

# Enrollment Trends

*A Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research Report - Fall 1998*  
<http://www.demographers.com>

## Kindergarten Decline Since 1995 in Most California Counties

Between fall 1995 and fall 1997, California public kindergarten enrollments fell by two percent. We should have expected this, because births peaked in 1990 and then declined. But because kindergarten enrollments rose for nearly two decades, some people may be surprised by the turnaround. Between 1990 and 1997, births declined by 14 percent. As a result, we should expect a similar drop in the state's kindergarten enrollments through 2002.

Northern California's kindergarten enrollments dropped by 8 percent between 1995 and 1997.

San Francisco Bay area counties averaged a two percent decrease. At the extremes were Marin County, with virtually no downturn and Sonoma County, with a four percent decline. Take a look at the map on the back of this newsletter to see data for your county.

This doesn't mean that all school districts will experience a drop in kindergarten enrollment, especially those with lots of new housing, many young families moving into older neighborhoods, or ethnic shifts.

## Return of the Teenager



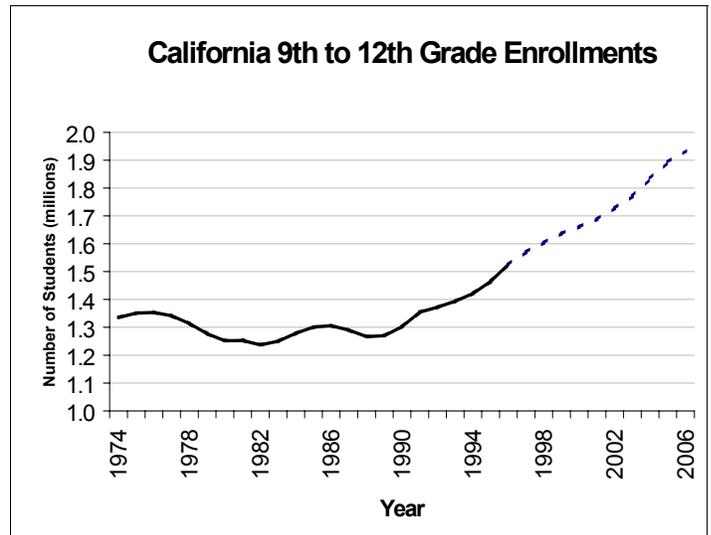
While the youngest students are declining in number, older students are becoming more numerous. This is the result of the decades-long kindergarten enrollment increases.

High schools have been relatively empty for so long that it's hard to believe they will be crowded in the future. But students from bulging elementary schools will soon enter the high schools. Administrators will need to find staff and room for more students than ever before.

California high school enrollments remained stable for more than two decades, at 1.3 to 1.4 million students. Enrollments started to increase in the early 1990s. What's coming, according to state demographers at the California Department of Finance, is a straight-line increase in high school enrollments, to nearly 2 million!

San Francisco Bay Area public high school

enrollments are expected to increase by about 20 percent during the next decade. If your district has much housing growth, the increase should be even



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# How New Neighborhoods Age

Our red-hot economy has activated bulldozers, backhoes, and hammers everywhere. As housing is constructed, new students enter schools. Administrators must determine whether to build portable or permanent facilities, because it is unclear how long enrollments will continue to increase. The number of students to expect from each new home may not be clear, either.

The number of students to expect from a new development depends on many things. These include the type, price, style, and community surrounding the new housing. We looked in detail at one particular neighborhood built in the late 1980s. We found that enrollments changed quickly and substantially over time. We also measured the student yields.

*Columbia*, a relatively isolated Castro Valley subdivision, consists of 542 single family homes built between 1982 and 1988. We used a computer mapping program to track enrollments since 1989.

As expected, many *Columbia* homebuyers had young children. In 1989, there were 250 elementary students in the 564 homes, for an elementary yield of .44 elementary students per home (44 per 100 homes). At first there were relatively few high school students – only 89, for a high school yield of .16. *Columbia* averaged 42 elementary students per grade, but only 22 high schoolers per grade.

