

School Enrollment in the United States: 2021

American Community Survey Reports

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INTRODUCTION

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), about one-quarter (24.8 percent) of the U.S. population over the age of 3 was enrolled in school in 2021. This report provides a comprehensive picture of the state of school enrollment using recently published data from the ACS.¹ It outlines modern enrollment trends while also offering comparisons to past levels of enrollment. More specifically, this report covers the time of the COVID-19 pandemic that was characterized by school closures, expanded remote learning, and decisions to delay school enrollment from both schools and families. We pay specific attention to two levels of schooling that saw notable shifts from 2019 to 2021—preschool enrollment and college enrollment—and we examine whether certain demographic groups or geographic areas were more impacted than others.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way society operates in many ways, from shifts in the way people work to increased focus on public health. This report shows that the way people approach schooling may also have shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As more data become available, we can investigate whether the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a long-term shift in school enrollment trends or was simply an external shock whose effects will dissipate as the pandemic wanes.

¹ The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. CBDRB-FY23-POP001-0108.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2021, school enrollment included 4.1 million preschool students, 4.0 million kindergartners, 32.9 million students in first through eighth grades, 17.3 million high schoolers, 16.6 million undergraduate students, and 4.6 million graduate students.
- In 2021, approximately 19.8 percent of graduate students and 11.1 percent of undergraduate students were foreign-born.
- Just over one-half (51.8 percent) of all undergraduate students were White, 13.9 percent were Black, 7.6 percent were Asian, and 20.6 percent were Hispanic.
- Similarly, 48.1 percent of all kindergarten through 12th (K-12) grade students were White, 12.8 percent were Black, 4.9 percent were Asian, and 25.7 percent were Hispanic.
- High school dropout rates—defined as the percentage of people (aged 18 to 24) who are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school degree—declined from 12.5 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds in 2005 to 5.8 percent in 2021.
- Since 2019, the number of students enrolled in preschool has declined, and the roughly 4.1 million preschool students in 2021 marked the lowest recorded estimate since the ACS began data collection in 2005.
- College enrollment continued to decline, with 21.1 million students enrolled in 2021, compared to 21.7 million in 2019 and 23.7 million in 2011.

However, the 2019 to 2021 decline occurred solely in the public undergraduate sector, in contrast with the 2011 to 2019 decline that occurred for both public and private colleges.

CURRENT ENROLLMENT STATISTICS FROM THE ACS

In 2021, 79.5 million people in the United States were enrolled in school (Table 1). In this section, we

examine demographic characteristics of people enrolled in school by level and type of school.

Preschool

Racially and ethnically, about one-half (2.2 million) of preschool students were non-Hispanic White alone, with 483,000 non-Hispanic Black (11.8 percent), 184,000 non-Hispanic Asian (4.5 percent), and

857,000 Hispanic (20.9 percent).² The vast majority (98.4 percent) of preschool students were native-born. Household income for children enrolled in school varied by level of enrollment (Table 2). Median annual income for households of preschool students was \$99,530—higher than that for students in kindergarten through high

² In this report, these groups are referred to as White, Black, and Asian.

Table 1.
School Enrollment by Level of Enrollment and Selected Characteristics: 2021
(Population aged 3 and older enrolled in school. Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics	Total enrolled in school	Pre-school	Kindergarten through 12th grade					College		
			Total	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 4	Grades 5 to 8	High school	Total	Undergraduate	Graduate school
Total	79,454	4,096	54,161	4,012	15,768	17,087	17,294	21,197	16,602	4,595
Sex										
Male	39,232	2,128	27,832	2,066	8,118	8,719	8,929	9,272	7,409	1,863
Female	40,222	1,968	26,329	1,946	7,650	8,368	8,365	11,925	9,193	2,732
Race and Hispanic Origin										
Non-Hispanic, White alone	39,330	2,172	26,050	1,883	7,551	8,200	8,414	11,110	8,602	2,509
Non-Hispanic, Black alone	10,340	483	6,948	508	1,984	2,221	2,234	2,904	2,306	598
Non-Hispanic, Asian alone	4,695	184	2,676	211	792	829	844	1,836	1,255	581
Non-Hispanic, other	6,232	400	4,554	374	1,419	1,423	1,339	1,277	1,015	262
Hispanic (any race)	18,860	857	13,930	1,036	4,023	4,413	4,462	4,069	3,424	645
Nativity										
Native-born	74,250	4,029	51,770	3,908	15,210	16,360	16,300	18,450	14,760	3,686
Foreign-born	5,208	67	2,389	104	560	731	995	2,751	1,842	909
Type of School										
Public	65,058	2,350	47,209	3,372	13,562	14,925	15,351	15,499	12,746	2,753
Private	14,395	1,745	6,952	640	2,206	2,163	1,943	5,698	3,856	1,842
Region										
Northeast	13,259	730	8,652	631	2,508	2,724	2,789	3,877	2,954	923
Midwest	16,408	930	11,321	841	3,315	3,579	3,586	4,157	3,260	897
South	30,536	1,562	21,190	1,595	6,162	6,724	6,709	7,784	6,090	1,694
West	19,251	874	12,998	945	3,783	4,061	4,209	5,379	4,299	1,080
Language Spoken at Home										
Total population aged 5 and above	76,300	1,135	53,970	3,818	15,770	17,090	17,290	21,200	16,600	4,595
Speaks English	59,200	945	42,370	3,043	12,500	13,450	13,370	15,890	12,530	3,357
Speaks a non-English language	17,100	190	11,600	776	3,267	3,638	3,921	5,309	4,071	1,238
Poverty Status										
Total poverty status population	75,791	4,036	53,360	3,948	15,508	16,794	17,109	18,395	13,862	4,533
In poverty	12,655	556	8,691	710	2,716	2,708	2,557	3,408	2,732	675
Not in poverty	63,136	3,480	44,669	3,239	12,792	14,086	14,553	14,987	11,129	3,857

