POLICY BRIEF

EDUCATION POLICY

Guinn CENTER



DECLINING ENROLLMENT:

FACTORS, TRENDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

What you need to know...

- Public school enrollment is shrinking nationwide, and Nevada is no exception.
- Public K-12 enrollment is projected to decline 5.5 percent nationwide by 2031.
- Fewer students may mean less funding, but fixed costs for districts remain. Nevada's per-pupil spending is almost $3,000 below the national average.
- Research shows that high-poverty schools are losing students at nearly double the rate of more affluent schools, and they may be the least equipped to absorb the funding loss.

What our analysis found:

- Nevada's public K-12 enrollment has fallen 5.4 percent from its peak of 500,860 students in SY 2019-2020 to 473,657 in SY 2025-2026, including a 1.9 percent drop in the past year alone.
- The main driver is fewer births. Nevada's birth rate fell 17.2 percent between 2011 and 2023, far more than the 10.6 percent national decline.
- Policymakers and districts are weighing different options alongside emergency regulations that help stabilize funding.

INTRODUCTION

Public schools across the country are grappling with declining enrollment trends that have been emerging over the last several years. Since 2019, public school enrollment has been trending downward. This is not a result of any single factor, but rather a combination of forces that have affected enrollment across the nation.[1]

In this brief, we explore national trends in declining enrollment, examine the main factors associated with these declines, analyze enrollment trends in Nevada, and discuss the potential challenges and opportunities that may arise from declining enrollment.



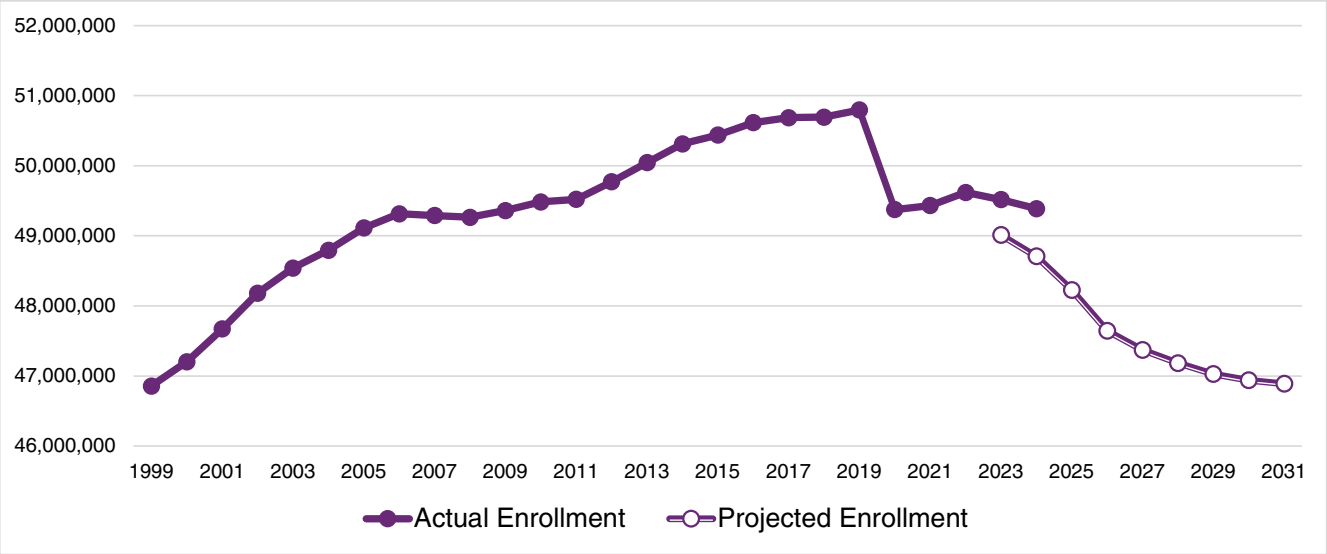
1. Tara Moon, "K-12 Public School Enrollment Declines, Explained," ***FutureEd***, August 5, 2025, updated July 2, 2026, https://www.future-ed.org/k-12-public-school-enrollment-declines-explained/.

NATIONWIDE TRENDS IN K-12 ENROLLMENT

Public K-12 enrollment dropped sharply in 2020 and has been relatively flat since.[2] As shown in Figure 1, enrollment is projected to decline through 2031.[3] This predicted decline is largely due to a smaller population of children in the United States. According to an Axios analysis of the U.S. Census data, America's population of children under the age of 18 fell by 1.8 million between 2020 and 2025.[4] If these children were distributed evenly across elementary, middle, and high school grades, they would fill more than 3,200 typical school buildings. The logistics of managing the related financial, staffing, and community effects are falling on public schools and school boards in many parts of the country. This is a paradigm shift for districts and communities, many of which have known nothing but growth for decades.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) estimates that the total number of high school graduates in the United States peaked in 2025 and will enter a period of steady decline until 2041.[5] This is not a result of lower graduation rates, but rather a result of fewer students enrolled overall. This decline, projected at 13 percent, is largely attributable to a decline in birth rates following the Great Recession in 2008. This is important to note, as this decline in the total student population is also affecting college enrollment trends.[6] As a decline in K-12 enrollment today will affect higher education enrollment and participation in the workforce in the future, thoughtful consideration should be given to identifying long-term solutions to address this challenge.

Figure 1: Nationwide Trends in Public K-12 Enrollment



Sources: See notes 2 and 3.

