

The K-12 Education Landscape in Ohio
A Review of Public, Private and Charter Schools by County
By Susan Kaeser, LWVO Education Specialist
February 26, 2025

Executive Summary

Ohio families have multiple legal options for educating children between the ages of 6 and 18. They are public schools, in-person and statewide on-line charter schools, private schools, and two forms of homeschooling, education by the parent or by a group of families in a non-chartered nonpublic school. The standards, professionalism, stability, fiscal and academic accountability, separation of church and state, legal protections, and requirements for transparent governance embedded in the public system do not apply in the nonpublic alternatives.

Education is a local activity. A county by county look at K-12 options for Ohio's 88 counties makes it possible to assess where options are available and the role they play. This report documents the number of nonpublic schools located in each county in the 2024-25 school year. This includes charter, private and non-chartered nonpublic schools.

Public schools, private school vouchers, and charter school tuition are all funded from the same line item in the state budget (non-chartered nonpublic schools do not receive state funds and do not report enrollment). They compete for students at the community level and state funds in the legislature. The number of schools establishes if an option is available. This analysis uses enrollment data for the 2023-24 school year to assess the role of public education compared to the two alternatives in educating students and where state funds for nonpublic education are being spent.

The numbers indicate:

1. Only public schools, homeschooling and the 15 statewide on-line charter schools are available everywhere in the state. Access to private, charter and non-chartered nonpublic schools depends on where you live. The menu of options is unique to each county. Except for non-chartered nonpublic schools, population density helps predict where alternatives are likely.
2. The reality in Ohio counties can be very different. There are two counties where public schools are the only schools located within their boundaries, and three counties that each have more than 100 private and charter schools. There are fewer than 10 nonpublic options in 64 counties.
3. Public schools are the primary education resource in all 88 counties serving between 73% and 100% of the public, private and charter school students in each county. Between 90% and 100% of students in 75 Ohio counties use a public school.
4. Rural Ohio depends on public schools, schools that are a core community institution. Public school students make up between 95% and 100% of students in 47 counties – all but two have fewer than 10,000 public school students.
5. While public school enrollment is the largest in Ohio's urban counties, public school enrollment as a share of enrollment in the three options is smallest in six urban counties where less than 80% of students attend a public school. They are Lucas, Montgomery, Summit, Hamilton, Cuyahoga, and Franklin counties. Charter schools and private schools are concentrated in these six counties and have a significant impact on public school enrollment. Together they educate

39% of Ohio's public school students, 67% of the private school students and 81% of in-person charter school students. The seven mid-sized counties where public school enrollment is between 80% and 89% account for 9% of the private school students and 9.5% of charter school students.

6. Most of Ohio relies heavily on public schools but taxpayers are funding charter school and private school vouchers that are concentrated in 13 counties. State taxes are being used for something that does not bolster their communities, while awaiting adequate funds for the schools they use and contribute to the quality of life where they live.
7. Each time a student enrolls in a charter school or private school it increases the state spending on those schools and decreases resources available to public school students that remain. These options have a double impact driving up state costs and undermining local public school resources.

As part of becoming a state, Ohio established a system of common schools as the most reliable way to guarantee all children access to a free education, a necessity for self-governance. This report validates that conclusion. Public schools are the only education that is universally accessible.

Generations of Ohio citizens have built a remarkable public education infrastructure that educates individuals and supports communities and democracy. The Ohio legislature has seen fit to create and fund different education opportunities, but this does not reduce their responsibility to protect the investment made by previous generations in our system of public education.

The clearest way lawmakers can strengthen education for all of Ohio, is to invest in the public schools that welcome all children, are located in every community, and serve the public.