THE NUMBER OF DENTAL SCHOOLS IN THE U.S. steadily increased from the 1950s into the 1980s, reaching a then-peak of 60. A wave of closures occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since 1997, there has been a net gain of 12 dental schools (13 opened and one closed), bringing the current total to 66. Ten of these 13 new schools have opened since 2008.

Source: American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, Survey of Dental Education (various years).

FIRST-YEAR ENROLLMENT decreased during the 1980s, after reaching an all-time high at the time of 6,030 in 1980. Beginning in 1990, first-year enrollment has increased nearly every year. Although much of the surge has been driven by the 13 new dental schools that opened since 1997, they did not contribute to the entire gain; first-year enrollment also increased by more than 800 students at the 53 established dental schools since 2000.

Source: American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, Survey of Dental Education (various years).

APPLICANTS TO DENTAL SCHOOLS between 2000 and 2017 grew at a faster rate (52.8%) than either applicants to medical schools (39.2%) or law schools (24.4% decrease).


FEMALE AND UNDER-REPRESENTED MINORITY (URM) FIRST-YEAR DENTAL STUDENTS The 1980s were a transformative period for dental schools in terms of gender composition and URM first-year students, as the percentage of each nearly doubled. Since 1990, the percentage of female students has increased at a much slower pace, while the percentage of URM students has fluctuated.

Source: American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, Survey of Dental Education (various years).

AVERAGE EDUCATIONAL INDEBTEDNESS of graduating dental students has increased an average of 3.95% annually between 2000 and 2017 after adjusting for inflation.

Source: American Dental Education Association, Survey of Dental School Seniors, 2017 Graduating Class

For more information, visit ADA.org/HPI or contact the Health Policy Institute at hpi@ada.org.