



THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS OF ORANGE COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

Local schools stand as prominent markers of community identity and quality. Recent public interest in schools has centered around educational finance, student academic achievement, teacher shortages, and the accommodation of growing student numbers. These concerns tend to be narrowly focused on a particular school site or on residents' immediate school district. Many people remain unaware and unconcerned about the larger arrangement of school system organization, region-wide character of our schools, and how conditions vary across districts and schools.

This century opened with nearly 569,500 students enrolled in K-12 settings in Orange County. According to the state's Department of Education, 495,700 of those were in public schools, leaving the remaining 73,800 in private, mostly faith-based schools. Their educational experiences were shaped at 575 public and some 270 privately-operated school sites. With such large numbers comes an inevitably wide range of conditions and challenges.

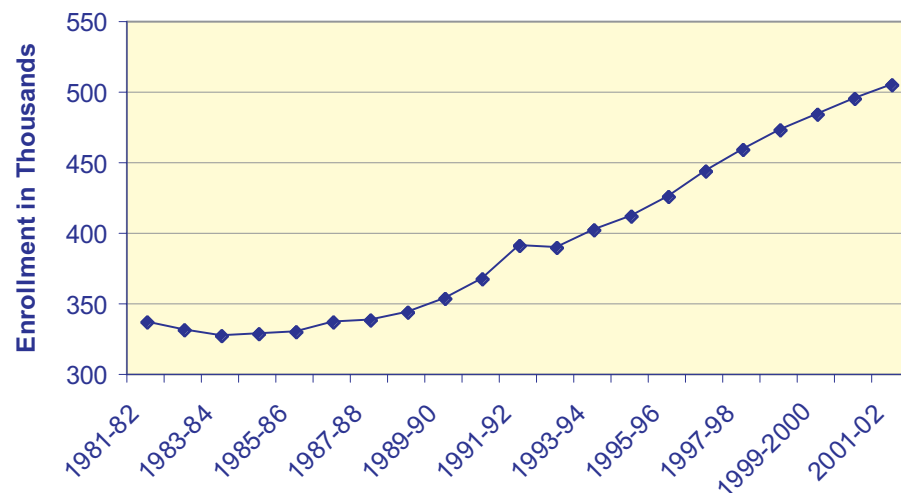
This issue of Profiles examines the structure of public school (K-12) education within Orange County. Key indicators are the types of schools, enrollment levels, recent growth trends, teacher qualifications, and the numbers of students whose first language is/was not English. The data are from the Educational Demographics Unit of the California Department of Education*,

reflecting conditions for the 2001-02 school year. Most indicators are presented at the level of the school district, of which there are 28 operating in the county. [*Note: The Department of Education's statistics are richly detailed and accessible via a user-friendly web site called DataQuest - <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>.]