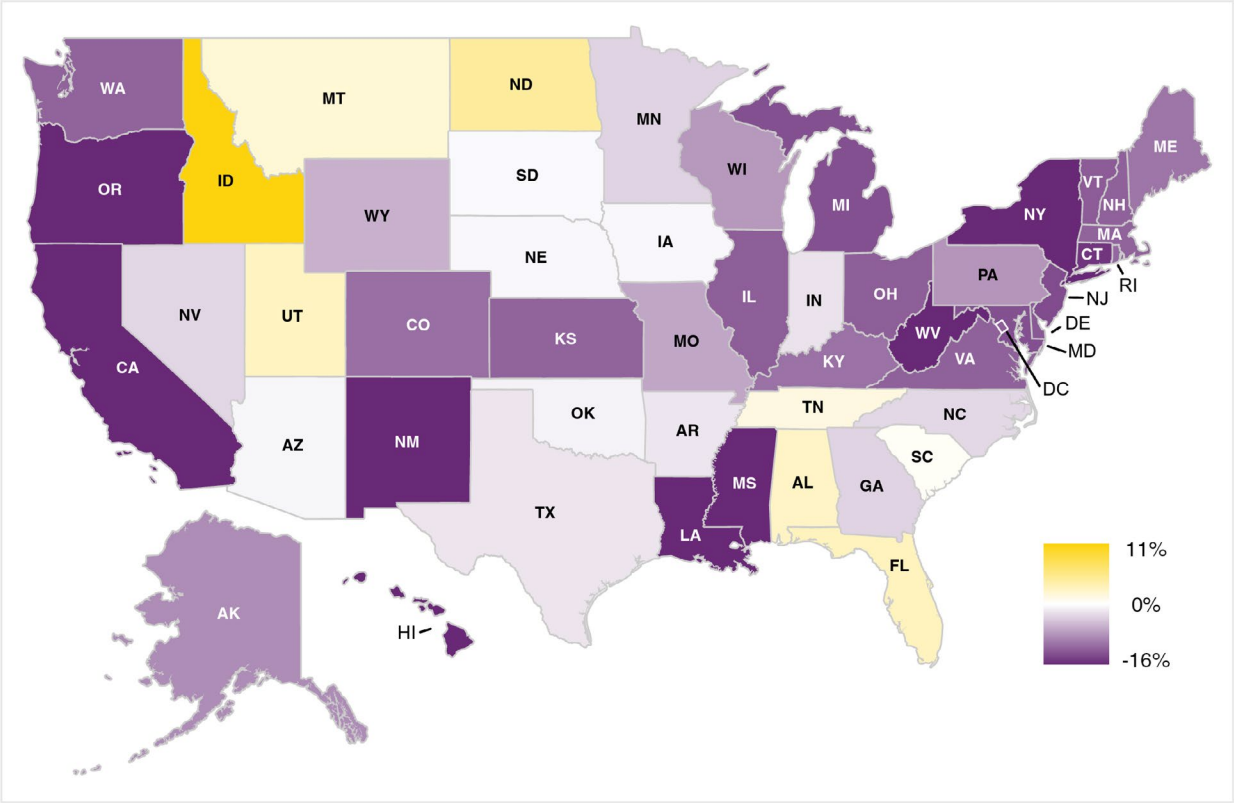
2. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Region, State, and Jurisdiction: Selected Years, Fall 1990 through Fall 2031," table 203.20, *Digest of Education Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, December 2023, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_203.20.asp.
3. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Level and Grade: Selected Years, Fall 1980 through Fall 2031," table 203.10, *Digest of Education Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, December 2023, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_203.10.asp.
4. Russell Contreras, "America's College Enrollment Map Is Being Redrawn," *Axios*, August 22, 2026, https://www.axios.com/2026/08/22/college-pipeline-south-northeast.
5. Patrick Lane, et al., *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*, 11th ed. (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, December 2024), https://www.wiche.edu/resources/knocking-at-the-college-door-11th-edition/.
6. Jordan Conley, "US College Enrollment Decline – 2026 Facts & Figures," *College Transitions*, May 21, 2026, https://www.collegetransitions.com/blog/college-enrollment-decline/.

Enrollment in public K-12 schools fell 2.1 percent from 2017 to 2022 nationwide, with a projected decline of 5.5 percent by 2031.[7] As of fall 2024 (the most recent year National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data is available), 49,387,403 students were enrolled in public K-12 schools in the United States, down from 50,796,445 in fall 2019.[8]

Different regions of the United States are projected to experience varying degrees of enrollment decline by 2031, with the West and Northeast expected to see the steepest declines—9.7 percent and 9.1 percent, respectively. States in the Midwest are facing a projected decline of 5 percent, while states in the South are projected to have a 1.8 percent decline in public K-12 enrollment.

Many states are facing general population declines, apart from a few southern states. Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida are seeing projected K-12 public school enrollment growth alongside population growth.[9] Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and Utah are also among the states experiencing an increase in K-12 public school enrollment, the most notable being Idaho with a projected increase of nearly 11 percent.[10] States such as California, West Virginia, and Hawaii are facing steeper population declines overall, and Hawaii, California, and New Mexico are projected to have the steepest decline in public school enrollment by 2031, all with a decrease of over 15 percent.[11]

Figure 2: Projected Percent Change in Total Enrollment 2022-2031



Source: See note 2.

7. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Level and Grade," 203.20 (2023).
8. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Level and Grade: Selected Years, Fall 1980 through Fall 2024," table 203.10, *Digest of Education Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, March 2026, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d25/tables/dt25_203.10.asp.
9. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2025*, January 2026, https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2020-2025/state/totals/NST-EST2025-POP.xlsx.
10. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Region, State, and Jurisdiction," table 203.20 (2023).
11. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Region, State, and Jurisdiction," table 203.20 (2023).

