

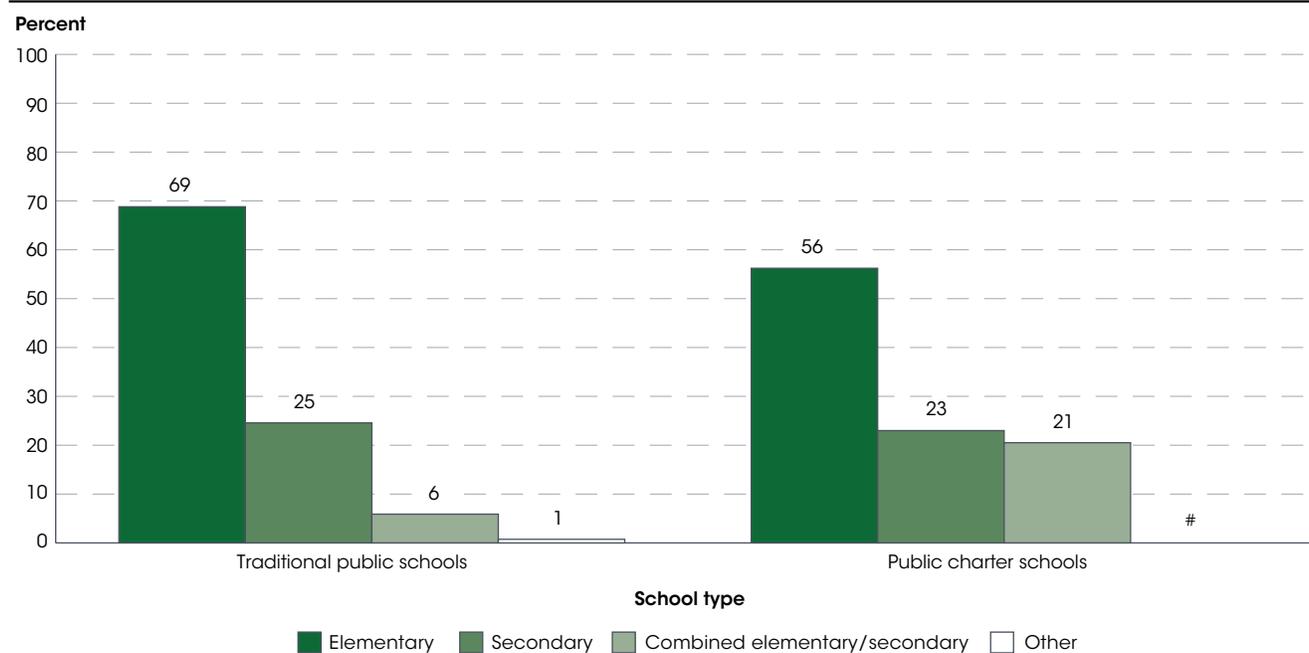
Characteristics of Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools

In 2015–16, some 57 percent of public charter schools were located in cities, compared to 25 percent of traditional public schools. A higher percentage of public charter schools than of traditional public schools had more than 50 percent Black enrollment (23 vs. 9 percent), and more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment (25 vs. 16 percent). A lower percentage of public charter schools than of traditional public schools had more than 50 percent White enrollment (34 vs. 58 percent).

In school year 2015–16, there were 98,280 public schools in the United States, consisting of 91,420 traditional public schools and 6,860 public charter schools. The total number of public schools was higher in 2015–16 than in 2000–01, when there was a total of 93,270 public schools—91,280 traditional public schools and 1,990 public charter schools. Between school years 2000–01

and 2015–16, the percentage of all public schools that were traditional public schools decreased from 98 to 93 percent, while the percentage that were charter schools increased from 2 to 7 percent. See indicator [Public Charter School Enrollment](#) for additional information about charter schools and charter school legislation.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by school level: School year 2015–16



Rounds to zero.

