

Charter School Enrollment

From school year 1999–2000 to 2011–12, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 0.3 million to 2.1 million students. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 0.7 to 4.2 percent.

A *public charter school* is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state or jurisdiction. The charter exempts the school from certain state or local rules and regulations. In return for flexibility and autonomy, the charter school must meet the accountability standards stated in its charter. A school's charter is reviewed periodically (typically every 3 to 5 years) by the group or jurisdiction that granted it and can be revoked if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the standards are not met.¹ The first law allowing the establishment of charter

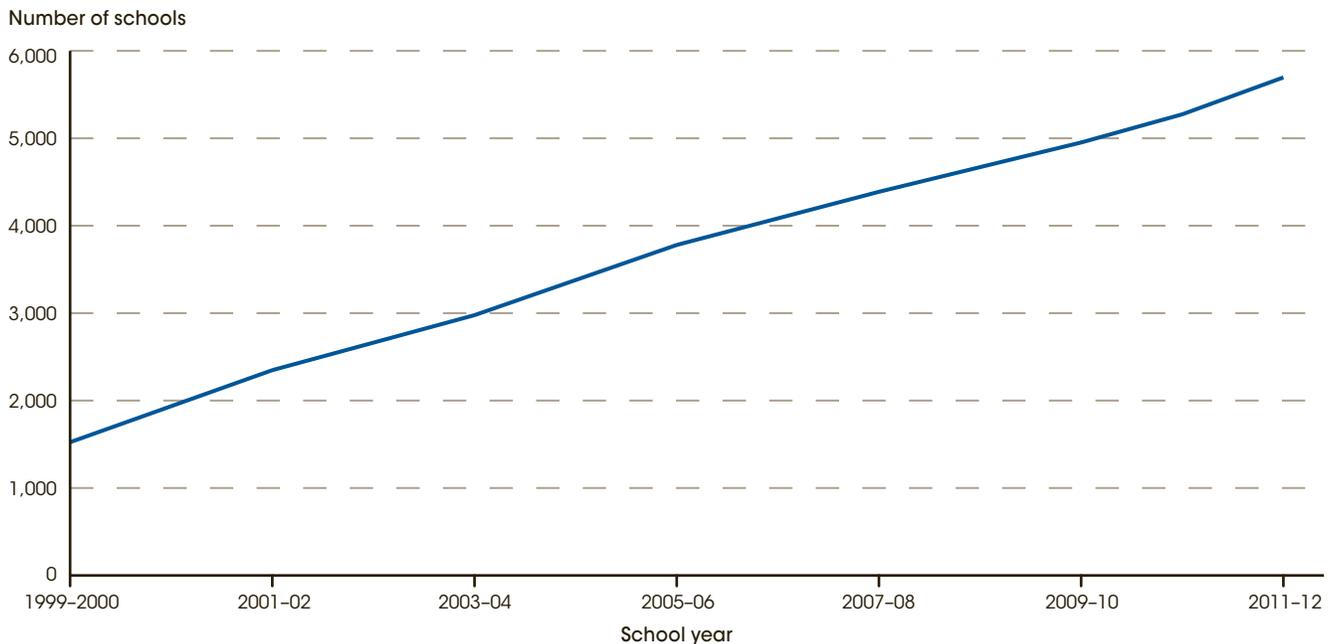
¹Berman, P., Ericson, J., Kamprath, N., Nelson, B., Perry, R., Silverman, D., and Solomon, D. (2000). *The State of Charter Schools 2000*. National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991.² Charter school legislation had been passed in 42 states and the District of Columbia as of school year 2011–12. Despite legislative approval in Maine and Washington, no charter schools were operational in these states in 2011–12. Charter school legislation has not been passed in the following states: Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.³

²Adelman, N., Anderson, L., Cotton, L., Donnelly, M., Finnigan, K., and Price, T. (2004). *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary. Washington, DC: Policy and Program Studies Service.

³The Center for Education Reform. (2013). *The Last Eight States without Charter School Laws*. Retrieved December 4, 2013, from <http://www.edreform.com/2013/01/the-last-eight-states-without-charter-school-laws/>.

