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School Enrollment — Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1981 (Advance Report)

From 1980 to 1981, total school enrollment continued the downward trend that began 6 years before, as the number of elementary school students declined and the number of high school students leveled off and then declined. In October 1981, 58.4 million persons 3 to 34 years old were enrolled in school, including 2.1 million in nursery school, 3.2 million in kindergarten, 27.8 million in elementary school, 14.6 million in high school, and 10.7 million in college. The data are from the October 1981 school enrollment supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey.

Two series of data are shown for 1981 when survey estimates were inflated separately to independent population estimates based on the 1970 census and to independent estimates based on the 1980 census. The 1980 census showed marked differences in population figures by age in comparison with independent estimates for the same year built on the results of the previous census. This is particularly apparent among persons of school age. When enrollment rates found in the 1981 survey for each age, race, and sex group were applied to the 1980 census-based population estimates for these groups, the total number of persons enrolled was larger than the number derived using the 1970 census-based estimates. In this report, comparisons of figures for 1981 with data for 1976 to 1980 are based on 1970 census-based estimates for each year. All other discussion of figures for 1981 involve 1980 census-based estimates. A more detailed account of the impact of the introduction of new population controls will appear in the final enrollment report for 1981.

From 1980 to 1981, elementary enrollment declined slightly to about 18 percent below its 1970 peak; high school enrollment did not decline, but, in 1981, it was 9 percent below its apparent 1976-77 peak. Kindergarten enrollment did not change significantly from 1980 to 1981, but it was about 12 percent below the mid-1970's peak. At the nursery school level, enrollment did not change significantly during the 1980-81 period, but the number enrolled was about twice the number enrolled a decade earlier, largely because of substantial increases in enrollment rates of the eligible age groups: 3- and 4-year-olds (table 2). College enrollment did not change significantly during the period.

Private school enrollment. The proportion of all elementary and secondary students enrolled in private schools in 1981 was about the same as in 1971. Among elementary school students, 11 percent were attending private schools in 1971 and in 1981. The private elementary school enrollment rate declined from 15 percent in 1964 to about 10 percent in the mid-1970's. (See table.) The apparent increase in the proportion of elementary school children enrolled in private schools in the late 1970's did not continue. The proportion has been 11 percent since 1977, and the number of students in private elementary schools has not risen since the decline ended in the mid-1970's. The influx of smaller birth cohorts into elementary schools, which began in the late 1960's, has caused substantial enrollment reductions in all types of schools. This undoubtedly affected private school enrollment along with public school enrollment as the numbers of students enrolled in both types of schools declined over the last decade. There were less than two-thirds as many students enrolled in private elementary schools in 1981 as in 1964 (3.0 million vs 4.9 million). For a decade, private high school enrollment has not varied significantly from the most recent figure of 7.6 percent; at its peak in the mid-1960's, it was about 11.0 percent of all high school enrollment.¹ At the nursery school level, two-thirds of the students were in private schools in 1981. Among kindergarten students the figure was 17 percent (table 1).

Enrollment rates by age. School enrollment rates by age show some variation by race and ethnicity at noncompulsory school attendance ages (table 6). The rates did not vary substantially at the compulsory school ages, with 98 percent or better of all persons between 7 and 15 years old enrolled in school. At nursery-school ages, 36 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in school in 1981, with similar proportions for White and Black children; only 25 percent of children of Spanish origin were enrolled. Above the compulsory attendance ages, there were also differences:

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 121, *Private School Enrollment, Tuition and Enrollment Trends: October 1979*.

Percentage of Elementary and High School Enrollment in Private Schools: 1960 to 1981

Year	Elementary (grades 1-8)	High school (grades 9-12)	Year	Elementary (grades 1-8)	High school (grades 9-12)
1981 ¹	10.9	7.6	1970.....	11.6	8.0
1881 ²	11.0	7.7	1969.....	11.7	7.9
1980.....	11.1	(NA)	1968.....	12.5	9.6
1979.....	11.2	7.4	1967.....	13.6	9.4
1978.....	11.4	8.0	1966.....	14.3	10.3
1977.....	11.1	7.9	1965.....	15.0	11.2
1976.....	10.3	7.6	1964.....	15.5	11.0
1975.....	10.8	7.5	1963.....	15.2	10.1
1974.....	10.2	7.6	1962.....	14.7	9.4
1973.....	10.4	7.7	1961.....	14.6	10.4
1972.....	11.0	7.6	1960.....	14.9	10.1
1971.....	11.0	7.4			

NA Not available.

¹Consistent with 1980 census-based population estimates.

²Consistent with 1970 census-based population estimates.

about 91 percent of both Black and White 16- and 17-year-olds were enrolled in school in 1981; for Spanish-origin youth, the figure was 83 percent. At ages 18 and 19, persons of Spanish origin also remained less likely than Blacks or Whites to be enrolled in school; among those of Spanish origin, only 38 percent of 18- and 19-year-olds were in school, but among Blacks and Whites, roughly one-half were still enrolled in school. One-fifth of White persons 18 and 19 years old enrolled in school were enrolled in high school, the remainder in college. For Black and Spanish-origin 18- and 19-year-olds, about two-fifths of those enrolled in school were still attending high school.

