

Basic *(and Sometimes Surprising)* Facts  
about the U.S. Education System

# A Public Education Primer



**Center on Education Policy**

1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 522  
Washington, D.C. 20036

tel: 202.822.8065

fax: 202.822.6008

e: [cep-dc@cep-dc.org](mailto:cep-dc@cep-dc.org)

w: [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org)

This publication was researched and written by Nancy Kober, a freelance writer and consultant to CEP. Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs, and Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, provided advice and assistance. We want to thank William Porter, executive director of the Grant Makers for Education (GFE), who approached the Center about developing the primer as a resource for his membership. The Center and the GFE collaborated on a version of the primer for GFE members; this primer, an outgrowth of that work, is meant for a broader audience.

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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# Introduction

Public education matters, whether you're a student, parent, teacher, volunteer, employer, employee, or taxpayer. Although you undoubtedly know something about public education, you may be unaware of important facts about the U.S. education system or may be surprised to learn how things have changed in recent years.

In this primer on public education, the Center on Education Policy has pulled together data, mostly from government sources, to answer these seven questions:

1. **Where are the students?**
2. **Who are the students?**
3. **Who controls public education?**
4. **How are public schools funded?**
5. **How well are students achieving?**
6. **What is the public school teaching force like?**
7. **What other services do public schools provide?**

As much as possible, the data compiled here come from the federal government—primarily from the National Center for Education Statistics. NCES is the chief agency in the U.S. Department of Education charged with gathering education data. For each topic, we've used data from the most recent year available, which is often 2002-03 or earlier, due to the lag time involved in collecting and checking the data. In cases where NCES data are not available, we've carefully chosen data from other reliable sources.

This primer is meant to give an overall snapshot of the nation's public schools, so it relies on national averages. The experiences, trends, and issues in your local community may vary somewhat from the broad picture presented here. In any case, we hope this primer will provide you with sufficient background information about public education to encourage your interest in education issues and your involvement in your local schools.





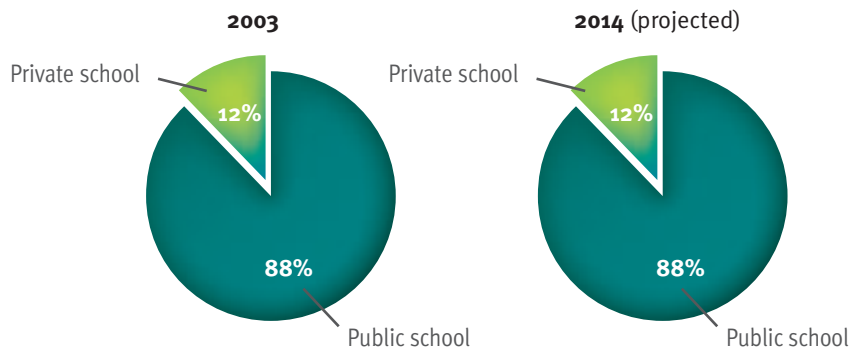
# 1

## Where Are the Students?

### ➤ Almost 9 out of 10 students in the U.S. are educated in public schools.

Public elementary and secondary schools educate 88% of the nation's 54.9 million students, while private schools educate 12%. Although total enrollments are projected to reach 56.7 million in 2014, the public and private school shares are expected to stay about the same.

#### Percentage of U.S. Students Enrolled in Public and Private Schools

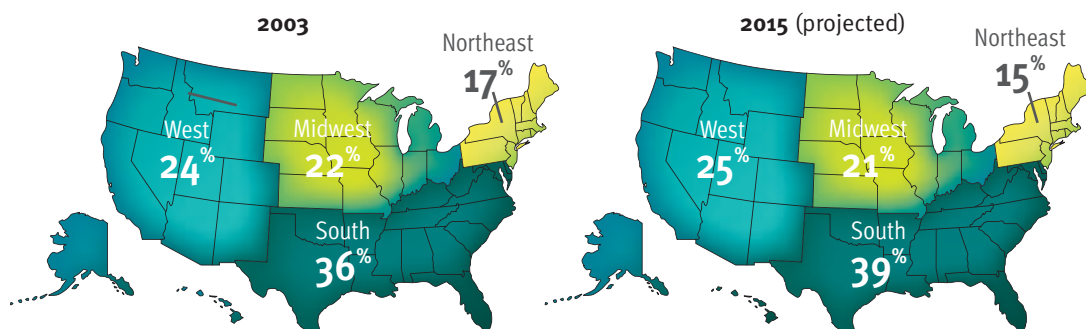


Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *Digest of Education Statistics 2005* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006), table 3.

### ➤ Sixty percent of the nation's public school students live in the South and West.

Over the past decades, public school enrollments have grown more rapidly in the South and West than in the Midwest and Northeast. In coming years, enrollments are expected to keep rising in the South and West while they decline in the Midwest and Northeast.

#### Percentage of Public School Enrollments by Region

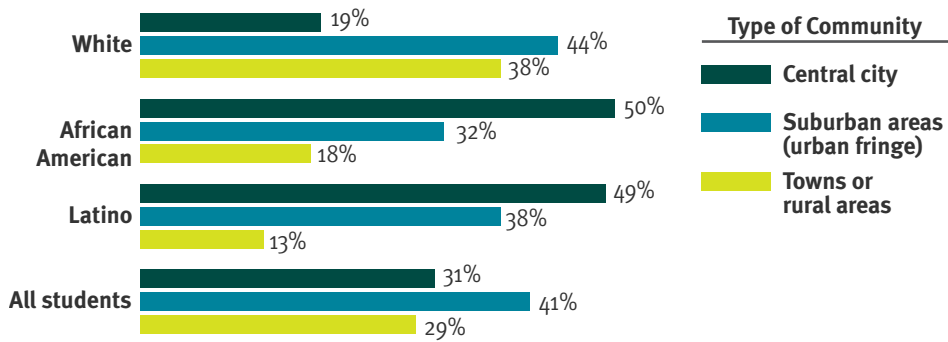


Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006), table 3-1.

➤ Overall, more public school students attend school in suburbs, towns, and rural areas than in urban areas. But more African American and Latino students attend school in urban areas than in suburban or rural areas.

### Percentage Distribution of Public School Enrollments by Type of Community, 2003



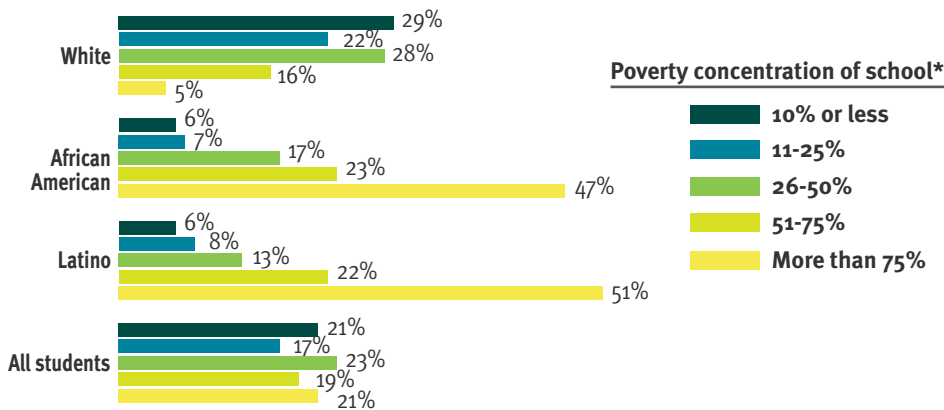
Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. Totals do not include students whose locale was unknown.