Figure 1. Number of U.S. public charter schools: Selected school years, 1999–2000 through 2011–12



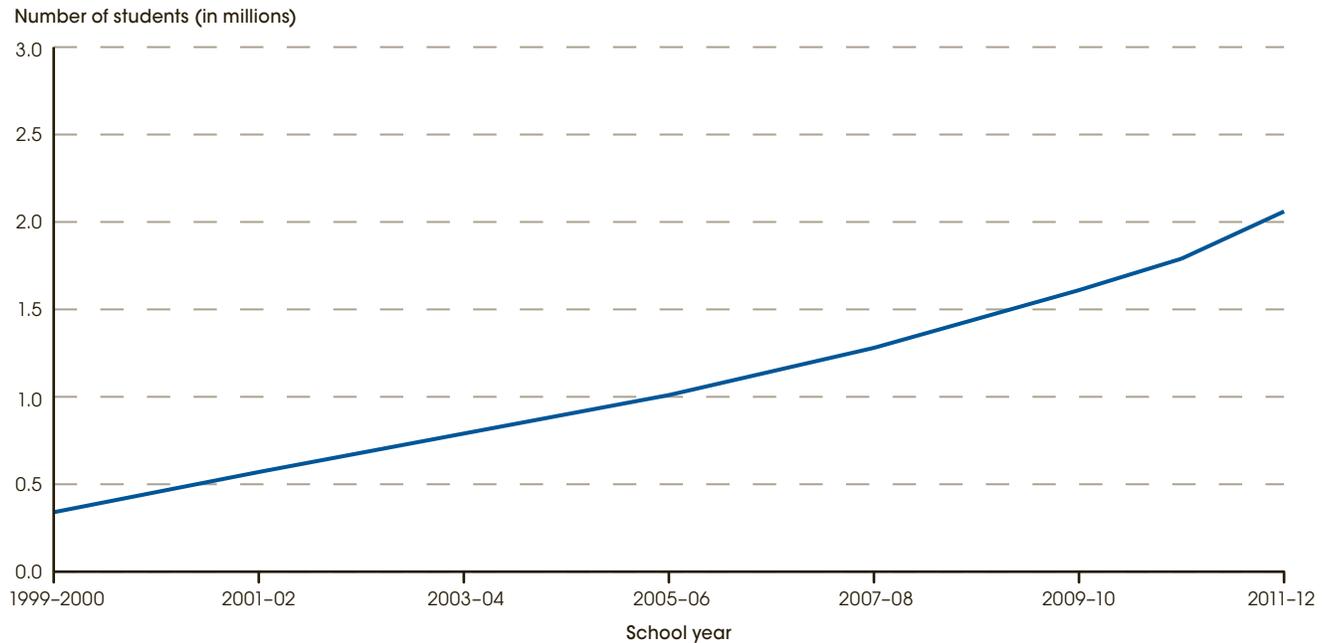
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 1999–2000 through 2011–12. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 216.30.

For more information, see the Reader's Guide and the Guide to Sources.

From school year 1999–2000 to 2011–12, the percentage of all public schools that were public charter schools increased from 1.7 to 5.8 percent, and the total number of public charter schools increased from 1,500 to 5,700. In addition to increasing in number, charter schools have generally increased in enrollment size over time.

For instance, the percentages of charter schools with the largest enrollment sizes (500–900 students and 1,000 or more students) increased from 1999–2000 to 2011–12, and the percentage of charter schools with the smallest enrollment size (under 300 students) decreased from 77 to 56 percent.

