



Data Brief: 2021-2022 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.

During the 2021-2022 academic year, Catholic school students, teachers and administrators continue to face unprecedented challenges caused by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. When schools opened in person this fall, as many did during the 2020-2021 school year, they were optimistic that the worst of the pandemic was behind them. They still encountered new challenges daily as they worked to meet the educational, economic, mental health and spiritual needs of their students and staff. This data brief highlights the most significant findings in NCEA's latest version of its annual statistical report considering the current circumstances.

1) Catholic school enrollment across the nation increased by 3.8%, the first increase in two decades and the largest recorded increase by NCEA.

Enrollment at all types of schools -- public, charter and private -- were impacted last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Catholic schools had a decline in enrollment of 6.4% from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021, the largest single year decline in the 50 years NCEA has collected data. Catholic schools' dedication in safely opening classrooms and supporting their communities' needs last year is demonstrated in the 3.8% increase in enrollment, more than 62,000 students, this year. Catholic schools continue to educate a diverse population as 21.5% of students are racial minorities, 18.6% are Hispanic, and 20.3% are students of other faiths.

2021-2022 Catholic School Enrollment		
	Number of Students	Number of Schools
Elementary Schools	1,167,917	4,765
Secondary Schools	520,500	1,173
All Schools	1,688,417	5,938

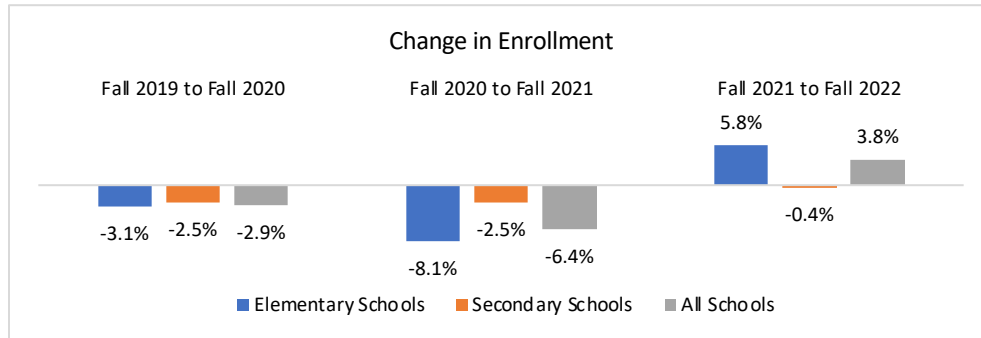
2) Catholic schools provide at least 22.7 billion dollars a year in savings for the nation.

With 1,688,417 students in 5,938 Catholic schools across the country and based on the average public school per pupil cost of \$14,455¹, Catholic schools provide at least 22.7 billion dollars a year in savings for the nation.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *2020 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data*. Census.gov. Retrieved [12/10/2021] from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/econ/school-finance/secondary-education-finance.html>

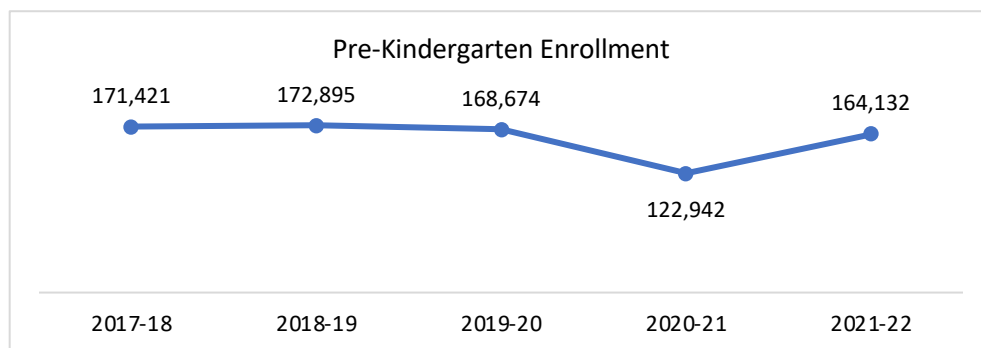
3) **Catholic elementary schools had a 5.8% increase in enrollment this year while secondary schools had a slight decline of 0.4%.**

Elementary schools were impacted the most by the COVID-19 pandemic last year with an 8.1% decrease in enrollment. They have rebounded this year, increasing enrollment by 5.8%. 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. Increases in enrollment at the primary grade levels is a positive sign for long-term secondary school viability, even if there was a slight decline this year.



4) **Pre-kindergarten enrollment increased by 33.5% from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022.**

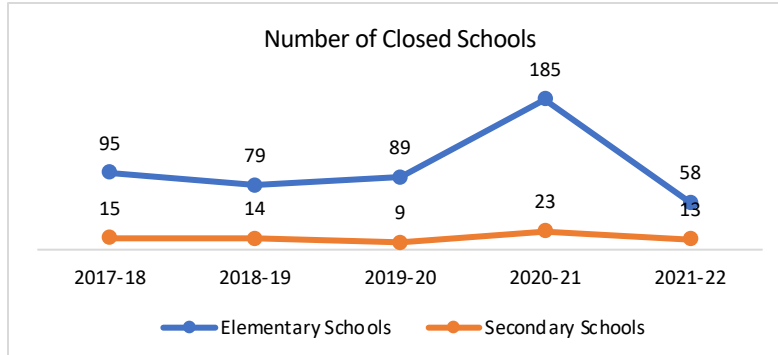
Enrollment of the youngest learners in Catholic schools was a driver of the overall Catholic elementary school increase. Almost every state had an increase in pre-kindergarten enrollment, with Utah (137%, 284 students) and California (134%, 6,187 students) showing the most significant increases.



