



Data Brief: 2022-2023 Catholic School Enrollment



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Catholic School Enrollment

Each year, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) has published a statistical report on Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States. These annual reports are designed to provide an understanding of this significant sector of American education, to inform the public discussion of educational policy issues and to encourage and improve practice at the school level.

Almost three years after the start of the COVID-19 health crisis, Catholic schools have continued the legacy that has characterized Catholic education: academic excellence, a strong partnership with parents, a sense of community and a faith-filled education for students nationwide. In the 2022-2023 school year, Catholic school enrollment has grown (0.3%) to 1,693,493 students in 5,920 schools, continuing the two-year trend of increasing Catholic school enrollment across the nation. Catholic schools have attracted and retained new students, supporting their academic, spiritual and mental health. The merits of Catholic schools evident in national test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress¹, high school graduation rates of 98.9%², four-year college attendance rate of 85.2%³ and other data demonstrating the quality of Catholic schools in comparison to schools in both public and private sectors. This data brief highlights the most significant findings in NCEA's latest version of its annual statistical report.

1) The growth in Catholic school enrollment (0.3%) continues the two-year trend in increasing Catholic school enrollment across the nation.

After facing the largest single year decline in enrollment of 6.4% from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 followed by the largest increase of 3.7% from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, Catholic school enrollment had a slight increase of 0.3% this year. In the fall of 2022, with almost all schools open across the country, the growth in Catholic school enrollment shows that parents actively chose a Catholic education from a variety of educational opportunities. Parents appreciated Catholic schools' dedication to nurturing the whole child. Catholic schools continue to educate a diverse population as 23.1% of students are racial minorities, 19.3% are Hispanic, and 22.0% are students of other faiths.

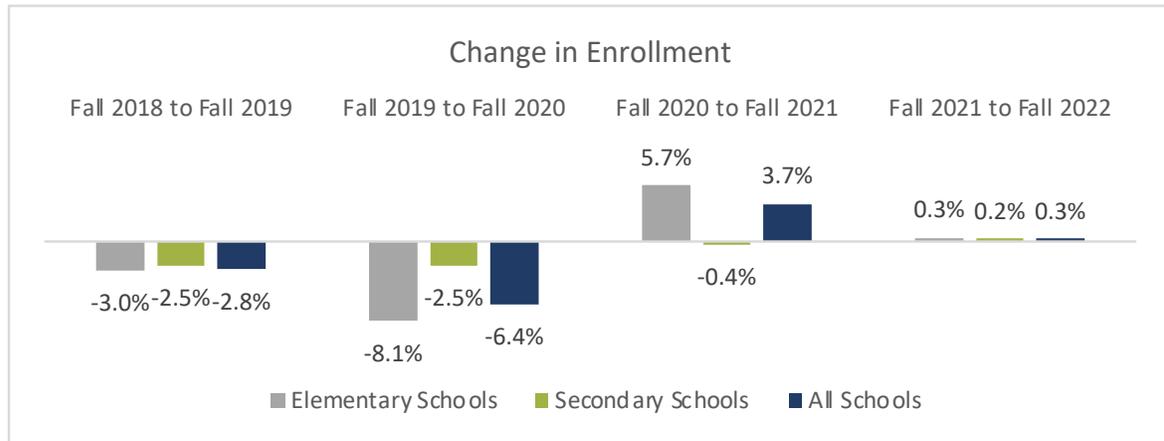
2022-2023 Catholic School Enrollment		
	Number of Students	Number of Schools
Elementary Schools	1,174,744	4,746
Secondary Schools	521,749	1,174
All Schools	1,693,493	5,920

¹ https://ncea.org/NCEA/How_We_Serve/News/Press_Releases/The_Nation_s_Report_Card_Shows_Catholic_Schools_Excelling_Post-Pandemic.aspx

^{2,3} Broughman, S.P., Kincel, B., Peterson, J., and Willinger, J. (2021). *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2019–20 Private School Universe Survey First Look* (NCES 2021-061). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [12/10/2021] from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
Irwin, V., De La Rosa, J., Wang, K., Hein, S., Zhang, J., Burr, R., ... & Parker, S. (2022). *The Condition of Education 2022* (NCES 2022-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [11/04/2022] from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

