

## **STATEWIDE SCHOOL CHOICE MARKET TOPS 110,000**

(UPDATED: November 12, 2021) More than 110,000 Arkansas students will attend charter, home or private schools, or are eligible to participate in a public school choice program in the current (2021-22) school year, state Department of Education and non-profit records show.

The niche school choice market has grown from 66,627 students (2013)(1) to an estimated 110,496 (2020-22).

Factors contributing to market growth include dissatisfaction with public schools deemed 'failing' in letter-grade surveys, technology that makes distance learning feasible, religious affiliations, and health considerations.

### **Charters Remain Largest Group**

School choice has advanced since Policy Foundation analysts Allyson Tucker and Donna Watson wrote their landmark 1996 study (2) recommending charters as an option for students.

Nearly 40,000 students are enrolled in charters, a type of public school that is free from certain state regulations. There were 40,512 enrolled in charters last year (2020-21). Records show 39,232 students enrolled this year (2021-22).

Education department records show 21,265 students enrolled in public open-enrollment charters in the current school year (2021-22). An open-enrollment charter is operated by "a governmental entity, an institution of higher learning or a tax-exempt non-sectarian organization," according to the education department. Another 17,967 students are enrolled in public district conversion charters this year. A conversion school "is a public school converted to a public charter school. Conversion schools can only draw students from within the school district's boundaries," the department notes.(3)

### **Home Schools Are Second Largest Group**

Students attending home schools are the second largest group. An estimated 30,271 students enrolled in home schools last year.(4) The number increased this year as more households turned to the practice in response to COVID-19.

### **Public School Choice**

Another 22,073 students are eligible to participate in public school choice programs this year, department records show. The program allows students to transfer to another public school district.(5)

### **Private School Enrollment Increases**

Private school rolls increased to 18,920 in the current year, data from the non-profit Arkansas Nonpublic School Accrediting Association shows.(6) There were 17,843 students enrolled in private schools last year.

--Greg Kaza

### **Sources**

- (1) "Arkansas School Choice Market Expands" (Policy Foundation Research memo) February 2014
- (2) Tucker, Allyson and Donna Watson. *Arkansas' Weak Charter School Law: Failing The Grade* (Policy Foundation study) 1996
- (3) [Division of Elementary and Secondary Education - Offices - Public School Accountability - Charter Schools \(arkansas.gov\)](#)
- (4) ADE preliminary estimate, 2020-21 school year. ADE communication to Policy Foundation, Nov. 12, 2021.
- (5) [School Choice \(General\) by State : State : ADE Data Center \(arkansas.gov\)](#)
- (6) [www.ansaa.com/uploads/2/6/1/3/26134429/ansaa\\_directory\\_2021-2022.pdf](http://www.ansaa.com/uploads/2/6/1/3/26134429/ansaa_directory_2021-2022.pdf)