

# School Enrollment Rates of Young Children

**Between 2021 and 2022, the overall school enrollment rates increased for both 3- to 4-year-olds (from 40 to 47 percent) and 5-year-olds (from 79 to 84 percent). Despite these increases, the enrollment rates in 2022 for both age groups remained lower than they had been in 2019, prior to the coronavirus pandemic.**

Formal schooling, such as preschool and kindergarten programs, is an important component of early childhood education. This indicator looks at the school enrollment rates of 3- to 5-year-olds using data from the American Community Survey (ACS).<sup>1</sup> This indicator also compares enrollment rates in public and private education by various child and family characteristics within the 3- to 4-year-old and 5-year-old age groups. Throughout this indicator, homeschooled students are included in the group of students receiving a private education.<sup>2</sup>

## Overall School Enrollment Rates

In 2022, about 59 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in school overall, including 39 percent enrolled in public schools and 20 percent who were receiving a private education. The total enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds than for 3- to 4-year-olds (84 vs. 47 percent).

**FIGURE 1.**

**Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school: Selected years, 2012 through 2022**



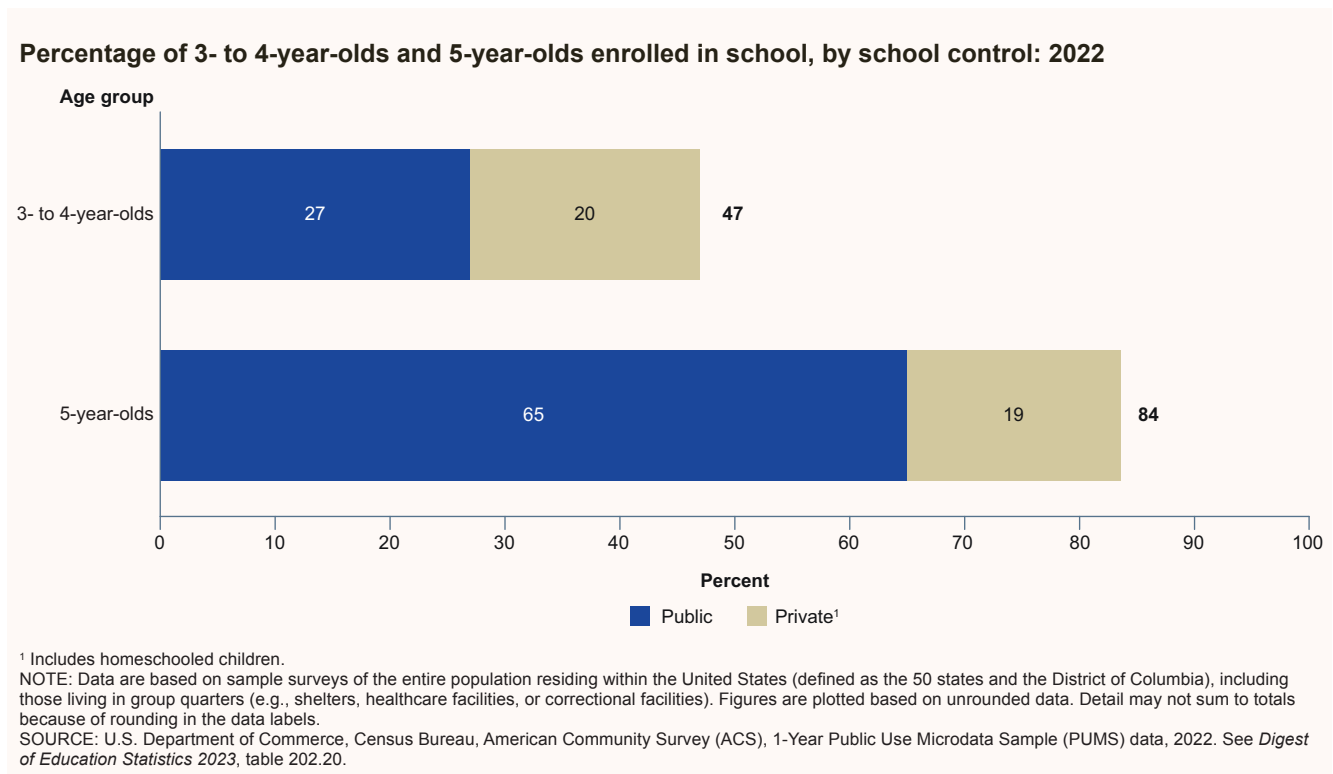
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States (defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia), including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). Data for 2020 are not presented in this figure due to collection issues associated with the coronavirus pandemic. While the 2020 ACS data are not available, data were collected throughout the 12 months of 2021. In addition, the school enrollment question asked about enrollment during the previous 3 months in 2021 ACS. Thus, respondents to the 2021 ACS could be reporting on school enrollment from late 2020 to fall 2021, throughout much of the 2020–21 school year. For additional information, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about.html> and the 2021 questionnaire at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/forms-and-instructions.2021.html#list-tab-9466845>. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2012 through 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 202.20.

