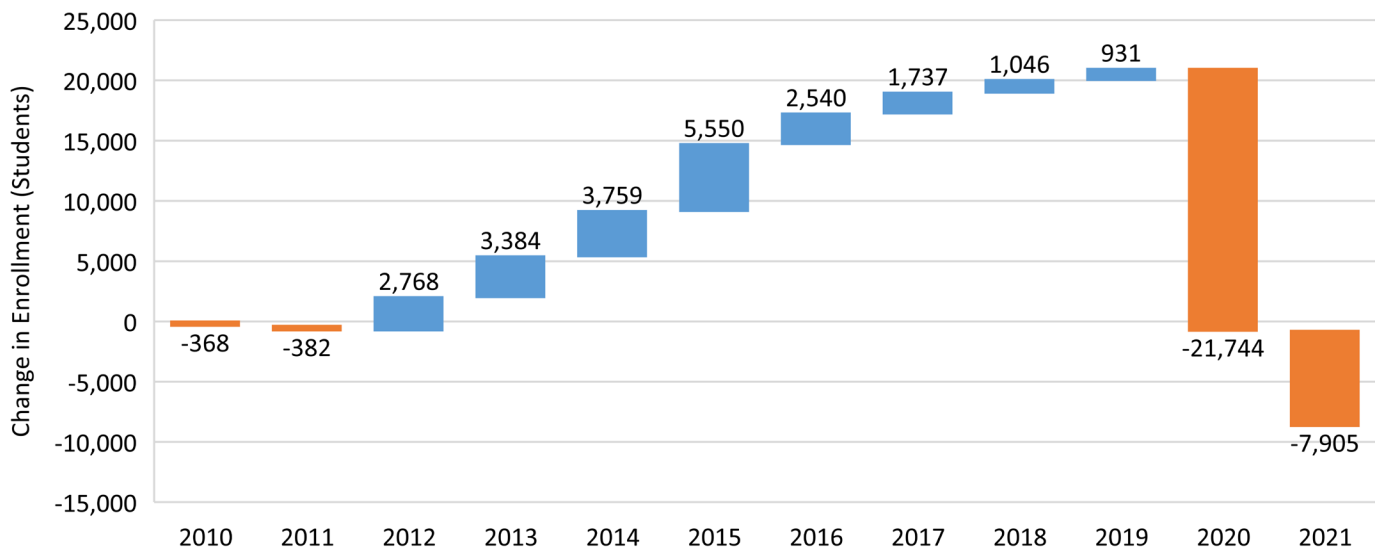


Falling Enrollment During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Oregon’s K-12 public schools experienced a dramatic enrollment decline during the 2020-21 school year and again in the 2021-22 school year. By October 1, 2020, Oregon saw more than 21,000 fewer students enrolled in K-12 public school, relative to October of the prior year (a 3.7% decline). One year later, on October 1, 2021, Oregon public schools had seen an additional decline of nearly 8,000 students (another 1.4% decline). Combined together, Oregon’s public schools served nearly 30,000 fewer students at the beginning of 2021-22 than at the beginning of 2019-20. In support of the [High School Success](#) program’s work to support engagement, needs assessment, and dropout prevention across Oregon public school districts, this brief will examine historical trend data for student enrollment in Oregon in order to understand and explore the significant decline.

Yearly Enrollment Changes
First School Day in October



Key Takeaways

- Oregon public school enrollment dropped substantially during the first year of the pandemic (2020) and has continued to decline.
- Declines in enrollment are concentrated among [white](#) students and [kindergarteners](#).
- There was no evidence to suggest that students moving from Oregon to Idaho was a significant factor in enrollment changes, but data indicate substantial increases in [homeschooling](#) within Oregon.
- Some Oregon districts [experienced enrollment increases](#) during this period, largely connected to the operation of virtual schools, both existing and newly created. With enrollment trends stabilizing, many of these enrollment increases were short-lived.
- Virtual programs are [expanding](#) in Oregon, in part to meet the needs of all students, yet there may be other supports or modifications that districts and schools can [offer](#) to help re-engage students.

Background

The first case of COVID-19 in Oregon was [reported](#) in a public school employee at the end of February 2020. In response, a state of emergency was [declared](#) in Oregon a little over a week later, on March 8, 2020; shortly afterwards, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and President Trump declared it a national emergency.

In order to protect public health and in consideration of staffing challenges due to the pandemic, Oregon's Governor, Kate Brown, [ordered](#) public schools to close beginning March 16, 2020. The closure was extended by [executive order](#) on March 17, and [again](#) in April 2021. Public schools shifted to largely distance learning, with exceptions for limited in-person instruction, for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. At the time of the initial closures, state officials hoped that these would be short-lived precautions and that schools would be able to reopen for the next school year. With COVID-19 continuing to spread over the summer, Governor Brown [ordered](#) schools to follow precautions based on [metrics](#) representing the level of COVID-19 circulation in their communities, which in many cases resulted in the school continuing to operate remotely for much of the 2020-21 school year. In [March 2021](#), Governor Brown [ordered](#) all schools to resume providing in-person instruction (on-site or hybrid) by mid-April and through the end of the 2020-21 school year. For the 2021-22 school year, the [expectation](#) was that all non-virtual¹ public schools would operate in-person, for every student, every school day, all year long.