Source: NCES, *Navigating resources for rural schools*, table 1 ([http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/TablesHTML/1\\_raceethnic\\_enroll.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/TablesHTML/1_raceethnic_enroll.asp)).

➤ African American and Latino students are much more likely than white students to attend high-poverty schools.

Half of the nation's Latino 4<sup>th</sup> graders and almost half of African American 4<sup>th</sup> graders attend public schools in which more than three-fourths of the students come from low-income families (as measured by their eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch). Just 5% of white 4<sup>th</sup> graders attend schools with poverty rates this high.

### Distribution of 4<sup>th</sup> Graders by Race/Ethnicity and Poverty Concentration of Their Public School, 2003

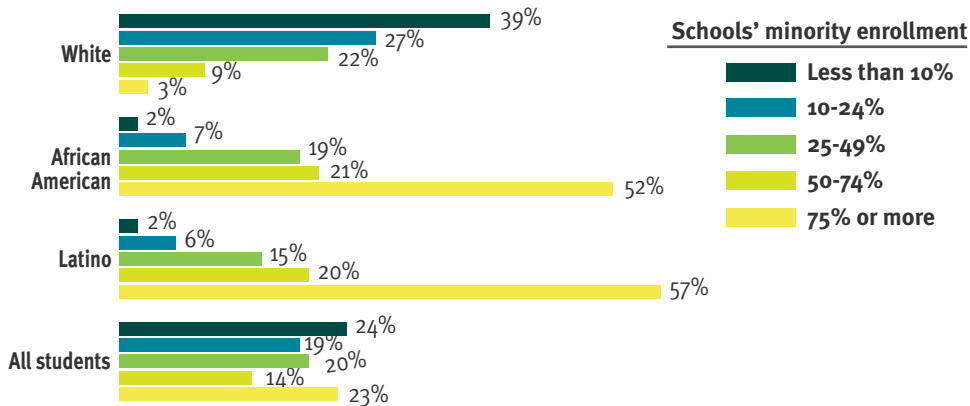


\* The poverty concentration in this table is based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch. Children qualify for free lunches under the National School Lunch Act if their family income does not exceed 130% of the federal poverty level; they qualify for reduced-price lunches if their family income is above 130% but below 185% of the poverty level.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2004*, indicator 5.

➤ More than half of the nation’s African American and Latino students attend public schools in which at least three-quarters of students are children of color.

**Distribution of Public School Students by Race/Ethnicity, According to Concentration of Minority Students in the School, 2003**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 94.

➤ About 17% of public school students attend public “schools of choice.” About 2% of public school students attend charter schools, and 3% attend magnet schools.

Some districts allow students to attend public schools chosen by their parents instead of their assigned neighborhood school.

**17%** Percentage of public school students enrolled in a public school chosen by their parents, 2003

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2004*, supplemental table 25-1.

Two popular types of choice schools include magnet schools, which have specialized curricula designed to attract students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds; and charter schools, which are publicly funded schools governed by a group under a contract or charter that exempts them from certain government regulations. The number of charter schools has grown rapidly in recent years, especially in some large urban districts.

**3%** Percentage of public school students attending a magnet school, 2003-04

**2%** Percentage of public school students attending a public charter school, 2003-04

Source: NCES, *Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006), tables 10 and 11.

➤ **An estimated 1.1 million school-age children were being schooled at home in 2003.**

The number of home-schooled children has grown markedly since 1999, but it still represents a very small share of the school-age population.

**2.2%** Estimated percentage of U.S. children ages 5-17 who were home-schooled, 2003

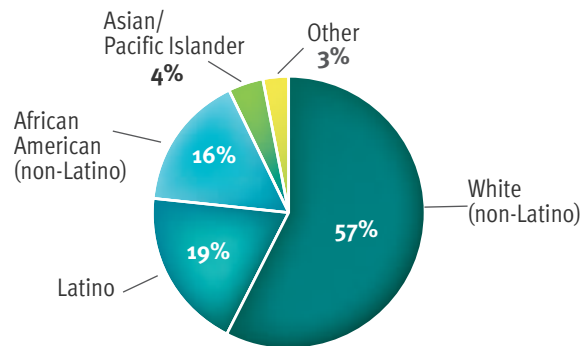
*Source: NCES, 1.1 million homeschooled students in the United States in 2003 (<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/homeschool/>).*

# 2

## Who Are the Students?

➤ **Four out of ten public school students are children of color—a proportion that's expected to increase in coming years.**

**Percentage Distribution of Public School Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2004**

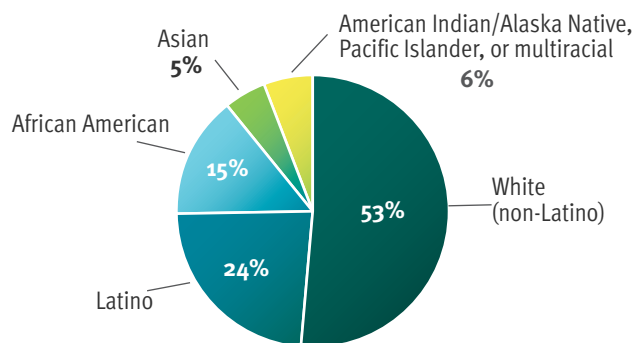


Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *Condition of Education 2006*, table 5-1.

The Census Bureau projects that by 2020, nearly half of the nation's school-age children will be children of color.

**Percentage of Children Ages 5-17 by Race/Ethnicity, 2020 (Projected)**

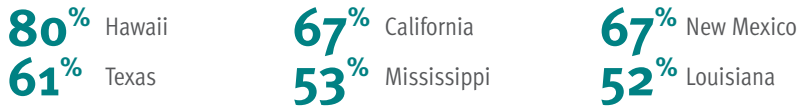


Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005* (<http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/>), table POP3.

► Children of color make up the majority of public school enrollments in six states and many school districts.

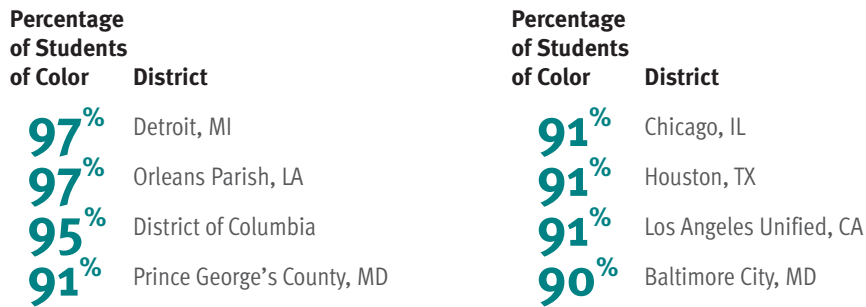
**Percentage of Public School Students Who Are Children of Color in Six States with the Highest Minority Enrollments, 2002**



Sources: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 38.

Children of color also constitute a majority of students in two-thirds of the nation's 50 largest school districts, and over 90% of enrollments in several of the nation's largest districts.

**Large School Districts with the Highest Enrollments of Students of Color, 2002-03**



Sources: NCES, *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2002-03* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2005), table 8.

➤ **More than one-third of public school students are from low-income families.**

Students' eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches is an indicator commonly used by schools to determine the number of children from low-income families. Children qualify for free lunches under the National School Lunch Act if their family income does not exceed 130% of the federal poverty level and for reduced-price lunches if their family income is above 130% but below 185% of the poverty level.

**36%** Percentage of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, 2003-04

Source: NCES, *Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04*, table 3.

