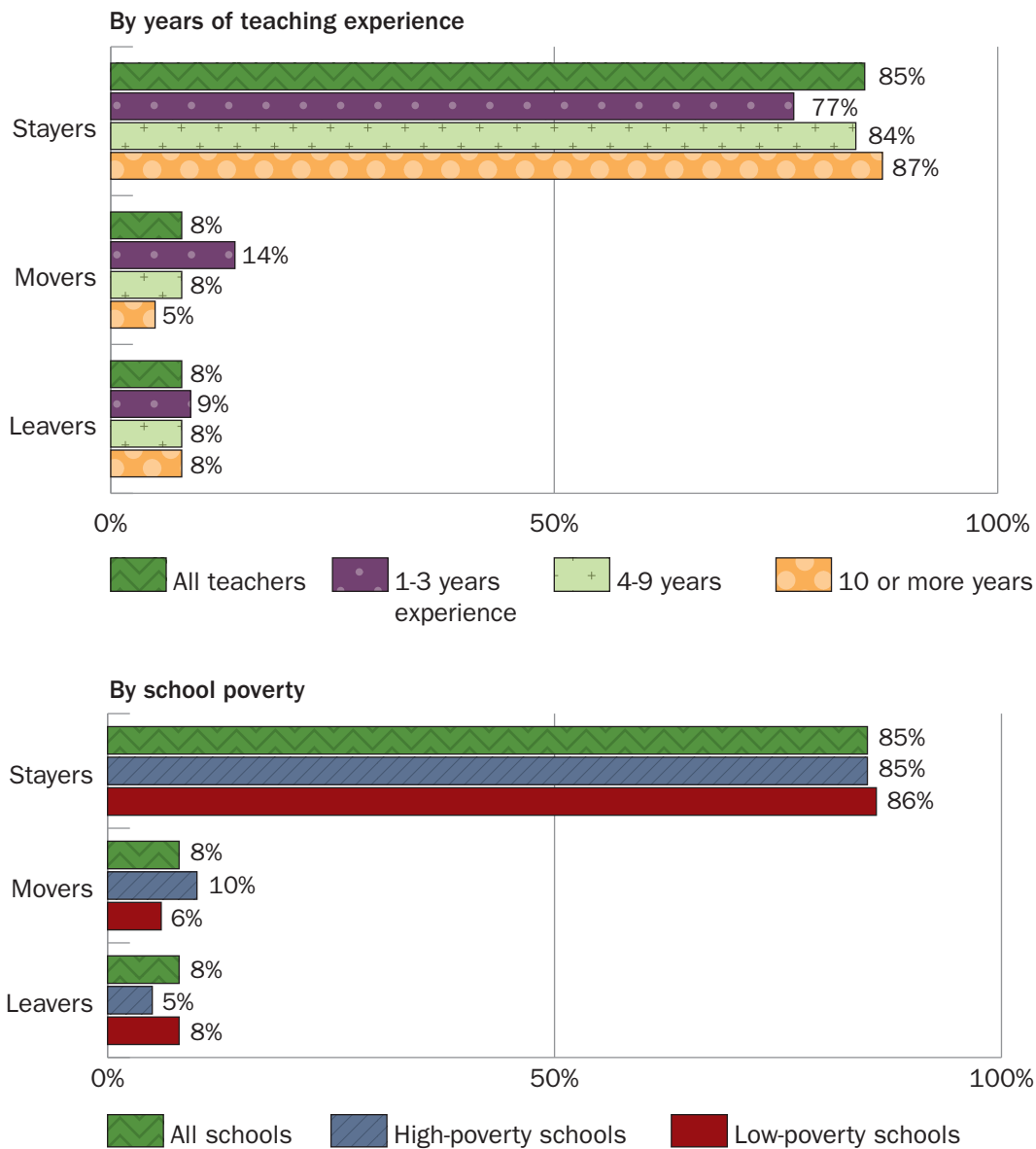
Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *Condition of Education 2011*, table A-31-1, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-tsp-1.asp>

## About 8% of teachers leave the profession each year, and roughly the same percentage changes schools.

Teachers in the early years of their careers are somewhat more likely to change schools or leave the profession than more experienced teachers. Teachers in high-poverty schools are slightly more likely than those in low-poverty schools to change schools, but somewhat less likely to leave teaching altogether.