These and other public health measures, including vaccines and non-pharmaceutical interventions, are [estimated](#) to have saved thousands of lives in Oregon over the pandemic thus far, with one study estimating school closures to be associated with a 62% decrease in mortality from COVID-19 in the time immediately following the closure.²

History of Enrollment Trends in Oregon

In the years prior to the beginning of the pandemic, Oregon public K-12 enrollment followed a predictable pattern. Each year [since 2011-12](#), enrollment numbers show a small increase over the prior year at the beginning of the school year (reflecting Oregon population growth), then a small decline over winter break in December/January of each year (potentially reflecting extended breaks/travel taken by students and families). The winter declines may also reflect the tendency for increased student disengagement during prolonged periods without regular school.³ Enrollment would then typically remain relatively steady until schools begin to let out for summer in May and June.

As shown below, 2019-20 enrollment initially followed a nearly identical trend to the two prior years. The beginning of COVID-19 school closures coincided with a small enrollment dip, as seen below. This represents a decline of around 2,000 students. However, enrollment rebounded and the overall enrollment in May was 99.2% of October enrollment,⁴

¹ [Virtual](#) schools are schools designed to operate remotely, not schools providing temporary comprehensive distance learning as a result of the pandemic.

² Auger, Katherine A., Samir S. Shah, Troy Richardson, David Hartley, Matthew Hall, Amanda Warniment, Kristen Timmons, Dianna Bosse, Sarah A. Ferris, Patrick W. Brady, Amanda C. Schondelmeyer, and Joanna E. Thomson. "Association between Statewide School Closure and Covid-19 Incidence and Mortality in the Us." *JAMA* 324, no. 9 (2020): 859-70. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.14348>.

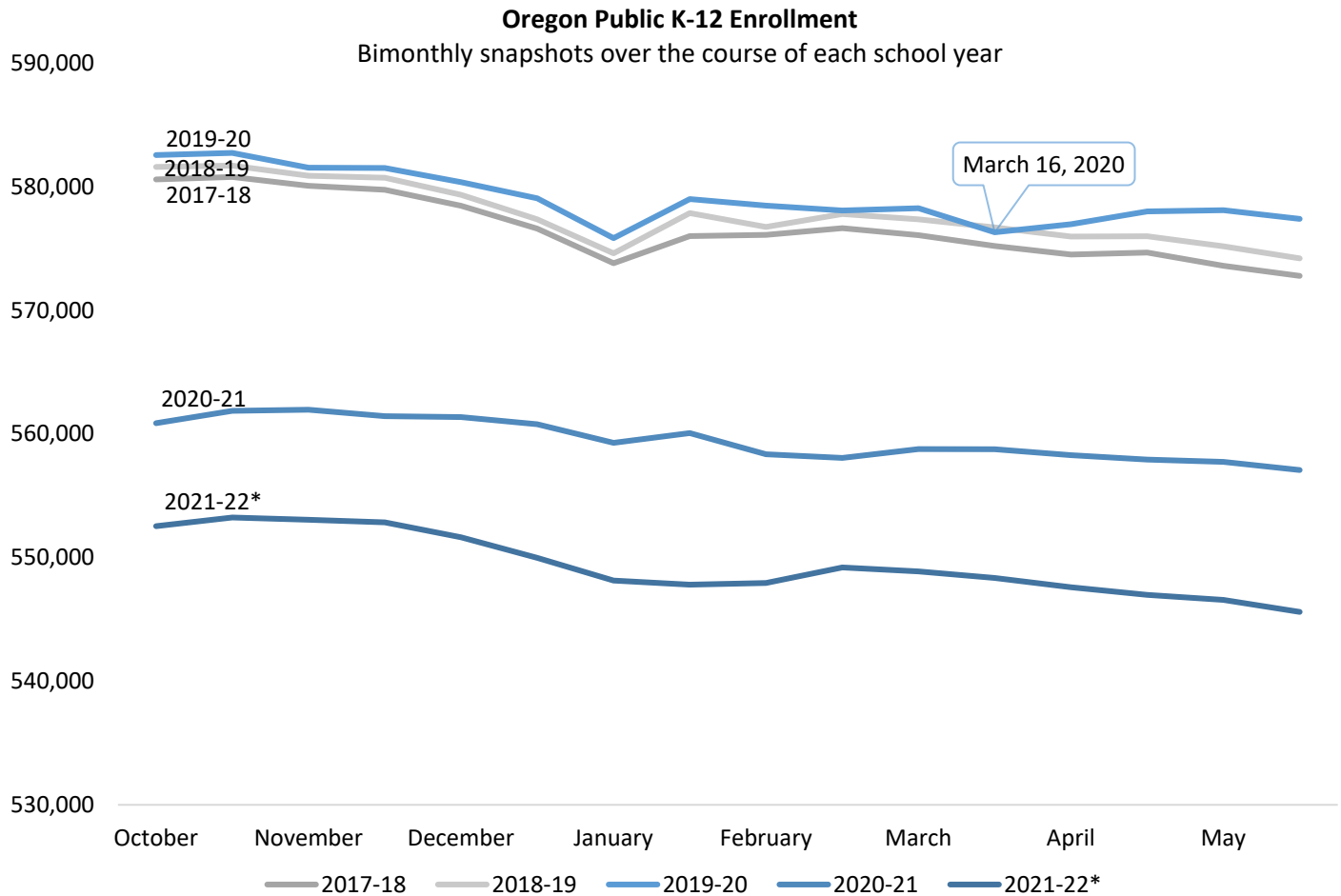
³ Students are, in general, slightly more likely to exit K-12 schools when school is not actively in session, as seen in [high school non-completers](#) data.