A stricter definition of low-income, used by the Census Bureau, includes only those families whose income falls below the federal poverty level. By this measure, about one-sixth of children ages 5-17 are from poor families.

**16%** Percentage of children ages 5-17 in families with incomes below the poverty level, 2004

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 20.

➤ **One in every ten public school students is an English language learner—a student whose first language is not English and who is learning English.**

**10%** Percentage of public school students who are English language learners, 2003-04

Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA), FAQ No. 1 ([www.ncele.gwu.edu/expert/faq/o1leps.htm](http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/expert/faq/o1leps.htm)).

English language learners are the fastest-growing population in U.S. schools.

**65%↑** Percentage increase in English language learners in public schools between 1993-94 and 2003-04

Source: NCELA, FAQ No. 1 ([www.ncele.gwu.edu/expert/faq/o1leps.htm](http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/expert/faq/o1leps.htm)).

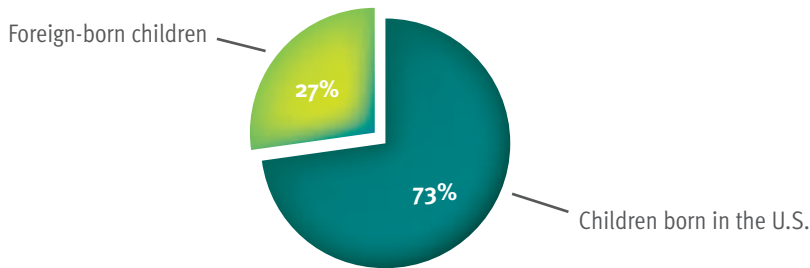
➤ **About 1 school-age child in 5 is a child of immigrants.**

**19%** Percentage of school-age children whose parents were immigrants (legal or undocumented), 2000

Source: R. Capps, M. Fix, J. Murray, J. Ost, J. S. Passel & S. Herwanto, *The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2005), table 1 and figure 4.

According to an analysis of Census Bureau data by the Urban Institute, nearly three-fourths of the school-age children of immigrants were born in the U.S. The rest were foreign-born. Of those children born outside the U.S., 38% were from Mexico and 25% from Asian countries. The rest were from Latin America, Europe, and other parts of the world.

**Birth Status of School-Age Children of Immigrant (Legal or Undocumented) Parents, 2000**



Source: R. Capps et al., *The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2005), table 1 and figure 4.

➤ **Almost 14% of public school students receive special education services because they have a disability. In 2003-04, three-fourths of these students with disabilities were educated in regular classrooms with other children for a significant part of the school day.**

**Percentage of Students with Disabilities Educated in Regular Classrooms for At Least 40% of the School Day, 2003-04**

**50%** Students with disabilities who spend 80% or more of the school day in regular classrooms

**28%** Students with disabilities who spend between 40% and 79% of the school day in regular classrooms

Sources: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2005*, table 27-1; and NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 50.



# 3

## Who Controls Public Education?

- **The U.S. public education system consists of more than 14,000 autonomous school districts.**

**14,063** Number of local school districts in the U.S., 2003-04

Source: NCES, *Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04*, table C-15.

- **About 35% of the nation's school districts are very small, enrolling fewer than 600 students. But the very largest school districts—the top 2%—enroll a third of all students.**

### Percentage Distribution of Public School Districts and Students by Enrollment Size

<u>District enrollment size</u>	<u>Percentage of districts</u>	<u>Percentage of students</u>
25,000 students or more:	2%	34%
10,000 – 24,999:	4%	19%
2,500 – 9,999:	22%	30%
1,000 – 2,499:	24%	12%
600 – 999:	12%	3%
599 and under:	35%	3%

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: NCES, *Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04*, table C-15.

➤ **Public education in the U.S. is decentralized compared with the educational systems of most industrialized nations.**

Although the federal role in education has expanded under the No Child Left Behind Act, most key education decisions are still made at the state or local level. Unlike most nations in the G-8 group, the U.S. has no national curriculum or national exam.

**National Curriculum and Exam Policies in G-8 Countries**

<b>G-8 Country</b>	<b>National Curriculum?</b>	<b>National Exam?</b>
Canada	No	No – some provinces have high school exit exams
France	Yes	Yes – for exit from lower secondary school, entrance to university
Germany	No – lander (states) determine curriculum	Yes – for entrance to higher education
Italy	Yes	Yes – for entrance to upper secondary school, receipt of high school diploma
Japan	Yes	Yes – for entrance to and placement in upper secondary school
Russia	Yes	Yes – for graduation from lower secondary school, receipt of secondary completion certificate
United Kingdom	Yes, with some local discretion	Yes – for receipt of general certificate of secondary education (age 16) and admittance to most higher education institutions
United States	No	No – some states have high school exit exams

Source: NCES, *Comparative Indicators of Education in the United States and Other G-8 Countries* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2004), figures A-1 through A-9; Mullins, et al., *TIMSS 1999: International Science Report* (Boston, MA: International Study Center, 2000), exhibit 5.2; and Eurydice, *Summary sheets on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms, 2006 edition* ([http://oraprod.eurydice.org/portal/page?\\_pageid=196,160677&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&pubid=047EN](http://oraprod.eurydice.org/portal/page?_pageid=196,160677&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&pubid=047EN)).

➤ **Most key education policies are determined at the state and local level rather than the federal level.**

**Examples of Education Policies Typically Set at the State and Local Levels**

<b>Policies Typically Set by State Legislatures or State Boards of Education</b>	<b>Policies Typically Determined at the Local Level</b>
<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards for curriculum content</li> <li>General accountability requirements for school district and student performance</li> <li>Student testing requirements</li> <li>General student promotion and retention policies</li> <li>Graduation requirements, including whether to require students to pass an exit exam</li> </ul>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific curriculum content and specific performance standards</li> <li>Choice of textbooks and other instructional materials</li> <li>Decisions about promoting or retaining specific students</li> <li>Student discipline and truancy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher preparation requirements</li> <li>Teacher licensing and certification requirements</li> <li>“Right to work” or other collective bargaining laws affecting teachers’ unions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher hiring and collective bargaining</li> <li>Teacher salaries and job requirements</li> <li>Teacher professional development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of years of compulsory schooling</li> <li>Compulsory school age requirements</li> <li>Whether to require districts to offer kindergarten</li> <li>Length of school year</li> <li>Charter school requirements</li> </ul>	<p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School schedule</li> <li>School grade configurations</li> <li>School attendance zones</li> <li>Class sizes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Finance, organization and facilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systems of financing public schools within the state</li> </ul>	<p><b>Finance, organization and facilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Types of non-instructional services to be provided</li> <li>Local taxing policies for education</li> <li>Budgets and school funding</li> <li>Construction, renovation, and use of school facilities</li> </ul>

Source: K. Zinth, *What governors need to know: Highlights of state education systems* (Denver: Education Commission of the States (ECS), 2005); ECS, *Unions/collective bargaining*, State Notes ([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/48/3748.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/48/3748.pdf)); ECS, *Student promotion/retention policies*, State Notes ([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/65/51/6551.htm](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/65/51/6551.htm)); Education Week, *Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education* (Washington, DC: Editorial Projects in Education, 2006); National School Boards Association, *Key work of school boards* ([www.nsba.org/keywork2/](http://www.nsba.org/keywork2/)); and T. Ziebarth, *The Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 2002).

➤ **Fundamental aspects of education vary from state to state.**

To give just a few examples of differences in state policies, only 11 states require districts to offer full-day kindergarten; the rest do not. In 2006, 25 states required students to pass an exit exam before receiving a high school diploma or were phasing in such a requirement; the rest had no statewide exit exam requirement.

