

KERA UPDATE

April 2003

About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#66

KERA — Parents Are Figuring it Out, And Getting OUT!

Kentucky wants to lead the nation in education. Now, on one statistic, it is, thought the result certainly isn't an endorsement for Kentucky's public schools.

A new analysis of US Census data shows something remarkable has happened.

Over the past decade, Kentucky led the nation with the largest increase in the percentage of students in private school.

Kentucky kids are bailing out of public schools faster than anywhere else in the nation. More than one out of ten Kentucky students are now in non-public schooling!

This situation becomes more remarkable when Census data for family income is examined. The new Census figures show Kentucky remains a poor state. Although Kentucky's percent rise in family income ranked 10th in the nation, the rise in absolute figures is another matter. The state's 46th place rank for family income in 1989 scarcely improved to 43rd place in the 1999 figures (Census lags the financial data by a year in its reports).

Thus, Kentucky's nation-leading rate of rise in private schooling is even more conspicuous. Clearly, although they have considerably less disposable income than parents in most other states, Kentuckians still chose to pull their kids out of public schools in remarkable numbers.

Why did this happen? What does it mean for Kentucky's public school education reform?

I am not aware of any surveys dealing with reasons for this notable rise in Kentucky private schooling, but after 10 years of public school reform, there are many indicators that all is not well. Kentucky's ACT college entrance scores have not budged in a decade, and our graduation rate has generally been on the skids ever since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was passed in 1990. College remediation rates in the state rose sharply in the 1990's. Youth unemployment in the state is running at a much higher rate now, compared to our seven neighboring states, than was true when KERA began to impact classrooms around 1992 or so. And, Kentucky's public school remedial programs enroll huge percentages of students, something a smart parent couldn't help but notice. And, apparently, parents have noticed.

Kentucky parents are figuring KERA out, and they are getting their kids out!

Sources of Enrollment Figures and Financial Data Used to Create the Table:

Data can be accessed using the Census Bureau's American Factfinder web site.

Year 2000 Enrollment: Table P36. Sex by School Enrollment By Level of School by Type of School For the Population 3 Years and Over [47] - Universe: Population 3 Years and Over, US Census Bureau, Year 2000 Census, Summary File - 3 (SF-3). Public Enrollment calculated by summing disaggregated public school figures in this file for Male and Female Kindergarten, Grade 1 to 4, Grade 5 to 8, Grade 9 to 12. Private School Enrollment calculated by summing similar figures in this file.

Kentucky's Percentage of Students in Private Schools and Family Financial Status From 1990 and 2000 Census Data Tape Files

	Value	National Rank
Kentucky's Difference in Percent of Students in Private School 1990 to 2000	3.10%	1
Kentucky's Percent of Students in Private School Year 2000	11.72%	14
Kentucky's Percent of Students in Private School Year 1990	8.62%	24
Kentucky's Median Family Income 1999	\$40,939	43
Kentucky's Median Family Income 1989	\$27,028	46

Year 1990 Enrollment: Figures taken directly from Elementary or High School enrollments listed in Table P054, School Enrollment and Type of School - Universe: Persons 3 Years and Over, US Census Bureau, Year 1990 Census, Summary Tape File 3 (STF 3) - Sample Data.

1999 Family Financial Data: Table P77, Summary File 3, Median Family Income in 1999 (Dollars) [1] - Universe: Families.

1989 Family Financial Data: Table P107A, Summary Tape File 3, Median Family Income in 1989 - Universe: Families.