Of the net gain of 62,000 students to Catholic schools from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, 66% of that gain can be attributed to pre-kindergarten related enrollment. However, pre-kindergarten enrollment in 2021-2022 is still 2.7% lower than 2019-2020. It is promising that early childhood students have returned to Catholic schools but troubling that enrollment is still lower than pre-pandemic levels.

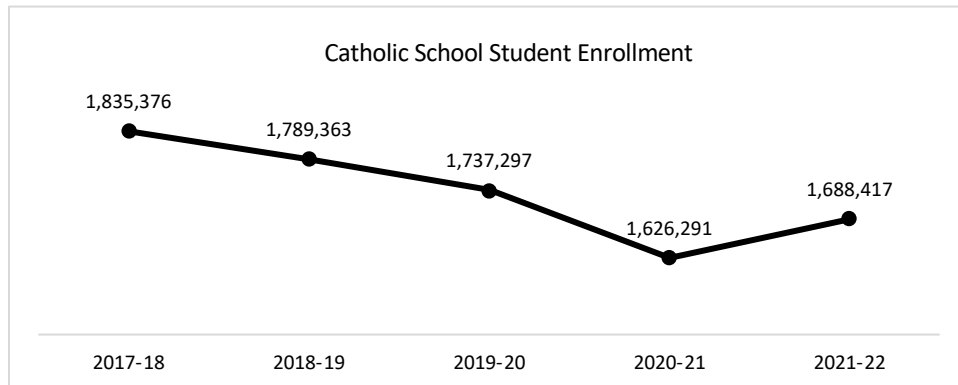
5) **The lowest number of Catholic schools closed or consolidated in two decades at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.**

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 2020-2021 school year, 71 Catholic schools closed or merged.



6) **Overall Catholic school enrollment is 2.8% lower than 2019-2020.**

Although 54 of the 175 Catholic school dioceses saw an increase of 1% or greater since 2019-2020, nationwide Catholic school enrollment is still lower than pre-pandemic levels. Catholic schools innovated throughout the last two years to meet the needs of their communities. They need to continue to adapt to those needs and use the momentum to retain students and recruit new students in the upcoming years to stabilize or continue to increase enrollment.



7) **The largest dioceses are losing enrollment at more than double the rate of other dioceses over the last two years.**

The ten largest dioceses (based on total enrollment in 2021-2022) had a larger loss in enrollment than the other 165 dioceses, a decline of 5.3% compared to a decline of 2.0%, respectively, from 2019-2020 to 2021-2022. As the population in the United States shifts away from major cities, the largest dioceses may face more school closures and consolidations. Dioceses will need to determine how they can continue to serve underserved communities in their cities as these changes occur. The ten largest dioceses are Los Angeles (CA), Chicago (IL), Philadelphia (PA), New York (NY), Cincinnati (OH), Cleveland (OH), St. Louis (MO), Miami (FL), Boston (MA), and New Orleans (LA).

	2019-2020 to 2021-2022 Change in Enrollment
Largest 10 Dioceses	-5.3%
All Other Dioceses	-2.0%
Total	-2.8%

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

There are 7 Catholic virtual schools, 71 International Baccalaureate Programs and 114 Dual Language immersion programs throughout the country. The Mideast region, comprised of Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, has the most offerings.

9) **Nationally, 6.8% of Catholic school students utilize a parental choice program and 20.2% of Catholic schools enrolled students using parental choice programs.**

For the first time, NCEA collected data around parental choice programs. Catholic schools in Arizona utilized parental choice programs the most (92.3% of schools), followed by Florida (75.3% of schools). Expansion of parental choice programs has long been viewed as a potential solution to increasing challenges of Catholic school viability. Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia offer school choice programs, but they vary in terms of their funding mechanisms and criterion. Accessibility for families and schools is a factor that we believe certainly impacts family participation in those programs and overall school enrollment trends. Further research is needed regarding the impact of parental choice programs on enrollment.

Parental Choice Program Participation		
State	Percent of Schools	Percent of Students
Arizona	92.3%	69.8%
Florida	75.3%	35.9%
Wisconsin	58.4%	29.2%
Iowa	81.0%	28.1%
Indiana	53.9%	26.1%
Ohio	39.4%	15.3%

10) **89% of principals and 86% of teachers were retained from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 school year.**

For the first time, NCEA collected data around principal and teacher retention. Excluding those who retired, Catholic schools across the country had 89% of principals and 86% of teachers return to their school from last year. The relatively high retention amidst the added pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates Catholic school teachers and principals feel supported. However, Catholic schools should continue to examine teacher pay as on average it is almost 20% below what local public school districts pay. Further, Catholic schools should offer opportunities for professional and spiritual growth for their teachers and dioceses need to similarly support their principals.

2020-2021 to 2021-2022 Retention	
Principal	Teacher
89%	86%



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