



UNIQUE NEEDS, UNIQUE SOLUTIONS:

CELEBRATING SCHOOL
CHOICE IN COLORADO

September 2024





Colorado has a long, vibrant, and bipartisan history of school choice. Options in education allow the unique needs of individual children to be uniquely met. In this report, you'll meet parents from across the state who enjoy their right to school choice in Colorado. You'll hear from elected officials who celebrate the impact of school choice and plan to keep it strong. And you'll see statistics demonstrating the power of school choice for families who exercise their options to help their children grow, learn, and succeed. School choice is a right that should be celebrated.






SCHOOL CHOICE BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY THE UNDERSERVED



“As a mother of a daughter with special learning needs, it is incredibly important that I have a choice as to the best schools to address her challenges and opportunities. My son is gifted and has different needs. Parental choice in education is necessary so that parents can make the decisions that best suit their children. With parental rights and school choice consistently under attack at the State Capitol, I support enshrining our rights to educational choice in the Colorado Constitution.”

*Rep. Rose Pugliese
State House Minority Leader & Mom in Colorado Springs*



Governor Jared Polis

Governor Jared Polis, born and raised in Colorado, is an entrepreneur, education leader, and public servant.

Since becoming Governor, Polis has achieved free full-day kindergarten, worked with the state legislature and people of Colorado to get universal preschool for all four-year-olds so that future generations will be prepared to succeed when they start school, supported career and college readiness pathways, such as work-based learning and apprenticeship, and worked with Colorado’s Department of Higher Education in establishing the Equity Champions Coalition to break down barriers to success across a much broader spectrum.

Governor Polis is committed to working collaboratively to take bold, innovative action to close the opportunity gap while prioritizing a whole child and family approach from pre-K through college.

For more than three decades, Colorado has led the nation in embracing school choice and providing many different public school options for families.

Colorado was one of the first states in the country to pass a statewide charter school law, and today 16% of students attend charter schools, the second highest proportion in the country. We were also one of the first states to embrace virtual learning choices, and currently have 30,000 students enrolled in online classes.

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“We are one of the only five states in the country that empowers every parent in our state with cross-district and within-district choice.”

Source: edreformnow

U.S. CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS TEND TO BE MORE RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE THAN THOSE IN OTHER TYPES OF SCHOOLS

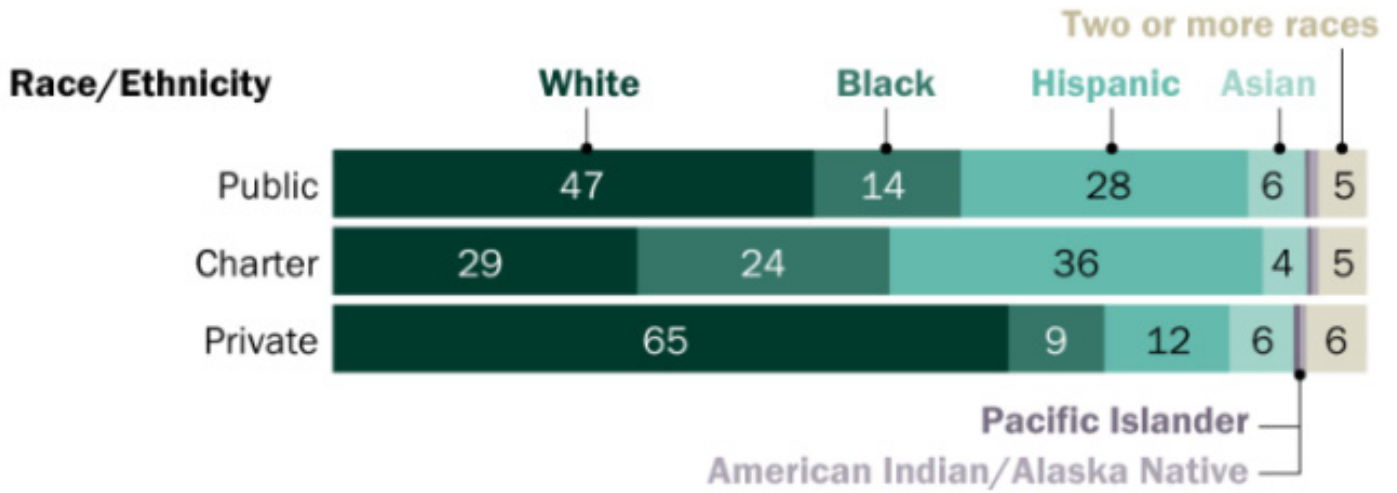


“We are fortunate in Durango to not only have 12 schools in 9-R, but two Charter School Institute schools, several faith-based private schools, and a couple of private schools. This year, our first online school was opened in partnership with Colorado Connections Academy @ Durango, an online platform for students across our state who will thrive in such a setting. Next year, we will celebrate the opening of an elementary strand at Mountain Middle School as well as a new public charter school sponsored by 9- R, The Juniper School. With the city’s growing population, these choices ensure that we will continue to increase our educational capacity and ease our crowded in-town schools. Some in our state and our nation fear school choice as a means of weakening public education. It is clear in Durango that choice has caused healthy competition that is causing all boats to rise.”