About 39 percent of White 18- and 19-year-olds were attending college; the figure for Blacks and for persons of Spanish origin together was only about one-fourth. However, for each race or ethnic group one-half or close to one-half of 18- and 19-year-old high school graduates were attending college. Thus, overall differences by race and ethnicity in college attendance are due to differences in the proportion becoming eligible, i.e., graduating from high school.

At older ages ethnic and racial differences in enrollment rates disappear rapidly. According to data in table 6, the percentage enrolled among persons 20 and 21 years old was lower than average for Black and Spanish-origin persons. Beyond age 21, there were no significant differences. (Only the youngest group of persons of Spanish origin showed evidence of lower than average attendance).

Perhaps the most important differences were in the proportions of the age group who were not enrolled in school and not high school graduates, i.e., dropouts. Among civilian 18- and 19-year-olds, 16 percent of Whites and 19 percent of Blacks were dropouts. The difference is significantly less than that recorded in 1967 (the first year such data were available) when 16 percent of Whites and 26 percent of Blacks of the same age were dropouts.² For persons of Spanish origin, the dropout rate is fully double the national figure; 36 percent

of 18- and 19-year-old persons of Spanish origin were dropouts in 1981.

College enrollment. Among persons under 35 years old, college enrollment was 10.7 million in 1981; it has remained around 10 million since 1976. When students of all ages are considered, including those 35 years old and over, college enrollment was about 12 million in 1981. The proportion of college students under 35 years old who were attending school full time was 70.5 percent in 1981, about the same as in the previous 4 years. In 1970, the proportion enrolled full time was much higher, 77.7 percent (table 1). The number of persons enrolled full time did not decline from 1970 to 1981, but rose by one-third to 7.6 million in 1981, while the number enrolled part time about doubled to 3.2 million. In 1970, one-half million Black students attended college; in 1981, Black college enrollment was about 1.1 million. This figure has remained about the same since 1976. Spanish college enrollment reached one-half million in 1981. In 1972, the first year data were available separately for persons of Spanish origin, the figure was about one-quarter million. In 1981, Blacks constituted 10.6 percent of all college students, and Spanish-origin students constituted 4.8 percent; in 1972 the figures were 8.7 and 2.9 percent, respectively.

Among all college students 14 years old and over, women outnumbered men in 1981, just as they did in 1979 and 1980. The ratio for students of all ages was 108 women for every 100 men. In 1972, the first year data for college students of all ages were available, men enrolled in college outnumbered women by 1.3 million, and the ratio of women to men was only 0.74. In all age groups between 20 and 34 years old in 1972, more men than women were attending college; only at the youngest and oldest ages shown in table 4 did the number of men not exceed the number of women on campus.

From 1972 to 1981, total college enrollment grew by 33 percent, reflecting a 12-percent increase for men and a 63-percent increase for women. Young male students (under

²U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 190, *School Enrollment: October 1968 and 1967*.

25 years old) dropped from 40 to 32 percent of all students, while young women constituted 32 percent of all students in both years. Women 25 years old and over increased from 11 to 20 percent of the total, while men in this age group remained between 16 and 17 percent of all students. Students of "traditional college ages" (21 or under) were no longer the majority of all college students in 1981.

The college enrollment survey figures presented thus far include full-time and part-time students, undergraduates and graduates, those in universities, other 4-year colleges, 2-year colleges, and professional schools. While the rise in the college attendance is particularly marked for women, it cannot be attributed solely to increased part-time attendance or continuing education because one-half of the increase was in full-time enrollment. Among students 14 to 34 years old, women reached about the same level as men in full-time undergraduate enrollment, but they exceeded men in part-time enrollment in 1981. In 2-year colleges, the total number of women exceeded the number of men with a women/men ratio of 1.17 in 1981. In 1972, the number of men exceeded the number of women in 2-year colleges, and the ratio of women to men was only 0.70.

The number of women has increased in relation to that for men at all levels of school and all enrollment statuses. While in 1972, they were greatly outnumbered by men, by 1981, women were on a par with men in full-time undergraduate enrollment and getting closer in graduate school enrollment. Among the 1.7 million graduate students in

1981, men outnumbered women by 176,000 with the difference appearing to be in full-time students. In fact, among the larger group of male graduate students, 55 percent attended full time, while among female graduate students, 42 percent attended full time.

The growth in undergraduate enrollment between 1972 and 1981 did not affect 2-year and 4-year colleges equally. In 1981, 2-year colleges enrolled 32 percent of undergraduates; in 1972, they enrolled only 27 percent of undergraduates. This group of schools absorbed one-half of the growth in undergraduate enrollment in the 9-year period. As they did among all undergraduates, there is some evidence that women contributed over three-fourths of the growth in the number of 2-year college students.

Although women constituted one-half of full-time undergraduate enrollment in 1981, they remained behind men with only 38 percent of full-time graduate enrollment. Data from other sources show women do not yet graduate from college at the same rate as men.³ It remains to be seen if the current similar enrollment figures for men and women (table 5) will produce equal proportions of college graduates in the future.

³U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1981*; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 374, Population Profile of the United States: 1981*.