

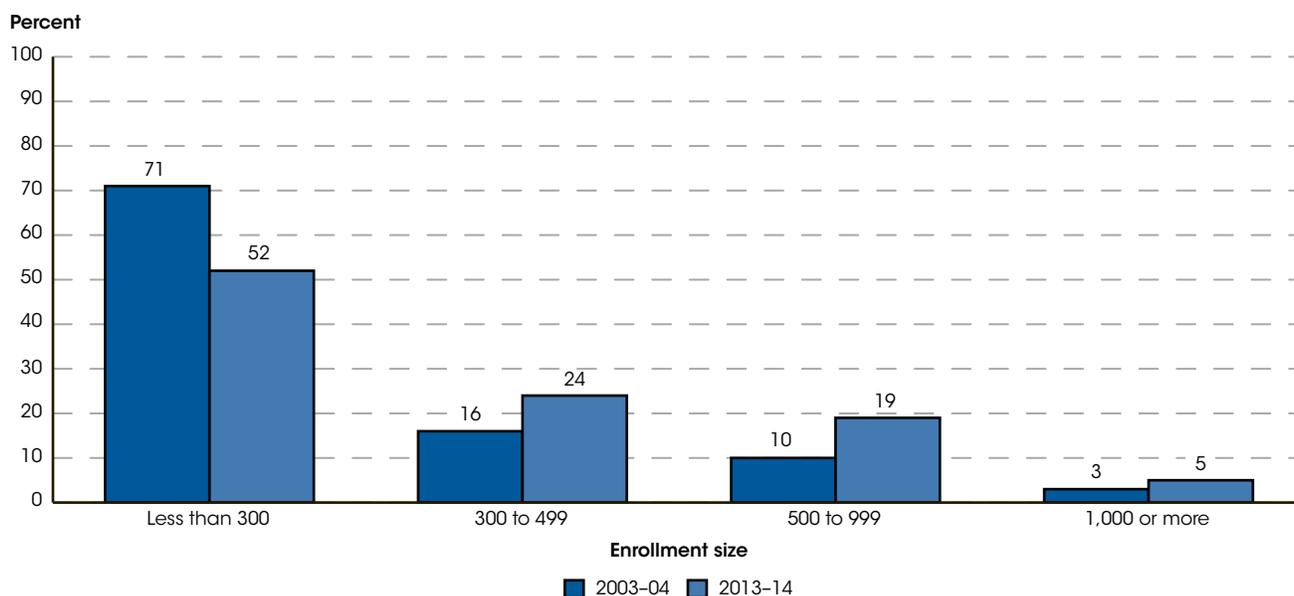
Charter School Enrollment

Between school years 2003–04 and 2013–14, overall public charter school enrollment increased from 0.8 million to 2.5 million. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 1.6 to 5.1 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 outlined 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 accountability standards are not met.¹

The first law allowing the establishment of charter schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991.² As of school year 2013–14, charter school legislation had been passed in 42 states and the District of Columbia.³ The states in which charter school legislation had not been passed by that year were Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia. Despite legislative approval for charter schools in Mississippi and Washington, none were operating in these states in 2013–14.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public charter schools, by enrollment size: School years 2003–04 and 2013–14