THE BIG PICTURE

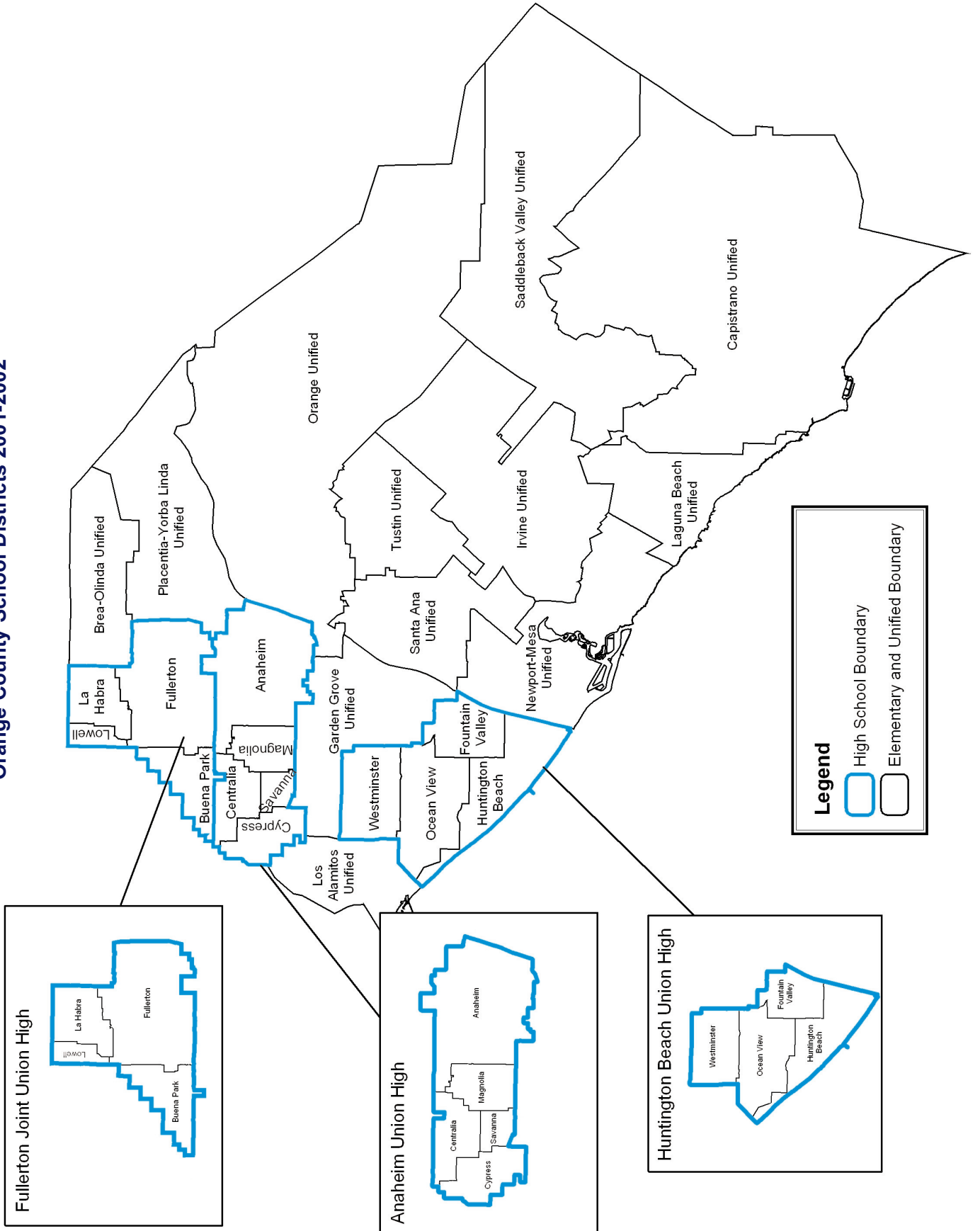
Why examine public school patterns and their diversity in Orange County? The most basic reasons are that schools receive the largest share of state and local funding and represent a major regional growth sector. Growth, however, was not always the case. Throughout much of the 1980s, public school enrollment was relatively stagnant and even declining while the total population continued to expand (Figure 1). In the early 1990s, the tide turned as higher birth rates and the turnover of households that had "aged in place" fueled an enrollment surge. Over the ten years from 1991/92 to 2001/02, the number of public school children in Orange County rose by 114,000, reaching the 504,900 mark. That 29.2% growth rate was almost double the 15.7% increase for the overall population. In the two most recent years, the pace may be slowing but such a pause is not yet evident in all school districts.

Figure 1
Orange County School Enrollment, 1981-2002



Source: Data for 1981-82 thru 1992-93 are from Orange County Progress Report. Subsequent years are from Calif. Department of Education and include three elementary schools from Lowell District in La Habra which are run by a Los Angeles County School District.

Figure 2
Orange County School Districts 2001-2002



THE DISTRICTS AND THE SCHOOLS

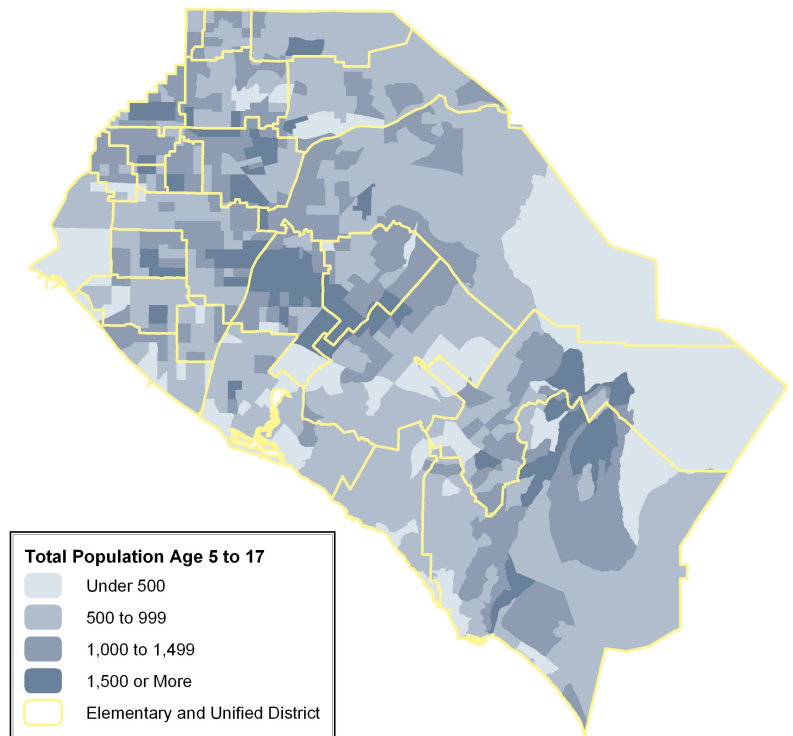
Local public school districts form an overlapping quilt across the landscape with patches of varying size. Administratively, one finds three basic types of districts: elementary, unified, and union high school districts as shown in Figure 2. The 14 elementary districts typically operate K-5 or K-6 school sites, with some also providing "junior high," "intermediate," or "middle schools" that serve two or three grade levels. In no case does a district boundary coincide exactly with municipal boundaries, despite the fact that names of a few may convey such an impression (Anaheim City Elementary and Huntington Beach City Elementary, for example). One also finds twelve unified districts that provide elementary, intermediate, and high school opportunities. Most of those are located in the central, eastern, and southern sections of Orange County. Three anomalous districts are "union high school" arrangements, encompassing four or more elementary districts (insets in Figure 2). The largest of these is the Anaheim Union High School District, which operates eight junior highs and eight standard high schools along with a handful of alternative and continuation school sites.

