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School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1983 (Advance Report)

INTRODUCTION

In October 1983, 57,745,000 persons aged 3 to 34 were enrolled in schools ranging from nursery and kindergarten to college. This number represented about 48.4 percent of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population in these ages. Despite the large size of the enrolled population, total attendance has decreased by 3.2 million students since 1975 (one of the years of highest enrollments)—a significant decline. While yearly point estimates for this 8-year period indicate apparent decreases every year, most of these year-to-year changes (including 1982-83) are not statistically significant.

Most of the decrease in the aggregate number of students is due to smaller cohorts of persons of elementary through high school ages (5 to 17 years). While the enrollment rate for these individuals has slightly increased, the absolute number of persons in these ages has decreased by some 5.5 million persons since 1975, yielding a net loss of 5.1 million students. However, there have been some compensating trends in other age groups which have reduced the overall decline in the number of students between 1975 and 1983. Increases in the size of the 18-to-34 age cohort have resulted in an increase of 1.4 million students, and higher rates of enrollment among young children 3 and 4 years old have added another 500,000 students over 1975 levels, resulting in the overall net decrease of 3.2 million students.

Current "middle series" population projections by the Census Bureau (Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 952) do not foresee much additional shrinkage in the near future in the 5-to-17 age cohort's size, and in fact, anticipate slow growth beginning in the next 2 to 3 years. Nevertheless, even under these assumptions, it is not expected that the 5-to-17 age category will return to its 1975 size anytime in the next 50 years. Of course, unanticipated large-scale increases in fertility or large numbers of net immigrants in these ages could alter this scenario substantially.

Enrollment numbers at different levels of schooling were distributed in the following way: 2.3 million nursery schoolers,

3.4 million kindergarten students, 27.2 million children in elementary school, 14.0 million persons in high school, and 10.8 million college students. Comparison of these figures with the previous year's indicates increases at the nursery and kindergarten levels and decreases at all other levels, although none of these year-to-year changes were statistically significant.

ENROLLMENT

With nursery school enrollment at 2.3 million persons the size of this category has now increased by 75 percent in the past 10 years. This increase is principally due to an increase in rates of nursery school attendance. In 1973, 17.7 percent of children 3 to 4 years old were enrolled in nursery school; by the fall of 1983, this figure had risen to 30.9 percent. Overall, the change in rate for 3-to-4-year-olds accounted for 90 percent of the overall increase in nursery school. (See Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 272, table 15, and unpublished 1983 data.) While over 70 percent of White nursery-school students were in private schools, only a third of Black nursery schoolers were, indicating that cost and public availability may be serious limiting factors in usage of this still-growing type of schooling.

Increases in the number of kindergarten students are not as substantial as those at the nursery school level. Roughly 3.4 million children were enrolled in kindergarten in October 1983, compared with 3.1 million in 1973. Unlike nursery school, enrollment rates for children of kindergarten age (and elementary and high school ages) have been relatively high for at least the last 10 years. (That is, generally 90 percent or more of the eligible population is enrolled in school.) Consequently, most fluctuations in the number of persons enrolled at this level will be due to corresponding changes in the size of the age cohort at risk. Since it is expected that cohorts of kindergarten age will be successively larger in the next several years, it is likely that the actual number of persons in kindergarten will increase slightly.

With 27.2 million students, elementary school enrollments are approaching the point at which they will stop decreasing and begin rising. Elementary school students decreased numerically by over 4.2 million in the past 10 years, even though the rates of enrollment remained essentially the same. Shrinking cohort size has been the main force in enrollment declines at the elementary school level. Declines in both White and Black enrollments have been substantial, and only an increase of over a half-million elementary school students of other races (principally Asian because of increased immigration) kept this decrease from approaching 5 million students. Based on the age structure of children 5 years and younger, increases in the numbers of elementary school students are still at least 3 years away.

High school enrollments of 14 million persons also represented a large drop from the level in 1973, when 15.3 million students attended high school. This decline is even more severe when one considers that in 1977 there were 15.8 million high school students. Despite this overall fall in the number of high school students, enrollments in private high schools in 1983 were about the same as they were in 1973. Whites accounted for 81.5 percent of all high school students and 89.2 percent of all private high schoolers in 1983. In comparison, nearly 95 percent of all private high school students in 1973 were White, perhaps indicating that private high schools have become slightly more accessible to nonwhite students over time.

