

## Commissioner's Statement

### INTRODUCTION

Reliable data are critical in guiding efforts to improve education in America. When the original U.S. Department of Education was created in 1867, the law stated that it should “gather statistics and facts on the condition and progress of education in the United States and Territories.” The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) currently carries out this mission for the U.S. Department of Education through such work as *The Condition of Education*, a mandated report submitted to Congress on June 1<sup>st</sup> every year.

Drawing on numerous data sources, this annual report presents indicators of important developments and trends in American education. Recurrent themes underscored by the indicators include participation and persistence in education, student performance and other outcomes, the environment for learning, and societal support for education. In addition, this year's special analyses focus on private elementary and secondary schools and on nontraditional undergraduates (such as those who are financially independent or attend part time).

### PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Enrollments in the United States are growing at all levels of education, but for different reasons. At the early childhood level, growth is due to higher rates of enrollment; that is, larger percentages of 3- to 5-year-old children are enrolling in preschool, nursery school, or other early childhood education programs. At the elementary and secondary levels, growth is due to demographic changes, which are also making the student body more diverse. At the postsecondary level, high enrollment rates and population growth are combining to swell enrollments.

- Enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds in early childhood education programs were higher in 2001 than in 1991. Black

and White children enroll in early childhood education programs at higher rates than Hispanic children (*indicator 1*).

- Public elementary and secondary enrollment is projected to reach 47.4 million in 2002, and to increase through 2005, before decreasing slowly. The West will experience most of this increase (*indicator 2*).
- Hispanic students are the fastest growing student group in the nation's elementary and secondary schools (*indicator 3*).
- The school-age poverty rate decreased between 1994 and 2001 (*indicator 4*).
- In a change from the enrollment patterns of the 1980s and 1990s, undergraduate enrollment during this decade is projected to increase at a faster rate in 4-year institutions than in 2-year institutions. Women's undergraduate enrollment is expected to continue increasing at a faster rate than men's (*indicator 5*).
- Graduate and first-professional enrollments grew rapidly during the 1970s, slowed or declined in the 1980s, and then began to increase again in the 1990s (*indicator 6*).

### LEARNER OUTCOMES

At the elementary and secondary levels, students are performing better in some areas, but their performance has not changed or has declined in others. Students' performance in mathematics has improved somewhat over the past decade. Students' reading performance, on the other hand, remains unchanged. In addition, issues of equal educational opportunity and international competitiveness remain.

- Fourth-grade reading performance did not change significantly between 1992 and 2000. In each assessment year, female stu-

## Commissioner's Statement

Continued

- dents scored higher than their male peers (*indicator 7*).
- The average reading scores of White students are higher than those of Black students at ages 9, 13, and 17. While differences in performance decreased between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, the gaps have remained relatively stable or increased slightly since then (*indicator 8*).
  - U.S. 15-year-olds performed at the international average of 27 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in reading literacy in 2000, scoring below the average of 3 countries (Canada, Finland, and New Zealand) and above the average of 4 OECD countries (Greece, Portugal, Luxembourg, and Mexico) (*indicator 9*).
  - The mathematics performance of 4<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders increased steadily from 1990 to 2000, while the performance of 12<sup>th</sup>-graders increased from 1990 to 1996 but then declined between 1996 and 2000 (*indicator 10*).
  - Compared with students in low-poverty public schools, students in high-poverty public schools had lower achievement scores in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade mathematics in 2000 (*indicator 11*).
  - The scores of both 4<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders in science did not change significantly between 1996 and 2000, while 12<sup>th</sup>-graders' scores declined slightly (*indicator 12*).
  - In 1999, U.S. 8<sup>th</sup>-graders exceeded the international average of 38 countries in mathematics and science, but performed lower than their peers in 14 countries (*indicator 13*).
  - In 1999, U.S. 9<sup>th</sup>-graders scored significantly higher than the international average of 28 countries in overall civic knowledge and outperformed students in all other participating countries in civic skills (*indicator 15*).
  - The better educated a person is, the more likely that person is to report being in "very good" or "excellent" health, regardless of income (*indicator 14*).
  - The median earnings of young adults with at least a bachelor's degree increased over the past 20 years relative to their counterparts who have no more than a high school diploma (*indicator 16*).