### TEACHER RETENTION AND ATTRITION, 2008-09



Note: For this study, high-poverty schools are those in which 75% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while low-poverty schools are those in which less than 34% of the students are eligible for subsidized lunches.

Source: NCES, *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2008-2009 Teacher Follow-Up Survey* (2010), table 2, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010353.pdf>

## Teachers spend a significant amount of time doing school work outside of regular classroom teaching hours.

In 2006, teachers worked an average of 52 hours per week. Thirty-seven of these hours on average were worked during the required school day. The rest were devoted to additional instruction-related activities, such as lesson plans and grading, and other non-instructional work for which teachers may or may not be compensated.

**NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK SPENT ON ALL TEACHING DUTIES, 2006**

| Use of time  | Average number of hours per week |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Required school work week  | 37                               |
| Additional compensated time spent on non-instructional activities  | 5                                |
| Additional non-compensated time spent on school-related activities | 10                               |
| <i>Total time spent on teaching work</i>                           | 52                               |

Source: National Education Association, *Status of the American Public School Teacher 2005-2006* (2010), tables 26, 28, 29, and 31, <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/2005-06StatusTextandAppendixA.pdf>



## U.S. teachers spend more time teaching than their counterparts in European countries and many other developed nations.

U.S. teachers at the primary and secondary levels spend more than 1,000 hours per year teaching students—well over the averages of the member nations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Among the OECD nations, the U.S. is second only to Chile in average number of teaching hours at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. Regulations affecting teachers’ work hours vary considerably, however, with some countries formally regulating only the time a teacher must spend teaching students and other countries (including state policies in the U.S.) also regulating the time a teacher must be present at school.

**NUMBER OF TEACHING HOURS\* PER YEAR, 2009**

| Level of education <sup>†</sup> | U.S. teaching hours | OECD average teaching hours | U.S. rank out of OECD nations <sup>‡</sup> | Highest of OECD nations | Lowest of OECD nations |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Primary                         | 1,097               | 779                         | 2 of 33                                    | 1,232 (Chile)           | 489 (Poland)           |
| Lower secondary                 | 1,068               | 701                         | 2 of 32                                    | 1,232 (Chile)           | 426 (Greece)           |
| Upper secondary                 | 1,051               | 656                         | 2 of 33                                    | 1,232 (Chile)           | 377 (Denmark)          |

\*For this study, teaching time was defined as the number of hours per year that a full-time teacher teaches a group or class of students as set by policy.

<sup>†</sup>The OECD defines primary education as the six years of education that typically begin during ages 5 to 7; lower secondary education as the three years following primary education; and upper secondary education as the more specialized subject education for students who are typically ages 15 or 16 and have already completed nine years of education.

<sup>‡</sup>OECD nations with data for these comparisons include Australia, Austria, Belgium (French), Belgium (Flemish), Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand (2008 data), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, and the U.S.

Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, table D4.2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465417>

## Teachers' salaries in the U.S. are relatively low compared with earnings of experienced, college-educated employees in this country and in many other developed nations.

In 2007-08, the average salary for a teacher in the U.S. was \$49,600, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (*Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 78). But this figure alone does not give much of a perspective. One way of grasping what this means is to look at how well teachers are paid compared with other employees of similar experience and educational levels.

According to an OECD analysis, U.S. primary and middle school teachers with 15 years of experience make 61% of the average salaries paid to other U.S. employees with the same experience and a college education. At the high school level, the average teacher makes 65% of what these similar workers earn. More revealing, however, is the fact that the U.S. ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> out of 28 OECD countries in terms of the ratio of average teacher salaries to average earnings of other workers with similar experience and education.