Between 2012 and 2019, the overall school enrollment rate of 3- to 5-year-olds fluctuated between 59 and 61 percent, before falling to 53 percent in 2021—the data year which largely overlaps the first full school year of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>3</sup> In 2022, the rate had rebounded to 59 percent, but was still lower than in 2019 (61 percent). For each age group, the data show that

- from 2012 to 2019, the enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds increased by 1 percentage point (from 48 to 49 percent), while the rate for 5-year-olds was 86 percent in both years;
- the enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds was 9 percentage points lower in 2021 than in 2019 (40 vs. 49 percent) and the rate for 5-year-olds was 6 percentage points lower in 2021 than in 2019 (79 vs. 86 percent);<sup>4</sup> and
- from 2021 to 2022, enrollment rates increased for both age groups, but each remained 2 percentage points lower than in 2019.

**FIGURE 2.**

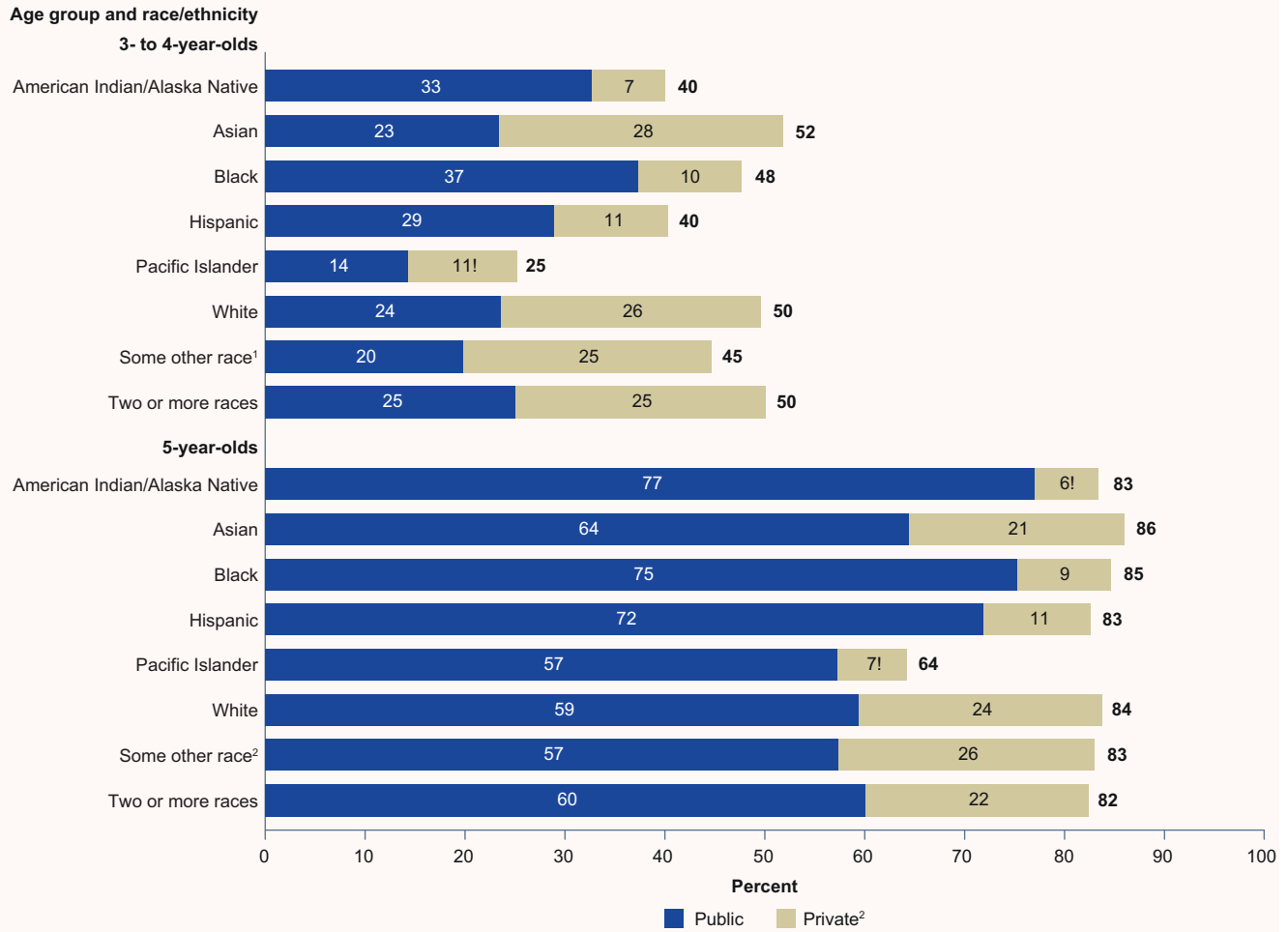


As previously stated, in 2022, the overall school enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds than for 3- to 4-year-olds (84 vs. 47 percent). This overall difference is due to the rate of public school enrollment, which was higher for 5-year-olds. Five is the age at which most states require provision of a free public education.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, 65 percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in public school, compared with 27 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds. In comparison, 19 percent of 5-year-olds and 20 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds were receiving a private education.

**Enrollment Rates by Child and Family Characteristics**

**FIGURE 3.**

**Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity and school control: 2022**



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> Includes homeschooled children.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States (defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia), including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding in the data labels.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 202.20.

