MAY 2026

Texas Public School Enrollment Trends

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Texas public school enrollment fell below 5.5 million students in school year 2025–26, the first year-over-year decline since the COVID-19 pandemic and the second largest single-year drop in the 40 years the state has reported on enrollment trends.

This report describes recent trends in statewide public school enrollment and the structural forces that led to where we are today. This report then projects public school enrollment five years into the future. It assumes familiarity with Texas public school enrollment and school finance policy.

A few findings emerge from the data:

- Hispanic students accounted for the majority of the decline. Emergent bilingual student enrollment also dropped sharply.
- Elementary grades absorbed the most loss. K–5 enrollment declined by 46,180 students, accounting for 60% of the total drop, a shortfall that will move through middle and high school pipelines within the decade.
- The share of the Texas school-aged population who is enrolled in public school has also declined by 3 to 4 percentage points, depending on the data source.
- Enrollment projections through the 2030–31 school year estimate that enrollment will continue to decline in every migration scenario. This means Texas is unlikely to grow its way out of this scenario and **public schools should prepare themselves for structural changes to accommodate this enrollment decline**.

These findings come prior to implementation of the Texas Education Freedom Accounts, which will have implications for public school enrollment in school years 2026-27 and beyond. Together, these findings describe a structural, not cyclical, shift in Texas public school enrollment. The state's largest student groups are shrinking, its largest district types are contracting, and its demographic engine is no longer reliably routing children into public classrooms. The 2025–26 decline is the first data point most Texans will see, but it is only the beginning of the decline to come.

Policymakers, district leaders and community stakeholders should plan now for a public school system that is smaller, more concentrated in rural and charter settings, and less reflective of overall Texas population growth than at any point in the last four decades.

Key Takeaways

- In the 2025-26 school year, Texas had **76,000 fewer public school students** than it did the school year before.
- This is the **first enrollment decline**, outside of a global pandemic, in nearly **40 years.**
- **Hispanic students** accounted for **4 out of 5 students.**
- In the past ten years, **major urban districts** have lost **17.3%** of their students, while **rural districts** grew by **13.4%**
- By 2030, Texas could see approximately **100,000** fewer K-12 students.[1]

[1]Based on a mid-migration scenario. Estimated decline is between ~25,000 in a high-migration scenario and ~150,000 in a low-migration scenario .

Texas Public Schools Posted Their Second Largest Enrollment Decline in the Past 40 Years

This section describes the scope and distribution of the school year 2025–26 enrollment decline: which students were affected most, which grade levels absorbed the greatest losses, which regions saw the steepest drops, and which districts lost the most students. The picture that emerges is of a broad, structural contraction concentrated in the state's largest urban centers and most pronounced among Hispanic and emergent bilingual students.

Texas Enrollment is Higher than 10 Years Ago, but Declined in the Last Year

Enrollment in Texas public schools in school year 2025–26 **dipped below 5.5 million students**, representing a **1.4% decline** from the previous school year.

What makes this decline especially notable is its timing. Unlike the COVID-era drop, which was widely understood as a temporary disruption, the current contraction occurs in a period of stability. Schools are fully open, no emergency remote-learning orders are in effect, and Texas' overall population continues to grow. The fact that enrollment is falling despite these conditions suggests that **structural forces are at work:** declining birth rates in prior years, competition from private and homeschooling, and shifting migration patterns all are combining to lower public school enrollment.

The 2025-26 school year marks only the second time in nearly 40 years for which data is available that overall public school enrollment declined in the state.

Texas Public School Enrollment Over Time

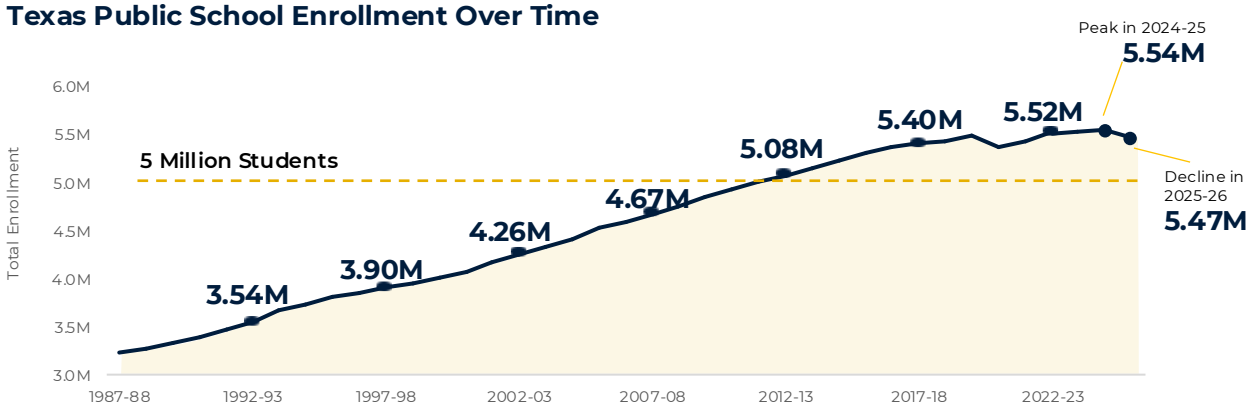


Figure 1.1 — Total Texas Public School Enrollment Since school year 1987-88

Source: TEA, Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2024-25.

Annual Change in Texas Public School Enrollment

1988-89 to 2025-26

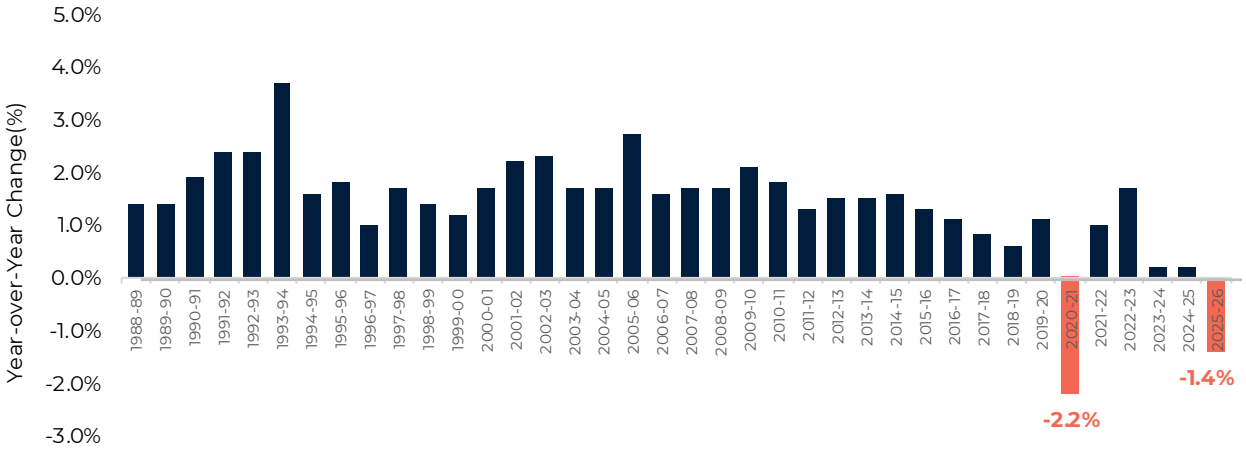


Figure 1.2 — Annual Change in Texas Public School Enrollment

Source: TEA, Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2024-25 (Table 2).

Figure 1.2 reveals that Texas public school enrollment growth was remarkably consistent over the past four decades until recently, with nearly all years falling in the 1–3% annual growth range. The two exceptions stand out sharply: the 2020-21 school year, when enrollment fell by 2.2% during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2025-26, when enrollment declined 1.4%, **marking only the second year of contraction in the entire 38-year record.**

The 2025-2026 school year saw only the **second public school enrollment decline in Texas history**. Before this, the only other enrollment decline was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic

60 Percent of the Enrollment Loss Was in Grades K–5

Between school year 2024–25 and school year 2025–26, elementary school enrollment (K–5) fell by 46,180 students (2%), representing 60% of the overall statewide public school enrollment decline. By comparison, high school grades (9–12) accounted for roughly 32% of the total decline, and middle school grades (6–8) accounted for 5% of the decline.

Today's smaller kindergarten class will move through every subsequent grade level over the next 12 years.

The contraction at the elementary level matters because those students are furthest from graduation: fewer kindergarteners today mean fewer first graders next year, fewer middle schoolers in five years, and fewer high school graduates in twelve. The pipeline effect of a smaller elementary cohort ripples forward through the entire K–12 system for over a decade, creating predictable enrollment and budget pressures that districts should begin planning for now.

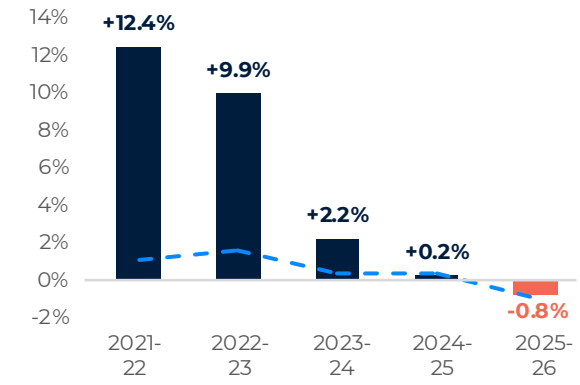
Annual Enrollment Change by Grade Span

Growth Decline Statewide Avg.

2021-22 to 2025-26

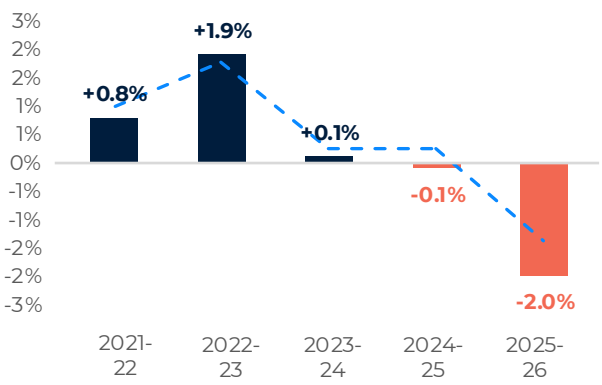
ECE & Pre-K

5.0% of Statewide Enrollment (2025-26)



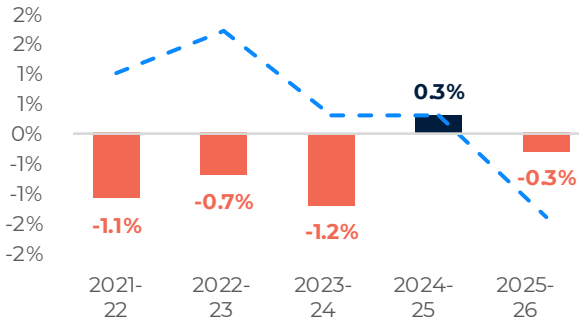
K-5

42.1% of Statewide Enrollment (2025-26)



6th – 8th

22.3% of Statewide Enrollment (2025-26)



9th – 12th

30.6% of Statewide Enrollment (2025-26)

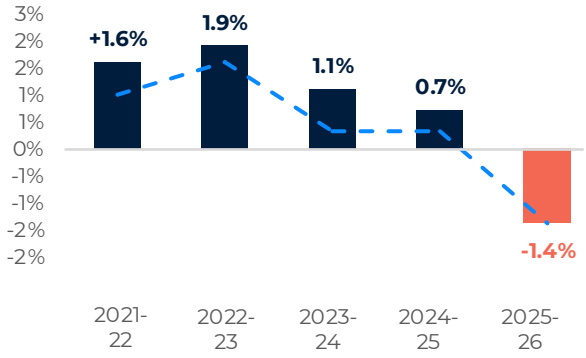


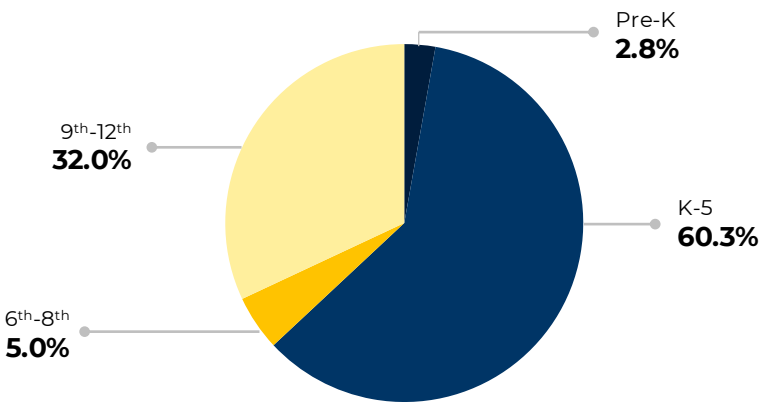
Figure 1.3 — Percent Change in Enrollment by Grade Span, 2021–22 to 2025–26

Source: TEA, PEIMS Student Enrollment Data

Enrollment declines in school year 2025–26 reached every grade span, completing a shift that had been building across the prior four years.