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

school, which ranged from \$83,650 to \$91,640. Higher median household income for preschool students compared to K-12 students may be related to the high rates of private school enrollment in preschool discussed later in this report.

Kindergarten Through 12th Grade

In 2021, 54.2 million students were enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade. Of these students, 26.1 million, or 48.1 percent of the total, were White (Table 1). This percentage ranged from 46.9 percent in kindergarten to 48.7 percent in high school.³ In 2021, there were 6.9 million Black K-12 students (12.8 percent of the total), 2.7 million Asian students in these grades (4.9 percent of the total), and 13.9 million Hispanic students (25.7 percent of the total). Most K-12 students were native-born. In 2021, 2.4 million K-12 students—4.4 percent of the total—were foreign-born.

College

Throughout this report, the term “college” is used to refer to enrollment in both undergraduate and graduate schools. Undergraduate schools are generally 2- and 4-year programs that lead to associate’s and bachelor’s degrees. Graduate schools enroll students pursuing advanced degrees such as

master’s degrees, Ph.D.s, law degrees, and medical degrees.

In 2021, approximately one-half (51.8 percent) of the 16.6 million undergraduate college students and 54.6 percent of the 4.6 million graduate students were White (Table 1). Black students made up 2.3 million, or 13.9 percent of all undergraduates, and 598,000 (13.0 percent) graduate students. In 2021, 1.3 million Asians were enrolled as undergraduates (7.6 percent of the undergraduate population), and 581,000 were enrolled as graduate students (12.6 percent of the graduate population). The same year, 3.4 million Hispanics were enrolled as undergraduates (20.6 percent of the undergraduate population), and 645,000 were enrolled as graduate students (14.0 percent). Students who spoke a language other than English at home made up 24.5 percent (4.1 million) of undergraduates and 27.0 percent (1.2 million) of graduate students. By comparison, the proportion speaking a language other than English among students at all levels was 22.4 percent.

Foreign-born students were 11.1 percent of undergraduates (1.8 million). Graduate school had the highest share of foreign-born students, with 909,000 students born abroad in 2021, 19.8 percent of the total number of graduate students.

In 2021 there were 9.2 million female undergraduate and 2.7 million female graduate students, who constituted 55.4 and 59.5 percent of the undergraduate and graduate student body, respectively.

Public and Private School

Table 1 shows that in 2021, 81.9 percent (65.1 million) of students enrolled were in public school and 18.1 percent (14.4 million) were in private school. Some levels of schooling had higher shares of private school enrollment than others. At the preschool level, private school attendance accounted for 42.6 percent of the total (1.7 of 4.1 million), more than at later grades, apart from graduate school. Although private school enrollment was prevalent among preschool students, a majority (57.4 percent) attended public preschools. The majority of U.S. K-12 students attended public schools, while 7.0 million (12.8 percent) attended private schools. Looking at college enrollment, Table 1 shows that 73.1 percent of college students were enrolled in public school, and 26.9 percent were enrolled in private school.

Looking at Table 2, we see that students in private schools came from homes with higher incomes than those students who attended public schools. In 2021, private preschool students

³ In this report, “high school” refers to students enrolled in grades 9 through 12.

Table 2.

Median Household Income of Students Enrolled in Preschool Through High School by Level of Enrollment and Type of School: 2021

(Population aged 3 and older living in households. Income in inflation-adjusted 2021 dollars)

Type of school	Preschool	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 4	Grades 5 to 8	High school
Total	99,530	83,650	85,030	87,580	91,640
Public	78,170	79,930	82,510	84,940	89,460
Private	131,700	104,600	103,600	106,300	112,800

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

were in higher median-income households (\$131,700) than public preschool students (\$78,170). Moreover, those who attended private kindergarten, elementary school, or high school came from households with median incomes of \$103,600 to \$112,800, whereas students who attended public schools in K-12 came from households with median incomes of \$79,930 to \$89,460.

