

REPORT: High School Graduating Classes to be Smaller and More Diverse

January 15, 2013 — The population of U.S. high school graduates is entering a period of modest decline after decades of sustained growth, according to a new report on high school graduates released by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

The 8th edition of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*, portrays a changing America that is rapidly growing more racially and ethnically diverse. And for the higher education community that recruits, enrolls and graduates these students, understanding high school graduation trends is more important than ever.

According to projections, national high school graduate numbers peaked at 3.4 million in 2010-11 after 15 years of growth before beginning a decline that will stabilize in 2013-14 at 3.2-3.3 million graduates. The next period of significant growth is projected to begin in 2020-21.

Past the Peak

Changes in the number of high school graduates will vary considerably across the United States from 2008-09 through 2019-20. Many states in the South and West are projected to experience at least some growth, while numerous states across the Midwest and Northeast can expect declines. While growth states may struggle to find the resources and capacity to serve their students, states with dwindling numbers may face a very different problem: sustaining the infrastructure they've built up over many years. According to the report, the following states can expect the following:

- **Dwindling production** (losses of 15 percent or more): **The District of Columbia, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.**
- **Slowing production** (losses of between 5 and 15 percent): Alaska, California, **Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania,** and Wisconsin.
- **Manageable decline** (losses of less than 5 percent): Arizona, **Delaware,** Indiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oregon, and **West Virginia.**
- **Manageable growth** (increases of less than 5 percent): Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Nebraska, New Mexico, **New York,** North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.
- **Accelerated expansion** (increases of between 5 and 15 percent): Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.
- **Swift expansion** (increases greater than 15 percent): Colorado, Texas, and Utah.

Diversity Ramps Up

High school graduating classes are rapidly becoming more diverse. By 2020 45 percent of the nation's public high school graduates are projected to be non-White, up by more than seven percent over the class of 2009. This trend is driven by the rapid increase in the number of Hispanics completing high school, corresponding to a nearly equivalent decline in the number of White non-Hispanics: between 2008-09 and 2019-20, the number of White public high school grads will drop by 228,000, while Hispanic graduates will increase by 197,000. At the same time, the number of Asians/Pacific Islanders graduating from high school is projected to rise rapidly (by 49,000), offsetting Black non-Hispanic numbers, which are expected to drop (by 41,000).

These national trends are reflected in almost every state, though the pace at which minority populations are gaining (or losing) shares varies. In most states the number of high school graduates of Hispanic descent is projected to increase, as is the number of Asian/Pacific Islander grads. Only a handful of states can expect to see growth in the number of White non-Hispanic graduates. And about half the states will see decreases among Black non-Hispanic graduates. Also by 2019-20, high school graduating classes in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and Nevada are projected to reach "majority-minority" status (graduating more minorities than Whites), joining California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas.

Knocking at the College Door and individual state profiles are posted at www.wiche.edu/Knocking.