In 2022, there were differences in the overall school enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds by race/ethnicity, both overall and for public and private school. Specifically,

- the overall school enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds who were Asian (52 percent) than for most other groups, and lowest for those who were Pacific Islander (25 percent);
- the public school enrollment rate was highest for 3- to 4-year-olds who were Black (37 percent), and lower for those who were Pacific Islander (14 percent) than for most other groups; and
- the private school enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds who were Asian (28 percent) than for most other groups, and lower for those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (7 percent) than most other groups.

For 3- to 4-year-olds of most racial/ethnic groups—except those who were Asian or White—the public school enrollment rate was either higher than or not measurably different from the private school enrollment rate in 2022. However, higher percentages of Asian and White 3- to 4-year-olds were enrolled in private school (28 and 26 percent, respectively) than in public school (23 and 24 percent, respectively).

There were also differences by race/ethnicity in the overall school enrollment rates of 5-year-olds in 2022. By school control (public vs. private), these differences were similar to those for 3- to 4-year-olds. Specifically,

- the overall school enrollment rate ranged from 82 to 86 percent for all groups except Pacific Islander 5-year-olds (64 percent);
- the public school enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds who were American Indian/Alaska Native (77 percent), Black (75 percent), and Hispanic (72 percent) than for those of other racial/ethnic groups; and
- the private school enrollment rate was highest for 5-year-olds who were of Some other race (26 percent),<sup>6</sup> White (24 percent), of Two or more races (22 percent), and Asian (21 percent).