Most of the changes in the number of high school students is accounted for by the size of high-school-age cohorts. Changes in the cohort size of the 14-to-17 age group alone accounted for a decrease component of 1.7 million high school students from 1973. Some evidence of slightly higher rates of enrollment by these persons, as well as some increase in the number of high school students at other ages, kept the actual net loss of high school students to about 1.3 million. By 1990, the 14-to-17 age group is projected to shrink in size by about 1.5 million persons from the 1983 estimate. At prevailing enrollment rates this implies a loss between 1983 and 1990 of well over 1 million high school students.

There were 10.8 million persons ages 14 to 34 enrolled in college in October 1983. This figure, while not significantly different from the estimated 10.9 million persons in October 1982, was substantially larger than the 8.2 million students enrolled in 1973. The increase in the enrolled population is a product of many different factors, the principal one being the size of the 18-to-21 age group. Individuals of these ages are commonly referred to as the "traditional" college-age population, and in 1983 about 34 percent of all civilian persons of these ages were, in fact, enrolled in college. Over the 10-year period, the size of this age cohort increased from 14.8 million to 15.9 million, yielding over 300,000 additional college students based on increased cohort size alone. While it cannot be said what future rates of attendance for this group will be, recent projections indicate that the size of the 18-to-21 age cohort is expected to drop by over 2.5 million in the next 12 years. Thus, unless the enrollment rate for these individuals rises dramatically, it is likely that the number

of students contributed by this age group will also significantly decline.

Increases in college enrollment have occurred in part because of rising participation rates of women. An estimated 28.2 percent of all women 18 to 21 years old were in college in 1973; by 1983 this figure had risen to 34.5 percent. When considered in the context of an at-risk population of several million people, increases of only a few percent translate to several hundred thousand additional students. Increases were apparent not only at traditional college ages, but at other ages as well. The attendance rate for women 22 to 34 years old rose from 5.8 to 8.9 percent in the 1973-83 period. The combined effect of higher rates and larger cohort size yielded an additional 1.2 million women students aged 22 to 34, and over 40 percent of the total increase in college students ages 18-34 that occurred during the 10-year period.

The relative proportions of some types of students remained the same when comparing 1973 and 1983. For example, in both years, about 83 percent of all students were enrolled in undergraduate school, and 76 percent were in public institutions. Large numeric and proportionate increases did occur for 2-year schools, however, as their enrollments rose from 22 percent to 27 percent of the total student population. Of the 1.1 million additional 2-year college students over 1973 levels, nearly 800,000 were women. Over 400,000 of the new students were 25 to 34 years old, and about 600,000 attended schools part-time. Increases such as these indicate that individuals who previously might not have attended college at all are using 2-year schools to obtain at least some college education. These students represent an important source contributing to the overall college enrollment increase.

In addition to the 10.8 million college students 14 to 34 years old, there were another 1.5 million persons aged 35 and older who also were attending college in 1983. This older adult group is one of the fastest-growing components of college enrollments, having increased by over 700,000 persons and nearly doubling in size in the past 10 years. While a relatively small proportion of persons 35 and older are actually enrolled in school, the size of this student group is substantial enough that it now accounts for over 12 percent of all college students. Nearly two-thirds of these students are women, 81 percent are attending part-time, 41 percent are graduate students, 89 percent are White, and 38 percent are attending 2-year schools.

HOMEWORK

In addition to regular questions on school enrollment, several other questions were asked about elementary and high school students in the October 1983 survey. Some of these questions were aimed at determining both the amount of homework that students regularly do, and how many students receive help from their parents. The results that follow are based on household informant's reports for all of the student members of that household, and might differ from what the

students themselves might actually report. The median amount of homework done per week by all students was about 5.4 hours. This includes the 12.8 percent of all students who reported having no homework in an average week.

As table A shows, there is some variation around this national figure of 5.4 hours. The median value for high school students was 6.9 hours, while for elementary students (grades 1-8) it was 5.0 hours. The overall difference between White and Black students, while small (5.4 vs. 5.6 hrs., or a difference of 12 minutes), is statistically significant. In public elementary school the race difference of .9 hour is the only significant difference for the four different combinations of type of school and grade level. In general, girls are reported to do more homework than boys. Sex differences are observed at every line in table A except for private high schools.