CAUSES OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT

Declining enrollment does not result from a single cause but from a combination of compounding factors. The largest drivers of declining enrollment are a drop in birth rates, fertility rates, migration patterns, and shifts away from traditional public education.



Declining Birth and Fertility Rates

The main driver of declining enrollment is a general birth rate decline—families are having fewer children, and they are having children later in life.

According to a 2025 report published by The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew), every state recorded a drop in its general fertility rate in 2023, compared with the 2011-2020 average. States in the West recorded the greatest declines at 16.4 percent, followed by the Midwest (11.6 percent), Northeast (9.4 percent), and South (9.3 percent). While the West has experienced significant population growth, these gains were mainly driven by an influx of people from other states and abroad rather than an increase in births. According to the Pew report, "in 2023, the general fertility rate declined by 10.6% nationally to 54.5 from the 2011-20 average of 61. This means that approximately six fewer babies were born per 1,000 women in 2023 than over the decade ending in 2020."[12]

Lower fertility rates will have far-reaching economic and social implications for the labor force and for the economy. According to a 2026 study published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, this decline is largely due to a "de-prioritization" of parenthood in people's adult lives, reflecting changing norms related to work, parenting, gender roles, and social activities. While there is not one specific cause for these dynamics, this transformation of priorities is affecting if, and when, people have children. There has also been a significant decline in teen birth rates, as women are having children later in life.[13] While this may have implications for public school enrollment, it is important to note that this may also be viewed as a positive societal trend.

The largest drivers of declining enrollment are a drop in birth rates, fertility rates, migration patterns, and shifts away from traditional public education.



12. Joanna Biernacka-Lievestro, et al., "How Record-Low Fertility Rates Foreshadow Budget Strain," *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, July 8, 2025, updated July 21, 2025, https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2025/07/08/how-record-low-fertility-rates-foreshadow-budget-strain?.
13. Melissa Schettini Kearney and Phillip B. Levine, *Why Is Fertility So Low in High Income Countries?*, NBER Working Paper 33989 (National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2025; revised January 2026), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w33989/w33989.pdf.

In Nevada specifically, a historic decrease in birth rates has reduced the number of school-aged children, even as the state's overall population continues to grow. This is a result of retirees or families without young children moving to Nevada, while families with young children may be less likely to move here because of economic circumstances, including higher housing costs. Nevada's birth rate fell by 17.2 percent between 2011 and 2023, representing one of the largest declines in the nation.[14] Nevada's decline in birth rates is significantly higher than the national average decline of 10.6 percent.

In 2007, Clark County recorded nearly 31,000 births. That number fell to roughly 24,000 in 2024. This decline in birth rates is now working its way through the school system, leading to smaller kindergarten class enrollments and contributing to the decline in enrollment overall. While Nevada's population may still be rising, graduating high school cohorts across the state are larger than incoming kindergarten cohorts.[15] The graduating class of 2026 represents the last cohort of students born before the birthrate decline precipitated by the Great Recession.

Migration Patterns

Changes in intrastate migration patterns are also affecting public school enrollment across the United States. These effects vary by locale type. The NCES classifies schools into four main categories: city, suburban, town, and rural, with rural schools further divided into "fringe," "distant," and "remote" based on their distance from an urban area.[16]

Nationally, urban schools have faced the steepest declines, with enrollment decreasing by 6 percent over the last decade. Suburban school enrollment has also declined, though less steeply, falling by 2 percent over the same period.[17]

Rural schools are further classified by their distance from an urban area. Schools are considered "remote" if they are located 25 miles or more from an urban area with a population above 50,000, or if they are further than 10 miles from an urban area with a population of less than 50,000. Remote schools saw enrollment decline by 6 percent over the last decade, the same rate as urban schools.

Nevada's decline in birth rates is significantly higher than the national average decline of 10.6 percent.



14. April Corbin Girnus, "Declining Birth Rate and Migration Trends Driving Public School Enrollment Woes," *Nevada Current*, March 25, 2026, https://nevadacurrent.com/2026/03/25/declining-birth-rate-and-migration-trends-driving-public-school-enrollment-woes/.
15. Girnus, "Declining Birth Rate and Migration Trends"; Biernacka-Lievestro et al., "How Record-Low Fertility Rates Foreshadow Budget Strain."
16. National Center for Education Statistics, "Locale Boundaries," Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries.
17. Krista Kaput et al., *How Student Enrollment Declines Are Affecting Education Budgets, Explained in 10 Figures* (Bellwether, September 2024, updated July 2026), https://bellwether.org/publications/declining-enrollment-in-10-figures/?activeTab=1.

Schools are classified as "distant" if they are located within 5 to 25 miles of an urban area with a population over 50,000, or if they are located within 2.5 to 10 miles of an urban area with a population less than 50,000. Distant schools saw enrollment decline by 5 percent over the last decade.

"Fringe" territories are defined as communities located outside of urban areas less than or equal to 5 miles from an urban area with a population of 50,000 or more, as well as territories outside urban areas that are less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban area with a population less than 50,000. Fringe areas have seen enrollment growth, increasing by 6 percent over the last decade—the only category among these to grow.[18]

These shifts, like declining birth rates, are due to a variety of factors, including families migrating directly outside of metropolitan areas due to job changes or transfers, wanting to be closer to family, lifestyle changes, and a rising cost of living.[19]

International and federal immigration policies are also affecting public school enrollment. Between 2011 and 2018, net international migration (NIM) ranged from 750,000 to 1 million. This number increased to 2.7 million in 2024 and then dropped by 50 percent in 2025 (falling to 1.3 million) and is projected to decline to 321,000 in 2026. According to the Population Estimates Program Staff of the U.S. Census Bureau, "the large drop in NIM from 2024 to 2026 was caused by both a decrease in immigration and an increase in emigration (people moving out of the United States) during that period."[20]



Changes in federal immigration enforcement and a reduction in international migration have an influence on K-12 enrollment and school attendance. A study conducted in 2026 found that recent immigration enforcement actions have led to a substantial and persistent increase in absences among foreign-born students, with a daily probability of absence rising by 2.2 to 2.4 percentage points, an increase relative to the pre-enforcement absence rate of 6.7 percent.[21] These absences also affect enrollment projections, as students who are chronically absent are seven times more likely to drop out of high school.[22] Schools may also face additional operational and educational challenges when students are frequently absent.