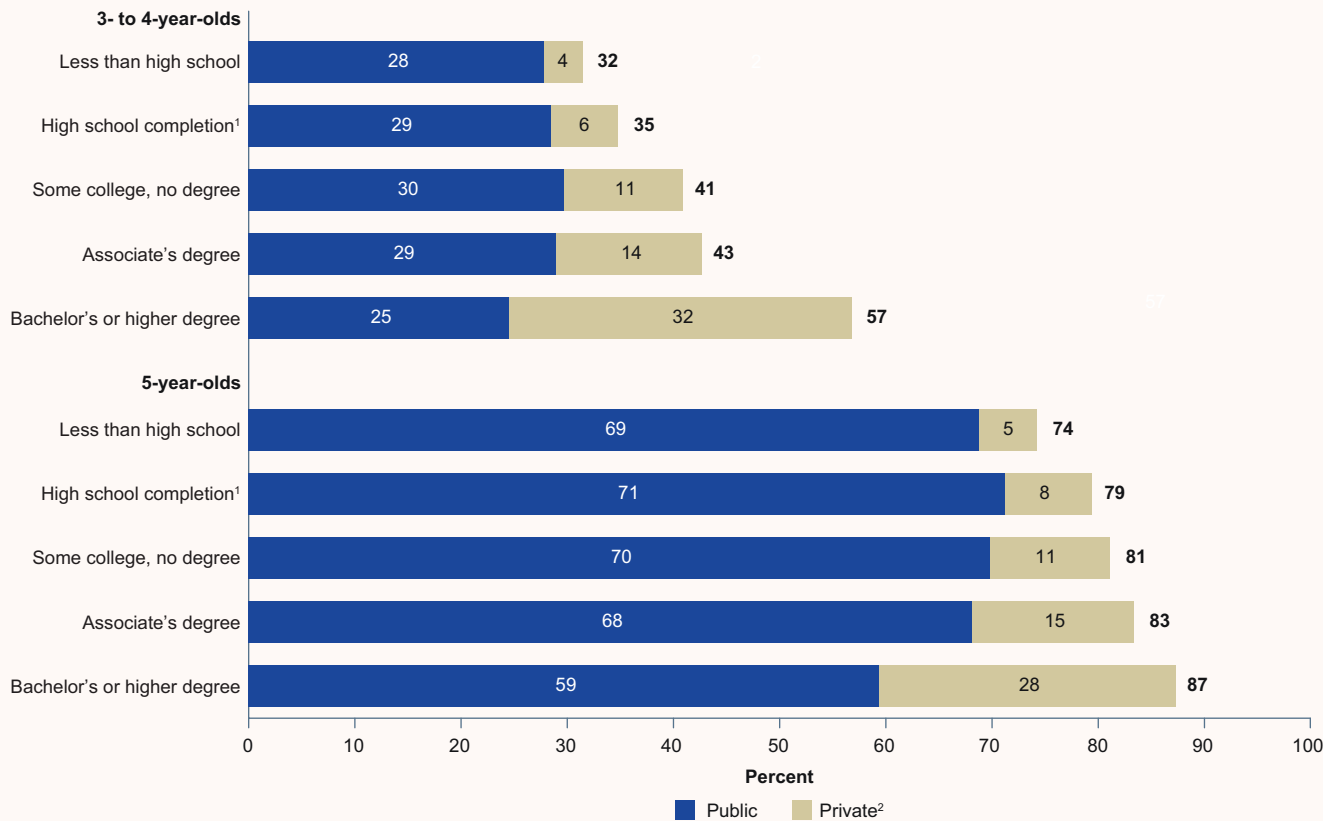
For 5-year-olds of all racial/ethnic groups, the public school enrollment rate was higher than the private school enrollment rate in 2022. For example, among Black 5-year-olds, 75 percent were enrolled in public school, while 9 percent were enrolled in private school.

In 2022, overall school enrollment rates did not measurably differ by sex for either 3- to 4-year-olds or 5-year-olds.

**FIGURE 4.**

**Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by related adults' highest level of educational attainment and school control: 2022**

Age group and related adults' highest level of educational attainment



<sup>1</sup> Includes related adults who completed a high school diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED.

<sup>2</sup> Includes homeschooled children.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States (defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia), including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). Refers to the highest education level of any related adult residing with the child. Related adults include adults who are related to the child and the householder or are themselves the householder. Related adults include adults who are related to the child and the householder or are themselves the householder. Includes related householders who are under age 18. Excludes adults who are related to the child but not to the householder. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding in the data labels.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 202.20.

For both age groups in 2022, the overall school enrollment rates were generally higher for children living with related adults who had higher educational attainment.<sup>7</sup> For example, for 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was

