

5 facts about America's students

By Lauren Kent

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/10/5-facts-about-americas-students/>

In a few weeks, America's roughly 53.5 million K-12 students will head to the classroom. Trading in swimming pools and summer jobs for math problems and history homework, these students will hit the books at one of more than 129,200 schools across the country, including about 5,700 charter schools and 30,900 private schools.

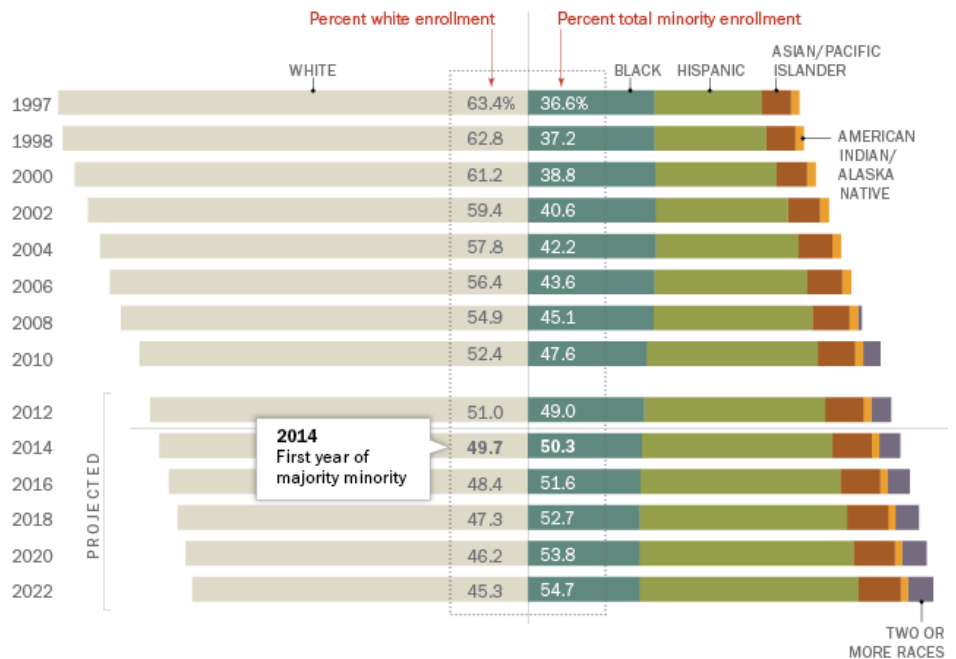
Pew Research Center has found today's American students as a whole to be more diverse – and on track to be better educated – than their parents and grandparents. Here are five key findings about these students:

1 As a whole, America's K-12 students are more racially diverse than ever. The U.S. Department of Education projected that minorities would outnumber whites at public schools by fall 2014, due largely to fast growth in the number of Hispanic and Asian school-age children born in the U.S. Since 2000 there has also been a large increase in the number of states where at least one-in-five public school kindergartners are Latino.

These changes reflect a broader shift toward a majority-minority youth population. Young Americans are far more likely than older Americans to be racial or ethnic minorities. Data from the Census Bureau show that half of Americans younger than 5 were minorities in 2013, compared with just 17% of those ages 85 or older.

Public Schools in the United States Projected to Be Majority-Minority in 2014

Actual and projected share of enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity



Note: Whites, blacks, Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Prior to 2008, "two or more races" was not an available category. In 2008 and 2009, some students of both Asian origin and Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island origin were included in the two or more races category. In 2010 and 2011, all students of both Asian origin and Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander origin were included in the two or more races category. In 2008, five states reported enrollment counts for students of two or more races. In 2009, 14 states reported enrollment counts for students of two or more races.

