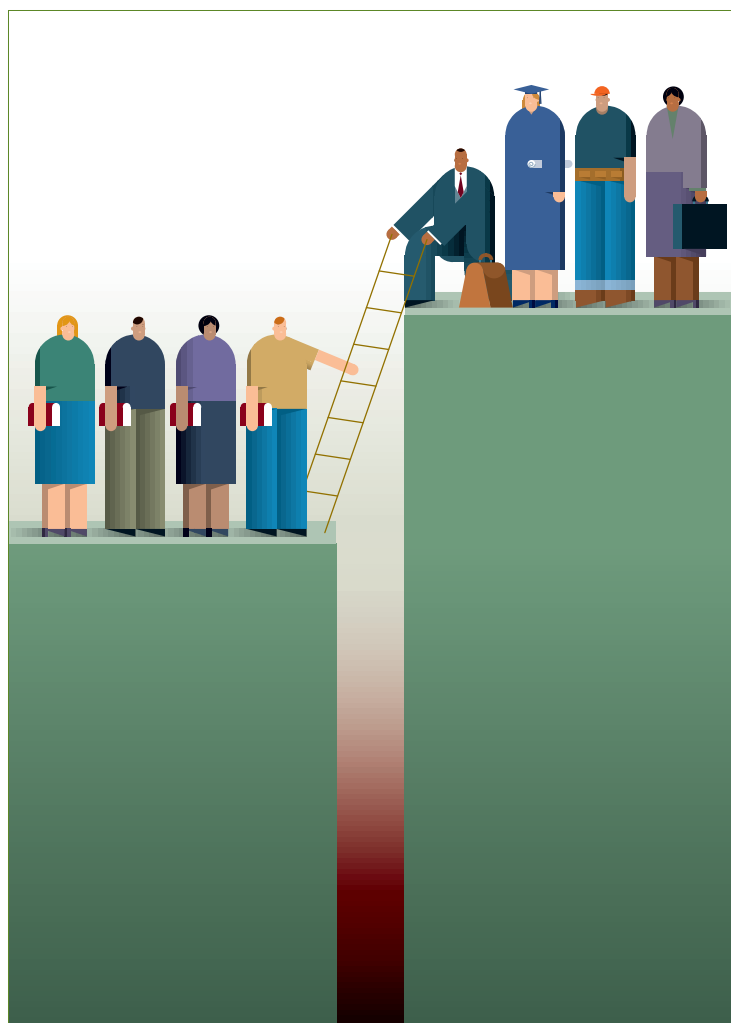


Meeting the Challenges of **Population Growth** and the Future Demand for **Postsecondary Education**

Considerations for State Higher Education Policy

By **Mario C. Martinez**



Education Commission
of the **S**tates

Center for Community College Policy

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Abstract

This policy brief tracks state-level population changes in the 18-and-older population and addresses the implications of those changes on the demand for postsecondary education over the next 15 years. Changes in the 18- to 24-year-old and 25-and-older populations will vary widely across states. These variations raise questions about how states should focus resources to provide the postsecondary services that will be needed to expand access, improve educational attainment and produce a competitive workforce. Projected demographic and enrollment statistics are provided for all 50 states, and various state examples throughout the brief illustrate the higher education policy issues that will arise over the next decade.

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, enrollments in the nation's colleges and universities have steadily risen. In fact, the demand for all forms of education and training beyond high school has never been higher. Now that a high school diploma is no longer seen as the ticket to employment and higher earnings, the demand for postsecondary education¹ can only be expected to increase in the years ahead. The projected growth in the overall size of the 18-and-older population across all 50 states will further increase the demand for postsecondary education. States that successfully provide more postsecondary services or tailor those services to meet the needs of their populations can expect the percentage of college-educated citizens in their states to increase. Conversely, the percentage of college-educated people will decline in those states that are unable to expand access to meet projected demand.

Most state legislators realize how important postsecondary education is to the future of their states. In two national surveys conducted over the last decade,² poli-

cymakers said that raising educational attainment is inextricably tied to their states' ability to (1) strengthen and diversify state and local economies and (2) prepare and train a high-skill, high-wage workforce. There also is evidence that improvements in educational attainment lead to other public and private benefits, such as increased civic participation, less dependency on social programs and a reduction in violent crimes.

Policymakers and college leaders will need to work together to meet state priorities and the growing demand for postsecondary education. The fulfillment of these ends in any state is dependent on the existing postsecondary capacity in that state, which is a product of the number of postsecondary institutions, the mix of two- and four-year and public and private institutions, and the services the institutions provide. This capacity, then, is directly related to the number of spaces that are available for students to attend college. The existing capacity in some states may be sufficient to meet state priorities and future demand; in other states, it may not be.

