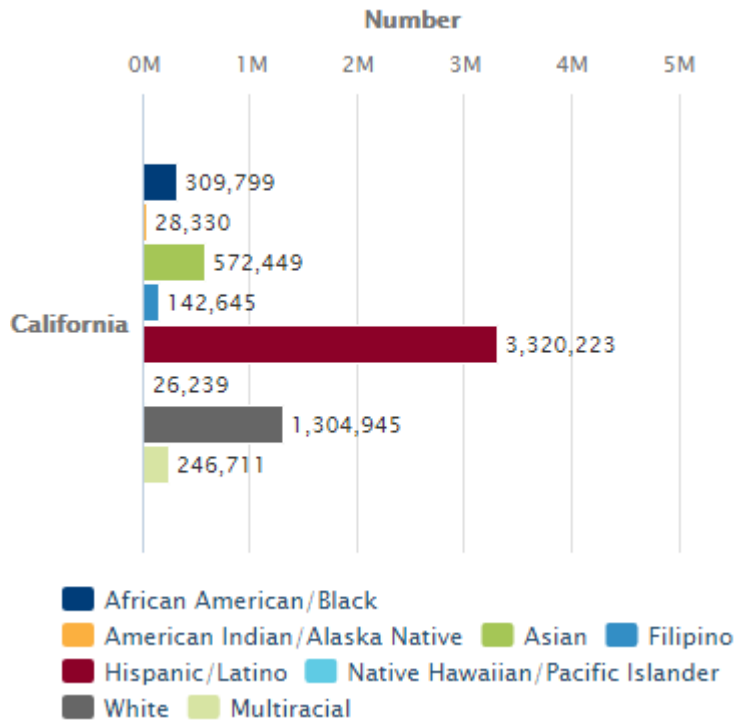


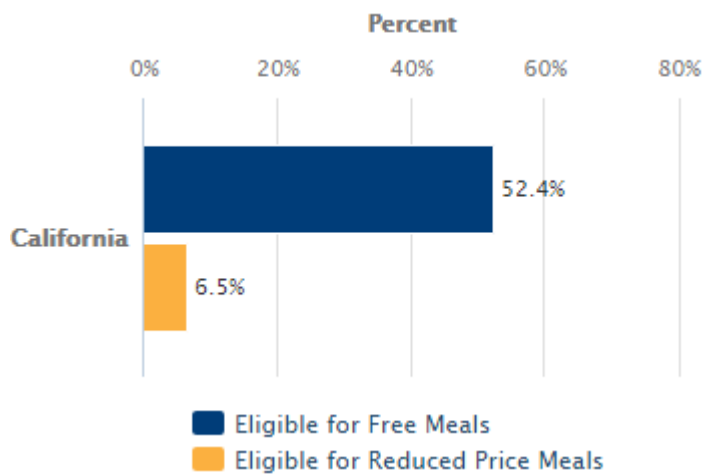
# Demographics of California Schoolchildren

Public School Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity: 2021



**Definition:** Number of students enrolled in public schools, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2021, 3,320,223 Hispanic/Latino students were enrolled in California public schools).  
**Data Source:** California Dept. of Education, [DataQuest](#); National Center for Education Statistics, [Digest of Education Statistics](#) (Aug. 2021).

Student Eligibility for Free or Reduced Price School Meals: 2021



**Definition:** Percentage of students ages 5-17 enrolled on census day, by eligibility to receive free or reduced price school meals (e.g., on census day in the 2021 school year, 52.4% of California students were eligible to receive free school meals).  
**Data Source:** California Dept. of Education, [Free or Reduced-Price Meal \(Student Poverty\) Data](#) (Jul. 2021).

## What It Is

Kidsdata.org offers data on student demographics as numbers and percentages at the national, state, county, and school district levels:

- [Total school enrollment](#) overall and by [race/ethnicity](#)
- [Students receiving special education services](#) overall, [by primary disability](#), and [by race/ethnicity](#)
- [High-need students](#)—i.e., those who are eligible for free or reduced price school meals, are English Learners, or are foster youth—as reported in the Unduplicated Pupil Count
- [Students eligible for free or reduced price school meals](#) (FRPM), along with [students by FRPM eligibility status](#) (eligible for free meals, eligible for reduced price meals, and not eligible)
- [English Learners](#) (ELs), [students by EL Status](#) (Spanish-speaking ELs, ELs with a primary language other than Spanish, and non-ELs), and [ELs by most common primary languages](#) statewide
- [Students eligible for the Migrant Education Program](#)

