

California's Demographic Future: Ethnic & Racial Change in the School-Age Population

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Executive Summary

The ethnoracial composition of California has seen decades of change mainly due to large waves of immigrants from Asia and Central and South America. While many states have experienced population decline, particularly among the youth and working-age populations, California has grown. However, small changes have begun to occur within the state, including smaller migration flows and falling birth rates. Population changes among school-age children have significant policy implications for a multitude of community institutions, including education, healthcare, and community planning.

What should schools and educators across California expect over the coming decades? How is the school-age population (ages 5-18) expected to change with respect to its ethnoracial composition, generational status, home language, and educational attainment? Employing an innovative microsimulation model, we project a small increase in the number of California's school-age children in 2050 and very little change in ethnoracial diversity due to the current state of ethnoracial heterogeneity across the state.

A summary of our findings follows:

Ethnoracial Diversity among California School-Age Youth. By 2050, non-Hispanic White children are projected to compose 23% of the population age 5-18, Hispanics 49%, Blacks 7%, Asians and Pacific Islanders 16%, and children with multiracial or other identities 6%. This represents a decrease of 3% among non-Hispanic White and Hispanic children, a 4% increase among Asian and Pacific Islanders and a 1% increase among multiracial children and those with other identities, respectively. No change is expected to be seen among Black children.

Ethnoracial Geographic Differences. Changes are not expected to occur uniformly across the state, nor among all ethnoracial groups. All regions are projected to see decreases among non-Hispanic White children, with the San Francisco Bay Area region experiencing the greatest decline (5%), and Southern California seeing the smallest (3%). All regions are projected to experience increases among Asian and Pacific Islanders, ranging from 5% in the Bay Area to 3% in the Rest of California. Southern California will have the greatest change among Hispanic children with a 5% decrease projected, whereas only a 1% decrease in the Rest of California and no change in the Bay Area is expected. See Table 1 for complete explanation of geographic areas of analyses.

Reductions in the Number of Children of Immigrants. The share of children of immigrant mothers in California would decline from 3 million to 1.9 million.

Declines in non-English Home Language Use. Like projections for the U.S., substantial declines are expected in the share of California's children speaking a non-English language at home, particularly among Hispanics (a 17-percentage point drop from 62% to 45%) and Asian/PI children (a 7-percentage point drop from 57% to 50%).

Gains in Educational Attainment for Hispanics. California could see fewer high school dropouts (decreasing from 12% to 10%) and more college graduates (increasing from 35% to 39%) by 2050. However, these projected improvements are largely confined to Hispanics with high school dropout rates expected to decrease from 15% to 11% in 2050, while the proportion of Hispanics completing college could increase from 27% to 35%.

Reducing Immigration in the Future Will Not Change These Trends. If immigration scenarios were to change we could expect an 11% decrease from the 2020 baseline scenario among school-age children in a low immigration scenario, while a high immigration scenario could project a 12% increase. However, any change in immigration would have little impact on the ethnoracial composition of the child population in California. The major reason being that California is already

very heterogeneous. Any changes among ethnoracial composition related to changes in immigration patterns are likely to be concentrated among Hispanics and Asian and Pacific Islanders.

The findings of this report are of great importance when considering educational resource allocation, as well as discussions focusing on curriculum development and culturally appropriate family and community support services.

