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SUPERINTENDENT'S EMAIL

Contact: John Hendron, 804-225-4387

DATE: March 8, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUPT'S EMAIL: **Quarterly Research Bulletin: COVID-19 Enrollment Loss**

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is pleased to provide you with the next issue of its Quarterly Research Bulletin. This issue summarizes statewide changes in enrollment and patterns of withdrawal by student demographic group and division operating status.

Throughout the year, the VDOE will publish a research bulletin on an issue of interest, highlighting published research, Virginia-specific data analytics, and evidence-based strategies for education leaders to consider.

For more information

Questions about this bulletin or ideas for future content can be addressed to Dr. Jennifer Piver-Renna, Director of Research, at Jennifer.Piver-Renna@doe.virginia.gov or 804-225-3698.

JFL/JPR

Attachment: *Quarterly Research Bulletin: Volume Two, Issue One* (PDF)

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

[State Dashboard on Virginia School Operational Status During the 2020-2021 School Year](#)

[State Reports on Annual School Enrollment](#)

[Research Study on Racial and Ethnic Differences in Parental Attitudes and Concerns About School Reopening During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

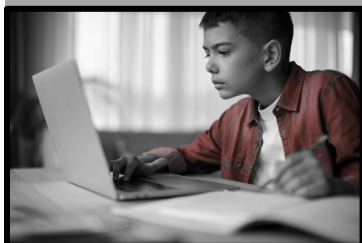
[Research Study on Fall Enrollment Losses for Higher Education](#)

[Report on Enrollment Drops in Virginia Early-Grade Public School Students](#)

CONTACT US

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Research Focus: COVID-19 Enrollment Loss

Five months after Governor Northam closed all Virginia PK-12 schools, education leaders faced another difficult decision about how schools would re-open for the 2020-2021 school year amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Balancing available remote learning options, public health guidelines, and concerns from teachers and parents, half of Virginia school divisions ($n = 67$) began the school year fully remote, ten divisions began in-person, and the remaining 55 divisions operated on a hybrid schedule, where some students were remote and others were in-person. Regardless of operating status, 91 percent of Virginia school divisions reported declines in student enrollment between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. As planning commences for next school year, this issue of the *Quarterly Research Bulletin* takes a closer look at changes in enrollment—specifically how these changes vary by student demographics—to inform conversations school divisions should have about determining grade-level placement and assessing and responding to learning loss.

State-wide Enrollment Trends

State-wide student counts are collected in the fall of each school year, and reflect the total number of students enrolled in public PK-12 schools as of September 30th. In 2019-2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment counts were at an all time-high of 1,296,822 full-time students. By fall of the 2020-2021 school year, student enrollment declined by 3.6 percent, to 1,251,499 full-time students. In the context of Virginia's consistently increasing enrollment trends, a 3.6 percent decline is substantial and reflects enrollment counts Virginia has not seen since 2010. Notably, enrollment loss between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years was not equally distributed by student race/ethnicity. White students comprise more than 80 percent of the difference between the point-in-time enrollment counts with an enrollment loss of 6.3 percent (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in Enrollment by Student Race/Ethnicity between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 School Years

Race/Ethnicity	2019-2020	2020-2021	Difference	Percent Change
American Indian or Alaska Native	3,374	3,283	(91)	-2.8%
Asian	93,506	93,168	(338)	-0.4%
Black	283,256	276,769	(6487)	-2.3%
Hispanic	220,707	218,419	(2288)	-1.0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2,156	2,002	(154)	-7.7%
Multiple Races	77,184	77,834	650	0.8%
White	616,639	580,024	(36615)	-6.3%
Total	1,296,822	1,251,499	(45323)	-3.6%

Brief Methodology

To place statewide enrollment losses into context, we examined point-in-time differences in enrollment counts by grade, student demographics, and school operating status from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. Then, we examined longitudinal data on students who withdrew from public school between the end of the 2019-2020 school year and the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

Two stories emerged: significant drops in enrollment among elementary students, and an exponential increase in students transferring to non-public school settings. We further describe the unique underlying patterns in each of these stories and implications for the 2021-2022 school year.

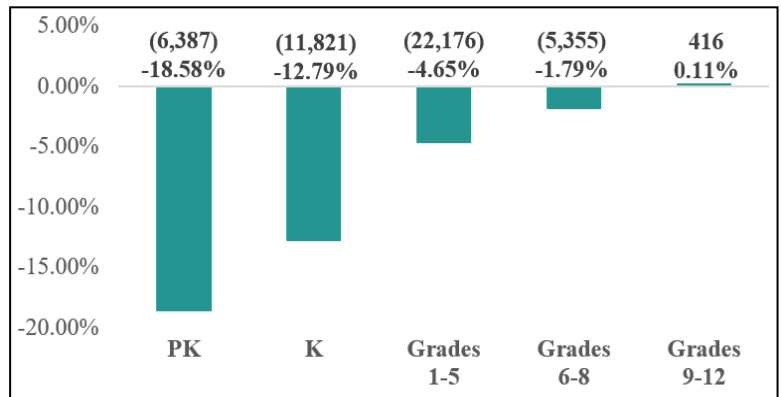
Looking Deeper: Point-in-Time Enrollment Loss By Grade and Student Demographics

State-wide enrollment losses were disproportionately noted among students in elementary grades, particularly among pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students (Figure 2). Combined enrollment losses in those two grades alone account for 40 percent of the state's total enrollment loss between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. Enrollment losses were notable as well for students in grades 1 through 5, but much smaller in the secondary grades. Enrollment losses by grade cluster are similar among divisions choosing in-person instruction or fully remote instruction.