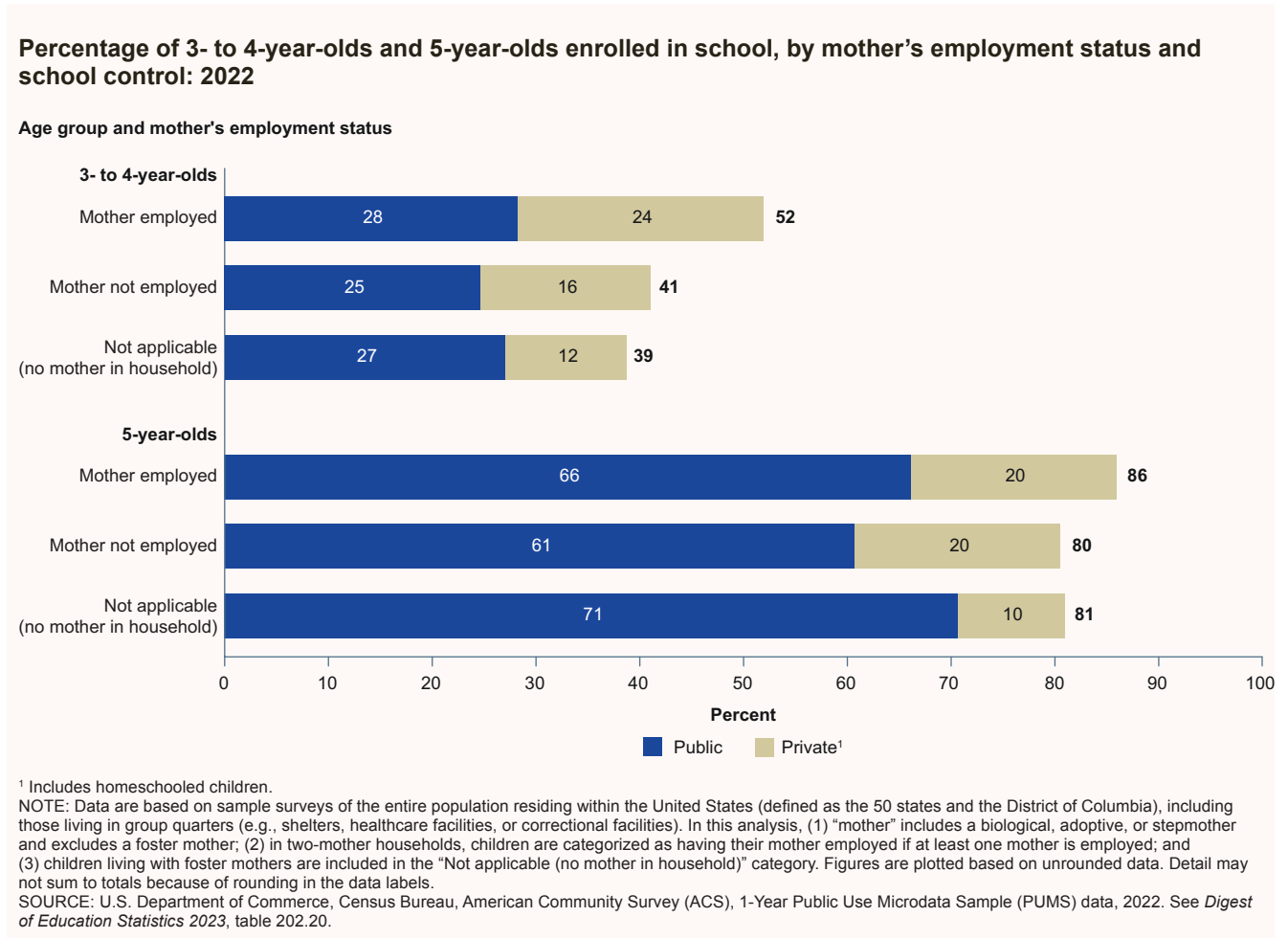
- lowest for those living in households where no related adult had completed high school (32 percent);<sup>8</sup> and
- highest for those living with related adults who had a bachelor's or higher degree (57 percent).

Similarly, for 5-year-olds, the enrollment rate was

- lowest for those living in households where no related adult had completed high school (74 percent); and
- highest for those living with related adults who had a bachelor's or higher degree (87 percent).

For both age groups in 2022, children living with related adults who had a bachelor's or higher degree had higher rates of private school enrollment and lower rates of public school enrollment than their peers living in households with lower levels of educational attainment. For example, the private school enrollment rate was 32 percent for 3- to 4-year-olds living with related adults who had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared with 4 to 14 percent of those living in households with lower attainment levels. In contrast, the public school enrollment rate was 25 percent for 3- to 4-year-olds living with related adults who had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared with 28 to 30 percent of those living in households with lower attainment levels.