High School Dropout Rates

In 2021, the high school dropout rate for 18- to 24-year-olds was 5.8 percent—that is, 5.8 percent of individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 were not currently

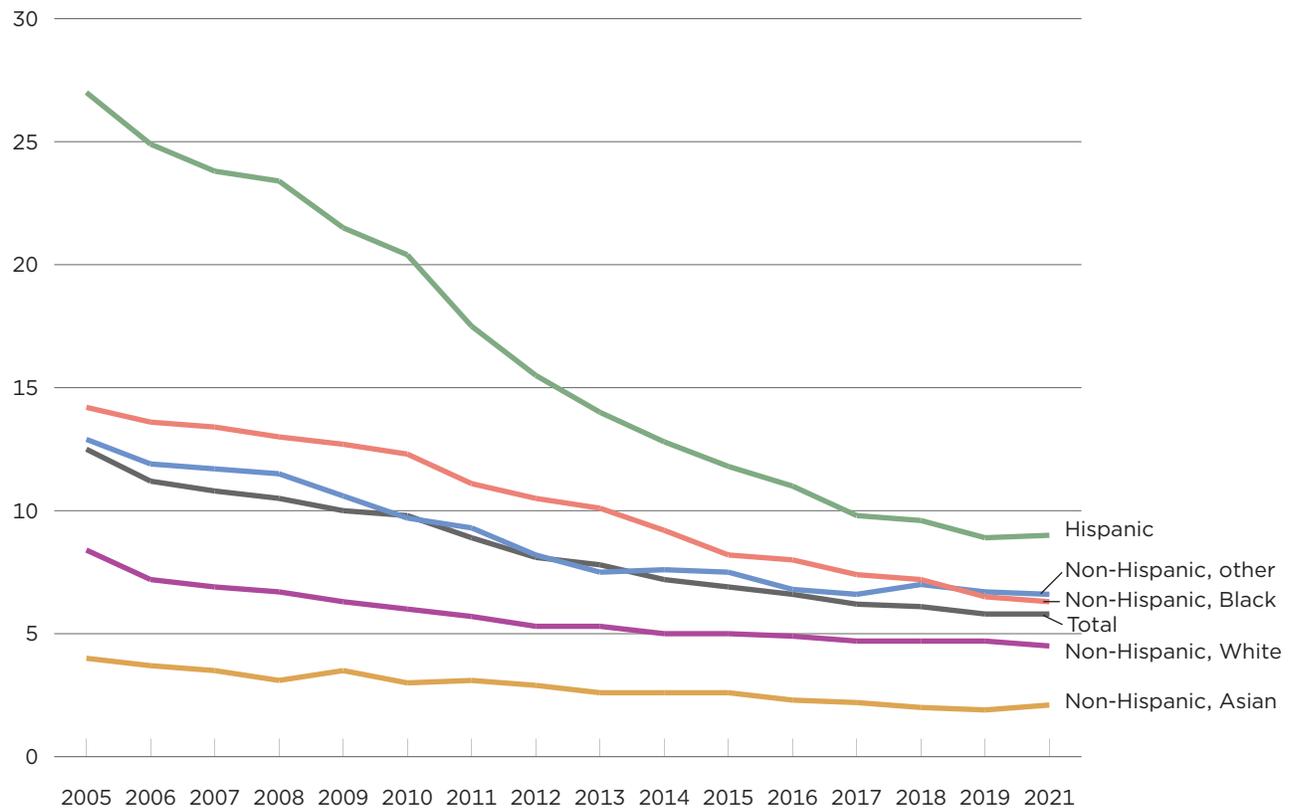
enrolled in high school and had not completed high school (Figure 1). It is worth noting that some of these 18- to 24-year-olds may later return to school, but at the time of the survey and for the purposes of this report, they are considered dropouts. High school dropout rates in the United States have declined about 6 percentage points from 12.5 percent in 2005. This decline has been particularly noteworthy among Black and Hispanic youth. The Black dropout rate declined from 14.2 percent in 2005 to 6.3 percent in 2021, while the Hispanic rate declined from 27.0 percent to 9.0 percent during the same period. For all years, White and Asian respondents had

lower high school dropout rates than the total population. Over the course of the 17 years covered in this report, the White rate declined from 8.4 percent to 4.5 percent, and the Asian dropout rate declined from 4.0 percent to 2.1 percent.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the next sections of this report, we examine preschool and college enrollment prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment in both college and preschool shifted substantially after 2019. One reason for this could be that

Figure 1.
High School Dropout Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2005 to 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

contrary to other levels of schooling, preschool and college are optional to attend and, thus, may be more susceptible to economic and social changes. Future research will be able to determine whether these changes are short-term shocks or the beginning of long-term shifts.

Preschool Enrollment and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Before examining preschool enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic, we first explore historical rates of preschool enrollment. Figure 2 shows the percentage of 3- to 6-year-olds enrolled in