⁴ Data after March 2020 may be impacted by the temporary suspension of the '10-day rule,' which allowed schools to keep students on the active roll even after prolonged periods of absence, as long as the student hadn't enrolled in another school or formally withdrawn. This rule suspension continued through the 2020-21 school year. The rule was reinstated for the 2021-22 school year.

ODE Guidance

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) issued guidance for schools to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning with [Distance Learning for All](#) in March 2020, and evolving into [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) (RSSL) for in-person, remote, or hybrid instruction in the 2020-21 school year and the RSSL [Resiliency Framework](#) for fully in-person instruction in 2021-22.

slightly higher than in previous years. Student accounting rules were modified during this period, to allow students to remain actively enrolled even after prolonged absence, in order to support local efforts to engage with students and families to encourage attendance and provide support. Some enrollment declines that occurred at the end of 2019-20 may thus not have been reflected in the data below until the beginning of the 2020-21 school year.



Sharp Decline in K-12 Enrollment

In the following year, 2020-21, enrollment dropped sharply.⁵ In a typical year, enrollment would rise by 1% or less. At the start of 2020-21, enrollment declined 3.7% from the prior year’s fall enrollment, representing the first drop since 2011-12, and a decrease of over 20,000 students from public school enrollment reports. This single-year enrollment drop erased all prior enrollment gains over the past decade, and 2020-21 enrollment was the lowest recorded over that time period.

In 2021-22, despite all schools resuming in-person instruction, enrollment in public schools continued to decline, with October enrollment falling another 1.4% from the prior year, for a total decline of nearly 30,000 students (5% of enrollment) from the pre-pandemic high at the beginning of 2019-20. Enrollment over the winter of 2021-22 also suffered a more prolonged dip than was usual in prior years, which may reflect the impact of the [Omicron wave of COVID-19](#). During this wave, COVID-19 case rates among school-aged children peaked at 1.7% of all school-aged children

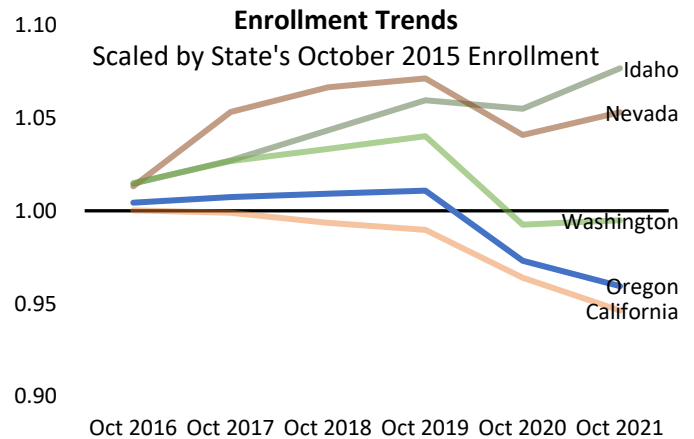
⁵ Or better reflected enrollment declines at the end of 2019-20; see previous footnote.

having a new case during the week of January 9, 2022: several times higher than case rates during previous waves.⁶ By Oregon [accounting](#) rules, students experiencing illness are not withdrawn from enrollment until they have accrued more than 10 consecutive days of absence, so an enrollment drop may reflect either prolonged illness/infectivity or parents choosing to withdraw students due to concerns about their increased risk of exposure.

Comparison to Neighboring States

All states reported a decline in enrollment between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020, though Oregon’s 3.7% drop is one of the largest. Only 9 states, including Washington State, reported a steeper decline between those time points.⁷

As illustrated in the chart to the right⁸, when considering both school years (2020 and 2021), Oregon’s relative enrollment declines are larger than those in any of our neighboring states apart from California, where enrollment has been declining since 2017. Oregon is not a strong outlier, but the two-year decline is unusual among our neighboring states.



Enrollment Changes by Race/Ethnicity

Enrollment changes were very similar for male and female students,⁹ but differed substantially by other demographic factors. Declines in 2020-21 were concentrated among white students, who made up 61% of pre-pandemic enrollment but 91% of the decline. Enrollment of white students dropped by 19,729 students from October 2019 to October 2020. A similar pattern was reported in 2021-22: enrollment of white students dropped by another 8,534 students, while enrollment among other student groups, particularly Hispanic/Latino/a/x students, stabilized or increased. Oregon also saw substantial declines in American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment in both years, though this population had already been shrinking pre-pandemic.

Enrollment and Percent Change from Prior Year

	Oct 2018	Oct 2019	(Percent)	Oct 2020	(Percent)	Oct 2021	(Percent)
All Students	581,730	582,661	(+0.2%)	560,917	(-3.7%)	553,012	(-1.4%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	7,280	7,012	(-3.7%)	6,570	(-6.3%)	6,357	(-3.2%)
Asian	23,267	23,208	(-0.3%)	22,733	(-2.0%)	22,145	(-2.6%)
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	4,363	4,431	(+1.6%)	4,335	(-2.2%)	4,454	(+2.7%)
Black/African American	13,301	13,176	(-0.9%)	13,021	(-1.2%)	12,731	(-2.2%)
Hispanic/Latino/a/x	136,186	138,273	(+1.5%)	137,101	(-0.8%)	138,112	(+0.7%)
White	360,197	358,257	(-0.5%)	338,528	(-5.5%)	329,994	(-2.5%)
Multi-Racial	37,136	38,306	(+3.2%)	38,629	(+0.8%)	39,219	(+1.5%)

⁶ Oregon Health Authority, “Oregon COVID-19 Pediatric Report.” Available from <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/oregon.health.authority.covid.19/viz/OregonCOVID-19PediatricReport/Demographics>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey”, 2019-20 v.1a, 2020-21 v.1a.

