

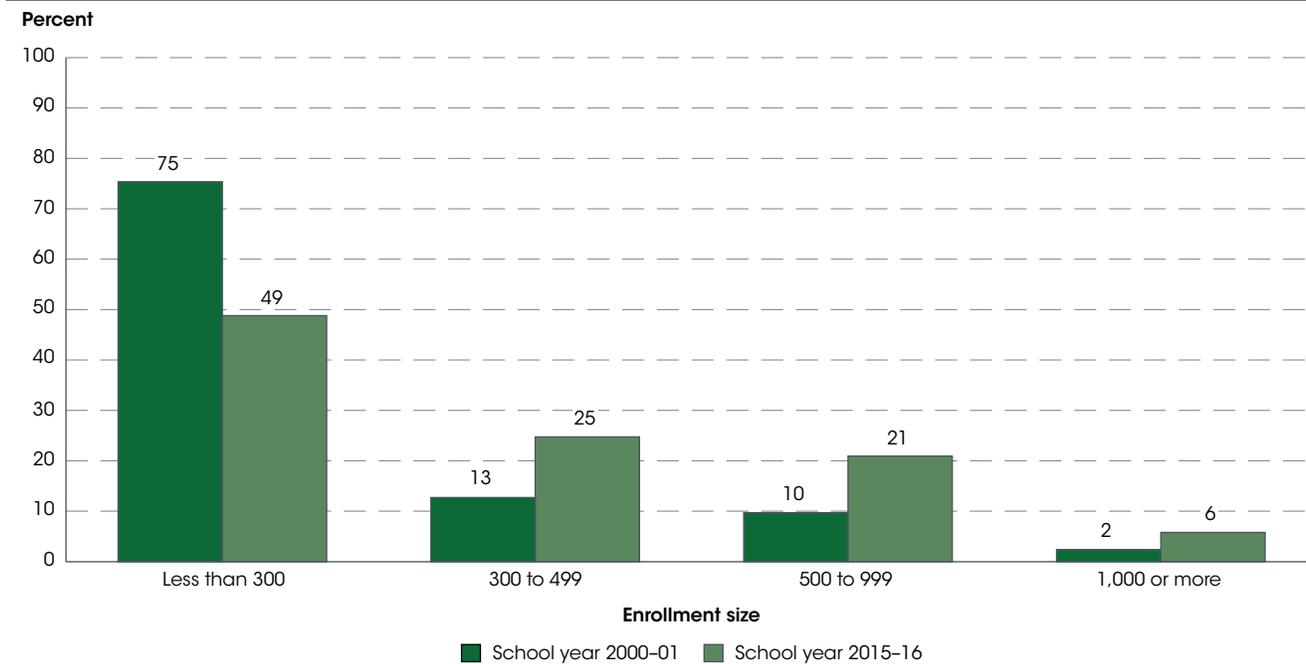
## Public Charter School Enrollment

Between fall 2000 and fall 2015, overall public charter school enrollment increased from 0.4 million to 2.8 million. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 1 to 6 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: School years 2000–01 and 2015–16