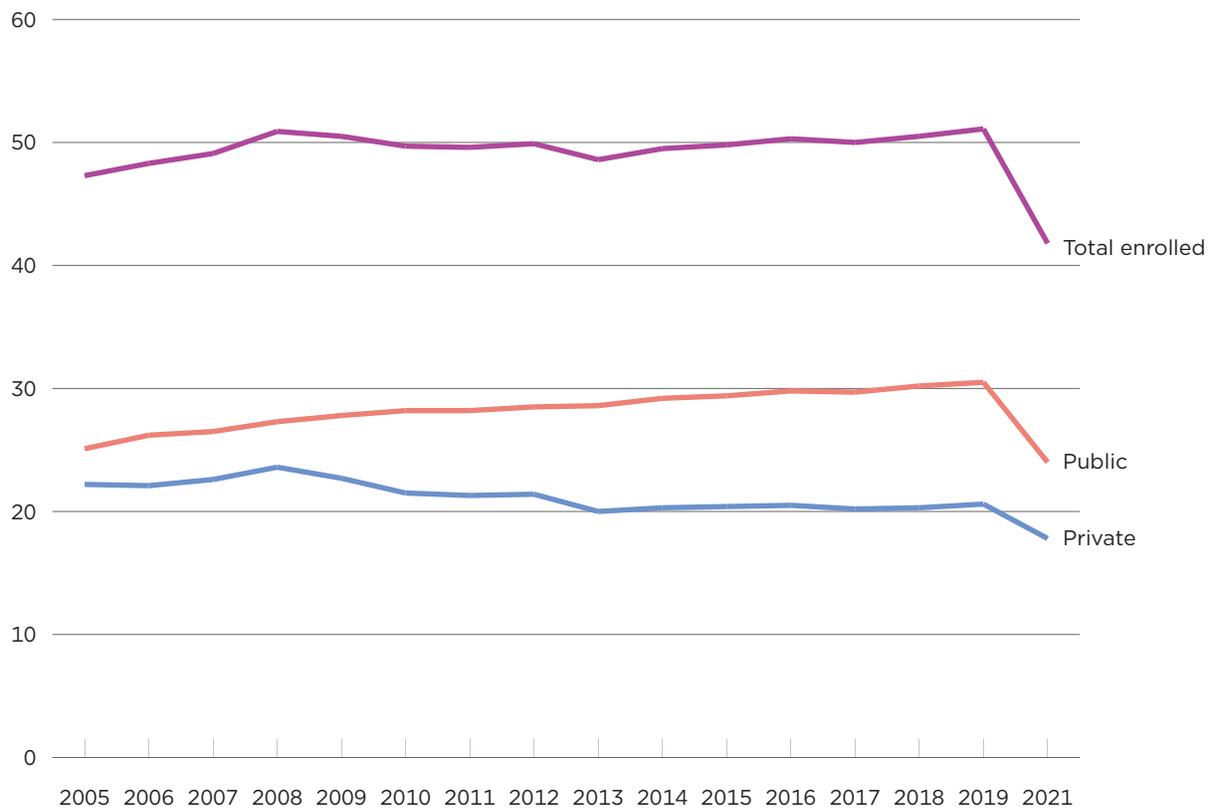
preschool from 2005 to 2021.⁴ The figure shows that from 2005 to 2019, preschool enrollment was becoming more common for young children, as it increased by 3.8 percentage points over this period. Since 2019, this trend shifted, as the percentage of 3- to 6-year-olds enrolled in preschool declined by 9.3 percentage points from 2019 to 2021. The 2021 data show that 41.8 percent of 3- to 6-year-olds were enrolled in preschool, the lowest rate since ACS data collection began in 2005. This shift occurred alongside the

⁴ Those already enrolled in kindergarten or a higher grade level are excluded from the universe in Figure 2.

height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but further research is required to determine whether this is a direct result of the pandemic or the product of other demographic or social shifts.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, trends in early childhood enrollment have reversed. It is not the intent of this report to explain why preschool enrollment has declined since 2019, but it is nonetheless important to mention the likely effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood education. Some studies note that the decline in preschool enrollment may be

Figure 2.
Percentage of 3- to 6-Year-Olds Enrolled in Preschool by School Type: 2005 to 2021



Note: Those already enrolled in kindergarten or a higher grade level are excluded from the universe.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

related to health and safety concerns about in-person schooling options, lack of in-person schooling options due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and cuts to preschool funding.⁵ In the next set of tables and maps, we examine changes in

⁵ More information is available at <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NIEER_Policy_Brief_Impacts-of-Covid-19-on_Preschool_Enrollment_and_Spending_3_16_21.pdf>.

preschool enrollment rates from 2019 to 2021 across a series of geographic, demographic, social, and economic characteristics.

Table 3 shows the percentage of 3- to 6-year-olds enrolled in preschool in 2019 and 2021 by select demographic, social, and economic characteristics as well as the percentage-point change

for each group from 2019 to 2021. Generally, the table shows that across all characteristics there was a drop in the percentage of children enrolled in preschool.⁶

The most striking changes in Table 3 are the differences across race and Hispanic origin groups.

The percentage of Asian children

⁶ All 2019 and 2021 comparisons were statistically different from one another.

Table 3.

Percentage of 3- to 6-Year-Olds Enrolled In Preschool by Select Demographic, Social, and Economic Characteristics: 2019 and 2021

