

Commissioner's Statement

INTRODUCTION

To ensure reliable, accurate, and timely data, which are necessary to monitor the progress of U.S. education, Congress has mandated that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) produce an annual report, *The Condition of Education*. This year's report presents indicators of important developments and trends in U.S. education. These indicators focus on participation and persistence in education, student performance and other measures of achievement, the environment for learning, and resources for education.

This statement summarizes the main findings of the 43 indicators that appear in the five following sections. Each indicator discussed is referenced by its number (e.g., *indicator 1*) in the volume.

PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

As the U.S. population increases in size, so does enrollment at all levels of education. At the elementary and secondary levels, growth is due largely to the increase in the size of the school-age population. At the postsecondary level, both population growth and increasing enrollment rates help account for rising enrollments in undergraduate, graduate, and first-professional programs. The cohorts of learners have become more diverse, with students who are members of racial/ethnic minorities or who speak a language other than English at home making up an increasing proportion of the school-age population over time.

- Between 1970 and 2006, children ages 3–4 (typically preschool ages) experienced the largest increase in enrollment rates, from 20 to 56 percent, of any age group. Notable growth was also seen in the enrollment rates for those ages 18–24, the period when young adults are typically enrolled in or transitioning into postsecondary

education. For example, the overall enrollment rate increased from 48 to 65 percent for those ages 18–19, from 32 to 48 percent for those ages 20–21, and from 15 to 27 percent for those ages 22–24 (*indicator 1*).

- A greater percentage of children who were about 4 years old in 2005–06 were in a center-based setting as their primary type of early education and care (57 percent) than in other arrangements such as regular parental care (20 percent), home-based relative care (13 percent), home-based nonrelative care (8 percent), or multiple arrangements (2 percent). A smaller percentage of Hispanic children (49 percent) were in a center-based setting as their primary type of early education and care than their White, Black, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native peers (60 to 62 percent each). The percentage of children in a center-based setting increased as parents' highest level of education increased (*indicator 2*).
- In 2008, public elementary and secondary school enrollment in the United States is expected to approach about 49.8 million students: 34.9 million in prekindergarten through 8th grade and 14.9 million in grades 9 through 12. Total public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to set new enrollment records each year from 2008 through 2017, at which time it is expected to reach an estimated high of 54.1 million students. According to projections, the South is expected to experience the largest increase in enrollment of all regions in the country (*indicator 3*).
- From 1989 to 2001, private school enrollment in kindergarten through grade 12 increased from 4.8 to 5.3 million students; by 2005, enrollment had declined to

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5.1 million students. Overall, while the number of students enrolled in private schools was higher in 2005 than in 1989, the percentage of all students attending private schools declined from 11 to 9 percent. Along with the changing level of private school enrollment, the distribution of students across different types of private schools changed during this period. Roman Catholic schools continued to have the largest percentage of total private school enrollment, but the distribution of students shifted from Roman Catholic to other religious and nonsectarian private schools at both the elementary and secondary levels (*indicator 4*).

- The percentage of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in the nation's public schools increased from 22 percent in 1972 to 31 percent in 1986 to 43 percent in 2006. This increase in minority enrollment largely reflects the growth in the percentage of students who were Hispanic. In 2006, Hispanic students represented 20 percent of public school enrollment, up from 6 percent in 1972 and 11 percent in 1986. The distribution of minority students in public schools differed across regions of the country, with minority public school enrollment (55 percent) exceeding White enrollment (45 percent) in the West in 2006 (*indicator 5*).
- The percentage of school-age children (ages 5–17) whose parents had completed a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 19 to 35 percent between 1979 and 2006. During this period, the percentage of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher increased for White children (from 22 to 44 percent), Black children (from 5 to 21 percent), and Hispanic children (from 7 to 15 percent). In 2006, some 67 percent of school-age children were living in two-parent households, representing a decrease since 1979, although this percentage has remained relatively stable since 1995. A larger percentage of school-age children were living in poor households in 2006 than in 1979 (17 vs. 15 percent), but both percentages were lower than the high of 21 percent in 1995 (*indicator 6*).
- Between 1979 and 2006, the number of school-age children (ages 5–17) who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 10.8 million, or from 9 to 20 percent of the population in this age range. Among these children, the percentage who spoke English with difficulty increased from 3 to 6 percent between 1979 and 2000, but this percentage did not change measurably between 2000 and 2006 (remained between 5 and 6 percent). In 2006, about 72 percent of the school-age children who spoke a language other than English at home spoke Spanish (*indicator 7*).
- Since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the mid-1970s, the number and percentage of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services increased nearly every year until 2004–05. In 1976–77, some 3.7 million children and youth in this age group were served under IDEA (5 percent), and by 2006–07, some 6.7 million received services (about 9 percent). The percentage receiving special education services for a specific learning disability was 3 percentage points higher in 2006–07 than in 1976–77 (5 vs. 2 percent). In comparison, the prevalence of speech or language impairments remained fairly constant (*indicator 8*).
- Total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions has generally increased since 1970 and is projected to reach 15.6 million students in