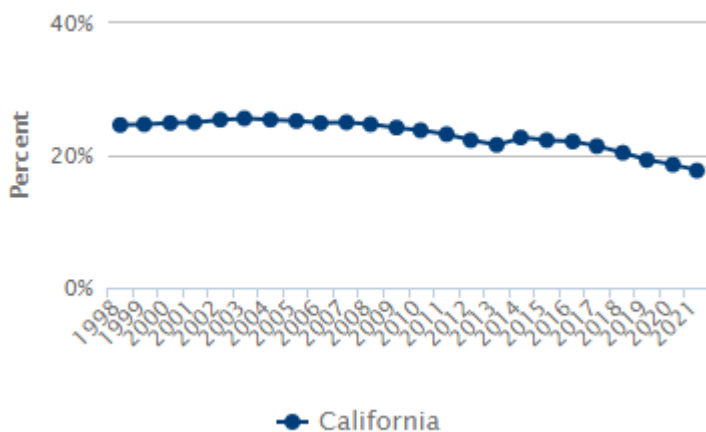
## Why This Topic Is Important

Student demographic trends are useful for projecting potential needs and for planning school and community services. California's public school system is charged with serving an extremely large and diverse student body. The state has a minority white student body and the largest public school population in the nation. Approximately 6 in 10 California students face socioeconomic challenges related to family income, homelessness, living in a migratory household, or involvement with the foster care system; nearly 1 in 5 have limited English language proficiency; and about 1 in 8 have disabilities for which they receive special education services. Disadvantaged children typically need additional support to achieve their academic potential.

## How Children Are Faring

The demographics of California's schoolchildren have changed in recent decades. In 1994, 37% of the state's 5.3 million K-12 students were Hispanic/Latino, 42% were white, and 9% were African American/black. In 2021, a majority (55%) of the 6 million students served were

## Percentage of English Learners Among Public School Enrollees



**Definition:** Percentage of public school students who, on census day, speak a language other than English at home and lack English language speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills necessary to succeed in regular instructional programs (e.g., on census day in the 2021 school year, 17.7% of California students were identified as English Learners).

**Data Source:** California Dept. of Education, *English Learners by Grade and Language* (Sept. 2021).

## Percentage of Students Receiving Special Education Services, by Primary Disability: 2020

California	Percent
Autism	15.6%
Emotional Disturbance	3.2%
Hard of Hearing / Deaf	1.7%
Intellectual Disability	5.3%
Learning Disability	37.2%
Orthopedic Impairment	1.1%
Speech or Language Impairment	20.8%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.2%
Visual Impairment	0.4%
Multiple Disability	1.0%
Other Health Impairment	13.7%

**Definition:** Percentage of public school students receiving special education services, by primary disability type (e.g., among California students enrolled in special education in 2020, 15.6% were enrolled for autism).

**Data Source:** California Dept. of Education, *Special Education Division* custom tabulation; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Jun. 2021).

Hispanic/Latino, 22% were white, and 5% were African American/black.

More than 800,000 California children and youth ages 0-22—13% of all students—received special education services in 2020. Autism, learning disabilities, and speech/language impairments were the most common primary disabilities among students in special education in 2020, accounting for nearly three-quarters (74%) of special education enrollment.

In 2021, high-needs students—i.e., those who are eligible for free or reduced price school meals, are English Learners, or are foster youth—made up 62% of K-12 students statewide. Across local areas with data, percentages ranged from 30% to 82% for counties and from 3% to 100% for school districts.

More than 3.4 million California schoolchildren ages 5-17—59% of students—were eligible for free or reduced price school meals in 2021, up from 51% in 2007. Fewer than 400,000 students (7%) were eligible for reduced price meals, meaning their family incomes were between 130%-184% of their federal poverty guideline. By comparison, more than 3 million students (52%) were eligible for free meals in 2021, meaning either their family incomes were below 130% of their federal poverty guideline, they participated in the CalFresh or CalWORKS programs, they were eligible for the Migrant Education Program, they were homeless, or were foster youth.

Students with limited English language proficiency—English Learners—accounted for 18% California's student body in 2021, down from 25% in 1998. Spanish consistently has been the most common primary language among English Learners statewide and in virtually all counties with data. Following Spanish, the state's most common primary languages among English Learners are Vietnamese and Mandarin.

*View references for this text and additional research on this topic:*  
<https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/103/student-demographics/summary>



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