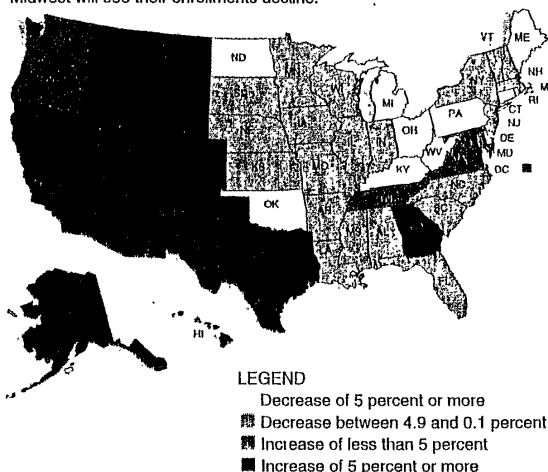


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East Is Least

While K-12 enrollment will set another record this fall, federal officials see it peaking and then declining slightly by 2011. Enrollment will continue to grow in the West, they estimate, but most states in the Northeast and Midwest will see their enrollments decline.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education.

K-12 Enrollment Sets Another Record, But Dip by 2011 Forecast

BY JOETTA L. SACK

School enrollment will again reach a record high, as 53.1 million students take their seats in American classrooms this fall.

It's the sixth consecutive record-breaking year, according to the U.S. Department of Education, which released its annual report, "Projections of Education Statistics," last month. The report also says that college enrollment reached a new height for the fourth year in a row.

The report tracks both public and private schools and gives educators and policymakers an idea of what to expect for the next 10 years. The latest edition projects that K-12 enrollments will rise to about 53.4 million in 2005, then dip slightly to about 53 million in 2011, for an overall increase of less than 1 percent from the 52.9 million level in 1999.

But enrollment trends will not be consistent across the country, the report shows. Most Western states will continue to see fast-growing enrollments, with an increase of 5 percent or more from 1999 to 2011. Meanwhile, many Northeastern and Midwestern states will see their enrollments plateau or decline slightly.

While all grade levels have seen slight increases in enrollment over the past decade, high school enrollments showed the largest increases, climbing from 12.5 million in 1990 to 14.8 million in 2000. They are expected to rise to a record 15.9 million in 2006, then decrease slightly. Those numbers spotlight an unusually large generation—the children of baby boomers—as they make their way through school.

The department anticipates

that this school year, 2.8 million students will graduate from public and private high schools, a number that will swell to about 3.1 million by 2010. That growth will in turn lead to a steady enrollment rise at colleges and universities over the next decade.

A record 15.3 million students will enter higher-education institutions this fall. Within 10 years, college growth is expected to rise about 16 percent to 17.7 million students.

'Plateaus' Welcomed

More teachers will be needed to serve higher enrollments. Currently, 3.3 million teachers are employed by U.S. schools; that number is expected to increase by about 10 percent, to 3.65 million, in 10 years.

Public school expenditures for this school year are expected to total about \$354 billion, at an average of \$7,487 for each student.

The report projects an increase in inflation-adjusted spending from the 1998-99 school year to the 2010-11 school year. It estimates that expenditures, in constant dollars, will rise by between 29 percent and 40 percent in that time.

Reggie Felton, the director of federal relations for the National School Boards Association, said the predictions were good news.

"Schools haven't been able to keep up with the growth, so the schools seeing plateaus will welcome that," he said. "For those that continue to see increases, it will be difficult."

FOLLOW-UP: The report can be found online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2001083>