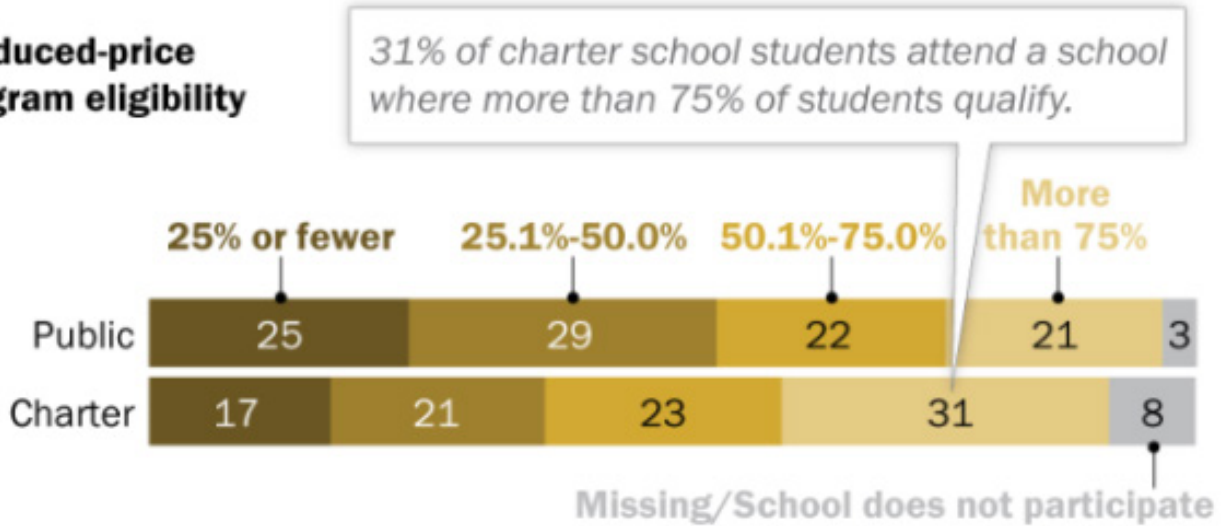
Dan Snowberger, Former Superintendent of Durango School District and Current Superintendent of Elizabeth School District



% of students in each type of school, fall 2021

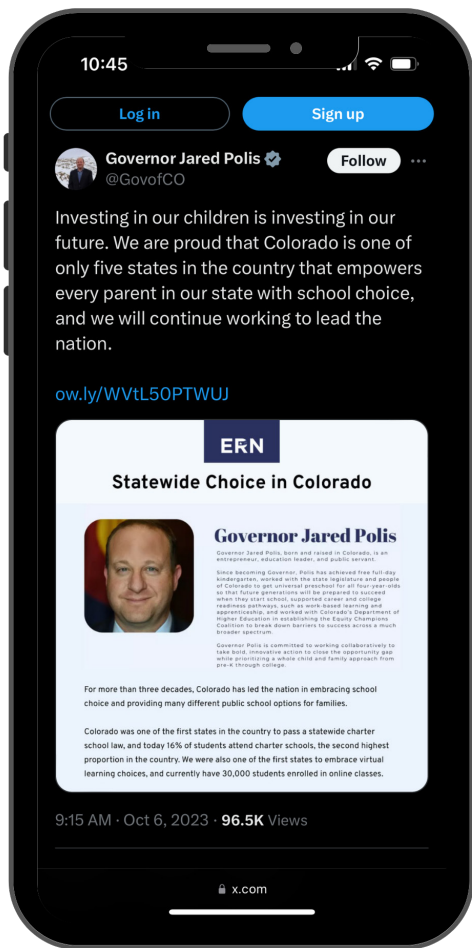


Free or reduced-price lunch program eligibility



Note: To be eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, students' household income must be at or below 130% of the poverty threshold. This data is unavailable for private schools and for public and charter schools in Alaska for the 2021-2022 school year. Race categories are single race and non-hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Race and ethnicity data is not available for prekindergarten students in private schools; percentage distribution in private schools is based on the students for whom race and ethnicity was reported. Figures may not sum to 100% due to the rounding. Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Source: Pew Research Center



Source: X

“School choice fosters significant positive impact by empowering families to select educational environments that best suit their children’s unique needs and learning styles. It also allows healthy competition among schools, encouraging them to improve quality to attract and retain students and staff. Additionally, school choice can help reduce overcrowding in public schools when other options are available. As an educator at a charter school that employs the classical education model, I have firsthand experience with a few benefits of school choice. It has allowed families to find a school that specifically aligns with their children’s giftings, needs, and family values. Secondly, students who are looking for a more tailored education in a trade or STEM field are free to find those programs elsewhere. One of the greatest outcomes is that school choice provides equal access for families of all socioeconomic backgrounds to higher-quality education that might otherwise be unavailable. School choice holistically benefits society by providing a more personalized and effective learning experience, promoting excellence and equity in education.”

