

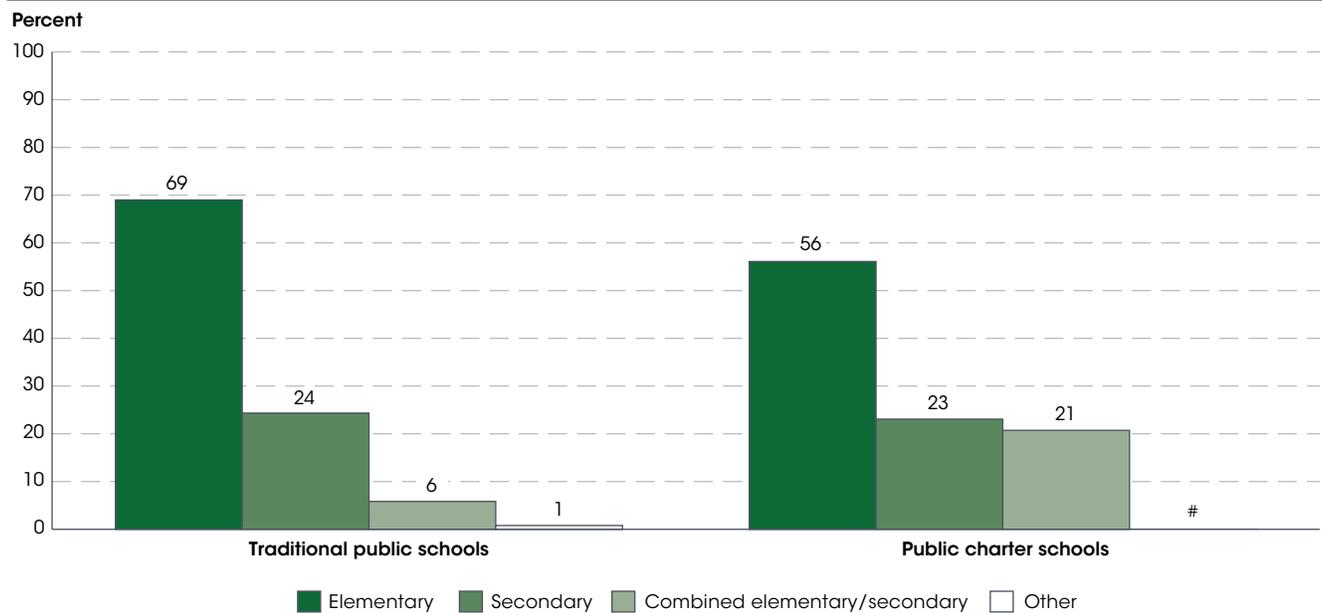
Characteristics of Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools

In school year 2016–17, about 56 percent of public charter schools were located in cities, compared with 25 percent of traditional public schools. Higher percentages 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 (26 vs. 16 percent). A lower percentage of public charter schools than of traditional public schools had more than 50 percent White enrollment (33 vs. 57 percent).

In school year 2016–17, there were 98,160 public schools in the United States, including the 50 states and the District of Columbia, consisting of 91,150 traditional public schools and 7,010 public charter schools. The total number of public schools was higher in 2016–17 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 2016–17, 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 2016–17



Rounds to zero.

