

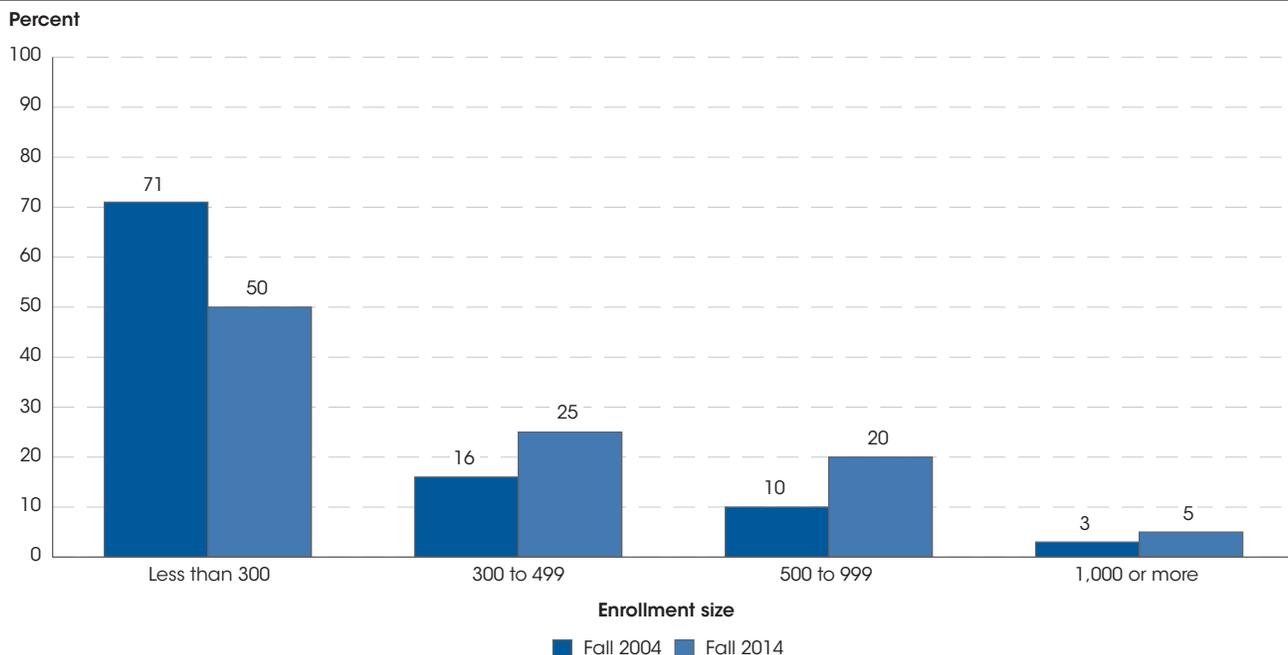
## Public Charter School Enrollment

Between fall 2004 and fall 2014, overall public charter school enrollment increased from 0.9 million to 2.7 million. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 2 to 5 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, district, or other entity. 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 by the entity that granted it and can be revoked if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the accountability standards are not met.<sup>1</sup>