Most concerning about the drop in enrollment for the pre-Kindergarten grade, perhaps, are enrollment losses among economically disadvantaged (ED) and English Learner (EL) students. Compared to the 2019-2020 school year, enrollment loss among pre-Kindergarten ED students was 4.5 times larger than their non-ED peers (Figure 3). The relationship between ED student enrollment and grade level

inverses for secondary students, where enrollment losses are higher among non-ED students compared to ED students. Enrollment losses for EL students, who were identified as a priority population for in-person learning, follow a different pattern. For EL students, enrollment losses were 2.8 times larger than their non-EL peers in pre-Kindergarten, and almost seven times larger than their non-EL peers in

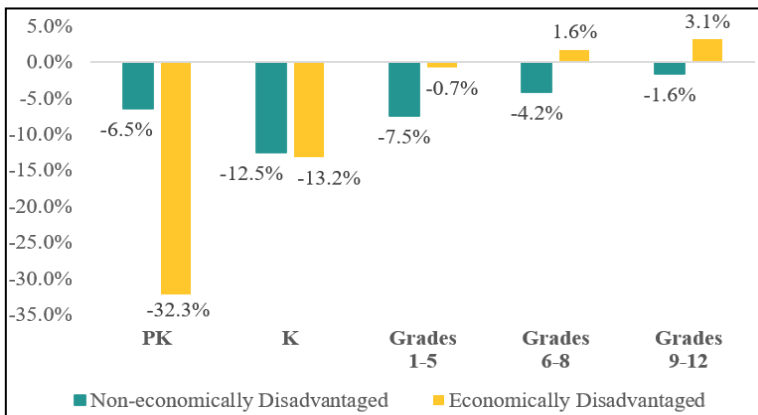
Figure 2. Student Count and Percent Enrollment Loss by Grade Level



Kindergarten. Counts of students with disabilities also show large enrollment losses in pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten grades.

When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, enrollment losses in pre-Kindergarten are similar among white, Black and Hispanic students. In Kindergarten, however, non-ED white students had a 19 percent decrease in enrollment compared to an approximately 1 percent decrease in enrollment among non-ED Black and Hispanic students (Figure 4). For families with options, this may be indicative of deferred enrollment for Kindergarten students, or transfers to private or homeschool settings. In other elementary and secondary grades, white and Black ED and non-ED students have similar rates of enrollment loss. For Hispanic students, however, the pattern is strikingly different. Non-ED Hispanic students increased enrollment in elementary and secondary grades (Figure 4), while ED Hispanic students decreased enrollment in elementary and secondary grades (Figure 5).

Figure 3. Enrollment Loss for Economically Disadvantaged and Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students by Grade Level



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Figure 4. Enrollment Loss for Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students by Race and Ethnicity

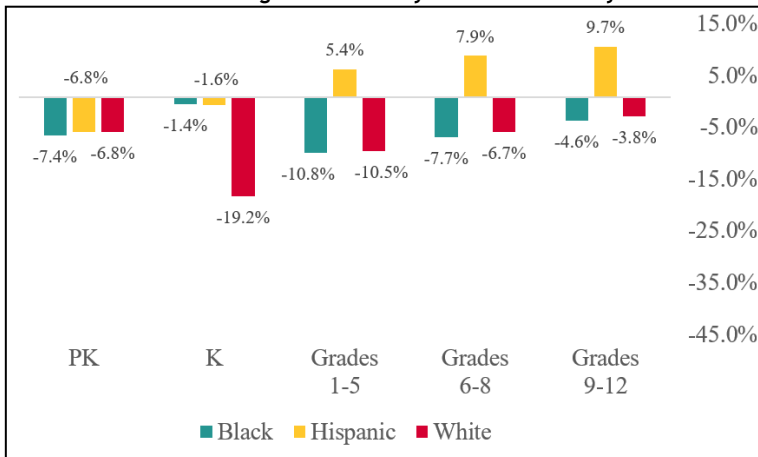
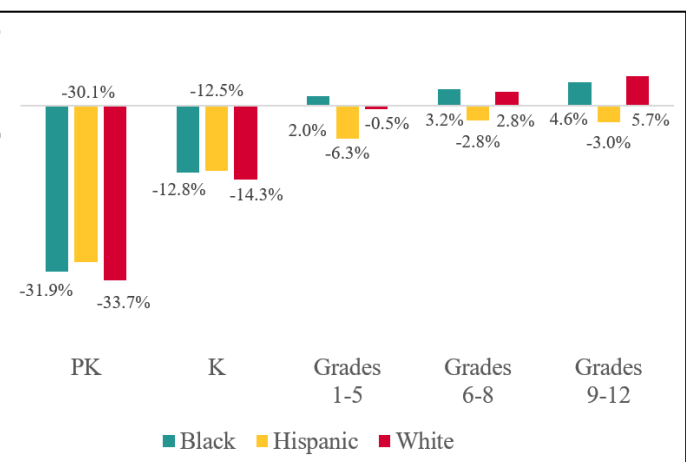


