

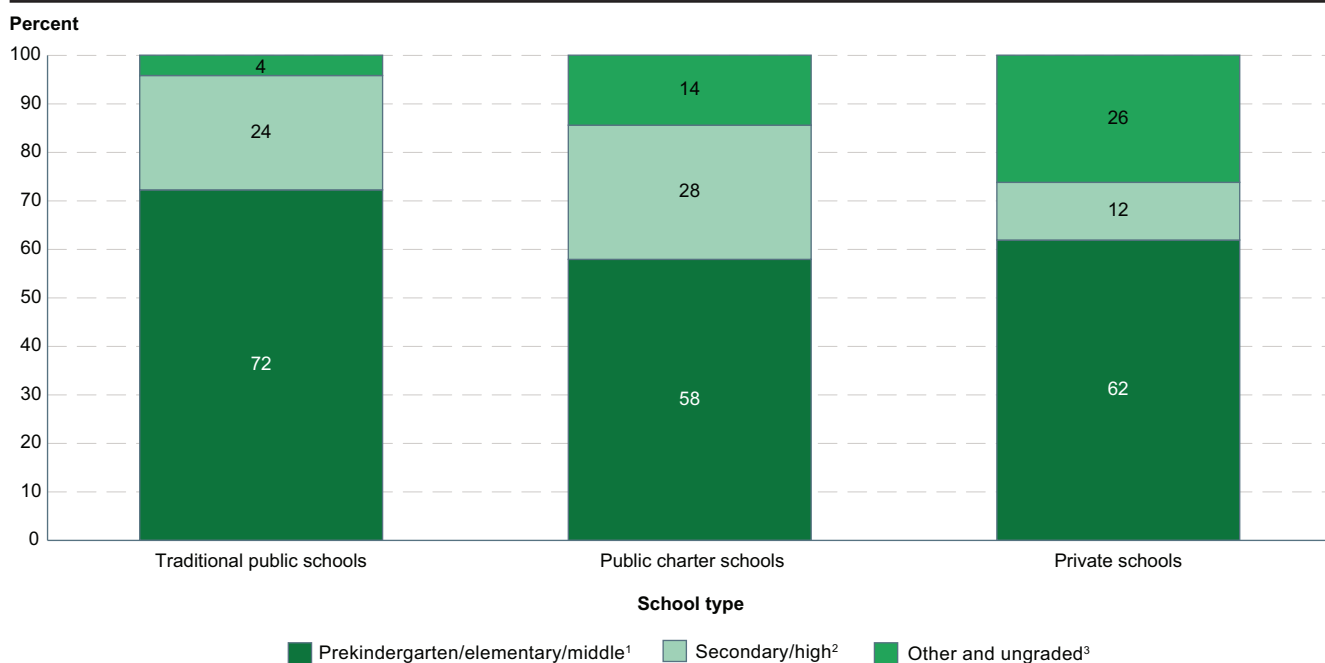
## Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools

*In school year 2019–20, just over half (55 percent) of traditional public schools had more than 50 percent White enrollment, compared with 30 percent of public charter schools and 70 percent of private schools.*

In school year 2019-20, there were approximately 98,500 public schools in the United States.<sup>1,2</sup> About 90,900 (92 percent) of all public schools were traditional public schools and 7,500 (8 percent) were public charter schools.<sup>3</sup> The total number of public schools was lower in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 (98,800). In school year 2009-10,

about 93,900 (95 percent) of all public schools were traditional public schools and 5,000 (5 percent) were public charter schools. In school year 2019-20, there were also about 30,500 private schools in the United States, which was lower than the number of private schools in 2009-10 (33,400).

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools, by school level: School year 2019–20**



<sup>1</sup> Prekindergarten schools are defined as schools that offer prekindergarten only. Elementary schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades K through 4 than higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades 5 through 8 than higher or lower grades.

<sup>2</sup> Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades 9 through 12 than lower grades.

<sup>3</sup> Other schools are defined as schools that offer all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools. Ungraded schools are defined as schools that offer ungraded education only.