**FIGURE 5.**

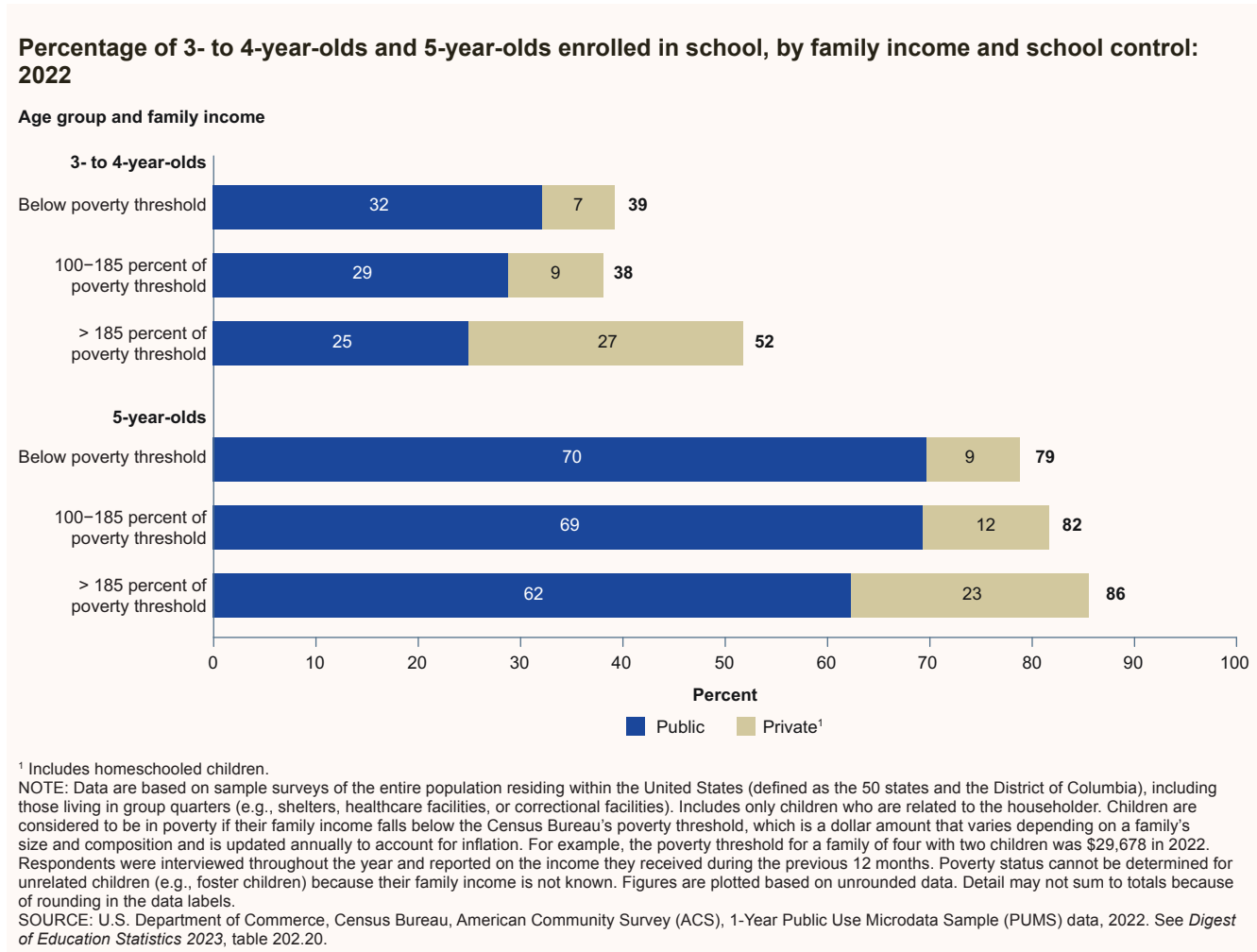


In 2022, the overall school enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose mothers were employed (52 percent) than for those whose mothers were not employed (41 percent) and those with no mother present in the household<sup>9</sup> (39 percent). Similarly, for 5-year-olds, the overall school enrollment rate was higher for children whose mothers were employed (86 percent) than for those whose mothers were not employed (80 percent) and those with no mother present in the household (81 percent).

For 3- to 4-year-olds in 2022, the public school enrollment rate was lower for those whose mothers were not employed (25 percent) than for those with no mother present in the household (27 percent) and those whose mothers were employed (28 percent). The public school enrollment rate for 5-year-olds was also lowest for those whose mothers were not employed (61 percent) compared with those whose mothers were employed (66 percent) and those with no mother present in the household (71 percent). In contrast, for both age groups, those with no mother present in the household had the lowest private school enrollment rate. For example, 12 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds with no mother present in the household were enrolled in private school, compared with 16 percent of those whose mothers were not employed and 24 percent of those whose mothers were employed.