- Early childhood education and pre-kindergarten experienced the most dramatic swing of any grade span over the period, surging more than 12% in school year 2021–22, then decelerating steadily before turning slightly negative in school year 2025–26.
- Kindergarten through fifth grade followed a similar but shallower arc, with modest growth through school year 2022–23 giving way to a 2% decline in school year 2025–26.
- Middle grades (6th–8th) have been the most consistently negative of the four spans, declining in four of the five years shown with only a brief uptick in school year 2024–25.
- High school enrollment (9th–12th) held up the longest, posting growth in each of the first four years before falling 1.4% in school year 2025–26.

Share of Overall Enrollment Decline by grade Span



All four grade spans falling into negative territory in the most recent year signals that the enrollment contraction is no longer contained to any single part of the K–12 pipeline, and the concentration of that contraction in early grades suggests enrollment declines for years to come.

Figure 1.4 —Share of Overall Enrollment Declines by Grade Span, 2024–25 to 2025–26

Source: TEA, PEIMS Student Enrollment Data

Middle School Enrollment Declines Continue to Persist

While the early grades and high school saw important enrollment declines in the past school year, it is also important to note that **middle school enrollment has been falling consistently for the last five school years.** Unlike the K–5 and high school declines, which turned negative only in school year 2025–26, middle school enrollment has been falling since the pandemic.

Middle School Enrollment Over Last Decade

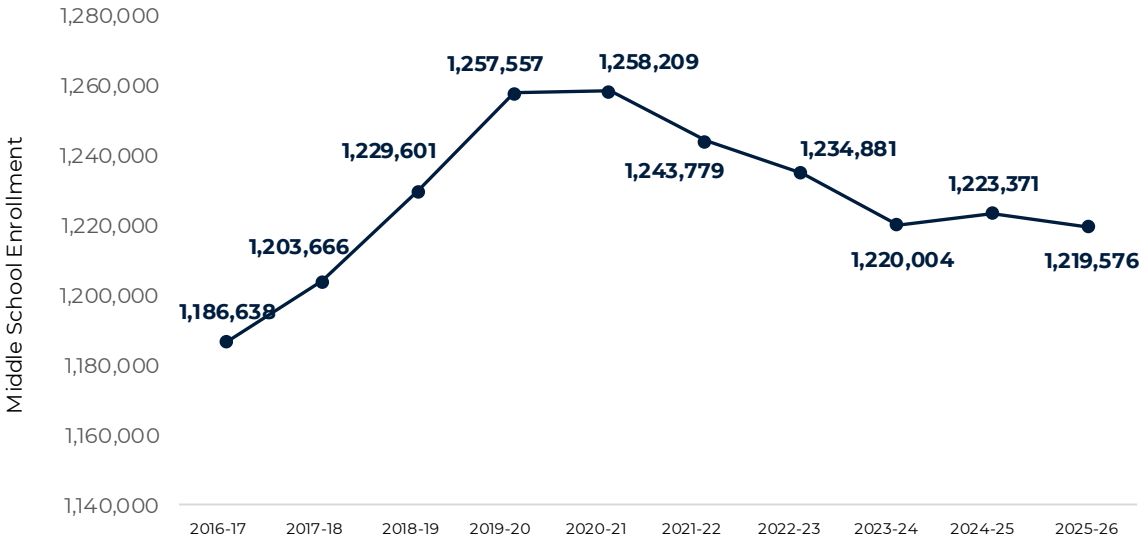


Figure 1.5—Middle School Enrollment, 2016-17 to 2025-26

Enrollment Declined in 18 of 20 ESC Regions, Hitting Hardest in the Rio Grande Valley, Amarillo and Midland

Statewide, total enrollment declined by about 1.4%. This overall contraction was widespread: 18 of the 20 ESC regions recorded fewer students in 2025-26 than the prior year, and Region 6 (Huntsville) was essentially flat, with a change of just six students.

The steepest losses in percentage terms occurred in Region 18 (Midland/Odessa, -3.1%), Region 16 (Amarillo, -3%), and Region 1 (Edinburg/Rio Grande Valley, -2.6%). In raw numbers, the largest declines were concentrated in the state's most populous regions: Region 4 (Houston) shed approximately 24,500 students, Region 1 lost around 11,400, and Region 10 (Richardson/Dallas area) declined by nearly 13,000. **Together, the enrollment declines in Regions 1, 4, and 10 account for more than half of the statewide decrease**.

The lone exception to statewide enrollment decline was Region 14 (Abilene). It added **approximately 2,800 students for a growth rate of 3.9%**

Taken together, these figures point to a statewide enrollment contraction that is disproportionately felt in large urban regions, in the Panhandle, and along the southern border. Only one mid-sized region showed growth.

Annual Enrollment Change by Education Service Center Region

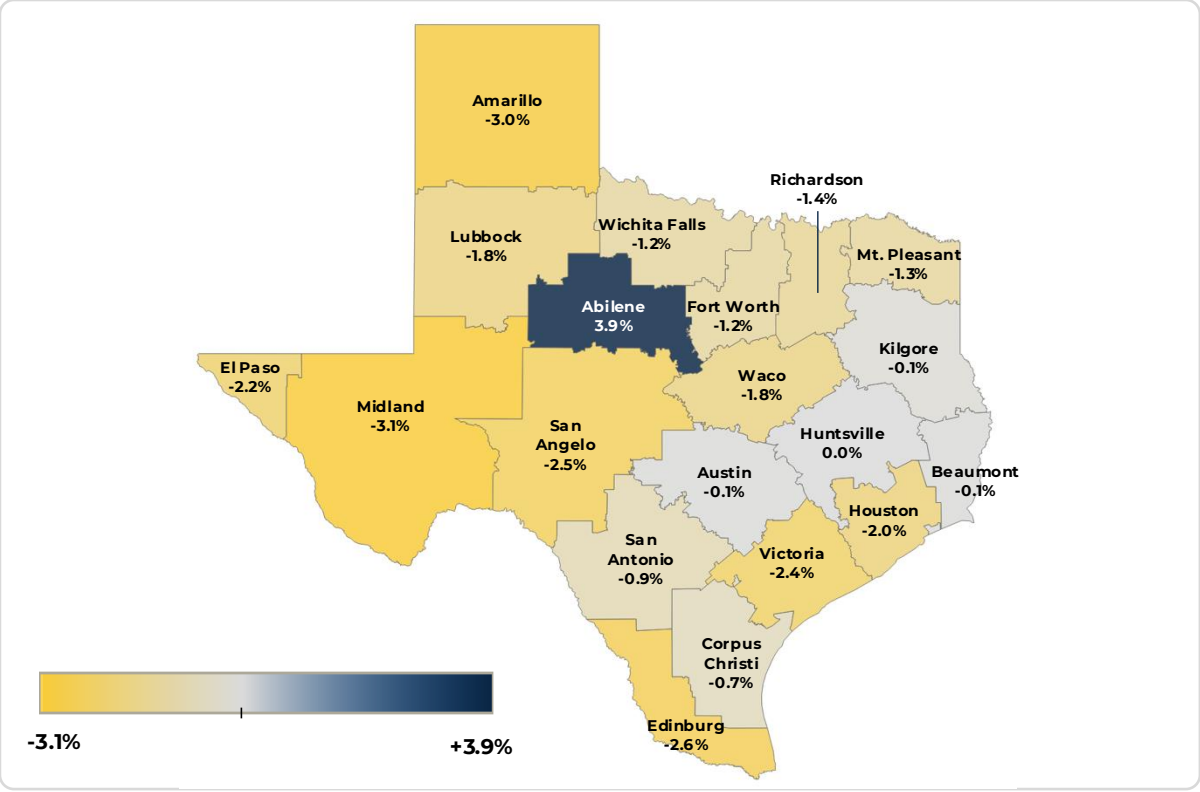


Figure 1.6 —Enrollment Change by ESC Region, 2024-25 to 2025-26

Texas Enrollment Is Redistributing Across District Types

Over the past decade, Texas public school enrollment has shifted significantly across district types. For this analysis, school districts were grouped into seven categories. The 11 largest urban districts[2] identified by the Texas Education Agency as "Major Urban" were treated as a distinct category. The remaining traditional public school districts were classified by their geographic setting: Major Suburban, Other City, Other City Suburban, Town, and Rural. Charter schools, which operate independently of traditional district boundaries, were placed in their own category regardless of location.

Over the last 10 years, Major Urban and Major Suburban districts contracted while rural communities and charter schools expand, a structural shift reflected in each classification's share of total enrollment over time. In the same time period, enrollment in districts in the Other City category also declined, while those in the Other City Suburban category grew substantially.

District Type	Definition
Major Urban	A district in a county with 1,214,000 or more people that has the largest enrollment in the county (or at least 70% of the largest), and at least 35% of its students are low-income.
Major Suburban	A district that borders a major urban district and has at least 3% of that district's enrollment **or** sits in the same county as a major urban district and has at least 15% of the enrollment of the major urban district.
Other City	A district that sits in a mid-sized county (100,000–1,213,999 people) and has the largest enrollment in the county (or at least 70% of the enrollment of the largest district in the county).
Other City Suburban	A district that sits in a mid-sized county with enrollment at least 15% of the county's largest district **or** borders an "other city" district and has at least 3% of that district's enrollment and has at least 901 students.
Town	A district that sits in a smaller county (25,000–99,999 people) and has the largest enrollment in the county (or at least 70% of the enrollment of the largest district in the county).
Rural	A district that doesn't fit any category above.
Charter	Charter schools operate independently of traditional district boundaries and were placed in their own category regardless of their location.

