

August 2022

U.S. Education in the Time of COVID

Beginning in March 2020, the American education system was confronted with unprecedented challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic caused the closures of many U.S. schools to in-person learning. Schools quickly transitioned to remote learning models, and the most lingering question—for parents, students, and educators—was: *When will U.S. schools re-open for full-time in-person learning?*

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has gathered highlights from a variety of data sources to provide a composite, high-level view of the complex American education landscape since the onset of the pandemic. In this first installment of the pandemic data hub, we provide findings related to

- changes in in-person instruction that have occurred over the last 2 years at both the elementary/secondary level and the postsecondary level;
- technology assistance that K-12 schools have provided to students and families;
- social and academic support that K-12 schools have offered;
- changes in school staffing that have occurred at K-12 schools; and
- economic and social impacts on postsecondary students.

In subsequent installments, we will explore key findings related to how the pandemic has potentially impacted achievement and opportunities to learn.

For more in-depth results underlying the highlights presented here, readers are encouraged to access the reports and dashboards via the links provided in each theme page.

Spring 2020

In spring 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of American schools transitioned to distance education models. During this period, 77 percent of public

schools moved to online distance learning, and 84 percent of college students reported having some or all classes moved to online-only instruction. Overall, 27 percent of undergraduate students received a tuition refund from their institutions in spring 2020.

Fall 2020

Total K-12 public school enrollment declined by 2.7 percent, and enrollment for first-time undergraduate students decreased by 9 percent compared with fall 2019. The number of public school teachers declined by 0.2 percent, smaller than the enrollment decline. Thus, the pupil/teacher ratio declined from 15.9 to 15.4 pupils per teacher compared with 2019. Two-thirds of adults with children in school reported their children moved to online learning.

Spring 2021

About half (52 percent) of public school students were enrolled in full-time in-person instruction in May 2021. A quarter (25 percent) of adults with children in public or private school reported that their children received food assistance from the school in spring 2021.

Fall 2021

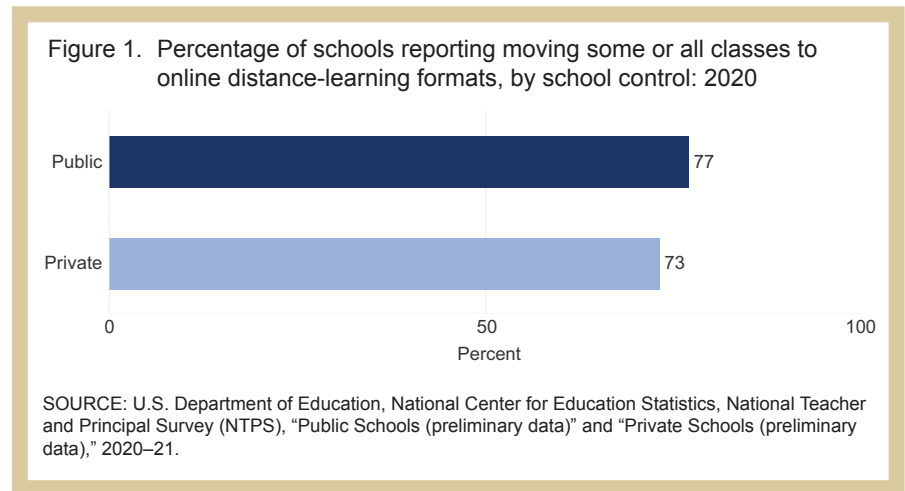
Almost all public schools (98 percent) planned to offer full-time in-person learning in fall 2021. In September 2021, almost all public schools (96 percent) reported providing digital devices, such as tablets, to students who needed them, and about 86 percent of public schools encouraged staff members to address students' social, emotional, and mental well-being. The percentage of state and local public education sector jobs with openings was 2.9 percent in December 2021, which was higher than in December 2019 or December 2020.

Elementary and Secondary Education

Shifts in Enrollment and Instructional Mode

Over 7 in 10 schools moved to online learning in early 2020.