**RATIO OF AVERAGE TEACHER SALARIES TO AVERAGE EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME, FULL-YEAR WORKERS AGED 25 TO 64 WITH 15 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND A COLLEGE EDUCATION, 2009\***

| Level of education <sup>†</sup> | U.S. average ratio | OECD average ratio | U.S. rank of OECD nations <sup>‡</sup> | Highest ratio in any OECD nation | Lowest ratio in any OECD nation |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Primary                         | 0.61               | 0.77               | 22 of 28                               | 1.19 (Portugal)                  | 0.44 (Slovak Republic)          |
| Lower secondary                 | 0.61               | 0.81               | 24 of 28                               | 1.27 (Spain)                     | 0.44 (Slovak Republic)          |
| Upper secondary                 | 0.65               | 0.85               | 24 of 28                               | 1.32 (Spain)                     | 0.44 (Slovak Republic)          |

\*Data are from 2006 for France and Iceland; from 2007 for Norway; and from 2008 for Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Sweden.

<sup>†</sup>The OECD defines primary education as the six years of education that typically begin during ages 5 to 7; lower secondary education as the three years following primary education; and upper secondary education as the more specialized subject education for students who are typically ages 15 or 16 and have already completed nine years of education.

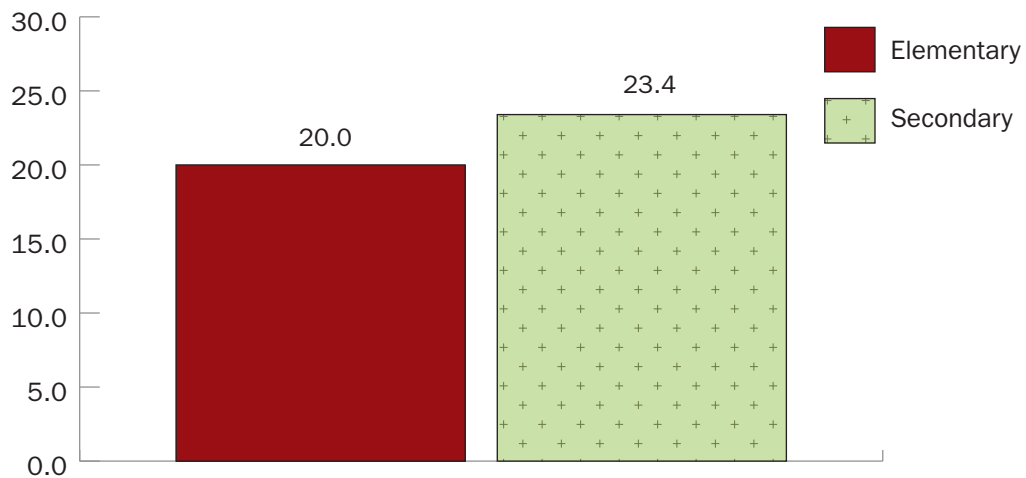
<sup>‡</sup>OECD nations with data for these comparisons include Australia, Austria, Belgium (French), Belgium (Flemish), Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S.

Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, table D3.2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465265>

## The average class size is 20 students for public school elementary teachers and more than 23 students for secondary school teachers.

The average class sizes shown below are based on surveys of teachers reporting on the counts of students in their classes and *exclude* students and teachers in classes designed exclusively for special education students. For that reason, class size is a different statistic from average pupil/teacher ratios, which include all special teachers and all enrolled students.

**AVERAGE CLASS SIZE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS, 2007-08**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 71, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_071.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_071.asp?referrer=list)



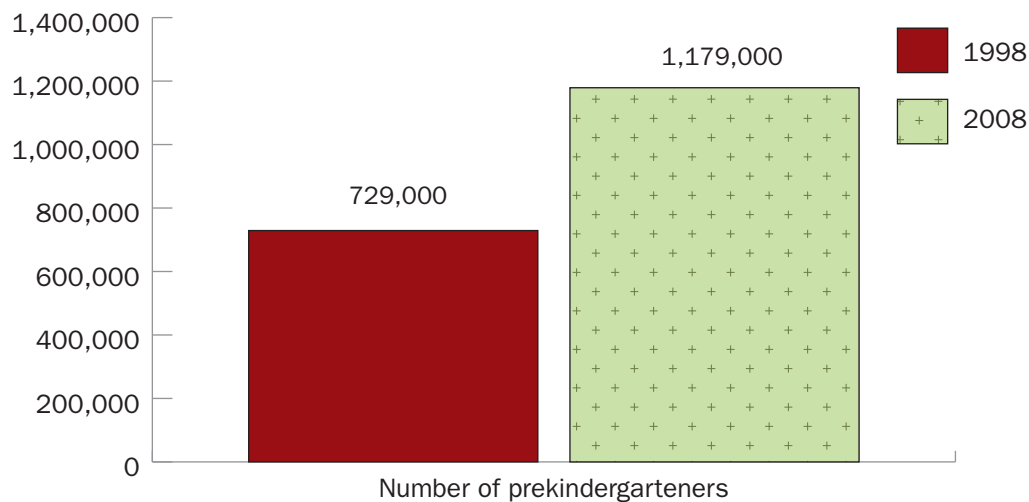
## VII. WHAT ARE THE OTHER KEY ELEMENTS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.?