In recent years there has been some discussion of differences in the educational rigor of public and private schools. While students in private schools had a median 6.2 hours of homework per week, those in public schools had about 5.4 hours. This discrepancy becomes far more pronounced when examining high school students only. Public high school students had a median 6.5 hours of homework per week,

while the comparative figure for private high schoolers was 14.2. Of course, private high schools in general promote academic or pre-college curricula, while public schools tend to be more diverse, including some schools and curricula that are principally remedial or vocational, many that offer general education, and some which are as academically advanced as the most advanced private schools. Nevertheless, this greater diversity of public institutions and the implicit selectivity of private schools is a major reason why the median levels of homework in public and private high schools differ so greatly.

Survey results indicate that many students receive at least some help with their homework from adults in their household. As the last column of table A shows, about 58 percent of all students usually receive aid in doing their studies. In this table, the greatest differentiation in receiving help is between elementary and high school students, although there is also a distinction, though far less substantial, between public and private school students. While high school students have more homework than elementary school children, they receive less help. It may be that the age of the student is more of a factor than the amount of homework in influencing parental aid.

Table A. Median Hours of Homework per week: October 1983

Type of school	All students	White	Black	Hispanic	Male	Female	Proportion getting help
All schools.....	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.3	5.2	5.7	57.9
Elementary.....	5.0	4.7	5.4	5.0	4.6	5.2	72.1
Public.....	4.9	4.5	5.4	4.9	4.5	5.1	71.9
Private.....	5.5	5.4	6.0	5.7	5.3	5.8	73.2
High school.....	6.9	6.8	6.8	6.1	5.9	8.3	33.1
Public.....	6.5	6.4	6.6	5.9	5.8	8.0	32.8
Private.....	14.2	14.2	14.4	14.5	14.1	14.4	35.5
Total public.....	5.4	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.2	5.6	57.4
Total private.....	6.2	6.0	8.0	6.8	5.8	7.2	61.8

CHANGING SCHOOLS

Other supplemental questions asked whether students had changed schools, either during or between school years. Concerns have been raised about the negative effect that switching schools has on a student's educational progress. The results of the questions asked in October 1983 provide a previously unavailable estimate of the magnitude of school switching by the student population. In total, 10.6 million students aged 5 to 21 who had been enrolled in elementary or high school sometime in the previous year (fall 1982-fall 1983) had changed schools at least once during that time. These 10.6 million students (or about 24.4 percent of the 43.4 million who were enrolled) actually accounted for 13.6 million school changes, since some of these individuals (2.7 million, or 25 percent of all movers) changed schools more than once in the preceding year.

Of course as table B shows, most students who changed schools did so only once, and most of these changes were made between school years (during the summer). Over 6.5 million students changing school made their single shift during summer vacation, while another 1.3 million made their only shift sometime during the school year. Another 2.7 million students made more than one school change in the 1-year period, but for most of these (2.5 million) one of these shifts occurred between school years.

Of those changes that occurred between school years, the largest proportion involved the switch from one public school to another. Table C shows the magnitude of switches involving different combinations of the type of control of origin and destination schools.

The data indicates a large flow from public to private schools (380,000), but there is some evidence of a somewhat larger one in the opposite direction (460,000). In addition to

Table B. Type and Number of School Changes, by Current Level of Enrollment from October 1982 to October 1983

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of school	All students	All students changing	Type of change			Number of shifts		
			During year only	During and between year	Between year only	One	More than one	No response
Total.....	43,374	10,594	1,508	2,545	6,540	7,881	2,675	38
Elementary.....	26,140	6,743	925	1,769	4,049	4,887	1,821	35
High school.....	13,395	3,605	336	777	2,492	2,782	820	3
Other ¹	3,839	246	246	0	0	212	34	0

¹Includes college students, high school graduates, and dropouts who were enrolled in elementary or high school during the reference period.

information on the type of school, reasons for switching are also displayed in table C. Public to private school shifts, accounting for 4 percent of all between-year changes, were made 73 percent of the time for reasons other than moving

or completing the highest grade at the previous school; for all other types of shifts, the "other" reason was given only 14 percent of the time.

Table C. Control of Origin and Destination Schools and Reasons for Changing: Between-Year Changes Only

(Numbers in thousands)

Origin and destination	Students changing between years	Reason for changing school			
		Moved	Completed highest grade	Other	No response
Total.....	9,086	2,628	4,858	1,504	96
Public to public.....	7,298	2,264	4,170	849	15
Public to private.....	380	33	68	279	0
Private to public.....	460	98	137	225	0
Private to private.....	364	70	207	86	1
No response to Public.....	557	158	268	57	74
No response to Private.....	27	5	8	8	6

No response—control of origin school not determined.