

O F INTEREST TO TEACHERS

U.S. Graduation Rates

Nearly 80 percent of white students in the United States complete high school on time, roughly 88 percent by age 25. Only 70 percent of black students and 50 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time. By age 25, roughly 82 percent of blacks have completed high school, but only 60 percent of Hispanics have. Urban students, regardless of race, drop out at very high rates.—Reported by Robert M. Huelskamp in *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Service Projects for Young People

General understandings of adolescent development suggest the following kinds of service projects for various ages of students:

For Grades 6-8

- Planting trees in a park
- Setting up a recycling program
- Helping a family move
- Collecting food for a food shelf
- Helping in a homeless shelter
- Tutoring younger children
- Visiting nursing homes
- Being peer ministers

For Grades 9-12

- Designing and conducting a campaign to educate others about the environment
- Writing letters to members of Congress or House of Parliament
- Organizing a product boycott
- Educating adults about racism
- Teaming with adults to build or renovate a home
- Running an after-school program. Based on a report from Search Institute in *Church Teachers*, June-August 1993.

Helping New Students Prepare for School

How can you help new students prepare for the school year? Coon Rapids High School in Minnesota found an innovative way to introduce new students to the school and school life in general. In the spring, journalism teacher John Weins asked his class to brainstorm how the school newspaper could help new students.

The result was a special edition of the school newspaper that was sent to students during the summer. It included information

and helpful hints on everything from appropriate locker decorations and fashion to getting along with seniors, choosing extracurricular activities, and finding one's way through the cafeteria.—Reported by *It Starts in the Classroom*, January 1993.

Firearm Deaths Escalating for America's Youth

The rate at which U.S. teenagers ages 15 to 19 were killed by firearms leaped 77 percent between 1985 and 1990, reaching its highest level to date, according to a recent federal study.

The 1990 rate of 23.5 deaths per 100,000 population in that age group was up from 19.8 per 100,000 the year before and 13.3 per 100,000 in 1985.

The 1990 rate of firearm deaths—which include murder, suicide, and accidents—meant that one in every four deaths in that age group came as the result of a firearm injury, the study said.

Firearms are the second-leading cause of death—behind motor-vehicle fatalities—for children ages 10 to 14 and teenagers ages 15 to 19.—From a study released in March 1993 by the National Center for Health Statistics.

Radon Levels High in Many U.S. Schools

Twenty percent of U.S. public schools have at least one classroom contaminated with harmful levels of radon, according to early data from an Environmental Protection Agency survey.

Based on the study, conducted during the 1990-1991 school year, the agency estimates that 73,000 classrooms in more than 15,000 public schools have radon levels above the federal standard of 4 picocuries per liter of air.

The percentage of schools with unhealthy radon concentrations varies from region to region, with the Northeast being worst, with 4.1 percent of the schoolrooms exceeding the standard, and lowest in the West, where 1.1 percent showed excessive levels of radon.

Schools are "uniquely vulnerable to indoor air pollutants," the study says, pointing to chemical contaminants often used in art rooms and science laboratories. Also, schools often have inadequate heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems.

Radon is an odorless, colorless radioactive gas produced by the decay of uranium in soils. When inhaled, radon can damage lung tissue and increase the risk of lung cancer. According to the Surgeon General, radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, exceeded only by smoking.

Part-Time College Students Have Unique Needs

Rapid growth in the number and proportion of part-time U.S. college students over the past two decades may require an overhaul of the student financial-aid system, according to a report from the American Council on Education.

The report, *Part-Time Enrollment: Trends and Issues*, found that between 1970 and 1990, the number of part-time undergraduates more than doubled, from 2.1 million to nearly 5 million. In contrast, full-time enrollment grew by 34 percent, from 5.3 to 7 million. By the middle of the 1990s, it is estimated that 44 percent of all undergraduates will attend college part time.

