

Private School Enrollment

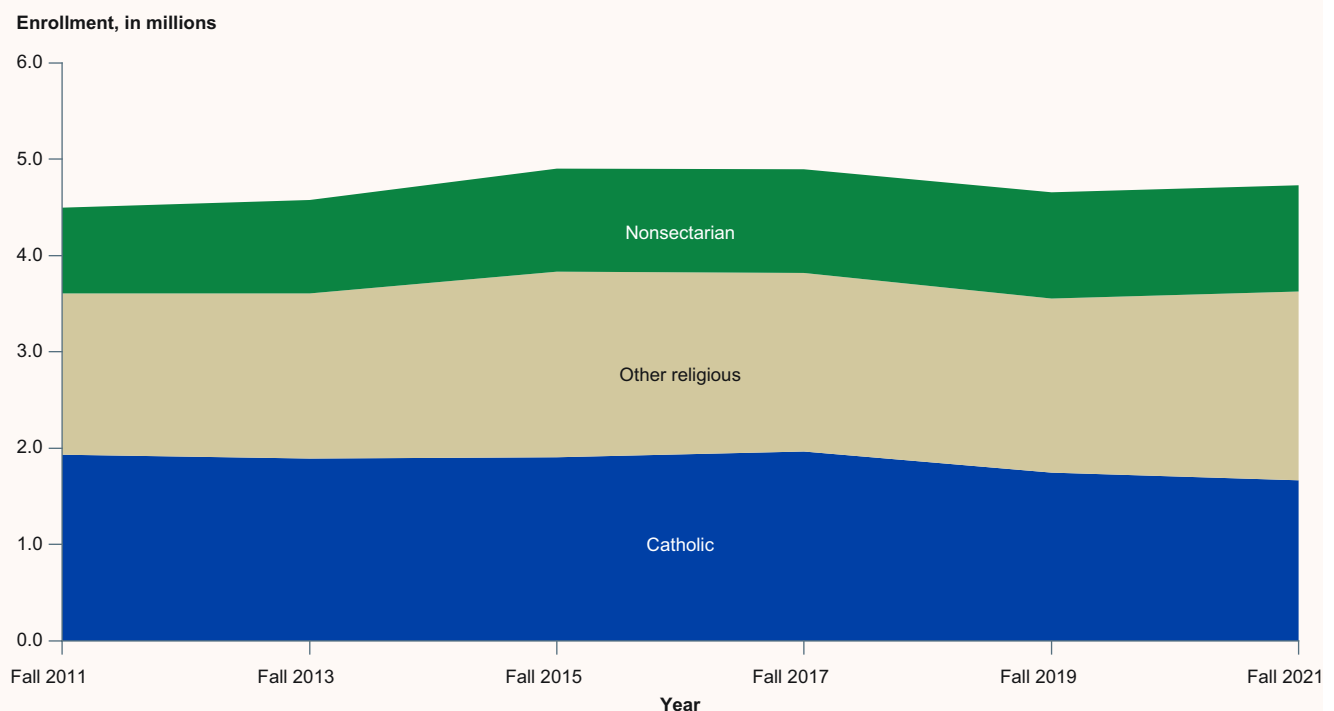
In the fall of 2021, some 4.7 million kindergarten through grade 12 students (9 percent of combined public and private school students) were enrolled in private schools.

Private schools are educational institutions that are not primarily supported by public funds.¹ In this indicator, private schools are grouped into the following categories by school orientation: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian (not religiously affiliated).² Catholic schools include parochial, diocesan, and private³ Catholic schools. The other religious category includes conservative Christian schools, schools that are affiliated with other denominations, and religious schools that are not affiliated with any specific denomination.

Private School Enrollment Over Time

FIGURE 1.

Number of kindergarten through grade 12 students enrolled in private schools, by school orientation: Fall 2011 through fall 2021



NOTE: Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2011–12 through 2021–22. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 205.20.