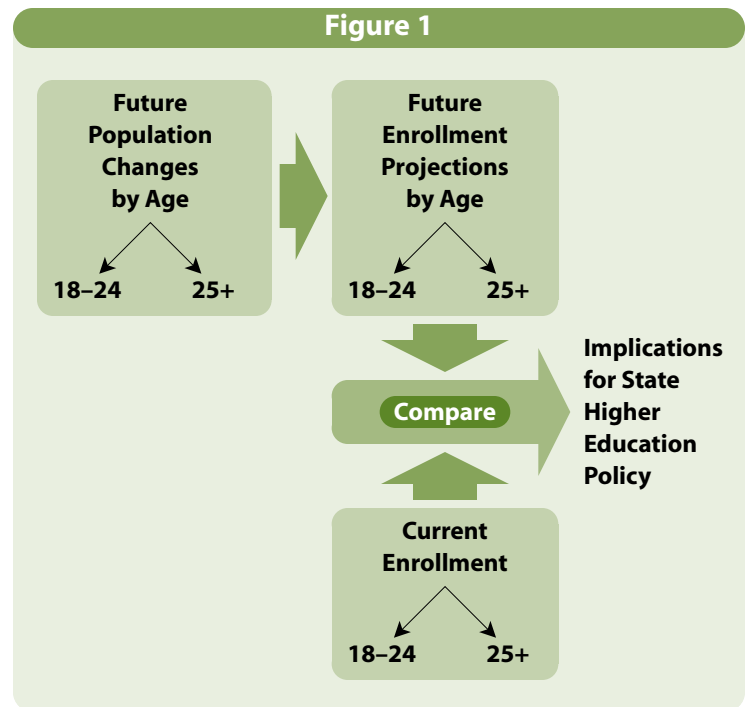
State Demographics and Postsecondary Enrollment

State age-group demographic changes over the next 10 years will affect the future demand for postsecondary education, policy decisions about funding and capacity, and perhaps even the priorities that states pursue. Demographics by age group are reasonably predictable and as such can inform state higher education policy.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) began the process of helping states think about future demographic changes with the release of its *Closing the College Participation Gap* study in fall 2003. The study relied on U.S. Census Bureau statistics to calculate and rank current state-by-state participation rates for the two college-eligible populations: 18- to 24-year-olds, and those 25 and older. Census population projections and participation rates were used to project national and state postsecondary enrollment demand for 2015 for both of these age groups. The ECS project compared current enrollments with projected enrollments to inform states of the coming demand for postsecondary education. In addition, the study projected future enrollment demand assuming states improve their participation rates over current levels.

This policy brief describes how state-level leaders can make use of these and other data elements from the *Closing the College Participation Gap* study to help plan for projected postsecondary enrollments. The brief has four objectives, which are outlined below and shown in Figure 1:

- Examine broad population changes between now and 2015 for each state and the nation for two age groups: 18- to 24-year-olds, and those 25 and older
- Describe future enrollment projections for the two age groups, given the projected population changes by age group
- Compare the future enrollment projections by age group with current statistics on enrollment by age group and enrollment by sector (two- or four-year institutions)
- Discuss higher education policies that might help states meet future enrollment projections and state priorities, given the unique contexts of the states.



Changing Populations by 2015

A record 17.3 million people in the United States ages 18 and older are enrolled in some form of postsecondary education, according to the 2000 Decennial Census. If all states simply maintain their current participation rates, an additional 2.3 million students will enroll in college by 2015 — an increase of nearly 13% over 2000 levels. Demographic growth alone will drive this increase. If states expand access to higher education, both improved participation rates and demographic growth will push enrollments even higher. Participation rates across the nation will have to improve to prevent the United States from slipping further behind other industrialized nations on measures of educational achievement.³

The total number of people 18 and older will increase in every state by 2015, but growth rates by state for 18- to 24-year-olds and those 25 and older will vary widely. Table 1 shows the 50 states and their projected percentage demographic growth rates for 18- to 24-year-olds and those 25 and older.

In some states, the number of 18- to 24-year olds will increase, while in others it will decrease. For those states expecting a decrease, the total adult population