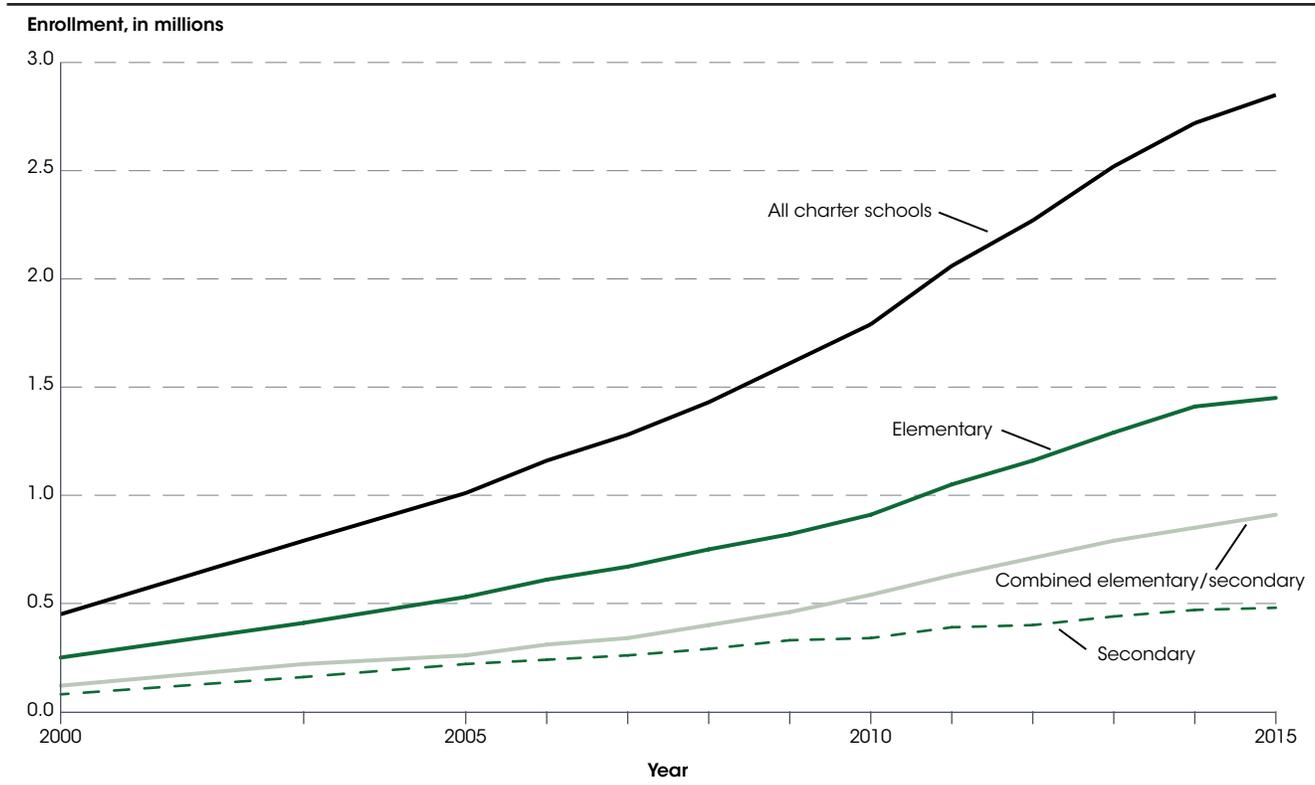
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2000–01 and 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.30.

Between school years 2000–01 and 2015–16, the percentage of all public schools that were charter schools increased from 2 to 7 percent, and the total number of charter schools increased from 2,000 to 6,900. In addition to increasing in number, public charter schools have also

generally increased in enrollment size over this period: from 2000–01 to 2015–16, 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: Selected years, fall 2000 through fall 2015