Variable sizes of school sites, differences in housing styles, neighborhood age, and capacities for on-site expansion, result in an arrangement that is an adaptable-scaled system. The dominant elementary school types are K-5 and K-6, with 128 and 237 schools respectively (as of Fall 2001). More than one district, though, is organized along lower-grade / upper-grade lines. The most notable case of this adaptable scaling can be found in Newport-Mesa Unified, where there are several K-3 schools, grades 3-6 or 4-6 schools, operating near K-5, K-6, or even one K-2 school site.

Similarly, not all high schools are limited to grades 9-12, although that is the predominant range (57 such schools). Four public high schools serve grades 7-12, with the Orange County High School of the Arts being perhaps the best known. One newer public high school, Tesoro in the Capistrano Unified district, is evolving into a 9-12 campus but will not have its first graduating class until 2004.

In total, there were 575 publicly-operated schools in Orange County as of Fall 2001. Elementary schools account for 391 (68%) of those; intermediate schools, 82 (14%);

Figure 3
School Age Children Ages 5 to 17
Orange County, California, 2000



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1.

standard high schools, another 62 (11%); and alternative or continuation schools number 40 (7%). The three largest districts in terms of school sites are Garden Grove Unified, Santa Ana Unified, and Capistrano Unified, respectively.

Figure 3 displays the concentrations of school age youth from the 2000 Census at the census tract level, with school district boundaries overlain in yellow. Virtually every district contains one or more pockets of large student numbers. Heavier concentrations are most evident in Buena Park Elementary, Anaheim City Elementary, southeastern Garden Grove Unified, Santa Ana Unified, and a visible south-county corridor that stretches from Mission Viejo and Rancho Santa Margarita southward to the coast (in the Saddleback Valley or Capistrano Unified districts). Relatively low student densities per census tract characterize much of Newport-Mesa Unified and Los Alamitos Unified.

From the above information it should come as no surprise that the largest school districts are all "unified" operations, covering the full spectrum of grades K-12. The enrollment leaders, in order, are Santa Ana, Garden Grove, and Capistrano (Table 1). Collectively, these three districts educate almost one-third of the public school children in Orange County. Other large districts of 25,000+ students are Saddleback Valley Unified, Orange Unified, Anaheim Union High, and Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified. At the opposite end of the spectrum, serving fewer than 3,000 students each, are Laguna Beach Unified, Savanna Elementary, and Lowell Elementary. This last

**Table 1
Public School Districts in Orange County
Ranked by 2001-2002 Enrollments**

Rank	District	Type	Public School Sites	Enrollment 2001-2002		Cumulative Percent
				Number	Percent	
1	Santa Ana Unified	Unified	54	61,909	12.3%	12.3%
2	Garden Grove Unified	Unified	66	49,809	9.9%	22.1%
3	Capistrano Unified	Unified	49	46,756	9.3%	31.4%
4	Saddleback Valley Unified	Unified	37	35,117	7.0%	38.3%
5	Orange Unified	Unified	42	31,689	6.3%	44.6%
6	Anaheim Union High	High School	21	30,258	6.0%	50.6%
7	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	Unified	30	26,121	5.2%	55.8%
8	Irvine Unified	Unified	34	24,412	4.8%	60.6%
9	Anaheim Elementary	Elem.	23	22,426	4.4%	65.1%
10	Newport-Mesa Unified	Unified	31	21,919	4.3%	69.4%
11	Tustin Unified	Unified	26	17,863	3.5%	72.9%
12	Fullerton Joint Union High	High School	8	15,500	3.1%	76.0%
13	Huntington Beach Union High	High School	8	14,434	2.9%	78.9%
14	Fullerton Elementary	Elem.	19	13,355	2.6%	81.5%
15	Westminster Elementary	Elem.	17	10,050	2.0%	83.5%
16	Ocean View Elementary	Elem.	15	10,015	2.0%	85.5%
17	Los Alamitos Unified	Unified	10	8,973	1.8%	87.3%
18	Orange County Office of Educ. ^(a)	Special	N.A.	8,016	1.6%	88.9%
19	Magnolia Elementary	Elem.	9	7,018	1.4%	90.2%
20	Huntington Beach City Elem.	Elem.	10	6,930	1.4%	91.6%
21	La Habra City Elementary	Elem.	9	6,478	1.3%	92.9%
22	Buena Park Elementary	Elem.	7	6,386	1.3%	94.2%
23	Fountain Valley Elementary	Elem.	11	6,299	1.2%	95.4%
24	Brea-Olinda Unified	Unified	9	6,044	1.2%	96.6%
25	Centralia Elementary	Elem.	9	5,469	1.1%	97.7%
26	Cypress Elementary	Elem.	10	4,900	1.0%	98.7%
27	Laguna Beach Unified	Unified	4	2,649	0.5%	99.2%
28	Savanna Elementary	Elem.	4	2,556	0.5%	99.7%
29	Lowell Elementary ^(b)	Elem.	3	1,561	0.3%	100.0%
Totals:			575	504,912		