Table 1.1 — TEA District Type Definitions

[2] Arlington ISD, Austin ISD, Dallas ISD, El Paso ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Houston ISD, North East ISD, Northside ISD, San Antonio ISD, Socorro ISD, Ysleta ISD

Enrollment share by District Classification

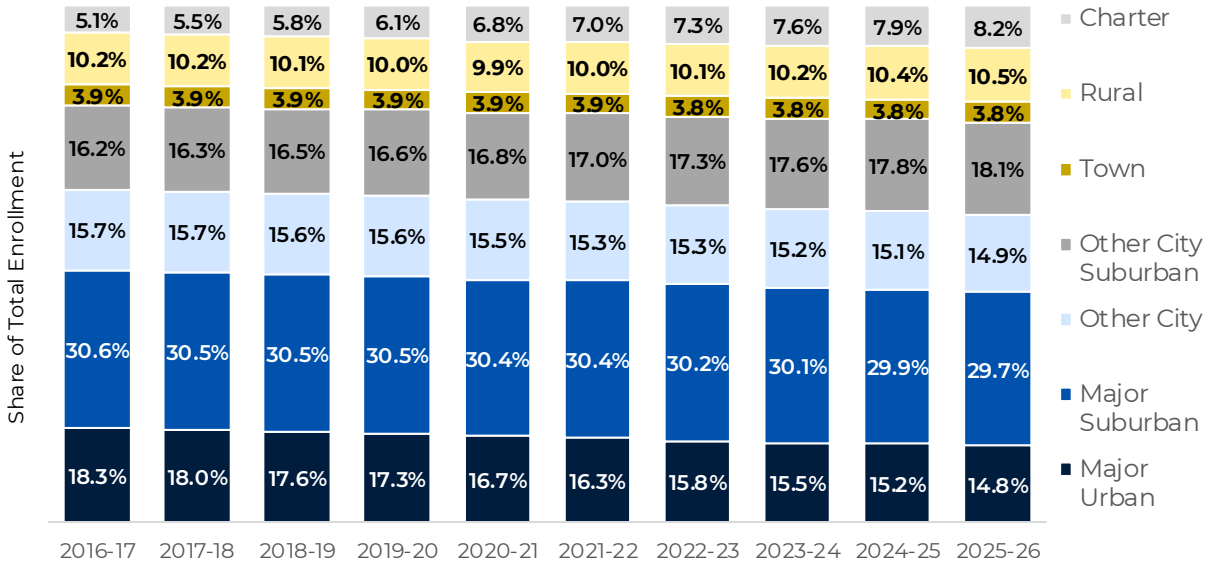


Figure 1.7 — Enrollment Share by District Classification

Source: TEA PEIMS enrollment data. District type based on 2023-24 classification for all school years.

Urban Districts Are Contracting, While Rural Schools are Expanding

The most striking trend is the steady erosion of Major Urban's enrollment share. Major Urban districts lost nearly 170,000 students over the decade. In the last five years, these 11 districts experienced an enrollment decline of 9.6%. Other City districts fell by 1.8% over the same period. Taken together, Major Urban and Other City districts account for nearly 30% of public school enrollment but are both trending downward, suggesting that population growth in those geographies alone is not translating into public school gains in the state's more densely populated areas.

In the maps on page 11, the change in enrollment in ISDs (excluding charters) between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years is compared to the estimated county level population changes between 2024 and 2025. On the map on the left, Districts in gold represent districts where the estimated county population is growing while the enrollment of the ISD within that county is not.

43% of traditional ISDs are located in a county where the **population is growing**, while **district enrollment is not**.

On the map on the right of page 11, districts in gold represent districts where the estimated county population is declining while the enrollment of the ISD within that county is either declining or stable.

Population Change Compared to ISD Enrollment Change

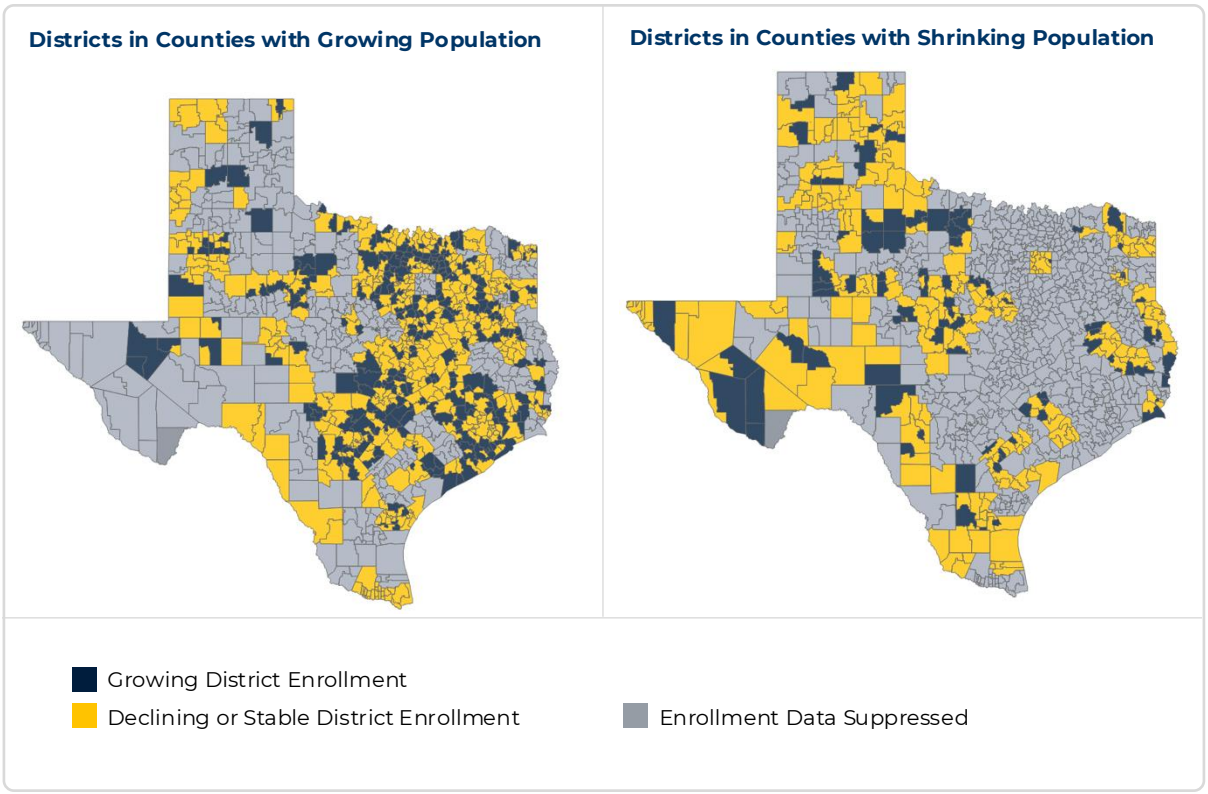


Figure 1.8 — Enrollment Change Compared to County Population Change

Source: TEA PEIMS enrollment data. Census Vintage 2024 and 2025 County Population Estimates

Multiple factors are likely driving this contraction. Major Urban and Other City districts typically serve older communities where the school-age population has been shifting to outer suburbs for years.[3] At the same time, charter school expansion has been most pronounced in urban areas, offering families additional alternatives to their assigned district schools.

Charter School Enrollment Has Sustained Consistent Growth

Starting from a base of 273,000 students in school year 2016–17, charter enrollment grew every single year without exception, reaching 447,000 by school year 2025–26. This consistent upward trajectory stands in contrast to most other categories, particularly the dip across nearly all district classifications during school year 2020–21. Charter schools continued to grow during and after pandemic disruptions, and they continue to capture a growing share of Texas students. Charter schools now enroll roughly 8.2% of all Texas public school students, up from about 5% a decade ago.

The chart on page 12 tracks total student enrollment in Texas open enrollment charter schools over the past decade, from the 2016-17 school year through 2025-26. The data illustrate a sustained and uninterrupted pattern of growth across the entire period.

[3] The Texas Tribune: Texas suburbs lead U.S. for population growth as international migration slows, census finds (Simpson 2026)

Annual Change in Public School Enrollment by Charter Status

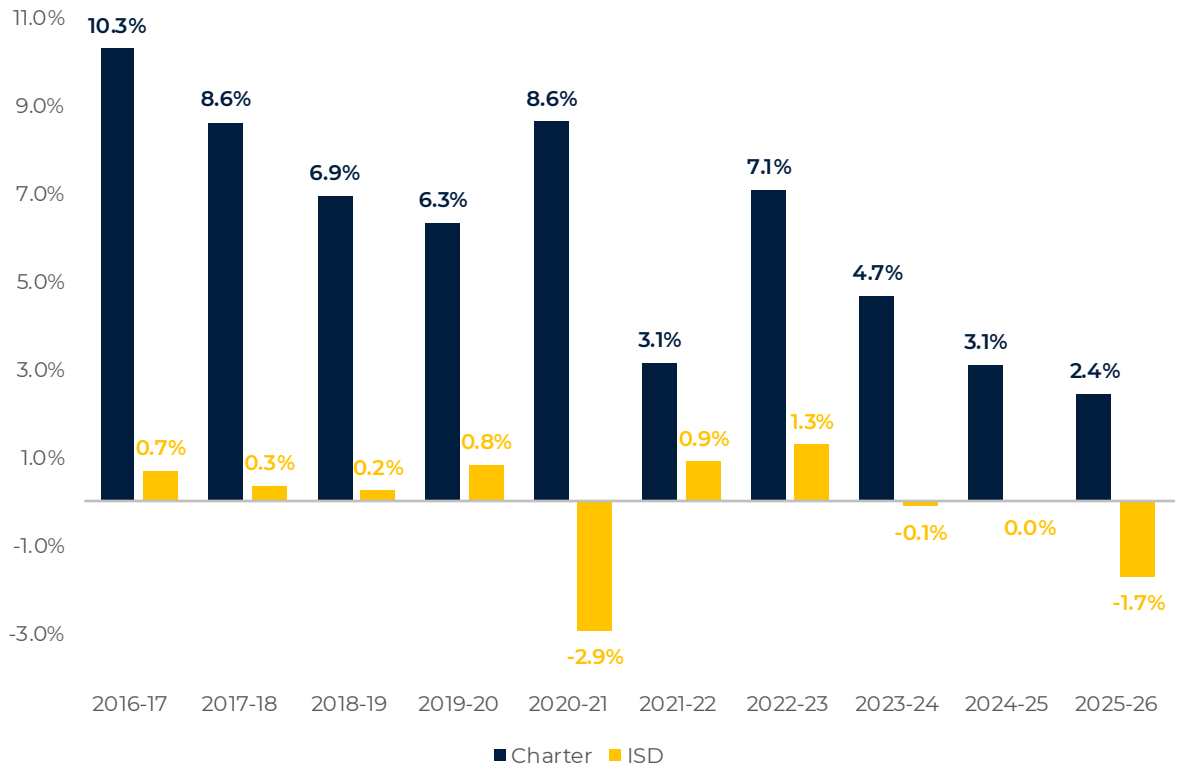


Figure 1.9 — Annual Change in Public School Enrollment by Charter Status

Source: TEA PEIMS enrollment data.

Charter enrollment has risen from approximately 272,800 students in 2016-17 to nearly 446,600 in 2025-26, an increase of roughly 173,800 students. That represents a cumulative growth rate of about 63% over 10 years. On average, the charter sector has added approximately 17,400 students per year during this period.

Notably, charter enrollment has grown every year since 2016-17 with no single year recording a decline. The sector continued to expand even during the 2020-21 school year, when overall public school enrollment in Texas was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While traditional district enrollment fell by 2.9% that year, charter enrollment grew by roughly 29,000 students (8.6%).

The pace of charter school growth has moderated in recent years. Annual gains exceeded 20,000 students in the years between 2017 and 2020. Since 2022-23, annual gains have settled closer to 10,000–15,000 students per year. The most recent year-over-year increase (from 436,031 in 2024-25 to 446,633 in 2025-26) reflects a gain of about 10,600 students, the smallest absolute increase in the decade but still a continuation of the upward trend.