**Range Among States in Key Education Policies** (From lowest state to highest state)

<b>9 to 13 years</b>	Number of years children must attend school
<b>Ages 5 to 8</b>	Minimum age for compulsory education
<b>Ages 16 to 18</b>	Maximum age for compulsory education
<b>173 to 186 days</b>	Number of instructional days per school year
<b>2 to 4 courses</b>	Number of high school math courses all students must take in states with minimum course requirements
<b>1 to 4 courses</b>	Number of high school science courses all students must take in states with minimum course requirements
<b>30% to 74%</b>	Percentage of total education funding provided by the state*

\*Excludes Hawaii, where the state education agency also functions as the only local school district, and the District of Columbia.

Sources: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 147; Center on Education Policy, *survey of states with high school exit exams*, June 2006; Education Commission of the States (ECS), *Compulsory school age requirements*, State Notes ([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/07/6407.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/07/6407.pdf)); J. Tomlinson, *Number of instructional days/hours in the school year*, State Notes ([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/55/26/5526.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/55/26/5526.pdf)); Achieve, Inc., *The Expectations Gap: A 50-State Review of High School Graduation Requirements* (Washington, DC: Achieve, 2004); and NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 153.

➤ **The federal role in education has expanded as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act.**

From the 1960s through 2001, the federal role in education was focused mostly on helping special groups of students, such as disadvantaged and disabled children, and addressing urgent national needs, such as improving math and science education. The No Child Left Behind Act, which took effect early in 2002, broadened the federal role to encompass all students and all teachers of academic subjects. To cite just a few examples, the Act:

- Requires school districts to annually test and meet performance goals for all students in grades 3-8 and once in high school, rather than just students served by the federal Title I program for disadvantaged children
- Requires all academic teachers to demonstrate they are highly qualified by having a degree in their subject or meeting other criteria of subject matter competence
- Requires districts to monitor and close achievement gaps among different groups of students, such as racial/ethnic groups
- Requires nearly all English language learners and students with disabilities to take the same subject area tests and meet the same achievement goals as other students

Source: Center on Education Policy, *From the Capital to the Classroom: State and Federal Efforts to Implement the No Child Left Behind Act* (Washington, DC: CEP, 2002).

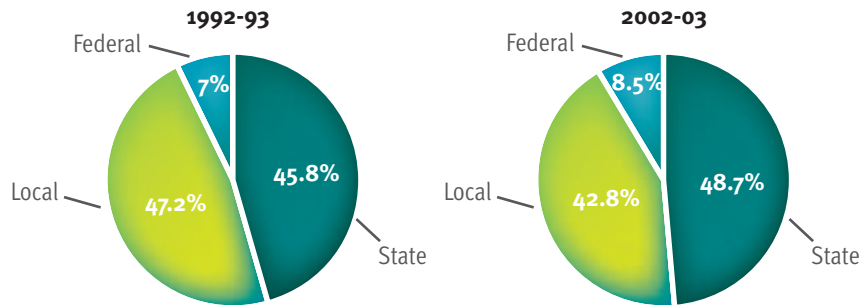
# 4

## How Are Public Schools Funded?

➤ **More than 90% of funding for public education comes from state and local sources.**

Over the past decade, state funding for public elementary and secondary education has grown to the point that almost half of the revenue for education comes from the states. Another 43% of education revenue comes from local sources, with more than three-fourths of this local share derived from local property taxes. The federal government provides just 9% of education funding.

**Percentage of Revenue for Public K-12 Education from Various Levels of Government**



Sources: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2005*, table 37-1; and NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 152.

➤ **Education funding per pupil has increased considerably over the past three decades, even when adjusted for inflation.**

**Current Expenditures per Pupil for Public Elementary and Secondary Education in Constant 2004-05 Dollars**

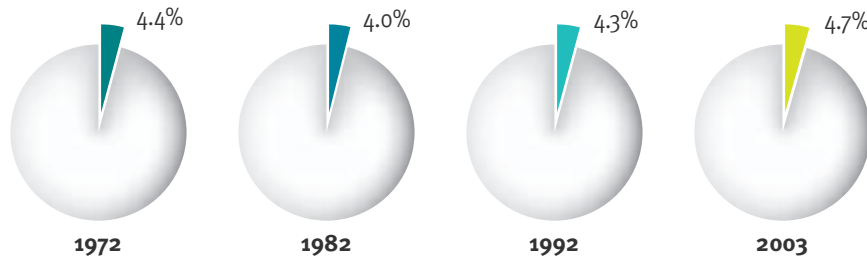


Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 106.

➤ **Even with increases in education spending, however, the level of public investment in education has changed only slightly in relation to the total value of goods and services produced in the domestic economy.**

The gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure of the nation's total economic resources—the value of all goods and services produced in the domestic economy. Analyzing the percentage of the GDP devoted to education is one way of assessing the level of public effort to fund education.

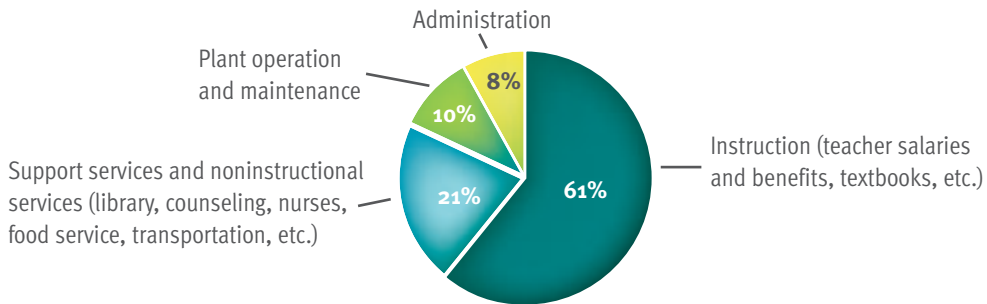
**Expenditures for All Elementary and Secondary Schools as a Percentage of the Gross Domestic Product**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 25.

➤ **More than 60% of education spending, on average, goes toward instruction. About 8% goes toward administration.**

**Percentage of Current Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education for Various Purposes, 2002-03**



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 156.

➤ **Enormous disparities in education funding exist between high-spending and low-spending states and school districts.**

Because local revenues are derived mostly from local property taxes, local spending on education is closely related to a school district's wealth. It is not unheard of for the wealthiest districts in a state to spend twice as much per pupil as the poorest districts. At the same time, some districts in some states spend more because they enroll a high percentage of low-income children and other students with special needs and consequently receive extra state and federal funding. This is far from universal, however.

The examples in the table below illustrate the funding disparities in the same state between school districts enrolling more than 10,000 students. The states shown are those with the greatest spending gaps among districts of that size. Several states have taken steps to equalize funding among districts, but in many states, significant gaps remain.

**Gaps in Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) Between the Highest- and Lowest-Spending Large School Districts in the Same State\*, 2003-04**  
(Includes only districts with enrollments of 10,000 or more)

<b>Highest-spending district in state</b>	<b>PPE in highest-spending district</b>	<b>Lowest-spending district in state</b>	<b>PPE in lowest-spending district</b>	<b>Gap in PPE</b>
Arlington Heights, IL	\$14,595	Plainfield, IL	\$6,562	-\$8,033
Arlington County, VA	\$14,273	Bedford County, VA	\$6,328	-\$7,945
Camden, NJ**	\$15,485	Brick Township, NJ	\$9,472	-\$6,013
Palo Alto Unified, CA**	\$10,709	Victor Valley Union High, CA	\$5,125	-\$5,584
Yonkers, NY	\$15,148	North Syracuse, NY	\$9,856	-\$5,292
Atlanta, GA	\$11,502	Columbia County, GA	\$6,580	-\$4,922
Pittsburgh, PA	\$12,242	Reading, PA	\$7,340	-\$4,902

\* The table shows districts in the seven states with the greatest gaps between the highest- and lowest-spending districts enrolling at least 10,000 students.