Characteristics	2019		2021		Percentage-point change
	Percent enrolled	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent enrolled	Margin of error (±) ¹	
Age					
3	34.8	0.53	28.5	0.45	-6.3
4	60.2	0.45	49.0	0.57	-11.2
5	69.6	0.74	57.3	0.71	-12.3
6	26.1	1.86	20.5	1.62	-5.6
Sex					
Male	51.3	0.41	42.2	0.38	-9.1
Female	50.8	0.44	41.4	0.52	-9.4
Race and Hispanic Origin					
Non-Hispanic, White alone	53.2	0.37	46.0	0.44	-7.2
Non-Hispanic, Black alone	53.0	1.08	39.6	1.07	-13.4
Non-Hispanic, Asian alone	56.7	1.37	38.1	1.26	-18.6
Non-Hispanic, other	52.0	1.15	43.4	1.02	-8.6
Hispanic (any race)	44.6	0.74	35.0	0.69	-9.6
Parental Education					
Less than high school	34.7	1.25	25.7	1.11	-9.0
High school or equivalent	40.1	0.91	30.9	0.64	-9.2
Some college	47.0	0.67	38.4	0.67	-8.6
Bachelor's degree or higher	62.2	0.40	51.6	0.49	-10.6
Poverty Status					
In poverty	42.2	0.86	32.3	0.89	-9.9
Not in poverty	53.1	0.33	44.0	0.37	-9.1
Family Structure/Parental Work Status					
Two-parent household:					
Both parents working	58.6	0.46	50.0	0.53	-8.6
One parent working	46.9	0.67	37.1	0.68	-9.8
Neither in labor force	41.4	3.59	33.3	3.22	-8.1
One-parent household:					
Working	47.8	0.68	38.2	0.62	-9.6
Not in labor force	37.6	1.47	30.4	1.32	-7.2
Parental Nativity					
Foreign-born parents	50.0	0.69	37.9	0.65	-12.1
Native-born parents	51.7	0.38	43.5	0.34	-8.2
Household Marital Status					
Married	53.4	0.39	44.3	0.39	-9.1
Not married	46.5	0.62	36.9	0.57	-9.6

¹ Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 and 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

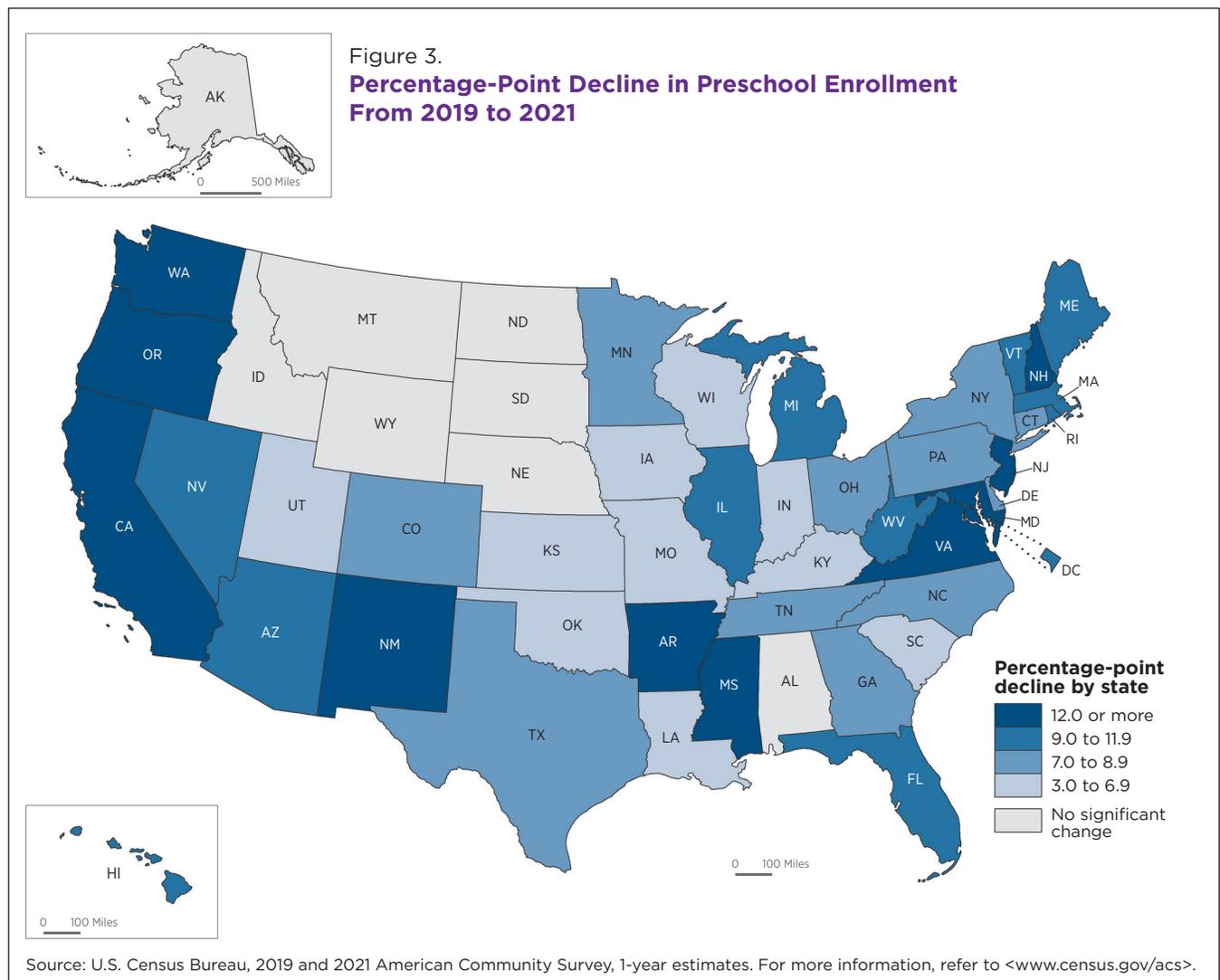
enrolled in preschool declined by 18.6 percentage points from 2019 to 2021, a larger decline than any other group. This was a large shift for a group that in 2019 had the highest rate of preschool enrollment of any racial or ethnic group. Black children had a slightly smaller decline, at 13.4 percentage points over the same time. By contrast, children who were White (7.2 percentage points), Some Other Race (8.6 percentage points), or Hispanic (any race) (9.6 percentage points) had smaller drops in preschool enrollment than Asian children. These racial and ethnic differences

in enrollment trends may be explained by myriad socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural factors that are beyond the scope of this report.

