As the numbers of minority children in elementary school continue to increase, so do the family risk factors that affect their school achievement.

Elementary enrollment is expected to remain at near-record levels this fall, when about 33.7 million children will be enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through 8 in public schools. This reflects a slight decline of less than 1 percent since 2001 after rising by 14 percent between 1990 and 2001. After a pause in enrollment growth between 2001 and 2005, elementary enrollment is expected to resume increasing. An additional 1.8 million Pre-K–8 students are expected in public schools by 2013.

The rising number of students has been reflected in the size, number, and configuration of public schools. Elementary schools grew from an average of 458 students in 1991–92 to 477 in 2001–02. The shift in structure of public school systems toward middle school configurations (generally grades 4 to 5 or 6; 6 to 7, or 8) has continued. While the number of elementary schools rose by 10 percent to 65,288 between 1991–92 and 2001–02, the number of middle schools increased by 33 percent during the same period, reaching 11,983 in 2001–02.

**Racial and Ethnic Projections**

New projections from the Bureau of the Census show that the number of pre-primary and elementary-age children will continue to grow through the rest of the decade. Between 2004 and 2010, the number of 3- to 4-year-olds is expected to rise by about 7 percent and the number of 6- to 9-year-olds by 6 percent, while the number of children in the upper elementary grades is expected to fall by 6 percent.

The number of minority children will rise more rapidly than the number of

---

**Figure 1. Percent change in elementary school-age population groups, by race/ethnicity: 2004 to 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and race/ethnicity</th>
<th>3 to 5</th>
<th>6 to 9</th>
<th>10 to 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>-12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>-7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

white children (Figure 1). White 3- to 5-year-olds will increase by about 2 percent between 2004 and 2010, compared to increases of 9 percent for black children, 16 percent for Hispanic children, and 19 percent for Asian children. Among 6- to 9-year-olds, the 1 percent increase of white children is substantially smaller than expected increases of 4 percent for black children, 18 percent for Hispanic children, and 17 percent for Asian children.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Poverty

The proportion of students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program is an indicator of the proportion of low-income families in a school. In 2003, 40 percent of fourth graders were eligible for this program, including 70 percent of black students, 71 percent of Hispanic students, and 23 percent of white students.

Black and Hispanic students are more likely than white students to be from low-income families, and tend to be concentrated in low-income schools (Figure 2). In central cities, 61 percent of black and 64 percent of Hispanic students were in the highest-poverty schools, compared with 12 percent of white students.

Early Childhood Reading and Math Achievement

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99, collected information on the achievement of a cohort of children in reading and math as they progressed from kindergarten in the fall of 1998 through the end of third grade in spring of 2002. During this period, the children’s average reading and math scores increased substantially, but with wide variations. A number of family risk factors—household below poverty level; non-English primary home language; mother’s highest education less than a high school diploma/GED; and single-parent household—were negatively associated with children’s achievement gains (Figure 3). Children with no family risk factors had an average gain of 84 points in reading, compared with a 73-point gain for children with two or more factors.

Reading Performance in Grades 4 and 8

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has assessed performance in reading in grades 4 and 8 since 1992. It has found the average reading scale score of fourth graders, after decreasing in the late 1990s, increased from 2000 to 2002. The average score of eighth graders decreased slightly in 2003, but was higher than in 1992.

Certain subgroups had higher average reading scores in 2003. Females scored higher than males in both grades, while white and Asian/Pacific Islander students had higher average scores than American Indian, Hispanic, and black students. Hispanic students had higher average scores than black students at both grade levels.

The number of books in the home at both grades was positively associated with student achievement for all racial/ ethnic groups. Fourth-grade students with fewer books in their homes had lower scores than students with higher numbers of books in their homes.

Fourth graders who participated in the school lunch program, which generally is indicative of low family income levels, had lower average scores than students who did not participate. The differences were sizeable in urban, suburban, as well as rural areas.

Math Performance in Grades 4 and 8

In assessing math performance in grades 4 and 8 since 1990, the NAEP found average scores were higher in 2003 than in all previous assessments since 1990. The average score in grade 4 increased from 226 in 2000 to 235 in 2003, and the average score in grade 8 rose from 273 to 278.

Achievement levels, which identify what students should know and be able to do at each grade, provide another measure of student performance from NAEP. The percentages of fourth and
eighth graders ranked at or above basic, proficient, and advanced levels in math were also higher in 2003 than in 1990. The percentage of fourth graders rated as proficient rose from 13 percent in 1990 to 32 percent in 2003, while the proportion of proficient eighth graders rose from 15 percent to 29 percent.

Certain subgroups outperformed others. Males, on average, scored higher than females in grades 4 and 8, while Asian/Pacific Islander students had higher scores than white, black, and Hispanic students in both grades. In grade 8, enrollment in higher-level math classes and having parents with higher levels of education were positively associated with student achievement. Higher levels of poverty, as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, was negatively associated with student achievement in both grades in 2003.

Parental School Choice

Between 1993 and 2003, the percentage of children in grades 1–5 attending a parent-chosen public school other than their assigned school increased from 12 to 17 percent, while the percentage attending assigned public schools decreased from 79 to 72 percent. While the percentages of children attending private schools in grades 1–5 increased during this period (1.4 percent for private church-related schools and 0.6 percent for private non-church-related schools), these increases were smaller than the 5 percent increase in the percentage of children attending parent-chosen public schools.

When asked whether they could send their child to a chosen public school, the parents of 50 percent of students in grades 1–5 reported having such a choice. Among students in grades 1–5 whose parents had the opportunity to choose public schools, about 26 percent attended a school other than their assigned school in 2003; 66 percent attended their assigned school; and about 9 percent attended private schools.

School Finances

The average total expenditure per student in public school districts in 2000–01 was $8,700, but expenditures varied by school location. Average total expenditures per student were highest in large cities ($9,452) and in urban fringes of large cities ($9,151), while those in urban fringes of midsize cities ($7,900), small towns ($7,697), and large towns ($7,532) were the lowest.

Between 1991–92 and 2000–01, total expenditures per student increased by 25 percent, after adjusting for inflation. However, there was a shift in the relationship of expenditures per student among the different locations. In 1991–92, expenditures in urban fringes of midsize cities were larger than those in midsize cities and rural areas. This difference was reversed in 2001–02, when expenditures per student in midsize cities and rural areas surpassed those in urban fringes of midsize cities.

### Scale score

![Scale score graph](image-url)

**NOTE:** Family risk factors, as measured in kindergarten, include living below the poverty level, primary home language was non-English, mother’s highest education was less than high school diploma/GED, and living in a single-parent household.


*Figure 3. Children’s reading scale scores from kindergarten through third grade, by family risk factors: fall 1998 to spring 2002*
Students transform story webs into dynamic visuals with die cuts. Help them remember lessons better with hands-on activities using the AccuCut® MARK IV™ Roller Die Cutting Machine and dies!

Get information and request a FREE catalog or video! Call 800-288-1670 or visit www.accucut.com.