Jeremy S. - Public Charter School Teacher in Colorado Springs

Mike Allen: “What’s the most common education mistake made around the country?”

“Assuming that there’s a ‘one-size-fits-all solution’ for improving education outcomes.”

Gov. John Hickenlooper



Source: YouTube, Axio360 Education Townhall, Feb. 2018

SCHOOL CHOICE IS POPULAR AND SUCCESSFUL

New Poll: School Choice Support Soars from 2020

Americans of all parties and backgrounds overwhelmingly support school choice.

According to a new poll from RealClear Opinion Research, which surveyed 1,000 registered voters from June 27-30, 2023, the concept of school choice enjoys overwhelming support (71% vs. 13% opposed). This is true across party lines, with 66% of Democrats, 80% of Republicans, and 69% of Independents saying they support such a policy. Additionally, 70% of Asian, 73% of Black, 71% of Hispanic, and 71% of White voters support school choice.

These results confirm that the school choice bump is here to stay and the political reality to which legislators must respond.

Changes since April 2020 include the following:

Overall support: 64% -> 71% (+7 pp)

Political Parties:

Democratic support: 59% -> 66% (+7 pp)

Republican support: 75% -> 80% (+5 pp)

Independent support: 60% -> 69% (+9 pp)

Race & Ethnicity:

Hispanic: 63% -> 71% (+8 pp)

White: 64% -> 71% (+7 pp)

Black: 68% -> 73% (+5 pp)

Asian: 56% -> 70% (+14 pp)

Source: Federation for Children



Dr. Debora Scheffel, Dean of the School of Education at Colorado Christian University, State Board of Education Member (CD-4)

“Much of my career, and my research work, has focused on special education and meeting the needs of children with developmental challenges. A key to the success of these young people is to develop educational strategies that meet their unique needs. If we believe every child is different, with varying levels of skills and gifts, then we cannot serve them well with an education system that is one-size-fits-all.”

SCHOOL CHOICE IS POPULAR AND INCREASINGLY COMMON

Kids have disappeared from public schools, with most opting for a range of alternatives.

J.D. Tuccille | 1.22.2024 7:00 AM

Source: Reason

“Why would anyone want to trap any child in a failing school? In my community, there is a charter school that has helped hundreds of disadvantaged young people get into college or trades with scholarships! There is another that works with kids who did not do well in traditional school settings (learning challenges, bullying, etc....) Why would you want to take success away from children?”

Marla R., Mom in Pueblo

Governor Hickenlooper Proclaimed Jan 21-27 “Colorado School Choice Week” Joining Leaders Nationwide in Celebrating Opportunity Education -- Colorado schools, communities to hold more than 550 events as part of nation’s largest-ever celebration of school choice

Denver, CO - Jan. 21 - 27 is officially Colorado School Choice Week, thanks to a proclamation from Governor John Hickenlooper. Gov. Hickenlooper joins dozens of other governors and hundreds of city and county leaders nationwide in issuing similar proclamations.

Source: i-70 Scout



“A child’s success is best achieved when their educational experience matches that of their personal learning style. As we celebrate School Choice Week, Let’s keep in mind that nothing is more important to a child’s future than the educational opportunities before them.”