18. Kaput et al., *How Student Enrollment Declines Are Affecting Education Budgets.*
19. Martin Lavelle and Elizabeth Kepner, "U.S. Migration Patterns Before and After the Start of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Midwest Economy Blog*, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, July 7, 2022, https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/blogs/midwest-economy/2022/migration-before-and-during-pandemic; Jennifer O., "Data Illustrates More Moved to be Closer to Family in 2021," *United Van Lines*, January 19, 2022, https://www.unitedvanlines.com/moving-tips/blog/more-moved-to-be-closer-to-family-in-2021.
20. Population Estimates Program Staff, "New Population Estimates Show Historic Decline in Net International Migration," U.S. Census Bureau, January 27, 2026, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2026/01/historic-decline-in-net-international-migration.html.
21. Andrew Camp et al., "Immigration Enforcement Actions and Empty Desks: Persistent and Acute Attendance Effects," *EdWorkingPaper* 26-1453 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, September 2026), https://doi.org/10.26300/bz9z-w627.
22. Anna Colquitt and Macie Nielsen, *Chronic Absenteeism in Nevada: Part I—Trends, Factors, and Policy Considerations* (Guinn Center, July 2025), https://www.guinncenter.org/research/chronic-absenteeism-in-nevada-part-i---trends-factors-and-policy-considerations.

Shifts Away from Traditional Public Education

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a growing disconnect between families and traditional public education, with families opting to either homeschool their children or enroll them in a full-time virtual program. By 2022, an estimated 3.4 percent of all school-aged children in the United States were homeschooled, increasing from 2.8 percent in 2019. It is estimated that 2.5 percent of all school-aged children were enrolled in a full-time virtual education program in 2023.[23]

It is helpful to understand the motivations of parents who decide to educate their children at home. According to an Institute of Education Sciences (IES) survey, 83 percent of parents who opted to homeschool their children reported concerns regarding the environment of district schools. Additionally, 75 percent of parents reported wanting to provide moral instruction for their children. Of the same group surveyed, 72 percent reported opting to homeschool their children to emphasize family life.[24]

In Nevada, when a family chooses to homeschool their child, notice is provided to the superintendent of the school district in which the child resides. Nevada requires a one-time Notice of Intent when a family withdraws a child from public school, and the state generally receives no subsequent information about the student's educational status or outcomes.[25] This makes it especially difficult to determine the number of students currently homeschooled in Nevada.

Private school enrollment is also a factor. Nevada's K-12 private school enrollment has fluctuated between 19,000 and 22,000 students over the last ten years, with 19,827 students enrolled in 2016 and 22,442 students enrolled in 2025. The largest increase in private school enrollment in Nevada during the last decade followed the COVID-19 pandemic, with 20,893 students enrolled in 2022 and 22,399 students enrolled in 2023. Enrollment has remained near this level since 2023.[26] At the national level, private school enrollment has held steady at around 8.8 percent between 2016 and 2024.[27]

According to a 2025 Brookings Institution report, a large share of students are not accounted for in any federal dataset. Out of 54.32 million school-age children in 2024, only 43.06 million were enrolled in traditional public schools. Between 2020 and 2022, the last two years with complete private school data available, roughly 2.05 million additional students were newly "missing" from both public and private school enrollment files, meaning that they were previously enrolled in a public or private school but no longer appear in enrollment records.[28] This does not necessarily mean that students have dropped out; rather, they are not captured through reporting. Some students may be homeschooled, some may have moved to a different district, and some may be unaccounted for due to other reasons.



Out of 54.32 million school-age children in 2024, only 43.06 million were enrolled in traditional public schools.

23. National Center for Education Statistics, "A Higher Percentage of K–12 Students Are Receiving Academic Instruction at Home," press release, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, September 17, 2024, https://ies.ed.gov/learn/press-release/higher-percentage-k-12-students-are-receiving-academic-instruction-home?utm_=.
24. National Center for Education Statistics, "A Higher Percentage of K–12 Students Are Receiving Academic Instruction at Home."
25. Nevada Department of Education, "Nevada Homeschooling," https://doe.nv.gov/offices/craleo/nevada-homeschooling.
26. Nevada Department of Education, *Nevada Private School Enrollment Data: School Year 2024–2025*, January 22, 2025, https://webapp-strapi-paas-prod-nde-001.azurewebsites.net/uploads/nevada_private_school_enrollment_data_2024_2025_e85dde2db4.pdf.
27. Dylan Council et al., *Declining Public School Enrollment* (Brookings Institution, August 2025), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/20250827_ES_Goulas_LearningLossFINAL.pdf.
28. Council et al., *Declining Public School Enrollment.*

ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN NEVADA

STATE-LEVEL TRENDS

Nevada's population boomed between 2000 and 2020, increasing from roughly 2 million to 3.1 million.[29] While the overall population has steadily increased, the population of children has plateaued. The number of children 0 to 4 years of age peaked in 2020 at 181,491, and began a steady decline thereafter, with 170,417 children aged 0 to 4 in 2025.[30] According to the validation day counts reported by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), statewide K-12 enrollment peaked in SY 2019-2020 at 500,860 students. By SY 2025-2026, the number of students enrolled in public K-12 institutions was down to 473,657.[31]

According to NCES estimates, Nevada is projected to experience a 1.6 percent decrease in public school enrollment between 2023 and 2031.[32] The most recent enrollment data collected by NDE suggests that Nevada may be on track to meet that projection earlier than expected, as enrollment began decreasing during the COVID-19 pandemic, dropping 2.8 percent, or roughly 14,200 students, in a single year.[33]

The total enrollment counts provided by NDE also include Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), Adult Education (AD), and Ungraded (UG) students enrolled in a public K-12 institution. It is important to note that the counts provided above are also slightly higher than the enrollment counts reported through the Nevada Accountability Portal, as those enrollment numbers do not include adult education in the calculations.