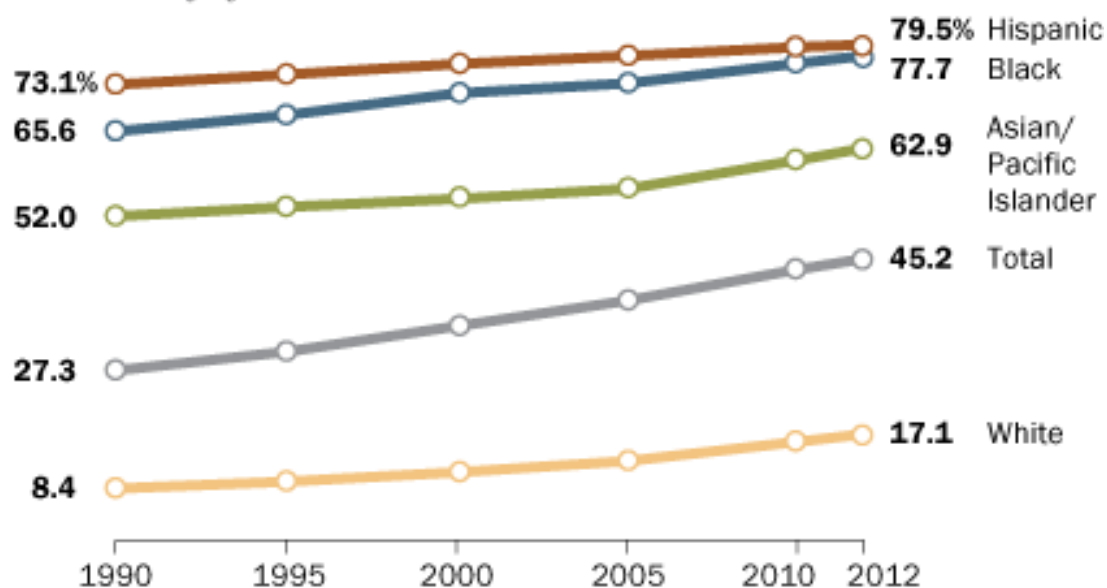
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

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2 Yet, even while school-age children as a whole have become more diverse, **most white students still attend largely white schools.** Just 17.1% of whites attended a school where minorities made up at least half of all students in 2012. Meanwhile, more than three-quarters of Hispanics and blacks (and six-in-ten Asians) attended these majority-minority schools. But many of these minority students are going to school with classmates of their same race or ethnicity. For the 2011-12 school year, the average Latino student attended a school that was 56.8% Latino, and the average black student attended a school that was 48.8% black, according to a recent [report from the Civil Rights Project](#) at the University of California, Los Angeles. (The average white student attended a school that was 72.5% white.)

Enrollment at Majority-Minority Schools

Percent attending public schools where minorities make up at least half of all students



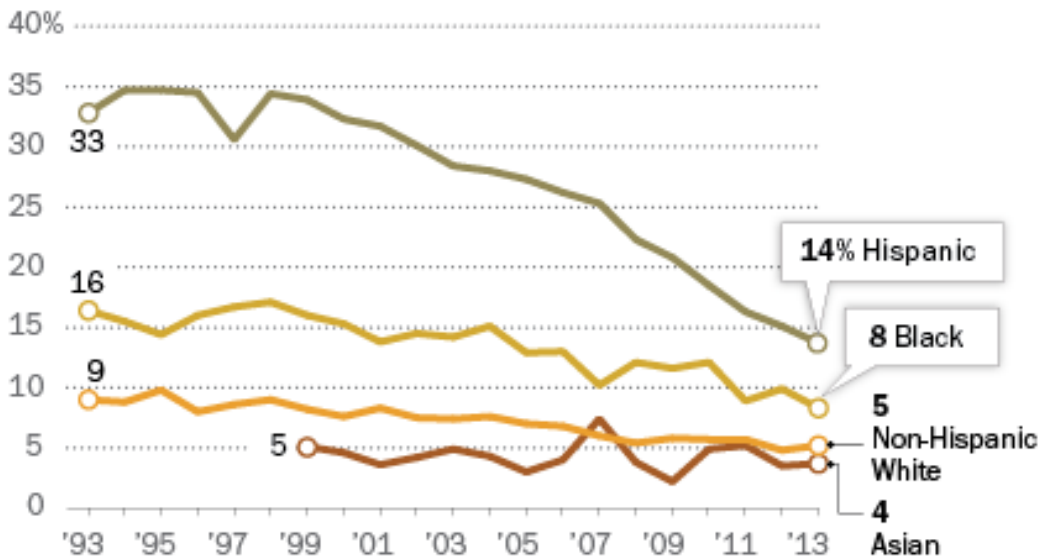
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data. Note: Blacks, whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