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2008. From 1970 to 2006, women's undergraduate enrollment increased over three times as fast as men's, surpassing men's enrollment in 1978. Women are projected to make up 57 percent of undergraduate enrollment through 2017. In addition, over the next 10 years, full-time undergraduate enrollment is expected to continue to exceed part-time enrollment, and enrollment at 4-year institutions is expected to continue to surpass that at 2-year institutions (*indicator 9*).

- In 2006, three-quarters of 4-year college freshmen who had graduated from high school in the previous 12 months attended an in-state college. The percentage of such freshmen who attended an in-state college ranged from 28 percent in the District of Columbia and 40 percent in New Jersey to 89 percent in Louisiana and 90 percent in Utah. Many of the southern states had relatively high percentages of in-state college attendance among college freshmen who had graduated from high school in the previous 12 months: 8 southern states had more than 85 percent of such freshmen attending in-state colleges (*indicator 10*).
- Graduate and first-professional enrollments in degree-granting institutions increased between 2000 and 2006. According to projections, increases in enrollment in both types of programs will continue, with graduate enrollment exceeding 2.6 million and first-professional enrollment reaching 418,000 by 2017. Over the past 30 years, female enrollment has increased by a larger percentage than male enrollment in both types of programs. Between 2000 and 2006, total minority enrollment increased by a larger percentage than did White enrollment (44 vs. 15 percent in graduate programs and 20 vs. 10 percent in first-professional programs) (*indicator 11*).

LEARNER OUTCOMES

How well does the American educational system—and its students—perform? Data from national and international assessments of students' academic achievement can help address this question, as can data on adults' educational and work experiences, literacy levels, and earnings. In some areas, such as mathematics and science, the performance of elementary and secondary students has shown some improvement over the past decade. However, such progress has not been seen on all assessments, in all grades assessed, or equally for all groups of students.

- Reading scores of 4th- and 8th-graders assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were higher in 2007 than in 1992, by 4 and 3 points, respectively. The average reading score of 12th-graders, however, was 6 points lower in 2005 than in 1992. The percentage of 4th-graders performing at or above *Basic* was higher in 2007 than in 1992, as was the percentage at or above *Proficient*. The percentage of 8th-graders at or above *Basic* was higher in 2007 than in 1992, while there was no measurable difference in the percentage at or above *Proficient*. The percentage of 12th-graders at or above *Basic* was lower in 2005 than in 1992, as was the percentage at or above *Proficient* (*indicator 12*).
- Average NAEP mathematics scores increased 27 points for 4th-graders and 19 points for 8th-graders between 1990 and 2007. Increases in scores were seen by sex and across racial/ethnic groups. The percentages of 4th- and 8th-graders performing at or above *Basic*, at or above *Proficient*, and at *Advanced* were higher in 2007 than in all previous mathematics assessments. The percentage of 4th-graders at or above *Proficient* tripled from 1990

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to 2007 and increased by 3 percentage points from 2005 to 2007. At the 8th-grade level, the percentage doubled since 1990 and increased by 2 percentage points from the 2005 assessment (*indicator 13*).