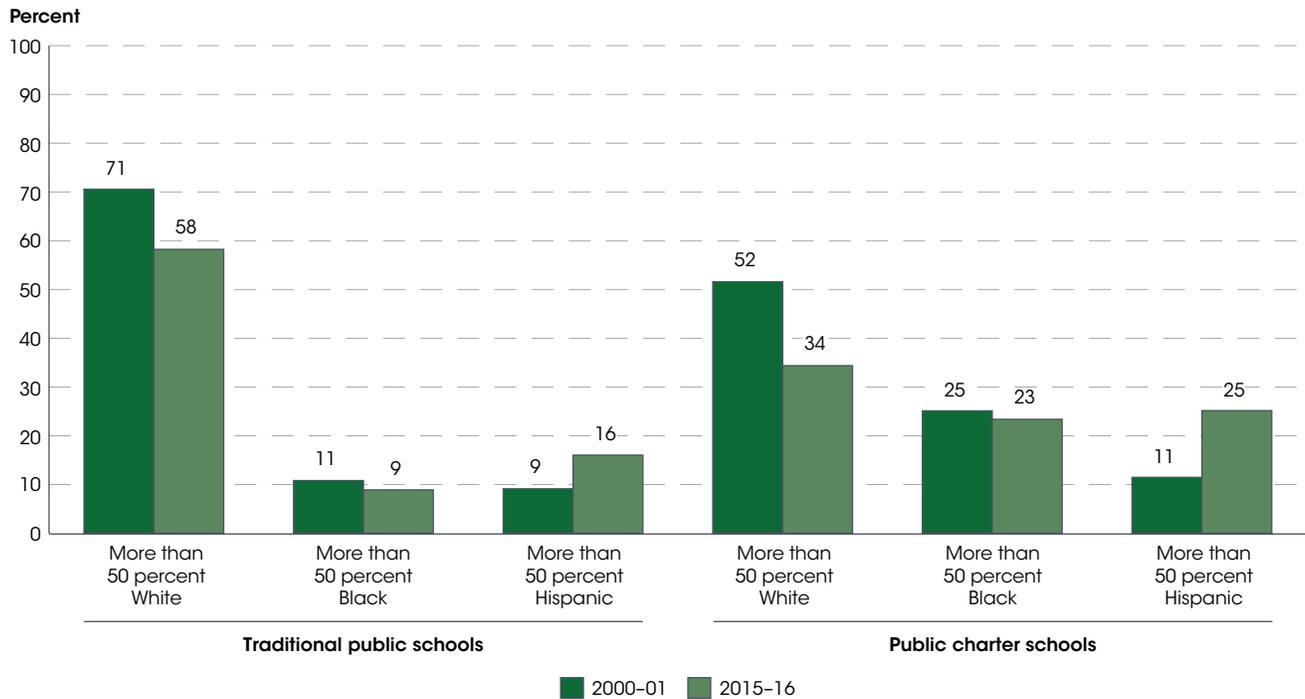
NOTE: "Elementary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and with no grade higher than 8. "Secondary" includes schools with no grade lower than 7. "Combined elementary/secondary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and ending with grade 9 or above. "Other" includes schools not classified by grade span. Detail may not sum to 100 percent 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," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.30.

In school year 2015–16, over two-thirds of traditional public schools (69 percent) were elementary schools, compared to 56 percent of public charter schools. The percentages of traditional public and public charter schools that were secondary schools were similar (25 and

23 percent, respectively). In contrast, 6 percent of traditional public schools were combined elementary/secondary schools,¹ compared with 21 percent of public charter schools.

