



Population Characteristics

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SCHOOL ENROLLMENT—SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS: OCTOBER 1974

(Advance report)

The total number of persons 3 to 34 years old enrolled in school in the fall of 1974 was 60.3 million students, 1.5 percent above the 1973 level of 59.4 million. Most of the increase occurred in nursery school and college enrollment with changes of about 280,000 and 650,000, respectively. Elementary school enrollment (grades 1 through 8) has declined since the early 1970's, reflecting decreases in the population of elementary school age rather than changes in proportions enrolled. Nearly all persons of elementary school age are enrolled in school because of compulsory attendance laws for persons 6 to 15 years old (see table 2). The number of births has been decreasing since the early 1960's, resulting in smaller cohorts entering elementary school each year. The fertility decline has not yet affected high school enrollment since these smaller cohorts have not reached high school age and it will not affect college enrollment until around 1980.

These results are based on the Current Population Survey conducted in October 1974 by the Bureau of the Census; the figures are for the civilian noninstitutional population.

Elementary and pre-primary enrollment. Nursery school attendance was higher than 10 years ago despite the decreases in births. Between 1964 and 1974 enrollment in nursery school tripled from about 470,000 to 1.6 million. During that time the population of 3- and 4-year-olds decreased from 8.4 to 7.0

million, but the proportion enrolled in school increased from 10 percent to 29 percent of the age group (table 2). In the same 10-year period, kindergarten attendance increased by 15 percent from 2.8 to 3.3 million. Among 5-year-olds, 70 percent were enrolled in school in 1964 and 90 percent in 1974.

Most formal education now takes place in public schools, but about three-fourths of nursery school students are enrolled in private schools. Although private elementary school enrollment has not changed significantly in the last year, the number of children attending private elementary schools has decreased in the last 10 years by 1.7 million. Enrollment in private schools declined from 15 percent to 10 percent of the total elementary enrollment. Total enrollment in elementary school was about the same in 1974 as in 1964.

College enrollment. College enrollment for persons 14 to 34 years old reached a new high of 8.8 million persons in 1974, about 8 percent higher than in 1973. The substantial increase in college enrollment in the past year occurred mainly among females, older students and blacks; the increases took place in public colleges—private college enrollment did not change.

Several major changes have occurred in the college population since 1970. The number of women college students increased by 30 percent since that year;

whereas men have increased by only about 12 percent. In fact, the increase in the number of women in college accounted for about 63 percent of the increase in college enrollment in the past 4 years. The proportion of the college student population that was female increased to 44 percent in 1974 compared with 41 percent in 1970. This continues a trend toward a greater proportion of female college students during the past 20 years.

College enrollment for blacks has also increased substantially since 1970. There were about 300,000 more Negro college students enrolled in college in 1974 than in 1970, a 56 percent increase in 4 years, and a 250 percent increase in 10 years (see table 3). The increase in black college enrollment has resulted in an increase in their proportion of all college students from 5 percent in 1964 to 7 percent in 1970 and 9 percent in 1974. About 12 percent of all persons 18 to 21 years old are black, thus blacks still represent a smaller proportion of college students than of the total population. About 350,000 persons of Spanish origin were enrolled in college during 1974, about 4 percent of the college population.

College students were more likely to be attending part time in 1974 than in 1970. During the 1960's, approximately 78 percent of all students were attending full time; however, in 1974 the proportion declined to 72 percent as part-time enrollment increased 50 percent and full-time enrollment increased by 10 percent since 1970. The increase in the number of part-time college students is due to a large increase in the number of persons 25 years old or over attending

college in the past few years.¹ A greater proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds were enrolled in college in 1974 than at any time during the past 10 years. The proportion of persons 18 to 24 years old attending college has remained about the same, or declined slightly, during the past 4 years. Since the fall of 1970, the number of 18 to 24 year old college students increased by about 9 percent while enrollment for persons 25 to 34 years old increased by 63 percent. Thus the fall 1974 college population was older and more likely to be enrolled part time than in the 1960's.

Enrollment figures have been collected on persons 35 years old and over since 1972. The number of persons 35 years old and over enrolled in college increased by 30 percent since that time to about 1 million students in the fall 1974. About 80 percent of persons of this age in college were attending part time. This rapid increase in enrollment among older persons may be due to a recognized need for retraining or to recruitment efforts of colleges, and perhaps to the recent decline in family size.

Since the figures presented in this report are based on sample data, they may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete census. The sampling variation may be relatively large where the numbers shown are small. A more complete statement on the variability due to sampling, as well as more detailed information will be issued in a later report in this series.

¹About 17 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were attending college part time while 63 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds were attending part time.