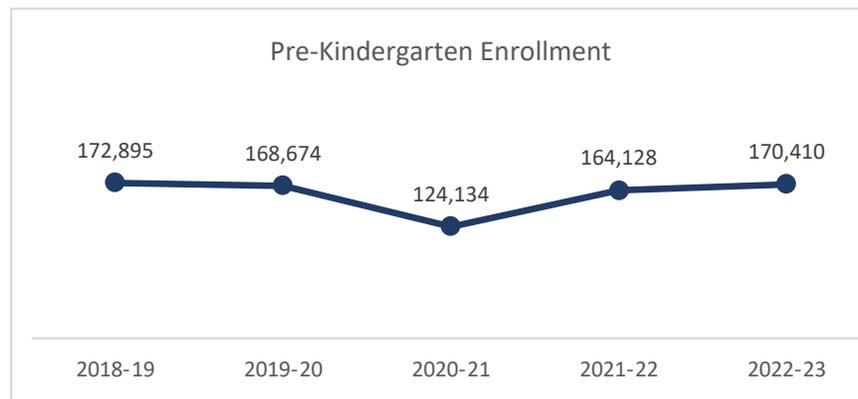
2) Both Catholic elementary and secondary schools had slight increases of 0.3% and 0.2%, respectively.

After a large rebound in elementary school enrollment and a small decrease in secondary school enrollment last year, this year both school levels had slight increases. Elementary school enrollment is largely seen as a predictor of future enrollment trends for secondary schools. Retention of students within Catholic school systems as they matriculate from elementary to secondary school is a key factor in Catholic secondary school viability. Stability in enrollment at the primary grade levels is a positive sign for long-term secondary school viability.



3) Pre-kindergarten enrollment is 1.0% higher than before the pandemic.

In every region except the Mideast and Great Lakes, early childhood enrollment increased from 2019-2020 to 2022-2023 school years. This growth is a positive sign of the long-term viability of Catholic schools should they retain these students in kindergarten and beyond.



4) More than 80% of principals and teachers in Catholic schools remained in their positions for the 2022-2023 school year.

Catholic schools across the country retained 82% of principals and 86% of teachers this year. The relatively high retention amidst the added pressure of the nationwide educator shortage indicates Catholic school teachers and principals feel supported in their roles.

2021-2022 to 2022-2023 Retention	
Principal	Teacher
82%	86%

5) Catholic schools have adapted to the nation’s changing needs by expanding their offerings in recent years.

There are seven virtual Catholic schools, 99 International Baccalaureate Programs and 125 Dual Language immersion programs throughout the country. The West/Far West region has the most offerings.

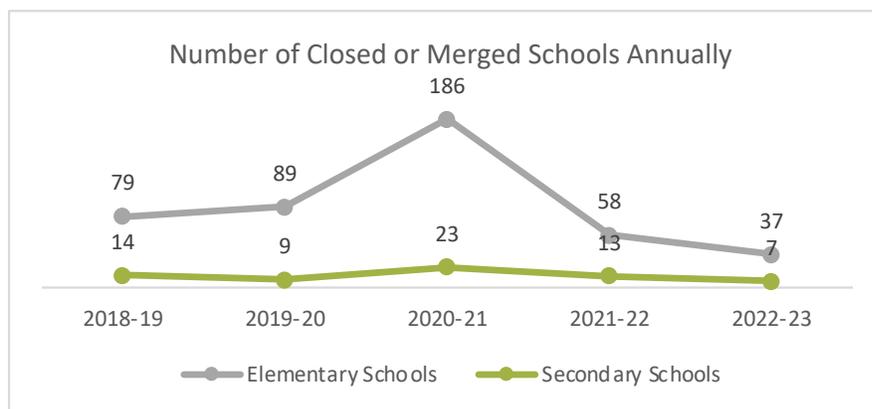
6) 10.5% of Catholic school students use a parental choice program⁴ and 27.6% of Catholic schools enrolled students using parental choice programs.