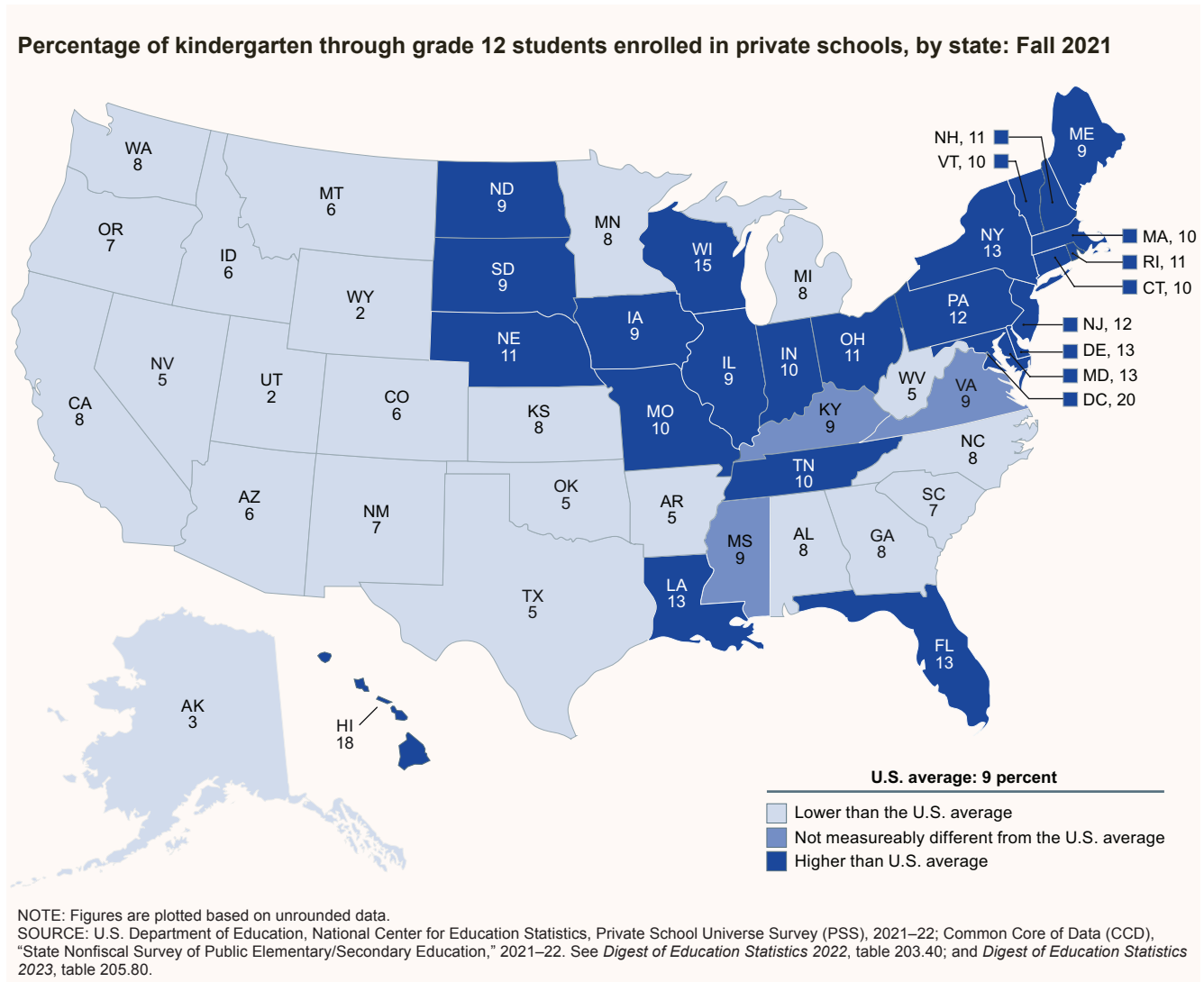
The latest year for which private school enrollment data are available is fall 2021, when 4.7 million kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students were enrolled in private schools. Private K-12 enrollment was 5 percent higher in fall 2021 than in fall 2011 (4.5 million), but there was no measurable trend in enrollment for the period. More recently, private K-12 enrollment was 4.7 million students in both fall 2019 (the year before the coronavirus pandemic) and fall 2021. In comparison, the number of K-12 students who were enrolled in public schools was 2 percent lower in fall 2021 than in fall 2019 (48.0 vs. 49.2 million). Despite these different enrollment patterns during the pandemic, private school students made up 9 percent of combined public and private enrollment in fall 2021 and in fall 2019, as they had in each year throughout the preceding decade.