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3 **Students today are more likely to stay in school.** As of 2013, America's high school dropout rate had reached a record low: Just 7% of 18- to 24-year-olds that year had dropped out of high school, down from 12% in 2000. The decline can be attributed to **falling numbers of black and Hispanic dropouts.** The dropout rate among black students fell by nearly half, from 15% in 2000 to 8% in 2013, while the rate for Hispanics tumbled to a record low of 14%, down from 32% in 2000. Yet while a growing share of Hispanic youths are finishing high school and attending college, Hispanics **still lag behind whites in obtaining four-year college degrees.**

Hispanic, Black High School Dropout Rates Reach Record Lows

Percent of 18-to 24-year-olds dropping out of high school



Notes: The status dropout rate shown refers to the share of 18-to 24-year-olds who were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school. Black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups. White includes only non-Hispanic whites.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau October Current Population Survey

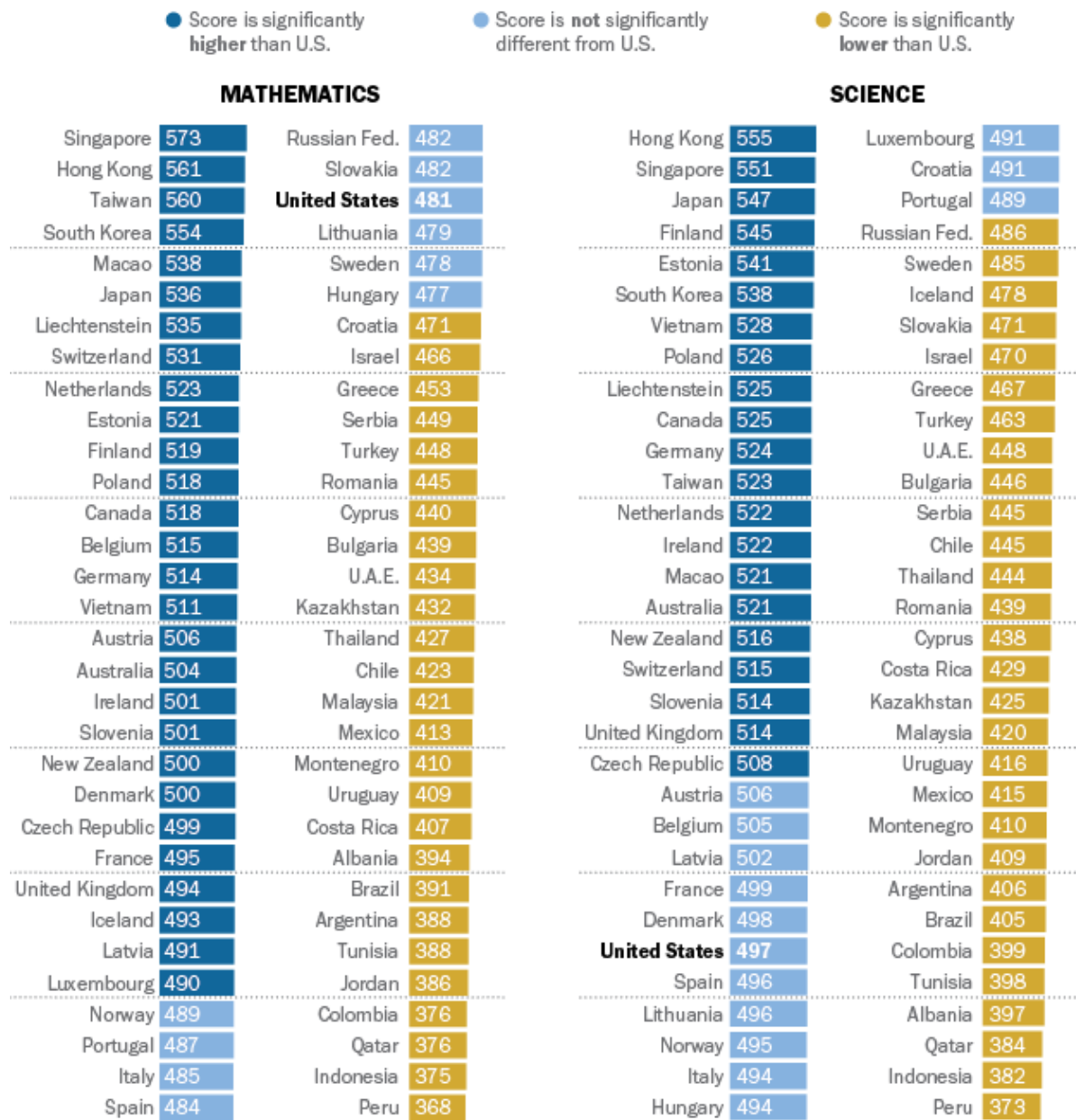
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4 America's students have improved in math and science over the past 20 years – but remain behind students in many other industrialized nations. The United States ranks 35th out of 64 countries in math and 27th in science, according to a cross-national test known as PISA. Although the U.S. spent more per pupil than many countries in 2012 (\$115,000), its students performed the same in math as those in Slovakia, which spent \$53,000 per student.