The distribution of students by grade reversed during the 1990s. Because even kids age one year at a time (though they might want it to happen faster!), *Columbia*

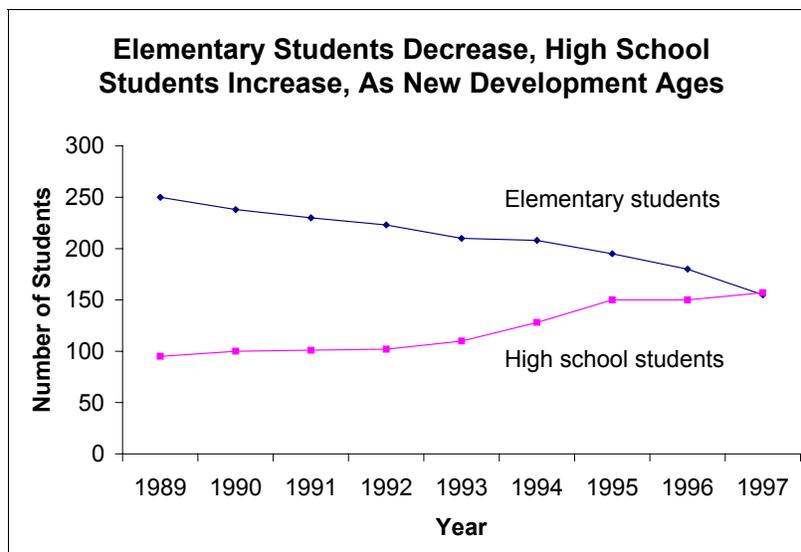
experienced dramatic enrollment changes as young children aged and progressed into higher grades. By 1997, there were as many high



schoolers as elementary students. Since Castro Valley's elementary schools have six grades but the high schools have only four grades, there were more students per high school grade (40) than per elementary grade (27). Interestingly, the total number of students from *Columbia* hasn't changed much over time, but the grade distribution has (see the chart below).

All this happened because original owners stayed put. If housing turnover were high, young families might move in, and there would not be such a dramatic decline in elementary enrollments. Between 1990 and 1997, only 10 percent of *Columbia* houses changed owners. This low turnover rate explains why *Columbia* enrollments changed so dramatically. Neighborhoods with more housing turnover are unlikely to see such strong shifts.

But if original home buyers stick around, as in *Columbia*, public schools should expect the age distribution of students from new housing to shift substantially over time. The ten-year-old Castro Valley homes are



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## Opening a new elementary school in Redwood Shores

# If you build it, will they come?

School administrators typically know when they need a new school: lots of new housing is planned and/or classrooms are already overcrowded at enough schools to warrant a new site. They also may have a good idea of how many current students live in the new school's proposed attendance area. But one, often overlooked, issue is whether the new school will attract *new* students to the district. Will some students formerly sent to private schools switch to the new public school? Will some parents choose to move into a neighborhood because of the new school? Will some parents who took children to school near their place of work decide to enroll them in the neighborhood school?

The opening of Sandpiper Elementary School in the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District was a perfect "experiment" to answer these questions. Sandpiper opened in fall 1997 with classes of kindergartners through third graders.

Sandpiper is located in Redwood Shores, a large development isolated from the rest of the school district. It is located between San Francisco Bay and Bayshore freeway (U.S. Highway 101). Until Sandpiper was opened, there was no neighborhood public school, and students crossed the freeway to attend District schools.

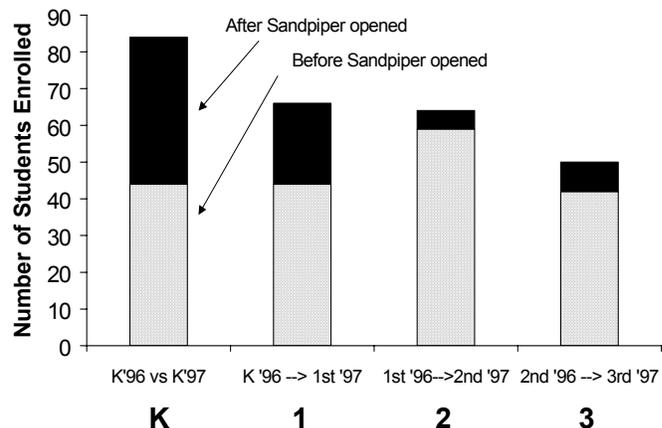
We studied enrollments in Redwood Shores before and after Sandpiper School opened, using our computer mapping software. We found that **kindergarten enrollment in Redwood Shores nearly doubled**—from 44 to 84 students! Also, the fall 1996 kindergarten class grew by 22 students when it progressed to the first grade

in 1997 at Sandpiper. Because parents transfer children from private day care to public schools, we would expect some increase between kindergarten and first grades, but the 50 percent increase was a big surprise.

Although opening Sandpiper evidently increased kindergarten and first grade enrollments, there wasn't much change in the number of students entering Sandpiper as second or third graders. Evidently, parents felt reluctant to switch their children who were already established at another school.

Our conclusion: **Build it, and the *young ones* will come!**

**Enrollments Before and After Sandpiper School Opened**



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## Should you charge developer fees on remodels? (Yes!)