Figure 2. Percentage of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by racial/ethnic concentration: School years 2000–01 and 2015–16



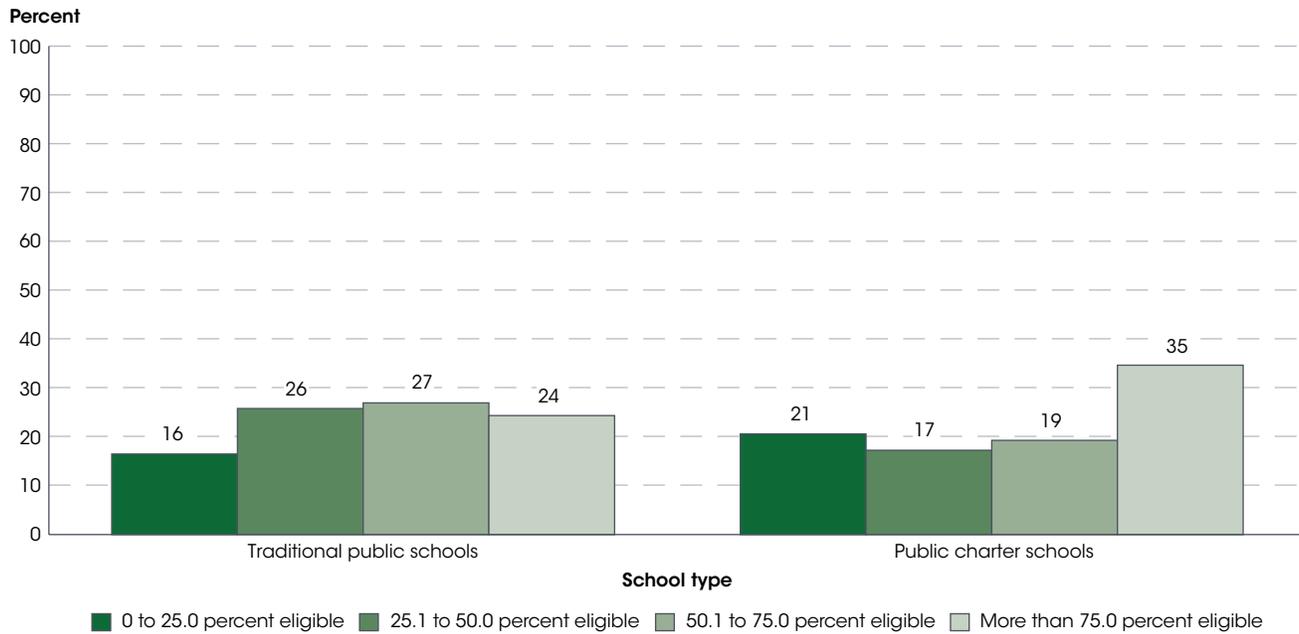
NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

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.

In school year 2015–16, a lower percentage of public charter schools (34 percent) than of traditional public schools (58 percent) had more than 50 percent White enrollment. In contrast, a higher percentage of public charter schools (23 percent) than of traditional public schools (9 percent) had more than 50 percent Black enrollment, and a higher percentage of public charter schools (25 percent) than of traditional public schools (16 percent) had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment. For both traditional public and public charter schools, the percentages of schools that had more than 50 percent White enrollment and more than 50 percent

Black enrollment were lower in 2015–16 than in 2000–01, while the percentage of schools that had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment was higher in 2015–16 than in 2000–01. These shifts reflect, in part, general changes in the school-age population. Between 2000 and 2015, the percentage of children ages 5 to 17 who were White decreased from 62 to 52 percent, the percentage who were Black decreased from 15 to 14 percent, and the percentage who were Hispanic increased from 16 to 24 percent (see *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 101.20).