\*\* The determination of highest spending in the state does not include dependent school districts that are under state control or are administered by a county government.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Public Education Finances 2004* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006), table 17.

Wide disparities in education spending also exist among states. Some of these differences are explained by regional variations in the costs of services, but this does not account for all of the spending gaps.

**\$13,211** Average per pupil spending for public elementary and secondary education in New York (highest-spending state), 2002-03

**\$ 5,247** Average per pupil spending for public elementary and secondary education in Utah (lowest-spending state), 2002-03

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 167.

► **Most states have faced or are still facing lawsuits challenging their systems of financing public education.**

In the late 1980s, legal strategies for school finance cases shifted away from claims seeking equity in education funding under the constitution's equal protection clause and toward claims emphasizing language in many state constitutions that entitles students to an "adequate" education. Since that shift, plaintiffs have won the majority of cases, and many state school finance systems have been found unconstitutional. These states have had to restructure their finance systems to provide more money to low-spending districts or districts with high-cost children—a complex process that often takes years more to settle.

### Status of State School Finance Cases, April 2006

- 38** Total number of states sued since 1989 in "educational adequacy" lawsuits challenging their school finance systems
- 21** States in which plaintiffs won (court found state school finance system unconstitutional)
- 7** States in which the state won (court upheld state school finance system)
- 10** States with lawsuits still pending (includes states where earlier cases were settled but new or additional suits have been filed)
- 75%** Percentage of school finance lawsuits won by plaintiffs since 1989

Source: Campaign for Educational Equity, *School funding "adequacy" decisions since 1989, April 6, 2006* ([www.schoolfunding.info/litigation/](http://www.schoolfunding.info/litigation/)).



# 5

## How Well Are Students Achieving?

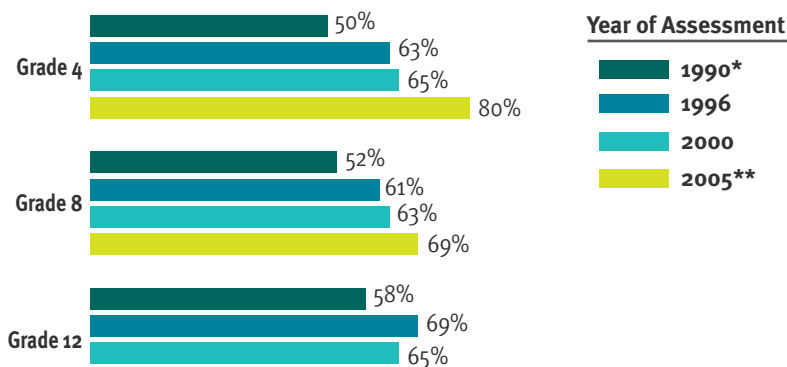
➤ Since the early 1990s, student achievement has gone up in math at grades 4 and 8, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and has remained about the same in reading. Achievement in science has gone up in grade 4, remained unchanged in grade 8, and declined in grade 12.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called “the Nation’s Report Card,” is the only independent measure of what America’s students know and can do in mathematics, reading, science, writing, and other core subjects. NAEP is administered by the U.S. Department of Education and tests students in grades 4, 8, and 12.

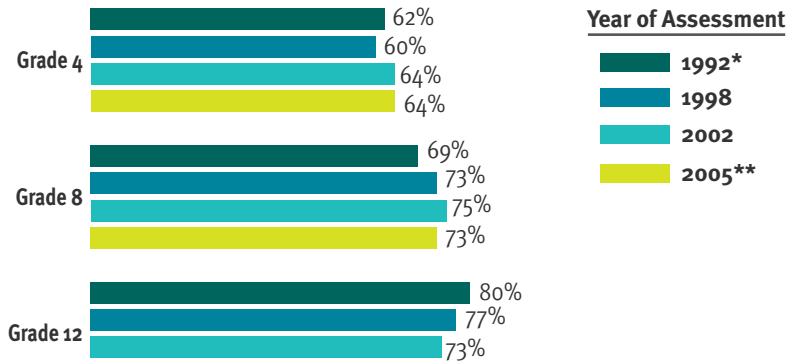
NAEP reports student performance in terms of three achievement levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. (These levels represent judgments by NAEP’s governing board about what students should know and be able to do at different points in their educational development. The NAEP achievement levels, which are higher than the performance levels set by many states for their own tests, are meant to provide a consistent and stable standard for comparing achievement across states.) Students performing at the NAEP Basic level show partial mastery of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.

Although 12<sup>th</sup> graders also are tested by NAEP, the government has not reported their scores since 2000 in math and 2002 in reading. In recent years, fewer high schools have agreed to participate in NAEP; in addition, concerns have arisen about whether high school seniors are motivated to do their best on the NAEP tests. NAEP did report scores for 12<sup>th</sup> graders on the recently released science assessment.

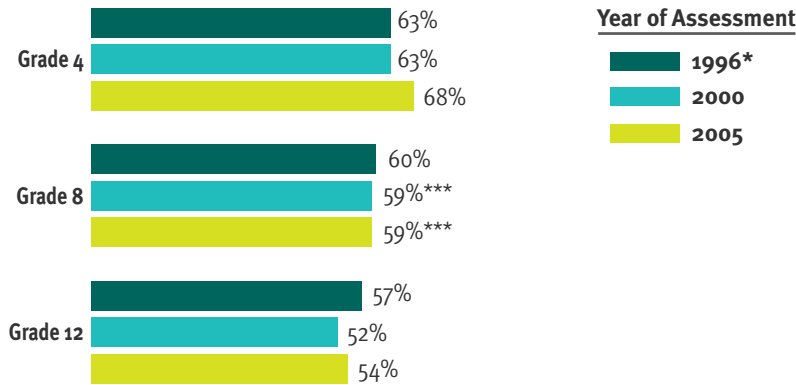
Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above the Basic Level, NAEP Math



### Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above the Basic Level, NAEP Reading



### Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above the Basic Level, NAEP Science



\* Test accommodations were not permitted for students with disabilities and English language learners before 1996 in math and before 1998 in reading.