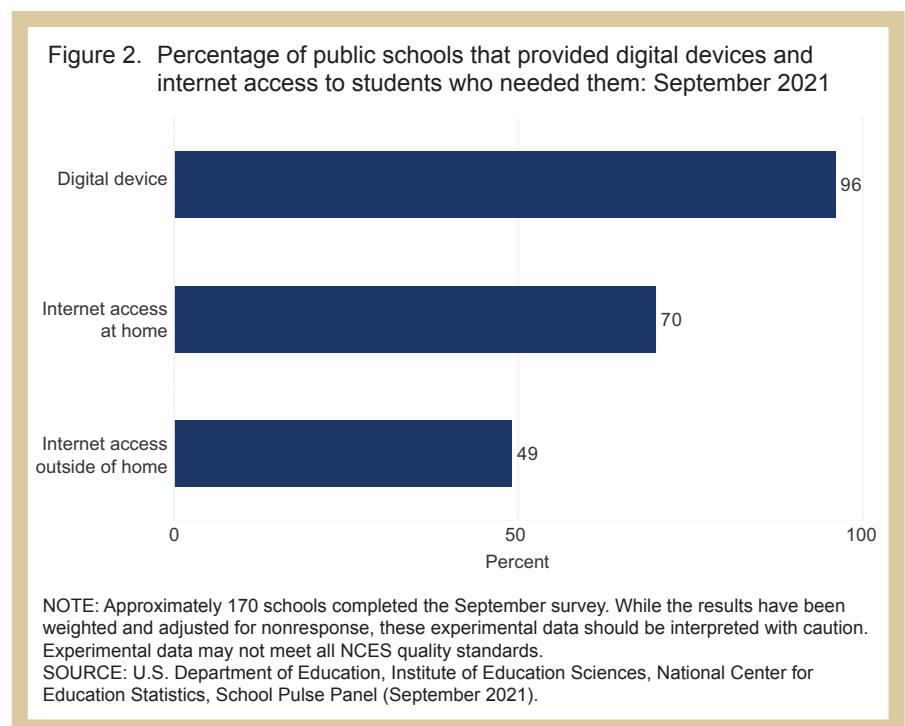
Seventy-seven percent of public schools and 73 percent of private schools reported moving some or all classes to online distance-learning formats in early 2020.



Technology Support

Almost all public schools (96 percent) reported providing digital devices to their students who needed them by the beginning of the 2021–22 school year.

Seventy percent of public schools also provided internet access at home to students who needed it, and 49 percent provided access at locations other than the home to students who needed it.

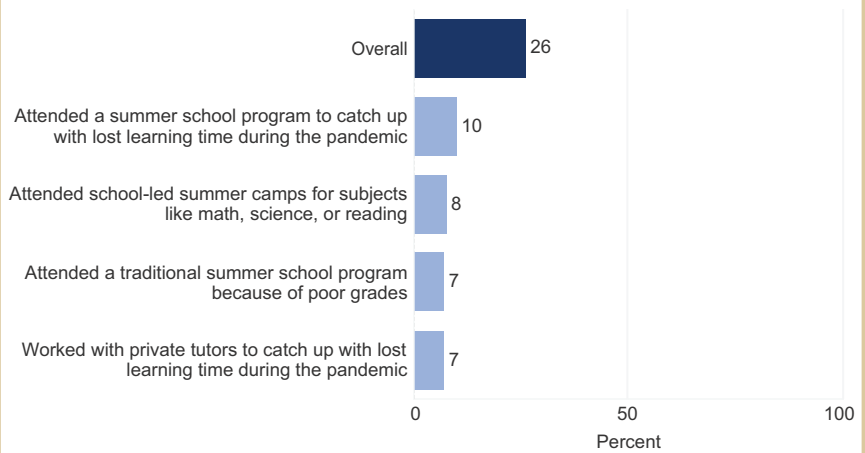


Social and Academic Supports

Some 26 percent of adults with children in school reported that their children attended summer programs offered by the school or worked with private tutors in summer 2021.

About 10 percent of adults with children in school reported in September 2021 that their children had attended a summer school program to catch up with lost learning time during the pandemic. Seven percent reported that their children attended a traditional summer school program because of poor grades.

Figure 3. Among adults 18 years old and over who had children under 18 in the home enrolled in school or homeschooled, percentage reporting summer education activities for their children, by type of activity: September 15 to 27, 2021



NOTE: Respondents could report multiple types of summer education activities. Data in this figure are considered experimental and do not meet NCES standards for response rates. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, collection period of September 15 to 27, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 227.60.

