

STATE SCHOOL CHOICE MARKET NEAR 110,000

"The most callused aspect of the current education monopoly in Arkansas is that it willingly and deliberately forces children--except those whose parents have wealth--to attend bad schools." Arkansas Policy Foundation, 1998

(December 2022) Nearly 110,000 Arkansas students attend charter, home or private schools, or are enrolled in a public school choice program in the current school year, state Department of Education and other records show.

The niche school choice market has grown from 66,627 students (2013)(1) to 109,683 in the 2022-23 school year. Factors contributing to growth include dissatisfaction with public schools deemed 'failing' in letter-grade surveys, technology that makes distance learning feasible, and religious affiliations.

Charters Are 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 education reform. Students enrolled in charters total 41,300, an increase from the 2021-22 school year when 39,232 students were enrolled.

Education department records show 24,772 students enrolled in public open-enrollment charters in the current school year. 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 16,528 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 explains on its site.(3)

Home Schools Are Second Largest Group

Students attending home schools are the second largest group. Education department records show 26,378 students are enrolled in home schools.(4)

Public School Choice

Another 22,073 "are currently enrolled in a traditional public school district via school choice "this school year, a department communication explains.(5) The program allows students to transfer to another public school district.

Private School Enrollment Increases

Private school enrollment increased to 19,932 in the current school year, data from the non-profit Arkansas Nonpublic School Accrediting Association shows.(6) There were 18,920 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) <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/home-school>
- (5) ADE communication to Policy Foundation, December 8, 2022
- (6) www.ansaa.com/uploads/2/6/1/3/26134429/ansaa_directory_2022-2023.pdf

Appendix

Open Enrollment Charter Schools

Academics Plus 1,825; Arkansas Arts Academy 1,090; Arkansas Connections Academy 3,231; Arkansas Lighthouse Academies 962; Arkansas Virtual Academy 3,733; eSTEM 2,890; Exalt Academy of Southwest Little Rock 638; Founders Classical Academies of Arkansas 1,551; Friendship Aspire Academies of Arkansas 913; Future School of Fort Smith 241; Graduate Arkansas 381; Haas Hall Academy 1,248; Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas 50; Imboden Area Charter School 63; KIPP Delta 1,174; LISA Academy 3,769; Premier High Schools of Arkansas 307; Responsive Education Solutions Premier High School North Little Rock 135; Responsive Education Solutions Premier HS Springdale 94; Scholarmade Achievement Place 394; Westwind School for Performing Arts 83.

Conversion Charter Schools

Academies at Rivercrest High School 314; Academies of West Memphis 952; Adventure Online Academy (Waldron) 34; Batesville High School Charter 973; Batesville Junior High School Charter 772; Bauxite Miner Academy 48; Cabot Panther Academy 321; Cave City High School Career & Collegiate Prep 371; Cave City Middle School Career & Collegiate Prep 288; Centerpoint Academy of Agricultural & Skilled Trades 22; Cross County Elementary Technology Academy 347; Cross County High School, A New Tech School 292; Don Tyson School of Innovation (Springdale) 2,116; Driven Virtual Academy (Pulaski County Special School District) 303; Fayetteville Virtual Academy 179; Fountain Lake Charter High School 406; Fountain Lake Middle School Cobra Digital Prep Academy 429; Fort Smith Virtual Academy 79; Guy Berry College & Career Academy (Mountain Home) 53; Hot Springs Junior Academy 815; Hot Springs World Class High School 739; Lincoln High School 349; Mountain Home High School Career Academies 1,518; Mountainburg Middle School Brain Academy 184; North Little Rock Center of Excellence 372; and Polk County Virtual Academy (Mena) 8; Prairie Grove High School 605; River Valley Virtual Academy (Van Buren) 148; Rogers New Technology High School 658; Siloam Springs High Conversion Charter 1,402; Southside Charter High School (Independence County) 446; Southside Junior High (Independence County) 481; Vilonia Pathways Academy 145; and Warren Middle School 359.