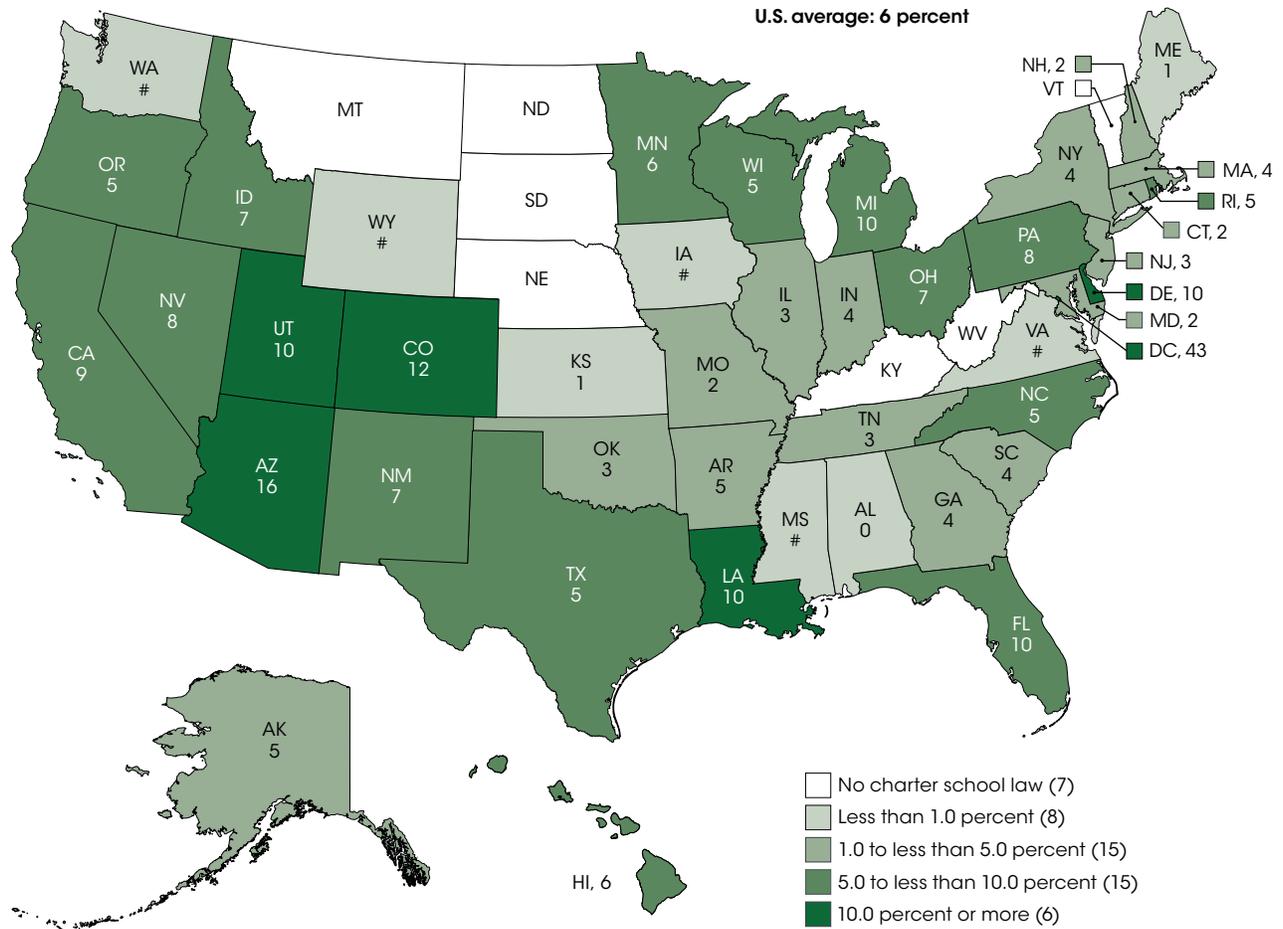


NOTE: "Elementary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and with no grade higher than 8. "Secondary" includes schools with no grade lower than 7. "Combined elementary/secondary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and ending with grade 9 or above. Other schools not classified 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," 2000-01 through 2015-16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016* and *2017*, table 216.20.

The percentage of all public school students who attended public charter schools increased from 1 to 6 percent between fall 2000 and fall 2015. During this period, public charter school enrollment increased steadily, from 0.4 million students in fall 2000 to 2.8 million students in fall 2015, an overall increase of 2.4 million students. In contrast, the number of students attending traditional public schools increased by 1.3 million between fall 2000

and fall 2005, and then decreased by 0.6 million between fall 2005 and fall 2015 (see indicator [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#)). In each year from fall 2000 to fall 2015, 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 3. Percentage of all public school students enrolled in public charter schools, by state: Fall 2015



