



Data Brief: 2023-2024 Catholic School Enrollment



DATA BRIEF 2023-2024

2023-2024 Academic Year

As Catholic schools continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by changing demographics, economic realities and educational needs, this report is crucial in guiding strategic decisions, fostering community engagement and enhancing the educational offerings to meet the needs of all students. The insights from the 2023-2024 academic year set a foundation for future growth, innovation and continued commitment to the mission of Catholic education.

The *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing* presents a high-level overview of the current state of Catholic education in the United States, shedding light on school characteristics, enrollment trends and the strategic positioning of schools across various regions. This data brief synthesizes key findings from the report, offering insights into the evolving landscape of Catholic education and its implications for stakeholders.

Moving forward, the Catholic education system's ability to navigate changing dynamics—fostering stability in a world of chaos, becoming more inclusive with distinct educational models, adapting by balancing tradition with innovation and offering witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ in a rapidly evolving environment—will be crucial for its continued relevance and growth. These insights not only inform strategic planning and policy development but also highlight the need for ongoing support, investment and innovation to ensure Catholic schools continue to serve as vital educational institutions and evangelists within their communities.

Stability Amidst Chaos

Amidst societal upheaval and educational instability, Catholic schools have emerged as beacons of stability, reversing years of enrollment decline. Faced with challenges such as technological shifts, demographic changes and the pandemic's impact, these institutions have adapted strategically. The following key findings directly reflect how Catholic schools have not only stabilized but also begun to flourish anew. This resilience underscores their enduring commitment to providing a grounded, faith-based education in a world that often seems in flux.

Enrollment Trends

The national enrollment for the PK-12 grade span stands at 1,693,327, with preschool students making up 10.1% of the total enrollment. Although the national enrollment decline since 2013-2014 school year has been 281,251, a 14.2% loss of the student population, enrollment in more recent years has stabilized. This year enrollment remained steady with a 0.0% change from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024.

Key Data Points:

- National PK-12 enrollment: 1,693,327.
- Enrollment has remained stable since last year, rather than continuing the trend of decline.
- After two years of growth, enrollment has stabilized.

Schools in Different Places

Regional Changes: The Great Lakes and West/Far West regions account for nearly half of the Catholic school population, indicating robust engagement in these areas. Notably, the Southeast region has seen

the highest enrollment increase since the 2019-2020 school year, showcasing a regional dynamism that could model growth for other areas. The total number of Catholic schools stands at 5,905, with a regional distribution that reflects broader demographic shifts in the United States.

Key Data Point:

- Southeast region enrollment shift: 3.6% increase since the 2019-2020 school year.
- The total number of Catholic schools is 5,905.

Urban vs Suburban Schools

Despite a decline in the total number of schools over the past four decades, Catholic education maintains a strong presence in urban and inner-city areas, with 38.7% of schools located in these settings. Meanwhile, suburban schools have increased to 40.3% of the total, reflecting changing urban landscapes and demographic trends.

Key Data Points:

- Urban and inner-city schools: 38.7%.
- Increase in suburban schools to 40.3%.

School Openings, Consolidations, and Closures

The report documents 20 new school openings against 55 closures or consolidations in the past school year, the lowest number of closures in years. The relatively low number of closures and consolidations, however, may indicate effective adaptation strategies and community support mechanisms that have helped stabilize many schools. However, 38% of all schools have a waiting list, demonstrating that there is strong interest in many locations.

Key Data Points:

- New schools opened: 20.
- Schools closed or consolidated: 55.
- 38% of all schools have a waiting list.

Commitment to Inclusion

Catholic schools are increasingly reflecting a commitment to inclusivity, responding to the growing diversity within their communities. By accommodating the rising enrollment of Hispanic students, addressing the needs of students with disabilities and embracing students from various faith backgrounds, these schools are actively working towards creating a more welcoming and supportive educational environment. This commitment to diversity not only enriches the learning experience for all students but also aligns with the Catholic educational mission of serving a broad and diverse community.

Support for Students with Disabilities

The inclusion and support of students with disabilities are indicative of the Catholic education system's commitment to serving all children. An increase in the percentage of students with diagnosed disabilities to 7.8% from the previous year's 6.9% reflects a growing recognition and accommodation within Catholic schools. This trend underscores the importance of inclusivity and personalized support in Catholic education.

Key Data Points:

- 7.8% of students in Catholic schools were reported having a diagnosed disability, highlighting the inclusive nature of Catholic education and its adaptability to diverse learning needs.