Table 1

General Population Changes, 2000–15

Age group: 18–24	Age group: 25+
Alaska 54.4%	Idaho 35.4%
California 40.8%	Wyoming 33.8%
Hawaii 36.0%	Utah 30.1%
Maryland 26.2%	New Mexico 27.9%
New Mexico 24.7%	Montana 26.4%
New Jersey 21.2%	Washington 26.0%
Connecticut 21.1%	Oregon 24.7%
Texas 20.7%	Hawaii 23.2%
New Hampshire 19.1%	Alaska 21.6%
Massachusetts 17.5%	Florida 20.5%
Virginia 17.2%	Arkansas 18.2%
Wyoming 16.7%	Texas 18.2%
Florida 16.2%	Colorado 17.8%
Washington 14.5%	Nevada 17.2%
Georgia 12.4%	Arizona 17.1%
New York 11.3%	Tennessee 16.9%
Arizona 10.4%	Georgia 16.9%
Tennessee 9.4%	Alabama 16.9%
Alabama 8.5%	South Dakota 16.9%
Delaware 7.6%	California 16.7%
Colorado 7.5%	Oklahoma 15.9%
Illinois 6.8%	North Carolina 15.9%
Louisiana 5.7%	Virginia 15.3%
Idaho 5.1%	New Hampshire 14.8%
Nevada 5.0%	South Carolina 14.7%
Maine 4.2%	North Dakota 14.4%
North Carolina 4.2%	Mississippi 14.0%
Missouri 4.0%	Kansas 13.8%
Vermont 3.7%	Vermont 13.3%
Kansas 3.2%	Minnesota 13.0%
Ohio 2.6%	Nebraska 12.9%
South Carolina 2.4%	Maryland 12.6%
Oregon 2.3%	Louisiana 12.2%
Pennsylvania 1.9%	Missouri 11.8%
Rhode Island 1.8%	Maine 11.6%
Minnesota 1.6%	Kentucky 11.3%
Michigan 0.7%	Wisconsin 11.2%
Oklahoma 0.3%	Indiana 10.6%
Indiana 0.0%	Delaware 10.1%
Utah -0.4%	Iowa 8.3%
Nebraska -0.8%	West Virginia 8.1%
Wisconsin -1.3%	New Jersey 7.1%
Montana -1.4%	Ohio 5.6%
North Dakota -3.0%	Illinois 4.5%
South Dakota -3.1%	Connecticut 4.3%
Kentucky -4.3%	Pennsylvania 4.0%
Arkansas -4.8%	Massachusetts 3.6%
Mississippi -5.9%	Rhode Island 2.8%
Iowa -10.3%	Michigan 2.7%
West Virginia -11.3%	New York -1.3%

will still grow because of the expected increase in the number of people 25 and older. For example, Wisconsin’s 1.3% decrease in the 18- to 24-year-old population will not result in a loss in the 18-and-older population because the 25-and-older population is projected to grow 11.2%. Even in West Virginia, where the 18- to 24-year-old population will decrease by 11.3%, the 8.1% growth of the 25-and-older population will still result in a total increase in the number of adults 18 and older in the 2015 population. In every state except New York, the 25-and-older population will increase.

Table 1 divides each age group into two categories, based on projected growth. States expecting double-digit population growth (10% or greater) for either age group are shown in bold. Thirty-nine states will experience double-digit growth in their 25-and-older populations. The growth in the 18- to 24-year-old population has captured much of the nation’s attention regarding education, largely because those who attend postsecondary education from this age group are typically considered traditional students. Table 1 suggests that the educational needs of the 25-and-older population will require at least as much if not more attention. Those who attend postsecondary education from the 25-and-older population are often referred to as adult students.

States expecting double-digit growth for a particular age group can be considered “high-growth” states for that age group. States expecting less than 10% growth for a particular age group can be considered “low-growth” states for that age group. A state with low growth for a particular age group can have negative growth, which means that the number of projected individuals in this age group is projected to decrease. Every state falls into one of the two categories for each age group, high or low. This means there are four possible scenarios to describe a state’s population changes relative to the two college-eligible populations:

- High growth for the 18- to 24-year-old population; high growth for the 25-and-older population
- High growth for the 18- to 24-year-old population; low growth for the 25-and-older population
- Low growth for the 18- to 24-year-old population; low growth for the 25-and-older population
- Low growth for the 18- to 24-year-old population; high growth for the 25-and-older population.

Figure 2 maps the population changes for the two age groups of interest for all 50 states using the four scenarios. The majority of states will experience high growth in the 25-and-older population and low growth in the 18- to 24-year-old population. The aging of the baby-boom generation has received much attention in

the popular press, and Figure 2 shows that a significant number of states may want to take into account this phenomenon as they plan for meeting the educational needs of their future populations.

Several regional patterns are noticeable in Figure 2. Thirteen states will experience high growth for both age groups, the majority of which are located in the western half of the United States. The four states that will experience high growth in the 18- to 24-year-old population but low growth in the 25-and-older population are all northeastern states. Four of the seven states projected to have low growth for both age groups are in the Midwest. Even with low projected growth for both age groups, however, the total number of people 18 and older will still increase for all seven of these states.

A more detailed look at a select group of states illustrates the dramatic variations in population changes by age group among states. As the graph in Figure 3 shows, the extent of age-group population changes varies by state — even for states that are similarly categorized in Figure 2. For example, high growth is projected for both age groups in California and Florida, but in Florida the growth rate for the 25-and-older population will outpace the growth rate for 18- to 24-year-olds. In California, the growth rate for 18- to 24-year-olds will outpace the growth rate for the 25-and-older population.