⁸ Data courtesy of California Department of Education DataQuest, “Statewide Enrollment Multi-Year Summary by Ethnicity” available from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>; State of Nevada Department of Education, “Enrollment for Nevada Public Schools” available at <https://doe.nv.gov/DataCenter/Enrollment/>; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, “Report Card Enrollment from 2014-15 to Current Year” available from <https://www.k12.wa.us/data-reporting/data-portal/>; Idaho State Department of Education, “Historical State by Grade Enrollment” available at <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/finance/>.

⁹ Trends for students of non-binary gender are complicated by the relative newness of this indicator in ODE’s data systems.

Enrollment Changes by Grade Level

Enrollment drops from October 2019 to October 2020 were disproportionately concentrated in kindergarten. While overall enrollment declined by 3.7% from the prior year, kindergarten enrollment over the same time period declined by 15%, equivalent to a decline of over 6,000 students. This suggests that some parents whose children would have been eligible to begin public school in fall 2020 opted to delay their enrollment by a year, perhaps in hopes that pandemic conditions would improve, or out of concerns about remote learning for kindergarteners. Decreases occurred across the state and were not concentrated in any particular geographic region.

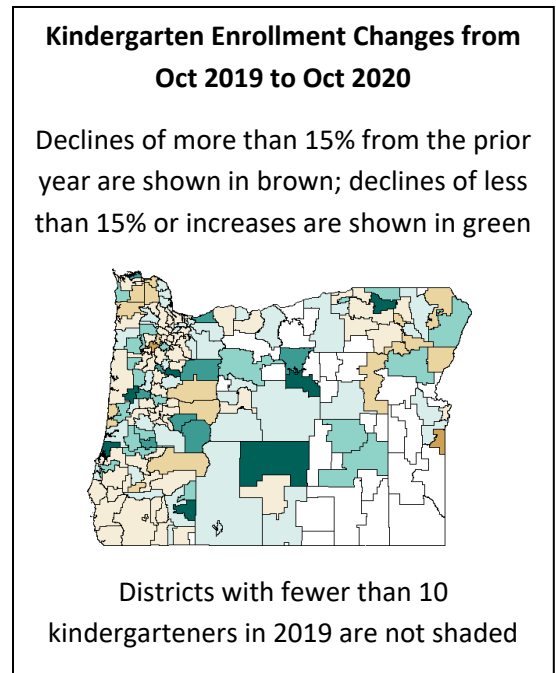
In October 2021, kindergarten enrollment increased by 5% over October 2020, while enrollment in other grades continued to decline or remained flat. Enrollment in first grade was also unexpectedly high, with 7% more students enrolling in first grade than had been enrolled the prior year in kindergarten. Kindergarteners in 2021 were also slightly older than in prior years.¹⁰ Together, these data points suggest that the changes are explained in part by families delaying entry into public K-12 enrollment from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

Long-term slowing of [population growth](#) may contribute somewhat to the overall declines seen, but is not likely to explain the majority of the enrollment decrease. The population trends are largely [attributed](#) to changes in migration patterns (people moving into or out of Oregon). Although the largest public school enrollment declines were in elementary grades, the population of children aged 5-9 and 10-14 in Oregon actually increased in both 2020 and 2021.¹¹

One [study](#) in Michigan found similar decreases in kindergarten enrollment to those seen in Oregon data, with larger drops in districts that offered fully remote instruction.¹² A Brookings Institute [report](#) found similar large drops in kindergarten enrollment nationally, and suggested that similar drops also occurred in pre-kindergarten.¹³ Oregon pre-kindergarten data (encompassing Head Start and [Oregon Pre-K](#) programs) showed a large decline (a 57% decrease) in enrollment from 2019-20 to 2020-21.¹⁴

Comprehensive Distance Learning and In-person Instruction

At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, most districts in Oregon were operating virtually, with hybrid and in-person operation more common on the eastern side of the state, where districts are generally smaller and more rural, and [internet access](#) is often slower and more limited. At the beginning of October 2020, 88% of public schools reported they were offering comprehensive distance learning¹⁵, with only 6% offering hybrid and another 6% fully on-site. Only around



¹⁰ 14.2% were 6 or older as of October 1, compared to 12-12.5% in prior years. A similar age increase was not seen in other grade levels. Most entering kindergarten students in Oregon are 5 years old, though a very small number are 4 or younger.

¹¹ Population age band estimates courtesy of Portland State University's Population Research Center, <https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-estimate-reports>.