N.A. Not applicable.

(a) Office of Education provides "alternative, community home education, correctional education at Juvenile Hall, and programs for special education students."

(b) Lowell district data are for the three Orange County schools only.

Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit.

example, serving just 1,561 students has its administrative headquarters in Whittier, Los Angeles County, but operates three schools located in La Habra.

The concentration of K-12 students in just a few districts is revealing when one observes that the five largest of the 28 districts enroll 45 percent of all Orange County public school students. Sixty-nine percent are served by the ten largest districts; conversely, the smallest 14 districts educate just 16% of the county's students.

ENROLLMENTS: A CLOSER LOOK

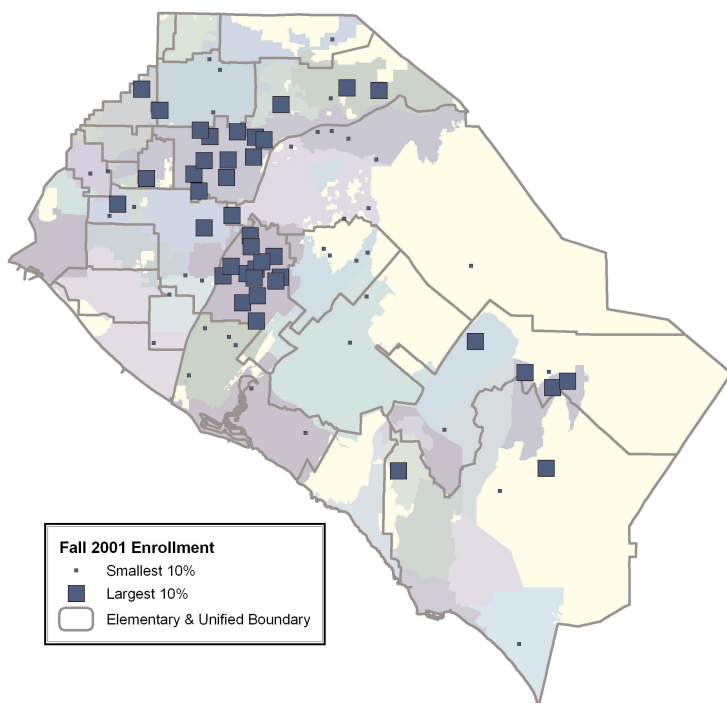
Despite the absence of agreement on the ideal size of a public school, many parents regard smaller elementary schools as indicative of stronger neighborhood control. At the high school level, preferences are for schools that are large enough to offer a diverse curriculum but not so large as to lose their sense of student identity or accountability. The maps included as Figures 4 and 5 respectively show the locations of the largest and smallest elementary schools and high schools displayed according to size categories.

At the elementary level, roughly one-half of all public school students attend schools ranging in size from 450 to 750 students. The average (mean) enrollment is 687, with the medi-

an being 650 students. Smaller elementary sites are most representative of four districts: Cypress, Brea-Olinda, Lowell, and Fountain Valley. Larger elementary schools are prevalent in the Anaheim City Elementary, Santa Ana Unified, and Buena Park Elementary systems, districts where the average school enrollment is in excess of 860 students. Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified has the unenviable distinction as home to the two largest elementary schools in Orange County, Travis Ranch (just under 1,800 students) and Rio Vista (1,510 students as of Fall 2001). In contrast, the smallest elementary sites are all quasi-rural, canyon schools: Silverado, Trabuco, and Olinda, with fewer than 160 students each.