Figure 2. Number of students enrolled in U.S. public charter schools: Selected school years, 1999–2000 through 2011–12

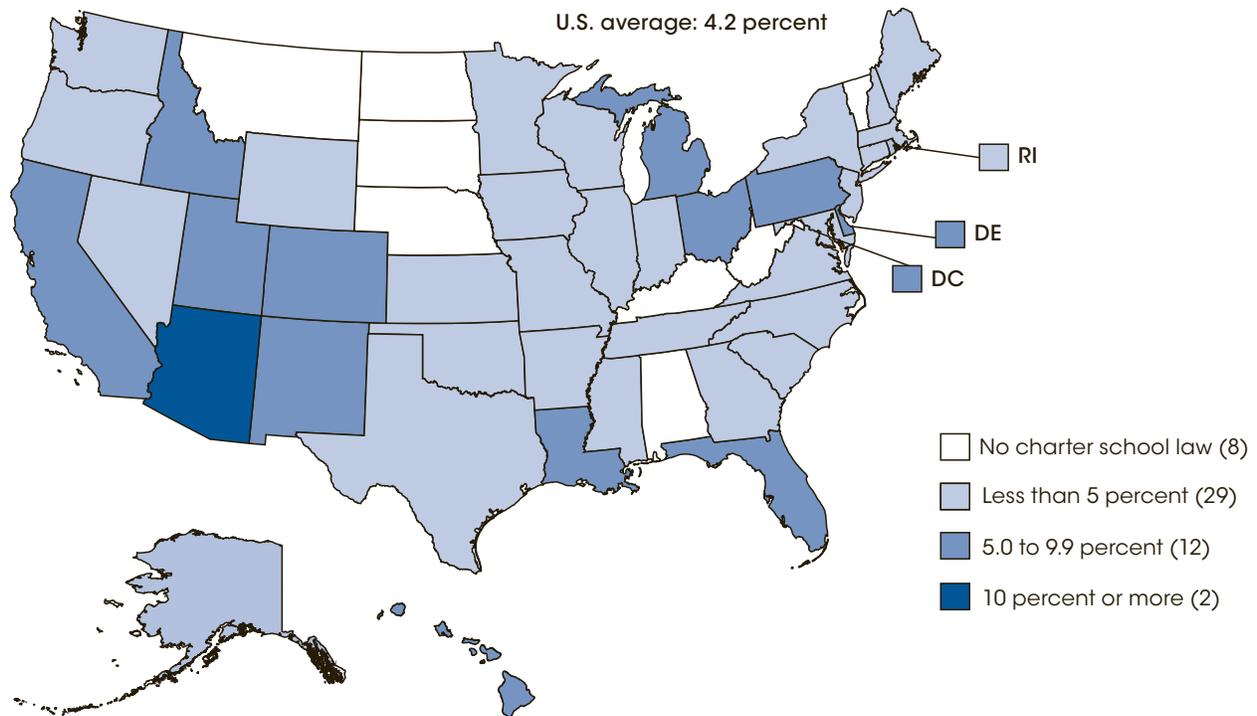


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 1999–2000 through 2011–12. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 216.30.

From school year 1999–2000 to 2011–12, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 0.3 million to 2.1 million students. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended

charter schools increased from 0.7 to 4.2 percent. Between school years 2010–11 and 2011–12, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 1.8 million to 2.1 million.

Figure 3. Percentage of all public school students enrolled in charter schools, by state or jurisdiction: School year 2011–12