- Reported on a scale of 0 to 300, average NAEP writing scores of 8th- and 12th-graders were higher in 2007 than in either 1998 or 2002. The percentage of 8th-graders performing at or above *Basic* was higher in 2007 than in 1998, as was the percentage at or above *Proficient*. The percentage of 8th-graders at or above *Basic* was also higher in 2007 than in 2002, but no measurable difference was found in the percentage at or above *Proficient* between these two years. The percentage of 12th-graders at or above *Basic* increased from 2002 to 2007 and was also higher in 2007 than in 1998. For all assessment years, females at each grade level outscored males (*indicator 14*).
- In 2006, NAEP conducted its first assessment of economics, which evaluated 12th-graders' knowledge about markets, the national economy, and international trade. About 79 percent of 12th-graders performed at or above the *Basic* level on this assessment, and 42 percent performed at or above *Proficient*, including 3 percent at the *Advanced* level. Students who reported higher levels of parental education outperformed those who reported lower levels. For example, 54 percent of students whose parents were college graduates performed at or above *Proficient*, compared with 17 percent of students whose parents did not finish high school (*indicator 15*).
- NAEP reading and mathematics assessments indicate that the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks at the 4th-grade level was smaller in 2007 than in the early 1990s. On a 0 to 500 scale, the 4th-grade White-Black achievement gap in reading decreased from 32 points in 1992 to 27 points in 2007, while in mathematics it decreased from 32 points in 1990 to 26 points in 2007. At the 8th-grade level, however, the White-Black achievement gap in 2007 was not measurably different in reading from the gap in 1992 or in mathematics from the gap in 1990. For these same years, there also was no measurable difference in the achievement gap in mathematics between Whites and Hispanics at either grade level (*indicator 16*).
- NAEP long-term trend results indicate that the achievement of 9- and 13-year-olds in reading and mathematics improved between the early 1970s and 2004. In reading, 9-year-olds scored higher in 2004 than in previous assessments, with an increase of 7 points between 1999 and 2004. In mathematics, the achievement of 9- and 13-year-olds in 2004 was the highest of any assessment year. Though the overall performance of 17-year-olds on both NAEP assessments was not measurably different from their performance in prior years, scores for Black and Hispanic students improved from the early 1970s (*indicator 17*).
- According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which assessed the reading literacy of 4th-graders in 45 educational jurisdictions around the world, U.S. 4th-graders performed above the international average of these jurisdictions in 2006. Students in 10 jurisdictions scored higher than U.S. students, on average, and U.S. students scored higher, on average, than their peers in 22 jurisdictions. No differences were detected between the U.S. average scores in 2001 and 2006 on the combined reading literacy scale or on the two subscales, reading for literary purposes and reading for informational purposes (*indicator 18*).

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- The 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA 2006) reports on the scientific literacy of 15-year-olds in 57 educational jurisdictions, including the 30 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and 27 non-OECD countries and subnational education systems. According to the results of PISA 2006, the average U.S. scientific literacy score was 489, which was below the average of the 30 OECD countries (500). U.S. students had a lower average score than students in 16 OECD-member countries and a higher average score than students in 5 OECD countries (*indicator 19*).
- Full-time, full-year workers ages 25–34 with greater educational attainment earned higher salaries than those with less education in each year between 1995 and 2006. For example, young adults with a bachelor's degree as their highest degree consistently had higher median earnings than those with less education. This pattern held for male, female, White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian subgroups. In 2006, young adults with a bachelor's degree earned 28 percent more than those with an associate's degree, 50 percent more than those who had completed high school, and 98 percent more than those who did not earn a high school diploma (*indicator 20*).
- Among public high school students in the class of 2004–05, about three-fourths graduated on time, based on an estimate of the incoming freshman class and the number of diplomas awarded 4 years later. Nebraska had the highest *averaged freshman graduation rate* in 2004–05, at 87.8 percent. Sixteen other states had graduation rates above 80 percent, and 10 other states and the District of Columbia had rates below 70 percent. The overall averaged freshman graduation rate increased from 71.7 percent in 2000–01 to 74.7 percent in 2004–05 (*indicator 21*).
- Between 1996–97 and 2005–06, the percentage of students with a disability exiting school with a regular high school diploma increased from 43 to 57 percent. About 94 percent of these students were ages 17–19. In addition, the percentage of students with disabilities exiting with a certificate of attendance increased from 9 to 15 percent, while the percentage who dropped out without a credential decreased from 46 to 26 percent. Among students with disabilities, the two groups with the highest percentages exiting with a regular high school diploma were those with visual impairments and those with hearing impairments (*indicator 22*).
- The *status dropout rate* represents the percentage of persons in an age group who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalent credential, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Status dropout rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics ages 16–24 have each generally declined between 1972 and 2006. However, during this period, status dropout rates for Whites remained lower than rates for Hispanics and Blacks (*indicator 23*).