### More than 1 million preschool children are educated in public elementary and secondary schools.

The most recent federal data on public schools offering prekindergarten programs are from school year 2000-01, when about 35% of all public elementary schools had prekindergarten classes.

More recent data are available on prekindergarten enrollments. The number of children in public school prekindergarten classes grew by 62% between 1998 and 2008. Prekindergarten children make up about 2% of all public school enrollments.

**NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOL PREKINDERGARTEN CLASSES**



Source: NCES, *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020* (2011), table 2.

[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2020/tables/table\\_02.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2020/tables/table_02.asp)

## Public schools provide a range of special services, programs, staff, and supports to help meet students' needs.

In addition to providing regular classroom instruction, public elementary and secondary schools offer various kinds of services, programs, special staff, and other supports. Some of these supports are aimed at improving students' learning, while others address health, emotional, and social needs.

The table below lists just some of the many supports available in public schools.

### EXAMPLES OF SERVICES, SUPPORTS, AND PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

| Service, support, or program                       | Data on availability   | Data source   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Special instructional programs and supports</b> |  |   |
| Libraries/media centers                            | Found in 83% of all public schools, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2011</i> , tables 427 and 90  |
| Internet access                                    | Available in 94% of public school classrooms, computer labs, and other instructional rooms, 2005           | <i>Digest 2011</i> , table 108  |
| Distance learning courses                          | Available in 14% of public schools, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2011</i> , table 105  |
| Title I programs for disadvantaged children        | Available in 63% of public schools, 2008-09  | <i>Condition 2011</i> , table A-27-1  |
| Title III programs for English language learners   | Available in 41% of school districts, 2004–05; served 86% of identified English language learners, 2005-06 | <i>State &amp; Local Implementation of NCLB</i> , vol. 6., p. xix; and <i>Title III Biennial Report</i> , table 2 |
| Gifted and talented programs                       | Available in 68% of public schools, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 105  |
| Advanced Placement courses                         | Available in 59% of public secondary schools, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 105  |
| International Baccalaureate programs               | Available in 2% of public secondary schools, 2007-08   | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 105  |
| <b>Special staff</b>                               |  |   |
| Special education teachers                         | Comprised almost 12% of all public school teachers, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 72   |
| ESL/bilingual education teachers                   | Comprised 1% of all public school teachers, 2007-08  | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 72   |
| Instructional aides                                | Comprised 12% of all public school staff, fall 2008*   | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 84   |

*continued* ►

## EXAMPLES OF SERVICES, SUPPORTS, AND PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

| Service, support, or program     | Data on availability  | Data source  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Special staff</b>             |   |  |
| Librarians                       | Comprised 1% of all public school staff, fall 2008*                         | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 84                        |
| Guidance counselors              | Comprised 2% of all public school staff, fall 2008*                         | <i>Digest 2010</i> , table 84                        |
| Speech therapists                | Employed by 93% of elementary schools and 75% of secondary schools, 2003-04 | <i>Condition of Education 2007</i> , table 35-1      |
| Psychologists                    | Employed by 69% of elementary schools and 64% of secondary schools, 2003-04 | <i>Condition of Education 2007</i> , table 35-1      |
| Social workers                   | Employed by 41% of elementary schools and 38% of secondary schools, 2003-04 | <i>Condition of Education 2007</i> , table 35-1      |
| Nurses                           | Employed by 84% of elementary schools and 83% of secondary schools, 2003-04 | <i>Condition of Education 2007</i> , table 35-1      |
| <b>Other services</b>            |   |  |
| Federal school lunch program     | Available in 95% of all public schools, 2007-08                             | <i>Schools and Staffing Survey 2007-08</i> , table 1 |
| Before- or after-school day care | Available in 48% of public elementary schools, 2007-08                      | <i>Digest 2011</i> , table 105                       |

\*Staff includes all administrative, teaching, and other staff.

