

Welcome to our quarterly newsletter, which aims to inform and educate school administrators on the process of performing enrollment projections and other topics related to school demography.

Two years ago, I wrote about the declining enrollment trend in New Jersey. I am revisiting the statewide trend to see if this pattern is changing. At the local level, many districts are still declining. This is leading to many difficult decisions: teacher layoffs, redistricting, and school closures. What people have to remember is that these enrollment trends are cyclical and will change.

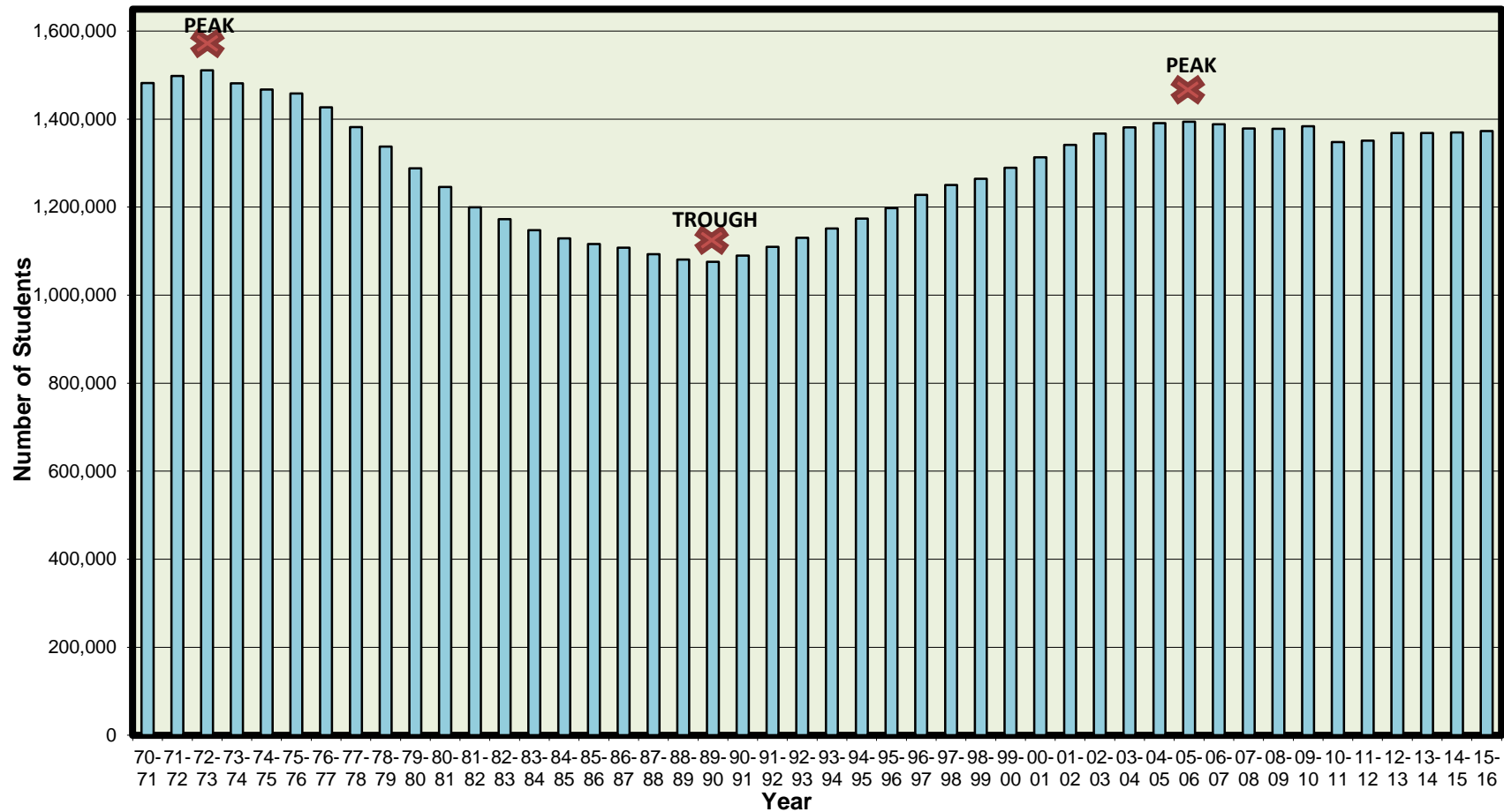
Public school enrollments do not always move lock in step with the overall population, as it is more dependent on age structure of a community. If two towns have exactly the same population but one has a large proportion of persons aged 25-40 while the other is predominantly 50 and over, of course the younger town is likely to have more schoolchildren.

Since 1970, New Jersey has grown from 7.2 million to just under 9 million in 2015. During the same time period, enrollment has ***decreased*** from 1.48 million to 1.37 million. As shown in the figure below, the enrollment pattern is similar to a roller coaster. Enrollment peaked in 1972-73 before declining for 17 years and bottoming out in 1989-90. Enrollment then increased for 16 years, peaking in 2005-06. Since the last peak in 2005-06, enrollment has declined by about 21,000 students but has stabilized in the last five years.

Why have these up and down cycles occurred in the last 45 years? The Baby Boomers (born from 1946 to 1964) led to increasing enrollment, peaking in the early 1970s. The “baby boomette”, which are children of the Boomers, led to increasing enrollment in the 1990s. If historical patterns are any indication, enrollment may decline into the early 2020s and start increasing again when the **grandchildren** of the Boomers are born.

The patterns at the state level are similar to what I am seeing in many of the local districts - it takes about 15-17 years for a peak-to-trough or trough-to-peak to occur. A reversal in the enrollment trend takes a long time, as smaller (or larger) grades move through the system.

**New Jersey Historical Enrollment
1970-71 to 2015-16**



Some of the districts that I have worked with are not representative of the enrollment trends in the state as a whole. It turns out that the districts having the greatest losses are the District Factor Group I and J districts, many of which have been declining for the last 8-10 years. These districts, which are at the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum, are difficult for younger people in their 20s and 30s to move into due to high-priced homes and taxes. Subsequently, they are older communities (40s and 50s) with a sharply declining birth rate. While many of these districts can offset some of the decline due to families moving in from other communities with school-aged children, it has not been enough to stem the enrollment losses.

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