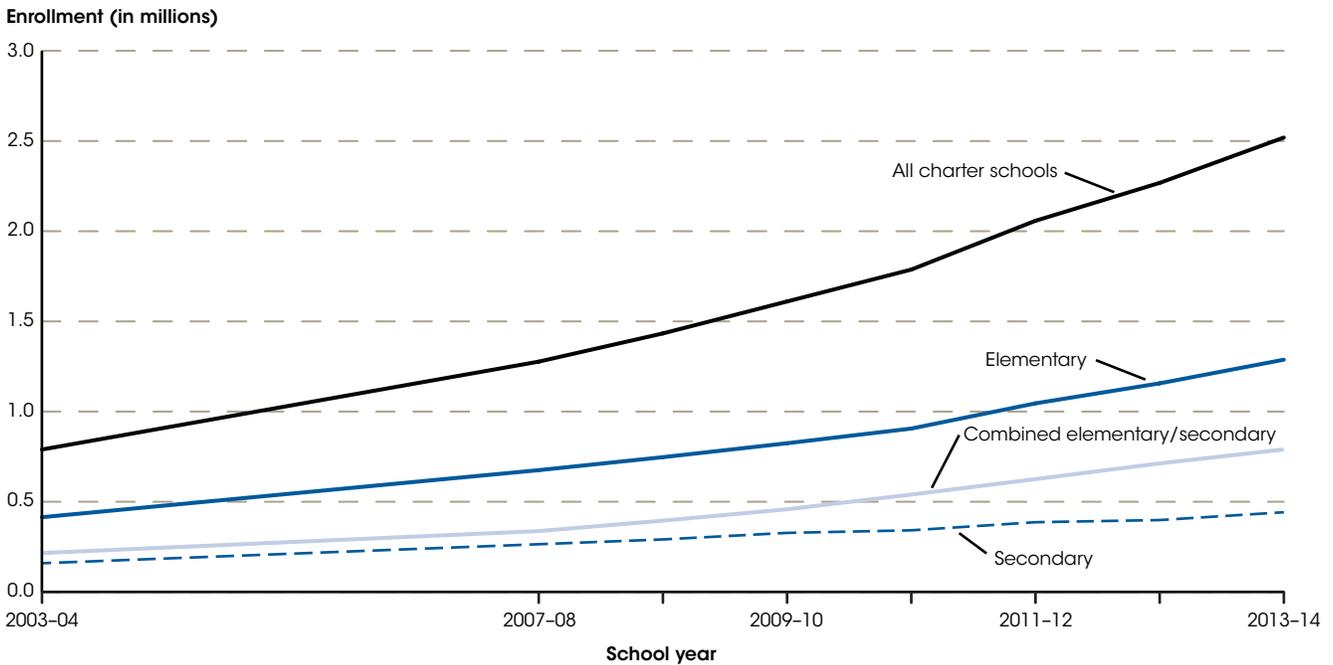


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 2003–04 and 2013–14. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 216.30.

Between school years 2003–04 and 2013–14, the percentage of all public schools that were public charter schools increased from 3.1 to 6.6 percent, and the total number of public charter schools increased from 3,000 to 6,500. In addition to increasing in number, charter schools have generally increased in enrollment

size over the last decade. From 2003–04 to 2013–14, the percentages of charter schools with 300–499, 500–999, and 1,000 or more students each increased, while the percentage of charter schools with fewer than 300 students decreased. Similar patterns were observed from 2012–13 to 2013–14.

Figure 2. Charter school enrollment, by school level: Selected school years, 2003–04 through 2013–14

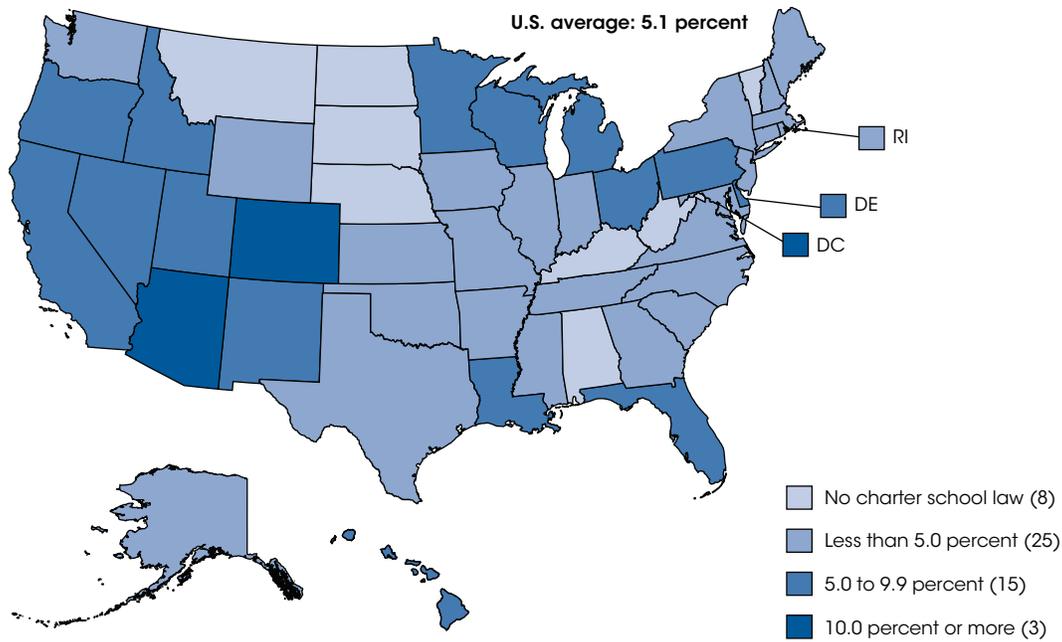


NOTE: "Elementary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and with no grade higher than 8. "Secondary" includes schools with no grade lower than 7. "Combined elementary/secondary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and ending with grade 9 or above. Other schools not classified by grade span are included in the "All charter schools" count but are not presented separately in the figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," selected school years, 2003–04 through 2013–14. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 216.20.

The number of students enrolled in public charter schools between school years 2003–04 and 2013–14 increased from 0.8 million to 2.5 million. During that period, larger numbers of charter school students were enrolled in elementary schools than in any of the following types of charter schools: secondary, combined, and other types that were not classified by grade span. The percentage of public school students who attended charter schools

increased from 1.6 to 5.1 percent during this period, following an increase of 1.7 million in the number of charter school students and a decrease of 0.4 million in the number of traditional public school students (see the [Public School Enrollment](#) indicator). Between 2012–13 and 2013–14, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 2.3 million to 2.5 million.