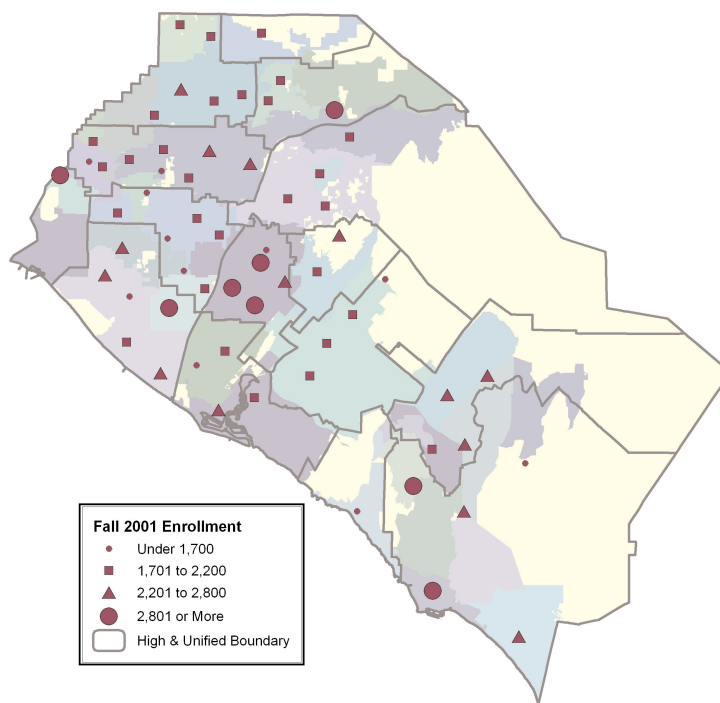
As one would expect, local high schools serve considerably larger student numbers. Their mean enrollment is 2,124 students and the median 2,083. Four-year high schools range in size from the 866 students at Laguna Beach High to nearly 3,840 at Santa Ana High. Seven of the ten largest are located in the Capistrano Unified or Santa Ana Unified districts. Both of these have additional high schools either under construction or on the drawing boards.

Figure 4
Public Elementary Schools
Orange County, Fall 2001



Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit.

Figure 5
Public High Schools
Orange County, Fall 2001



Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit.

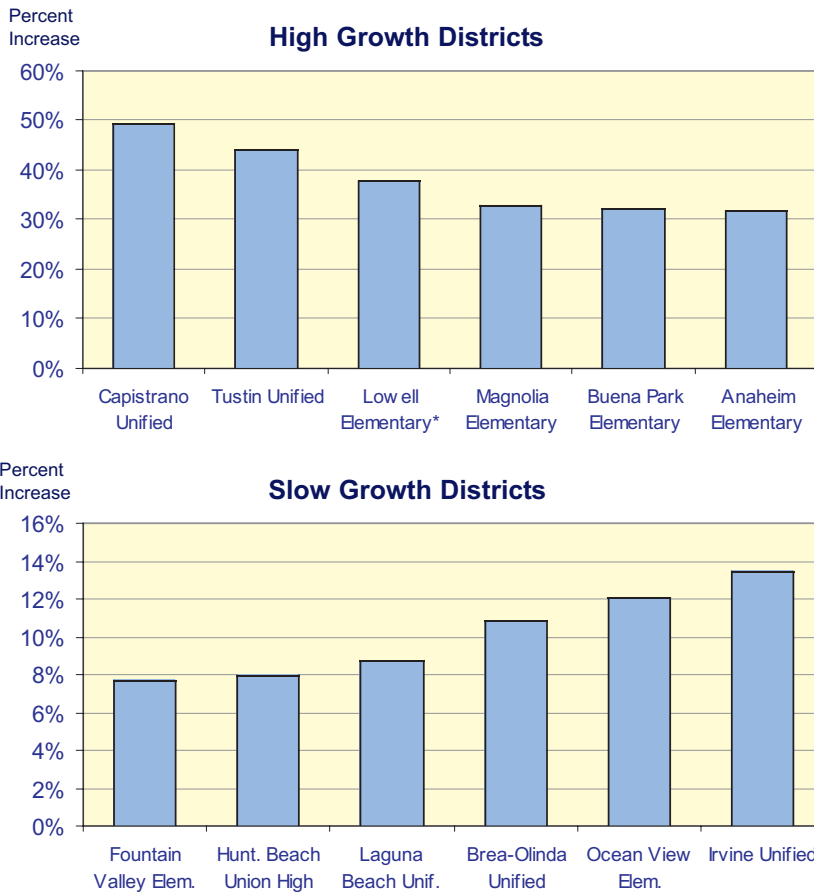
The state's Educational Demographics Unit has compiled grade-level enrollment totals at the scale of individual schools and districts since the mid-1990s. Figure 6 reveals the pattern of high and low growth districts over the latest eight year period for which data are available. In percentage terms, the two fastest growing areas have been Capistrano Unified (up 49.6%) and Tustin Unified (up 44.2%), areas of substantial new housing construction. Other districts with growth rates above 30% include Anaheim, Buena Park, Lowell, and Magnolia elementary in the northwestern corner of the county. Equally vivid from the graph is the relatively slower enrollment change experienced by the Fountain Valley (7.8%) and Laguna Beach (8.7%) districts. Household "thinning out" as families age-in-place and a preponderance of childless households help to explain these two slow growth cases.