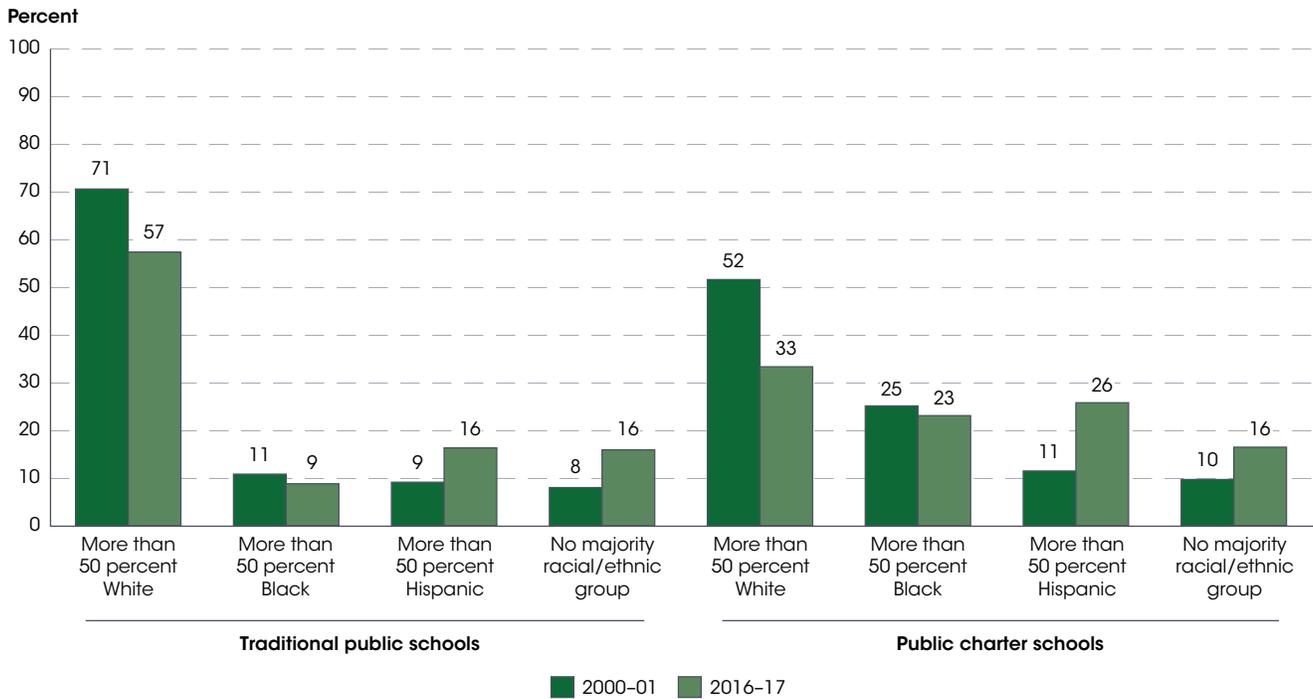
NOTE: "Elementary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and with no grade higher than 8. "Secondary" includes schools with no grade lower than 7. "Combined elementary/secondary" includes schools beginning with grade 6 or below and ending with grade 9 or above. "Other" includes schools not classified by grade span. Detail may not sum to 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," 2016–17. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 216.30.

In school year 2016–17, more than two-thirds of traditional public schools (69 percent) were elementary schools, compared with 56 percent of public charter schools. The percentages of traditional public and public charter schools that were secondary schools were similar

(24 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 selected racial/ethnic concentration: School years 2000–01 and 2016–17

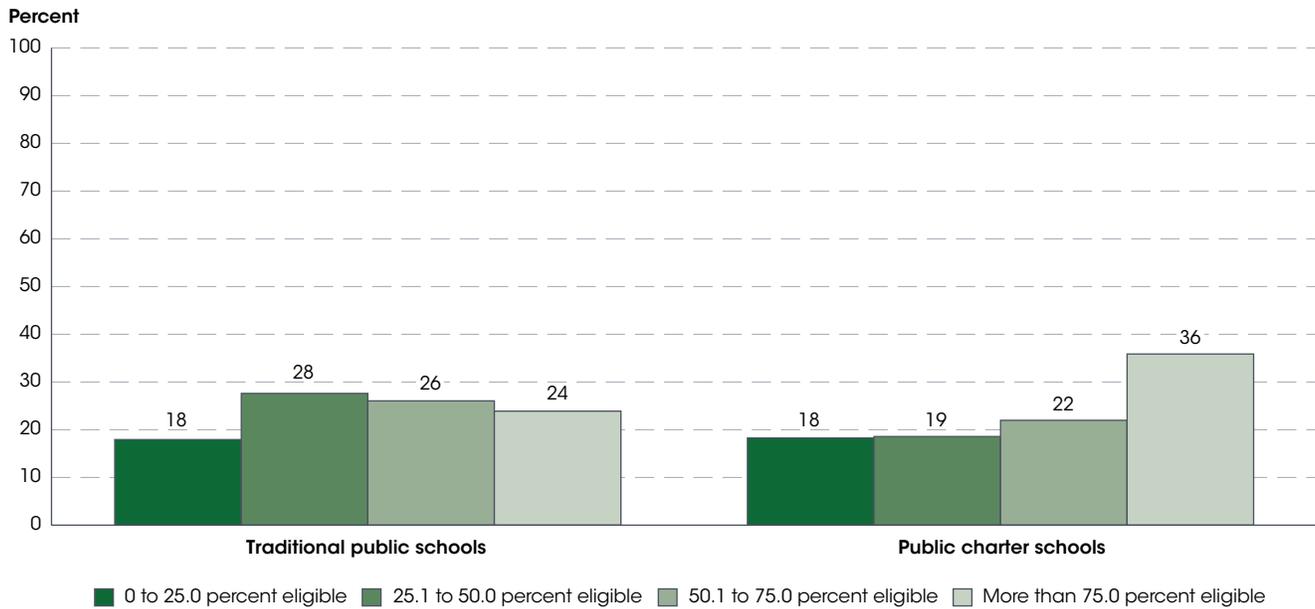


NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Schools with other racial/ethnic concentrations, such those with enrollment that is more than 50 percent Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Two or more races, are not shown. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
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 2016–17. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 216.30.

