Enrollment Fell in 2020–2021 School Year

Enrollment in U.S. public schools fell dramatically in the first full school year following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report released in August by Stanford University's Center for Education Policy Analysis and *The New York Times*. More than 1.1 million K–12 students failed to matriculate, or 2 percent of the previous year's enrollment.

The report says that the instructional strategy states and districts chose to offer during the pandemic was the biggest factor in the declines. Results suggest that remote-only instruction contributed to declines in enrollment, with states and districts that offered remote-only instruction seeing disenrollment rates jump from 2.6 to 3.7 percent. In-person and hybrid instruction had small, statistically insignificant effects, the study says.

The effects of remote-only instruction on declines in enrollment were heavily concentrated in kindergarten and elementary school grades. More than 10,000 local public schools in 33 states lost at least 20 percent of kindergartners in 2020, up from 4,000 schools at the pre-pandemic launch of the 2019 and 2018 school years. Disenrollment produced by remote-only instruction appeared to be larger in rural communities and in districts serving higher concentrations of Hispanic students, the study adds.

Declines in enrollment are likely to increase fiscal strain on public schools as well as produce multiple developmental implications for students, the report says. Long-term implications include the following:

• The decision to offer remote-only instruction will have negative fiscal consequences for school districts if disenrolled students do not return.
• The challenges created by reopening decisions will include educating first graders who have no experience in formal schooling.
• Disruptions in enrollment might produce unusually large classes with mixed-age cohorts in the early grades.

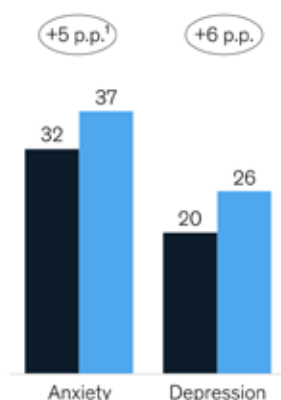For more, visit **stanford.io/3jHlD7d** and **nyti.ms/3fL4msH.** ●

Worst States for Enrollment Declines, 2020–2021 School Year		
State	Enrollment	No. of Students
1. Washington	–14.6%	–12,091
2. Oregon	–14.6%	–6,171
3. Hawaii	–13.9%	–1,940
4. New Hampshire	–13.6%	–1,587
5. Virginia	–12.8%	–11,817

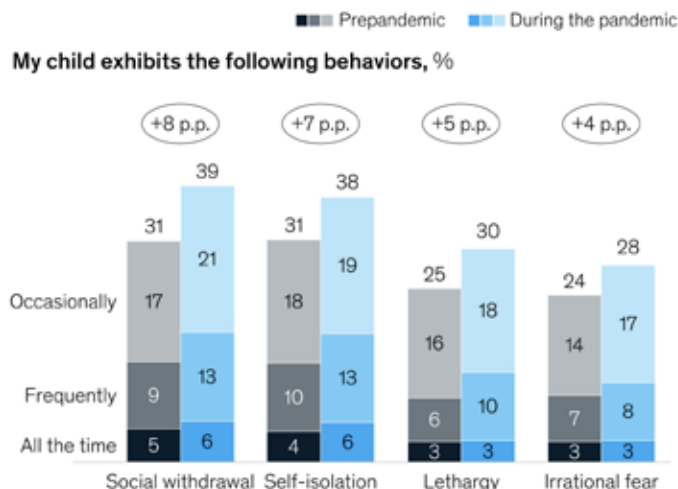*Source: Stanford University Center for Education Policy Analysis*

Pandemic Affecting Students' Mental Health, Parents Say

Parents reported increases in mental health conditions and concerning behaviors in their children.

My child suffers from the following conditions, %

■■ Prepandemic   ■■ During the pandemic

My child exhibits the following behaviors, %

(+5 p.p.¹) (+6 p.p.)   (+8 p.p.) (+7 p.p.) (+5 p.p.) (+4 p.p.)

	Anxiety	Depression		Social withdrawal	Self-isolation	Lethargy	Irrational fear
	32 → 37	20 → 26		31 → 39	31 → 38	25 → 30	24 → 28
Occasionally				17 / 21	18 / 19	16 / 18	14 / 17
Frequently				9 / 13	10 / 13	6 / 10	7 / 8
All the time				5 / 6	4 / 6	3 / 3	3 / 3

Note: Figures may not sum to totals, because of rounding.
¹Percentage points.
Source: McKinsey survey of 16,370 parents across all 50 states

McKinsey & Company

In a McKinsey survey of more than 16,000 U.S. parents with school-aged children, 35 percent said they were "very" or "extremely" concerned about their child's mental health. About 80 percent of parents reported some level of concern about their child's mental health or social and emotional health and development since the pandemic began, with concerns about mental health slightly lower among parents of early elementary school students.

Parents reported increases in clinical mental health conditions among their children, with a 5 percent increase in anxiety and a 6 percent increase in depression. They also reported increases in behaviors such as social withdrawal, self-isolation, lethargy, and irrational fears.