Sources: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011015.pdf>; *Condition of Education 2011*, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>; *Condition of Education 2007*, [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007064\\_App1.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007064_App1.pdf); and *Characteristics of Public, Private, and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey*, [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009321/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s12n\\_01.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009321/tables/sass0708_2009321_s12n_01.asp)

U.S. Department of Education, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume VI, Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds*, <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/nclb-targeting/nclb-targeting.pdf>; and *Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2004-06*, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/title3biennial0406.pdf>

## Many students participate in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, but participation varies by gender, socioeconomic status, and academic performance.

A greater share of female than of male students participates in academic clubs, music, and vocational clubs, while a higher proportion of male students participates in sports. Students with high socioeconomic status or high test performance are more likely to participate in most extracurricular activities than students with low SES or low test performance.

**PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS PARTICIPATING IN VARIOUS SCHOOL-SPONSORED EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, 2004**

| Student characteristics           | Academic clubs | Sports | Hobby clubs | Music (band, orchestra, chorus, choir) | Vocational clubs |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|--------|-------------|--|------------------|
| All high school seniors           | 21%            | 44%    | 12%         | 21%                                    | 16%              |
| Male                              | 18%            | 51%    | 12%         | 16%                                    | 15%              |
| Female                            | 25%            | 38%    | 12%         | 26%                                    | 17%              |
| High SES*                         | 28%            | 55%    | 16%         | 25%                                    | 12%              |
| Low SES*                          | 16%            | 33%    | 8%          | 17%                                    | 17%              |
| Highest test performance quartile | 32%            | 53%    | 17%         | 27%                                    | 13%              |
| Lowest test performance quartile  | 13%            | 35%    | 8%          | 18%                                    | 18%              |

\*Socioeconomic status was determined by combining parental education and occupations with family income.

