

Knocking at the College Door Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

ARKANSAS

At over 3.3 million, the nation's graduating class of 2007-08 is projected to be history's largest. In fact, 2007-08 will mark the last year in an era of continuous growth in the nation's production of high school graduates, a period that reaches back to 1994. Over that time, the number of graduates swelled by 35.7 percent. In 2008-09, however, our country will begin a protracted period during which its production of high school graduates is expected to stagnate, assuming existing patterns persist. The number of graduates nationally will dip slightly over the next several years before growth resumes at a slower pace around 2015. Ultimately, projections indicate that between 2004-05 (the last year of available actual data) and 2021-22, the number of high school graduates will grow by approximately 265,000, or 8.6 percent.

The national data obscure significant variations in this picture at the regional and state levels, however. Regionally, in the decade leading up to 2004-05, the number of high school graduates grew the fastest in the West at 34 percent, with the South growing by 23.5 percent, the Northeast by 20.7 percent, and the Midwest by 14.2 percent. But the regions face very different futures in the years to come. The South will see the most growth in its production of high school graduates, at about 9 percent by 2014-15; and the West's numbers will climb by 7.1 percent. But the number of graduates produced in the Northeast and the Midwest will decline – by 6.1 and 3 percent, respectively.

As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1).

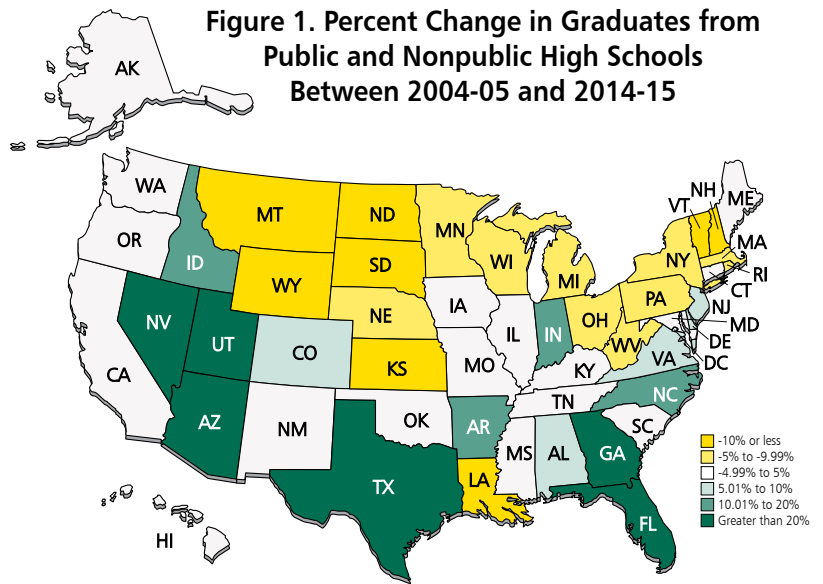
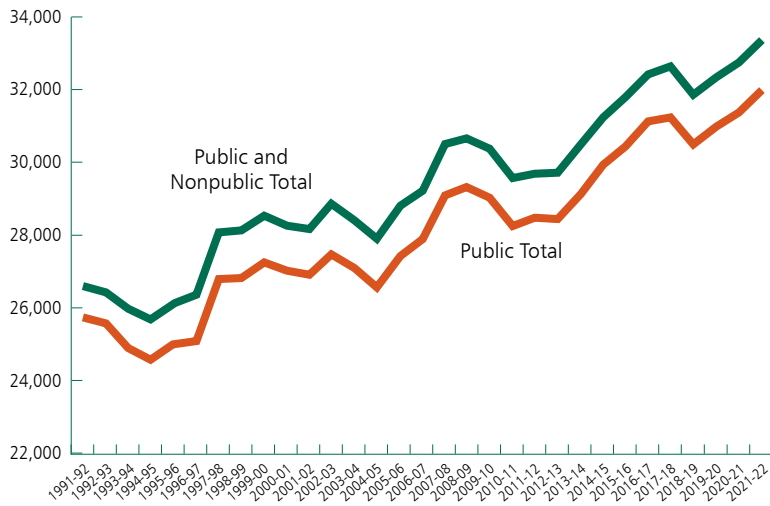


Figure 1. Percent Change in Graduates from Public and Nonpublic High Schools Between 2004-05 and 2014-15

Figure 2. Arkansas High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Arkansas produced over 2,200 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 8.6 percent. Projections indicate that Arkansas's number of graduates will continue growing rapidly through 2009-10, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. The state projects to produce over 3,300 more high school graduates in the decade after 2004-05, an increase equal to about 12 percent.