According to NCES estimates, Nevada is projected to experience a 1.6 percent decrease in public school enrollment between 2023 and 2031.



29. Christopher Wright, *Nevada County Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin Estimates and Projections 2000 to 2044* (Nevada Department of Taxation, October 1, 2025), https://tax.nv.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-ASRHO-Estimates-and-Projections-Summary-2000-to-2044.pdf.
30. Wright, *Nevada County Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin Estimates and Projections 2000 to 2044.*
31. Nevada Department of Education, "Enrollment for Nevada Public Schools," https://doe.nv.gov/offices/office-of-assessment-data-and-accountability-management-adam/accountability/data-requests/enrollment-for-nevada-public-schools.
32. National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Region, State, and Jurisdiction," table 203.20 (2023).
33. Nevada Department of Education, "Enrollment for Nevada Public Schools."

SCHOOL DISTRICT TRENDS

While there was a mix of growing and shrinking school districts over the course of the last ten years, nearly all Nevada public school districts outside of the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) experienced a decrease in enrollment between SY 2024-2025 and SY 2025-2026. Storey and Nye Counties were minor exceptions, as Storey County increased by 16 students while Nye County increased by 7 students in SY 2025-2026. Douglas County and Churchill County experienced decreases in enrollment of 4.0 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively. Esmeralda County, the smallest district, also experienced a decline in enrollment (8 percent), enrolling 75 students in SY 2024-2025 and 69 students in SY 2025-2026.

Clark County School District (CCSD), the largest public school district in Nevada and the fifth largest in the nation, experienced a 4.7 percent decrease in public school enrollment, a loss of 14,451 students, between SY 2024-2025 and SY 2025-2026. However, this figure overstates the number of students who actually left CCSD. In January 2025, roughly 5,550 students in six charter schools previously sponsored by CCSD were reassigned to the SPCSA.[34] Excluding this transfer, CCSD's decline is closer to 3.0 percent, or roughly 9,000 students.[35] Washoe County School District also experienced a slight decrease in K-12 enrollment, dropping from 64,244 students in SY 2024-2025 to 63,655 students in SY 2025-2026, a decrease of 0.92 percent.

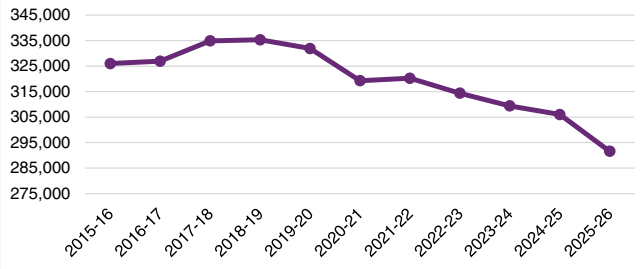
The SPCSA grew from 25,748 students in SY 2015-2016 to 70,534 in SY 2025-2026, reflecting an increase of 174 percent over the span of a decade. The SPCSA's share of total statewide K-12 enrollment rose from 5.5 percent to 14.9 percent, surpassing the Washoe County School District's total K-12 enrollment as the second largest district in Nevada. The CCSD's charter transfer also inflates the SPCSA's most recent growth: this transfer accounts for roughly 78 percent of the SPCSA's 10.9 percent increase (6,925 students) between SY 2024-2025 and SY 2025-2026. Without this transfer, the SPCSA's growth for the year was closer to 2.3 percent.[36]



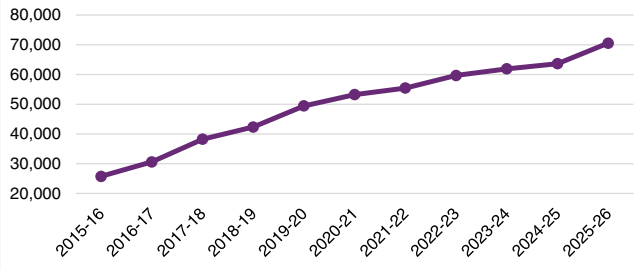
34. April Corbin Girnus, "Charter School Authority Absorbs 6 CCSD-Run Charter Schools," *Nevada Current*, January 29, 2025, https://nevadacurrent.com/2025/01/29/charter-school-authority-absorbs-6-ccsd-run-charter-schools/.
35. April Corbin Girnus, "Enrollment Climbs in Charter Schools, Drops in Clark and Washoe School Districts," *Nevada Current*, December 16, 2025, https://nevadacurrent.com/2025/12/16/enrollment-climbs-in-charter-schools-drops-in-clark-and-washoe-school-districts/.
36. Girnus, "Enrollment Climbs in Charter Schools, Drops in Clark and Washoe School Districts."