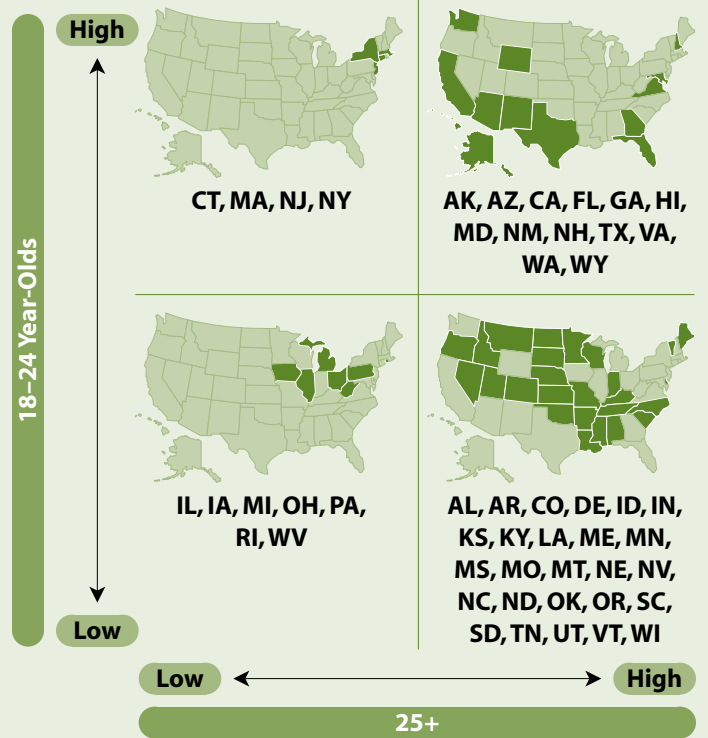
The population changes by age group, when viewed through the lens of a table, map or graph, reveal complementary but different details about the age groups. Population changes by age group, when combined with existing statistics on postsecondary participation, can also provide a data-driven view of how future enrollments are likely to change.

Demographic Changes and Enrollment Demand

Population changes in either the 18- to 24-year-old or 25-and-older age group generally translate into changes in demand for postsecondary education from the corresponding age group. For example, states expecting an increase in the 18- to 24-year-old population should expect an increase in traditional student enrollment. This also assumes that states maintain their existing participation rates for this age group. Conversely, a decrease in the size of the 18- to 24-year-old population should result in a decrease in traditional student enrollment, again assuming that state participation rates remain the same. Enrollment predictions for the 25-and-older population would follow similar patterns for adult students, if states maintain participation rates for this age group.

Figure 2

General Population Changes, 2000–15



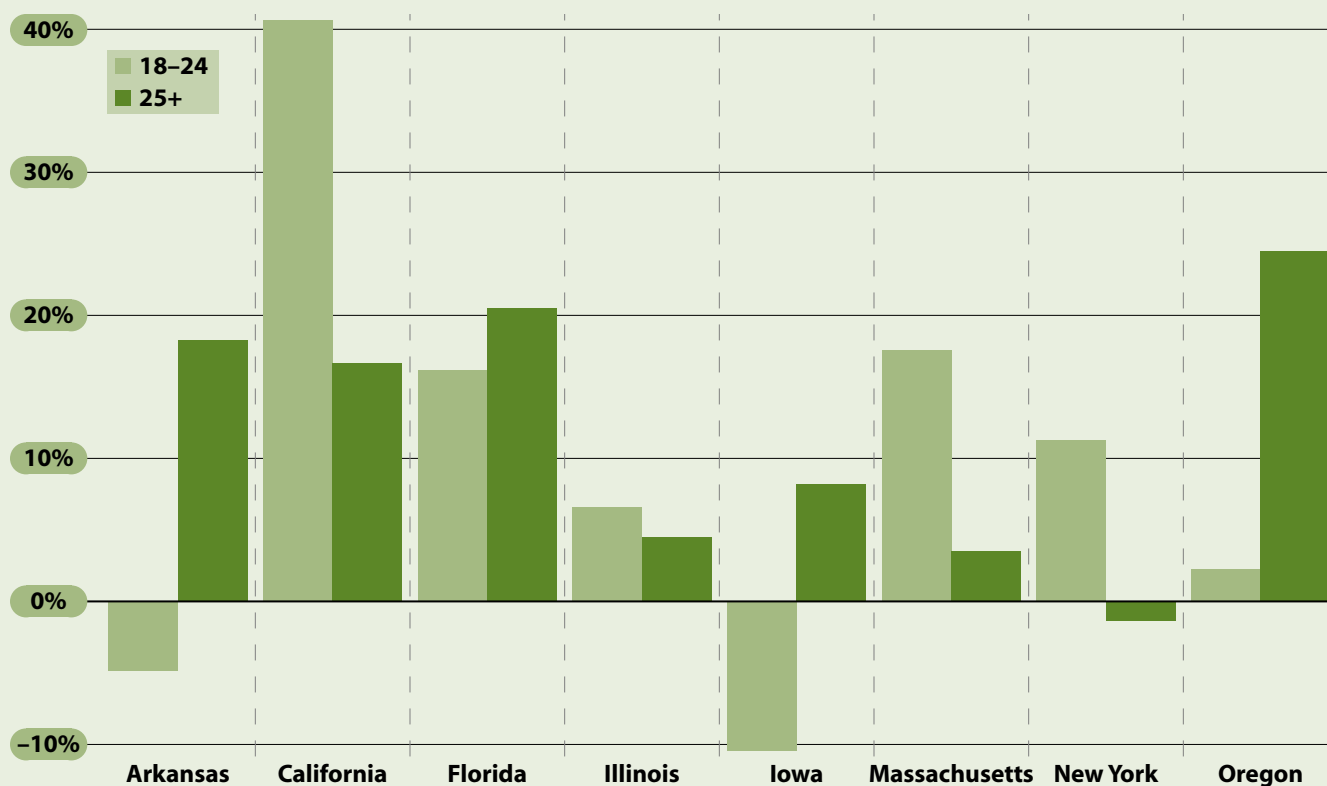
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Of the 17.3 million students 18 and older enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities, 53% are traditional college-age students, while 47% are adult students. This enrollment mix will not change on a national level, given that the growth in the 18- to 24-year-old and 25-and-older populations will both be near 13% and assuming states maintain their existing participation rates. There are a number of states for which population projections by age group will not be similar, as was shown in Table 1. For these states, it is likely that the proportion of the traditional student enrollment will shift relative to the 25-and-older student enrollment.

