

Executive Summary

The Condition of Education is a congressionally mandated compendium of education indicators that is updated yearly. Using the most recent data available (at the time this report was written) from the National Center for Education Statistics and other sources, the indicators show the enrollment levels, academic progress, educational attainment, financial status, and other characteristics of those people and institutions involved in the American educational endeavor. There are core indicators that are updated every year and other indicators that introduce new topics of interest to education systems, policymakers, researchers, and the public. The indicators are organized into four sections: preprimary, elementary, and secondary education; postsecondary education; population characteristics and economic outcomes; and international comparisons. Some of the key findings from selected indicators are summarized below.

In fall 2017, some 50.7 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (prekindergarten [preK] through grade 12). Total public school enrollment in preK through grade 12 is projected to increase to 51.1 million students (a 1 percent increase) by 2029, with changes across states ranging from an increase of 16 percent in North Dakota to a decrease of 12 percent in New Mexico. See [Public School Enrollment](#).

A public charter school is a publicly funded school that is typically governed under a legislative contract—a charter—with the state, the district, or another entity. Between fall 2000 and fall 2017, overall public charter school enrollment increased from 0.4 million to 3.1 million. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 1 to 6 percent. See [Public Charter School Enrollment](#).

In fall 2017, some 5.7 million students were enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools. Private schools are generally supported with private funds. The percentage of elementary and secondary students who were enrolled in private schools decreased from 11 percent (6.0 million) in fall 1999 to 10 percent (5.7 million) in fall 2017. See [Private School Enrollment](#).

The percentage of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program serves as a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school. In fall 2017, the percentages of students who attended high-poverty public schools were highest for Black and Hispanic students (45 percent each), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native students (41 percent). The percentage of

students who attended high-poverty public schools was lowest for White students (8 percent). See [Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch](#).

It has become increasingly important for students of all ages to be able to access and use the Internet for learning. This topic became especially salient as schools moved to remote learning in response to COVID-19 concerns at the start of 2020. In 2018, some 94 percent of 3- to 18-year-olds had home internet access: 88 percent had access through a computer, and 6 percent had access only through a smartphone. The remaining 6 percent had no internet access at home. See [Children's Internet Access at Home](#).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses U.S. public and private school student performance in a variety of subjects, including reading, mathematics, and science, at grades 4, 8, and 12. Reading and mathematics NAEP assessments at grades 4 and 8 are legislatively mandated to occur every 2 years. At grade 4, the average NAEP reading score in 2019 (220) was lower than the score in 2017 (222), when the assessment was last administered, but it was higher than the score in 1992 (217). Similarly, at grade 8, the average reading score in 2019 (263) was lower than the score in 2017 (267), but it was higher than the score in 1992 (260). See [Reading Performance](#).

At grade 4, the average NAEP mathematics score in 2019 (241) was higher than the scores in both 2017 (240), when the assessment was last administered, and 1990 (213). At grade 8, the average mathematics score in 2019 (282) was lower than the score in 2017 (283), but it was higher than the score in 1990 (263). See [Mathematics Performance](#). Data for grade 12 in 2019 were not available in time for publication.

In addition to NAEP, the United States participates at the national level in several international assessment programs. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), measures the performance of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science literacy and provides an opportunity to compare U.S. students' performance with that of their international peers. In 2018, there were 8 education systems with higher average reading literacy scores for 15-year-olds than the United States, 30 with higher mathematics literacy scores, and 11 with higher science literacy scores. The U.S. average reading score (505) and average science score (502) were higher than the

OECD average scores of 487 and 489, respectively. The U.S. average mathematics score (478) was lower than the OECD average score (489). See [International Comparisons: Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy of 15-Year-Old Students](#).

Another critical outcome measure of interest is graduation rates for K–12 students. *The Condition of Education* reports the percentage of U.S. public high school students who graduate on time, as measured by the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). State education agencies identify the “cohort” of first-time ninth graders in a particular school year, and this cohort is then adjusted by adding or subtracting students who transfer in or out. The ACGR is the percentage of students in this adjusted cohort who graduate within 4 years with a regular high school diploma. In 2017–18, the U.S. average ACGR for public high school students was 85 percent; this rate was unchanged from the prior school year, and the rate for both school years was the highest rate since ACGR was first measured in 2010–11. See [Public High School Graduation Rates](#). *The Condition of Education* also contains information on dropouts in the United States. The overall status dropout rate decreased from 9.7 percent in 2006 to 5.3 percent in 2018. See [Status Dropout Rates](#).

One of the paths high school graduates may take to prepare for their future is to enroll in some form of postsecondary education. The overall college enrollment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds at undergraduate or graduate institutions increased from 35 percent in 2000 to 41 percent in 2018. In 2018, the college enrollment rate was higher for 18- to 24-year-olds who were Asian (59 percent) than for those who were White (42 percent), Black (37 percent), and Hispanic (36 percent). See [College Enrollment Rates](#).

Postsecondary educational activities can have strong relationships with long-term life outcomes. For 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round in 2018, higher educational attainment was associated with higher median earnings. This pattern was consistent from 2000 through 2018. In 2018, the median earnings of 25- to 34-year-olds with a master’s or higher degree (\$65,000) were 19 percent higher than the earnings of those with a bachelor’s degree (\$54,700), and the median earnings of those with a bachelor’s degree were 57 percent higher than the earnings of high school completers (\$34,900). See [Annual Earnings](#). Similar to the earnings pattern, the employment rate in 2019 was higher for 25- to 34-year-olds with higher levels of educational attainment than for those with lower levels of educational attainment. See [Employment and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment](#).

In 2017–18, the average net price of attendance (total cost minus grant and scholarship aid) for first-time, full-time undergraduate students attending 4-year institutions was \$13,700 at public institutions, compared with \$27,000 at private nonprofit institutions and \$22,100 at private for-profit institutions (in constant 2018–19 dollars). See [Price of Attending an Undergraduate Institution](#).

In 2017–18, degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States spent \$604 billion (in current dollars). In 2017–18, instruction expenses per full-time-equivalent (FTE) student (in constant 2018–19 dollars) was the largest expense category at public institutions (\$10,870) and private nonprofit institutions (\$18,710). At private for-profit institutions, the combined category of academic support, student services, and institutional support expenses was the largest category of expenses per FTE student (\$10,480). See [Postsecondary Institution Expenses](#).

The Condition of Education also reports on the operational activities of education systems by providing financial information such as education revenue sources and educational expenditures. In 2016–17, elementary and secondary public school revenues totaled \$736 billion (in constant 2018–19 dollars). Since 2000–01, public school revenues have increased by 27 percent, while public school enrollment has increased by 7 percent. The majority of these revenues come from state and local sources. Of the total elementary and secondary public school revenues, states provided \$346 billion (47 percent), local sources provided \$330 billion (45 percent), and federal sources provided \$60 billion (8 percent). While these numbers represent the national averages, revenue and source distribution varied by state. See [Public School Revenue Sources](#).

The other side of the education finance system is expenditures. In 2016–17, public schools spent \$12,794 per pupil on current expenditures (in constant 2018–19 dollars), a category that includes salaries, employee benefits, purchased services, and supplies. Current expenditures per pupil were 20 percent higher in 2016–17 than in 2000–01, after adjusting for inflation. On a national basis in 2016–17, approximately 80 percent of current expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools were for salaries and benefits for staff. See [Public School Expenditures](#).

This summary highlights some of the interesting findings within *The Condition of Education 2020*. The report includes more detail and additional topics. The content of the report can be found on [The Condition of Education website](#).