### STUDENT EFFORT AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

The effort students devote to their studies and the choices they make as they proceed through the educational system contribute to their academic success. Students' attendance, interest, and attention to their studies affect how well they perform at each level and their access to and success at the next level.

- More than half of students in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades missed 1 or more days of school in a 4-week period in spring 2000 due to illness, skipping school, or other reasons. Moreover, about 13–14 percent of 8<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup>-graders were absent more than 5 days—or one-fourth of all school days—in this period (*indicator 17*).
- Over the past two decades, 12<sup>th</sup>-graders have reported a declining interest in school, while the effort they apply to their schoolwork has generally shown no measurable change over the past decade (*indicator 18*).
- One indicator of the failure to persist in school is the "status dropout rate" (i.e., the percentage of young people who have

## Commissioner's Statement

Continued

not completed high school and are not enrolled in school). Status dropout rates for Whites and Blacks ages 16–24 have declined since 1972, but have remained relatively stable since the early 1990s. The rates for Hispanic youths have not decreased and remain higher than those for other racial/ethnic groups (*indicator 19*).

- Rates of immediate college enrollment upon completing high school have increased since 1972. Rates of immediate enrollment for females have increased faster than those for males (*indicator 20*).
- College enrollment rates of high school graduates vary with family income, but among those who were college qualified and took the steps necessary for admission, low-income students were as likely as middle-income students to enroll in a 4-year institution (*indicator 21*).
- About one-third of young people at risk for low educational attainment enrolled in a 4-year college within 2 years of their high school graduation despite being at risk (*indicator 22*).
- Rigorous academic preparation in high school narrowed the gap in postsecondary persistence between students whose parents did not go to college and their peers who have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (*indicator 23*).
- Among low- and middle-income students at public 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions, recipients of Pell Grants persisted at the same rate as nonrecipients despite being less prepared academically and more likely to have certain risk factors (*indicator 24*).
- The percentages of 25- to 29-year-olds who have completed high school, some college, or a bachelor's degree or higher have increased since 1971, but disparities in attainment among racial/ethnic groups remain (*indicator 25*).

### CONTEXTS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Student performance in elementary and secondary schools is shaped by student coursework, the quality of the teaching staff, and the climate for learning within schools.

- The percentage of high school graduates who completed advanced coursework in science and mathematics in high school increased between 1982 and 1998 (*indicator 26*).
- Asian/Pacific Islanders and Whites completed advanced levels of science and mathematics coursework in high school at higher rates than did their peers in other racial/ethnic groups. Private school graduates also completed such coursework at higher rates than did public school graduates (*indicator 27*).
- The rates at which students of almost all disability types are being served in regular classrooms have increased over the past decade (*indicator 28*).
- Both the proportion of children enrolled in public schools chosen by their parents and the proportion enrolled in private, not church-related schools increased between 1993 and 1999. Differences in parental choice of schools are related to race/ethnicity, household income, and region. The percentage of children in grades 3–12 with parents who reported they were “very satisfied” with their children’s school decreased from 56 percent to 53 percent in 1999 (*indicator 29*).
- In 2000–2001, there were 1,993 public charter schools. Public charter schools

# Commissioner's Statement

## Continued

were more likely than traditional public schools to be located in urban settings, to enroll a higher proportion of Black and Hispanic students, and to employ teachers with fewer years of teaching experience (*indicator 30*).

- College students with low college entrance examination scores are more likely than students with high scores to prepare to become teachers and to become teachers upon graduation. They are also more likely than their high-scoring peers to remain in the teaching profession (*indicator 31*).
- About half of secondary school teachers majored in an academic subject, and about 4 out of 10 majored in an academic subject area in education (*indicator 32*).
- Teachers who participated in more than 8 hours of professional development activity in a single area of development per year were more likely than teachers who participated in 1–8 hours to report that the activity improved their teaching “a lot.” However, most teachers participated in such an activity only 1–8 hours (*indicator 33*).
- Victimization affects all types of students. However, students who reported gangs or guns at their schools were more likely to report victimization than students who did not report these conditions (*indicator 34*).