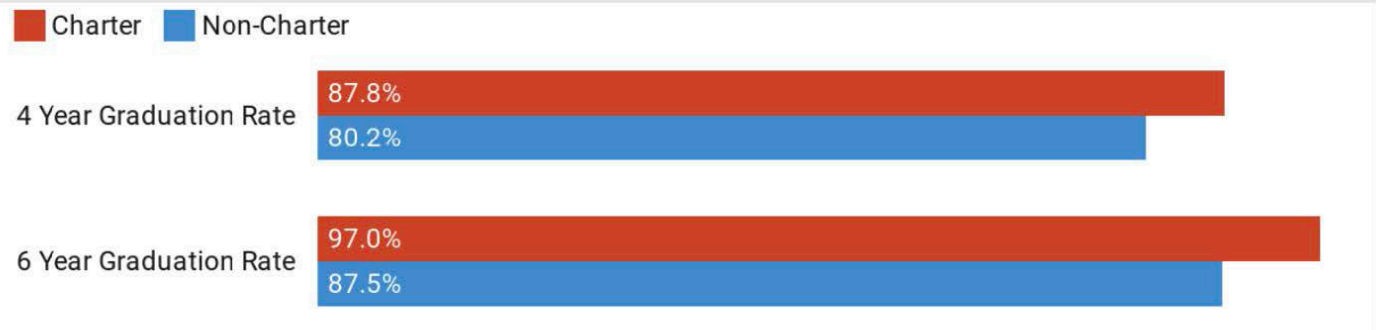
Gov. John Hickenlooper



“School choice has been proven to benefit all Colorado students, especially our low-income, IDD, and minority students. ... Every student, regardless of their race, religion, gender, economic class, etc., across Colorado deserves an education that best fits their needs and that means there must be choice!”

Former State Rep. Tim Geitner – Dad in El Paso County

Graduation Rates for Students of Color at Charter and Non-Charter Schools with over 70% Students of Color



Note: Data obtained from the Colorado Department of Education.

Source: Common Sense Institute



Source: X

“The [Democrats for Education Reform] poll also found that 78 percent of Democrats supported public charter schools as part of a public school choice educational system. (25) According to DEF, the relationship between Democrats and public charter schools might be complicated, but charter school policies have had the support of Democrats and progressives since the policy’s inception.”

Source: Advance Colorado: Protecting Educational Freedom



“I’ve seen how school choice is breaking cycles of poverty. I’ve seen kids leave the school districts that are not serving them and thrive in a school that meets their needs.”

Valeria Gurr – Founder, La Federación Americana para los Niños



CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESS STORY



“With school choice, parents aren’t forced to send their kids to underperforming local schools; they aren’t forced to send their special needs learner to a one-size-fits-all education setting; and they aren’t forced to send their kids to an unsafe environment

if they’ve made the decision at-home or online learning will better prepare that young learner for their next phase of life. As a proud graduate of a core knowledge public charter school, I can provide a first-hand account of how school choice helps prepare a young person to grow and thrive in their educational journey. I spent the first half of my elementary school years in a typical public school setting – kids roamed “open” classrooms where teachers had no control, I was told my poor handwriting didn’t matter because we had computers. A general lack of accountability led to little learning. Fast forward to the second half of elementary school and middle school and I thrived under the structure and academic expectations of the public charter school I attended. The right to school choice changed my life. While the charter school my parents picked for me was the environment I needed to succeed, it wasn’t for everyone and that’s the beauty of school choice: parents are free to make a choice that is best for their child’s unique situation. I believe every child in Colorado deserves an education that is tailored to their needs. Our kids deserve a rich, rewarding education that prepares them for adulthood. And that experience looks different for each and every kid. Some kids need schools that push for high academic achievement, while others need schools that teach according to different learning styles to address learning challenges. Other families see less traditional classroom environments as the best place for their kids to thrive. The important fact is to ensure that families have a wide and diverse set of educational options.”

Curtis Gardner, Aurora City Council Member

GREATER CHOICE IN EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL FOR EVERY FAMILY



“Parents want to be involved in their child’s education and often take advantage of opportunities other than their local neighborhood school. In Durango, it was a fairness issue of distributing tax dollars equally to include charter schools and expanding online choices. In Leadville, it united parents with carpooling and community discussions about what neighboring schools had to offer. In both cases, parents are taking an active role in selecting the school that best fits their child.”

Joyce Rankin, State Board of Education (CD-3)

“Parents are at the forefront of this movement. According to a recent report by The National School Choice Awareness Foundation, **over 70 percent of parents in almost every state support school choice policies.**”

#1

Over 134,000 students attend charters in Colorado. If it were a district, it would be the largest

265

Number of charter schools state-side, spread across 70 different cities and towns

15%

of public school students in Colorado currently attend charter schools

+5%

In Colorado, charter schools serve five percent more English language learners and students of color than the state’s non-charter schools

7

of the top 10 public high schools in 2022 were charter schools (USNWR, 2022)

2ND

strongest charter school law in the country because of its focus on transparency and accountability

Source: Advance Colorado: Protecting Educational Freedom

“Colorado’s charter schools have also found widespread success. **Seven of the top 10 public high schools in Colorado**, according to the 2022 US News & World Report, were charter schools.”

Source: Advance Colorado: Protecting Educational Freedom

“We love school choice! My oldest two benefited from going to Colorado Early Colleges Parker for high school. They both graduated at age 17 with 30 college credits and 67 college credits. My third kiddo will be a senior this year. He took 16 college credits last year with CEC and will be full-time there this coming year. I’m so grateful for the opportunity my kids have to get ahead in a college education while still in high school. We appreciate not just the credits, but the experience they get in navigating college coursework and the difference in responsibility a college class has over a high school class. One of the things that has made our experience so wonderful is our CEC advisor, who we have worked with for 6 years now. He empowers us to 100% pursue the path that we decide is best for each child. We seriously couldn’t be happier with our school choice!”