Beyond the differences across race groups and Hispanic origin, declines are evident across a number of other different characteristics. Looking at age, 4- and 5-year-olds had a sharper decline in preschool enrollment than 3- and 6-year-olds. Substantive differences also emerged in parents' nativity status. Children with at least one foreign-born parent saw a 12.1 percentage-point decline,

compared to an 8.2 percentage-point decline for children with native parents.

Beyond individual characteristics, another point of interest is whether the decline in preschool enrollment differed across geographic areas. Figure 3 shows a state map displaying the percentage-point change in preschool enrollment for 3- to 6-year-olds from 2019 to 2021. From 2019 to 2021, 42 states and the District of Columbia had statistically significant declines in preschool enrollment, with the other eight having nonsignificant changes. The



extent of the decline varied across states, from 3.6 percentage points in Indiana to 19.0 percentage points in New Hampshire. Figure 3 shows that there is no clear regional pattern in the size of the decline across states, beyond the concentration of nonsignificant changes in the upper Midwest and the large declines on the West Coast (California, Oregon, and Washington).

Comparing Two Periods of College Enrollment Declines: 2019–2021 and 2011–2019

Total college enrollment fell by over one-half million students between 2019 and 2021, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. This change was a continuation of a long-term decline in college enrollment, with over 2 million fewer students in 2019 than during peak enrollment

in 2011 and 2012.⁷ However, there are notable differences between the 2019 to 2021 and 2011 to 2019 declines.

Table 4 compares levels of college enrollment in 2011, 2019, and 2021, as well as the declines between 2011 and 2019 and between 2019 and 2021, by type of enrollment and level of educational attainment. This table also shows the distribution of enrolled students across these characteristics.

The 2019 to 2021 total college enrollment decline occurred solely in the public sector at the undergraduate level. The undergraduate share of total college enrollment fell 1.9 percentage points, from 80.1

percent in 2019 to 78.2 percent in 2021. In comparison, between 2011 and 2019 the undergraduate share of total enrollment declined by 2.5 percentage points. While the public undergraduate share of total college enrollment fell by 3.2 percentage points from 2019 to 2021, the private undergraduate enrollment share increased by 1.3 percentage points. In contrast to the 2019 to 2021 period, undergraduate enrollment declined in both the public and private sectors from 2011 to 2019. Graduate enrollment increased from 2011 to 2019 by 195,000 students and increased by 273,000 students between 2019 and 2021. These increases in graduate enrollment occurred in both the public and private sectors from 2019 to 2021.

⁷ Enrollment was not statistically significantly different in 2011 and 2012, and thus both years serve as peak enrollment.

Table 4.

Changes in College Enrollment by Enrollment Type and Educational Attainment: 2011–2021

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics	2011		2019		2021		2011–2019 growth		2019–2021 growth	
	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹
Total enrolled	23,720	100.0	21,690	100.0	21,070	100.0	-2,030	X	-620	X
Type of School										
Undergraduate	19,600	82.6	17,370	80.1	16,470	78.2	-2,230	-2.5	-900	-1.9
Public	15,310	64.5	13,700	63.2	12,640	60.0	-1,610	-1.3	-1,060	-3.2
Private	4,287	18.1	3,664	16.9	3,830	18.2	-623	-1.2	166	1.3
Graduate	4,127	17.4	4,322	19.9	4,595	21.8	195	2.5	273	1.9
Public	2,405	10.1	2,594	12.0	2,753	13.1	189	1.9	159	1.1
Private	1,722	7.3	1,728	8.0	1,842	8.7	6	0.7	114	0.7
Educational Attainment²										
High school graduate or equivalent	2,541	10.7	2,641	12.2	2,846	13.5	100	1.5	205	1.3
Some college	13,380	56.4	10,780	49.7	9,665	45.9	-2,600	-6.7	-1,115	-3.8
Associate's degree	2,426	10.2	2,453	11.3	2,486	11.8	27	1.1	33	0.5
Bachelor's degree or higher	5,306	22.4	5,759	26.6	6,021	28.6	453	4.2	262	2.0

X Not applicable.

¹ Percent columns show the share of the total distribution and the percentage-point growth in the share.

² The total excludes respondents who reported college enrollment with an educational attainment level lower than high school graduate or equivalent.