### SPECIAL FOCUS ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS

One of this year's special analyses examines private schools, how they differ by type, and how they differ from public schools (*Private Schools: A Brief Portrait*).

Comparisons between the public and private sectors—and within the private sector—of el-

ementary, secondary, and combined schools suggest that these schools vary greatly in their size, composition, climate, and goals. In 1999–2000, private schools accounted for 24 percent of all K–12 schools, 10 percent of all students, and 12 percent of all full-time-equivalent teachers. Private schools have maintained their share of total school enrollments throughout recent decades at roughly 10–11 percent.

- Private schools are smaller and the sector as a whole has lower proportions of Black and Hispanic students than the public school sector. The proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander students in the public sector is not measurably different from that in the private sector. Catholic schools tend to be larger and to enroll more minority students than other private schools.
- Principals at the three main types of private schools (Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian) differed in their top priorities for their school; overall, however, private school principals most often included academic excellence and religious development, as well as basic literacy skills in core areas like reading and mathematics, and self-discipline. Public school principals most often cited basic literacy skills and academic excellence, as well as self-discipline.
- Teachers in private schools reported that they have wide latitude in deciding how and what to teach, as well as a fairly strong influence on many school policies. Nonsectarian schools, in particular, may give teachers considerable authority to shape their course content and materials. In contrast to their counterparts in public schools, the majority of teachers in the three types of private schools—particularly teachers in non-Catholic religious schools—strongly agreed with positive statements

## Commissioner's Statement

Continued

about staff cooperation and school management.

- Private high schools require more academic courses for graduation, and their graduates are more likely than graduates of public schools to have completed advanced courses in mathematics, science, and foreign language.
- Private school students also score higher, on average, on achievement tests in reading, mathematics, and science than do their public school counterparts.
- Students who attended private schools in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1988 were twice as likely as those who attended public schools to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher by their mid-20s.

### CONTEXTS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The postsecondary education system encompasses various types of institutions, both public and private. Although issues of student access, persistence, and attainment have been predominant concerns in postsecondary education, the contexts in which postsecondary education takes place matter as well. The diversity of the undergraduate and graduate populations, the various educational missions and learning environments of colleges and universities, the courses that students take, and the ways in which colleges and universities use faculty and other resources all are important aspects of the contexts of postsecondary education.

- Undergraduates are diverse in their demographic, enrollment, and employment characteristics. Minority students represented nearly a third of all undergraduates in 1999–2000, up from about a quarter in 1989–90. The percentage of students working full time during the school

year rose 7 percentage points during this period, and the percentage not working rose 2 points (*indicator 35*).

- Undergraduates who worked but identified themselves primarily as students were more likely to report that working negatively affected their academic performance as the number of hours worked per week increased (*indicator 37*).
- Despite the proliferation of distance education offerings during the 1990s, only 8 percent of undergraduates and 12 percent of master's students enrolled in these classes in 1999–2000 (*indicator 38*).
- Over the past decade, the number of associate's degrees awarded has increased at a faster rate than the number of bachelor's degrees (*indicator 36*).
- During the 1990s, women advanced in their status as faculty members in several areas, including salary. At the end of the decade, however, a gap in salary between male and female faculty remained (*indicator 39*).

### SPECIAL FOCUS ON NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATES

A second special analysis this year examines the enrollment of nontraditional students in postsecondary education in contrast to “traditional” students (*Nontraditional Undergraduates*).

The undergraduate population today is quite different than it was over a generation ago in 1970. Indeed, the “traditional” postsecondary student—one who is dependent, attends full time until completing a bachelor's degree, and works no more than part time while enrolled—is no longer typical.