Kristie B. G. - Mom of 5

“If a school in any neighborhood is terrible, then the parents deserve to have the right to pursue a good quality education for their child by leaving that school for a better one.”

Patrick F., Colorado native

“Instead of removing parent input and inclusion in education, the district should empower families. There’s no doubt we would see our community flourish. We are better together!”

S. N. - Mom in Centennial



“I support school choice because I believe parents are better equipped than government to find the right educational environment for their children. We need to support options in education because all students should have the chance to excel academically in the setting that works for them. Parents should have the choice to do what’s right for their kids.”

Congressman Ken Buck



“A successful classroom is one that takes all of our students, wherever they start, and makes sure that they grow as much as possible in that education.”

Former Sen. Owen Hill

RURAL COMMUNITIES SEE BENEFITS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Source: Public Charters

“We highly value the freedom and control that Colorado’s school choice has given our family. The ability to tailor the environment, instruction, schedule, and curriculum uniquely to our child in a way that best supports his learning style, interests, and current stage of development is of utmost importance to us.”

Stephanie H. - Private & Homeschool Mom in Lafayette

“One thing I appreciate about our experience at a charter school is the down-to-earth families who are a part of it. All of my kids’ friends had jobs at 14-16 years old and most had to buy their own cars. A lot of them played a sport for a local high school, too. The school/work/life balance these kids have is incredible. They didn’t have time to ‘party’ and get in trouble. They had fun together at school and the events the school held, but the goal was to get ahead in life by reducing the time/cost of their college education. This is the goal of the school. The kids who succeed at this school appreciate the opportunity they are being given and work hard to cut up to two years off their education with dual enrollment.”

The Ginsberg Family from Franktown

“Every child deserves an effective, challenging, and motivating education.”

School Choice Week



SCHOOL CHOICE ADDRESSES DIVERSE STUDENT NEEDS BECAUSE ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

“Finding the right school for our son has been a process, and we’ve tried out several types of schools over the years. Now, he’s found a great home at our neighborhood public school. The school leadership has understood and responded to his needs, put him on an effective IEP, and worked with us as parents. For our family, having the ability to try several options, but coming back to our neighborhood school has worked the best. Every family should have the same choice available to them.”

Alyssa V., Mom in Castle Rock

Source: School Choice Awareness

The National School Choice Awareness Foundation’s January 2–4, 2024, survey of 2,595 U.S. parents reveals that in a post-pandemic world, U.S. parents increasingly see school choice as a “new normal.” Among moms and dads across America:



72% considered new schools for their children last year compared to 52% in 2022. That’s a 35% relative increase.



64% of parents saying they wish they had more information about education options for their children.



Only 29% say that the same school type works well for all of their children in their home.

“School choice matters. It empowers families to place their child(ren) in classrooms where they will thrive. Having school choice allowed us to achieve educational success for our child. Public schools could not provide the level of support our child needed to be successful even with an IEP and many levels of specialists from our school districts providing support. We were able to switch to a private school. Unfortunately, the outcome was the same at the private school. We were then able to switch to homeschooling, where we finally found success. Our son is flourishing. Every family deserves the opportunity to provide their children with the school and classroom environment that works best for who their children are and their specific needs.”

Sam M., Mom in Douglas County



BELIEVING IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A DEMOGRAPHIC AND STATE-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT TRENDS

December 11, 2023

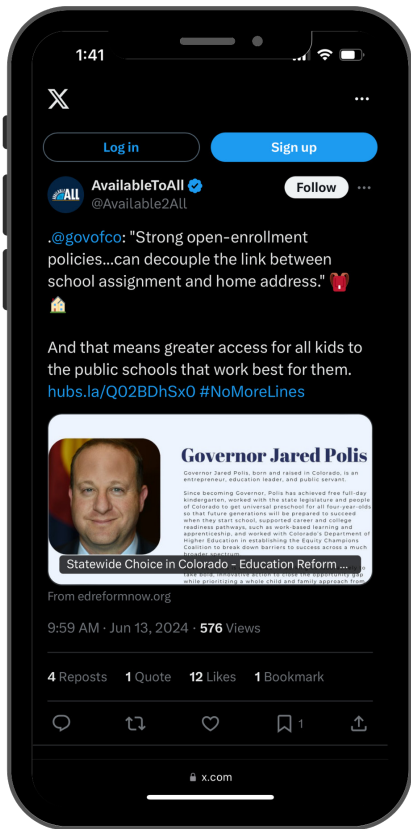
Believing in Public Education: A Demographic and State-level Analysis of Public Charter School and District Public School Enrollment Trends is a new data analysis that examines enrollment trends during the last four school years (2019-2023). Over the last four school years (2019-20 to 2022-23), charter schools have gained more than 300,000 students, an increase of 9%. Meanwhile, district public schools have been unable to recover the 1.5 million students they lost during the pandemic, a 3.5% loss. The report examined data for White, Black, and Hispanic students in 26 of 42 states included in the analysis. All three groups are continuing to choose charter schools—and, in some cases, charter school enrollment growth is even outpacing expected numbers based on population growth trends.