The period 1991-92 through 2001-02 was marked by instability in Arkansas's production of high school graduates, although in general the numbers trended upward (Figure 2). By 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data, the state's public high schools counted 26,621 graduates. While that number was just 776 higher than the 1994-95 level, it was nearly 2,000 more graduates than in 2001-02. Nonpublic schools added an estimated 1,328 graduates in 2004-05, which was over 500 more than graduated in 1991-92. Between 1994-95 and 2004-05, the estimated share of Arkansas's total high school graduates from nonpublic

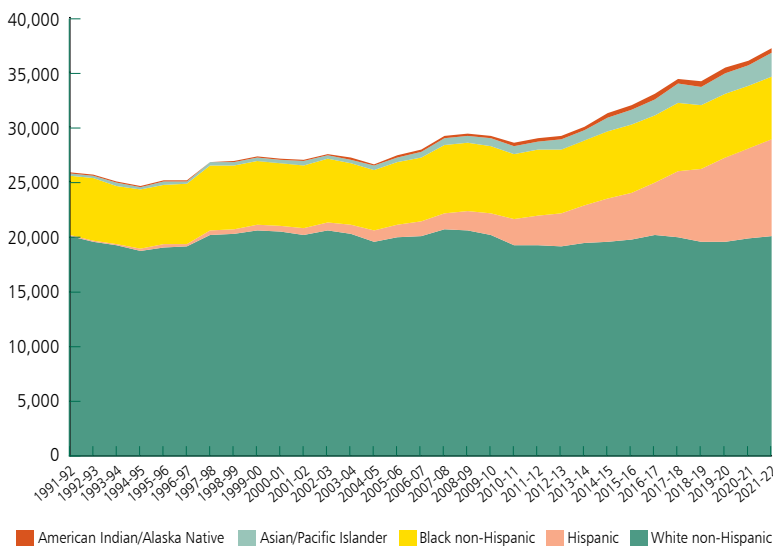
schools climbed from 10.5 percent to 13.1 percent. Of the state's total number of high school graduates each year throughout the actual and projected timeframe, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 4 percent, on average.

As is happening in many other Southern states, Arkansas's production of high school graduates is poised to continue growing. The number of public high school graduates is expected to climb to over 29,000 in 2009-10, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. Thereafter, the state will have a couple of years of declines before it begins a second growth period that will extend through 2017-18. Between 2004-05 and 2014-15, the number of public high school graduates is forecast to climb by 12.6 percent.

The racial/ethnic composition of Arkansas's public high school graduating classes will continue to show substantial diversification over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 75.9 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped to 73 percent. And that trend is projected to accelerate. By 2014-15, the proportion will reach 62.5 percent.

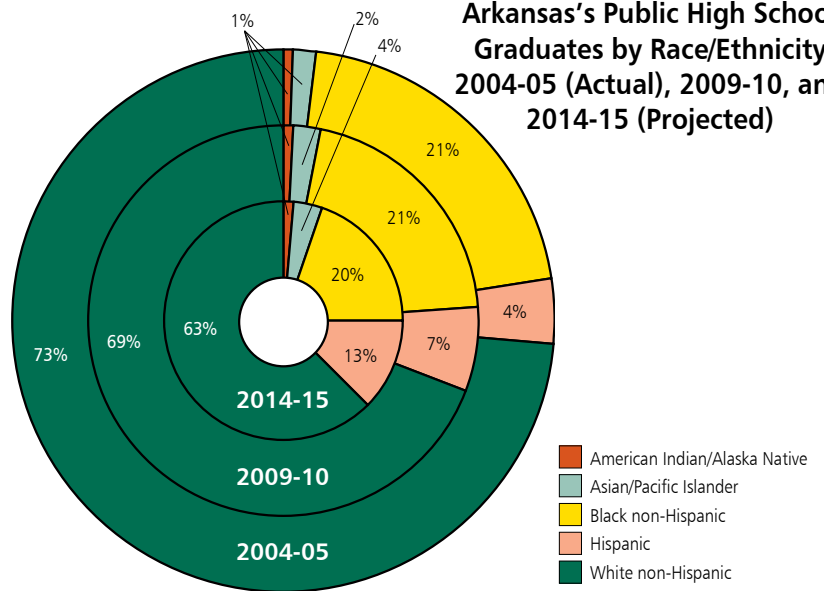
These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country. Although the magnitude may differ substantially, the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Arkansas, as in other states, the big changes are the result of rapid growth in the number of Hispanic high school students and graduates. While immigration has contributed to the growth of the Hispanic population, signs of the continuing demographic shift are evident in data showing a dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic births, which is due in part to a higher fertility rate among Hispanic women than other races/ethnicities. The number of graduates from other minority racial/ethnic groups is anticipated to climb relatively rapidly as well; while despite initial growth, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates is projected to be level by 2014-15.

Figure 4. Arkansas High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in Arkansas numbered just under 1,000 in 2004-05. But within a decade, Hispanic graduates are projected to nearly quadruple that amount to about 3,914, with the size of the annual increases growing in the later years (Figure 4). Asians/Pacific Islanders are also expected to see rapid growth, increasing 222 percent from their 2004-05 level of 386 graduates. And growth among American Indian/Alaska Native graduates is expected to add about 250 graduates (an increase of 152 percent) by 2014-15. The number of Black non-Hispanic graduates is projected to grow by more than 600 over the same span (11.4 percent) to exceed 6,100. Finally, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates will climb rapidly early in the projections; but by 2014-15, those gains will have eroded entirely, and their number will be basically unchanged from its 2004-05 level of 19,563.

Figure 3. Composition of Arkansas's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10, and 2014-15 (Projected)



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