## Commissioner's Statement

Continued

- Fully three-quarters of all undergraduates in 1999–2000 had at least one “nontraditional” characteristic (i.e., they delayed their enrollment in postsecondary education, attended part time for at least part of the academic year, worked full time while enrolled, were considered financially independent for purposes of determining financial aid eligibility, had dependents other than a spouse, were single parents, or did not have a high school diploma).
  - The most highly nontraditional students (those with four or more nontraditional characteristics) were concentrated in public 2-year institutions, with about two-thirds enrolled in such institutions.
  - Two-thirds of highly nontraditional students perceived their primary role to be that of an employee, suggesting that school did not have first claim on their time and energy. Among highly nontraditional students who considered themselves primarily students, many found that work limited their class and scheduling options.
  - Among beginning postsecondary students seeking associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, those with any nontraditional characteristics were more likely than traditional students to leave without earning a degree. They were at greater risk than traditional students of dropping out in their first year.
- were “very satisfied” with their child’s school, their child’s teachers, the school’s academic standards, and the school’s order and discipline (*indicator 40*).
  - In 1998, U.S. expenditures on primary and secondary education ranked high compared with the expenditures of other countries. U.S. spending on postsecondary education ranked highest among advanced industrialized countries (*indicator 41*).
  - At the elementary and secondary levels, public revenue raised for education per student has increased since the mid-1970s, while total public revenue expended as a percentage of total personal income has generally decreased. At the postsecondary level, public revenue per student has fluctuated within a narrow band since the mid-1970s, while total public revenue as a percentage of total personal income has generally declined (*indicator 42*).
  - Traditional differences in the proportion of local funding to state and federal funding generally persist across the United States, though a substantial decrease in local funding occurred in the Midwest, where local funding dropped from 55 percent in 1993–94 to 48 percent in 1994–95. This decrease was offset by a large increase in state funding (*indicator 43*).
  - The “net price” of college attendance—the amount that students pay with their own or borrowed funds after taking grants received into account—varies by the type of institution that students attend and by family income. In 1999–2000, the average net price of college attendance ranged from \$7,600 at public 2-year institutions to \$17,800 at private not-for-profit 4-year institutions (*indicator 44*).

### SOCIETAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Society and its members—families, individuals, employers, and governmental and private organizations—provide support for education in various ways, such as spending time on learning activities, providing encouragement to learners, and investing money in education.

- In 1999, half of all children in grades 3–12 had parents who reported that they

## Commissioner's Statement

Continued

### CONCLUSION

Trends in the condition of American education show a mixed picture. While high school graduates have increased their enrollment in more advanced courses since the early 1980s, the performance of 12<sup>th</sup>-graders in mathematics and science has stagnated in recent years. International comparisons suggest that U.S. 9<sup>th</sup>-graders have relatively good civic knowledge, and even better civic skills, but that the reading literacy scores of U.S. 15-year-olds are similar to the international average among advanced industrialized countries. International comparisons in mathematics and science also show mixed results, with U.S. 8<sup>th</sup>-graders performing above the international average of 38 countries but below the average of their counterparts in 14 countries.

In addition, gaps persist in academic performance and educational participation among different racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, and school sectors. The gaps between the average reading scores of White and Black students ages 9, 13, and 17 have remained stable or increased since the late 1980s. In mathematics, high poverty levels in schools are associated with low student achievement in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. While the percentages of dropouts in the population of White and Black young adults have declined, the percentage for Hispanics has remained higher than that of other groups and remains high. Finally, private school students in general scored higher than public school students in reading, mathematics, and science.

A growing and increasingly diverse population of elementary and secondary students continues to heighten the challenge of providing high-quality instruction and equal educational opportunities. In addition, school absence among middle and high school students and the declining academic interest of high school seniors are just a few of the challenges that educators face. At the postsecondary level, institutions must prepare for the record numbers of enrollments expected over the next decades.

NCES produces an array of reports each month on findings about the U.S. education system. *The Condition of Education* represents the culmination of a yearlong project. In the coming months, many other reports and surveys informing us about education will be released, including studies of elementary and secondary school staffing, the participation of children in before- and after-school programs, a follow-up look at the status of the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade class of 1988 14 years later, school crime, early childhood education, full- and half-day kindergarten, children's computer use at home and at school, and adult learning. As with the indicators presented in this volume, these surveys and reports will continue to inform Americans about the condition of education.



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