Hispanic Student Population

The demographic composition of the student body, particularly the Hispanic population, provides insight into the cultural diversity within Catholic schools. The increasing diversity, with a significant representation

of Hispanic students, reflects broader demographic shifts in the United States and the Catholic education system's response to these changes. Catholic schools are responding by building programming and increasing resources.

Key Data Points:

- The Hispanic/Latino student population in Catholic schools (19%) underscores the system's role in serving diverse communities and its adaptability to the changing demographics of the United States.
- 129 Catholic schools offer Dual-Language Immersion Programs.

Non-Catholic Students

The increasing trend of non-Catholic student enrollment in Catholic schools, which currently stands at 21%, is a significant development with various implications for these institutions. This shift not only reflects the changing landscape of Catholic education but also presents opportunities and challenges that schools must navigate thoughtfully. The trend of increasing non-Catholic enrollment in Catholic schools underscores the need for these institutions to adapt and innovate in ways that uphold their Catholic identity while embracing diversity.

Key Data Points:

- 21% of students are reported to be non-Catholic
- 16% of faculty are reported to be non-Catholic, and 12% have not reported a religious affiliation.

Adaptability and Resilience

Catholic schools demonstrate exceptional adaptability and resilience by effectively blending tradition with innovation and prioritizing operational sustainability. They have embraced parental choice programs, showcasing a flexibility that meets modern educational demands while preserving core values. This ability to evolve, evidenced by the strategic management of resources, developing of new models and serving populations with high demand underscores their commitment to providing a quality, faith-based education in an ever-changing world. This balance of maintaining tradition and embracing change positions Catholic schools as vital, forward-thinking institutions in the landscape of education.

Types of School Sponsorship

The sponsorship structure of Catholic schools is crucial for understanding their operational framework and strategic direction. The analysis reveals a diversification in sponsorship models, reflecting a shift towards more collaborative and inclusive approaches to school management.

Key Data Points:

- The majority of elementary schools remain parish-sponsored, indicating a strong connection to local church communities. However, there's been a notable growth in the number and percentage of elementary diocesan schools, from 2.3% in 1990 to 18.0% in 2023, signaling a trend towards consolidation and centralized management within dioceses.
- At the secondary level, private sponsorship remains prevalent (44.5%), followed closely by diocesan (39.0%), highlighting the diversity in sponsorship models across Catholic schools.

Governance

This year, for the first time we were able to provide a breakdown of number and type of board by elementary/middle and secondary. Catholic schools have had to adapt to new structures of decision-making in the absence of traditional oversight models such as religious orders. The data this year helps create a picture of how governance structures are evolving.

Key Data Points:

- 79.5% of elementary/middle schools have a board compared to 92.8% of schools at the secondary level.

- The most popular board type at the elementary/middle school level is advisory by a large margin (75.3%).
- Advisory is the most popular board type on the secondary level, the margin is much smaller (45.3%)

Parental Choice

Parental choice programs expanded in 20 states in 2023, offer families the ability to choose Catholic schools, which is pivotal for those in states like Ohio, Florida, Indiana and Arizona, where over half of the students utilize them. Catholic schools should advocate for the expansion of these programs, enhance awareness among families and tailor their educational offerings to attract and retain students benefiting from school choice, ensuring access to Catholic education for a broader demographic.

Key Data Points:

- 20 states expanded their Parental Choice programs in 2023.
- 13.7% of Catholic school students utilize parental choice programs.

Changing Composition of Faculty and Staff

Faculty Retention

Faculty retention rates within Catholic schools are a critical measure of institutional stability and educational quality. High retention rates indicate a supportive and engaging environment for educators, which directly impacts student learning outcomes. These data highlight the efforts made by Catholic schools to maintain a stable and experienced faculty and staff. Additionally, 73.4% of superintendents returned this year.

Key Data Points:

- Nationwide retention of principals and teachers was 81.1% and 88.1%, respectively, showcasing a strong commitment to retaining quality educators within the system.
- 73.4% of Superintendents returned this year.

The Superintendency

Dioceses had a retention rate of 73.4% for superintendents between fall 2022 and fall 2023, which represents a higher level of turnover at the position than in past years (in 2020, the retention rate was 84%; in 2015, it was 94%¹). Many dioceses operated with very limited personnel: three dioceses have no education offices, 19 education offices are staffed only by the superintendent and an additional 23 are staffed by a superintendent and one support person.

¹ Deals 2020; Deals 2015.



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