# Rounds to zero.

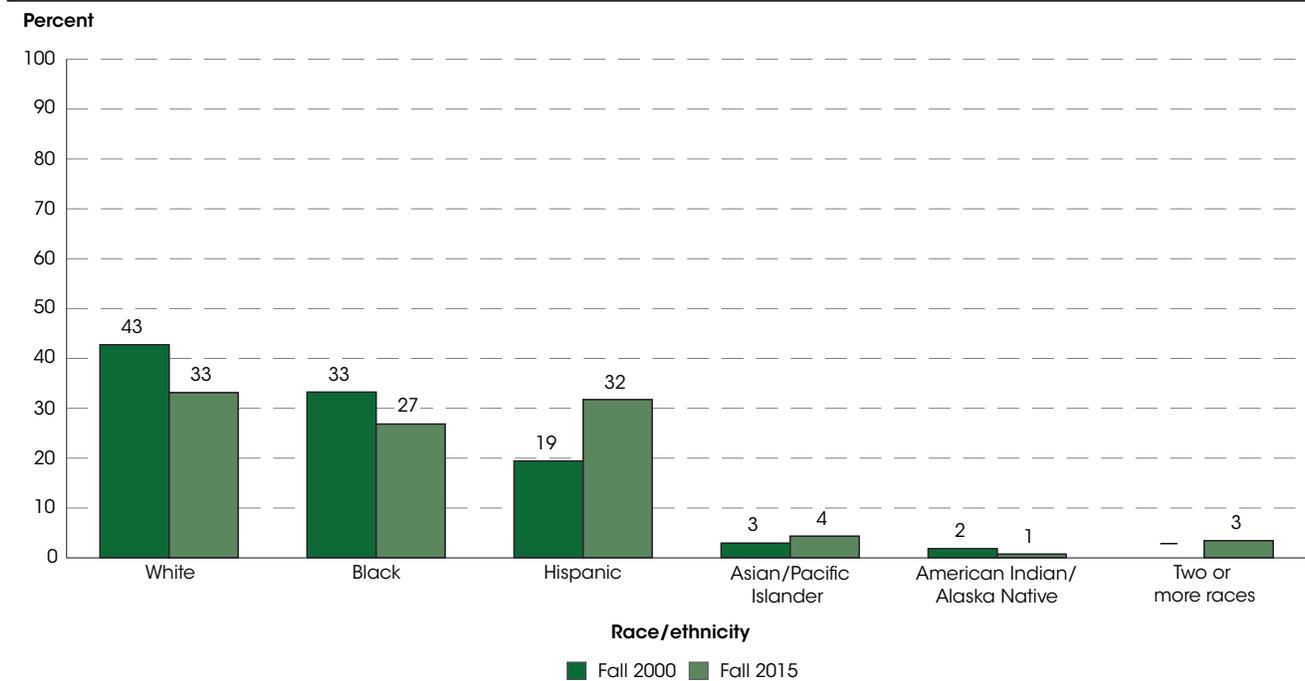
NOTE: Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2015-16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.90.

The first law allowing the establishment of public charter schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991.<sup>2</sup> As of fall 2015, charter school legislation had been passed in 43 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>3</sup> The states in which public charter school legislation had not been passed by that time were Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Of the 44 jurisdictions with legislative approval for public charter schools as of fall 2015, California had the largest number of students enrolled in charter schools (568,800, representing 9 percent of all public school students in

the state), and the District of Columbia had the highest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools (43 percent, representing 35,800 students). After the District of Columbia, Arizona had the next highest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools (16 percent, representing 176,900 students). In contrast, eight states had less than 1 percent of their public school students enrolled in public charter schools in fall 2015: Alabama,<sup>3</sup> Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of public charter school students, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2000 and fall 2015**

— 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,” 2000–01 and 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.30.

Between fall 2000 and fall 2015, public charter schools experienced changes in their demographic composition similar to those seen in public schools overall. (For more information on racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools, please see the report *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*.) The percentage of public charter school students who were Hispanic increased (from 19 to 32 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 43 to 33 percent), as did the percentages who were Black (from 33 to 27 percent) and American Indian/Alaska Native (from 2 to 1 percent). 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 2015.

In fall 2015, 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 (33 percent) than for traditional public school students (24 percent). In the same year, 22 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.<sup>4</sup>

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Thomsen, J. (2016). *50-State Comparison: Charter School Policies*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved September 18, 2017, 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 15, 2017, from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/finalreport.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Despite legislative approval for public charter schools in Alabama, none were operating in this state in fall 2015. For more information on charter school status in Alabama, please refer to <https://www.publiccharters.org/publications/model-law-supporting-growth-high-quality-public-charter-schools>.

<sup>4</sup> In fall 2015, some 9 percent of public charter school students and 2 percent of traditional public school students attended schools which did not participate in FRPL or had missing data.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 216.20, 216.30, and 216.90

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Private School Enrollment](#)

**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