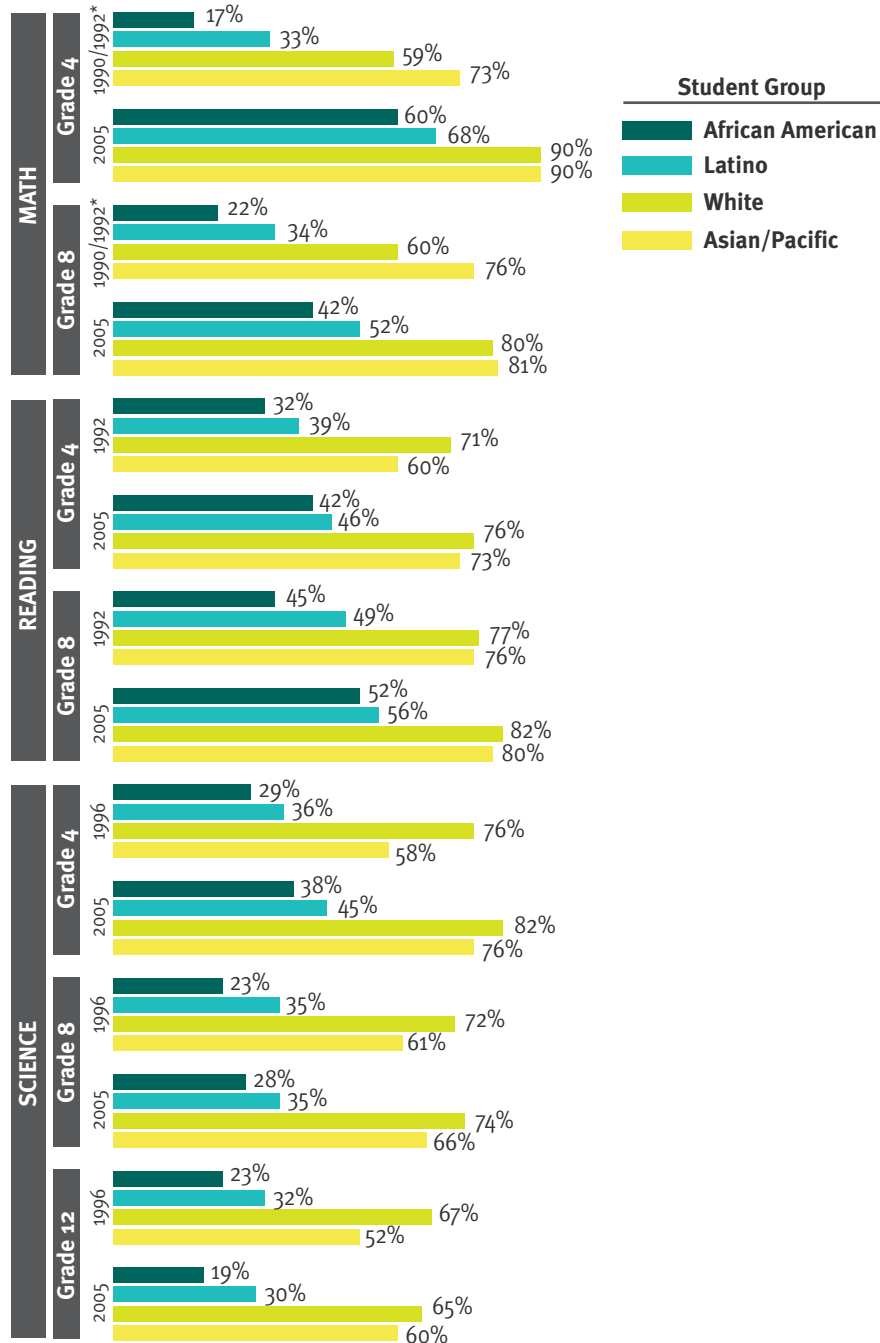
\*\* Results for grade 12 for the 2005 assessments in reading and math have not been released as of June 2006.

\*\*\* Scores are not significantly different from 1996 in a statistical sense.

Sources: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Math 2005 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2005), figure 1; Mathematics Highlights 2000; Reading 2005, figure 1; Reading Highlights 2002; and Science 2005, figures 4, 14, and 24.

➤ Although the NAEP scores of African American, Latino, and low-income students have gone up significantly since the 1990s in grades 4 and 8, wide gaps in test scores remain between racial/ethnic and income groups. This is partly because scores have gone up for all groups.

**Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above the Basic Level on NAEP by Race/Ethnicity and Subject**

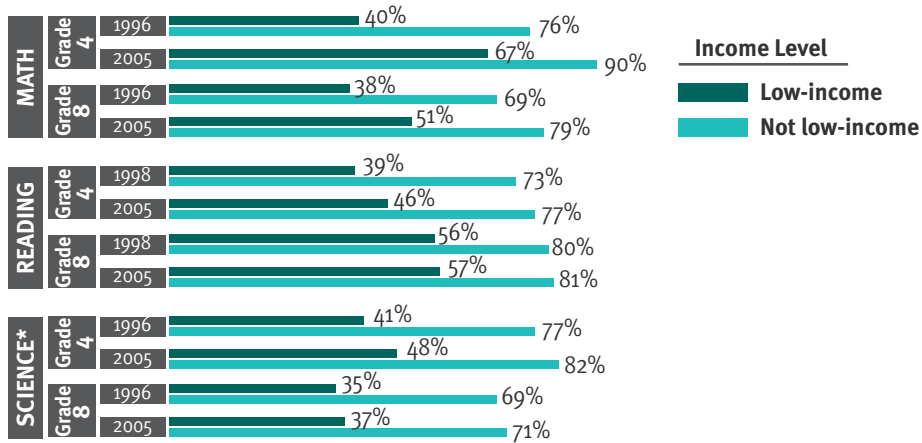


\* Math scores for Asian students are for 1992, the first year in which math scores were broken out for this racial/ethnic group.

Note: Results for grade 12 for the 2005 assessments in reading and math have not been released as of June 2006.

Sources: NAEP, Math 2005, figures 2 and 3; Reading 2005, figures 2 and 3; and NAEP 2005 assessment results—Science: Student group results: Race/ethnicity ([http://nationsreportcard.gov/science\\_2005](http://nationsreportcard.gov/science_2005)).

## Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above the Basic Level on NAEP by Income Level and Subject



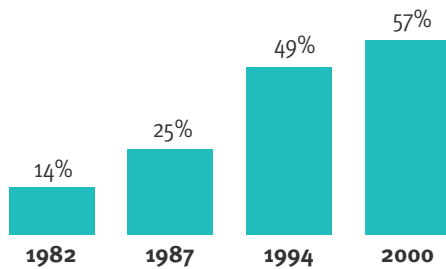
\*Although NAEP reported overall science scores for grade 12 students in 2005, the results were not broken out by income.

Note: Low-income students are those eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, while students who are not low-income are those ineligible for free or reduced-price lunches. NAEP did not begin to break out scores for income groups until the 1996 math assessments and the 1998 reading assessment.

Sources: NAEP, *Math 2005*, figures 6 and 7; NAEP, *Reading 2005*, figures 6 and 7; and NAEP 2005 assessment results—Science: Student group results: National school lunch ([http://nationsreportcard.gov/science\\_2005](http://nationsreportcard.gov/science_2005)).

### ➤ High school students are taking more challenging courses.

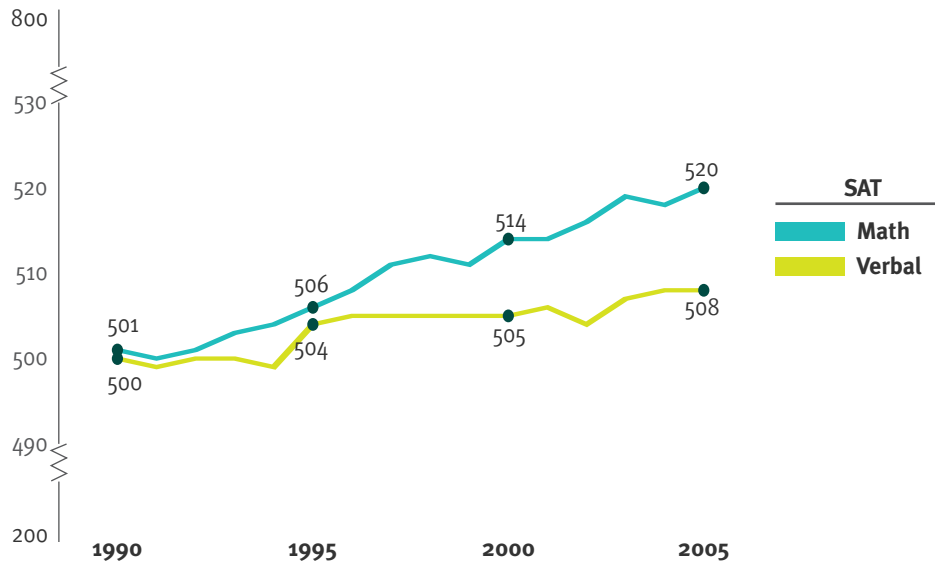
## Percentage of High School Graduates Completing a Core Academic Curriculum (Four years of English and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies)



Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 135.