STUDENT EFFORT AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

Many factors are associated with school success, persistence, and progress toward a high school diploma or a college or advanced degree. These include students' motivation and effort, learning experiences, and expectations for further education, as well as various family characteristics, such as parents' educational attainment and family income. Monitoring these factors and tracking educational attainment provide key indicators for describing the progress of students and schooling in the United States.

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- The rate at which high school completers enrolled in college in the fall immediately after high school increased from 49 percent in 1972 to 67 percent in 1997. Since then, the rate has fluctuated between 62 and 69 percent. Though immediate college enrollment rates increased overall between 1972 and 2006 for both Whites and Blacks, there has been no overall change in the White-Black gap. For Hispanics, the rate has fluctuated over time but increased overall between 1972 and 2006. Nonetheless, the White-Hispanic gap has widened over this period. Since 1972, the immediate college enrollment rate for high school completers has increased faster for females than for males (*indicator 24*).
- Some 87 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds had received a high school diploma or equivalency certificate by 2007. This rate has remained between 85 and 88 percent over the last 30 years. The percentage of students in this age group who had completed at least some college education increased from 34 to 58 percent between 1971 and 2007, though increases were not consistent throughout this period. In most years during this period, the percentage completing a bachelor's degree or higher was roughly half that for completing at least some college. While the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or higher increased for all three racial/ethnic groups, the gaps between Whites and their Black and Hispanic peers widened between 1971 and 2007 (*indicator 25*).
- Between 1995–96 and 2005–06, the number of associate's degrees earned by minority students grew at a faster rate than for White students and accounted for over 60 percent of the increase in the total number of associate's degrees awarded. While the number of bachelor's degrees earned by White students rose by 19

percent, the number of bachelor's degrees earned by minority students rose by 64 percent and accounted for 44 percent of the total increase during this period (*indicator 26*).

- Women have earned a larger number and percentage of bachelor's and master's degrees overall than men have since the early 1980s, but their share in various fields has varied. For example, though women earned over 75 percent of bachelor's and master's degrees awarded in health professions, education, and psychology in 2005–06, they earned less than 30 percent of degrees awarded in computer and information sciences and in engineering at both levels. In addition, women have made gains at the doctoral level: in 2005–06, they earned 49 percent of doctoral degrees awarded (up from 40 percent in 1995–96), and during this period, the number of doctoral degrees earned by women increased by 54 percent (*indicator 27*).

CONTEXTS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The school environment is described by a number of features, including the characteristics of teachers and staff, student/teacher ratios, and the climate for learning. Monitoring these and other factors provides a fuller picture of the conditions in schools that can influence education. Society also influences and provides support for education through means including learning activities that take place outside school, as well as financial support for education.

- During the 2005–06 school year, 86 percent of public schools indicated that one or more incidents—including violent ones (serious violent incidents, physical attack or fight without a weapon, and threat of physical attack without a weapon), thefts

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of items over \$10, and other incidents—had taken place at school. That year, 61 percent of public schools reported at least one incident to the police. Some 38 percent of public schools reported at least one violent incident, 13 percent reported at least one serious violent incident, 28 percent reported at least one theft, and 51 percent reported at least one of the other specified incidents. The percentage of schools experiencing at least one violent incident was lower in 2005–06 than in 2003–04, but was lowest in 1999–2000 (*indicator 28*).