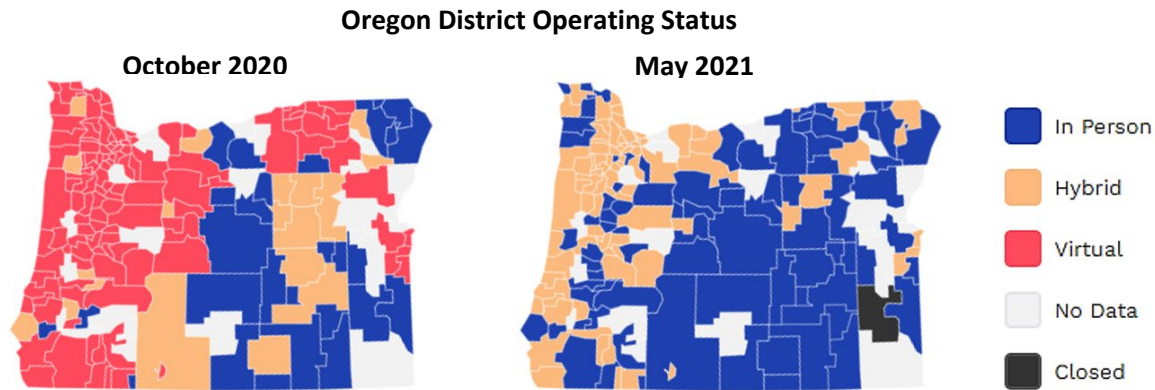
¹² Musaddiq, Tareena, Kevin Stange, Andrew Bacher-Hicks, and Joshua Goodman. "The Pandemic's Effect on Demand for Public Schools, Homeschooling, and Private Schools." *Journal of Public Economics* 212 (2022).

¹³ Bassok, Daphna and Anna Shapiro. "Understanding COVID-19-era enrollment drops among early-grade public school students." The Brookings Institute (2021). Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/22/understanding-covid-19-era-enrollment-drops-among-early-grade-public-school-students/>.

¹⁴ Pre-kindergarten students are not included in other measures of enrollment within this report.

¹⁵ Some with exceptions for limited in-person instruction when individual student needs required it.

25,000 students in the state were reported as attending in person, either in an on-site school or as part of a limited in-person instruction exception to comprehensive distance learning.^{16,17}



By May 2021, following the governor’s order, 65% of public schools reported operating in hybrid status, with another 26% operating fully on-site, and only 8% still offering comprehensive distance learning.¹⁸ Some districts operated both in-person and virtual schools, including schools that were operating virtually before the pandemic began and continued to do so.¹⁹ More than 390,000 students were reported as attending in person in May 2021.

Data from Virginia²⁰ showed larger drops in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten enrollment among districts offering fully-remote instruction, but no difference in higher elementary grade enrollment between those offering remote or in-person instruction. The report notes that “parents have expressed concerns about online learning, including worries about young children’s attention spans, the impact of prolonged screen time, and the need for constant adult supervision.” Another study found similar grade-level impacts of remote instruction nationally: remote instruction primarily impacted enrollment for kindergarteners, with smaller impacts on other elementary grades and no significant impact on middle or high school enrollment.²¹

While neighboring Idaho schools operated largely in person during Fall 2020²², enrollment in districts bordering Oregon declined more sharply than enrollment in Idaho overall²³, which suggests that families transferring from Oregon to Idaho schools was not a significant factor in Oregon’s enrollment declines.

Homeschooling and Private School

Oregon education service districts (ESDs) reported a substantial increase in students [registered](#) as homeschoolers between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. While not all ESDs were able to provide data, among those that did there was an increase of nearly 13,000 students registered in 2020-21, compared to 2019-20 – a more than 70% increase. In some regions, the number of homeschoolers more than doubled. The reported increase in homeschooling

¹⁶ Data available at <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/2020-21-School-Status.aspx>. Note, private schools are also included in these files.

¹⁷ Visualizations courtesy of the COVID-19 School Data Hub, available at <https://www.covidschooldatahub.com/states/oregon>. While included here as a visual representation of Oregon school status changes over time, these graphics do not fully capture the level of within-district variation that occurred.

¹⁸ Schools reporting comprehensive distance learning at this point include virtual schools who have always offered distance learning.

¹⁹ School operating status [archive](#), as of June 2021.

²⁰ Bassok.

²¹ Dee, Thomas S., Elizabeth Huffaker, Cheryl Philips, and Eric Sagara. "The Revealed Preferences for School Reopening: Evidence from Public-School Disenrollment. CEPA Working Paper No. 21-06." *Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis* (2021).

²² COVID-19 School Data Hub, <https://www.covidschooldatahub.com/states/idaho>

²³ Idaho State Department of Education, “Historical Enrollment by District or Charter.” <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/finance/>

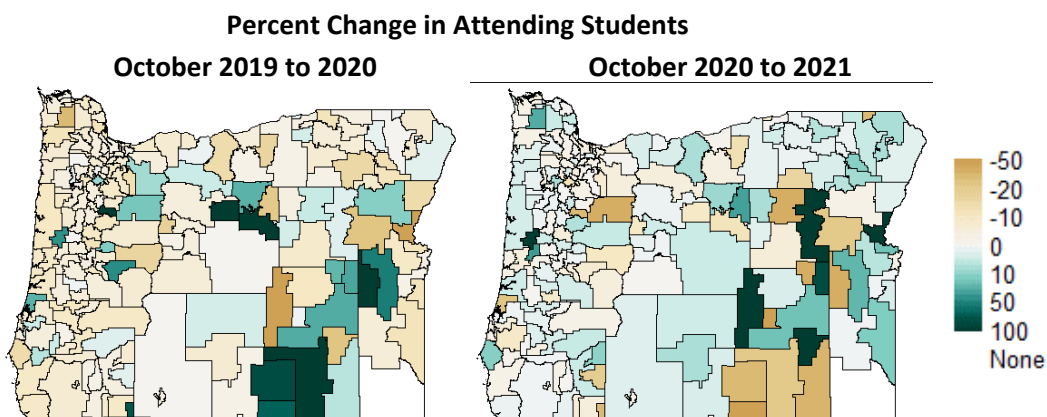
accounts for around 60% of the total decline in public K-12 enrollment that year, and the true number of homeschooling students may be higher.

The Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey found that nationally, homeschooling rates more than doubled between spring and fall 2020, with more than 11% of families in the study reporting homeschooling in early October 2020.²⁴ By October 2021, the survey found homeschooling rates had dropped to 7.6% nationally, down from the pandemic peak but still above spring 2020 rates.²⁵ In Oregon, the survey’s rates remained high, with 13.8% of families with children estimated to be homeschooling.

The [Michigan study](#)²⁶ found that homeschooling increased the most in districts offering in-person instruction, while private schooling increased the most in districts offering virtual instruction, indicating differing parental concerns about health, exposure, and virtual education. Differing parental resources (the capacity to oversee virtual or homeschooling; the capacity to pay private tuition) also may have affected these choices. Oregon does not have comprehensive data on students transferring to or attending private schools, and the experiences and choices of Oregon families may not align with studies conducted in other states.

Enrollment Changes by School District

The majority of school districts experienced declining enrollment²⁷ in the 2020-21 school year, as illustrated in the maps to the right. Many districts that experienced enrollment increases in October 2020 experienced enrollment declines in the following year as more districts resumed normal operations, and vice versa. There was no correlation between enrollment change and school district size.



Some noteworthy points regarding these maps:

- Districts with dramatically increased enrollment were frequently those with existing or new virtual schools.²⁸

²⁴ Eggleston, Casey and Jason Fields. “Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey Shows Significant Increase in Homeschooling Rates in Fall 2020.” The Census Bureau, 2021. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

²⁵ Week 39 Household Pulse Survey; Table 1c. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp39.html#tables>

²⁶ Musaddiq.

²⁷ Enrollment data is based on the district in which the student is attending. Students attending ESD-run schools, state-sponsored charter schools, the Oregon School for the Deaf, Juvenile Detention and Youth Corrections Education facilities, and some other education programs not administered by school districts are excluded from the maps, though they are included in statewide measures of enrollment presented elsewhere in this brief.

²⁸ These are schools designed to operate remotely, not schools providing temporary comprehensive distance learning as a result of the pandemic. See <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/Documents/virtualschoolstatusfaq.pdf> for virtual school definitions. Examples of these districts include Mitchell SD, North Bend SD, Scio SD, and Baker SD.

- Intermountain Education Service District (not pictured) served hundreds of students from its component districts in northeastern Oregon in 2020 through its virtual program, which may have contributed to declines in the number of attending students for districts in that region. They also reported a much smaller increase in [registered homeschoolers](#), compared to other regions.
- Some districts²⁹ also experienced enrollment losses due to wildfire damage that occurred in September 2020.

A sample of virtual charter schools with large enrollment increases between October 2019 and 2020 showed that the largest single source of new enrollees in these schools was students who were not enrolled in any Oregon public school in fall 2019, suggesting that they were transfers from private or homeschooling, or had experienced disruptions to their formal education.

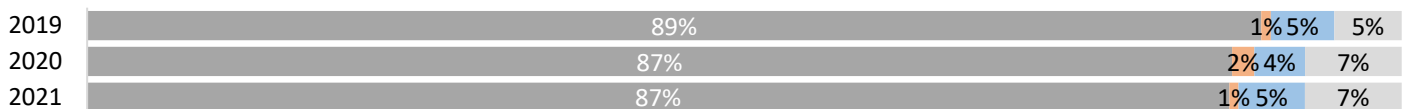
As seen in the charts below, this trend is borne out when looking at the state’s students as a whole.³⁰ Students attending virtual schools³¹ were more likely to remain in those schools in 2020³² than they had been in 2019, and less likely to transfer to a non-virtual school in another district (16% of virtual students in 2018 transferred to a non-virtual school in 2019, compared with only 9% from 2019 to 2020). Non-virtual students were only one percentage point more likely to transfer into a virtual school, and two percentage points more likely to not be enrolled, in 2020 than they had been in 2019. However, considering students who were not enrolled in Oregon public schools in fall 2019, 12% chose to enter a virtual school for 2020, compared to only 8% in the prior year.

Year-to-year Transfers by Prior Enrollment

Students **entering or re-entering** Oregon public K-12 schools



Students enrolled in a **non-virtual school** in the previous year



Students enrolled in a **virtual school** in the previous year



■ Same District ■ New District (Virtual School) ■ New District (Non-Virtual School) ■ Not Enrolled

²⁹ Particularly Santiam Canyon SD, Lincoln County SD, Phoenix-Talent SD, and McKenzie SD

³⁰ Excludes students who were 12th graders in the first year or Kindergarteners in the second year, given the expected high proportion of these students who were not enrolled in the comparison year. Students attending district-level programs or private placements where virtual status could not be determined were also excluded.

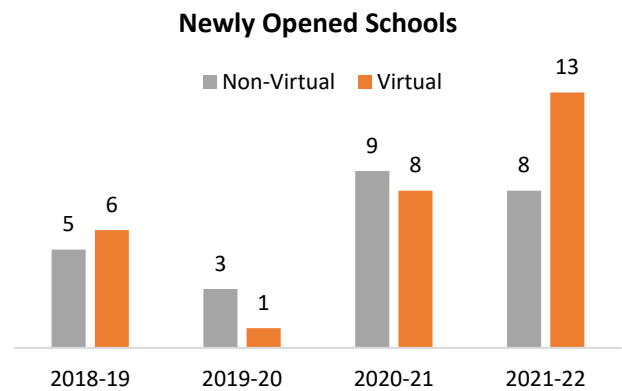
³¹ Virtual schools are schools designed to operate fully or primarily virtually, and does not include schools providing temporary comprehensive distance learning as a result of the pandemic.