Note: Estimates are for the population 18 years and older. Numbers and percentages may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2019, and 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

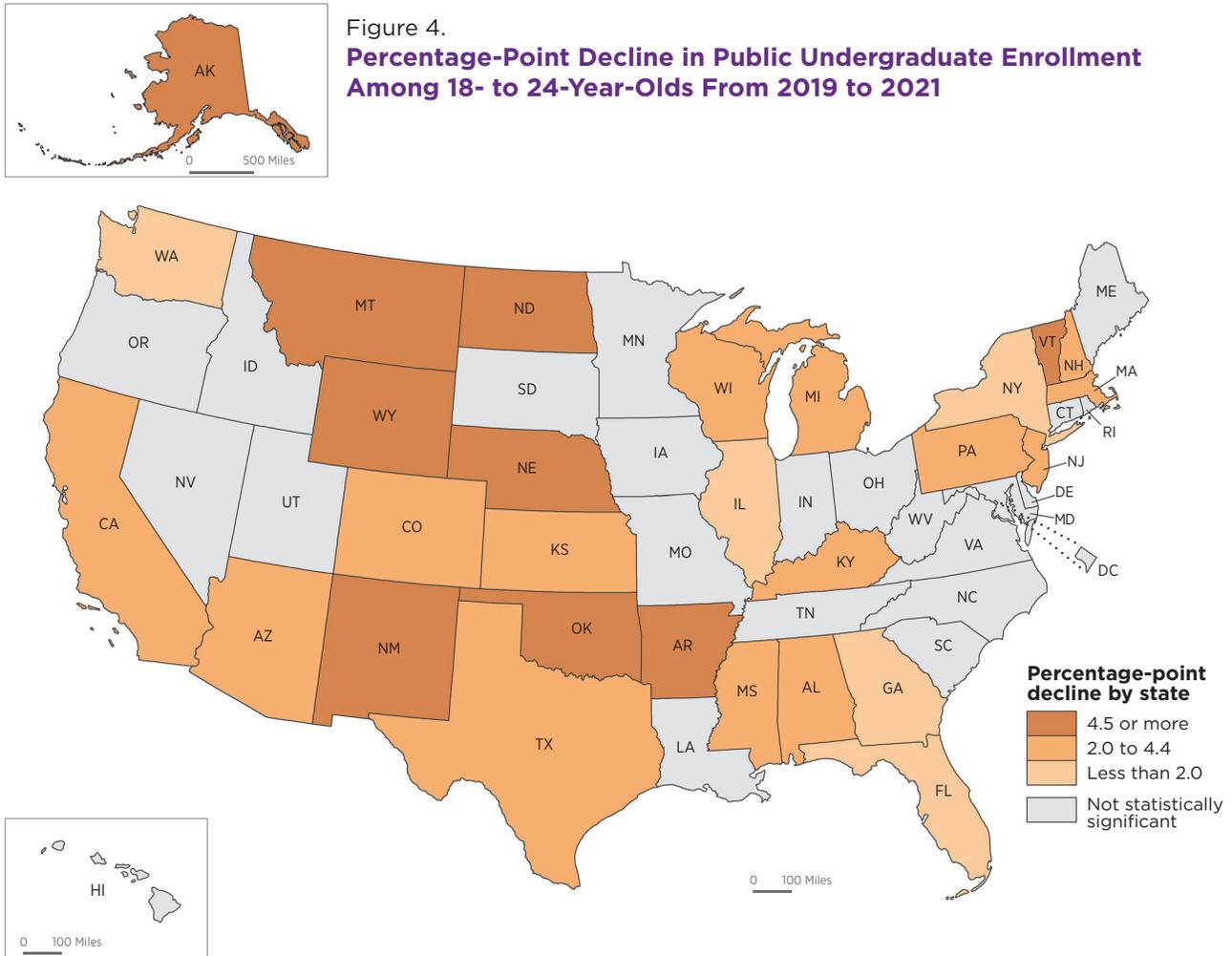
The 2019 to 2021 decline in public undergraduate enrollment showed significant declines in states across every region. Figure 4 shows a state-level map of changes over this period in the share of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled as undergraduates in public institutions. States with some of the largest declines in this share were Arkansas, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming, with public undergraduate enrollment declines of 6.1, 5.8, 5.9, and 5.6 percentage points,

respectively.⁸ North Dakota and Wyoming are part of a cluster of states in the Midwest and West regions with large public undergraduate enrollment share declines, including 4.8 and 4.5 percentage-point declines in Montana and Nebraska, respectively. No state experienced a significant increase in the share of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in public undergraduate colleges during this period.

⁸ The percentage-point declines in public undergraduate enrollment for these states were not statistically different from each other.

In both the 2011 to 2019 and 2019 to 2021 periods, total college enrollment declined only among those reporting having some college education without completing an associate's or bachelor's degree or higher (Table 4). The share of enrolled college students reporting this level of attainment fell from 56.4 percent in 2011 to 49.7 percent in 2019, and it fell further to 45.9 percent in 2021. The shares of college students reporting a high school diploma, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree or higher all increased in both periods.

Figure 4.
Percentage-Point Decline in Public Undergraduate Enrollment Among 18- to 24-Year-Olds From 2019 to 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 and 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

Table 5 compares the number and share of those 18 years old or older enrolled in college across demographic characteristics in 2011, 2019, and 2021.

Total college enrollment declined for all age groups between 2019 and 2021. In 2021, 47.4 percent of 18- to 19-year-olds were enrolled in college, a decline of 1.1 percentage points from 2019. In contrast, between 2011 and 2019 the share of 18- to 19-year-olds enrolled in college increased by 1.0 percentage point. College enrollment among 20- to 24-year-olds declined by 1.3 percentage points between 2019 and 2021, following

a decline of 2.0 percentage points from 2011 to 2019. For those aged 25 and older, the share enrolled in college fell from 5.0 percent in 2011 to 4.0 percent in 2019, before falling further to 3.8 percent in 2021.

