

More Bad Statistics

Either the Department of Education statisticians are fibbing or they need a refresher in math

by Linda Thom

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley announced in August that 1996 school enrollment would eclipse the prior enrollment record set in 1971. His report on the tidal wave of new students is entitled, *The Baby Boom Echo* and in it he states:

Twenty-five years after the baby boom generation set a national record for school enrollment at 51.3 million students, the record is about to be broken. It is fitting that the children of the baby boomers are doing the

record breaking. Demographers call this phenomenon the baby boom echo.

The Secretary also indicated that immigration and high birth rates among minorities partially fueled the enrollment surge.

But the following exercise in looking at the Department's own statistics will show that Secretary Riley's assessment of the nation's over-crowding of schools is clearly wrong. Baby boomer parents are *not* primarily responsible for the rise; it is immigration that accounts for nearly all of it.

During the press conference releasing the report, Secretary Riley had Tom Snyder at his side, a

statistician with the Department of Education. The Department of Education's statistical section, called the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, publishes an annual report called the *Digest of Education Statistics*; this section also compiled the data for *The Baby Boom Echo*. As this article will show, the Department of Education has the data to explain correctly the enrollment spike.

The Arithmetic

Where is enrollment changing? The *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995* answers this question. Table 248 in this compendium is entitled,

	1980	1985	1990	1993	Change 1980-93	Percent of Total
United States	40,878	39,422	41,216	43,353	2,475	100%
California	4,077	4,256	4,951	5,339	1,262	51.0%
Florida	1,510	1,562	1,862	2,042	532	21.5%
Texas	2,900	3,132	3,383	3,580	680	25.5%
Total change for California, Florida and Texas					2,474	100%

"Public Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment, by State: 1980 to 1983." The source for Table 248 data is U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, annual; therefore, the data came from the Department of Education.

Between 1980 and 1993 public school enrollment in the United States increased by 2,475,000 students. Together, increased enrollment in California, Florida and Texas increased by 2,474,000. In 1993, these three states accounted for 24 percent of the nation's population and 99.9 percent of the enrollment increase. In many other

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states enrollment dropped and among those states are: Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. In some other states enrollment also burgeoned: Arizona, Nevada and Utah. What demographic changes might have caused this?

Utah has a very high fertility rate, the highest in the nation. California's is second. So maybe births

ethnic composition of the change. (Calculations by author.)

Enrollment in the United States declined by 2,843,177 students but Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students increased by 2,685,116. Hmm. These numbers come entirely from the annual reports of the U. S. Department of Education. That's Secretary Riley's Department of Education. The same Secretary Riley who said the baby boomers' children caused the "Boom" in enrollment.

Who are the baby boomers? They are the folks who were born in the United States after the end of World War II in 1945. They are overwhelmingly white and black, not Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander. Those additional children in our schools are either immigrants or children of immigrants or a combination of both.

Most Asian and Hispanic women giving birth in the United States are foreign-born. In addition to the *Digest of Education Statistics*, the Department of Education publishes *Youth Indicators*. The 1993 edition has all manner of interesting statistics including birth rates by race and ethnicity. The original source of the birth data is the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Monthly Vital Statistics Reports. Referring to the June 24, 1996, Monthly Vital Statistics Report (Ventura), one finds that 64 percent of Hispanic women giving birth in the nation in 1993 were foreign-born. Ninety-one percent of the Asian women giving birth in 1993 were foreign-born. Moreover, the vital statistics show that the birth rate for Hispanic women is 105.6 births per 1,000 women and the next highest birth rate is for blacks whose birth rate is 76.9, down from 84.9 per 1,000 in 1980.

Annual births in the United States increased between 1985 and 1990. Part of the increase was caused by baby boomers who delayed their births into their late thirties and early forties but the overwhelming surge in births was caused by immigrant women (Ventura). In addition to births, the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986 caused a huge surge in immigrant children in our nation's schools as spouses and children poured into the country to join their relatives who were illegal aliens given an amnesty (Thom).

One might visualize annual births from 1970 to 1990 as a road sloping downward with a speed bump at the bottom of the hill. School enrollment

<u>Year</u>	<u>California ADA</u>	<u>United States ADA</u>
1975	4,366,617	41,269,720
1980	4,014,917	37,703,744
1985	4,245,090	36,523,103
1990	5,065,647	38,426,543
Change	699,030	(-2,843,177)

caused this phenomenon. People are moving out of the Northeast and into the sunny South. Maybe that caused it. Or maybe immigration caused it.

The U.S. Department of Education's *Digests of Education Statistics* tell the story. School enrollment, according to the *Digests*, peaked in

<u>Race\Ethnicity</u>	<u>California</u>	<u>United States</u>
White	(-586,435)	(-5,471,874)
Black	(-991)	(-93,013)
Hispanic	925,884	1,883,848
Asian/Pacific Islander	361,842	801,268
Amer. Indian/Other	(-1,270)	36,594
Change	699,030	(-2,843,177)

1971, declined, and then began increasing again in 1985. California's enrollment began growing between 1980 and 1985, as is shown in Table 2. (Calculations by author.)

Between 1975 and 1990, average daily attendance in California climbed by almost 700,000 students while national average daily attendance, including California, declined by 2.8 million. Who are these children? The *Digests* show the racial and

can be envisioned the same way. Enrollment dropped nationally but then started to rise in 1985. The Department of Education is pointing at the speed bump and telling the American people that this bump at the bottom of the hill was caused by baby boomers' children and this caused the new enrollment record set in 1996. Some of the bump was caused by baby boomers' children but if enrollment trends are envisioned from the top of the hill, 1971, then white and black enrollment declined. It did not increase and, therefore, baby boomers' children are not the cause of the new record set in 1996. Hispanic and Asian children are. They are not the children of baby boomers. They are the children of immigrants.

Conclusion

Do the statisticians at the Department of Education know this? The numbers are certainly available at the Department of Education. Why have the Department of Education statisticians said the new enrollment record was set by baby boomers? There are two alternatives. Either they are fibbing or they need a refresher in arithmetic □

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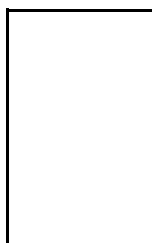
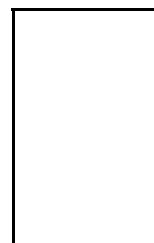
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