Source: Public Charters

“At various points in time, our children have attended parochial, public charter, and public homeschool enrichment programs. Having multiple options gives us as parents the ability to select the educational environment that best suits each child and is crucial to their academic success.”

Melanie F. - Mom in Erie





“School choice is important. As a parent, I value being central to the decisions around my children’s education. I want to choose a school that is the best fit for my child. I know my child and want a school that will partner with me to help educate my children in a safe and nurturing environment. Every child has different abilities and needs. School choice allows a broader opportunity for me to position my child in a school that enables them to thrive.”

Rachel P. - Private, Charter, & Traditional Public School Mom in Erie

“When my kids were younger, we went from homeschooling to a charter school and were very thankful that we could transition to that...”

Heidi A. – Mom in Fort Collins

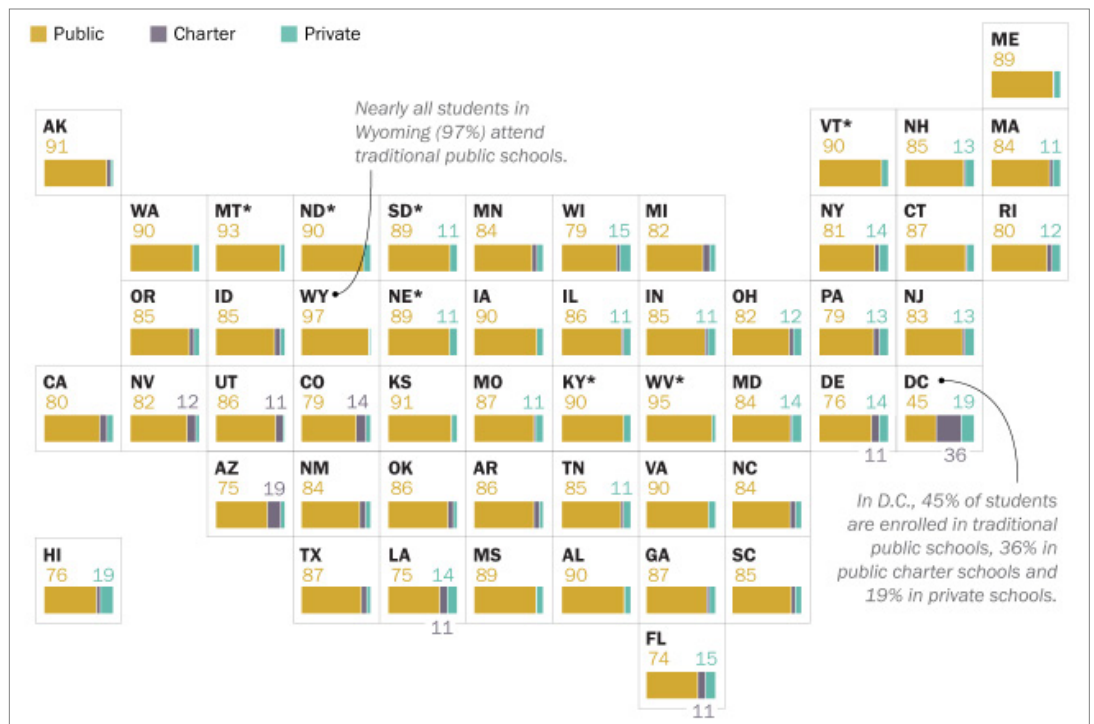
Source: X

U.S. ENROLLMENT IN TRADITIONAL PUBLIC, CHARTER AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS VARIES BY STATE

% of total enrollment in prekindergarten through 12th grade, fall 2021

As of 2021, Colorado has the third highest rate of charter school students in the nation.

**State did not have charter school legislation or reported having no charter schools in 2021. Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Source: National Center for Education Statistics.*



Source: Pew Research Center

“We believe in school choice because we have seen a decline in our neighborhood school. We wanted a better environment for our daughters, so we drive 20 minutes to satisfy that. Our son has different needs than our daughters, so we drive him to a school that has a gifted program. We spend two hours a day in the car because we are able to choose schools that meet our children’s unique qualities. If we didn’t have school choice, I would pull them and exclusively homeschool.”