The number of men and women enrolled in all levels of college both declined from 2019 to 2021, by 429,000 and 190,000, respectively. The share of men aged 18 and over enrolled in college declined from 7.8 percent in 2019 to 7.3 percent in 2021, after falling from 9.0 percent in 2011. The share of women aged 18 and over enrolled in college declined from

10.9 percent in 2011 to 9.2 percent in 2019, before declining further to 9.0 percent in 2021.

The share enrolled in college declined among all race and Hispanic origin groups from 2019 to 2021 and from 2011 to 2019.

The share of the Asian population enrolled in college was the highest among all groups in 2021; however, this share declined by 0.8 percentage points from 2019 to 2021 and by 2.2 percentage points from 2011 to 2019. The share of the White and Black populations enrolled in college both declined by 0.3 percentage points from 2019 to 2021. These

Table 5.

Changes in College Enrollment by Select Characteristics: 2011–2021

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	2011		2019		2021		2011–2019 growth		2019–2021 growth	
	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ¹
Total enrolled	23,720	10.0	21,690	8.5	21,070	8.2	-2,030	-1.5	-620	-0.4
Age										
18 to 19	4,328	47.5	4,321	48.5	4,192	47.4	-7	1.0	-129	-1.1
20 to 24	9,168	41.5	8,480	39.5	8,165	38.2	-688	-2.0	-315	-1.3
25 and older	10,230	5.0	8,888	4.0	8,709	3.8	-1,342	-1.0	-179	-0.1
Sex										
Male	10,370	9.0	9,646	7.8	9,217	7.3	-724	-1.2	-429	-0.5
Female	13,350	10.9	12,040	9.2	11,850	9.0	-1,310	-1.7	-190	-0.2
Race and Hispanic Origin										
Non-Hispanic, White alone	14,180	9.0	11,690	7.3	11,060	7.0	-2,490	-1.7	-630	-0.3
Non-Hispanic, Black alone	3,531	12.6	3,062	9.9	2,882	9.6	-469	-2.7	-180	-0.3
Non-Hispanic, Asian alone	1,740	14.9	1,903	12.7	1,822	12.0	163	-2.2	-81	-0.8
Non-Hispanic, other	832	14.8	941	12.9	1,268	10.6	109	-1.9	327	-2.3
Hispanic (any race)	3,436	10.0	4,093	9.8	4,037	9.2	657	-0.2	-56	-0.5
Nativity										
Native-born	20,680	10.3	18,720	8.8	18,330	8.5	-1,960	-1.6	-390	-0.3
Foreign-born	3,043	8.1	2,967	7.0	2,740	6.4	-76	-1.1	-227	-0.6

¹ Percent columns show the share of the total population and the percentage-point growth in the share.

Note: Estimates are for the population 18 years and older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2019, and 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. For more information, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

declines were a continuation of enrollment declines from 2011 to 2019 for both groups, as the share of the White population enrolled fell by 1.7 percentage points and the share of the Black population enrolled fell by 2.7 percentage points over this period. Enrollment among the Hispanic population fell by 0.5 percentage points from 2019 to 2021, following a 0.2 percentage-point decrease from 2011 to 2019. While the share of the population identifying as some other race enrolled in college fell by 2.3 percentage points from 2019 to 2021, the number enrolled in this group increased by 327,000 during this period.

Total college enrollment fell among both the native-born and the foreign-born from 2019 to 2021. For the native-born population, college enrollment declined by 390,000, and the share enrolled decreased by 0.3 percentage points. For the foreign-born population, college enrollment declined by 227,000, and the share enrolled decreased by 0.6 percentage points. From 2011 to 2019, the share of the native-born population enrolled declined by 1.6 percentage points, and the share of the foreign-born population enrolled declined by 1.1 percentage points.

SUMMARY

This report shows trends in school enrollment from 2005 to 2021 using the ACS. This is the first Census Bureau report to examine

changes in school enrollment since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. While we do not identify the causes of the shifts we see in school enrollment over time, the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic and declines in early childhood and college enrollment suggest that the pandemic may have affected people's choices about school enrollment.

Preschool and college enrollment are unique from other levels of school in that they are optional to attend and therefore more susceptible to changes in the economy and society more broadly. These changes could be temporary or part of a broader long-term shift. With vaccinations now readily available and remote learning becoming normalized, we may see early childhood education and college enrollment bounce back to pre-COVID-19 levels. Or this could be part of a larger trend that shifts the way individuals make choices about school enrollment, particularly as it relates to college enrollment. It is crucial for future research to track these enrollment trends as more data become available.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about educational attainment in the United States, refer to the Census Bureau's website on educational attainment at www.census.gov/topics/employment/commuting.html.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS samples interviewed from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2019, and January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021. The estimates based on these samples describe the actual average values of person, household, and housing unit characteristics over these periods of collection. Sampling error is the uncertainty between an estimate based on a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of sampling error are provided in the form of margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent confidence level. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, refer to the 2019 and 2021 ACS 1-year Accuracy of the Data documents at www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning

in 2006, ACS data have been released annually for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit <www.census.gov/acs>.

CONTACTS

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