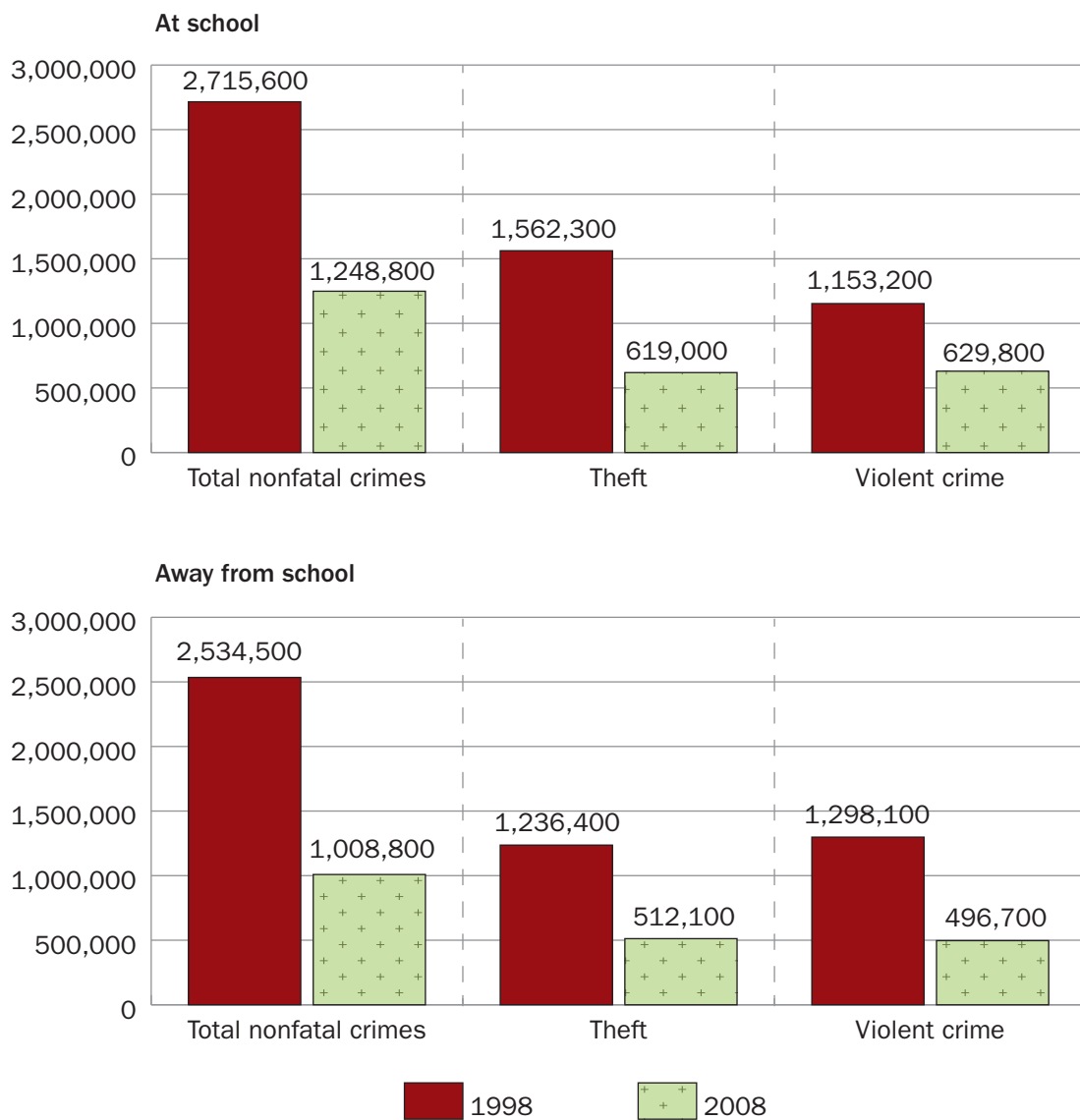
Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 164, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_164.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_164.asp?referrer=list)



Although the majority of schools have experienced some type of criminal incident, the number of crimes against students has fallen sharply during the past decade. Schools have taken various measures to improve safety and reduce violence.

In 2007-08, about 86% of public schools reported having a criminal incident, ranging from a less serious crime, such as a theft or fight without weapons, to a serious violent crime. Nonfatal crimes against students at school, however, have decreased by more than half during the past decade.