Table 2 shows the proportion of traditional student enrollment for the eight states identified in Figure 3. The eight states in Table 2 represent different regions of the country, and they vary in terms of their projected population and enrollment changes by age group.

Figure 3

General Population Changes, 2000–15



The proportion of traditional student enrollment is the number of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in postsecondary education compared to the total number of students 18 and older enrolled in postsecondary education. This means that the proportion statistic in Table 2 is the percentage of traditional students enrolled in postsecondary education relative to the entire student population for each state. The student enrollment projections by age group used to calculate the enrollment proportions are from the ECS' *Closing the College Participation Gap* study. These projected enrollments assume that states will maintain existing participation rates for adult and traditional students. If states improve participation rates for one or both age groups, then the absolute number of students enrolled would increase and the age-group enrollment proportions would likely change.

Table 2 also shows enrollment trends against population changes for the 18- to 24-year-old age group only. The proportion of adult student enrollment is implied from the proportion of traditional student enrollment for each state. For example, in Arkansas, the 18- to 24-year-old population is actually projected to decline in 2015 (last column on the table). If Arkansas maintains its current participation rates for each age group, the proportion of traditional students

enrolled in postsecondary education will decrease from 58.8% to 53.5%, as shown in Table 2. This means that adult students will represent 46.5% (100%-53.5%) of the state's enrollments in 2015, compared to 41.2% in 2000. The enrollment trend by age group in New York is opposite that of Arkansas: the 18- to 24-year-old population is growing and the 25-and-older population is declining. Traditional-age students are projected to represent a growing proportion of total enrollments in the state, from 53.8% to 56.8%.

It is possible that the 18- to 24-year-old population will increase in some states, yet the proportion of traditional students will decrease. The proportion of adult students will increase faster because the 25-and-older population for these states is projected to grow much faster than the 18- to 24-year-old population. Oregon is one such state.

As shown in Table 2, in Oregon, the 18- to 24-year-old population is going to increase slightly (2.3%), yet the proportion of enrollment for traditional students will decline. The bar graph in Figure 3 explains this result for Oregon, showing the 25-and-older population growing at a much faster rate than the 18- to 24-year-old population. Figure 3 shows that Florida's age-group growth patterns are similar to

Oregon's, although the difference in growth between the two age groups in Florida is not as dramatic as in Oregon.

The projected age-group population changes for 18-to-24-year-olds and those 25 and older will influence future enrollment demand. As shown in Table 2, the general impact of age-group population changes on future state enrollments can be established within reasonable parameters. This information can then be used to think about which institutions and services will best meet future demand.

Where Are They Enrolled? Where Will They Want To Enroll?

Any state's current capacity to provide postsecondary education is a combination of history, demand, state resource availability and past decisions by policymakers and higher education leaders. It is not easy to assess whether specific institutions are fully maximizing their existing capacity, and different stakeholders within a single state will predictably offer different perspectives on this issue. An examination of current enrollment trends, however, provides an indication of where, over time, states have built capacity to provide postsecondary services. In some states, such as Washington and California, the majority of state postsecondary enrollments are in the two-year sector. In other states, such as North Dakota and Massachusetts, the majority of state postsecondary enrollments are in the four-year sector.