In school year 2016–17, a lower percentage of public charter schools (33 percent) than of traditional public schools (57 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 (26 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 2016–17 than in 2000–01, while

the percentages of schools that had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment were higher in 2016–17 than in 2000–01. Further, the percentage of schools with no majority racial/ethnic group was higher in 2016–17 than in 2000–01 for both traditional public schools (16 vs. 8 percent) and charter schools (16 vs. 10 percent). These shifts reflect, in part, general changes in the school-age population. Between 2000 and 2016, 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 25 percent (see *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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 2016–17

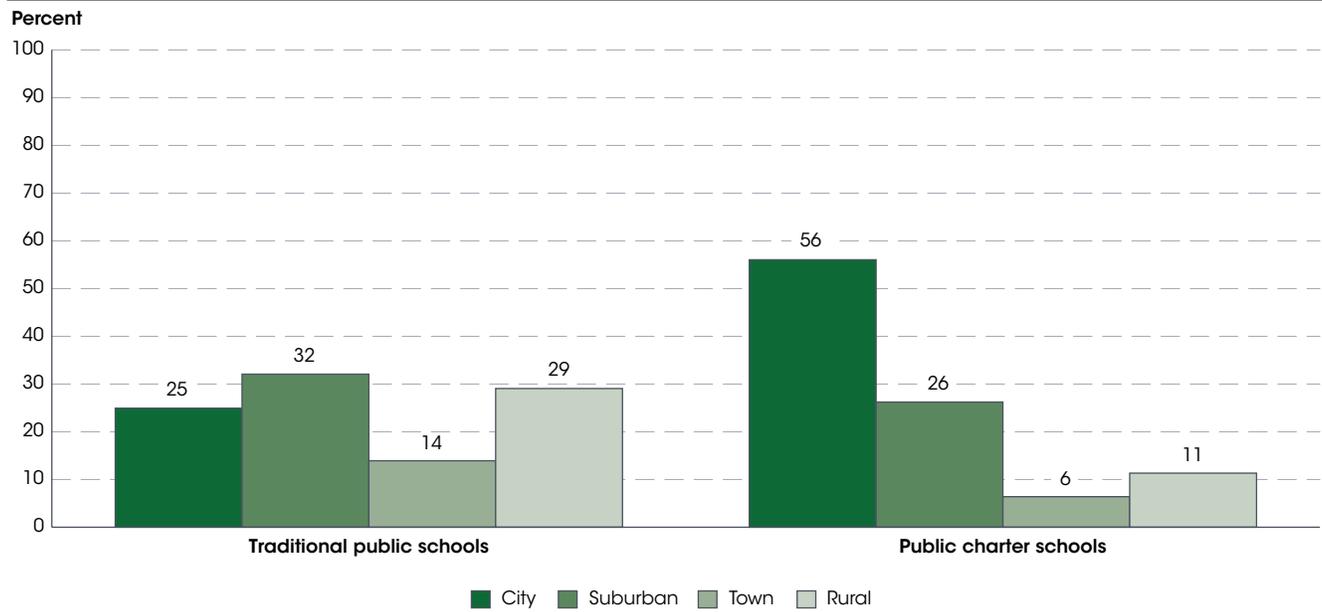


NOTE: The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program. Data include students whose National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility has been determined through direct certification. The category “missing/school does not participate” is not included in this figure; thus, the sum of the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility categories does not equal 100 percent. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see NCES blog post “Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?” Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 2016–17. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 216.30.

In this indicator, low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-low poverty schools are defined as those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are defined as those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are defined as those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL.² In school year 2016–17, about 36 percent of public

charter schools were high-poverty schools, compared with 24 percent of traditional public schools. The percentages of public charter and traditional public schools that were low-poverty schools were similar (18 percent each). In contrast, the percentages of schools that were mid-low poverty and mid-high poverty were higher among traditional public schools (28 percent and 26 percent, respectively) than among public charter schools (19 percent and 22 percent, respectively).³

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by school locale: School year 2016–17



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," 2016–17. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 216.30.

Compared with traditional public schools, a higher percentage of public charter schools were located in cities and lower percentages were located in all other locales in school year 2016–17. For example, some 56 percent of public charter schools were located in cities, compared

with 25 percent of traditional public schools. In contrast, 11 percent of public charter schools were located in rural areas, compared with 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 Includes students whose National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility has been determined through direct certification.

- ³ In school year 2016–17, some 5 percent of public charter school students and less than 1 percent of traditional public school students attended schools that did not participate in FRPL or had missing data.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 101.20 and 216.30

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

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