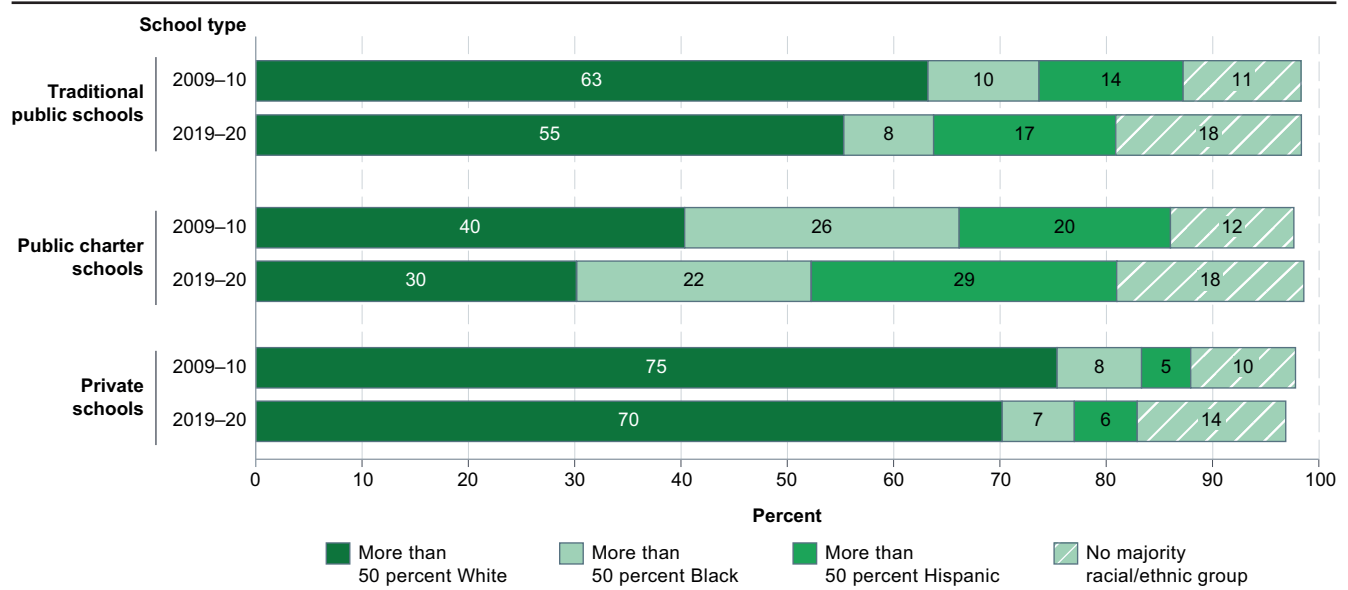
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2019–20; Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 205.40 and 216.30.

The distribution of schools across levels varied by whether they were traditional public schools, charter schools, or private schools. In school year 2019-20, almost three-quarters (72 percent) of traditional public schools were prekindergarten, elementary, and middle schools,<sup>4</sup> compared with 58 percent of public charter schools. Meanwhile, 24 percent of traditional public

schools were secondary and high schools,<sup>5</sup> compared with 28 percent of public charter schools. In that same year, 62 percent of private schools were prekindergarten, elementary, and middle schools and 12 percent were secondary and high schools. A higher percentage of private schools were categorized as other or ungraded<sup>6</sup> (26 percent) than as secondary or high schools.

**Figure 2. Percentage of traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools, by selected racial/ethnic concentration: School years 2009–10 and 2019–20**



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Schools with other racial/ethnic concentrations, such as those with enrollment that is more than 50 percent of students who were Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or of Two or more races, are not included in this figure; thus, the sum of the racial/ethnic concentration categories does not equal 100 percent. 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,” 2009–10 and 2019–20; Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2009–10 and 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 205.40 and 216.30.