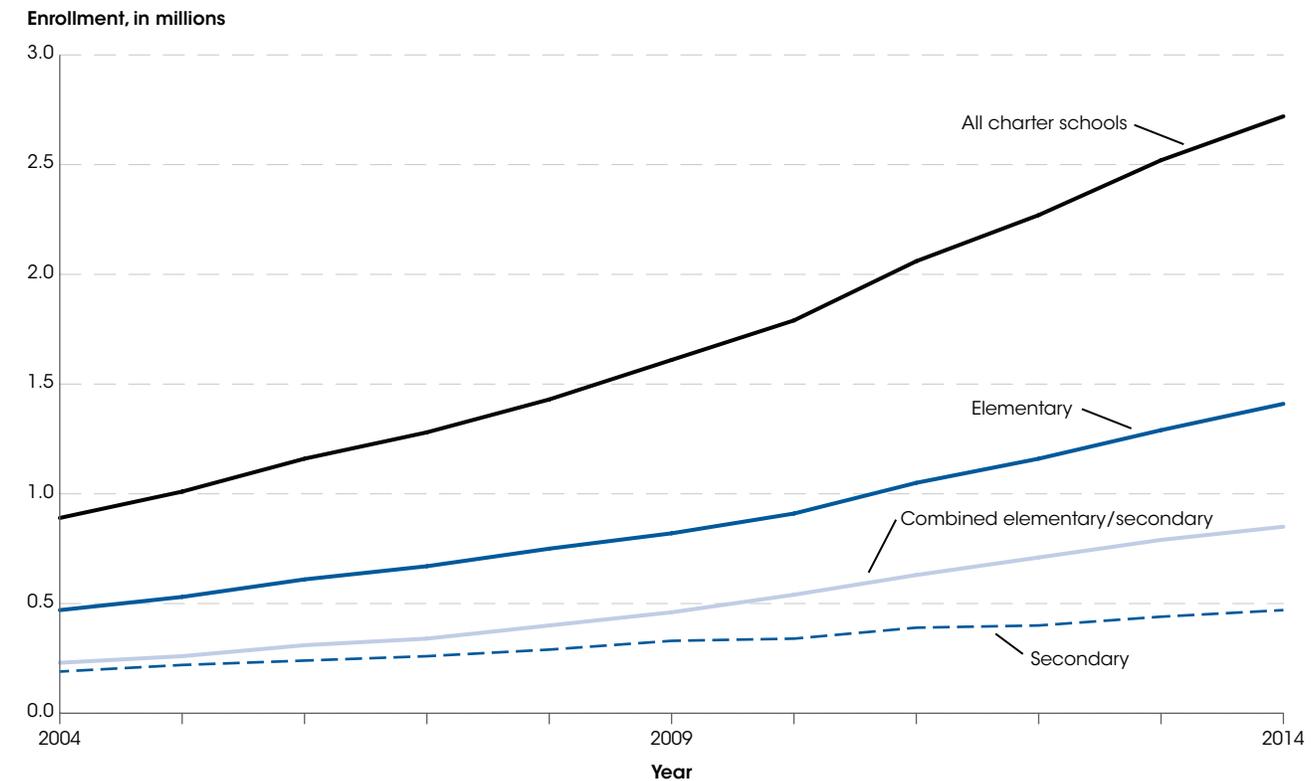
Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public charter schools, by enrollment size: Fall 2004 and fall 2014



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2004–05 and 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 216.30.

Between school years 2004–05 and 2014–15, the percentage of all public schools that were charter schools increased from 4 to 7 percent, and the total number of charter schools increased from 3,400 to 6,750. In addition to increasing in number, public charter schools have also

generally increased in enrollment size over the last decade. From fall 2004 to fall 2014, the percentages of public 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.