New homes usually hold more students than homes in older neighborhoods. We have found that in some suburban areas, new homes average about .75 kindergarten through twelfth graders per unit (or 75 students in 100 new homes). In contrast, yields in older neighborhoods are often around .40 per unit.

We studied yields in recently remodeled older homes in Palo Alto Unified School District. The remodeled homes had the same student yield as new homes (.77 per unit), and had much higher student yields than other homes in the same neighborhood (.41).

We suspect that remodels have high yields because most remodeling is done by new owners. Like owners of new

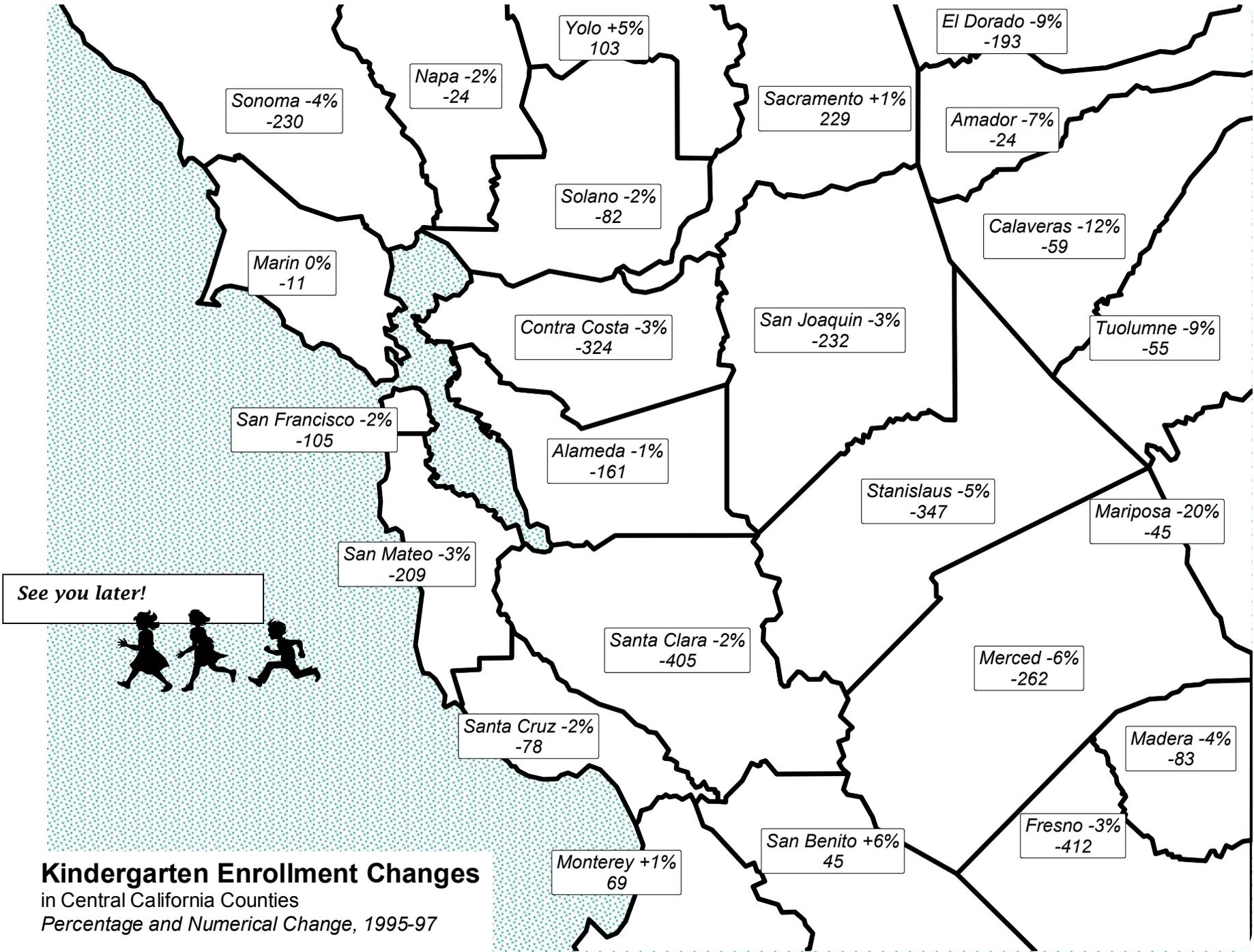
homes, they tend to be people with young children. Therefore, if you want to target households with school-aged children, then you're probably right to charge developer fees on remodels.

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**Kindergarten Enrollment Changes**  
 in Central California Counties  
*Percentage and Numerical Change, 1995-97*