Students didn't just miss out on learning during the pandemic, the survey says. Some lost family members, some witnessed their caregivers lose jobs and income, and most experienced increased social isolation. If unaddressed, such mental health challenges can influence children's learning, attendance, and ability to complete schoolwork.

"Broader student well-being is not independent of academics," the report says. "Parents whose children have fallen significantly behind academically are one-third more likely to say that they are 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about their children's mental health. Black and Hispanic parents are seven to nine percentage points more likely than white parents to report higher levels of concern."

Visit **mck.co/3CspfCJ** to read more. ●

Gifted Programs Fail to Deliver for Low-Income, Black Students

Black students benefit less from participating in gifted education programs than white students, according to a peer-reviewed study released in April by education scholars Christopher Redding and Jason A. Grissom, "Do Students in Gifted Programs Perform Better? Linking Gifted Program Participation to Achievement and Nonachievement Outcomes."

Analyzing data for 1,340 students who participated in elementary gifted education programs, the study found that gifted and talented programs improved achievement for high-ability students in reading and math nationwide. In reading, however, affluent students appeared to get more out of gifted education programs than students from families with lower incomes did.

The average student receiving gifted services saw his or her reading achievement scores increase from the 78th to 80th percentile, irrespective of race or income. But low-income students and Black students in gifted programs didn't realize net achievement gains in reading.

Although advocates for gifted education programs have worked to improve access to programs in recent years, the study findings suggest that access to gifted education programs isn't the only issue. "It may not just be about getting into gifted programs, but how well the programs serve those students once they are admitted," it says.

The findings shouldn't suggest that gifted programs aren't capable of supporting high-ability students from historically marginalized student populations, the authors note. But differences in achievement suggest that educators should examine their gifted education programming to assess whether it serves the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students adequately.

To read the report, visit **bit.ly/3jF41IV.** ●

Pandemic Widens Divide Between General and Special Education

While collaboration between general and special education teachers creates more inclusive and productive learning environments, remote learning widened the gulf between the two groups in the 2020–2021 school year, according to a report from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). And now that students are back in classrooms, school leaders must work to reestablish collaboration on the accommodations made for students with disabilities.

Interviews revealed that most general educators don't think they are responsible for creating adaptations for students with disabilities or communicating with the students' families. Special educators took responsibility for instructional support and communication, even in inclusive settings where students with and without disabilities are educated together.
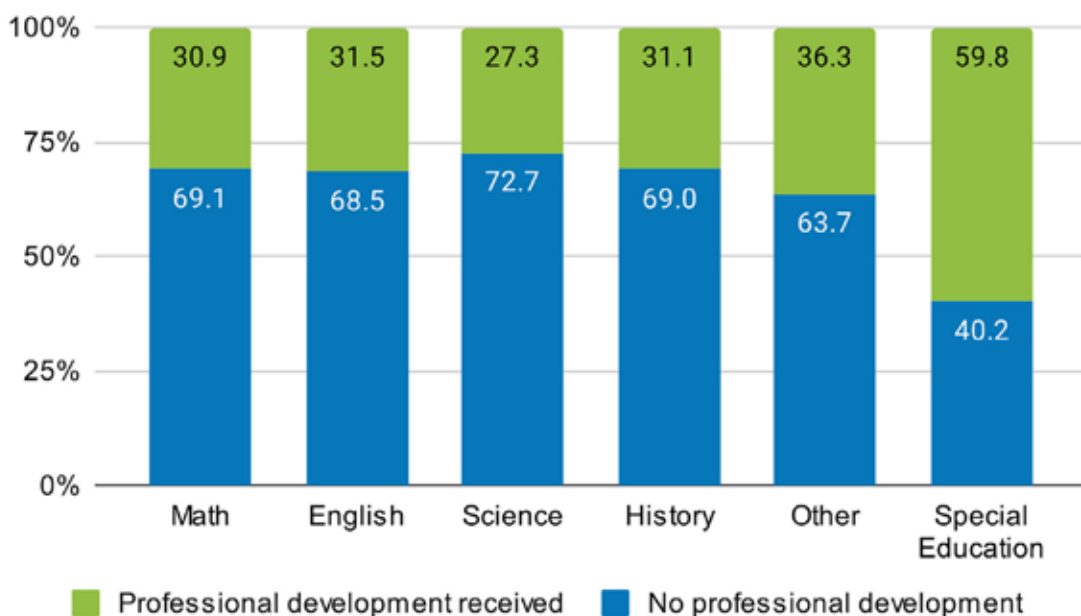
General educators also said that they lacked the training necessary to support special ed students in remote settings and socially distanced cohorts. Both groups have been "largely left on their own," the report says. "Confined to their homes or classrooms, general and special educators were unlikely to encounter each other during the day."

To encourage teachers to identify all students as "their" students, school leaders "must make clear that general and special education teachers are jointly responsible for students with disabilities," the report says. "These expectations must be accompanied by opportunities for educators to live out these new standards through dedicated time for collaboration.

"At the same time, general educators must receive ongoing training and support on how to design and deliver instruction with modifications and accommodations for diverse learners across a range of learning environments." ●

Few general educators received the training they needed to support students with disabilities in remote settings.

Source: CRPE