District Enrollment: 2025-2026		Percent Change: 2016-2026
SPCSA	70,534	173.94%
Eureka	300	15.83%
Nye	5,794	14.26%
Lyon	9,060	11.45%
Lander	1,047	4.60%
Mineral	520	2.97%
White Pine	1,243	0.49%
Pershing	647	-0.31%
Storey	408	-0.73%
Churchill	3,145	-3.91%
Washoe	63,655	-4.28%
Lincoln	945	-6.06%
Carson City	7,281	-7.05%
Elko	9,293	-8.43%
Humboldt	3,176	-8.92%
Clark	291,587	-10.55%
Esmeralda	69	-11.54%
Douglas	4,745	-21.45%

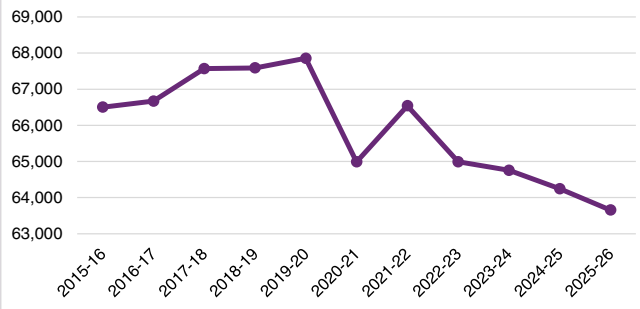
Clark County



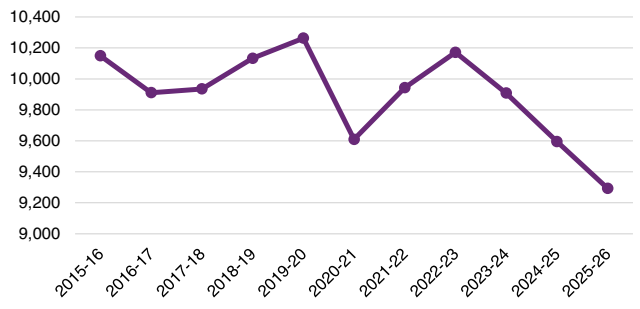
State Public Charter School Authority



Washoe County



Elko County



For a complete list of public K-12 district enrollment totals between 2016 and 2026, please see Appendix A.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A dwindling student population may place additional fiscal stress on public schools. As most education funding is provided on a per-pupil basis, district leaders must grapple with difficult decisions regarding adjusting school capacities, redistricting, or potentially closing campuses.[37]

While fewer students might suggest opportunities for smaller class sizes or more individualized instruction, the reality of the financial situation is much more complex. As enrollment declines, the per-pupil funding received by a school district decreases, while many operating costs, including school administration, building maintenance, and utilities, remain fixed. Many of these costs were partially covered by pandemic relief funds, which have now expired.[38] Nevada is not alone in facing this challenge, and several other states have adjusted their approach to education funding to account for declines in public K-12 enrollment.

Adjusting Funding Formulas

One approach to leveraging the current level of school funding while enrollment declines is for states with weighted funding formulas for some student groups to better account for students who may fall into multiple weighted funding categories. "Stacking" funding weights would allow targeted funding to reach public schools serving larger concentrations of economically disadvantaged, special education, or English learner students, as these populations have a growing need even as enrollment falls. Stacking categories for individual students would ensure each benefits from additional funding to meet their needs.[39]

Other states have implemented temporary hold-harmless policies over the last several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[40] For example, 22 states froze individual district state education funding changes based on enrollment, and these temporary hold-harmless provisions are now also assisting districts to navigate a climate of declining enrollment. Depending on the state, districts may use enrollment numbers from the previous year or an average of several years. This approach could also enable states to allocate funding based on enrollment projections instead of adjusting funding after the school year begins.



37. Council et al., *Declining Public School Enrollment.*
38. Moon, "K-12 Public School Enrollment Declines."
39. Indira Dammu et al., *How Are State Education Funding Formulas Structured?* (Bellwether, October 2021, updated October 2023), https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SplittingtheBill_3_Bellwether_October2023.pdf.
40. Eric Syverson and Chris Duncombe, *Student Counts in K-12 Funding Models* (Education Commission of the States, January 2022), https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Student-Counts-in-K-12-Funding-Models.pdf.

Nevada's Commission on School Funding is currently reviewing the state's funding plan, including its hold-harmless provision, with additional recommendations expected ahead of the 2027 Legislative Session. The CCSD's Board of Trustees has also recently authorized the district to pursue legislation that would base state funding on enrollment from the previous October or a three-year average, whichever is higher. Current Nevada law requires districts to create budgets based on estimated enrollment before the year begins, and those budgets are adjusted after official enrollment counts are made. These mid-year adjustments often affect staffing, programs, and services offered by schools. Basing enrollment projections on the previous year or averaging enrollment numbers could help prevent disruptions caused by mid-year budget adjustments and staffing changes.[41] While many public schools are experiencing enrollment declines, considerations could also be made for schools that are experiencing enrollment growth.

In September 2026, the Governor endorsed an emergency regulation proposed by NDE that would allow schools to receive funding based on the enrollment figures approved during the 2025 Legislative Session or the school's current quarterly enrollment, whichever is greater. This would allow schools to receive the per-pupil funding that was originally allocated instead of adjusting mid-year for lower enrollment counts.[42]

Temporary hold-harmless policies may provide districts with additional time to adjust to changing enrollment. However, permanent hold-harmless policies would subsidize districts for students that they are ultimately no longer serving. This would change the intention of per-pupil funding formulas and may divert funding from growing districts. When enrollment declines, policymakers may choose to reduce education spending proportionally, maintain education spending and allow per-pupil funding to rise, or make strategic choices about how to invest enrollment-related savings into other educational priorities.[43]



41. Sara Sullivan, "CCSD Proposes Bill to Prevent Mid-Year School Budget Cuts Amid Enrollment Decline," *News 3 Las Vegas*, September 18, 2026, https://news3lv.com/news/local/ccsd-proposes-bill-to-prevent-mid-year-school-budget-cuts-amid-enrollment-decline.
42. Drew Galang, "Governor Lombardo Signs Off on Emergency Funding for School Districts Facing Declining Enrollments," press release, Nevada Governor's Office, September 25, 2026, https://www.gov.nv.gov/press-releases/governor-lombardo-signs-off-on-emergency-funding-for-school-districts-facing-declining-enrollments/.
43. John Bellaire et al., *How Do School Finance Systems Respond to Enrollment Changes?* (Bellwether, March 2025), https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/SplittingtheBill_19_Bellwether_March2025.pdf.