³² Fall enrollment data based on the school a student attended on the first school day in October of each year.

In 2021, with all districts returning to in-person instruction, there was an increase in students leaving virtual schools for non-virtual (22% of students in virtual schools in 2020 transferred to a non-virtual school in another district in 2021), which appears to reflect a reversal of the temporary shift towards virtual schools in 2020. Most other transfer rates, including the choices made by students entering Oregon public schools who had not been enrolled the previous fall, returned to pre-pandemic rates.

New Virtual Institutions

Given the temporary increase in students choosing virtual schools, as well as continued interest in virtual education from families concerned about ongoing pandemic risks to their children, it is unsurprising that the 2021-22 school year saw the opening of nearly as many virtual schools in one year as in the prior three years combined, as shown in the chart to the right. ODE is currently [engaged in work](#) to update and revise policies for remote learning models, including virtual schools.

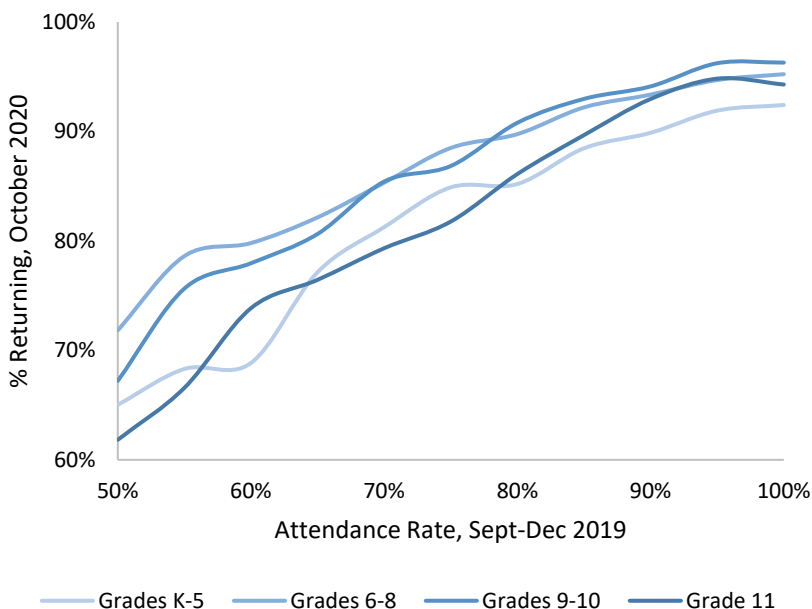


Disengagement

Families and students may have left Oregon public schools for a wide variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the academic content or policies of the school, feeling unsafe within the school environment³³, concerns about the disruptions caused by unpredictable changes in learning modalities, an exacerbation of family stressors such as job loss and homelessness, or any of the existing problems [research indicates](#) contribute to disengagement, [absenteeism](#), and

eventual [push-out](#).³⁴ As shown in the chart below, students who were already experiencing disengagement or barriers to attendance prior to the pandemic were much less likely to return for enrollment in October 2020.

Prior Year Attendance Predicts Likelihood of Returning in October 2020
By 2019 Grade Level



Some of these families may now be satisfied with their current educational plans, but others may be struggling and in need of services. Districts and schools will need to continue to reach out more broadly to [engage with their communities](#), identify and ameliorate causes of leaving the system or declining to enter it in the first place, and work with the communities and community-based organizations to [reengage](#) pushed-out students in need of services.

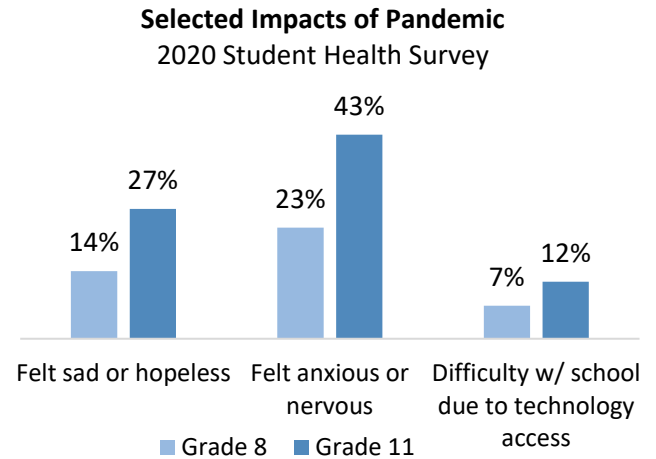
³³ A leading reason cited for homeschooling, pre-pandemic. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES:2019). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_206.15.asp.

³⁴ Families may also have left Oregon in response to other factors, such as moving to be near family or community connections during the pandemic, or for economic/employment-related reasons.