Enrollment in private schools by school orientation in fall 2021 differed from fall 2011 as follows:

- enrollment in Catholic schools was lower in fall 2021 (1.7 million students) than in fall 2011 (1.9 million students), although there was no measurable trend for the period;
- enrollment in other religious schools in fall 2021 (2.0 million) was higher than in fall 2011 (1.7 million), although there was no measurable trend for the period; and
- enrollment in nonsectarian schools increased from 0.9 million in fall 2011 to 1.1 million in fall 2021.

Private School Enrollment by State

FIGURE 2.

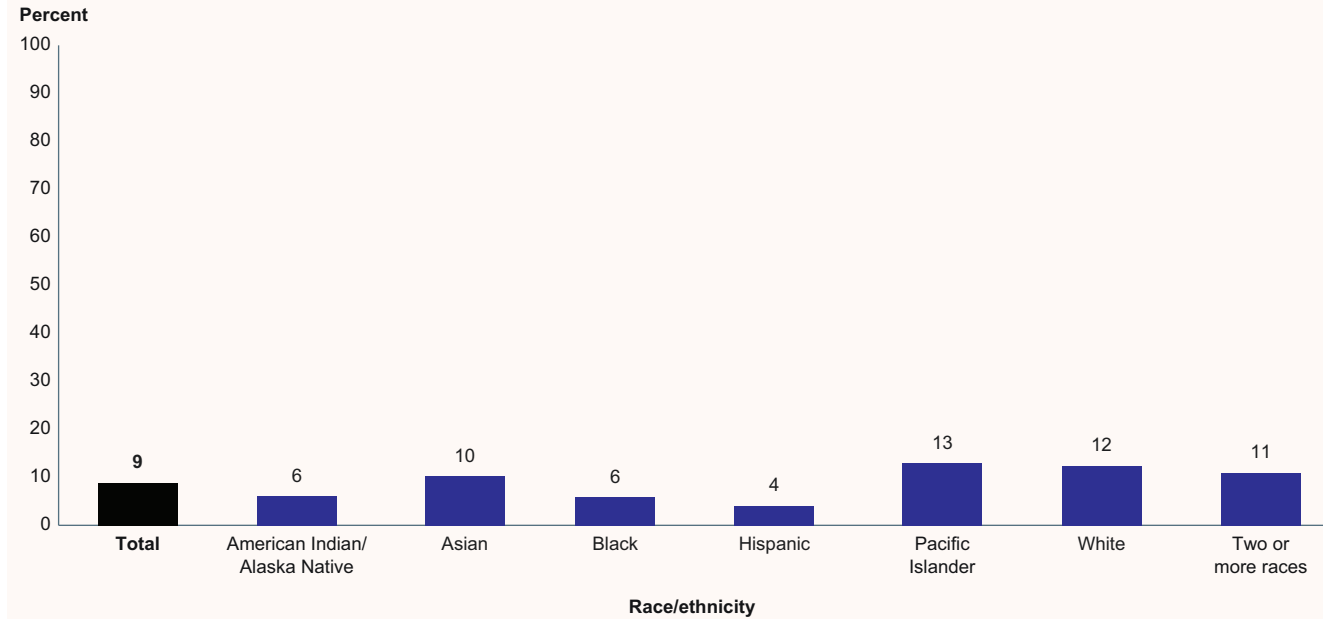


Across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the percentage of K-12 students enrolled in private schools ranged from 2 percent in Wyoming and Utah to 20 percent in the District of Columbia.