Catholic school students in Arizona utilized parental choice programs the most (73.8% of students), followed by Indiana (52.7% of students). Expansion of parental choice programs has long been viewed as a way to support parents as the primary educators of their children. Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia offer school choice programs, all of which vary in terms of their funding mechanisms and criterion. Iowa and Utah, both of which already had programs, recently expanded school choice to include more families across the states. Catholic schools should work together to support expansion of parental choice programs across the nation, including the federal tax credit program currently in Congress *Educational Choice for Children Act*.

Parental Choice Program Participation		
State	Percent of Schools	Percent of Students
Arizona	95.3%	73.8%
Indiana	92.6%	52.7%
Wisconsin	60.8%	51.2%
Florida	83.1%	40.6%
Ohio	84.8%	37.5%
Iowa	57.1%	20.2%

7) The fewest Catholic schools closed or consolidated in two decades at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

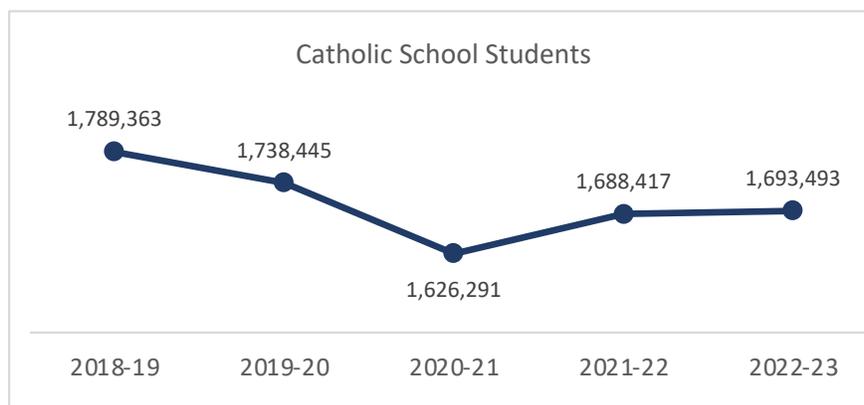
Excluding the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, on average, approximately 100 Catholic schools close or consolidate each year. At the end of the 2021-2022 school year, 44 Catholic schools closed or merged. Over the last three years, 324 schools have closed, indicating that the pandemic most likely accelerated the closure of some schools in summer 2020. The current positive trend in Catholic school enrollment may enable a continued trend of fewer school closures or mergers.



⁴ Parental choice programs are state programs that provide children the option to attend the elementary or secondary school of their parents’ choice through tax credit, voucher, or scholarship.

8) Overall Catholic school enrollment is 2.6% lower than 2019-2020.

Although 60 of the 175 Catholic school dioceses saw an increase of 1.0% or greater in enrollment since 2019-2020, nationwide Catholic school enrollment is still 2.6% lower than pre-pandemic levels. In the past three years, Catholic schools have innovated in order to meet the needs of their communities and attracted and retained new students to stabilize or increase their enrollment. They will need to continue to support their students and communities in the future to maintain the positive enrollment trend.



9) Catholic school enrollment across the nation has varied widely since the pandemic with Southeast region’s enrollment up 1.7% and Mideast region down 7.5% from 2019-2020.

Matching the migration trends of the U.S. population, Catholic schools in the Southeast region now enroll more students than before the pandemic. The growth is driven by a 8.8% increase in enrollment in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. The Mideast region, consisting of Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, has seen the largest decline of 7.5% driven by the closure or merger of 10.6% schools. Maryland and District of Columbia, though, had increases in enrollment from 2019-2020 to 2022-2023 of 4.6% and 1.5%, respectively.

2019-2020 to 2022-2023 Change in Enrollment		
Region	Percent Change in Students	Percent Change in Schools
Southeast	1.7%	-2.2%
Plains	0.1%	0.5%
New England	-1.3%	-8.6%
Great Lakes	-2.0%	-2.3%
West/Far West	-3.3%	-3.3%
Mideast	-7.5%	-10.6%

All of the data, analysis and commentary in this Data Brief are to be attributed to the National Catholic Educational Association in all written, digital and spoken use and references.



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