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**School Enrollment—Social and Economic
Characteristics of Students: October 1977
(Advance Report)**

This report presents a summary of recent trends in school and college enrollment based on the October 1977 Current Population Survey (CPS) and earlier surveys. Persons in the Armed Forces and inmates of institutions are not included in the figures shown in the statistical tables.

The total number of persons 3 to 34 years old enrolled in school was 60 million in October 1977, about 1 million less than the number enrolled in 1975 (table 1). This decline in total enrollment was largely due to a decrease of 1.2 million at the elementary school level between 1975 and 1977. This decrease was not significantly different from the decline in total enrollment during the period. Also, there was a decrease of 4.7 million in elementary enrollment between 1970 and 1977. In 1970, elementary school enrollment accounted for 56 percent of the total enrollment; by 1977 it had dropped to about 49 percent. As the number of persons enrolled in kindergarten through high school was primarily determined by the size of the eligible age groups rather than by changes in enrollment rates, enrollment trends at these levels reflected mainly population trends between 1975 and 1977.

Nursery school enrollment did not change significantly between 1976 and 1977 and there is some evidence that it remained below the 1975 level. The proportion of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled has remained essentially the same since 1975, about 32 percent (table 2). In 1967 the proportion was 14 percent. Kindergarten enrollment declined by about 300,000 between 1976 and 1977. This was the first significant decline recorded in a single year since these data were first collected in the CPS 30 years ago.

The majority of children enrolled in kindergarten were 5 years old (about 80 percent). Even though 5-year-olds are not covered by compulsory school attendance laws in any State, more than 9 out of 10 of these children were attending school in 1977; their enrollment rate is rapidly approaching that of all elementary school age children. The population of 5-year-olds decreased about 8 percent between

1976 and 1977, as did kindergarten enrollment, reflecting the large drop in the number of births 5 years earlier. All of the decrease occurred in public schools, which enrolled 5 out of 6 kindergarten students. Future changes in the size of the eligible population will probably have more influence on the total number of children enrolled in kindergarten than changes in enrollment rates which have already reached 92 percent for 5-year-olds.

Although there is some evidence of a decrease in elementary school enrollment (about 540,000) between 1976 and 1977, private school enrollment did not change significantly. In fact, private elementary school enrollment was not significantly different in 1977 from the level 4 years earlier. Nevertheless, private school students made up only 11 percent of all elementary school students in 1977, down from 15 percent in the mid-1960's. Total high school enrollment was about the same in 1977 as in the previous 2 years, as children born in two of the highest birth years (1960 and 1961) were still in high school in 1977.

Although the CPS did not show any significant growth in college enrollment of persons under 35 years old between 1976 and 1977, the number of persons enrolled in 1977 was about one-half million larger than in 1975. The number enrolled part time increased by about 9 percent between 1976 and 1977, while the number enrolled full time did not change.¹ The increase in part-time enrollment is probably a result of an increase in enrollment of persons 25 to 34 years old, the majority of whom are enrolled part time. The number of college women remained at about 47 percent of all college students. Women constituted half of students of traditional college age (under 22 years old) and 44 percent of those 22 to 34 (table 4). Ten years earlier women made up only 40 percent of all college students, 46 percent of the traditional aged students, and 28 percent of older students.

¹There is only some evidence that the trends in part-time and full-time enrollment are different.

There were some changes in the number of students enrolled at various college levels. The number of college freshmen increased by about 300,000 following a nearly comparable decline the previous year. There is some evidence that the number of second year students dropped in 1977, reflecting the decline in freshmen in 1976. Enrollment at the remaining levels, third year and higher showed no significant change. Among undergraduates there was no significant change in 2-year or 4-year college enrollment nor was there significant change among men or women (table 5).

The significant changes in total college enrollment by age occurred among students 25 to 34 years old. There was also some evidence of an enrollment increase among persons 35 years old and over, as colleges continued to attract more persons above traditional college age (table 4). The number of students 25 years old and over increased from 3.7 to 4.1 million from 1976 to 1977. Among students 25 years old and over the number of women increased significantly while

the number of men did not. About 36 percent of all college students were 25 years old or over in 1977 compared with 28 percent 5 years earlier.

The enrollment of Blacks in college did not change significantly from 1976 to 1977. Year-to-year changes in Black college enrollment are difficult to detect with a sample the size of the Current Population Survey. An observed change of about 150,000 Blacks in college is required to determine that a statistically significant change occurred. Still, the number of Black students 14 to 34 years old enrolled in 1977, 1.1 million, was twice the number enrolled in 1970 (tables 3 and 6). For Whites, the increase in the same period was about 30 percent. In the fall of 1977, Black students constituted about 11 percent of the college population, as in 1976; in 1970 they were about 7 percent of all college students.

Symbols. A dash "--" represents zero or rounds to zero and "NA" means not available.