Hispanic Students Account for Four in Five Students Lost Statewide

Between school year 2024–25 and school year 2025–26, overall public school enrollment declined by 76,613 students. In the same period, the number of Hispanic students fell by 61,781.

81% of the decline in public school enrollment was from Hispanic students.

A significant portion of this Hispanic enrollment loss likely reflects a simultaneous decline in emergent bilingual students, a population that heavily overlaps with Hispanic enrollment.

Annual Enrollment Change by Race/Ethnicity

2021-22 to 2025-26

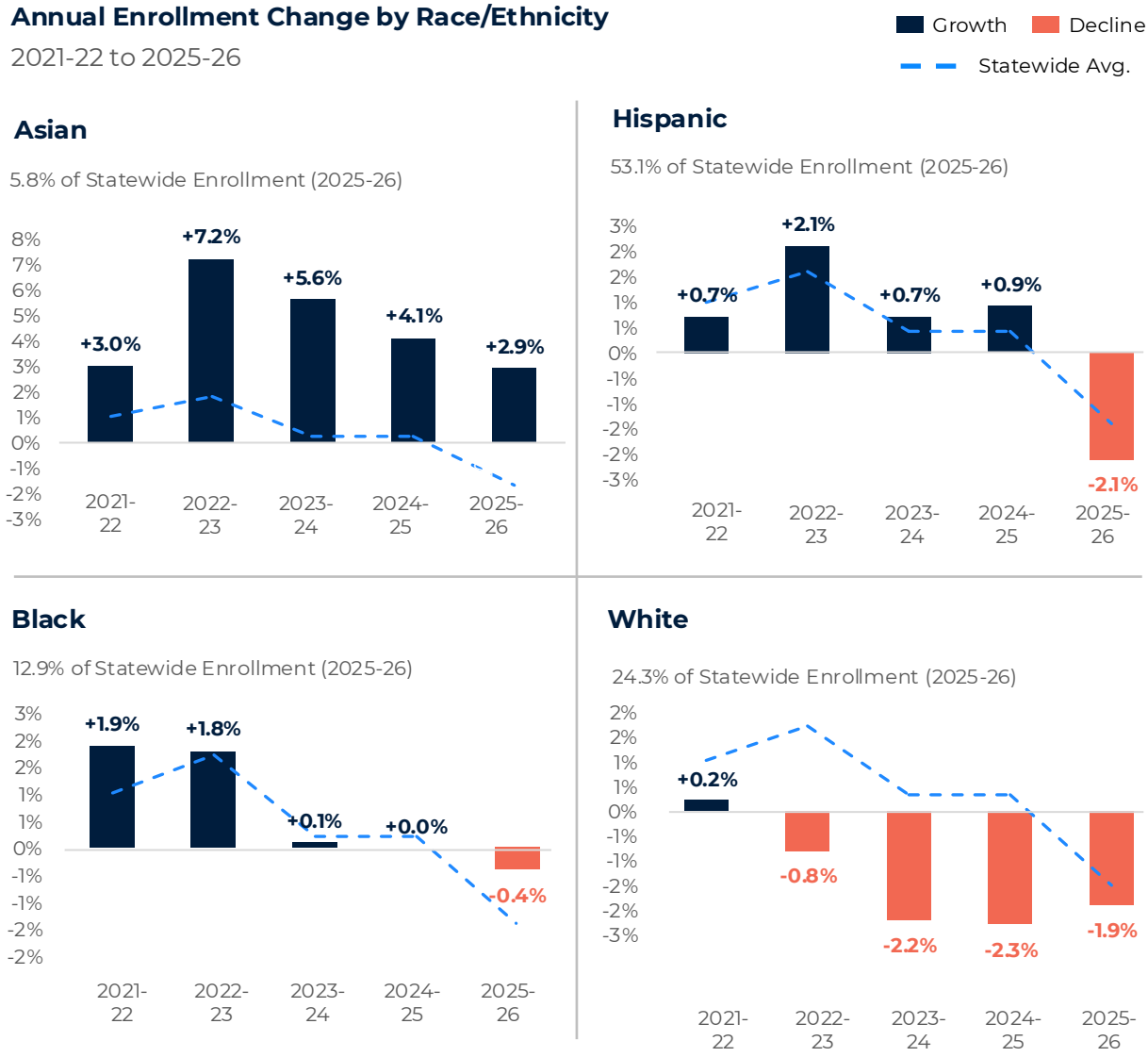


Figure 1.10 — Percent Change in Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2021–22 to 2025–26

Source: TEA, PEIMS Student Enrollment Data by Race/Ethnicity.

The four largest racial and ethnic groups in Texas public schools tell four distinct stories over the past five years.

- Asian enrollment has grown every year in the period, though the pace has slowed from 7.2% in school year 2022–23 to 2.9% in school year 2025–26.
- Hispanic students, who make up more than half of all Texas public school enrollment, grew modestly from school year 2021–22 through school year 2024–25 before swinging sharply to a 2.1% decline in school year 2025–26 — the single largest year-over-year reversal among the four groups and a primary driver of the statewide enrollment drop that year.
- Black enrollment was essentially flat for two years before tipping negative in school year 2025–26, declining by 0.4%.
- White enrollment has declined in each of the past four years, with annual losses accelerating from under 1% in school year 2021–22 to roughly 2% annually since school year 2023–24.

Taken together, the 2025–26 school year marks the first year in this five-year window in which three of the four largest groups declined simultaneously.

Texas saw **enrollment declines** in Hispanic, black, and white students, while Asian student enrollment continues to grow.

Emergent Bilingual and Economically Disadvantaged Students Are Declining Faster Than Enrollment Overall

Among all the special populations tracked by TEA, important trends among two of Texas' largest subgroups have emerged: emergent bilingual students and economically disadvantaged students have declined at a rate faster than overall enrollment. Economically disadvantaged students make up approximately **60% of total enrollment statewide** and emergent bilingual students represent **nearly one in four students.** These two groups encompass much of Texas's public school population.

In school year 2025–26, overall Texas public school enrollment fell by **1.4%**. Economically disadvantaged enrollment fell by **2.3%** and emergent bilingual enrollment fell by **4.1%**. As shown in the figure on page 15, these two populations are declining faster than nearly every other group tracked by TEA, while simultaneously representing a far larger share of total enrollment than most.

A few themes run through the discussion that follows. First, both emergent bilingual and economically disadvantaged enrollment are declining faster than Texas public school enrollment overall. Second, these declines are consistent across every traditional ISD classification, from Major Urban to Rural. Third, the charter sector is the one exception: charters grew their share of both populations in school year 2025–26, suggesting that **it could be the case that some of these students are leaving traditional ISDs for charter schools rather than leaving the public system altogether**.

Special Populations Declined Faster Than Overall Enrollment

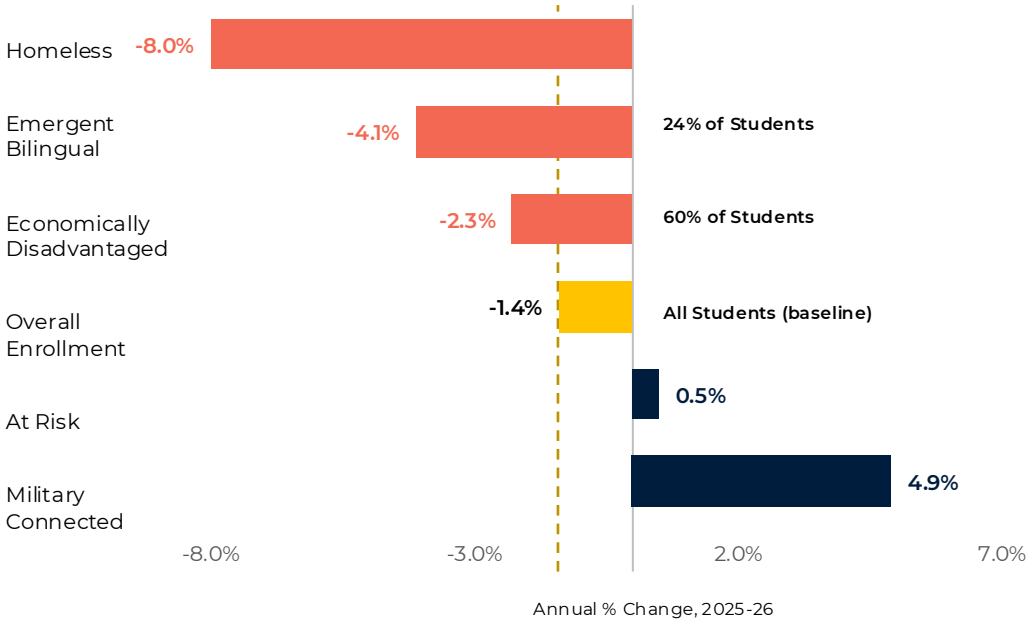


Figure 1.11 — Annual Enrollment Change by Special Population, 2025–26.

Source: TEA PEIMS Student Program and Special Populations data.

Emergent Bilingual Enrollment Declined in School Year 2025-26

In school year 2024–25, 86% of emergent bilingual students in Texas were also Hispanic. These are not two separate populations with separate declines; they substantially overlap. Emergent bilingual students are students who do not speak English as their primary home language and whose English proficiency falls below the level designated by an assessment committee.

As shown on the chart on page 16, Texas public schools saw dramatic growth in emergent bilingual students over the past decade, followed most recently by a sharp and consequential reversal. The emergent bilingual population grew from just over 1 million students in school year 2016–17 to a peak of 1,345,917 in school year 2023–24. The acceleration after school year 2019–20 was especially sharp, with emergent bilingual enrollment climbing by nearly 237,000 students in just four years.

Emergent Bilingual Enrollment Over Last Decade

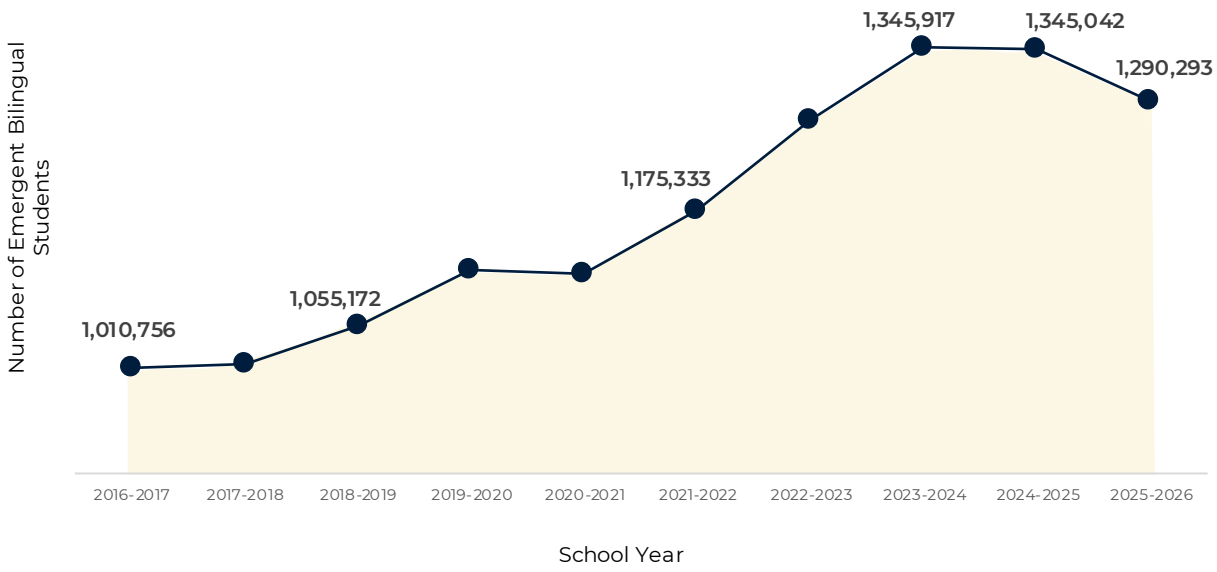


Figure 1.12 — Emergent Bilingual Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2016–17 to 2025–26

Source: TEA PEIMS Student and Special Populations data, 2025-26.