School Consolidations and Closures

Outside of formula adjustments, some states have considered closing or consolidating schools, as maintaining underutilized and outdated buildings is costly, and facility expenses may exceed available funding. In West Virginia, where enrollment has declined 13 percent since 2015, 53 schools were closed between 2019 and 2024.[44] More recently, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas each approved plans to close or consolidate over a dozen schools before SY 2026-2027.[45] Vermont and Wisconsin are considering legislation to consolidate entire school districts in response to steeper declines in enrollment among remote and distant schools.[46] California is contemplating opportunities to lease, sell, or repurpose closed or underutilized facilities.[47]

School closures or consolidations may become a reality in Nevada, as CCSD's facility master plan has identified schools for possible closure, renovation, or consolidation.[48] Douglas County School District has also begun consolidating schools to help offset its decline in enrollment and budget deficit.[49] School consolidations, however, raise other questions for districts to consider, such as the effects that larger schools may have on children, and how these changes may impact transportation, school culture, family relationships, and the student experience.

Early Childhood Education

As programs shift and districts evaluate their priorities, an opportunity to expand preschool programs may arise. In Clark County, for example, there are currently draft options which consider converting some elementary and middle schools into pre-K-8 campuses, as well as adding pre-K classrooms at high schools.[50] Creating pre-K programs at existing campuses would help balance building capacity and utilization while providing sorely needed pre-K space.[51] This would also afford high school students the opportunity to gain experience in early childhood education, building upon already existing early childhood educator pipelines.



44. Moon, "K-12 Public School Enrollment Declines."
45. Anna Merod, "Cleveland Metropolitan School District to Close or Merge 29 Schools by 2026-27," *K-12 Dive*, December 15, 2025, https://www.k12dive.com/news/cleveland-metropolitan-school-district-to-close-or-merge-29-schools-by-2026/807943/; Anna Merod, "Philadelphia to Close 17 Schools as It Aims to Address 'Aging' Buildings," *K-12 Dive*, May 4, 2026, https://www.k12dive.com/news/philadelphia-to-close-17-schools-as-it-aims-to-address-aging-buildings/819140/; Bianca Seward, "Houston ISD Board Votes to Close 12 Schools, Angering Audience at Meeting," *Houston Public Media*, February 26, 2026, https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/education/2026/02/26/544580/houston-school-closures-hisd-board/.
46. Ethan Weinstein, "Vermont Legislature Passes Landmark Education Reform Without Forcing Districts to Merge," *VTDigger*, May 29, 2026, https://vtdigger.org/2026/05/29/vermont-passes-landmark-education-reform-without-forcing-districts-to-merge/; Corrinne Hess, "Wisconsin GOP Introduces Series of School District Consolidation Bills," *Wisconsin Public Radio*, November 12, 2025, https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsin-republican-school-district-consolidation-bills.
47. Paul Beach et al., *Navigating Change: Strategies to Strengthen California High Schools Amid Declining Enrollment* (Bellwether, September 11, 2024), https://bellwether.org/publications/navigating-change/.
48. Joshua Peguero, "CCSD Draft Report Lists School for Possible Closure, Renovation, or Consolidation," *8 News Now*, March 3, 2026, https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/ccsd-draft-report-lists-school-for-possible-closure-renovation-or-consolidation/.
49. Rocío Hernández and James Wolfgang Perez, "Public Schools Are Closing All Over Nevada as Enrollment Drops," *The Nevada Independent*, June 28, 2026, https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/public-schools-are-closing-all-over-nevada-as-enrollment-drops.
50. Peguero, "CCSD Draft Report Lists School for Possible Closure, Renovation, or Consolidation."
51. Todd Butterworth and Anna Colquitt, *Vital Questions for Nevada About Universal Pre-K* (Guinn Center, May 2025), https://www.guinncenter.org/research/vital-questions-for-nevada-about-universal-pre-k.

CONCLUSION

While the nation is experiencing declining enrollment, not all declines are landing evenly. Research shows that areas with high-poverty schools are losing students at nearly double the rate of their more affluent counterparts. High-poverty schools, which are more likely to serve a higher population of unhoused or immigrant families, are also more likely to be under-resourced.[52] These schools may also have a harder time retaining and attracting families. Furthermore, schools that are most likely to experience declining enrollment also may be the least equipped to manage these funding declines, as they often have less staff and fewer programs.

Declining enrollment is not simply a matter of having fewer students and therefore needing fewer resources. As district leaders and policymakers consider and develop long-term solutions, it is important to ensure that declining enrollment does not unintentionally widen existing inequities among schools and communities.

In Nevada, disparities exist between school districts, and those districts under the most acute fiscal stress have the least room to maneuver. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 Annual Survey of School System Finances (the most recent year available), Nevada's per-pupil spending was $14,812, which is almost $3,000 below the national average of $17,620.[53] As smaller districts have fewer alternative revenue sources, even a slight decline in enrollment can have a big effect on the district's budget.[54] District leaders are often faced with the challenge of either shrinking spending or identifying ways to generate additional revenue.