Student Impacts

The 2020 [Oregon Student Health Survey](#), administered to around 30% of Oregon 8th and 11th graders during the 2020-21 school year, included a number of questions about the impacts they had experienced due to COVID-19.³⁵ The majority of students reported at least one negative impact, including personal or family illness, food insecurity, feelings of anxiety or depression, and job loss. Rates of emotional impacts of the pandemic, such as feelings of anxiety or hopelessness, were similarly high among students who reported attending in-person and those who attended via distance learning.³⁶

Seven percent of 8th graders and twelve percent of 11th graders reported difficulty keeping up with schoolwork due to technological barriers (lack of reliable computer or internet).³⁷ Students who reported difficulty keeping up with schoolwork also were less likely to agree that adults at their school would notice if they were absent, or to agree that they were happy to be at their school – both factors that may predict disengagement. They were also more likely to report missing a large number of school days. 29% of 11th graders who reported difficulty keeping up with schoolwork also reported having missed more than 10 school days, compared to only 12% of other 11th graders.³⁸



In the Student Health Survey’s free-response section, students described the stresses of keeping up with distance learning and remaining motivated, particularly with technological challenges and without extracurricular activities. Students also described worrying about family members who work in COVID-19 units of hospitals, and financial insecurity related to loss of jobs or struggling family businesses – some had to get jobs to compensate for reductions in their family’s income. Some students had seriously ill family members or [lost family members](#) to COVID-19 or other illnesses. Many students described physical and mental health struggles, including [lingering COVID symptoms](#), and the difficulty of managing distance learning while navigating disability. Encouragingly, despite these struggles, [youth suicide rates](#) declined in 2019, and continued that decline in 2020 and 2021.

Parent Beliefs

Another [survey](#), conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center in February 2022 (shortly before the statewide requirement for students to wear face coverings in K-12 settings was [lifted](#)), found that 64% of respondents with school-aged children felt that their area’s K-12 schools were doing a good job keeping students safe and minimizing the spread of COVID-19.³⁹ While these rates are generally encouraging, 25% of respondents with school-aged children indicated that they did not feel that their K-12 schools were doing a good job in this area, with respondents in urban, suburban, and rural areas, and across racial/ethnic groups roughly equally likely to feel this way, indicating broad room for improvement in this area.

An earlier version of this survey, conducted in November 2021, found that a majority of parents support face coverings, vaccination, and other mitigation measures within schools, and were concerned about their children contracting COVID-

³⁵ Results were [weighted](#) in order to produce accurate state-level estimates.

³⁶ <https://www.bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Crosstabs.aspx>

³⁷ Selected responses shown; for complete question wording and full list of response options, see <https://www.bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Categories.aspx>.

³⁸ <https://www.bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Crosstabs.aspx>

³⁹ Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. “Checking In: Covid-19 Impact on Hospitals & Schools.” <https://oregonvbc.org/checking-in-covid-19-impact-on-hospitals-schools/>.

19 at school, developing serious illness, or passing the virus on to another family member. 65% of parents and 63% of all respondents indicated a willingness to pay increased taxes in order to fund facility mitigation measures, such as [improved ventilation](#).⁴⁰

Discussion

Oregon experienced substantial drops in enrollment after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of mitigating measures. While some of the initial decline in enrollment may be attributable to Oregon’s transition to virtual (distance) learning, the year-over-year decline presents Oregon with new challenges. It is concerning that Oregon has not yet experienced any enrollment rebound after largely returning to in-person instruction – there are likely other factors in play.

The declines were predominantly among white students and kindergarteners, especially in the first school year of the pandemic. Delayed kindergarten enrollment does not explain the entirety of the drop, or the continued decline into 2021-22. Substantial increases in homeschooling explain a large portion of the drop in 2020-21.

Although some students may have left Oregon, we estimate that there are more than 20,000 students⁴¹ currently residing in Oregon who left public K-12 enrollment for other educational settings, or were pushed out⁴² of education, in the last two years. Some of these students may be well-served in their current educational setting⁴³; however, districts and schools who experienced significant declines may wish to conduct additional engagement with students, families, and communities where possible, in order to better understand these choices. Virtual programs are expanding, in part to meet the needs of these students, but there may be other supports or modifications that districts and schools can offer to help these students return to public K-12 education, including enhanced COVID-19 mitigations⁴⁴, mental health and disability supports, flexible schedules to accommodate jobs or family responsibilities, education targeted towards future career and/or college goals, and connection with educators invested in their attendance and success.

Support for engagement efforts, student supports, and/or enhanced mitigation strategies is available through the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund](#), [Every Student Belongs](#), and [integrated](#) programs including the Student Investment Account, High School Success, and Every Day Matters.

Nationally, school connectedness is [associated with](#) a significant protective effect against mental and behavioral health challenges. Building supportive, inclusive, and safe schools is key to developing students’ sense of belonging. [Resources](#) are available from the American Academy of Pediatrics on supporting students experiencing [behavioral health challenges](#), isolation, bereavement, housing and food insecurity, disability, and technological barriers, as well as on mitigation measures, such as improved ventilation to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

ODE resources to support safe, equitable, and inclusive schools, and to foster student sense of belonging, include [Every Student Belongs](#), the [Mental Health Toolkit](#), and the [Care and Connection Toolkit](#).

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⁴⁰ Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. “COVID-19 and K-12 Schools.” <https://oregonvbc.org/covid-19-and-k-12-schools/>.

⁴¹ Enrollment drop, adjusted for inflows and outflows based on data from The Census Bureau. “BO7401: GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY AGE FOR RESIDENCE 1 YEAR AGO IN THE UNITED STATES” and “BO7001: GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY AGE FOR CURRENT RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES.” 2021: American Community Survey 1-year estimates. Available from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci>.

⁴² Left school before earning a credential, often due to discipline practices, disengagement, inflexibility, or other structural factors.

⁴³ ODE (with a few exceptions) does not collect data for students placed into private schools or homeschooling.

⁴⁴ For information about clean indoor air, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanindoorair/> and https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-03/508-cleanairbuildings_factsheet_v5_508.pdf.