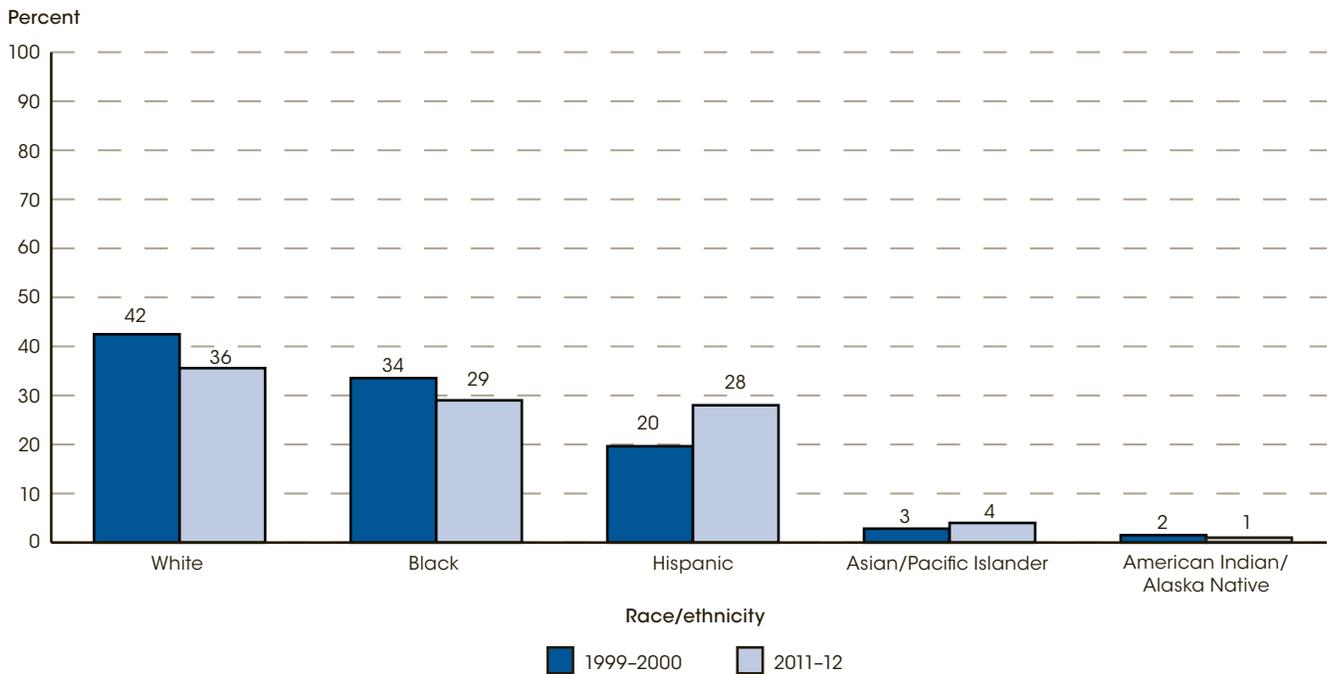


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2011–12. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 216.90.

In school year 2011–12, among all states California enrolled the largest number of students in charter schools (413,000, representing 7 percent of total public school students in the state), and the District of Columbia enrolled the highest percentage of public school students

in charter schools (39 percent, representing 29,000 students). After the District of Columbia, Arizona had the second highest percentage (13 percent) of charter school enrollment as a percent of total public school enrollment.

Figure 4. Percentage of students enrolled in U.S. public charter schools, by race/ethnicity: School years, 1999–2000 and 2011–12



NOTE: Estimates for the “two or more races” category are not presented in the figure because data for this category were not available prior to 2009–10. In 2011–12, some 3 percent of students were of two or more races and are not presented in the graphic; therefore, the percentages for this year will not equal 100 percent.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 1999–2000 and 2011–12. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 216.30.

From school year 1999–2000 to 2011–12, charter schools experienced changes in their demographic composition similar to those seen at traditional public schools. The percentages of charter school students who were Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander increased (from 20 to 28 percent and from 3 to 4 percent, respectively). In contrast, the percentage of charter school students who were White decreased from 42 to 36 percent, and the percentages who were Black and American Indian/Alaska Native decreased as well. For example, the percentage of charter school students who were Black decreased from 34 to 29 percent. Data were collected for charter school students of two or more races beginning in 2009–10. Students of two or more races accounted for 3 percent of the charter school population in 2011–12.

The percentage of students attending high-poverty charter schools—schools in which more than 75 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)—increased from 14 percent in school year 1999–2000 to 31 percent in school year 2011–12. Over the same period, the percentages of students attending charter schools with lower percentages of students qualifying for FRPL decreased. For instance, the percentage of students attending low-poverty charter schools, schools in which 25 percent or less of students qualify for FRPL, decreased from 37 percent in 1999–2000 to 22 percent in 2011–12.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, tables 216.30 and 216.90

Glossary: Charter school, Combined school, Elementary school, Free or reduced-price lunch, National School Lunch Program, Secondary school, Student membership, Traditional public school