As states continue to navigate the challenges that come with declining enrollment, it is important to continue involving families, communities, and educators in the budgeting process and conversations surrounding decision-making at every stage. This helps improve transparency and ensures alignment with community priorities while making processes and decisions more accessible.[55]

Declining enrollment is not a new phenomenon, and it is a challenge that has been building over many years. While many reasons for declining public school enrollment exist outside of a district's control, some families have willingly disengaged from the traditional public school system. To benefit the district's remaining students, it may be wise to understand why some families leave the K-12 public school system altogether.[56] Future research could also focus on better understanding the challenges faced by youth who have dropped out or disengaged from the school system entirely.[57]

Administrators, district leaders, policymakers, and communities may wish to work together to plan for continued enrollment declines within classrooms and to better understand how these declines will affect higher education and the workforce. As declining enrollment is not unique to Nevada, researchers and policymakers may look to other states to consider how best to navigate sustained enrollment decline.

52. Moon, "K-12 Public School Enrollment Declines."
53. U.S. Census Bureau, *2024 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data*, "Per Pupil Amounts for Current Spending of Public Elementary-Secondary School Systems by State: Fiscal Year 2024," Summary Table 8, https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww2.census.gov%2Fprograms-surveys%2Fschool-finances%2Ftables%2F2024%2Fsecondary-education-finance%2Felsec24_sumtables.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.
54. *The State of Education in Nevada (2025): A Comprehensive Report,* Nevada Governor Elections 2026, 2025, https://www.nvgov2026.org/sources/state_of_education_in_nevada_2025.pdf.
55. Kaput et al., *How Student Enrollment Declines Are Affecting Education Budgets.*
56. Council et al., *Declining Public School Enrollment.*
57. Jaylin Hendricks, *Out-of-School Youth in Southern Nevada: A Focus Group Analysis on Challenges Faced by Out-of-School Youth and Service Providers* (Guinn Center, May 2023), https://www.guinncenter.org/research/final-osy-report.

APPENDIX A:

NDE Reported Totals for Select Years					Percent Change		
1989-1990	1999-2000	2010-2011	2015-2016	2025-2026	1990-2026	2011-2026	2016-2026
201,316	340,706	439,634	467,527	473,657	135.28%	7.74%	1.31%

District	Total Enrollment											Percent Change 2016-2026
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	
Carson City	7,833	8,093	8,184	8,221	8,219	7,836	7,822	7,722	7,522	7,459	7,281	-7.05%
Churchill	3,273	3,196	3,424	3,466	3,456	3,247	3,360	3,394	3,336	3,284	3,145	-3.91%
Clark	325,990	326,952	334,900	335,333	331,921	319,293	320,245	314,372	309,397	306,038	291,587*	-10.55%
Douglas	6,041	5,932	5,813	5,856	5,787	5,400	5,397	5,331	5,036	4,943	4,745	-21.45%
Elko	10,149	9,911	9,935	10,133	10,263	9,609	9,943	10,171	9,908	9,595	9,293	-8.43%
Esmeralda	78	75	73	96	81	101	83	88	89	75	69	-11.54%
Eureka	259	276	291	321	349	324	348	333	325	310	300	15.83%
Humboldt	3,487	3,399	3,584	3,525	3,525	3,306	3,387	3,329	3,356	3,257	3,176	-8.92%
Lander	1,001	1,004	1,027	1,002	1,034	1,027	1,030	1,059	1,077	1,059	1,047	4.60%
Lincoln	1,006	1,085	1,107	1,015	978	886	942	958	959	958	945	-6.06%
Lyon	8,129	8,348	8,986	9,105	9,042	8,823	8,937	9,085	9,085	9,205	9,060	11.45%
Mineral	505	518	587	602	586	572	612	613	596	542	520	2.97%
Nye	5,071	5,037	5,442	5,484	5,712	5,394	5,627	5,873	5,682	5,787	5,794	14.26%
Pershing	649	627	700	658	674	656	686	684	657	666	647	-0.31%
State Public Charter School Authority	25,748	30,597	38,224	42,333	49,420	53,223	55,415	59,670	61,883	63,609	70,534*	173.94%
Storey	411	425	443	460	449	448	433	416	400	392	408	-0.73%
University Schools (Davidson)	156	159	172	189	178	234	229	163	171	169	171	9.62%
Washoe	66,504	66,671	67,569	67,590	67,856	64,988	66,541	64,990	64,755	64,244	63,655	-4.28%
White Pine	1,237	1,390	1,955	1,655	1,287	1,228	1,272	1,322	1,290	1,276	1,243	0.49%
Correctional School District				60	43	38	29	24	46	40	37	
Achievement School District				1,512								
NDE Reported Total:	**467,527**	**473,695**	**492,416**	**498,616**	**500,860**	**486,633**	**492,338**	**489,597**	**485,570**	**482,908**	**473,657**	**1.31%**
NDE Reported Enrollment (with PreK, UG, and AD Removed):	461,130	467,367	476,018	480,143	483,914	471,932	474,785	471,211	465,021	462,918	454,270	-1.49%
Private School Enrollment	19,827	20,034	20,028	19,676	19,325	19,427	20,893	22,399	22,810	22,442		13.19%

**Totals include six existing charter schools (~5,400 students) transferred from the Clark County School District to the State Public Charter School Authority in January 2025.*

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OUR VISION

Identify and advance sound policies and actionable solutions that support a thriving and prosperous Nevada.



OUR MISSION

Advancing evidence-based policy solutions for Nevada through research, public engagement, and partnerships.



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