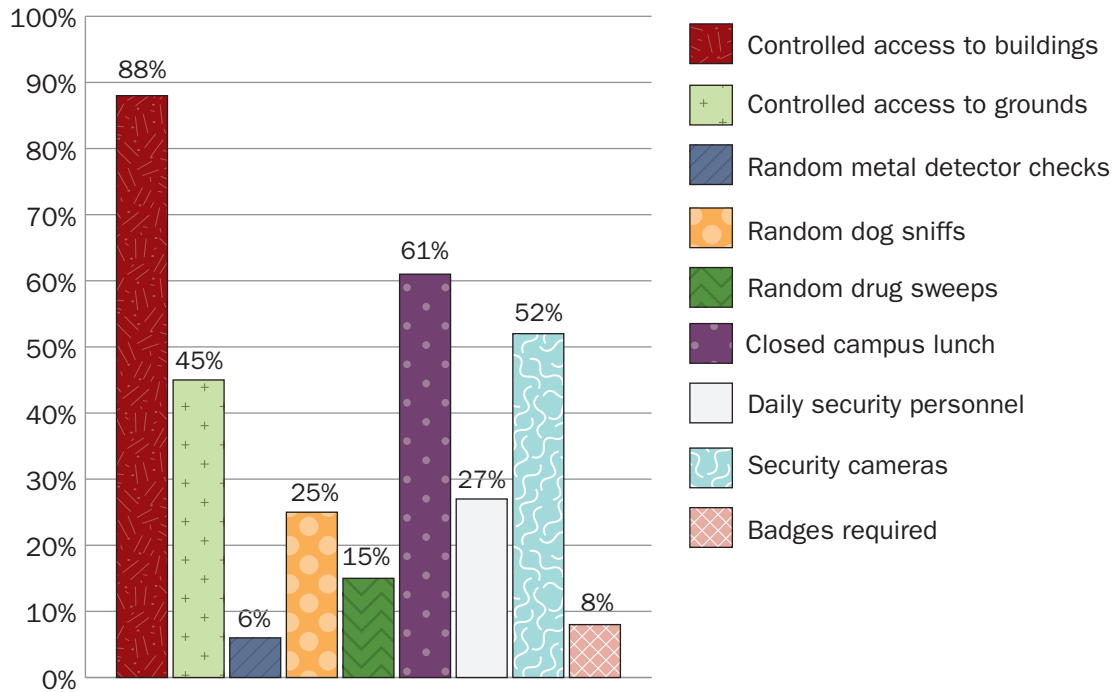
**NUMBER OF NONFATAL CRIMES AGAINST STUDENTS AGES 12-18**



Note: Violent crime includes simple assault and serious violent crimes (rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault).  
 Source: NCES, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010*, tables 1.1 and 2.1, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011002.pdf>

Schools use various approaches to try to keep students safe. A majority of public schools control access to school buildings, require students to stay on campus for lunch, and use security cameras. Somewhat less than half of public schools control access to school grounds. Smaller percentages of schools use other security measures. Nearly all of the measures in the figure below are more common in secondary schools than in elementary schools.

**PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS TAKING VARIOUS SECURITY MEASURES, 2007-08**

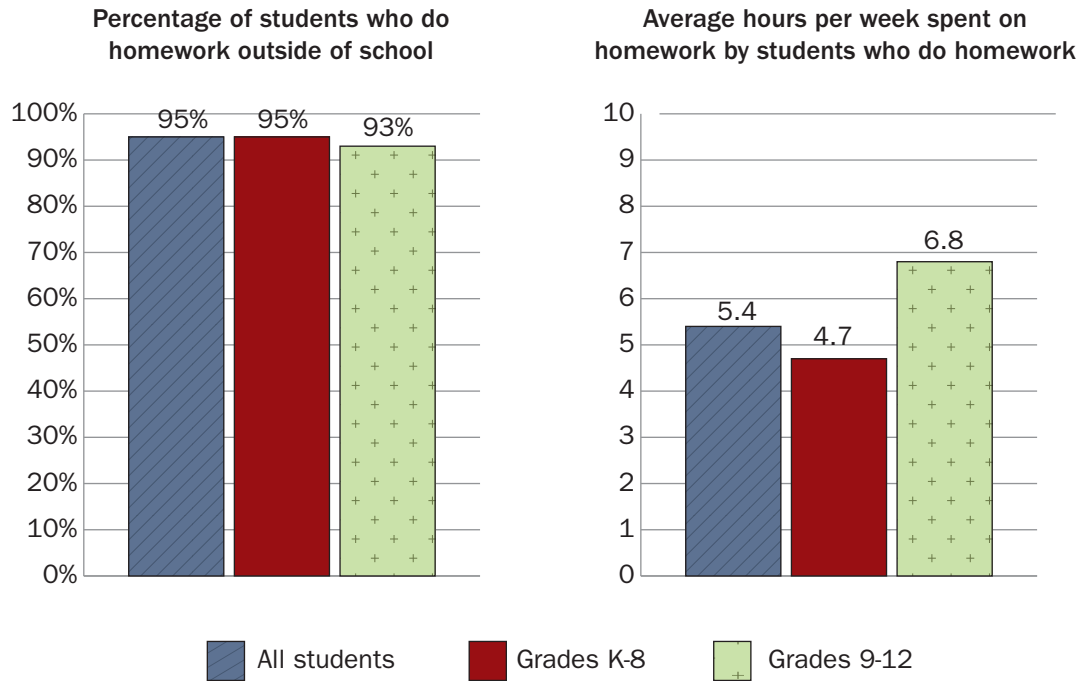


Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2009*, table 160, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09\\_160.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_160.asp)

## Nearly all students do homework outside of school—an average of more than five hours per week.

Students in grades 9-12 do more hours of homework than students in grades K-8.

### HOMEWORK IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2007



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, table 165, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_165.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_165.asp)