For both age groups in 2022, a higher percentage of children were enrolled in public school than in private school, regardless of mother’s employment status and whether a mother was present in the household.

**FIGURE 6.**



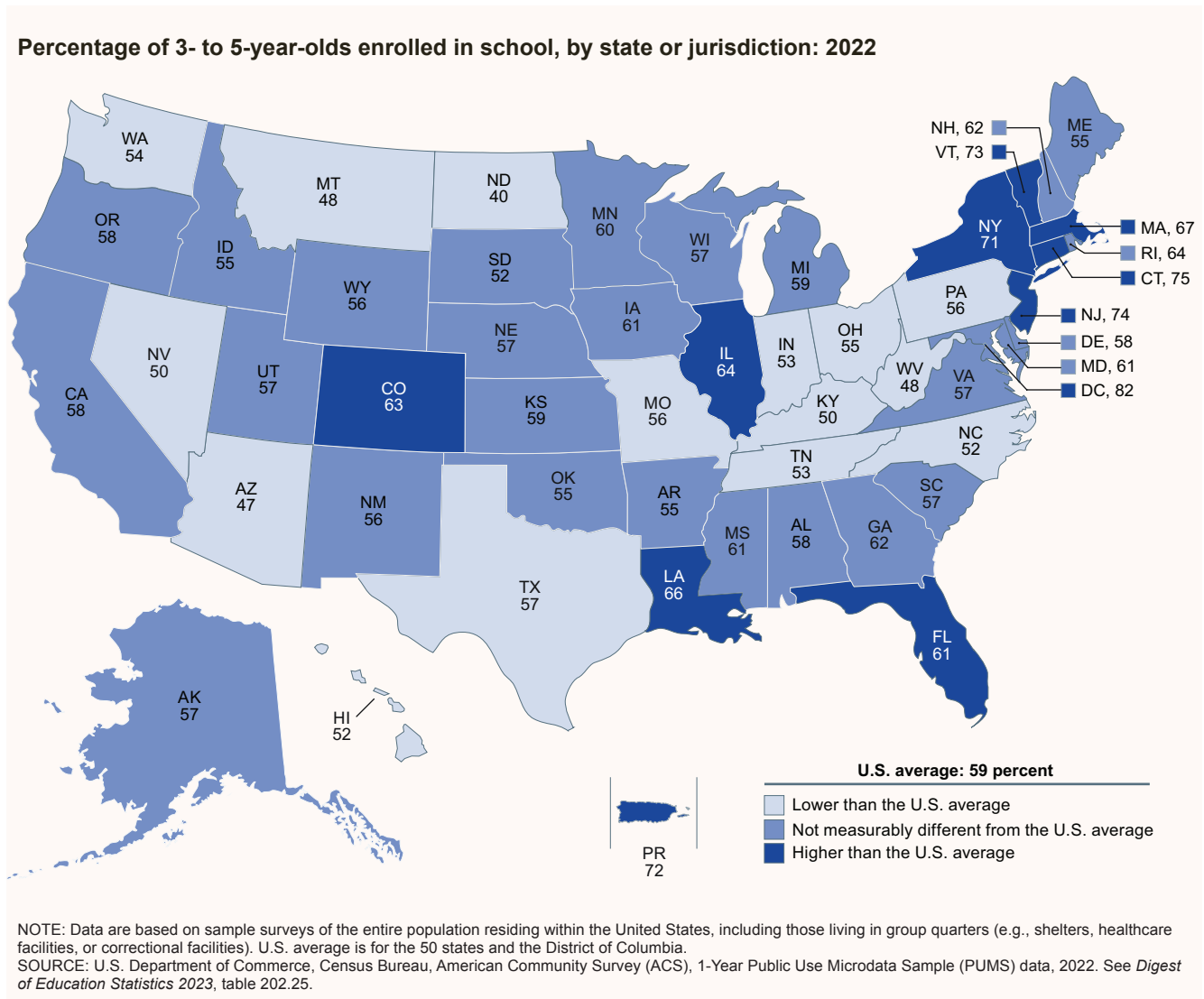
In 2022, among 3- to 4-year-olds, the overall school enrollment rate was higher for those in households with a family income that was greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold<sup>10</sup> (52 percent) than for those in households with a family income between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold (38 percent) and those in households below the poverty threshold (39 percent). Similarly, 5-year-olds in households with a family income that was greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold had a higher school enrollment rate (86 percent) than did those in households with a family income between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold (82 percent) and those in households below the poverty threshold (79 percent).