The number held essentially flat in school year 2024–25 at 1,345,042 before declining to 1,290,293 in school year 2025–26, a drop of roughly 55,000 students, or 4.1%, in a single year. **This is the first meaningful decline in emergent bilingual enrollment since current tracking began.** Because the emergent bilingual and Hispanic student populations substantially overlap this decline is not separate from the Hispanic enrollment story told previously; it is a central part of the same story.

The scale of the emergent bilingual decline relative to total enrollment loss is striking. The emergent bilingual student decline of approximately 55,000 students between the two most recent school years, against a backdrop of 76,613 fewer total students enrolled statewide, means that **emergent bilingual students account for about 71% of the total enrollment decline despite being only 24% of the student population.**

Emergent Bilingual Enrollment Loss Is Concentrated in Urban and Suburban Districts

When the loss of emergent bilingual students is examined by district type, a clear pattern emerges: declines are concentrated in urban and suburban traditional ISDs. Urban and suburban districts (including “Major” and “Other” classification types) together account for over 56,000 lost emergent bilingual students, more than offsetting the modest gains seen in charters. Every single traditional ISD classification experienced a decline in emergent bilingual enrollment, with no exceptions regardless of community type or size.

Classification	Emergent Bilingual 2024–25	Emergent Bilingual 2025–26	Net Change	% Change
Major Urban	287,080	263,715	**–23,365**	–8.1%
Major Suburban	423,170	405,574	**–17,496**	-4.2%
Other City	187.371	177,047	**–10,324**	-5.5%
Other City Suburban	188,609	183,500	**–5,109**	-2.7%
Town	35,276	34,214	**–1,062**	-3.0%
Rural	73,118	71,845	**-1,273**	-1.7%
Charter	150,519	154,433	**+3,914**	+2.5%

Table 1.2 — Emergent Bilingual Enrollment Change by District Classification, 2024–25 to 2025–26

Source: TEA PEIMS Student Program and Special Populations data. Suppressed values (n<10) imputed as n=5.

Major Urban districts saw the steepest proportional losses at 8.1%, losing over 23,000 emergent bilingual students in a single year. Other City districts fell by 5.5%, and Major Suburban districts declined by 4.2%. Even the more stable classifications (Town, Rural and Other City Suburban) posted losses, underscoring that this is not an isolated urban phenomenon but a statewide trend affecting traditional public schools across the geographic spectrum.

The one exception to this pattern is the charter sector, which was the only classification to grow its emergent bilingual enrollment, adding 3,914 students for a 2.6% increase. Just as with economically disadvantaged enrollment (discussed below), **charter schools appear to be absorbing a growing share of the emergent bilingual student population** even as traditional ISDs of every type contract.

Economically Disadvantaged Enrollment Is Declining, Faster than Overall Trends

Texas public schools identify “economically disadvantaged” students as those from low-income households, determined by family income, household size, or participation in public assistance programs. These students make up a majority of Texas enrollment and carry additional formula weight in the state’s school finance system.

After reaching a decade-high, **economically disadvantaged enrollment has declined in each of the past two school years**, and that decline is outpacing overall enrollment loss.

Economically disadvantaged enrollment fell by 2.3% in school year 2025–26, compared to an overall enrollment decline of 1.4%. While the gap is not as dramatic as the 4.1% drop in emergent bilingual enrollment, the scale of the economically disadvantaged population means the absolute numbers are large.

~166,000
fewer economically disadvantaged students in Texas public schools than there were two years ago.

Economically Disadvantaged Enrollment Over Last Decade

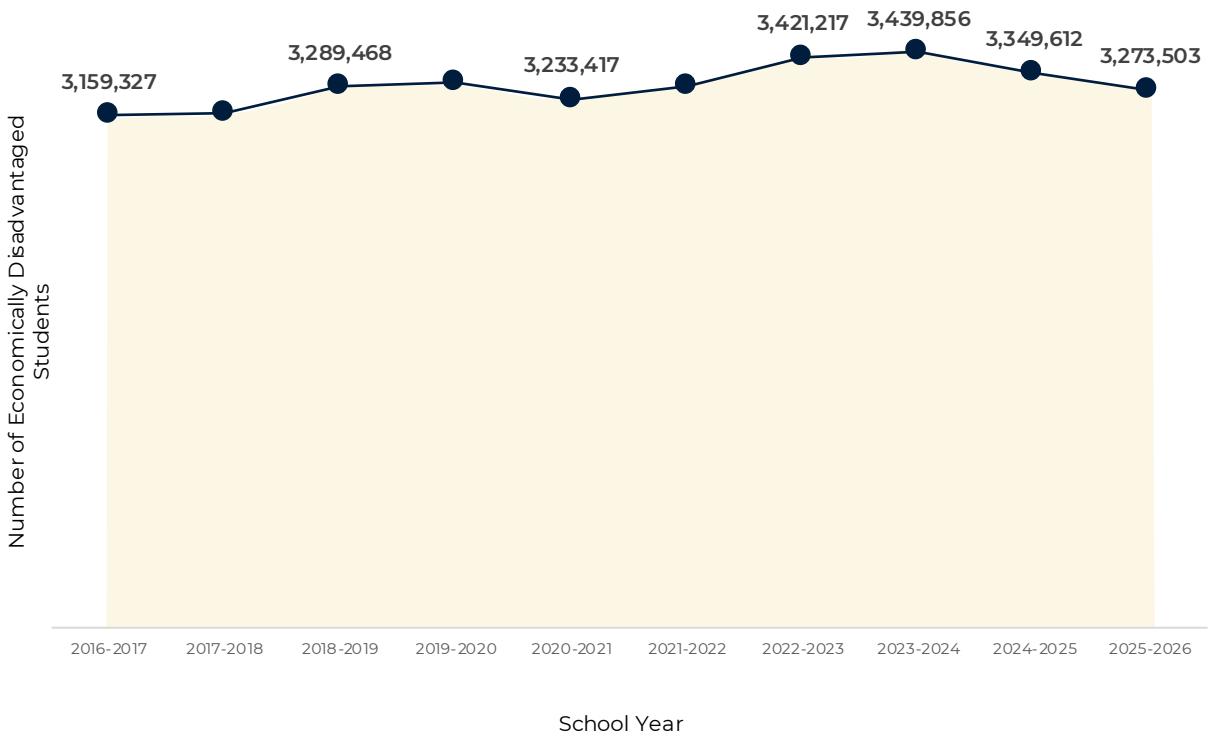


Figure 1.13 — Economically Disadvantaged Student Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2016 –17 to 2025–26

Source: TEA PEIMS Student and Special Populations data, 2025-26.

The data are marked by two distinct phases. From 2016-17 through 2019-20, the economically disadvantaged population grew steadily, rising from approximately 3.16 million to 3.31 million. The count dipped slightly in 2020-21 (likely reflecting pandemic-era enrollment disruptions) before resuming an upward climb that peaked at nearly 3.44 million in 2023-24, the highest point in the decade.

Since that peak, the trend has reversed. Economically disadvantaged enrollment has declined in each of the past two school years, falling to approximately 3.27 million in school year 2025–26—a two-year loss of roughly 166,000 students. Notably, this decline

is outpacing overall enrollment contraction in percentage terms (losing 2.3% of economically disadvantaged students compared to 1.4% of all students). These enrollment losses suggest that low-income students are leaving Texas public schools at a faster rate than students overall, or that more families are rising above the economically disadvantaged threshold.[4]

Economically Disadvantaged Enrollment Loss Is Concentrated in Urban and Suburban Districts

Classification	Economically Disadvantaged 2024–25	Economically Disadvantaged 2025–26	Net Change	% Chg.
Major Urban	608,715	571,165	-37,550	-6.2%
Major Suburban	933,317	915,514	-17,803	-1.9%
Other City	494,655	476,560	-18,095	-3.7%
Other City Suburban	523,099	521,763	-1,336	-0.3%
Town	140,528	138,574	-1,954	-1.4%
Rural	344,164	338,828	-5,336	-1.6%
Charter	305,133	311,111	+5,978	2.0%

Table 1.3 — Economically Disadvantaged Enrollment Change by District Classification, 2024–25 to 2025–26

Source: TEA PEIMS Student Program and Special Populations data. Suppressed values (n<10) imputed as n=5.

Looking at the economically disadvantaged enrollment data across district type from 2024-25 to 2025-26, a clear divergence is emerging between traditional ISDs and charters. Across every traditional ISD classification, economically disadvantaged enrollment declined from 2024-25 to 2025-26, a pattern that holds regardless of whether a district serves a major urban core, suburban community, small city, or rural area. The steepest loss occurred in Major Urban districts, which shed over 37,500 economically disadvantaged students, a 6.2% drop in a single year. Other City districts fell by 3.7%, while Major Suburban districts declined by 1.9%. Even the most stable traditional categories, Other City Suburban and Rural, posted losses, though more modest at -0.3% and -1.6% respectively.

The one exception to this statewide trend is the charter sector, which was the only classification to grow its economically disadvantaged enrollment, adding nearly 6,000 students for a 2.0% increase.

[4] A student-level analysis would be needed to answer the question of whether economically disadvantaged students are leaving the public school system in Texas or if they are rising above the economically disadvantaged threshold. Analyses in this report happen at the state- and district-level.

Where Students Go When They Leave Texas Public Schools

Annual data from TEA track the number of 7th to 12th grade students who were reported as leaving Texas public schools during one school year. Districts can submit different exit withdrawal types for each student who left the public school. In the table below, the top five reasons why students left Texas public schools statewide are shown for each school year from 2020-21 through 2023-24

Leaver Reason	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Reason Unknown	45,495	42,865	40,524	37,885
Enrolled in a Public or Private School outside Texas	30,895	30,978	30,619	30,622
Home Schooling	29,846	29,765	30,061	26,647
Returned to Home Country	8,585	10,698	11,152	11,623
Enrolled in Texas Private School	7,816	8,426	7,399	6,415

Table 1.4—Top 5 Other Leaver Reasons and Number of Students, 2020-21 to 2023-24

Source: TEA Annual Leaver Statewide Reports

Enrollment in a private or public school outside Texas and home schooling together account for more than 55,000 exits per year, outnumbering students who returned to a home country or enrolled in a Texas private school. Even accounting for the limits of this dataset, the consistent volume of students leaving for home schooling or for schools outside Texas is notable, a pattern consistent with the broader redistribution of students described elsewhere in this report.

Public Schools Are Losing Market Share Among School-Age Texans and the Trend is Projected to Continue

The previous section describes what is happening in Texas public schools today. However, the more operative question for state policymakers, school leaders and community members is: **what will public school enrollment look like in the coming years?**

In examining demographic trends in light of structural enrollment change, **Texas 2036 projects that public school enrollment will likely continue to decline in the coming years.**

This conclusion rests on three lines of evidence:

- The fraction of newborns who eventually show up in public school kindergartens has been falling for a decade;
- The share of Texas school-age children enrolled in public school has fallen by roughly 3.5 percentage points since 2015; and
- The Texas Demographic Center is projecting that Texans under 18 as a share of the total state population will decline from 25% in 2020 to 18% by 2060. In the near-term, whether assuming low, mid or high migration to the state, TDC is projecting that the school-age population will shrink in 2026 and continue to shrink each year through 2030 in a low-migration scenario.