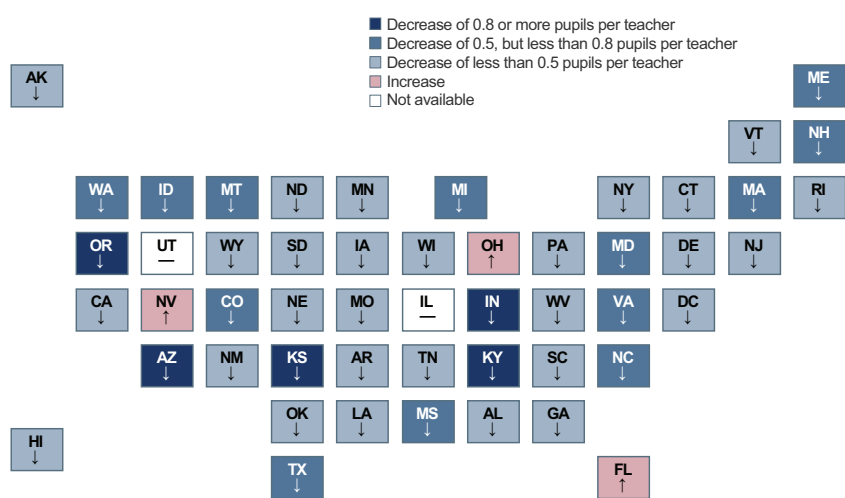
Teacher and Staffing

2020-2021

The public school pupil/teacher ratio declined from 15.9 pupils per teacher in the 2019-20 school year to 15.4 pupils per teacher in the 2020-21 school year.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a historic decline (2.7 percent) in public school enrollment in fall 2020. Due to the relatively smaller decrease in the number of teachers (0.2 percent), the pupil/teacher ratio decreased in most states (the exceptions were Nevada, Florida, and Ohio).

Figure 4. Change in pupil/teacher ratio in public elementary and secondary schools, by state: 2019-20 to 2020-21



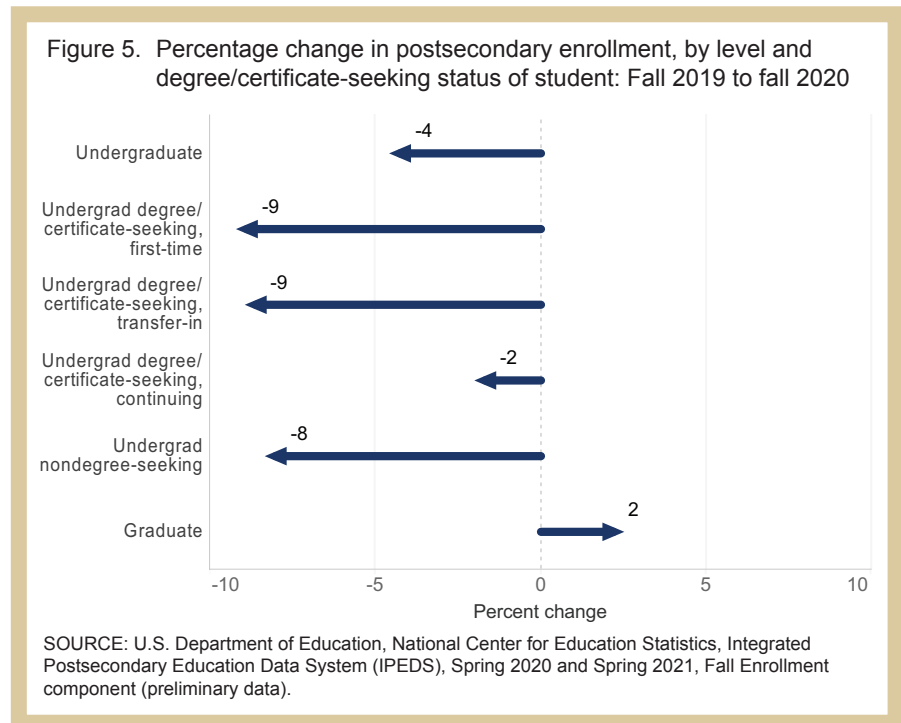
NOTE: Data for Illinois and Utah are not available. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey," 2019-20 v.1a, table 2 and 2020-21 v.1a, table 2.

Postsecondary Education

Shifts in Enrollment and Instructional Mode

Enrollment for first-time undergraduate students in fall 2020 decreased 9 percent from fall 2019.

Overall undergraduate enrollment in fall 2020 decreased about 4 percent from fall 2019, while graduate enrollment increased about 2 percent.



Social and Economic Impacts

Fifteen percent of undergraduate students received emergency financial assistance from their institutions in spring 2020.

Undergraduates with Pell Grants received emergency financial assistance from their institutions at about double the rate as students without Pell Grants (22 percent vs. 9 percent).