Despite their growing numbers, part-time students are much less likely than their full-time counterparts to receive financial assistance from federal, state, or institutional sources, even though their needs may be greater. In 1990, the ACE study says, only 12 percent of part-time students received federal aid, compared with 43 percent of full-time undergraduates. The gap between the two groups receiving institutional aid was also large; only 5 percent of part-timers received aid from institutional sources, compared with 20 percent of full-time students.

Although federal law allows needy students studying part time to receive Pell Grants, those who have enrolled less than half time in recent years have been excluded from the program. At the state and institutional level as well, most financial assistance is limited to full-time students.

Demographics on part-time students suggest that they would benefit from additional financial aid, as more than two-thirds hold jobs and are over 25 years of age. Also, a large percentage are female and/or minorities.

Costs of College

In 1992, a record number of U.S. freshman college students indicated that they had chosen their school on the basis of low tuition (30 percent, up from 27.7 percent in 1991), the financial assistance they were offered (28.3 percent, up from 27.8 percent), or because they wanted to live near home (23.6 percent, up from 21.3 percent in 1991). In addition, a record one in six freshmen (17.4 percent, compared with 13.1 percent in 1989) reported a "major concern" about their ability to finance college. The proportions of students who said they expected to work and who were living with parents while in

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college also rose in 1992.—Based on the 27th annual report, *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1992*.

Increase in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

The incidence of babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome in the U.S. more than tripled between 1979 and 1992, according to a recent study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The rate of such births increased from 1 per 10,000 births in 1979 to 3.7 per 10,000 births in 1992, according to the report.

The chief of the agency's birth-defects and genetic-diseases branch cautioned that the difficulty physicians have in diagnosing the condition in infants may mean that the syndrome is even more prevalent than the survey suggests.

Fetal alcohol syndrome, the leading preventable cause of birth defects and mental retardation in the U.S., is characterized by a variety of physical and behavioral traits, including prenatal or postnatal growth deficiency, abnormal facial features, and deficits in the central nervous system.

In Many States, Minority Youth Soon to Be Majority

Certain U.S. ethnic groups grew rapidly in the 1980s. The number of African-Americans increased by 13.2 percent; Native Americans by 37.9 percent, Asian-Pacific Islanders by 107.8 percent, and Hispanics of all races, by 53 percent, compared to the number of non-Hispanic whites, which grew by only 6 percent.

At present, about 22 percent of the total U.S. population can be described as minority, but 30 percent of the school-age children are minority, a number that will reach 36 percent by the year 2000. This is largely caused by the changing locations from which new Americans emigrate (in rank order): Mexico, the Philippines, Korea, China/Taiwan, India, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Canada, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, and Iran. By contrast, between 1820 and 1945 most immigrants came from Germany, Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Canada, and Sweden.

By the year 2010, the number of minority young people in the United States will increase by 4.4 million, while the number of non-Hispanic youth will decline by 3.8 million. In 12 states,

the youth population will be more than 52 percent "minority."—Reported by Harold Hodgkinson in *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1993.

Student Interest in Racial and Social Issues Increases

Interest in racial issues and social change among new U.S. college freshmen was up sharply in 1992, a national study of entering first-year enrollees has revealed. The 27th annual study was conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute.

The proportion of students for whom "helping to promote racial understanding" was an "essential" or "very important" goal rose to an all-time high of 42 percent (up from 33.7 percent in 1991). In addition, a record high of six out of seven freshmen (85.1 percent, compared to 79.7 percent in 1991) disagreed with the proposition that "racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America."

The national survey of 213,630 students at 404 colleges and universities showed that a record two out of every five freshmen participated in an organized demonstration in 1991.

The percentage of students who said "influencing social values" was an "essential" or "very important" goal in life also reached an all-time high (43.3 percent, up from 39.6 percent in 1991), while the portion wanting to "influence the political structure" remained at near-record levels (20.1 percent, compared with the 1990 high of 20.6 percent). ❧

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