Future enrollment demand by age group is one tool that states can use to think about where they should build capacity. States expecting large population increases in the 18- to-24-year-old population may focus their capacity-building efforts on a different sector than states expecting large population increases in the 25-and-older population. Historically, 18- to-24-year-old enrollment is more heavily concentrated at four-year institutions, while students 25 and older tend to enroll in two-year institutions. Traditional students constitute 61% of four-year enrollments and 49.7% of two-year enrollments. Those 25 and older show the opposite pattern, constituting 44.4% of enrollments at two-year institutions and 35.9% at four-year institutions. In general, these data suggest a state expecting dramatic increases in its 25-and-older population might expect more demand at two-year institutions⁴ than four-year institutions; a state expecting a dramatic increase in its 18- to-24-year-old population might expect more demand at four-year institutions than two-year institutions.

Table 2

Statistics for the 18–24 Age Group

State	Proportion of Enrollment		Population Change
	2000	2015	2000–15
Arkansas	58.8%	53.5%	-4.8%
California	46.7%	51.3%	40.8%
Florida	47.6%	46.7%	16.2%
Illinois	52.1%	52.6%	6.8%
Iowa	63.9%	59.5%	-10.3%
Massachusetts	54.3%	57.4%	17.5%
New York	53.8%	56.8%	11.3%
Oregon	49.3%	44.4%	2.3%
Nation	52.9%	52.9%	13.0%

Table 3

Projected Enrollment Changes by Age Group Versus Current Enrollment by Sector

State	Enrollment Change 2000–15		Percent of Enrollment, 2000	
	2000	2015	4-Year Sector	2-Year Sector
Arkansas	58.8%	53.5%	70.4%	29.6%
California	46.7%	51.3%	37.4%	62.6%
Florida	47.6%	46.7%	52.7%	47.3%
Illinois	52.1%	52.6%	53.4%	46.6%
Iowa	63.9%	59.5%	64.0%	36.0%
Massachusetts	54.3%	57.4%	79.9%	20.1%
New York	53.8%	56.8%	74.1%	25.9%
Oregon	49.3%	44.4%	53.7%	46.3%
Nation	52.9%	52.9%	61.2%	38.8%

Table 3 shows the projected enrollment changes by age group versus current enrollment by sector for the eight states from Table 2. The two- and four-year enrollment percentages include both public and private institutions. A national average is provided for the breakdown of enrollment by sector so that states may assess whether they tend to over- or under-emphasize a particular sector relative to other states.

Projected Enrollment Changes by Age Group Versus Current Enrollment by Sector

Nationally, the percentage change in enrollment for traditional and adult students is expected to grow at approximately the same rate, 11.5% and 11.3%, respectively. Given the comparable rate of national growth in enrollments by age group, it is reasonable to assume that the national proportion of enrollment by age group for the two-year sector (38.8%) and four-year sector (61.2%) also will stay the same in 2015.

Projected enrollment changes by age group for some states will vary from the national averages, however, raising the possibility that the future enrollment proportions by sector also will change. Three states in Table 3 — Arkansas, California and Iowa — stand out as examples. In Arkansas and Iowa, enrollments in two-year institutions currently fall below the national average, at 29.6% and 36%, respectively. At the same time, both states are expected to see a decline in traditional student enrollment and an increase in adult student enrollment, as shown in Table 3. The result in Arkansas: adult students will constitute 46.5% of the student population in 2015 compared to 41.2% in 2000. The pattern is similar in Iowa, where the proportion of adult students is projected to increase from

36.1% to 40.5%. These two states may have to more fully utilize the two-year sector to meet the future demand of the growing adult student population.

California, based on the data presented in Table 3, exhibits a different pattern of projected growth, but like Arkansas and Iowa, it also appears to have a misalignment between future enrollment changes and its current capacity emphasis. California currently relies heavily on its two-year sector, but the growth in traditional student enrollment is projected to increase dramatically, by 29%, compared to a 14.3% growth rate for adult student enrollment. Although California's adult enrollment will increase in absolute numbers, it will decrease as a proportion of total student enrollment, from 53.3% in 2000 to 48.7% in 2015. California's disproportionate reliance on the two-year sector, in the face of astronomical growth in future demand from traditional students, raises many questions about where the state might need to build capacity to meet future needs.

Every state will have a different strategy for accommodating changing enrollments. Shifting enrollment by age group is one important factor that state leaders should consider as they attempt to align capacity with future student needs. The context of each state also will influence decisions about which policies will best maximize access to postsecondary education while helping states reach their goals. Policy options are best informed by demographics and state context, which is the topic of the next section.