Figure 5. Enrollment Loss for Economically Disadvantaged Students by Race and Ethnicity



Looking Deeper: Student Withdrawal by Grade and Student Demographics

Longitudinal student records indicate a significant increase in the number of student withdrawals from public school between the end of the 2019-2020 school year and the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. In a typical year, approximately three percent of Virginia public school students withdraw during the summer, and most of these withdrawals are students transferring to a public school in another state. However, during the summer of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students withdrawing from Virginia public schools increased by approximately 20,000, for a student withdrawal rate of five percent.

Exit Code	Prior Three Year Average	2020-2021 School Year	Percent Change
Transfer to a private school	5,385.7	12,825	138%
Transfer to home schooling	2,981.3	16,369	449%

Of the 61,382 students who withdrew from public schools between the end of the 2019-2020 school year and the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, fifty-three percent were students transferring to a non-public school. Specifically, by the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, Virginia saw a 449 percent increase in students transferring to home schooling and a 138 percent increase in students transferring to private school compared to the previous three-year average (Table 2). Student withdrawal rates across division’s fall operating status (e.g., remote or in-person) were relatively consistent.

Student withdrawals are also disproportionately concentrated among elementary grades. However, students withdrawing from public school were more likely to be non-economically disadvantaged (Figure 6). When disaggregated by race, non-economically disadvantaged white students were far more likely to withdraw to both home school and private school settings overall as compared to non-economically disadvantaged Black students (Figure 7).

Student withdrawals are also disproportionately concentrated among elementary grades. However, students withdrawing from public school were more likely to be non-economically disadvantaged (Figure 6). When disaggregated by race, non-economically disadvantaged white students were far more likely to withdraw to both home school and private school settings overall as compared to non-economically disadvantaged Black students (Figure 7).

Final Thoughts

Understanding differential patterns of disenrollment and withdrawal within certain student groups is critical as education leaders plan for the remainder of this school year and into the next. Statewide, enrollment losses are most concentrated among economically disadvantaged pre-Kindergarten and all Kindergarten students, while non-economically disadvantaged white students were more likely to move into home school or private school settings. VDOE will continue to monitor trends in enrollment throughout the spring and into next fall. While the number of students who will return to public school next year is not known, school divisions are encouraged to begin conversations early with families about placement decisions for Fall 2021, especially for younger learners. The differential quality of students’ most recent educational experiences (including students who were enrolled in public schools but disengaged in instruction) will greatly impact instructional strategies need to effectively address learning loss.



Figure 6. Fall 2020-2021 Student Withdrawals by 2019-2020 Grade Level and Economically Disadvantaged Status

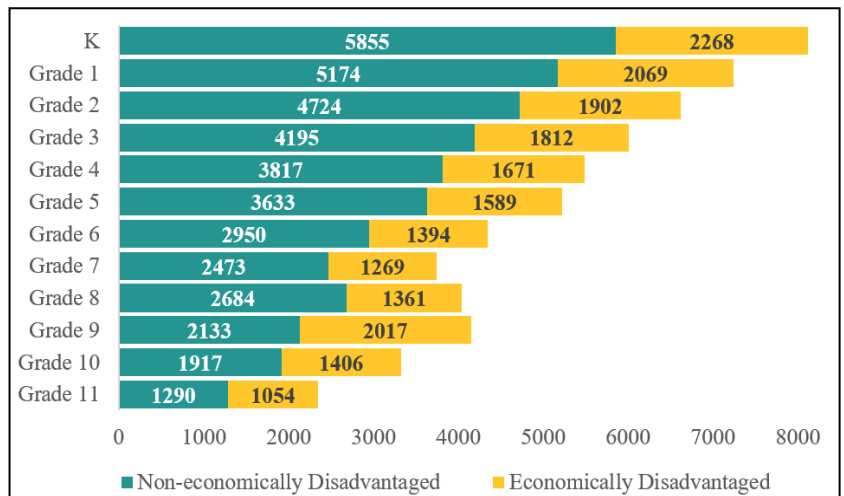


Figure 7. Student Withdrawal by to Home and Private School by Race and Economically Disadvantaged Status