➤ Scores on college entrance exams have increased modestly, in the case of the SAT, or held steady, in the case of the ACT. These trends have occurred even as the number of students taking these tests has reached all-time highs and the percentage of minority test-takers has grown rapidly.

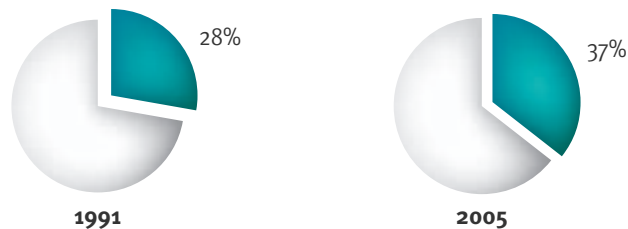
### Average SAT Scores (on a scale of 200–800)



Note: In 1995, the College Board, which administers the SAT, recentered the midpoint score on the test. However, the 1990 and 1995 SAT scores shown above were recomputed by the College Board using the new scale, so they are comparable to the other years.

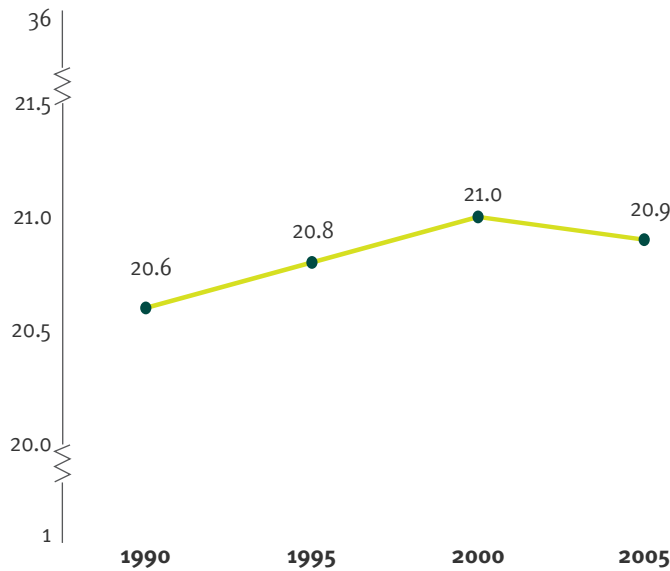
Source: College Board, 2005 College Bound Seniors ([www.collegeboard.com/about/news\\_info/cbsenior/yr2005/reports.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2005/reports.html)), table 2.

### Percentage of SAT Test-Takers Who Are Students of Color



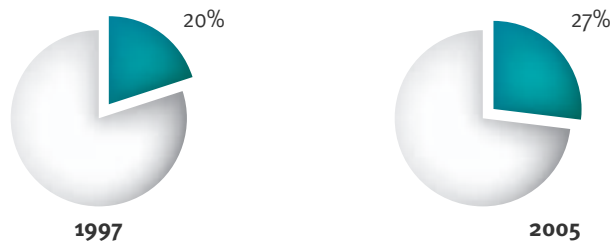
Source: College Board, 2005 College Bound Seniors, table 1.

### National Average ACT Composite Scores (on a scale of 1–36)



Source: ACT, 2005 ACT National and State Scores ([www.act.org/news/data/05/charts/text.html](http://www.act.org/news/data/05/charts/text.html)).

### Percentage of ACT Test-Takers Who Are Students of Color



Sources: ACT, 2005 National Score Report, table 11; and ACT, The 1997 ACT High School Profile Report, table 9.

► **U.S. students perform relatively well in reading literacy compared with their international peers, including students in highly industrialized countries. In addition, U.S. students do relatively well in math and science at the lower grades compared with students in other countries. But when older students are asked to apply what they have learned in math and science, they lag behind students in many industrialized countries.**

In the 2001 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> graders performed above the international average and significantly higher, on average, than students in about two-thirds of the participating countries. In a different study, a 2000 test of applied reading skills by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), U.S. 15-year-

olds performed as well as or better than most of their peers in participating countries and at the average for the member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), U.S. students in grades 4 and 8 performed well above the international average in science; only three nations did significantly better in grade 4, while seven countries did better in grade 8. On the TIMSS math test, U.S. students scored above the international average but still performed below their peers from several other nations.

U.S. performance was more disappointing on the 2003 PISA math assessment, which measured how well 15-year-olds apply math to practical situations. U.S. students scored 24<sup>th</sup> among the 29 member nations of the OECD.

### U.S. Performance on International Assessments of Reading, Mathematics, and Science Relative to Other Countries

Subject and Grade or Age	Number of Countries <sup>1</sup>	Number of Countries with Average Score Relative to the U.S.		
		Significantly Higher	Not Significantly Higher	Significantly Lower
<b>Reading</b>				
4 <sup>th</sup> graders (2001)	34	3	8	23
15-year-olds (2000)	30	3	20	7
<b>Mathematics</b>				
4 <sup>th</sup> graders (2003)	24	11	0	13
8 <sup>th</sup> graders (2003)	44	9	10	25
15-year-olds (2003)	38	23	4	11
<b>Science</b>				
4 <sup>th</sup> graders (2003)	24	3	5	16
8 <sup>th</sup> graders (2003)	44	7	5	32
15-year-olds (2003)	38	18	9	11

<sup>1</sup> Includes those countries with approved data appearing in reports. Total excludes the United States.

Source: NCES, *U.S. Student and Adult Performance on International Assessments of Educational Achievement: Findings from the Condition of Education 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006), table 10.

## ► Too many students, especially students of color, do not finish high school.

Collecting accurate data on high school dropout and graduation rates is difficult, in part because many states and school districts lack adequate systems for tracking what happens to students who leave a particular school. Estimates of the dropout rate vary significantly, depending on such factors as the following:

- Whether the data come from people’s self-reports of their educational attainment on national surveys like the census; from student enrollment, diploma, or transcript data; or from systems that track individual students through high school and beyond
- Which grade level is used as a starting point to track dropouts (for example, 9<sup>th</sup> grade or later)
- Whether young people who get a GED instead of a regular diploma are counted as graduates
- Whether only students who receive a diploma “on time” are counted as graduates or whether young people who take more time to graduate are also included

Several studies have spotlighted shortcomings in dropout data collected by the federal government, states, and school districts. Aware of the problems, the U.S. Department of Education and the National Governors Association are taking steps to improve federal and state data. In the meantime, studies that use different methods and data sources have reached widely varying conclusions about high school completion rates. For example, the table below shows the range of conclusions about high school completion rates reached by studies conducted by four different organizations: NCES (using Census Bureau data), the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), and the Urban Institute. Even the higher estimates of high school completion rates, however, suggest that too many U.S. students, especially students of color, do not complete high school.

### Range of High School Completion Rates (Lowest to Highest) from Four Different Studies

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Percentage Range and Sources</b>
All students	68% (Urban Institute) to 87% (NCES)
White	75% (Urban Institute) to 91% (NCES)
African American	50% (Urban Institute) to 86% (NCES)
Latino	52% (Manhattan Inst.) to 74% (EPI)

Note: The four studies cited used different methods and definitions to determine which students were high school graduates or completers.