Private School Enrollment by Student Characteristics

FIGURE 3.

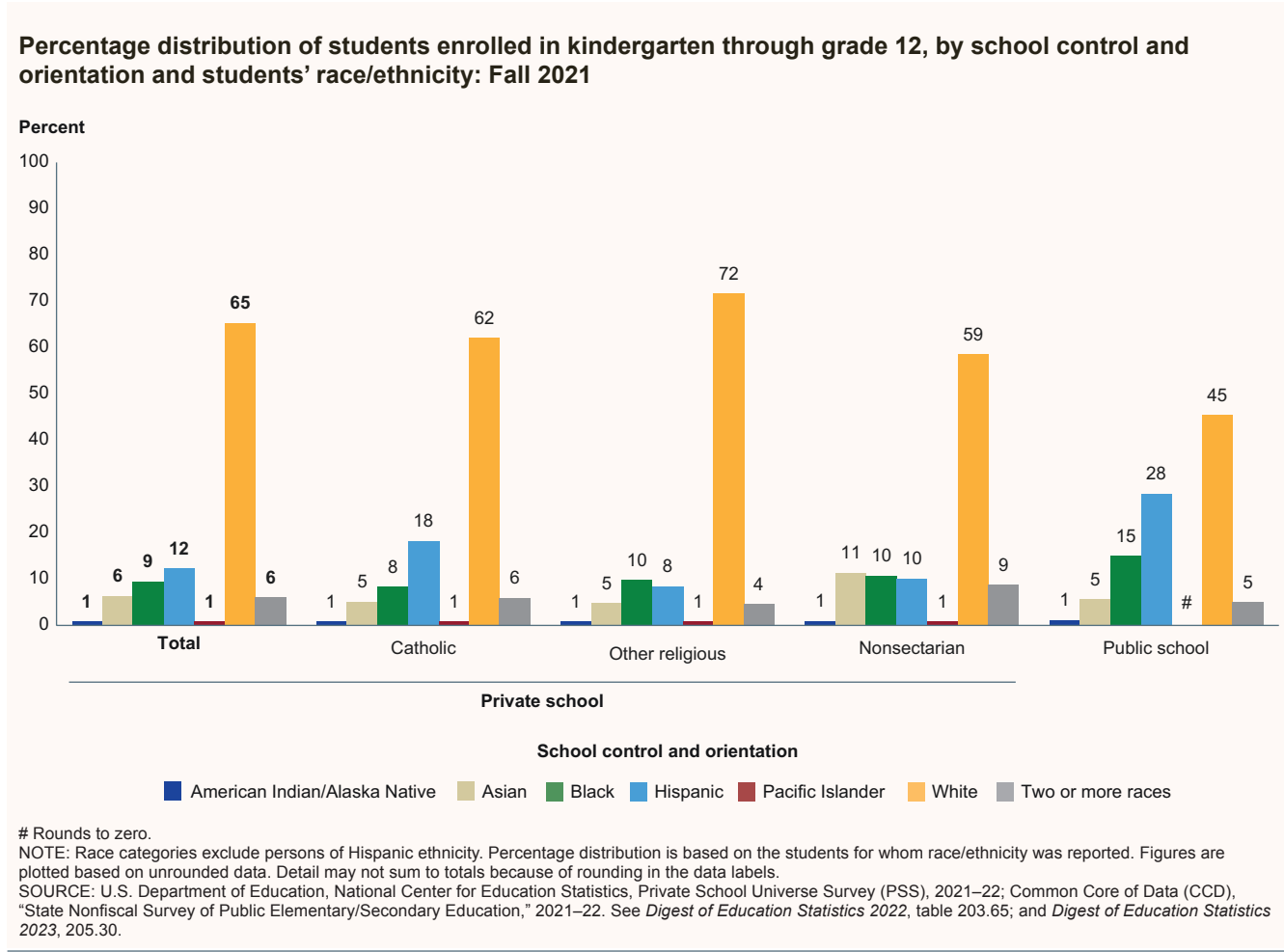
Percentage of kindergarten through grade 12 students enrolled in private schools, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2021



NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. To calculate the percentages, enrollment data for students not reported by race/ethnicity were prorated based on the known racial/ethnic composition of their peers. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2021–22; Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 2021–22. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 203.65; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables 205.20 and 205.30.

The percentage of K-12 students who were enrolled in private schools varied by race/ethnicity. In fall 2021, the percentages of Pacific Islander students (13 percent), White students (12 percent), students of Two or more races (11 percent), and Asian students (10 percent) who were enrolled in private schools were higher than the national average (9 percent).⁴ In comparison, the percentages of American Indian/Alaska Native students (6 percent), Black students (6 percent), and Hispanic students (4 percent) who were enrolled in private schools were lower than the national average.

FIGURE 4.



Among the 4.7 million K-12 students who were enrolled in private schools in fall 2021,

- 65 percent were White;
- 12 percent were Hispanic;
- 9 percent were Black;
- 6 percent each were Asian and of Two or more races; and
- 1 percent each were American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander.

The percentage of students who were White was highest at other religious schools (72 percent), the percentage of students who were Hispanic was highest at Catholic schools (18 percent), and the percentages of students who were Asian, Black, and of Two or more races were highest at nonsectarian schools (11, 10, and 9 percent, respectively).

Compared to public school students, higher percentages of private school students overall were

- White (65 vs. 45 percent);
- Asian (6 vs. 5 percent); and
- of Two or more races (6 vs. 5 percent).

In contrast, lower percentages of private school students than of public school students were

- Hispanic (12 vs. 28 percent); and
- Black (9 vs. 15 percent).

American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander students each constituted 1 percent or less of enrollment in both private and public schools in fall 2021.

Private school students also differed from public school students in other demographic characteristics. In 2021, the poverty rate for private school students was 11 percent, compared with 17 percent for public school students.⁵ Higher percentages of private school students than of public school students were enrolled in schools in cities (43 vs. 30 percent) and in suburban areas (40 vs. 39 percent). In contrast, lower percentages of private school students than of public school students were enrolled in schools in rural areas (11 vs. 20 percent) and in towns (6 vs. 11 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ For the purposes of this indicator, private schools exclude organizations or institutions that provide support for homeschooling. Unless otherwise noted, this indicator includes kindergarten through grade 12 enrollment in the United States, defined as including the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

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

³ Refers to Catholic schools with a private governance structure.

⁴ To calculate the percentages, enrollment data for students not reported by race/ethnicity were prorated based on the known racial/ethnic composition of their peers.

⁵ Findings in this paragraph include prekindergarten students. Poverty data for private school students are from the American Community Survey (ACS) and include homeschooled students. Data on enrollment by geographic locale (city, suburban, town, rural) are from the Private School Universe Survey and include prekindergarten students enrolled in schools offering kindergarten or higher grades (742,200 students).

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [205.10](#), [205.20](#), [205.30](#), and [205.80](#); *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables [102.70](#), [203.20](#), [203.40](#), [203.65](#), and [203.72](#)

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Public Charter School Enrollment](#); [Public School Enrollment](#); [School Choice in the United States: 2019](#)

Glossary: [Catholic school](#); [Combined/other school](#); [Elementary school](#); [Enrollment](#); [Nonsectarian school](#); [Other religious school](#); [Prekindergarten](#); [Private school](#); [Racial/ethnic group](#); [Secondary/high school](#)