The plethora of available indicators regarding student demographics and schools' student performance offers intrigue as well as unending controversy. Alternative school formats (continuation, magnet, and alternative schools) and standardized testing programs are just two topics deserving of their own detailed research studies. Space limitations here though restrict our comments to a brief note on one student indicator, namely language diversity, as revealed by data about "English learners" in the region's public schools.

Approximately 157,000 (31%) of Orange County's public school students have grown up with some language other than English in the home and are deemed lacking in the basic English language skills needed for success in school. Nine out of ten of these "English learners" are taught in either "structured English immersion" (68,700 students) or "mainstream" classes (72,100 students). [Note: See Glossary in Data Quest for detailed definitions.] Just over 9,000 are receiving bilingual education or alternative language instruction, most as a result of parental waiver requests. Three districts, Santa Ana Unified, Garden Grove Unified, and Anaheim City Elementary, account for one-half of all designated English learner students in the county as indicated in Table 2. Other districts with over 5,000 English learners are Anaheim Union High, Orange Unified, Capistrano Unified, Newport-Mesa Unified, and Tustin Unified. Only small numbers of such students reside in the western and southwestern districts of the county.

Though the Department of Education officially lists some 55 languages as native to these students, seven comprise the overwhelming majority of heritage languages. In order, these are Spanish (82.8%), Vietnamese (7.8%), Korean (2.7%), Filipino (0.7%), Farsi or Persian (0.6%), Mandarin (0.6%), and Arabic (0.5%).

**Figure 6
District Growth Rates, 1993/94-2001/02**



*Lowell district data are for the three Orange County schools only.
Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit.

STAFFING VARIATIONS

The half-million K-12 public school students are taught by 23,500 teachers. Of interest are such indicators as educational qualifications, experience, credential status, and salaries. Table 3 summarizes district level conditions on various measures that describe Orange County teachers. Thematic maps portray three of these patterns.

Teacher base salaries fall in the general range from about \$36,650 for starting teachers to \$79,635 for those at the top of their salary scale. One finds greater variability in starting salaries than in the ceilings. Saddleback Valley and Brea-Olinda pay the least to beginning teachers, while Anaheim and Garden Grove districts offer the highest minimums. Salaries for most teachers "top out" between \$75,000 and \$81,500, with the highest being offered in the Buena Park Elementary district.

It would be misleading to suggest a "typical teacher's salary," not because of district wage scale variability, but rather because the vast majority of Orange County's teachers bring several years of experience to their classrooms. The average teacher service for every single district in the county is at least ten years, with a mean of 13.2 years of experience.

That having been said, local opportunities for beginning teachers remain abundant. In the 2001-02 school year, districts reported 1,647 first year and 1,432 second-year classroom teachers. Stated another way, one out of every eight Orange County teachers are in their first or second year of professional practice. The largest number of new hires took place in the Garden Grove (490+), Santa Ana (360+), Orange (315+), and Capistrano Valley (195+) unified districts. Very limited hiring occurred in Laguna Beach, Fountain Valley, and the elementary districts of western Orange County (Figure 7 and Table 3).

In short, the 23,500 public school teachers bring a wealth of experiences to their classrooms where they can mentor a substantial corps of newly-minted instructors. Recent news about budget uncertainties has heightened anxieties and fueled considerable speculation about the prospect of teacher layoffs and lack of hiring. Even though the fiscal constraints are real and serious, we should not overlook the fact that many teachers are approaching retirement age or are planning to embark on second careers, thereby opening the doors for new hires (National Center for Educational Statistics, Digest of Educational Statistics, 2001).

The two final maps (Figures 8 and 9) illustrate teachers' credential status and extent of advanced education beyond the bachelor's degree. Almost 92% of the Orange County public school teachers are fully credentialed by the State of California. In eleven of the districts, the figure exceeds 95%. The districts with the lowest rate of credentialed teachers are Orange Unified (78.5%) and Santa Ana Unified (81.9%), areas plagued by chronic tensions between local school boards, teachers, and voters. Of note is the fact that large numbers of teachers continue their own educations after entering the profession, partly to maintain credential standing but also for general professional development and economic motivations. Almost 40% of teachers possess a master's degree or even more units of advanced education. That ratio tops 50% in Huntington Beach Union High district and Ocean View Elementary, but drops to a mere 10.9% in Garden Grove and 23.6% in Cypress Elementary.