Americans are critical of the quality of the nation's K-12 science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) instruction: Only 29% believe U.S. STEM education is above average or the best in the world, and 29% say it is below average. At the same time, Americans believe math and science skills are less critical to success than communication and reading skills: 90% say communication is one of the most important skills for American children to get ahead, while 79% name math and only 58% name science.

Internationally, U.S. Stands in Middle of Pack on Science, Math Scores

Average scores of 15-year-olds taking the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment



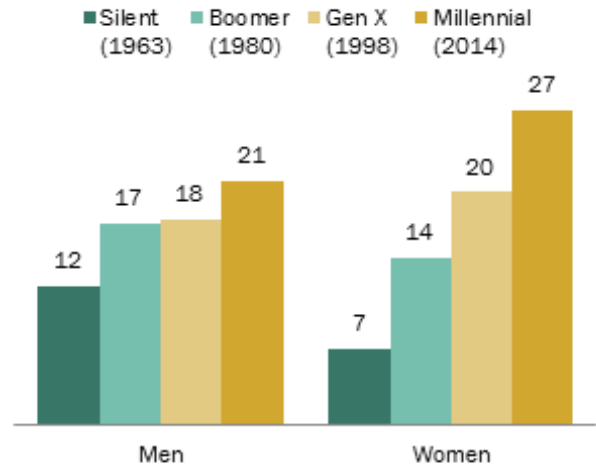
Note: Scale ranges from 0-1,000. Results for China are not shown because only Shanghai fully participated in PISA 2012.
Source: OECD, PISA 2012 via National Center for Education Statistics

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5 While they may lag their peers in other nations, American students are outperforming one group: **their grandparents**. In fact, **Millennials are on track to be the most educated generation in history** compared with older generations when they were the same age. This is partly due to increases in higher education among minorities, as well as to educational gains for women. Millennial women are nearly four times as likely as women in the Silent generation to have at least a bachelor's degree.

Millennials On Track to be the Most Educated Generation to Date

% completing at least a bachelor's degree at ages 18-33, by gender



Note: The educational attainment question was changed in 1992. So for Boomers and Silents, this refers to those who completed at least four years of college. Educational attainment was not available for the 1963 Current Population Survey. The education of Silents was approximated using 18-33 year-olds from the 1962 Current Population Survey.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the March Current Population Surveys (1963, 1980, 1998, and 2014) from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)

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