

Back to school: Enrollment falls in state, Rochester since 2000

Schools

Chad Arnold

Albany Bureau USA TODAY NETWORK

ALBANY - Public schools in New York have had a decline in enrollment, despite the state's above-average spending on education, according to a new report.

Empire Center, a fiscally conservative think tank based in Albany, issued the report this week as students return to New

DC- ROC0017932- 01

York's roughly 700 school districts.

The report found enrollment has decreased by 10 percent in the state since 2000, while national rates increased by an average of 7 percent during the same period.

Enrollment rates in New York have fluctuated since peaking at 3.5 million in 1970-71. Following a decline in the 1980s, rates rebounded, reaching 2.9 million in the 1999-2000 school year, according to the report.

Since then, totals have decreased every year, with districts across the state losing 250,000 students in the past 18 years.

Currently, 2.6 million students are enrolled in public schools in New York.

In all, 600 districts saw a decrease in enrollment since 2007.

Cities in upstate and

western New York were among those in decline, but parts of the Hudson Valley grew.

Regions of the state

The Rochester City School District had 3,886 fewer students in 2017 than it did in 2007, a nearly 12 percent decline.

The district enrolled 29,451 in 2017, according to state data. But Yonkers had an 8 percent increase, up to 26,586 last school year, as it grapples with overcrowding and plans for a massive school-rebuilding program.

Arlington, a suburb in Dutchess County, had a decrease of 21 percent, or 2,177, during the same period. The district enrolled 8,144 students last year.

Decreases were found

See **SCHOOLS**, Page **11A**

Back to school: Enrollment falls in state, Rochester since 2000

Schools

Continued from Page 8A

in districts across upstate, including Elmira (17 percent), Binghamton (10 percent), Buffalo (8 percent)

standards is one of the factors requiring a greater investment in public education and actually represents a potential benefit for future employment in retaining graduates to stay employed in the state and not go elsewhere," the state School Board Association in a statement.

Some enrollment grows

and Ithaca (3 percent).

The decline in enrollment numbers wasn't just confined to counties upstate.

Putnam County, an hour north of New York City, saw a decline in all six of its public school districts.

The decline in upstate enrollment followed a similar trend in overall upstate population loss.

Forty-two upstate counties had a combined 93,000 decrease in population between 2010 and 2017, according to U.S. Census data.

Higher spending

Despite falling enrollment rates, New York has continued to spend a higher-than-average amount on education — \$67 billion in 2016 alone when state and federal aid and property-tax revenue are factored in.

New York spent \$22,366 per pupil at its public schools in 2016 — 90 percent above the national average, the U.S. Census Bureau said earlier this year.

School advocates said the money is an important investment amid rising costs for education, such as for health care and pensions.

“The emphasis on higher

The group recognized the declining enrollment numbers, but pointed to an increase in unfunded mandates at both the state and local levels for driving up budget costs.

“In addition, many of the costs borne by schools, such as building repairs, heating/cooling, etc., are fixed and remain despite an enrollment decrease,” the organization said in a statement.

A total of 100 districts, located mostly in New York City, Westchester and Rockland counties, saw an increase in enrollment over the last 10 years, according to the Empire Center report.

Over the last decade, East Ramapo led the region in growth with a 26 percent increase in enrollment, up to 10,627 students last school year.

White Plains and New Rochelle also experienced enrollment growth over the last 10 years, up 8 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

CARNOLD@Gannett.com Chad Arnold is a staff writer with USA TODAY Network's Albany Bureau.