- In 2005–06, larger percentages of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students attended high-poverty schools—defined as public schools with more than 75 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—than did White or Asian/Pacific Islander students, and higher percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander than White students did so. Overall, a similar pattern was found among racial/ethnic groups within different school locales: in each locale (cities, suburban areas, towns, and rural areas), higher percentages of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students attended high-poverty schools than did their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers (*indicator 29*).
- Public schools with high minority enrollments (defined as schools in which 75 percent or more of the students were Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native) enrolled 23 percent of all public elementary and secondary students in 2005–06. However, about half of all Hispanic and Black public school students attended such schools—larger percentages than Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or White public school students at such schools. A larger percentage of public school students in schools with high minority enrollments were found in cities than in suburban areas, towns, or rural areas (*indicator 30*).
- At the end of the 2003–04 school year, 17 percent of the elementary and secondary teachers left the public and private schools where they had been teaching. Almost half of this teacher turnover was due to transferring to a different school: 8 percent did so. The remainder (9 percent of the teacher workforce) was due to teachers who left teaching to take a job in another field, pursue further education, leave for family reasons, retire, or leave for other reasons. In 2003–04, the turnover rate for high-poverty public schools (where 75 percent or more of their students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) was greater than for low-poverty public schools (where less than 15 percent of their students were eligible) (*indicator 31*).
- In 2003–04, public schools employed over 5.5 million staff: 2.8 million were employed by elementary schools, 950,000 by middle schools, and 1.4 million by secondary schools. Professional instructional staff—including principals, teachers, instructional coordinators and supervisors, librarians/library media specialists, and school counselors—accounted for 64 percent of public school staff, with teachers making up the majority (57 percent) of all staff. Schools in rural areas generally had lower average numbers of students per staff member than did schools in other locales for most professional instructional and student services professional staff (*indicator 32*).
- The ratio of students to teachers, which is sometimes used as a proxy measure for class size, declined between 1990 and 2005

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from 17.6 to 16.1 students per teacher for all regular public elementary, secondary, and combined schools. In every year during this period, the student/teacher ratios tended to be higher in public schools with larger enrollments than in public schools with smaller enrollments. For example, in 2005, regular secondary schools with 1,500 students or more enrolled 6.6 more students per teacher, on average, than regular secondary schools with enrollments under 300 (*indicator 33*).

- Total elementary and secondary public school revenues increased 55 percent in constant dollars from 1989–90 to 2004–05. Federal and state revenues increased at a faster rate than all local revenues (both property tax revenue and other local revenue). During this period, the percentage of total revenue for public elementary and secondary education from local sources declined (from 47 to 44 percent), while the proportion of total revenue flowing to public schools from federal sources increased (from 6 to 9 percent) and the proportion from state sources stayed the same (47 percent) (*indicator 34*).
- Between 1989–90 and 2004–05, total expenditures per student in public elementary and secondary schools rose 29 percent in constant 2006–07 dollars, from \$8,437 to \$10,892. Among the functions of current expenditures, spending on student and staff support increased the most (48 percent), followed by instruction (26 percent) and transportation (20 percent). Although the amount of current expenditures spent on salaries increased by 16 percent during this period, the percentage of current expenditures spent on salaries declined 4 percentage points, from 66 to 62 percent. The percentage spent on employee benefits increased almost 3 percentage points (*indicator 35*).
- Differences between states accounted for a greater percentage of the variation in instruction expenditures per student among unified public school districts than did differences within states from 1997–98 to 2004–05. The between-state differences increased during this period, while the within-state differences remained largely unchanged. In the 1997–98 school year, 57 percent of the variation in instruction expenditures per student was due to the between-state differences, and 43 percent was due to the within-state differences. In the 2004–05 school year, the corresponding percentages were 66 and 34 percent (*indicator 36*).
- In 2004–05, current expenditures per student, which include instructional, administrative, and operation and maintenance expenditures, were highest in high-poverty districts (\$9,892), next highest in low-poverty districts (\$9,263), and lowest in middle-poverty districts (\$8,536). Between 1997–98 and 2004–05, current expenditures per student increased by 20 percent in constant 2006–07 dollars, from \$7,602 to \$9,094. Current expenditures per student increased the most for the high-poverty districts (26 percent) and the least for the middle-poverty districts (16 percent) (*indicator 37*).
- In 2004, U.S. expenditures per student at the combined elementary and secondary level were \$9,368—higher than the average of \$6,604 for the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reporting data. At the postsecondary level, U.S. expenditures per student were \$22,476, higher than the OECD average of \$11,418 (*indicator 38*).

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CONTEXTS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The postsecondary education system encompasses various types of institutions under public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit control. Important indicators of this context include student fields of study; the price of attending college; the availability of financial aid; the instructional responsibilities of faculty and staff; and the ways in which colleges and universities attract and compensate faculty.

