



School District of Lancaster Enrollment from 2018-2019 to 2023-2024

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Introduction

Like many districts throughout Pennsylvania, School District of Lancaster suffered an enrollment decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike some other districts, deep enrollment declines persist as the district hovers just above 10,000 students. This significant change in district enrollment patterns requires new thinking and creativity from all stakeholders. It also represents an opportunity to consider unique solutions to retain students and ensure success.

Given the sudden impact of the pandemic, this report aims to give a broader context to enrollment trends. While single year trends are noted, this report focuses on the longer term trends from the 2018-2019 school year to present. This helps to uncover deeper insights that provide a helpful comparison point from before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

This data is primarily drawn from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) October enrollment snapshot. This PDE dataset provides a count of enrollment on the first business Monday in October of each school year and provides a consistent comparison point. This does not, necessarily, account for the many students who enroll after that date and depart prior to the next year's snapshot. Likewise, students may leave after the snapshot and no longer receive education from the district in that year. Despite these shortcomings, it is the most consistent and longitudinal measure to report actual enrollment over time and allows for comparison with other districts throughout the commonwealth.

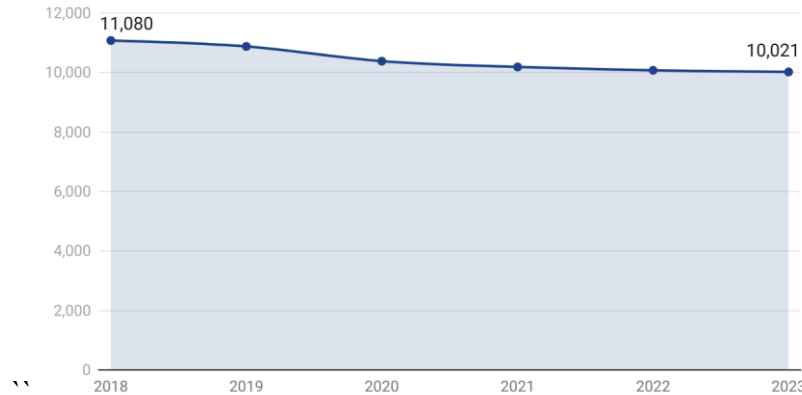
Analysis

General Trends

From the 2022-2023 to 2023-2024 school years, School District of Lancaster saw a decrease of 54 students which represents a .5% decline in enrollment. While this single-year decline is minimal, it reflects a longer-term trend. Enrollment has decreased by 1,059 students since the 2018-2019 school year, a 9.6% decrease.

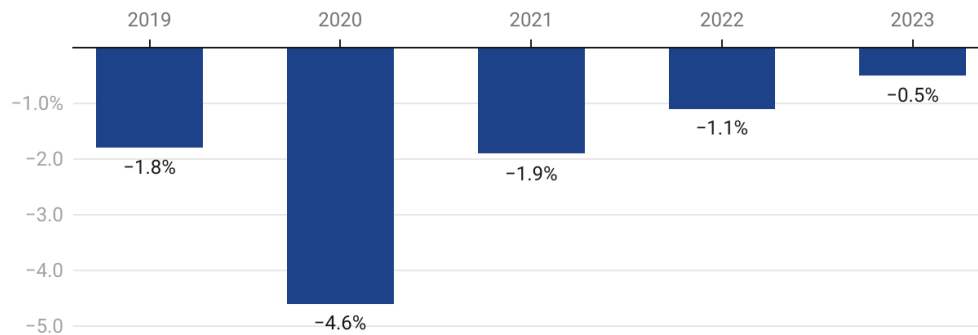


School District of Lancaster Enrollment Count 2018/2019-2023/2024



This decline has slowed over the past few years after an initial uptick in the 2020-2021 school year at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides at least some hope that perhaps these declines will dissipate in the coming years.

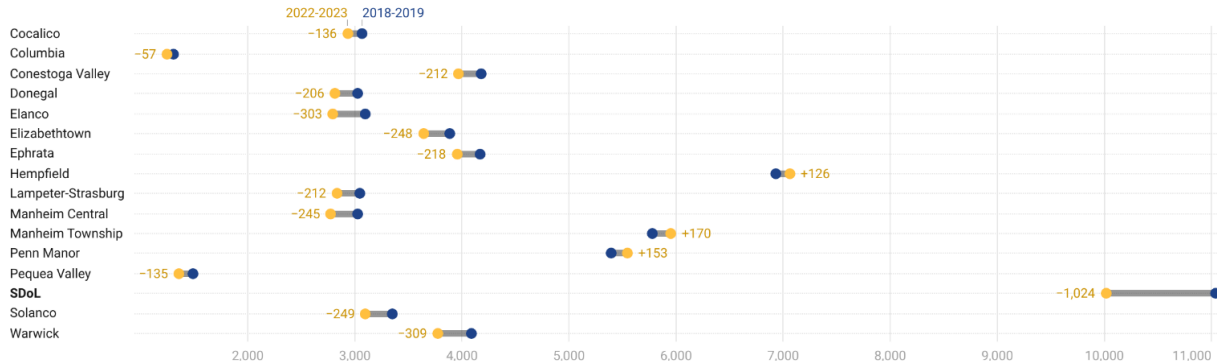
Year over Year Enrollment Declines Slowing



