



Population Characteristics

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Series P-20, No. 355
Issued August 1980

School Enrollment — Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1979 (Advance Report)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Elementary school enrollment declined in 1979, continuing the trend begun in the early 1970's. About 28 million children were attending grades 1 to 8 in 1979 compared with 34 million in 1970.
- High school enrollment declined for the second consecutive year.¹
- More women than men were enrolled in college in October 1979. This was the first time since World War II that women outnumbered men in college attendance. Below age 35, about 5 million men and 5 million women were enrolled in college, but among students 35 years old and over, there were 914,000 women and 487,000 men in college.
- The number of persons 14 to 34 years old enrolled in college has not changed substantially since 1975; about 10 million persons were enrolled in 1979. A slight decline in the number of men enrolled and a simultaneous rise in the number of women from 1975 to 1979 has resulted in the number of men and women being about the same in 1979.
- In October 1979, over one-third (36 percent) of all college students were 25 years old and over, but most of the older students were enrolled part time; of students attending full time, only 16 percent were 25 years old and over.

This report presents a summary of trends in school enrollment based on data from the October 1979 Current Population Survey (CPS) and earlier surveys.

¹ From 1977 to 1979, the population of high school age, 14 to 17 years old, has declined from 16.6 million to 16.0 million. The enrollment rate of the age group did not change. This resulted in a drop in the number of high school students 14 to 17 years old in each year.

In October 1979, a total of 57.9 million persons 3 to 34 years old were enrolled in school, about 800,000 less than the number enrolled in October 1978. The decline reflects the drop in enrollment in elementary school and the decline in persons of high school age. There were no significant changes in nursery school, kindergarten, or college enrollment.

Elementary school enrollment was 27.9 million in 1979, about 600,000 below the 1978 figure. This decrease continued the downward trend begun in the early 1970's. About 34 million children were enrolled in elementary school in 1970; by 1979, elementary schools had experienced a decline of about 6 million students or an 18-percent drop. High school enrollment totaled 15.1 million in 1979, a significant decline from the number enrolled 2 years earlier. Enrollment reached about 15.7 million students between 1975 and 1977 and then began to decline. All indications are that high school enrollment in the 1980's will follow the trends experienced by elementary schools in the 1970's, one of continued decline. The decrease in the annual number of births that occurred in the 1960's and the early 1970's has begun to be reflected in the population decline among persons of high school age (14 to 17 years old). The smaller eligible population has caused a drop in high school enrollment for the age group. The 14- to 17-year-old age group will continue to decrease through the 1980's, and the number of persons enrolled in high school will likely be similarly diminished.

There was no significant change from 1978 to 1979 in nursery school enrollment. In the decade from 1969 to 1979, however, the number of children enrolled in nursery school has doubled even though the number of eligible children (3- and 4-year-olds) declined by about 18 percent. The enrollment rate for these children more than doubled from 16 to 35 percent during the period (table 2). This is the only age group for which there has been a large increase in the proportion attending school in recent years, perhaps because of the increasingly recognized value of preprimary education as well as the growth in employment of women with young

children.² It is also the only group for which most of the enrollment was in private schools.

Women outnumbered men in college enrollment in 1979 for the first time in 34 years; during World War II, women also comprised a larger proportion of college students.³ A major contributing factor was the larger number of older women than older men enrolled in college part time. In addition to the 10 million students under 35 years old, equally divided between men and women, about 914,000 women and 487,000 men 35 years old and over were attending college (about 85 percent part time). More women than men were enrolled among students under 20 years old and over 34 years old, but men outnumbered women among students in the mid- to late 20's (22 to 29 years of age).

While among all students women outnumbered men in 1979, there is some evidence that among full-time students (64 percent of all students), the majority were men. The proportion of all college students enrolled full time declined during the 1970's. A large portion of the decline in the proportion of students attending full time can be attributed to the rise in the number of older students, the majority of whom attend part time. This increase in persons 25 years

old and over enrolled in college part time has contributed significantly to the growth in the total number of college students. Of the 2.3 million student increase in college enrollment from 1972 to 1979, one-half (52 percent) of the new students were part-time students 25 years old and over.⁴ Although older part-time students were only 19 percent of all students in 1972, they represented 26 percent of all students by 1979. Only 16 percent of full-time students were 25 years old and over in 1979 compared with 71 percent of part-time students.

Black college enrollment has been at or near 1 million since 1975. The number of Black persons 14 to 34 years old enrolled in college nearly doubled from 1969 to 1975 but has not varied by much since 1975. As a proportion of all college students 14 to 34 years old, Blacks were about 10 percent in 1979, slightly less than their proportion of the college-age population but a higher percentage than at the beginning of the decade.

Among persons of Spanish origin in 1979, college enrollment reached 440,000 for persons 14 to 34 years old, not significantly different from the figure in 1978 but substantially higher than the number enrolled in 1972 (table 1), the first year that such data were available for the Spanish-origin population from the CPS.

²Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 102, No. 10, October 1979, *Working Mothers in the 1970's: A Look at the Statistics*.

³Bureau of the Census, Series P-S, No. 9, *School Attendance of the Civilian Population: October 1945*.

⁴Data are shown for 1972 and 1979 because 1972 was the first year data for all college students, including those over 34 years old, were available.

Table A. Full-Time Enrollment of College Students 14 Years Old and Over, by Age and Sex: October 1979 and 1972

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

| Sex and age | 1979 | | | 1972 | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| | All students | Full time | | All students | Full time | |
| | | Number | Percent | | Number | Percent |
| MALE | | | | | | |
| 14 years old and over.. | 5,480 | 3,722 | 67.9 | 5,218 | 3,791 | 72.7 |
| 14 to 34 years old..... | 4,993 | 3,641 | 72.9 | 4,853 | 3,713 | 76.5 |
| 14 to 19 years old..... | 1,470 | 1,346 | 91.6 | 1,507 | 1,424 | 94.5 |
| 20 and 21 years old..... | 1,192 | 1,046 | 87.8 | 1,170 | 1,056 | 90.3 |
| 22 to 24 years old..... | 975 | 692 | 71.0 | 998 | 725 | 72.6 |
| 25 to 29 years old..... | 893 | 419 | 46.9 | 848 | 398 | 46.9 |
| 30 to 34 years old..... | 463 | 139 | 30.0 | 330 | 110 | 33.3 |
| 35 years old and over..... | 487 | 81 | 16.6 | 365 | 78 | 21.4 |
| FEMALE | | | | | | |
| 14 years old and over.. | 5,900 | 3,517 | 59.6 | 3,877 | 2,655 | 68.5 |
| 14 to 34 years old..... | 4,986 | 3,370 | 67.6 | 3,459 | 2,601 | 75.2 |
| 14 to 19 years old..... | 1,686 | 1,546 | 91.7 | 1,467 | 1,373 | 93.6 |
| 20 and 21 years old..... | 1,161 | 980 | 84.4 | 946 | 830 | 87.7 |
| 22 to 24 years old..... | 818 | 480 | 58.7 | 464 | 231 | 49.8 |
| 25 to 29 years old..... | 786 | 248 | 31.6 | 381 | 109 | 28.6 |
| 30 to 34 years old..... | 533 | 116 | 21.8 | 200 | 57 | 28.5 |
| 35 years old and over..... | 914 | 147 | 16.1 | 418 | 54 | 12.9 |