For both age groups in 2022, children living in households with a family income greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold had lower rates of public school enrollment and higher rates of private school enrollment than their peers living in households with lower family income levels. For example, 3- to 4-year-olds with a family income that was greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold had the lowest public school enrollment rate (25 percent) compared with those with lower family income levels (29 percent for those with a family income that was between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold and 32 percent for those with a family income that was below the poverty threshold). In contrast, 3- to 4-year-olds with a family income that was greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold had the highest private school enrollment rate (27 percent) compared with those with lower family income levels (9 percent for those with a family income that was between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold and 7 percent for those with a family income that was below the poverty threshold).

For both age groups in 2022, generally, a higher percentage of children were enrolled in public school than in private school, regardless of their poverty status. The only exception was 3- to 4-year-olds with a family income that was greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold—a lower percentage of these children were enrolled in public school than in private school (25 vs. 27 percent).

**Enrollment Rates by State or Jurisdiction**

**FIGURE 7.**



While the overall school enrollment rate for 3-to-5-year-olds was 59 percent nationally in 2022, the rates ranged from 40 percent in North Dakota to 82 percent in the District of Columbia. Fifteen states had enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds that were lower than the national average; 9 states, and the District of Columbia had rates that were higher than the national average; and 26 states had rates that were not measurably different from the national average. In 2022, about 72 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds in Puerto Rico were enrolled in school.



**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, data in this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

<sup>3</sup> The 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) data are not available due to collection issues associated with the coronavirus pandemic. While the 2020 ACS data are not available, data were collected throughout the 12 months of 2021. In the ACS, the school enrollment question asked about enrollment during the previous 3 months. Thus, respondents to the 2021 ACS could be reporting on school enrollment from late 2020 to fall 2021, throughout much of the 2020-21 school year. For additional information, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about.html> and the 2021 questionnaire at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/forms-and-instructions.2021.html#list-tab-9466845>.

<sup>4</sup> Enrollment drops during the coronavirus pandemic were also observed in data collected by NCES (see indicators [Public School Enrollment and Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#)).

<sup>5</sup> As of 2020, there were 47 states—plus the District of Columbia—that required that free education be offered by age 5; however, schooling was only compulsory for 5-year-olds in 11 states and the District of Columbia (see [Table 1.2. Compulsory school attendance laws, minimum and maximum age limits for required free education, by state: 2020](#)).

<sup>6</sup> “Some other race” includes respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>7</sup> Refers to the highest education level of any related adult residing with the child. In this indicator, “related adult” is defined as adults who are related to the child and the householder or are themselves the householder. Includes related householders who are under age 18. Excludes adults who are related to the child but not to the householder.

<sup>8</sup> Refers to those whose highest level of education completed is a high school diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED.

<sup>9</sup> In two-mother households, children are categorized as having their mother employed if at least one mother is employed.

<sup>10</sup> Includes only children who are related to the householder. Children are considered to be in poverty if their family income falls below the Census Bureau's poverty threshold, which is a dollar amount that varies depending on a family's size and composition and is updated annually to account for inflation. For example, the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was \$29,678 in 2022. Respondents were interviewed throughout the year and reported on the income they received during the previous 12 months. Poverty status cannot be determined for unrelated children (e.g., foster children) because their family income is not known.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [202.20](#) and [202.25](#)

**Related indicators and resources:** [Early Childcare and Education Arrangements](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Early Childhood Care Arrangements: Choices and Costs](#) [*The Condition of Education 2018 Spotlight*]; [Kindergarten Entry Status: On-Time, Delayed-Entry, and Repeating Kindergartners](#) [*The Condition of Education 2013 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning Behaviors and Academic Outcomes](#) [*The Condition of Education 2015 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning, Family Socioeconomic Status, and Early Academic Gains](#) [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*]; [Percentage of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity and state: 2021](#) [*Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.25]; [Private School Enrollment; Public School Enrollment; Risk Factors and Academic Outcomes in Kindergarten Through Third Grade](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]

**Glossary:** [Associate's degree](#); [Bachelor's degree](#); [College](#); [Enrollment](#); [High school completer](#); [Household](#); [Preschool](#); [Racial/ethnic group](#)