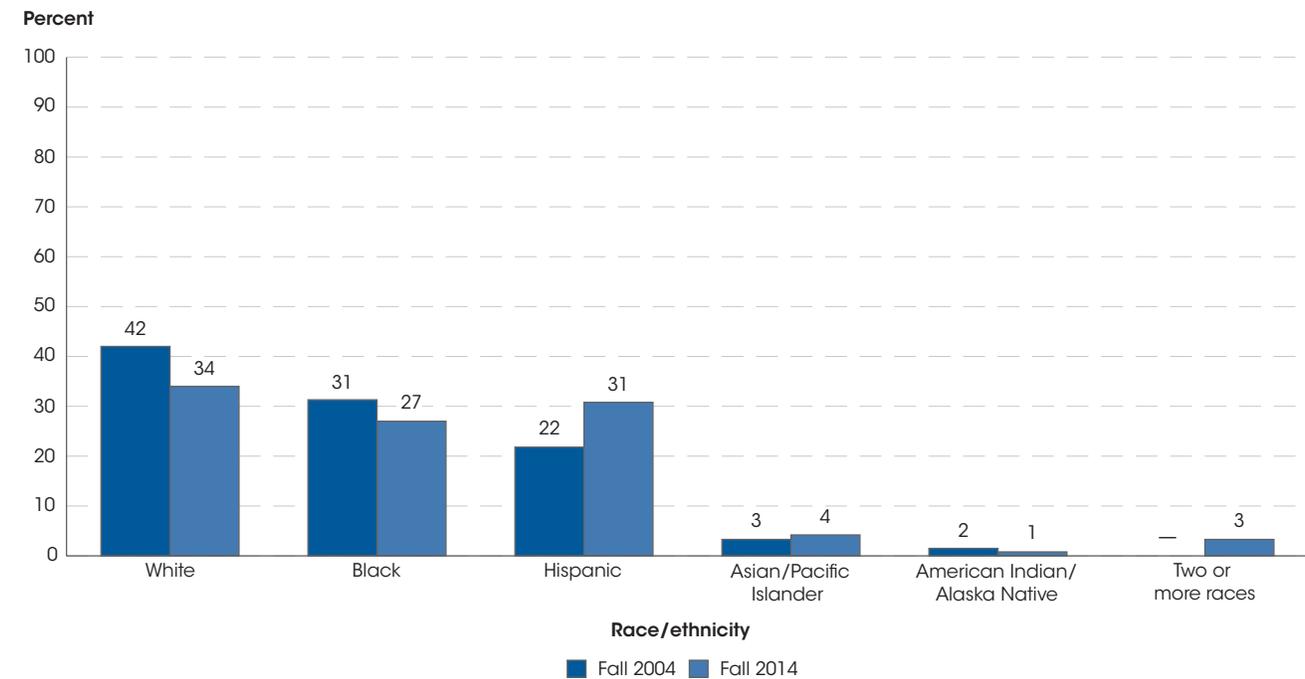
**Figure 2. Public charter school enrollment, by school level: Fall 2004 through fall 2014**

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," 2004-05 through 2014-15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016*, table 216.20.

The percentage of public school students who attended public charter schools increased from 2 to 5 percent between fall 2004 and fall 2014. The number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased by 1.8 million students (from 0.9 million to 2.7 million), while the number of students attending traditional public schools

decreased by 0.4 million (see indicator [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#)). In each school year during that period, larger numbers of public charter school students were enrolled in elementary schools than in any of the other types of charter schools: secondary, combined, and other types that were not classified by grade span.



**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of public charter school students, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2004 and fall 2014**

— Not available.

NOTE: Data for the "Two or more races" category were not available prior to fall 2009. 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," 2004–05 and 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 216.30.

Between fall 2004 and fall 2014, public charter schools experienced changes in their demographic composition similar to those seen in public schools overall (see indicator [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#)). The percentage of public charter school students who were Hispanic increased (from 22 to 31 percent), as did the percentage who were Asian/Pacific Islander (from 3 to 4 percent). In contrast, the percentage of public charter school students who were White decreased from 42 to 34 percent. The percentages decreased for Black (from 31 to 27 percent) and American Indian/Alaska Native (from 2 to 1 percent) public charter school students as well. Beginning in fall 2009, data were collected on students of Two or more races attending public charter

schools. Students of Two or more races accounted for 3 percent of public charter school students in fall 2014, compared to 1 percent in fall 2009.

In fall 2014, 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 public charter school students (35 percent) than for traditional public school students (24 percent). In the same year, 21 percent of public charter school students and 20 percent of traditional public school students attended low-poverty schools—those in which 25 percent or less of students qualify for FRPL.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Thomsen, J. (2016). *50-State Comparison: Charter School Policies*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved September 27, 2016, from <http://www.ecs.org/charter-school-policies/>.

<sup>2</sup> 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 7, 2016, from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/finalreport.pdf>.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 216.20, 216.30, and 216.90

**Related indicators and resources:** Elementary and Secondary Enrollment, Private School Enrollment, Characteristics of Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools

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