Demographics, State Context and Higher Education Policy

In this section, three states representing different regions of the country — Arkansas, California and Massachusetts — serve as case studies to illustrate how future enrollment shifts and state context can inform higher education policy. These three states exhibit some variation in terms of either projected enrollment shifts or where they currently emphasize capacity.

The case studies are for illustration purposes and are necessarily abbreviated for inclusion in this brief. As such, the policy discussions that accompany the case studies primarily focus on the issue of maximizing access through capacity, against the backdrop of state context and demographic-driven enrollment shifts. There are undoubtedly additional policy options that must address capacity, demographics and other factors unique to each state.

For example, some states may focus on generous financial aid packages that can be used inside or out-

side the state, while other states may favor reciprocity arrangements with neighboring states to accommodate growing enrollments. In a select number of states, there is little projected change in adult and traditional student enrollments, which may mean that higher education policy in these states changes less dramatically than in other states. The bottom line: these abbreviated case studies are intended to be a springboard for conversation rather than a definition of absolute policy solutions for the states under study.

Arkansas

As in many southern states, Arkansas' poverty rate and median family income are both below the national average. The state is more rural than the average U.S. state and the population less educated. Arkansas' projected population shifts also are representative of many southern states. Double-digit growth in the 25-

and-older population likely will be accompanied by a decline in the 18- to-24-year-old population. These projections will create a shifting dynamic in the profile of students seeking postsecondary education in the future. The current focus of Arkansas's higher education system is on enrollment in the four-year sector — which, at over 70%, is well above the national average of 61.2%.

Aside from the projected enrollment growth among adult students, there are specific indicators suggesting that Arkansas look to the expansion or development of its two-year sector as a strategic point of emphasis to accommodate future demand for postsecondary education. Arkansas, compared to all states, already has the second-lowest percentage of college-degree holders relative to its 25-and-older population, and the second-lowest participation rate of adult students in postsecondary education. The percentage of the population 25 and older without a high school diploma is 24.7%, compared to the national average of 19.6%.

Arkansas demonstrates perhaps as much as any state the need to examine current educational statistics for its population against where it wishes to go over the next decade. This information, along with the coming population shifts, should be examined against the state's current capacity to provide postsecondary education.

First, several state indicators on educational attainment and participation suggest that postsecondary education and training for those 25 and older already is an important need. As the 25-and-older population continues to grow relative to the 18- to-24-year-old population, there will be an increasing number of adult students. Since the state clearly relies on the four-year sector to provide its existing postsecondary services, the major question for the state is: Are existing four-year institutions positioned to offer the services that existing and future students 25 and older require?

As the 25-and-older population grows, the challenge for Arkansas will be to build capacity at those institutions best at offering services that encourage adults to engage in education and training beyond high school. It may be that four-year institutions play a significant role in that process, as they prepare for declines in traditional student enrollment and growing adult student demand. Another option is for legislators to begin implementing policies that allow two-year institutions to play a more visible role in the delivery of postsecondary services.

State leaders, informed by state context, demographics and current capacity, are best positioned to decide whether enrollment at four-year institutions should be maintained or resources should shift to the two-

year sector. Perhaps the particular sector is not as important as focusing on the types of postsecondary services that will meet the needs of future students. An important component to this issue is which institutions are able and willing to provide such services.

California

California's projected percentage growth in the general population and for enrollment for both college-eligible age groups is among the highest in the nation, a statistic even more remarkable given that the state is already the most populous in the country, at 34 million people. California also was the destination for one-quarter of new immigrants who arrived in this country between 1990 and 2000. The continued influx of immigrants will certainly contribute to growth in California's 18- to-24-year-old population, an important contextual factor that will impact the demand for educational services across the state.

California's future higher education policies will have to purposefully account for factors such as growth and immigration if the state is to maintain its standing in various educational statistics. For example, California's current participation rate for adult students leads the nation, at 6.4% — well above the national average of 4.5%. The state's 35.4% participation rate for traditional students is slightly above the 34% national average as well. Educational attainment levels of the 25-and-older population is higher than the national average, as is the median family income, but the state also has a higher poverty rate than the national average.

The success of California's future higher education policies will likely be judged on how well the state meets the needs of a population that varies widely in terms of its preparation level and ability to pay for postsecondary education. California's three-tier system already provides a number of avenues to accommodate a diversity of students, but more capacity will be needed if the state is to meet its economic goals and maintain a higher-than-average percentage of college-educated adults.

One indication of California's strategy for meeting future demand is the recent passage of a \$2.3 billion bond measure for higher education construction projects through 2006. Proportionally, the California Community Colleges will receive the majority of these monies,⁵ indicating that capacity-building efforts will occur in all three of the state's systems but more so in the community college sector. It appears the growing number of traditional students will be channeled into the two-year sector. California already relies disproportionately on the two-year sector (62.6% enroll-

ments statewide versus 38.8% enrollments nationally), so competing policy alternatives might consider whether more capacity-building efforts should favor four-year institutions.