- Overall, 158,000 more associate's degrees were awarded in 2005–06 than in 1995–96 (a 28 percent increase). About 85 percent of this growth was attributable to the increases in the number of associate's degrees awarded in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; health professions; business; and computer and information sciences. Overall 320,000 more bachelor's degrees were awarded in 2005–06 than in 1995–96 (a 28 percent increase). Degrees in the field of business made up 21 percent of degrees awarded at the bachelor's degree level in 2005–06, with over 318,000 bachelor's degrees awarded in business that year (*indicator 39*).
- Overall, 188,000 more master's degrees were awarded in 2005–06 than in 1995–96 (a 46 percent increase). Of the 594,000 master's degrees awarded in 2005–06, over 50 percent were in the fields of education (29 percent) and business (25 percent). Overall, 11,400 more doctoral degrees were awarded in 2005–06 than in 1995–96 (a 26 percent increase). Of the 56,000 doctoral degrees awarded in 2005–06, some 13 to 14 percent each were in the fields of education, engineering, and health professions. The number of first-professional degrees awarded increased by 11,000 (a 14 percent increase) between 1995–96 and 2005–06. The increase in the number of degrees awarded in pharmacy (264 percent) accounted for 62 percent of this overall growth (*indicator 40*).
- Although the number of degrees conferred by public and private institutions increased between 1995–96 and 2005–06, the percentage increase varied among types of institutions. During this period, the number of associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees conferred by private for-profit institutions increased by a larger percentage than did the number conferred by private not-for-profit and public institutions. Despite relatively large percentage increases in the number of degrees conferred by private for-profit institutions, the number of degrees awarded remained substantially lower than at public or private not-for-profit institutions, with the exception of associate's degrees (*indicator 41*).
- Average inflation-adjusted salaries for full-time instructional faculty in colleges and universities increased by 20 percent overall between 1979–80 and 2006–07. The average salary increased at all types of institutions as well, ranging from 8 percent at public 2-year colleges to 37 percent at private doctoral universities. However, after increasing during the 1980s and 1990s, recent increases in faculty salaries have been relatively small (1 percent between 1999–2000 and 2006–07). The percentage of faculty compensation received in the form of benefits rose from 16 percent in 1979–80 to 21 percent in 2006–07 (*indicator 42*).
- The percentage of full-time college students ages 16–24 who were employed increased from 34 to 52 percent between 1970 and 2000 and fluctuated between 46 and 49 percent after that. In addition, the number of hours these students worked per week has increased since

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1970. In contrast to the increase among full-time college students, there was no measurable change between 1970 and 2006 in the percentage of part-time college students who were employed. In 2006, approximately 81 percent of part-time college students were employed, but these students worked fewer hours in 2006 than they did in 1970 (*indicator 43*).

CONCLUSION

Over the long-term, there has been improvement in the scores of 9- and 13-year-olds on national reading and mathematics assessments since the early 1970s, but the scores of 17-year-olds have remained flat. In the short-term, progress on national assessments in reading and mathematics has been made among 4th- and 8th-graders since the early 1990s, but reading scores for 12th-graders have declined. In other subject areas, such as writing, scores for 8th- and 12th-graders have improved. However, significant achievement gaps among racial/ethnic groups remain. International assessments show that U.S. students are in the top third of 4th-graders in reading, but below the international averages in science and mathematics at age 15. Other measures of progress show an increase in the high school graduation rate since 2000 and a decline in the status dropout rate.

The U.S. education system also shows signs of continued growth for years to come. In elementary and secondary education, enrollments have followed population shifts and are projected to increase each year through 2017 to an all-time high of 54 million, with the South expected to experience the largest increase in enrollments. Rates of enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have increased and are projected to continue to do so throughout the next 10 years. The number of school-age children who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled between 1979 and 2006, and the number and percentage of children receiving special education services in our elementary and secondary schools have increased nearly every year up until 2004–05.

NCES produces an array of reports each year that present findings about the U.S. education system. *The Condition of Education 2008* is the culmination of a yearlong project. It includes data that were available by early April 2008. In the coming months, other reports and surveys informing the nation about education will be released. Along with the indicators in this volume, NCES intends these surveys and reports to help inform policymakers and the American public about trends and conditions in U.S. education.



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