THE FUTURE OF WISCONSIN
PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Between 2000 and 2005, 69% of Wisconsin’s public school districts experienced declining enrollment. However, decline has not been uniform across school districts, as some districts, especially ones located in suburban, exurban, and small city areas, have seen substantial enrollment increases. Districts experiencing profound growth and decline balance one another out, so that statewide school enrollment has seen relatively slight decline (1.6% decline in K–12 students between 2000 and 2005).

Multiple demographic trends (particularly changes in number of births, the age structure of the population and an increasing Hispanic population) influence current and projected school enrollment. A combination of aging Baby Boomers (who are no longer in their childbearing years), the postponing of fertility until later in life, and an overall lowering of fertility rates have all contributed to a decrease in Wisconsin births over the last 25 years. There were relatively many births when Baby Boomers were in their prime childbearing years during the 1980s. Since then, there were fewer births through the 1990s. This shift in birth numbers over time causes a disparity between the large cohorts of high school graduates and

IN MEMORY OF DR. DORIS SLESINGER

Eminent rural sociologist and demographer, Dr. Doris P. Slesinger, died of pancreatic cancer on October 1, 2006, in Madison, WI. Doris joined the faculty of UW-Madison’s Department of Rural Sociology as an assistant professor in 1973, and retired from active departmental activities in 1998, though she remained actively engaged in university affairs until just a few months before her death. She maintained a close affiliation with the department’s Applied Population Laboratory (APL) during her career, serving as co-director of the APL between 1974 and 1987, and acting director in 1996.

Many of the APL’s most requested reports over the years were the demographic chartbooks produced under Doris’s guidance. These popular reports revealed graphically the dynamics of several of Wisconsin’s minority

Note: The 2004/05 enrollment count for all three types of districts is likely too low, because of data quality problems at Wisconsin DPI.
the smaller replacement cohorts of Kindergarteners. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe this trend is changing. Births have been increasing from their low in 1997, mostly due to an increasing Hispanic population and indicators suggest that births may continue to increase over the next five to fifteen years.

Using cohort component techniques and data from Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, the APL generated three models projecting future students in Wisconsin’s schools. The models differ in how they project future births, with the DOA model using statewide births projected by Wisconsin Dept. or Administration and the Longer Term and Recent Trend models extrapolating past trends in observed births. Total enrollment in Wisconsin’s public schools is projected to decline moderately over the next five years. It may then begin to rise, although not reaching the extent of the previously high levels of the late 1990s by 2015. Non-Hispanic White enrollment is projected to continue to decline over the next several years. Total enrollment increase is projected to occur because of growth in the minority population, and in particular, the Hispanic population which is projected to grow exponentially over the next ten years. If the sharp and steady increase in Hispanic births continues, we project that the number of Hispanic births will reach almost 8,000 in 2010, up from less than 2,000 in 1991. Similarly, K-12 Hispanic enrollment in Wisconsin’s public schools is projected to more than double by 2014, increasing from 55,522 students in 2005 to about 116,000 students in 2014.

Interesting differences within the state can be seen when urban, suburban, and rural school districts are compared. Urban and rural schools have seen enrollment decline, while suburban schools have grown. Rural districts have special problems in that they have disproportionately experienced enrollment decline over the last several years and they tend to cover large land areas and thus have higher transportation costs. While the overall population in rural Wisconsin grew by about 12% between 1990 and 2000, this growth was entirely due to net in-migration, while the population change due to natural increase declined. Rural populations are relatively old and past their childbearing years and young adults of childbearing age tend to out-migrate, adding to the decline in numbers of school-aged children. On the other hand, suburban areas tend to attract young families, and urban areas tend to attract young singles.

In sum, most school districts across the state of Wisconsin have experienced some degree of enrollment decline over the past several years. We project that decline will continue for five to six years for most districts, then begin to rebound. Our projections suggest that increases in births and a growing minority population (particularly Hispanics) will alleviate enrollment decline in many of the state’s school districts over the next ten years. However, districts that are particularly white, older, rural, remote, and/or built up with housing units may see more severe and prolonged enrollment decline.