Together, these patterns indicate that the 2025–26 decline is not a one-year blip.

The Texas 2036 model presented later in this section may understate the projected decline, since it does not capture the effect of the new Texas Education Freedom Accounts, which will take effect for school year 2026-27, and it assumes that the public-school share of school-age Texans will hold steady rather than continuing the decline trend observed over the past decade.

The Share of Newborns in Public School Has Declined Steadily for Last Decade

The birth-to-kindergarten enrollment ratio compares the number of students enrolling in public school kindergarten with the number of births five years earlier. This metric is useful because it isolates how effectively public schools are capturing each new birth cohort as children reach school age. A declining ratio means that fewer children born in a given year are ultimately enrolling in public school kindergarten five years later.

Texas' birth-to-kindergarten ratio has trended downward over the past decade. The ratio stood above 98% in the mid-2010s and has **declined by 3.5 percentage points as of school year 2025–26**. While this may seem like a small shift, at Texas' scale, each percentage point represents roughly 3,700 children who would have entered public kindergarten in a prior era but no longer do.[5]

Children Born in Texas Compared to Kindergarten Enrollment

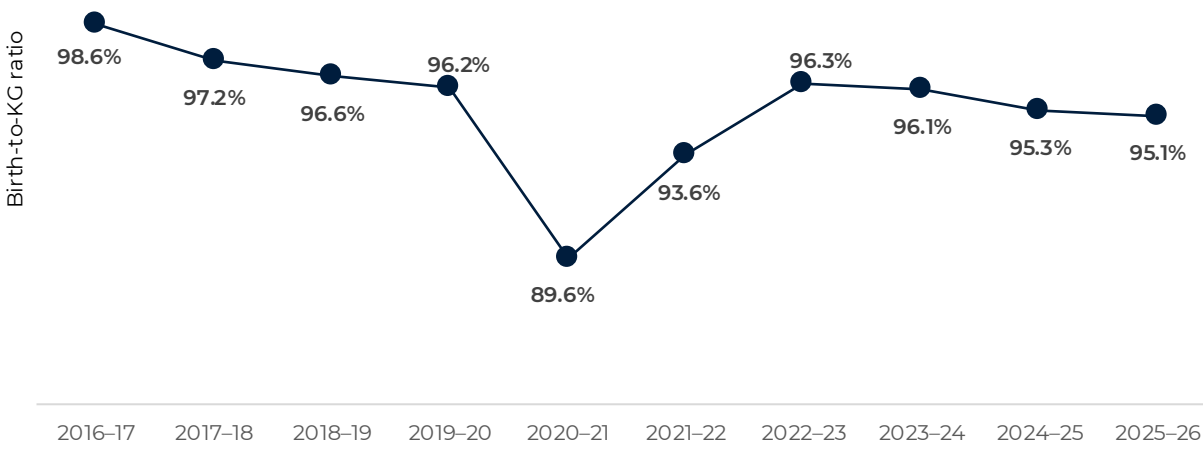


Figure 1.15 — Birth-to-Kindergarten Enrollment Ratio, 2016–17 to 2025–26

Source: TEA PEIMS Student Enrollment Reports and Texas Department of State Health Services, Birth Certificate Data

School Year	16 – 17	17 – 18	18 – 19	19 – 20	20 – 21	21 – 22	22 – 23	23 – 24	24 – 25	25 – 26
Kindergarten Enrollment	372,011	371,618	374,020	384,114	361,349	371,502	367,633	361,799	359,871	350,226
Births 5 Years Earlier	377,274	382,438	387,110	399,482	403,439	396,999	381,876	376,354	377,710	368,317
Share of Lagged Births Enrolled in Kinder	98.6%	97.2%	96.6%	96.2%	89.6%	93.6%	96.3%	96.1%	95.3%	95.1%

Table 1.5 — Lagged Annual Births Compared to Kindergarten Enrollment

The declining ratio suggests that a **growing share of Texas families are choosing to keep their children out of public schools** from the very beginning of their academic careers.

This means that over the last decade, fewer children born in Texas enrolled in kindergarten five years later. This trend has significant long-term implications for public school funding and capacity planning.

[5] Calculated as 1% of the average annual Texas births during the relevant period (approximately 370,000 per year). Source: Texas Department of State Health Services, Vital Statistics Annual Reports.

The Share of School-age Children in Public School Has Been Declining

While the kindergarten ratio captures the entry point of the public school pipeline, it does not capture how all school-age children in the state compare to K-12 enrollment. The U.S. Census Bureau annually surveys parents of school-age children about public school participation across the full K-12 system.

Over the last decade, the share of school-age Texans enrolled in public schools has fallen from nearly **90% to 86.5%**

Since 2015, public schools lost approximately 3.5 percentage points of the school-age market—not because fewer children live in Texas, but because a larger share of all Texans (those born here and those who were not) chose to do their schooling elsewhere.

Public school enrollment share of school-age Texans (ages 5-17)

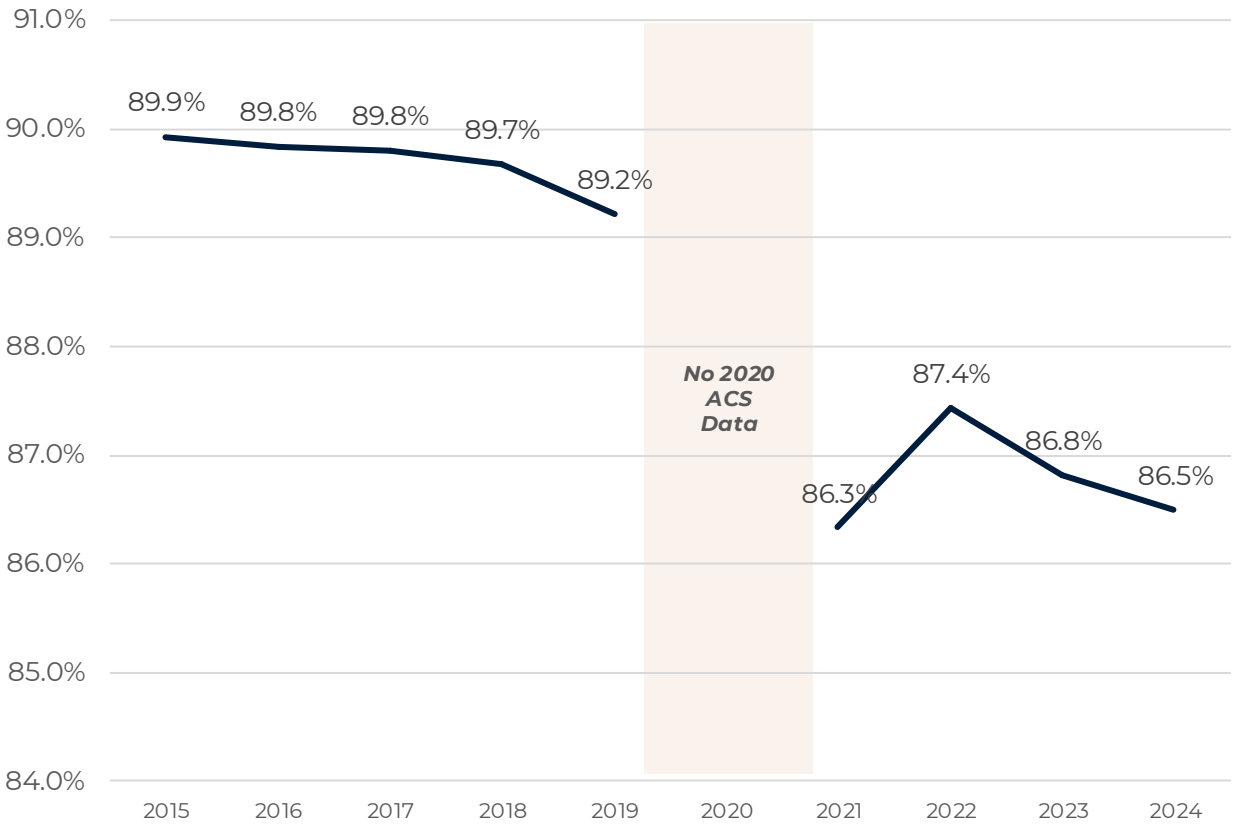


Figure 1.16 — Share of school-age children that enroll in public school, 2015-2024

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S1401.
2020 omitted: ACS 1-year not released.

Population Projections Indicate Enrollment Will Decline Further

While Texas' total population is projected to grow by 46% by 2060, the population under 18 is only projected to grow by 5%. In the long term and under the TDC's mid-migration scenario, the state will add roughly 13.5 million residents between 2020 and 2060, rising from 29.1 million to 42.6 million. Yet almost all of that growth is concentrated among adults. The share of Texans under age 18 is projected to fall from 25% in 2020 to 18% by 2060. In absolute terms, Texas's under-18 population grows only modestly over the entire 40-year horizon, from 7.3 million in 2020 to 7.7 million in 2060, while its 65-and-older population more than doubles, from 3.9 million to 9.2 million. (See Figure A.2 in Appendix).

While TDC estimates that the school-age population grew between 2020 and 2024, it projects that the school-age population will contract next year, regardless of what happens with migration. In the low- and mid-migration scenarios, the school age population is projected to continue to shrink through 2029 before beginning a recovery. In the high-migration scenarios, the school-age population is projected to begin a recovery sooner.

Texas Demographic Center 2024 Ages 5 to 18 Population Projections

(2020-2030)

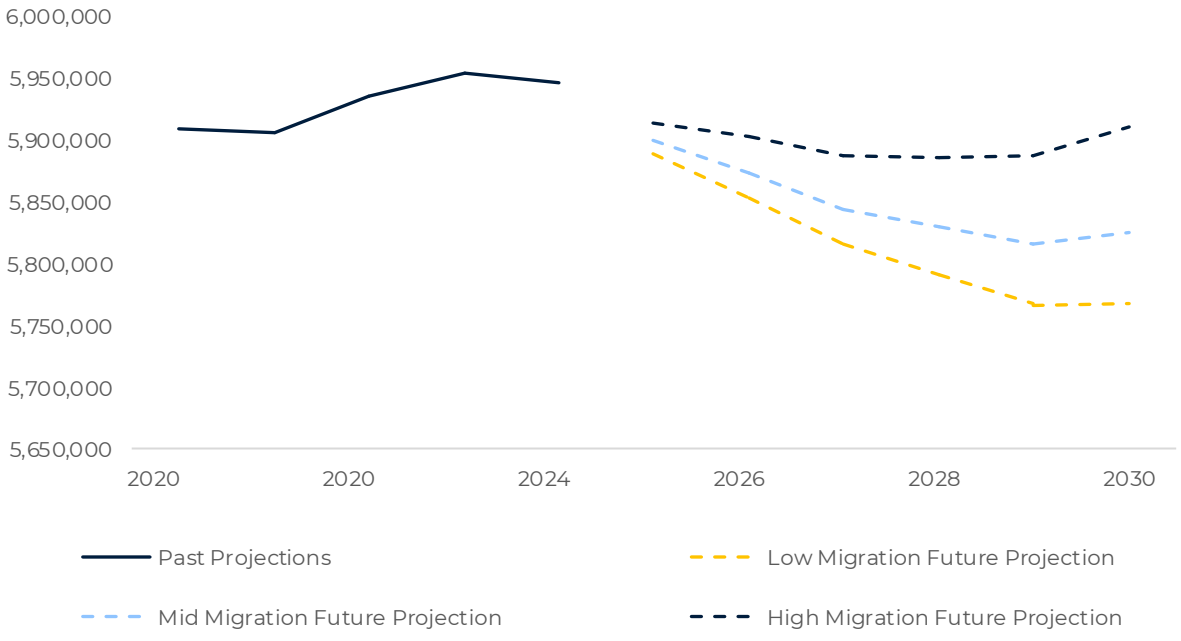


Figure 1.17 TDC 5 to 18 Population Projections

Source: Texas Demographic Center. 2024 Vintage Population Projections

Enrollment Projections Show Continued Decline Under All Migration Scenarios

Looking forward to the next five years, the chart on page 25 presents enrollment projections through school year 2030–31 under three migration scenarios laid out by the TDC.

