

# WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

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October 2007

## Site of the Month

### LOW-INCOME STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) recently released the report titled *A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools*. The report provides an historical overview of public-school enrollment of white and black children in the South,\* compares the South to other regions in the U.S. on the percent of low-income students enrolled in public schools, and presents data on public-school spending.

SEF reports that at the end of the 2007 summer school year, 54 percent of the public-school students in the South were from low-income households, constituting a majority of public-school students in the South for the first time in 40 years. Although the South is the only region where low-income students comprise the majority, the West, with 47 percent of its enrollment low-income, is close to having a majority low-income student enrollment.

Among the 13 western states, New Mexico had the highest percentage (62 percent) of low-income students enrolled in public schools in 2006-2007 and Utah and Wyoming the lowest (34 percent). Nevada's low-income public-school enrollment was 39 percent.

SEF predicts that the U.S. in ten years could see a majority of low-income students enrolled in public schools, assuming growth continues in the South and West, as well as in Illinois and New York. SEF is concerned that in the future, the South, in particular, may lack the human capital which is required for building a stable, vibrant economy. This is possible, SEF contends, because research shows that low-income students are less likely than wealthier students to receive early childhood education, more likely to score lower on national tests, more likely to drop out of school, and less likely to attend college.

Although the implications and consequences of the South having a majority of low-income students in its public schools are provided in the report, solutions are not offered. The importance of finding solutions, however, is acknowledged in the report's concluding sentence, "How the Southern states recognize and address this new majority is the most important challenge that the region and perhaps the nation will face in the early 21st century" (p. 13).

The report is available online at: <http://www.sefatl.org/pdf/A%20New%20Majority%20Report-Final.pdf>. Don't forget to read the compelling preface by Lynn Huntley, president of SEF.

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\*The southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.