

Highlights from *The Condition of Education 2004*

The Condition of Education 2004, the latest edition of NCES's annual congressionally mandated progress reports, conveys current information on 38 indicators that cover all aspects of U.S. education, including trends in enrollments, student achievement, dropout rates, degree attainment, long-term outcomes of education, and education financing. Here are some highlights from this year's edition.

Paying for college

This year's special analysis examines recent changes in the ways that families pay for the college education of full-time, dependent undergraduates. According to *Paying for College, Changes Between 1990 and 2000 for Full-Time Dependent Undergraduate*, college prices and financial aid both increased during the 1990s. During the 1990s, increases in tuition and fees outpaced both inflation and growth in the median family income. The same period saw an increase in the percentage of full-time, dependent undergraduates who received financial aid (consisting primarily of grants, student loans, or both).

The analysis shows that between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of full-time dependent undergraduates receiving aid in the form of grants increased from 45 to 57 percent. Because grant aid is not repaid, it reduces the price to attend college. However, the growth in grant aid was not enough to fully offset price increases. Use of student loans also increased during this period, with the percentage of borrowers among full-time, dependent undergraduates rising from 30 to 45 percent. The growth in grant and loan aid was enough to offset or exceed price increases except for students in the highest income groups attending 2- and 4-year public institutions. Financial aid increases occurred partly because the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act broadened eligibility for need-based aid, raised loan limits, and made unsubsidized loans available to students regardless of need. In addition, states and institutions increased their grant aid.

Elementary/secondary education enrollments

The Condition of Education provides a picture of both progress and ongoing challenges in U.S. education. On the topic of participation in elementary and secondary education, enrollments are on the increase as a result of rising immigration and the baby boom echo. Many public schools are offering prekindergarten programs as well; in 2000–01, 35 percent of public elementary schools offered such programs, and over 800,000 children participated. Thirteen percent of public elementary schools had full-day programs, 19 percent had half-

day programs, and 3 percent had both. Between 1977 and 2001, kindergarten enrollments increased, with the majority of enrolled children shifting from half-day to full-day programs. A continuing challenge was reflected in the distribution of minority students in 2003, with about half of Black and Hispanic 4th-graders (compared with 5 percent of White 4th-graders) enrolled in schools where 75 percent or more of the students came from families living in poverty. Similarly, about 40 percent of Black and Hispanic students attended schools in which 90 percent or more of the students were minorities.

Student achievement

The success of our education system ultimately depends upon the academic achievement of *all* students. While students with multiple risk factors make considerable progress in reading and mathematics from the beginning of kindergarten through the 3rd grade, they start behind students with no risk factors and make less progress. Improvements have occurred in the performance of elementary and secondary students over the past decade, though not in all grades and all subjects. The reading performance of 8th-graders increased between 1992 and 2003, while no change occurred for 4th-graders. The writing performance of both 4th- and 8th-graders improved between 1998 and 2002, although no significant change was detected among 12th graders' writing. Between 1990 and 2003, the mathematics performance of 4th- and 8th-graders improved each time an assessment was administered (about every 4 years).

The success of our education system is also reflected in students' rates of progress toward the completion of high school and their engagement in further learning or the workforce. In 2003, 13 percent of all persons ages 16–24 were neither enrolled in school nor working. This was a decrease from 16 percent in 1986. During the same period, the percentage of poor youth who were neither enrolled in school nor working decreased more than the percentage of nonpoor youth. The annual rate of dropping out of high school declined during the 1970s and 1980s but remained unchanged for all income groups during the 1990s. Among students entering postsecondary education as freshmen in fall 2000, 28 percent were required to take some remedial coursework. Students who take any remedial coursework are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree or certificate than those who take none. Overall, bachelor's degree completion rates have remained steady over time; 53 percent earn a bachelor's degree within 5 years. However, the likelihood of still being enrolled for a bachelor's degree at the end of 5 years has increased. Women have earned more than half of all bachelor's degrees every year since 1981–82. They still trail men in certain fields but have made substantial gains in since 1970–71 and have taken the lead in some fields that were previously male-dominated.

Salient features of schooling

The Condition of Education also looks at salient features of the schooling process—including courses taken, teacher qualifications, choice of schools available to parents and families. The percentage of high school graduates who had completed advanced courses in science and mathematics increased between 1982 and 2000. In science, the increase was from 35 percent to 63 percent of graduates; in mathematics, the increase was from 26 percent to 45 percent of graduates. In 1999–2000, high school students in high-poverty and high-minority public schools were more often taught English, science, and mathematics by out-of-field teachers than their peers in low-poverty and low-minority schools. In middle schools, the difference was evident only in social studies where the students in low-minority schools were more likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher than those in high-minority schools.

Between 1993 and 2003, the percentage of students in grades 1–12 whose parents enrolled them in chosen (as opposed to assigned) public schools increased from 11 to 15 percent, while the percentage attending assigned public schools decreased from 80 to 74 percent. The percentage of students attending private schools also increased; this increase was, however, smaller than the increase in the percentage of students attending chosen public schools. The parents of 51 percent of students reported that they had the option of sending their child to a chosen public school. The parents of 24 percent of students said that they moved to a new neighborhood so that their children could attend a particular school.

Between 1991–92 and 2000–01, total expenditures per student enrolled in public elementary/secondary education increased by 25 percent in constant 2000–01 dollars, from \$6,950 in 1991–92 to \$8,700 in 2000–01. During the same period, current expenditures, which consist of total expenditures less capital expenditures, increased by 24 percent.

Postsecondary education

In the next 10 years, continued increases in undergraduate enrollments are projected, with enrollments rising faster in 4-year institutions compared with 2-year institutions, among full-time students compared with part-time students, and among women compared with men. The college courses in which students earn the most credits have remained relatively stable over the past three decades. For 1972, 1982, and 1992 high school graduates who went on to earn a bachelor's degree, 21 of the top 30 college courses were the same (these courses were in the areas of the humanities and languages, science and mathematics, social science, business, music performance, physical education, and student teaching). The number of course enrollments in distance education increased from 1.7 to 3.1 million between 1997–98 and 2000–01. About half of all

distance education course enrollments in 2000–01 were in 2-year public colleges.