Texas 2036 generated these public school enrollment projections by applying an average public school enrollment share of 87.42%. The public school enrollment share is derived by taking the average of the enrollment share for 2020-21 through 2024-25, comparing TDC ages 5 to 18 population estimates[6] to actual K-12 enrollment.[7]

In every migration scenario in the projection, K–12 public school enrollment is projected to shrink next school year. In the low- and mid-migration scenarios, public school enrollment is projected to continue to decline through school year 2029-30, before it's projected to start to make a recovery in school year 2030-31.

In the high-migration scenario, enrollment continues to decline through school year 2028–29 and only begins to recover in the final two years of the projection. Even under that most optimistic scenario, projected school year 2030–31 enrollment remains below today's level.

How These Projections are Built

Projected ages 5-18 population × Average participation rate = Projected K-12 enrollment

TDC projected ages 5-18 population

Texas Demographic Center, 2024 Vintage

- High migration
- Mid migration
- Low migration

5 annual values per scenario (2026-27 to 2030-31)

X

Average participation rate **87.42%**

Participation rate is calculated by taking annual K-12 enrollment and dividing by 5-18 population estimates for that year.

=

Projected K-12 public school enrollment

- High migration
- Mid migration
- Low migration

Low / Mid / High migration scenarios

Inputs:

» Ages 5-18 population: Texas Demographic Center, 2024 Vintage projections, low / mid / high net migration scenarios, 2026-27 to 2030-31.

» Participation rate: TEA PEIMS K-12 public school enrollment data, Fall Snapshot, 2020-21 through 2024-25 divided by TDC 2024 Vintage ages 5-18 population estimates.

[6] Public school enrollment share is calculated by dividing K-12 enrollment for that school year by the estimated 5 to 18 population. The average of the public school enrollment for 2020-2024 was 87.42%. See Table A.4 in appendix for more details.

[7] Note that K-12 enrollment differs from overall enrollment as it excludes pre-K and early childhood education enrollment figures.

Texas K–12 Public School Enrollment Projections

2026–27 to 2030–31 (Low / Mid / High Migration Scenarios)

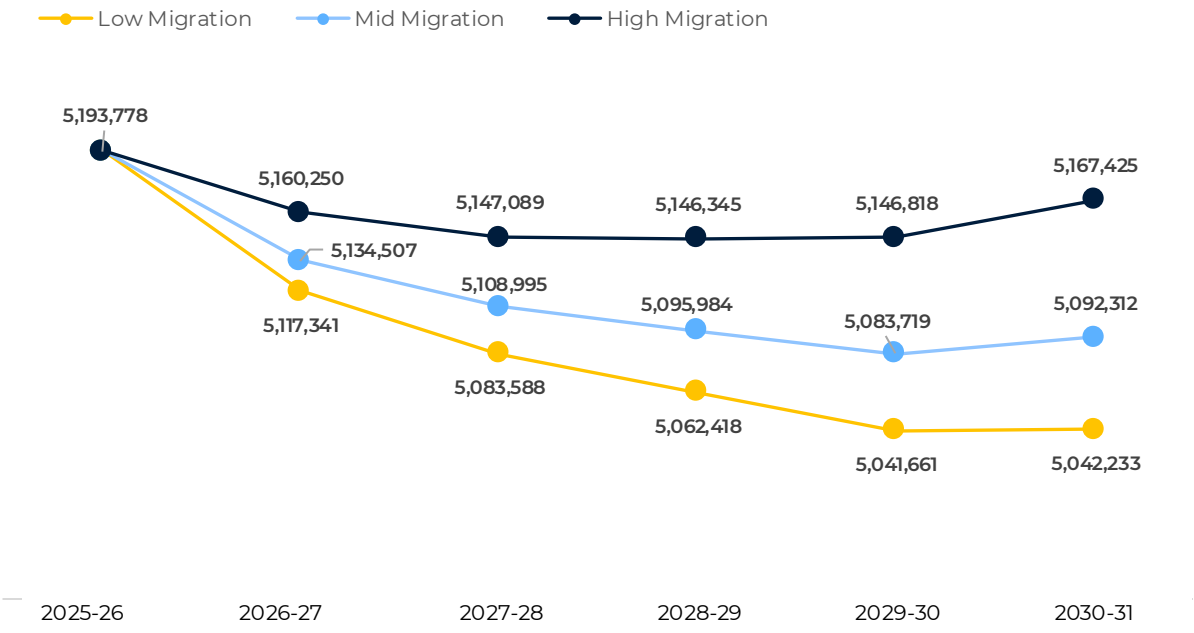


Figure 1.18 — K–12 Public School Enrollment Projections, 2026–27 to 2030–31 (Low / Mid / High Migration Scenarios)

Projected Enrollment Figures May Underestimate Future Enrollment Declines

These projections carry two important methodological caveats. First, they do not attempt to model the effect of the Texas Education Freedom Accounts, which take effect in school year 2026–27 and appear likely to impact future public school enrollment.

Second, the projection uses the five-year average public-school participation rate of 87.42%. That rate is anchored to school year 2020–21 through school year 2024–25 and therefore embeds no assumption about continued decline in the participation rate going forward. A declining share is arguably the more realistic assumption, but post-pandemic enrollment data have not yet stabilized enough for us to commit to a specific rate of decline. Future reports will provide updated projections as post-pandemic enrollment patterns stabilize and TEFA implementation data becomes available.

Taken together, both caveats point in the same direction: actual enrollment outcomes could fall below even the low-migration projection.

Conclusion: Texas Public Schools Face a Structural Challenge

Texas public schools are in structural enrollment decline. The school year 2025–26 data tell a coherent and consequential story: a statewide decline of 76,613 students is not evenly distributed and does not appear to be temporary. This enrollment decline is characterized by a few underlying trends:

- Elementary grades are absorbing the sharpest declines, setting up a decade of shrinking cohorts moving through the pipeline. Meanwhile the middle grades have been, and remain, in an enrollment freefall.
- Hispanic students, who are disproportionately also enrolled as emergent bilingual learners, account for the majority of losses.
- 18 of 20 education service regions are experiencing enrollment declines. One region had essentially flat enrollment. The only region experiencing enrollment growth is Abilene.
- Urban districts are contracting while rural districts and charter schools grow.

Meanwhile, structural changes in demographics and the composition of who is entering the public school system will compound these recent enrollment dips:

- A smaller share of Texas-born children are enrolling in kindergarten in public schools. This has been trending downward for a decade;
- The share of current 5- to 18-year-olds in Texas (Texas-born or otherwise) enrolled in public school has declined by roughly 3.5 percentage points over the last decade; and
- Demographic projections through school year 2030–31 show likely enrollment declines under every migration scenario.

These combine to drive Texas 2036 to conclude that Texas public schools will likely continue to see enrollment declines over the next several years, regardless of changes driven by the Texas Education Freedom Accounts program.

The school year 2025–26 enrollment decline is a reflection of the structural changes in Texas that are foundational to public school enrollment in the state. Hispanic and emergent bilingual losses, an elementary-led pipeline effect, and demographic projections that suggest fewer school-age Texans in the future all point toward future enrollment declines.

The policy question for Texas is no longer whether public school enrollment will decline, but how the state will adapt to a public school system that is smaller and structurally different than the one most current policies were designed around.

Data Sources and Methodology

Primary Data Sources

- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Student Enrollment data, Fall Snapshot, school year 2016-17 through 2025-26. Available at: https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/standard-reports/peims-standard-reports
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), PEIMS Enrollment Counts in Student Program and Special Populations Reports, Fall Snapshot, school year 2024-25 and 2025-26. Available at: https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/standard-reports/peims-standard-reports
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Enrollment in Texas Public School, 2024-25 Available at: https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-performance/accountability-research/enrollment-trends
- Texas Department of State Health Services, Birth Certificate Data. Retrieved from https://healthdata.dshs.texas.gov/dashboard/births-and-deaths/live-births
- Texas Demographic Center (TDC). 2024 Vintage County Population Projections. Multiple migration scenarios (0.0, 0.5, 1.0). Available at: demographics.texas.gov/Projections/
- Texas Demographic Center (TDC). 2024 Vintage County Population Estimates. Available at: demographics.texas.gov/Estimates/
- U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Texas, Vintages 2024 and 2025 (CO-EST2024-POP and CO-EST2025-POP), released March 2025 and March 2026 respectively. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-counties-total.html

Note: Year ranges in this report are anchored to the most recent available data for each measure. Multi-year analyses use the most recent years for which complete data exist, which varies by metric.

Projection Methodology

Enrollment projections were developed using TDC Vintage 2024 population projections for Texas, spanning calendar years 2025 through 2030. Three migration scenarios (Low, Mid, and High) were drawn from TDC's projections, which reflect differing assumptions about future domestic and international migration patterns.

The school-age population was defined as Texas residents ages 5 through 18 and compared to actual enrollment to derive an average participation rate for the last five school years. Projections for school year 2026–27 through school year 2030–31 apply an average participation rate of 87.42%. Calendar years map directly to school years, such that the 2026 population underpins the school year 2026–27 projection.

Classification of Districts

District classifications used throughout this report are derived from TEA's annual district type designations, which assign each Texas public school district to one of nine categories based on enrollment size, geographic location, and metropolitan status. For this report, three of those categories (Rural, Non-metropolitan Stable, and Non-metropolitan Fast Growing) are consolidated into a single Rural designation, reflecting their shared characteristics as non-urban districts. Two category names are also simplified for readability: "Other Central City" is rendered as Other City, and "Other Central City Suburban" as Other City Suburban. The resulting seven classifications are: Major Urban, Major Suburban, Other City, Other City Suburban, Town, Rural, and Charter Schools.