These declines are at least somewhat in line with district peers, though 2023-2024 data is not yet publicly available for peer districts. Allentown School District’s enrollment dropped from 16,730 in 2018-2019 to 15,988 in 2022-2023. Bethlehem Area School District saw a similar trend during the same timeframe, dropping from 13,644 to 12,973. School District of Lancaster’s decline is easily the most significant in Lancaster County, but other districts saw declines as well. Several of the districts directly bordering School District of Lancaster, however, saw enrollment increases during the same time frame with Penn Manor adding 153 students and Manheim Township adding 170 (Public school enrollment reports).



Lancaster County Public School District Enrollment Trends from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023



Demographics

Many of the district’s demographics remain largely unchanged. The district’s racial demographics remain fairly similar, with a slight increase in the percentage of students identifying as multi-racial. The breakdown of gender remains nearly evenly split with 50.9% male and 49.1% female.

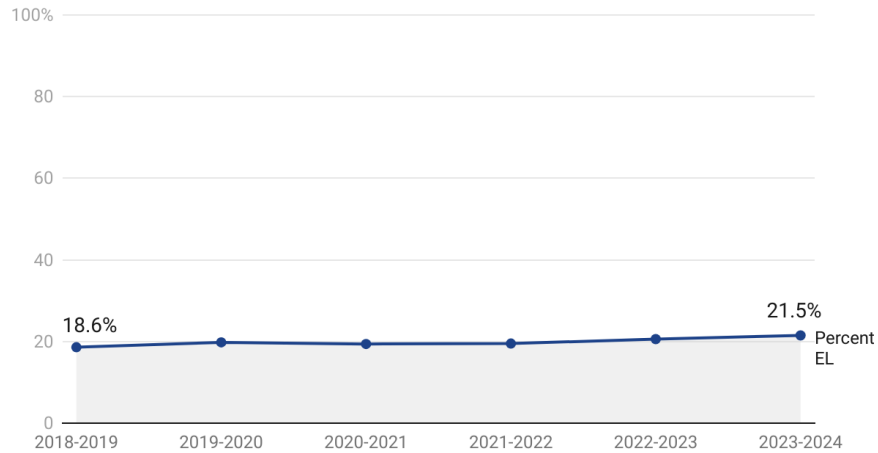
Racial Demographics over Time

	Black	Hispanic	White	Multi-Racial	Asian
2018-2019	16.9%	61.0%	12.8%	5.1%	4.2%
2019-2020	16.7%	61.1%	12.4%	5.3%	4.3%
2020-2021	16.3%	61.6%	12.4%	5.3%	4.4%
2021-2022	16.6%	61.2%	12.4%	5.7%	4.1%
2022-2023	16.1%	61.2%	12.5%	6.2%	4.0%
2023-2024	16.4%	60.6%	12.9%	6.4%	3.7%

Some demographic shifts have taken place over the past few years. First, the number of economically disadvantaged students sharply declined from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024 with a decline of over five percentage points. While the percentage remains high (85%), the drop was sudden. Discussions with key district stakeholders indicate this may be due to a change in data tracking practice more than a sudden change in demographics. While the number of students enrolled continues to decline, the percentage of enrolled students who are English Language Learners or receiving Special Education services is on the rise. The percentage of students who are English Language Learners grew from 18.6% in 2018-2019 to 21.5% in 2023-2024.

Percent of Students who are English Language Learners

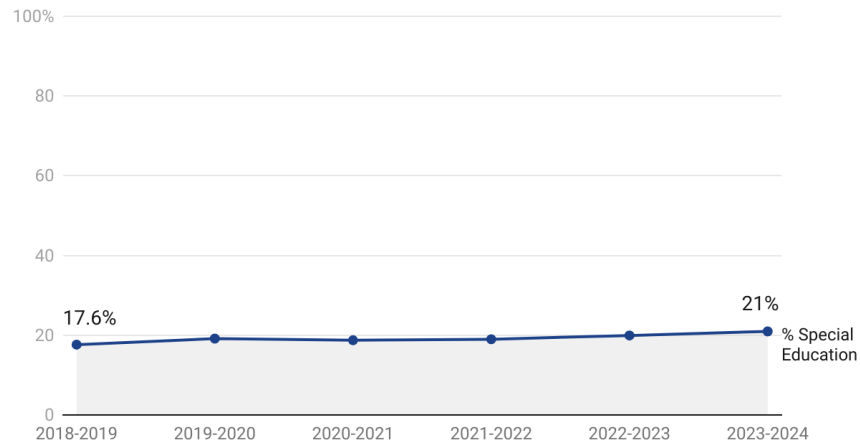
Increase from 18.6% in 2018-2019 to 21.5% in 2023-2024



Special Education saw an increase from 17.6% to 21% in 2023-2024 during the same timeframe. These increases have important implications for future staffing needs given the unique needs of both student populations.

Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services

Increase of 3.5 percentage points in six years



Grade Distribution

Enrollment declines are not uniform, and most clearly impact the district’s elementary schools. Since 2018-2019, elementary schools saw the sharpest decline with an enrollment decrease of 15.4%. Middle school enrollment dropped by 9.3% and high school by 3.4%.

Enrollment Trends by Grade Level

Sharpest declines among elementary school grades

Grade Level	# Decreased	% Decreased	2018-2018 to Present
PreK-5	-755	15.4%	5,656 → 4,901
6-8	-202	9.3%	2,365 → 2,163
9-12	-102	3.4%	3,059 → 2,957

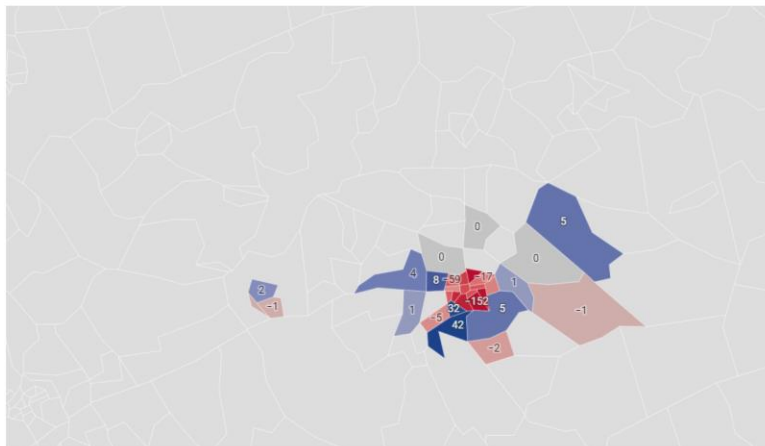
Similarly, the average number of years since students were first enrolled in the district has declined for several elementary grade levels, specifically Kindergarten and 2nd grade students. The majority of the district, however, has seen a rise in the time current students were enrolled in the district. This indicates that students who are currently enrolled have been in the district longer than those previously, potentially because students who were more likely to transition out already did so.

Location

The district’s enrollment changes have been uneven when considering physical location. This prompted a district boundary realignment for the first time in nearly 30 years starting with the 2022-2023 school year. An analysis of enrollment from 2018-2019 to 2023-2024 by census tract provides additional insight. Nearly every census tract in the center of Lancaster City saw an enrollment decline during that timeframe, with the most concentrated loss within Lancaster County Census Tract 3 in the Northeast part of the city. The southern part of the district saw some growth, the largest in Census Tract 135.04.

Enrollment Changes by Census Tract

Changes from 2018/2019 to 2023/2024





School District of Lancaster

Together We Can!

This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the significant rise in housing costs in Lancaster City and Lancaster Township. The Federal Housing Finance Agency’s provides an Annual House Price Index which is a weighted, repeat-sales index that measures average price changes in repeated sales of the same properties (House Price Index). Available data from 2018 to 2022 within district census tracts shows a significant rise. Census Tract 3, the census tract with the largest enrollment decline, has the second highest rate of raw increase in housing index score (329.37 to 472.97). Census Tract 1, located at the center of Lancaster City, nearly doubled with a 94.1% increase. At the same time, other Census Tracts saw price jumps while maintaining enrollment. Census Tract 135.04 increased by 49.6% in the short time frame yet boasted the highest increase in district enrollment.

Top 10 SDoL Census Tracts for House Price Index Increases

Lancaster County Census Tract	HPI # Increase	HPI % Increase
1	124	94.1%
118.05	192	74.8%
12	137	55.6%
135.03	137	51.2%
135.05	134	49.7%
135.04	130	49.6%
114	120	49.4%
113	125	48.2%
135.02	134	47.7%
118.03	119	47.6%

Source: Federal Housing Finance Agency (2018, 2022)

Conclusion

School District of Lancaster is undoubtedly in a difficult position with declining student enrollment. There is some cause for hope as declines have slowed, yet it is difficult to expect any significant changes to City of Lancaster’s development and the availability of affordable housing. The district does show some signs of growth on the outskirts of the city and township, while the center of the district continues to decline in enrollment. This will require intentionality when considering school boundaries with implications for current schools, transportation, and more. Changes in district demographics, especially the increasing percentage of English Language Learners and Special Education students, will require additional consideration for staffing given the needs of these learners.



References

House price index. (n.d.). *Federal Housing Finance*

Agency. https://www.fhfa.gov/DataTools/Downloads/Pages/House-Price-Index.aspx?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

Public school enrollment reports. (n.d.) *Department of Education*.

<https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Enrollment/Pages/PublicSchEnrReports.aspx>