Table 2
Distribution of English Learner Students by District
Orange County, 2001-2002

Rank	District	English Learner Students	Percent of EL Countywide	Cumulative Percent
1	Santa Ana Unified	41,278	26.31%	26.3%
2	Garden Grove Unified	25,864	16.49%	42.8%
3	Anaheim Elementary	13,997	8.92%	51.7%
4	Anaheim Union High	8,696	5.54%	57.3%
5	Orange Unified	7,567	4.82%	62.1%
6	Capistrano Unified	6,465	4.12%	66.2%
7	Newport-Mesa Unified	6,031	3.84%	70.0%
8	Tustin Unified	5,631	3.59%	73.6%
9	Fullerton Joint Union High	4,650	2.96%	76.6%
10	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	4,104	2.62%	79.2%
11	Westminster Elementary	4,083	2.60%	81.8%
12	Fullerton Elementary	4,023	2.56%	84.4%
13	Magnolia Elementary	3,387	2.16%	86.5%
14	Irvine Unified	3,255	2.07%	88.6%
15	Buena Park Elementary	2,898	1.85%	90.5%
16	La Habra City Elementary	2,896	1.85%	92.3%
17	Saddleback Valley Unified	2,585	1.65%	94.0%
18	Ocean View Elementary	2,067	1.32%	95.3%
19	Huntington Beach Union High	1,705	1.09%	96.4%
20	Centralia Elementary	1,430	0.91%	97.3%
21	Savanna Elementary	794	0.51%	97.8%
22	Brea-Olinda Unified	694	0.44%	98.2%
23	Fountain Valley Elementary	631	0.40%	98.6%
24	Orange County Office of Educ. ^(a)	610	0.39%	99.0%
25	Cypress Elementary	607	0.39%	99.4%
26	Huntington Beach City Elem.	487	0.31%	99.7%
27	Los Alamitos Unified	196	0.12%	99.8%
28	Lowell Elementary ^(b)	165	0.11%	99.9%
29	Laguna Beach Unified	94	0.06%	100.0%
Totals:		156,890	100.00%	100.0%

(a) Office of Education provides "alternative, community home education, correctional education at Juvenile Hall, and programs for special education students."

(b) Lowell district data are for the three Orange County schools only.

Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, "English Learner" data base

PROSPECT

Recent months have been marked by considerable stress to Orange County's public schools, due largely to the state's fiscal woes. Anxieties and difficult decisions are certain to persist in the coming months and into the next academic year or two. Even so, the important business of educating the county's next generation of workers, leaders, and well-rounded adults must continue. Remember that during the 1990s, almost 12,750 new students were added to Orange County's public schools each year. The state's Demographic Research Unit projects K-12 school population growth to continue, adding an average of 6,600 more students annually over the coming five-year period. That would translate into about four new elementary schools and one new high school each year. As has been the recent trend, the growth and the

Note: Figures 7-9 display data by Elementary and Unified School District Boundaries
 Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit.

Figure 7
First and Second Year Teachers

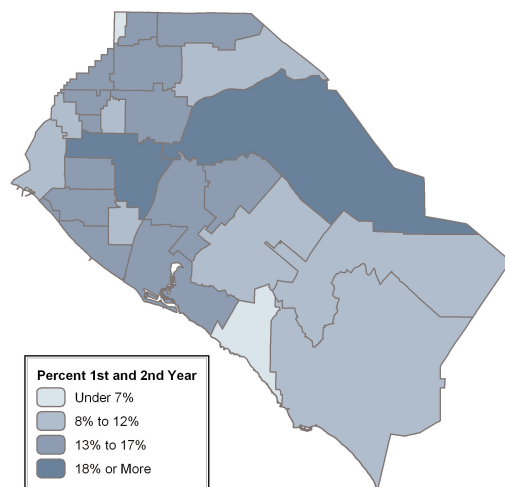


Figure 8
Teachers With Full Credentials

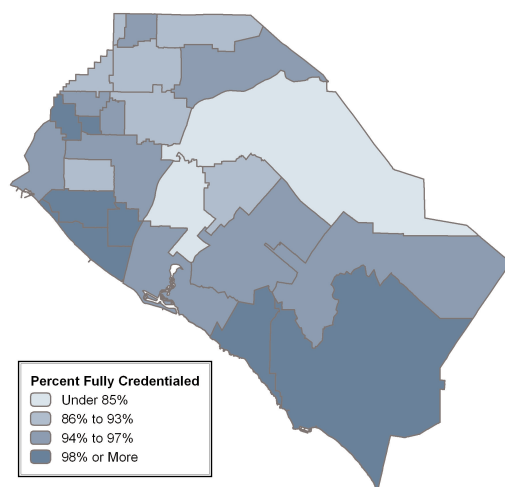
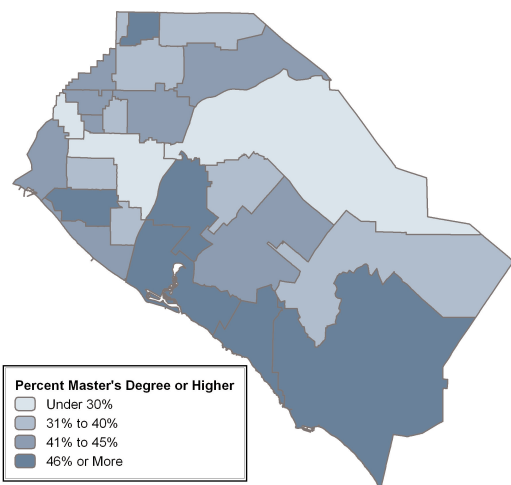