Sources: NCES, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001* (Washington, DC: NCES, 2004), table 4; J. P. Greene & M. A. Winters, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991-2002* (New York: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2005); L. Mishel & J. Roy, *Rethinking High School Graduation Rates and Trends* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2005); and C. B. Swanson, *Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Education Policy Center, 2004).



# 6

## What Is the Public School Teaching Force Like?

➤ **Almost half of all public school teachers have advanced degrees, and the majority have more than 10 years of experience.**

**47%** Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers with a master’s degree or higher, 1999-2000

**58%** Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers with 10 or more years full-time teaching experience, 1999-2000

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 66.

The degrees held by middle and high school teachers, however, are not always in the main academic subject they teach.

### Percentage of Public School Teachers with an Undergraduate or Graduate Major and Certificate in the Main Subject They Teach, 1999-2000

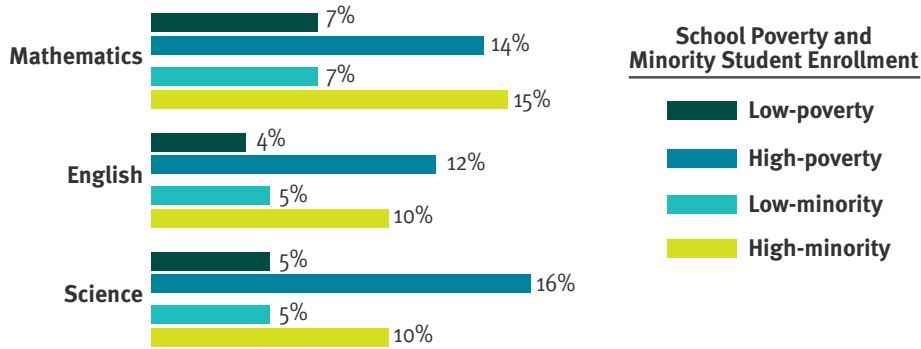
	<u>Math</u>	<u>Science</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Social science/history</u>
High school	79%	83%	81%	84%
Middle school	35%	51%	48%	59%

Source: NCES, *Qualifications of the Public School Teacher Workforce: Prevalence of Out-of-Field Teaching 1987-88 to 1999-2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2002), tables B-2 and B-3.

➤ **Students in high schools with high concentrations of low-income or minority students are more often taught by “out-of-field” or less experienced teachers than students in low-poverty or low-minority-enrollment schools.**

“Out of field” teachers are those who lack specific certification or a college major in the field they teach.

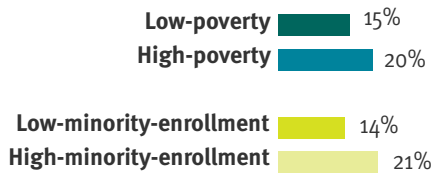
### Percentage of Public High School Students Taught by Out-of-Field Teachers By School Poverty and Minority Student Enrollment, 1999-2000



Note: High-poverty schools are those in which 75% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; in low-poverty schools, less than 10% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. High-minority schools are those in which 75% or more of the students are from racial/ethnic minority groups; in low-minority schools, less than 10% of the students are from minority groups.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2004*, indicator 24.

### Percentage of Full-Time Public School Teachers with Three Years' Experience or Less By School Poverty Concentration and Minority Enrollment, 1999-2000

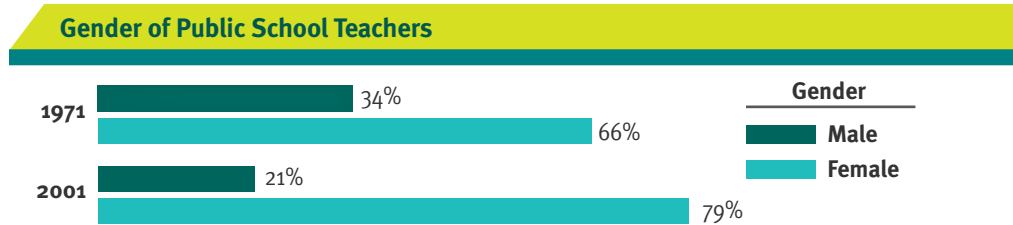


Note: High-poverty schools are those in which 75% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. For this table only, low-poverty schools are those in which less than 15% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. High-minority schools are those in which 75% or more of the students are from racial/ethnic minority groups; in low-minority schools, less than 10% of the students are from minority groups.

Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2003*, table 29-2.

➤ **The public school teaching force does not reflect the diversity of the student population. Nine out of 10 teachers are white, and almost 8 out of 10 are female.**

The percentage of teachers who are African American has declined since 1971. And the percentage of teachers who are men has fallen to its lowest level since 1961.



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: National Education Association, *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 2001-2002* (Washington, DC: NEA, 2003).

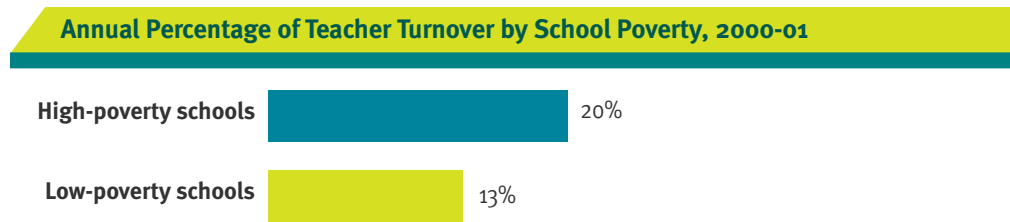
➤ **High rates of teachers changing schools and leaving the profession altogether are the main reasons for teacher shortages.**

### Percentage of New Teachers Who Leave Teaching in the Early Years of Their Career

**33%** Percentage of new teachers who leave teaching during the first three years of their career  
**46%** Percentage of new teachers who leave teaching during the first five years of their career

Source: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children*, 2003, figure 2.

Teacher turnover and attrition are worse in high-poverty schools.



Note: For this figure only, high-poverty schools are those in which 80% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, while low-poverty schools are those in which less than 10% of the students are eligible for subsidized lunches.

Source: *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children, 2003, figure 3.*

# 7

## What Other Services Do Public Schools Provide?

► In addition to educating K-12 students, public schools provide an array of services to meet society's needs.

The table below gives just some examples of the variety of non-instructional services and educational services beyond the K-12 range that schools provide.

**Percentage of Public Schools Offering Specific Services, 1999-2000**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Percentage of all schools</b>	<b>Percentage of elementary</b>	<b>Percentage of secondary</b>
Federal school lunch program	93%*		
Speech therapists		96%	83%
School nurses		81%	79%
School counselors		79%	98%
Psychologists		74%	67%
Extended day or before- or after-school daycare		47%	14%
Social workers		44%	41%
Medical health care services		38%	41%
Prekindergarten programs		35%	NA

\* Data on lunch programs are not broken out by elementary and secondary schools.

Sources: NCES, *The Condition of Education 2004*, table 28-1; NCES, *Schools and Staffing Survey 1999-2000*, tables 1.05, 1.06, and 1.07; and NCES, *Prekindergarten in U.S. Public Schools: 2000-2001* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2003), table 2.







**Center on Education Policy**  
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 522  
Washington, D.C. 20036

tel: 202.822.8065  
fax: 202.822.6008

e: [cep-dc@cep-dc.org](mailto:cep-dc@cep-dc.org)  
w: [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org)