Sam I., – Mom in Castle Rock

BENNET, SCOTT APPLAUD SENATE PASSAGE OF RESOLUTION TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL WEEK

May 10, 2022

Earlier This Week, The Senators Led a Bipartisan Group of Their Colleagues in Introducing the Resolution

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) and Tim Scott (R-S.C.) applauded U.S. Senate passage of their resolution to celebrate National Charter School Week and commend charter schools for their contribution to education.

“Every student deserves access to high-quality education to help set them up for future success,” said Bennet. “During National Charter Schools Week, we celebrate the educators and school leaders who work day in and day out to make that possible and shape the next generation of leaders.”

“A good education is the foundation for success, and parents are in the best position to determine what school matches their child’s individual educational needs. I have remained a strong proponent of expanding school choice as it improves quality and encourages competition, and I’ll continue to work to maximize parental choice for childhood education in order to provide our children with more opportunities to excel.”

Former Senator Cory Gardner

Source: JustFacts - Vote Smart



BALANCING FAMILY VALUES AND EDUCATION WITH SCHOOL CHOICE

“Last year was our first year at our charter school; we moved our two kids there from their public elementary school. We observed that our public school, despite being in the top district in the state, placed far more emphasis on social and emotional learning than on actual academic advancement, and we saw our bright children being placed on computers to learn and regularly complaining of boredom. In contrast, our charter’s rigorous curriculum has pushed our children to achieve their best and become lovers of learning. The teachers and administrators are passionate and dedicated, and we’ve found them to be well-educated and articulate. We like the traditional, teacher-led methods of instruction, compared to the group learning (and computer learning) we saw used in public school. We’ve seen significant growth in our children’s knowledge and skills, and their national standardized test scores jumped from the beginning of the year to the end. While we know that public schools are right for some families, we are so grateful that we had the opportunity to find a challenging education for our kids.”

Catherine - Mom in Arapahoe County





“A few years ago – the Steamboat Springs School Board implemented a policy after 10 or 12 parents at a board meeting spoke in opposition to the policy – and a *single* district staff member spoke in support of the policy – and we transferred our kids to the South Routt District. South Routt is a rural school district that respects parents, and the ranch kids don’t pretend boys can become girls, or demand to control the language of others to affirm their personal beliefs. Two of our three sons have now graduated from South Routt, and we couldn’t be happier that we had the ability to remove our students from a district that was ignoring and undermining the values of parents in the district.”

Ken M. – Dad in Routt County



Proclamation

WHEREAS, all children in Colorado should have access to the highest-quality education possible; and

WHEREAS, Colorado recognizes the important role that an effective education plays in preparing all students in Colorado to be successful adults; and

WHEREAS, quality education is critically important to the economic vitality of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, Colorado is home to high quality public and nonpublic schools from which parents can choose for their children, in addition to families who educate their children in the home; and

WHEREAS, educational variety not only helps to diversify our economy, but also enhances the vibrancy of our community; and

WHEREAS, Colorado has many high-quality teaching professionals in all types of school settings who are committed to educating our children; and

WHEREAS, School Choice Week is celebrated across the country by millions of students, parents, educators, schools and organizations to raise awareness of the need for effective educational options;

THEREFORE, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, do hereby proclaim the period of time between January 21 and January 27, 2024, as

COLORADO SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

in the State of Colorado.



GIVEN under my hand and the Executive Seal of the State of Colorado, this twenty-first day of January, 2024



