Factors and Future Projections for K–12 Declining Enrollment

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Why does declining enrollment matter?

- What is declining enrollment?
  - Loss of enrollment over specific time frame
  - Typically measure using October enrollment data

- Districts are funded per pupil (ADA)
  - Loss of total funding... but not per-pupil
  - Downsizing challenging, can be inefficient with constraints
We study state and regional trends as well as district responses

- Trends
  - Past and projected
  - By grade, demographics, county, region
  - Examine potential causes of declines

- District-level responses
  - Where past district declines occurred
  - Are school closures likely? How equitable are closures?
Declining enrollment has fiscal impacts for the state

- Prop 98 guarantee: “silver lining”
  - Declining enrollment is a boon to system on per-pupil basis
  - If budget constant or growing, more $$ per child

- Hold harmless creates **winners and losers**
  - Growing and stable districts implicitly receive less
  - Funding students that “no longer exist”
Enrollment rose for decades, plateaued, then dropped in recent years—with declines projected to continue
Enrollment is expected to decline in all but two California regions over the next decade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Projected</th>
<th>Past</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sierra</td>
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<td>Central Valley - Northern Valley</td>
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<td>Central Valley - Sacramento Metro</td>
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<td>North Coast and North State</td>
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<td>San Diego &amp; Imperial</td>
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<td>Greater Los Angeles</td>
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The chart shows the projected and past enrollment changes for various California regions over the next decade.
Counties with more English Learners expect larger declines

Change in enrollment

- Past: 2012–2022
- Projected: 2022–2032

1st quartile, or lowest EL shares: -2.5% / 2.2%
2nd quartile: -0.5% / -3.7%
3rd quartile: -7.1% / -13.3%
4th quartile, or highest EL shares: -2.9% / -10.6%
Enrollment has fallen more among students who have ever been English Learners.
As public school enrollment sank, private school enrollment grew during the pandemic

Change since 2004–2005
Fertility rates have fallen over the past 30 years, and are projected to decline further
Districts facing declines rarely closed schools

- More than 70% of districts are now facing declines
- School closures are fairly not common
  - Even when declines are 10% or more, less than 40% of districts closed schools
- Schools closed by districts had lower test scores
In districts with wider income division, closed schools have far more low-income students than the rest of the district.

Closed school vs district average

- Mean diff FRPM
- Mean diff high-need
- Mean diff EL

Overall
Growing
Declining

More economic division
Growing
Declining

Less economic division
Growing
Declining
Policy Recommendations

- Provide greater assistance and information to districts on effective and efficient downsizing
- Prioritize equity in decisions on school closures so that they do not disproportionately affect high-need students
- Avoid insulating districts from enrollment declines through additional funding
Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.