California's state context and demographic growth will certainly drive capacity-building efforts beyond the recent bond measure. Additional questions to help strengthen future policy decisions might focus on future student needs: Is the growth in each sector going to align with the type of education future students seek and need? Will the state purposely channel students into two-year institutions as a short-term strategy to relieve cost pressures? Should the state continue to increase its two-year enrollments relative to four-year institutions, and what are the long-term implications of doing so?

Massachusetts

By a number of measures, Massachusetts is one of the most educated states in the nation. It has the second-highest participation rate in the nation for traditional students, at 44.1%. Participation among adult students also is higher than average, and poverty and dropout rates are lower than the national average. No state in the nation utilizes the private four-year sector as much as Massachusetts, and no state has a higher proportion of its enrollment in four-year institutions, public and private combined. Educational attainment and median income in Massachusetts are among the highest in the nation, as is the percentage of students who are enrolled in graduate programs.

All these factors help explain why the state enrolls a disproportionate percentage of students in four-year institutions — and there is no reason to expect significant changes given 2015 demographic projections. The proportion of traditional students enrolled in

higher education in the state is slightly higher than the national average, and that proportion will likely increase as 18- to-24-year-olds become a larger proportion of the 18-and-older population in 2015. The 25-and-older population also is expected to grow, by 3.6% — substantially smaller than the 17.5% increase for 18- to-24-year-olds.

From a policy perspective, it appears that Massachusetts must assure continued capacity in its public four-year institutions to provide access to its resident 18- to-24-year-old population. The state's efforts to maximize accessibility may need to focus on maintaining student tuition and fees at acceptable levels. If capacity is not added, student tuition and fees can be expected to skyrocket for two reasons: increased demand from traditional students and limited space.

Massachusetts may consider another option to help accommodate its projected growth: draw more heavily on the private sector to help meet public priorities. The private sector in the state accounts for over half of the state's current enrollment. States such as New Jersey and Pennsylvania continue to use private-sector capacity to meet public needs, and an emphasis on similar strategies may be an important consideration for Massachusetts in the future.

Finally, though Massachusetts has high educational attainment levels among its 25-and-older population, a significant percentage of this population still participates in some form of postsecondary education. A percentage of these adult students are in graduate programs, while another percentage accounts for enrollment in the state's community colleges. As the state looks to ensure access in the future, two-year institutions will certainly continue providing the many services typically affiliated with community colleges, and they may also serve as a low-cost entry option for some traditional and adult students.

Conclusion

Some states may require only minor adjustments in their current higher education policies, as they strive to meet state goals and citizen needs. Other states will see dramatic shifts in enrollment demand between the two college-eligible age groups, and the services that future students seek may not be aligned with the types of services states currently emphasize.

In any state, there are a number of factors that can influence the types of postsecondary services that adult and traditional students will demand in the future. A state cannot possibly account for every factor and predict the precise impact of that factor. Data and information, however, can provide guidelines that

help states construct a meaningful dialogue so the development of higher education policy does not take place in what has been referred to as a “policy vacuum.”⁶

In the end, each state may devise its own policies to improve access and educational attainment levels in the future. The public and private benefits that will result from such improvements will certainly include a competitive workforce that can help diversify and strengthen state economies. It is for this reason that the lure of short-term solutions must be balanced with a long-term perspective on state priorities; a focus on only low cost and convenience may prove to be a future liability.

Endnotes

¹ The term postsecondary education follows the U.S. Census definition for postsecondary education: two- or four-year college and universities, public and private institutions, or any form of accredited education and training beyond high school that leads toward credit for a terminal degree. The terms postsecondary education, higher education and college will be used interchangeably throughout the brief to avoid repetition and improve readability.

² The two legislative reports are: (1) Ruppert, S.S. *The Politics of Remedy: State Legislative Views on Higher Education*. (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1996), and (2); Ruppert, S.S. *Where We Go from Here: State Legislative Views on Higher Education in the New Millennium*. (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 2001).

³ Ruppert, S.S. *Closing the College Participation Gap: A National Summary*. (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, Center for Community College Policy, 2003).

⁴ National Center for Educational Statistics. “Fall Enrollment in Degree Granting Institutions, 1999, Table 176,” *Digest of Education Statistics, 2002*. Percentages do not total 100 because students under 18 are not included, and a small percentage of student ages are designated as “unknown.”

⁵ “California Voters Approve a \$2.3 Billion Bond Measure for Higher Education,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. L(27), A22. (March 12, 2004).

⁶ Callan, P.M. and Finney, J. (1997). *Public and Private Financing of Higher Education*. (Phoenix, AZ: ACE/Oryx Press).

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Meeting the Challenges of **Population Growth** and the Future Demand for **Postsecondary Education**

Considerations for State Higher Education Policy

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