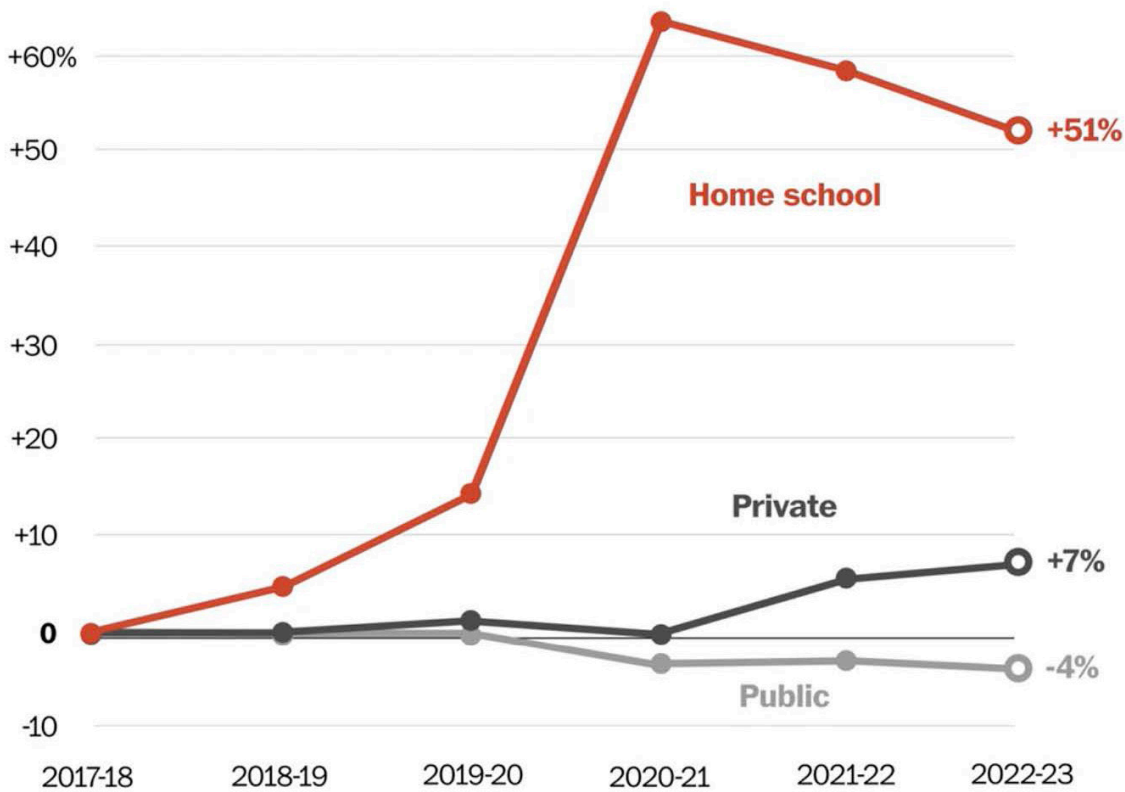
Jared Polis
Governor

Source: School Choice Week

HOME SCHOOLING’S RISE FROM FRINGE TO FASTEST-GROWING FORM OF EDUCATION

A district-by-district look at home schooling’s explosive growth, which a Post analysis finds has far outpaced the rate at private and public schools

By Peter Jamison, Laura Meckler, Prayag Gordy, Clara Ence Morse and Chris Alcantara, Oct. 31



“Homeschooling is now the fastest-growing form of education in the country. In the Centennial State, **homeschooling has seen a 17 percent increase in the last six years.** District 49, a school district on the east side of Colorado Springs, **saw a 280 percent increase in homeschooling in the same time frame.**”

Source: Advance Colorado: Protecting Educational Freedom

“My wife and I started our schooling journey with our family nearly 12 years ago. School choice has been a blessing for us, first because of the ability to customize learning experiences for our three young children. We decided to homeschool our children and include several extracurricular activities, including a co-op with a classical academy in our district. We have found this to be a wonderful balance for us as we become the primary educators in our children’s lives, syncing traditional curriculum with the values most dear to our family. We appreciate the organic partnership with the district as well. Secondly, as we better understand how our children learn and process information, we can take time to adapt the learning experience in a way that’s suitable for each of them. This flexibility relieves pressure and empowers them to take more accountability for their education. Finally, we are blessed by the ability to protect our family time. Being able to choose our schooling methods allows us to bring the education priorities into our everyday life experiences, also making learning application much more relevant.”

Billy C. - Homeschool Father in Colorado Springs

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS HOMESCHOOL GROWTH ACROSS ALL RACE, INCOME CATEGORIES

Table 1 | Percent of Families that Homeschool by Race and Cultural Background

Group	National Center for Education Statistics Surveys					HPS*	Factor Increase Between 2016–2021
	1999	2003	2007	2012	2016	2021	
White	2.0	2.7	3.9	4.5	3.8	20.4	5.4
Black	1.0	1.3	0.8	2.0	1.9	18.3	9.6
Hispanic	1.1	0.7	1.5	2.3	3.5	18.2	5.3
Asian	-	-	-	2.8	1.4	15.1	10.8
Other	1.6	4.9	4.8	3.2	2.7	19.2	7.1

* Note: HPS—Household Pulse Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau.

Source: HSLDA

“Both my husband and I were homeschooled. We love the fact that we have the opportunity to choose what we do for our kids! We choose to homeschool.”

Janelle R. - Mom in Pueblo



“School choice is important because it allows each family to choose what schools are the best fit for their children. Parents, not the government, know their children the best and they should decide the school that will best educate their children.”

Source: Advance Colorado: Protecting Educational Freedom

“In the end, our education system, good teachers and Colorado children are the winners. There is no time like the launch of a new governor’s term to take on the bigger issues. And the test of leadership is always mustering the courage to leave the comfort zone of one’s political base and set out to achieve goals that are important and necessary. I know I had to occasionally make that same choice on various issues, and Gov. Hickenlooper can and should do so on education reform.”

Gov. Bill Owens, advice to Gov. Hickenlooper





The growth of school choice has been celebrated in Colorado for decades. It's a commonsense solution for families who want the best for their children – and that includes all of us. A variety of educational options ensure that every kid gets the greatest opportunity to succeed. Our children are our future, and school choice ensures that our future is bright!