For more information on School Enrollment Projections and the possibility of contracting a study for your school district, please contact Sarah Kemp (kemp@wisc.edu), Richelle Winkler (rwinkler@ssc.wisc.edu), or Sara Lazenby (slazenby@wisc.edu) at the Applied Population Laboratory.
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Doris also played a central role in the 1980s with the planning and execution of several highly successful national conferences, called Census Analysis Workshops, jointly sponsored by the Applied Population Laboratory and the Wisconsin State Data Center. She was instrumental in having Wisconsin certified by the Census Bureau as an early partner in the State Data Center program in the late 1970s, and was instrumental in the creation of a Committee on Applied Demography within the Population Association of America. Doris served as chair of Madison’s Department of Rural Sociology between 1987 and 1991 – the first woman chair of a rural sociology department in the country. The Rural Sociological Society presented Doris with the Distinguished Rural Sociologist award in 2002 for lifetime career achievements.

A memorial service for Doris was held on November 3, 2006, at the First Unitarian Society in Madison. You may honor Doris’s memory by donating to organizations that were important in her life. Her family has requested that donations be made to HospiceCare in Fitchburg, Wisconsin, in lieu of flowers. Call HospiceCare at (608) 276-4660 or email giving@hospicecareinc.com for more information. Alternatively, you may help endow the Doris Slesinger Award for Excellence in Mentoring by contributing to that fund. Contact Lori Rappe of the UW Foundation at (608)263-1991 for more information about supporting their program.

ON THE HORIZON

January 7–9: Applied Demography Conference to be held in San Antonio, TX.

January 17–19: The 86th Wisconsin State Education Convention will be held in Milwaukee, WI.

ON THE MAP

School District Boundary files are notoriously out of date. Whenever we are creating school district maps we inevitably have a district point out that the map doesn’t reflect their current boundary. This is due to the lack of a current and updated school district map for the state.

The need for current boundaries stretches beyond school district mapping, to enrollment projections, school funding through tax assessment, research questions and many other applications. We are conducting an effort to create a current statewide school district boundary map. This map, when completed, would be made available through our GetFacts interface, where web users can access Census data by various geographies. We are also looking into providing this information to the Census Bureau. Please help us by providing current school district boundaries in whatever form they are available. Help keep your school district on the map...accurate and current. Contact Bill Buckingham (wrbuckin@wisc.edu) with your maps for more information.
As we enter the last month of 2006, I have been reflecting a bit on the year. It has been a year of transition and change here in the APL. Happily, almost of the changes have been because of growth and wonderful opportunities. In July, we were fortunate to have Sara Lazenby join our staff to help with our growing school enrollment projection program (see the September 2006 newsletter for a feature on Sara). In August, two APL colleagues headed off for adventures in far away countries. Dave Long joined his family for a year long sojourn to Xalapa, Mexico, where he is learning Spanish and soaking up the sights, sounds, and flavors. Paul Voss (officially retired but still working hard) winged his way to Ireland for five months. He is living and working in Maynooth but has found the time to explore a good deal of Ireland (mostly on foot). Towards the end of August, Sarah Kemp, who heads up the APL’s school district enrollment projection program, moved to Woodruff, Wisconsin. Fortunately, Sarah is still working full-time for the APL from her home office in Vilas County and has been able to invigorate interest in APL services among northern Wisconsin school districts. In October, Jennifer Huck joined the APL and immediately got involved with a number of new projects. Jenn will also help to coordinate the production of the APL newsletter. Sadly, October also marked the passing of Doris Slesinger – a colleague, mentor and friend to all in the APL. We’ll all miss Doris and know that her spirit and influence will live on here in the Applied Population Laboratory.

Finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to let you know about one temporary transition that will happen in early 2007. My family and I will be in Mexico for six months starting in February. We’ll be in a Spanish language immersion program and living in a small city on the Pacific Coast of Mexico. Through the magic of the internet and computers and other electronic resources, I’ll still be working for the APL, but I will be off-campus and on a reduced appointment. I’m looking forward to it and appreciate the support of my colleagues in the APL, Rural Sociology and UW Extension – without whom this adventure would not be possible.

Regards, Dan