Figure 3. Percentage of all public school students enrolled in public charter schools, by state: School year 2013–14



NOTE: Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.

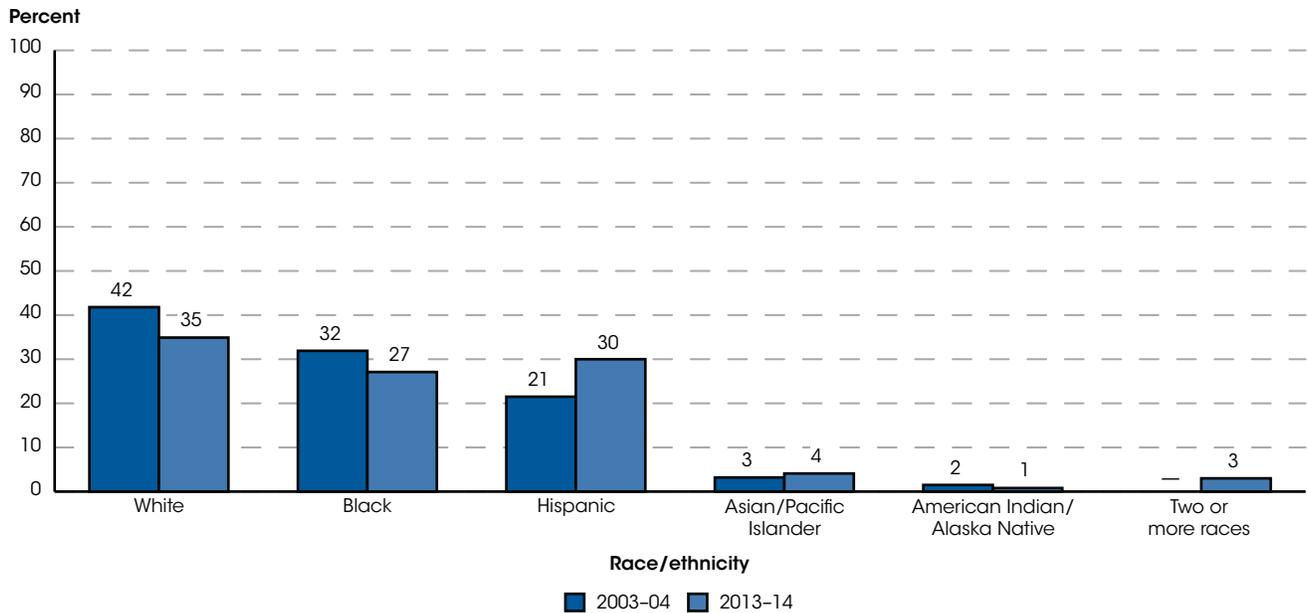
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2013–14. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 216.90.

In school year 2013–14, California had the largest number of students enrolled in charter schools (513,400, representing 8 percent of total public school students in the state), and the District of Columbia had the highest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools (42 percent, representing 33,200 students). After the District of Columbia, Arizona had the next highest percentage (18 percent) of charter school enrollment as a percentage of total public school enrollment.

Between school years 2003–04 and 2013–14, charter schools experienced changes in their demographic composition similar to those seen at traditional public

schools. The percentage of charter school students who were Hispanic increased (from 21 to 30 percent), as did the percentage who were Asian/Pacific Islander (from 3 to 4 percent). In contrast, the percentage of charter school students who were White decreased from 42 to 35 percent. The percentages decreased for Black (from 32 to 27 percent) and American Indian/Alaska Native (from 2 to 1 percent) charter school students, as well. 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 2013–14.

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of public charter school students, by race/ethnicity: School years 2003–04 and 2013–14



— Not available.

NOTE: Data for the “Two or more races” category were not available prior to 2009–10. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 2003–04 and 2013–14. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 216.30.

In school year 2013–14, the percentage of students attending high-poverty schools—schools in which more than 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program—was higher for charter school students

(37 percent) than for traditional public school students (24 percent). In the same year, 20 percent each of charter school students and of traditional public school students attended low-poverty schools, those in which 25 percent or less of students qualify for FRPL.

Endnotes:

¹ Nelson, B., Berman, P., Ericson, J., Kamprath, N., 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. Retrieved September 30, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED437724.pdf>.

² Finnigan, K., Adelman, N., Anderson, L., Cotton, L., Donnelly, M., 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. Retrieved September 30, 2015, from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/finalreport.pdf>.

³ The Center for Education Reform. (2015). *Choice and Charter Schools: Charter School Law*. Retrieved September 22, 2015, from www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/laws-legislation.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, tables 216.20, 216.30, and 216.90

Related indicators: Characteristics of Traditional Public and Public Charter Schools

Glossary: Charter school, Combined school, Elementary school, Enrollment, Free or reduced-price lunch, National School Lunch Program, Public school or institution, Racial/ethnic group, Secondary school, Student membership, Traditional public school