INTRODUCTION

A continuing topic of interest is changes in public school enrollment. Orange County’s recent downward trend in enrollment for public schools has served to heighten awareness of this topic. As shown in Figure 1, the downward enrollment trend is relatively recent in Orange County, occurring in the last five years. This issue of Profiles will present data on school enrollment for Orange County and its districts, focusing on changes from 2002 to 2007, as well as discussing Orange County in comparison to California and the Southern California region. Also included are data on service topics which are related to changes in enrollment levels. All of the observations reported in this issue are based upon the latest historical data and do not predict current or future enrollment.

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

In the last 15 years, California’s overall public school enrollment has grown from 5,267,277 to 6,275,469, an increase of 1,008,192 students, or 19.1% (Figure 1). In the past five years, enrollment growth has slowed, showing an increase of only 30,737 or 0.5%.

Orange County, on the other hand, grew by 100,911 (25.1%) in the same 15-year period and in the last five years, since the 2002/03 school
year, the enrollment in Orange County’s 28 public schools has decreased by a total of 8,880 students (-1.7%). The neighboring counties of Los Angeles (-5.1%) and San Diego (-0.8%) have also experienced a decline in enrollment over the same five-year period, while Riverside (20.7%) and San Bernardino (5.2%) Counties experienced an increase in enrollment. These last two counties, also known as the Inland Empire, have experienced substantial housing and population growth and many families moved to these counties to purchase housing during the housing market boom that occurred during this five-year period.

ORANGE COUNTY DISTRICT ENROLLMENT

Eighteen of the 28 Orange County school districts have shown decreases in their enrollment over the last five years (Table 1). The elementary school districts have had the largest decreases in enrollment between the 2002/03 and 2007/08 school years. The top three declines were in Cypress (-14.8%), Anaheim City (-13.6%), and La Habra City (-11.0%).

The declining enrollment is not a characteristic of all of the districts in Orange County. There are 10 school districts that have shown moderate increases in student enrollment over the same time period. Tustin Unified (12.9%), Huntington Beach Union (9.4%), and Capistrano Unified (7.8%) have shown the largest percentage increases in student enrollment. The areas that are serviced

### Table 1

|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|----------------|
Elementary (47.0%), and Cypress Elementary (40.1%) have all seen increases of more than 40% in their ELL enrollment over the last five years. Cypress Elementary a notable case in that its ELL enrollment is increasing despite an overall decline in total student enrollment.

Out of the 15 Orange County school districts that have experienced declines in their ELL population, three Orange County school districts (Fullerton Joint Union, Capistrano Unified, and Santa Ana Unified) have experienced a decrease of more than 20%.

PUPIL-TO-TEACHER RATIO
Another service-related measure to look at with changes in student enrollment is the number of students enrolled compared to the number of teachers. This is often referred to as the pupil-(student) to-teacher ratio. This is by these three districts have all had substantial housing unit growth over the last five years.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
One service-related area that has seen more dramatic shifts in enrollment is the percent of English Language Learner (ELL) students. Approximately 28.4% (142,833) of students enrolled in Orange County public schools were ELL students in 2007/08 (Table 2). This is a decrease from the 31.1% share (159,145) reported in the 2002/03 school year. The decline of 10.2% in ELL students is noticeably different from the 1.7% decrease in overall county enrollment.

Thirteen school districts in Orange County showed an increase in the percentage share of ELL students. Saddleback Valley Unified (50.1%), Fountain Valley Elementary (47.0%), and Cypress Elementary (40.1%) have all seen increases of more than 40% in their ELL enrollment over the last five years. Cypress Elementary a notable case in that its ELL enrollment is increasing despite an overall decline in total student enrollment.

Out of the 15 Orange County school districts that have experienced declines in their ELL population, three Orange County school districts (Fullerton Joint Union, Capistrano Unified, and Santa Ana Unified) have experienced a decrease of more than 20%.
calculated by first converting the total number of teachers employed to full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers. Teaching assignments vary so the California Department of Education uses FTE’s when assessing staffing levels. This number is most often different than the total number of teachers employed, especially if there are any teachers who work more or less than full-time. For example, two half-time teachers equal one FTE.

As shown in Table 3, 21 Orange County school districts showed an increase in the pupil-to-teacher ratio between the 2002/03 and 2007/08 school years. This means that in those 21 districts, there were more students for each teacher. The school districts with the largest increases were Brea-Olinda Unified (2.9), Huntington Beach City Elementary School (2.8), and Savannah Elementary (2.6). In the case of Brea-Olinda, there were 2.9 more students for every full-time equivalent teacher in 2007/08 than in the 2002/03 school year.

There were six school districts in Orange County with a decline in the pupil-to-teacher ratio. The three with the largest declines were Fullerton Joint Union (-1.5), Anaheim Elementary (-1.0), and Anaheim Union (-0.8). In the case of Anaheim, there were 1.5 fewer students per full-time equivalent teacher in 2007/08 than in the 2002/03 school year.

CONCLUSION

This recent downward trend is important to document because schools receive funding for each student enrolled and year-to-year funding decreases when enrollment declines. One may expect that with a drop in enrollment there will be fewer students and therefore a lowered demand for services and financing. Often times, minimal student declines can have greater impacts on quality and fulfillment of services, yet continued declines in overall enrollment often result in long-term district budget cuts and reduction of services. There is no singular factor that explains the enrollment decline as a whole. Rather, the demographic trends and historic patterns that demonstrate the continued rise and fall in enrollment, a modest increase in private school enrollment (0.6%) over the same time period, the state of the job and housing markets, as well as individual choices and preferences on living locations may all contribute in part to the current decline.