Figure 9
Teachers With a Master's Degree or Higher



**Table 3
Teacher Variations by District
Orange County, California, 2001-2002**

District	Number of Teachers	Minimum Teacher Salaries	Maximum Teacher Salaries	Percent Fully Credentialed	Percent 1st or 2nd Yr. Teachers	Percent With Master's or Above
Anaheim Elementary	1,038	\$40,698	\$81,437	91.1%	14.4%	42.2%
Anaheim Union High	1,227	\$40,346	\$81,227	94.1%	11.8%	37.7%
Brea-Olinda Unified	300	\$32,497	\$75,553	88.0%	12.0%	37.7%
Buena Park Elementary	299	\$37,890	\$83,025	92.0%	13.0%	40.8%
Capistrano Unified	2,164	\$37,000	\$79,725	97.5%	9.1%	45.6%
Centralia Elementary	260	\$34,754	\$78,364	95.4%	16.5%	41.2%
Cypress Elementary	250	\$36,626	\$77,194	99.2%	10.8%	23.6%
Fountain Valley Elementary	293	\$35,175	\$71,329	99.3%	9.2%	33.8%
Fullerton Elementary	622	\$37,155	\$80,012	92.8%	15.9%	39.4%
Fullerton Joint Union High	604	\$38,431	\$81,542	86.1%	11.9%	43.7%
Garden Grove Unified	2,223	\$40,367	\$78,853	93.2%	22.1%	10.9%
Huntington Beach City Elem.	318	\$35,061	\$80,517	98.1%	12.3%	44.3%
Huntington Beach Union High	597	\$37,851	\$80,338	94.5%	9.9%	52.3%
Irvine Unified	1,145	\$34,303	\$77,261	96.6%	8.4%	42.4%
La Habra City Elementary	328	\$37,225	\$80,818	93.6%	14.3%	46.3%
Laguna Beach Unified	125	\$37,302	\$79,544	99.2%	2.4%	46.4%
Los Alamitos Unified	410	\$37,877	\$81,641	96.6%	8.0%	44.6%
Lowell Elementary ^(a)	76	\$33,556	\$72,727	90.8%	6.6%	36.8%
Magnolia Elementary	370	\$36,667	\$81,550	94.9%	9.7%	35.1%
Newport-Mesa Unified	1,100	\$33,620	\$78,808	93.8%	14.0%	48.7%
Ocean View Elementary	511	\$34,000	\$80,480	98.2%	12.9%	52.4%
Orange County Office of Educ. ^(b)	439	N.A.	N.A.	82.2%	10.9%	52.8%
Orange Unified	1,530	\$34,000	\$78,827	78.5%	20.7%	30.3%
Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	1,213	\$33,900	\$78,846	94.6%	11.4%	43.9%
Saddleback Valley Unified	1,715	\$30,000	\$75,541	97.2%	8.5%	38.5%
Santa Ana Unified	2,862	\$37,586	\$77,185	81.9%	12.7%	47.4%
Savanna Elementary	125	N.A.	N.A.	100.0%	16.8%	40.8%
Tustin Unified	825	\$36,559	\$76,157	92.2%	14.5%	39.3%
Westminster Elementary	532	\$34,321	\$81,226	92.7%	13.0%	39.7%
County Totals:	23,501	\$36,647 (Median)	\$79,635 (Median)	91.8%	13.1%	39.4%

N.A.- Not Available.

(a) Lowell district data are for the three Orange County schools only.

(b) Office of Education provides "alternative, community home education, correctional education at Juvenile Hall, and programs for special education students."

Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit; teacher salary data from RAND California: <http://ca.rand.org/stats/education/teachsalfixed.html>

subsequent demand for more classrooms will be unevenly distributed across the various districts and be contingent upon the ability of each to accommodate large student populations at existing school sites. Forecasters anticipate that public school enrollment may peak at just below 545,000 in the 2007-08 academic year. Stabilization and potential shrinkage will rest heavily upon two great unknowns, future birth rates and turnover in existing households.

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