



Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ACROSS AMERICA LEVELING OFF; MINORITY GRADS RISING, TO BE NEAR MAJORITY SOON

After 30-percent increase in graduates from 1995 to 2013, number of high school grads will not grow through 2023

[Reporters and editors: See state reports and projections to provide your readers with a portrait of your state's graduates in coming years.]

WASHINGTON, D.C.—December 6, 2016—The steady growth in high school graduates that led to significant expansion of higher education in the United States in recent decades is coming to an abrupt halt. While the percentage of graduates grew 30 percent from 1995 to 2013, the graduation rate is expected to show virtually no growth for the next seven years, and will likely decline this school year, even as the percentage of the high school students earning diplomas rises, according to a new report released by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) today at the National Press Club.

The report, [Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates](#), reveals that the boom in high school students is leveling out, and White students are increasingly being replaced with larger numbers of Hispanics and Asians.

“We are moving toward a time when nearly half of all high school graduates will be students of color, with the largest increases among Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders,” said Joe Garcia, president of WICHE. “Meanwhile, as our population continues to shift geographically, the states that will gain the most population will educate the highest percentage of students of color.”

“While there are clear national and regional trends, there is great variation within states,” Garcia notes. “In states like my home state of Colorado that are gaining population, some public colleges and universities still have excess capacity while others turn away scores of applicants every year. Students from some demographic populations enroll and graduate at high rates, while others are consistently underrepresented in our institutions.”

The data in the report and accompanying materials provided on the website (www.wiche.edu/knocking) are designed to help states target resources effectively to meet the education and workforce needs of current and future populations and industries.

“Higher education institutions can no longer rely on an ever-increasing pool of high school graduates to fill their classrooms. They also must rethink how they equip their institutions to support a new majority,” said Peace Bransberger, senior research analyst at WICHE and a co-author of the report.

With generous support from ACT, Inc. and the College Board, *Knocking at the College Door* provides policymakers, college enrollment managers, counselors, school leaders, researchers and the media with data projecting how the numbers of high school graduates are likely to change in the years ahead.

www.wiche.edu

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“The study shows demographic trends state by state and region by region as reflected in our schools and soon to be seen at colleges. Primary educational institutions are typically the first to fully see the changing face of society in that of the students they enroll,” says Demarée K. Michelau, vice president of policy analysis and research at WICHE and one of the report’s co-authors.

The report, part of a series that has been released every four years for nearly four decades, is one of the most widely cited sources of comprehensive and reliable data on the future size and composition of high school graduating classes throughout the nation and not just in WICHE member states in the West. The study, now in its ninth edition, remains the only national series that includes state-level projections for students attending private schools and the most comprehensive report analyzing public high school graduates by race/ethnicity at the state and regional levels.

Key Findings of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*

- **Fewer high school graduates.** The nation is projected to produce fewer high school graduates in all of the 10 graduating classes between 2013 and 2023, compared to the highest recorded number of graduates in 2013. The year of greatest decline is projected to be 2017, with about 81,000 fewer graduates (2.3 percent), the report says. While the country is projected to see three years of growth between 2024 and 2026, this will be a short-term increase as the average size of graduating classes between 2027 and 2032 is expected to be smaller than those in 2013.
- **Dramatic increases in graduates who are Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander.** The racial/ethnic mix of high school graduates in the United States will continue to shift significantly toward a more diverse population of graduates fueled primarily by large increases in the number of Hispanic (50 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islander (30 percent) public high school graduates through about 2025. The pending national plateau is largely fueled by a decline in the White student population and counterbalanced by growth in the number of non-White public school graduates—Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders in particular. Overall, there will be consistent declines in the number of White public high school graduates and robust growth in the number of public high school graduates of color in the coming years.
- **Marked regional differences will continue.** There is significant regional variation with the Northeast and the Midwest experiencing continuing declines in the number of high school graduates while the West will see slight increases, and the South will see significant and steady increases. Most notably, the South is the engine of growth for high school graduates. It is the only region that is projected to experience an increase in the number of high school graduates for every year of the projections, even though that number is expected to contract after 2025.
- **Sharp declines in private school graduates.** The number of students graduating from private high schools will decline more sharply than the decreases in the overall numbers of graduates. The number of high school graduates from private religious and nonsectarian schools is projected to decline at an even greater rate than the overall trend, from 302,000 in 2011 to about 220,000 by the early 2030s—a decrease of 80,000 graduates, or 26 percent.

“The projections in this report are more than a data set for academic discussion; they are a window into our future,” notes Garcia, a former college president and lieutenant governor in Colorado. “As graduations level out and even decline in many states, and the minority students increase across the board, states and their K-12 and higher education leaders have an important opportunity to ensure that they close achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color. Equally important, our higher education systems must establish policies and practices that will lead to greater attainment of degrees and certificates for students of color.”

WICHE’s data visualization tool which accompanies the online report at www.wiche.edu/knocking allows users to view the impact of the data on specific regions and states, and see growth and declines for different demographic groups. Users can also download individual state profiles on the site. The tool will be live on December 6, 2016.

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education** (www.wiche.edu) and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education’s contributions to the region’s social, economic, and civic life. Our programs—Student Exchange, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), Policy Analysis and Research, and Mental Health—are working to find answers to some of the most critical questions facing higher education today. WICHE’s members include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, and the U.S. Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States.