Figure 3. Percentage of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: School year 2015–16

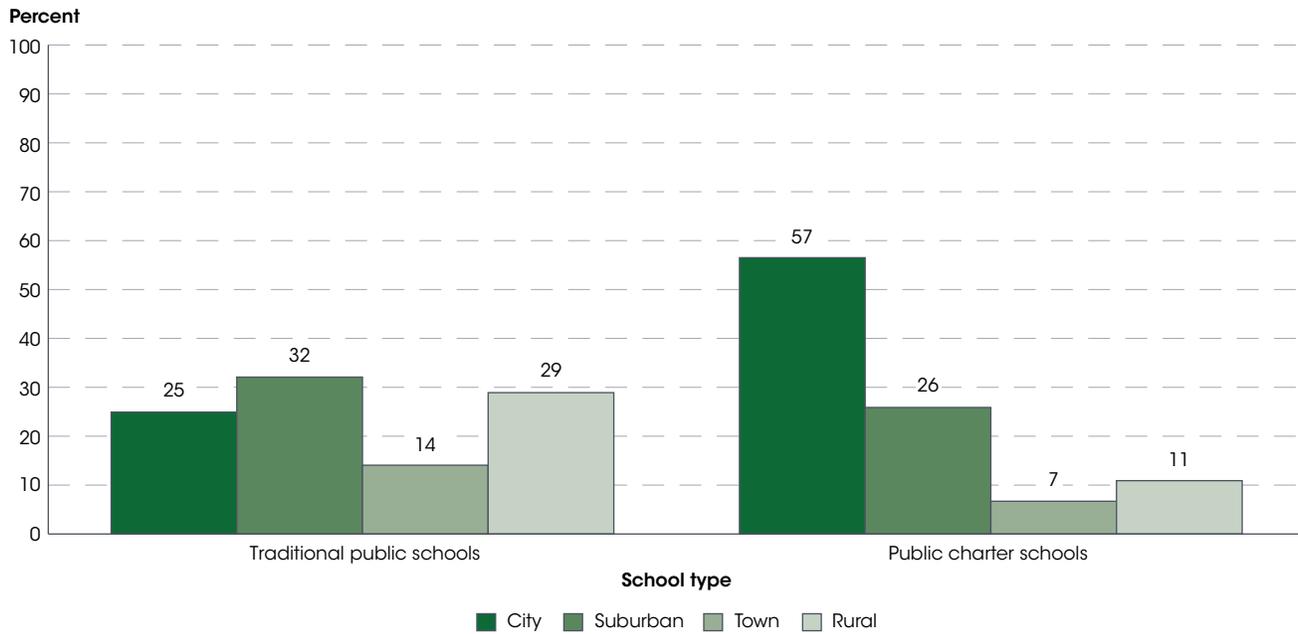


NOTE: The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program. To be eligible for free lunch under the program, a student must be from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty threshold; to be eligible for reduced-price lunch, a student must be from a household with an income between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty threshold. The category "missing/school does not participate" is not included in this figure; thus, the sum of the free or reduced-price lunch eligible categories does 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," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.30.

In school year 2015–16, some 35 percent of public charter schools were high-poverty schools, defined as those in which more than three-quarters of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). In the same year, 24 percent of traditional public schools were high-poverty schools. The percentage of schools that were low poverty (up to one-quarter of students were FRPL eligible) was also higher among public charter schools (21 percent)

than among traditional public schools (16 percent). In contrast, the percentages of schools in the middle poverty categories (one-quarter to one-half FRPL eligible and one-half to three-quarters FRPL eligible) were higher among traditional public schools (26 percent and 27 percent, respectively) than among public charter schools (17 percent and 19 percent, respectively).²

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by school locale: School year 2015–16



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals due to rounding.
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 216.30.

Compared to traditional public schools, a higher percentage of public charter schools were located in cities and a lower percentage were located in all other locales in school year 2015–16. Some 57 percent of public charter

schools were located in cities, compared to 25 percent of traditional public schools. In contrast, 11 percent of public charter schools were located in rural areas, compared to 29 percent of traditional public schools.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Combined elementary/secondary schools are schools beginning with grade 6 or below and ending with grade 9 or above.
- ² In school year 2015–16, some 9 percent of public charter school students and 2 percent of traditional public school students

attended schools that did not participate in FRPL or had missing data.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 101.20 and 216.30

Related indicators and resources: [Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch](#); [Elementary and Secondary Enrollment](#); [Public Charter School Enrollment](#)

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