Appendix

Table A.1 – Total Enrollment by Education Service Region, 2024–25 to 2025–26

ESC Region	2024-25 Enrollment	2025-26 Enrollment	Change (Absolute)	Change (%)
Edinburg	435,144	423,760	-11,384	-2.6%
Corpus Christi	94,521	93,856	-665	-0.7%
Victoria	47,706	46,578	-1,128	-2.4%
Houston	1,246,551	1,222,037	-24,514	-2.0%
Beaumont	83,884	83,813	-71	-0.1%
Huntsville	224,622	224,628	+6	+0.0%
Kilgore	184,645	184,375	-270	-0.1%
Mount Pleasant	55,432	54,705	-727	-1.3%
Wichita Falls	35,699	35,262	-437	-1.2%
Richardson	910,252	897,268	-12,984	-1.4%
Fort Worth	595,779	588,403	-7,376	-1.2%
Waco	176,884	173,727	-3,157	-1.8%
Austin	397,937	397,603	-334	-0.1%
Abilene	71,695	74,482	+2,787	+3.9%
San Angelo	49,576	48,339	-1,237	-2.5%
Amarillo	79,169	76,822	-2,347	-3.0%
Lubbock	81,623	80,137	-1,486	-1.8%
Midland	106,051	102,732	-3,319	-3.1%
El Paso	160,879	157,293	-3,586	-2.2%
San Antonio	506,197	501,822	-4,375	-0.9%

Figure A. 1 – Districts That Declined In Enrollment in School Year 2025-26

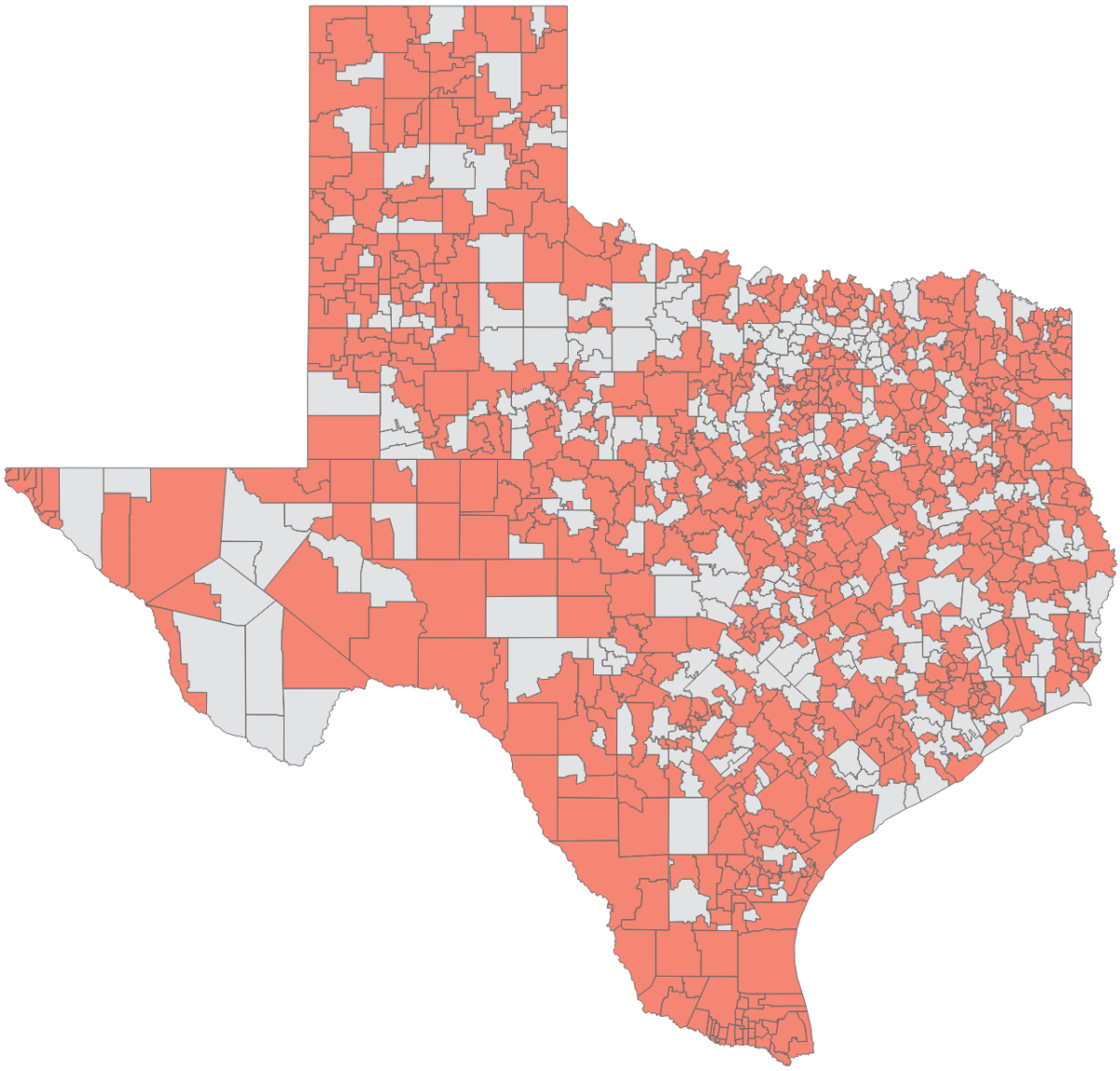


Table A.2 – Top 20 Districts Losing the Largest Number of Students

Rank	District Name	Classification	2024-25 Enrollment	2025-26 Enrollment	Change	% Change
1	HOUSTON ISD	Major Urban	176,727	168,812	(7,915)	-4.5%
2	DALLAS ISD	Major Urban	139,802	134,308	(5,494)	-3.9%
3	ALDINE ISD	Major Suburban	56,419	52,161	(4,258)	-7.5%
4	CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD	Major Suburban	117,927	114,697	(3,230)	-2.7%
5	AUSTIN ISD	Major Urban	72,272	69,074	(3,198)	-4.4%
6	FORT WORTH ISD	Major Urban	70,405	67,491	(2,914)	-4.1%
7	NORTH EAST ISD	Major Urban	56,420	53,732	(2,688)	-4.8%
8	PLANO ISD	Major Suburban	46,612	43,979	(2,633)	-5.6%
9	FRISCO ISD	Other City	65,289	62,713	(2,576)	-3.9%
10	PASADENA ISD	Major Suburban	46,491	44,146	(2,345)	-5.0%
11	ARLINGTON ISD	Major Urban	53,339	51,139	(2,200)	-4.1%
12	ALIEF ISD	Major Suburban	38,610	36,441	(2,169)	-5.6%
13	NORTHSIDE ISD	Major Urban	100,208	98,333	(1,875)	-1.9%
14	EL PASO ISD	Major Urban	48,118	46,244	(1,874)	-3.9%
15	GARLAND ISD	Major Suburban	51,021	49,151	(1,870)	-3.7%
16	BROWNSVILLE ISD	Other City	36,140	34,337	(1,803)	-5.0%
17	ECTOR COUNTY ISD	Other City	33,663	31,896	(1,767)	-5.2%
18	FORT BEND ISD	Major Suburban	79,663	78,062	(1,601)	-2.0%
19	KELLER ISD	Major Suburban	32,042	30,486	(1,556)	-4.9%
20	IRVING ISD	Major Suburban	30,767	29,212	(1,555)	-5.1%

Table A.3 – Top 20 Districts Losing the Largest Share of Students (Enrollment>500)

Rank	District Name	Classification	2024-25 Enrollment	2025-26 Enrollment	% Change
1	CUMBERLAND ACADEMY	Charter Schools	2,047	1,519	-25.8%
2	TRIVIUM ACADEMY	Charter Schools	629	503	-20.0%
3	LEGACY PREPARATORY	Charter Schools	1,138	914	-19.7%
4	GEORGE I SANCHEZ CHARTER	Charter Schools	1,120	941	-16.0%
5	GATEWAY CHARTER ACADEMY	Charter Schools	511	430	-15.9%
6	TEXANS CAN ACADEMIES	Charter Schools	3,479	2,935	-15.6%
7	LEGACY TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS - TEXAS	Charter Schools	2,186	1,855	-15.1%
8	EL PASO LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	Charter Schools	775	665	-14.2%
9	GEORGE GERVIN ACADEMY	Charter Schools	865	744	-14.0%
10	SWEENY ISD	Rural	1,919	1,693	-11.8%
11	HORIZON MONTESSORI PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Charter Schools	1,164	1,034	-11.2%
12	BRUCEVILLE-EDDY ISD	Rural	565	505	-10.6%
13	CANADIAN ISD	Rural	758	678	-10.6%
14	BLOOMINGTON ISD	Rural	795	712	-10.4%
15	CONNALLY ISD	Other City Suburban	2,269	2,034	-10.4%
16	LA VILLA ISD	Rural	512	459	-10.4%
17	REFUGIO ISD	Rural	656	593	-9.6%
18	WINTERS ISD	Rural	552	501	-9.2%
19	CRYSTAL CITY ISD	Rural	1,643	1,493	-9.1%
20	KARNES CITY ISD	Rural	1,021	929	-9.0%

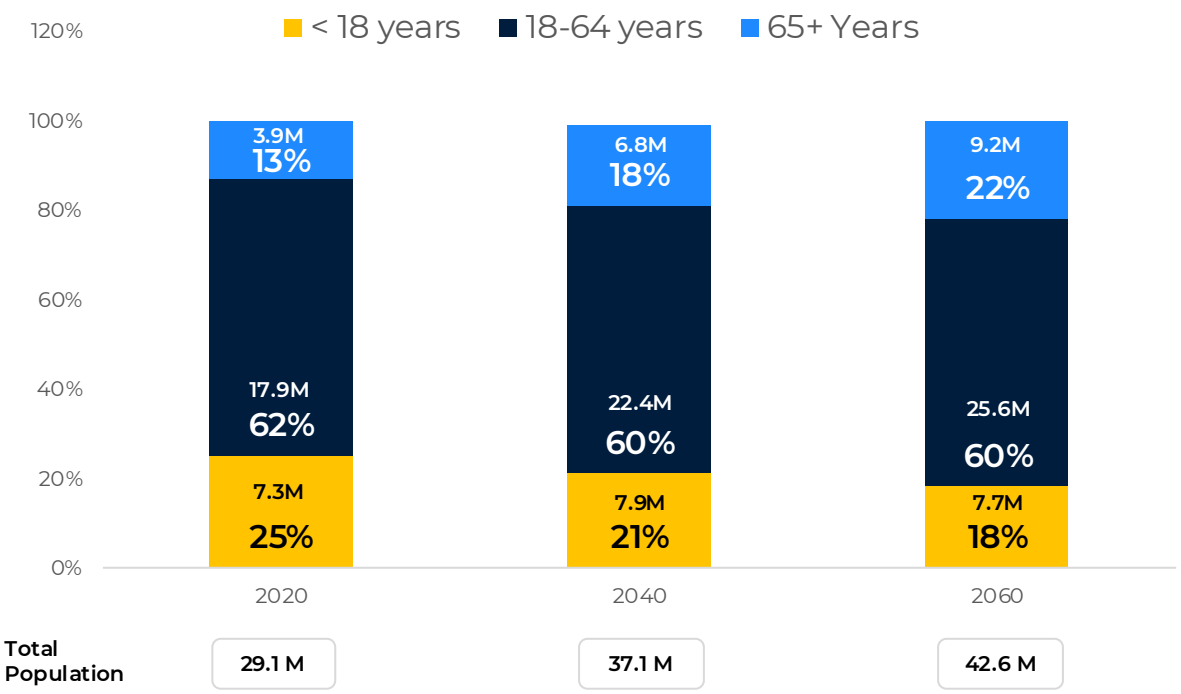
Table A.4 – Texas Demographic Center School-Age Population Estimates (2020-2024)

Calendar Year	5 to 18 Estimate	K-12 Enrollment	School Year	School Age to K12 Ratio
2020	5,890,093	5,153,502	2020-21	87.49%
2021	5,943,649	5,182,262	2021-22	87.19%
2022	5,990,079	5,249,038	2022-23	87.63%
2023	6,019,778	5,255,813	2023-24	87.31%
2024	6,022,684	5,268,281	2024-25	87.47%
Source	*Texas Demographic Center*	*Texas Education Agency*	**Average**	**87.42%**

Table A.5 – Texas Demographic Center School-Age Population Projections (2026-2030)

Calendar Year	Low Migration	Mid Migration	High Migration
2026	5,853,742	5,873,378	5,902,826
2027	5,815,131	5,844,195	5,887,770
2028	5,790,915	5,829,311	5,886,919
2029	5,767,171	5,815,281	5,887,460
2030	5,767,826	5,825,111	5,911,033

Figure A.2 – Texas Projected Population by Age



Source: Texas Demographic Center

TX 2036