In school year 2019-20, a higher percentage of schools had majority White enrollment than had majority enrollments of any other racial/ethnic group. This was true across traditional public, public charter, and private schools. Just over half of traditional public schools had more than 50 percent White enrollment (55 percent), compared with 8 percent that had more than 50 percent Black enrollment and 17 percent that had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment. A higher percentage of public charter schools had more than 50 percent Black enrollment (22 percent) or more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment (29 percent), compared with traditional public schools (8 percent and 17 percent, respectively). However, the percentage of public charter schools with majority White enrollment (30 percent) was still higher than percentages of schools that had majority enrollment of any other racial/ethnic groups.

The percentages of traditional public schools and public charter schools with no majority racial/ethnic group enrollment were similar (both 18 percent). The percentage of traditional public schools with no majority racial/ethnic group (18 percent) was higher than the percentage with a majority of any group besides White students. This was also true of private schools. In 2019-20, 70 percent of private schools had more than 50 percent White enrollment and 14 percent had no majority racial/ethnic group enrollment. This is compared with 7 percent of private schools with more than 50 percent Black enrollment and 6 percent with more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment.

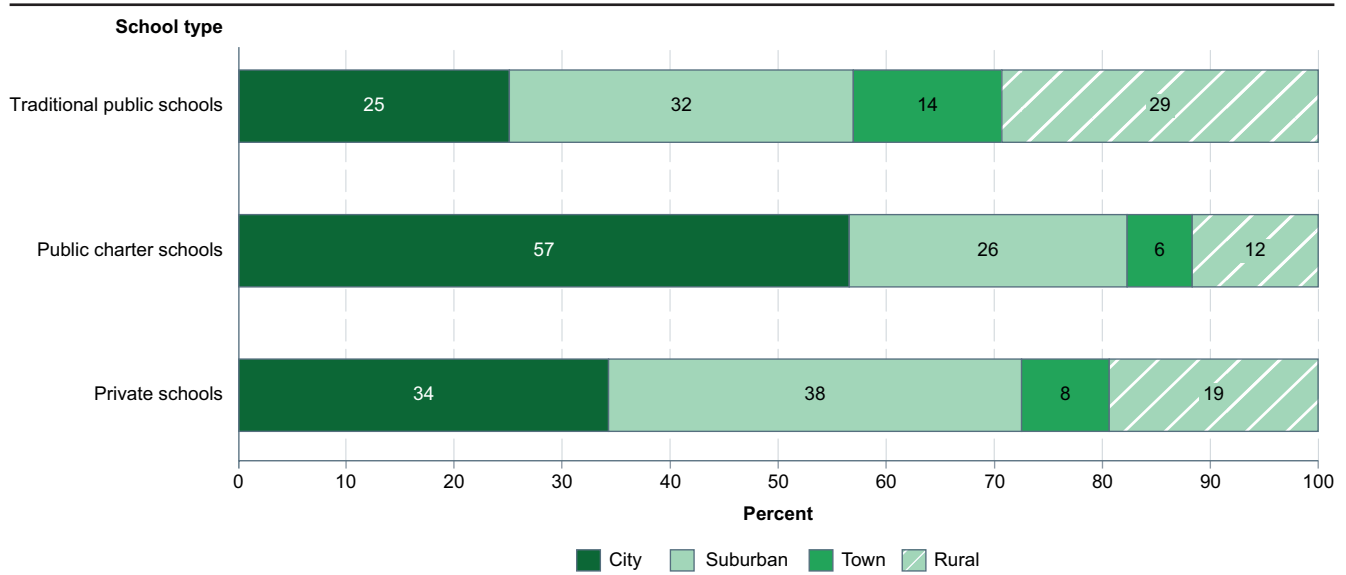
Across traditional public, public charter, and private schools, the percentages of schools with different majority racial/ethnic groups changed over time. These shifts in the racial/ethnic concentration of schools reflect, in part, general changes in the school-age population. Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of children ages 5 to 17 who were White decreased from 55 to 50 percent and the percentage who were Hispanic increased from 22 to 25 percent. The percentage who were Black was 14 percent in both 2010 and 2020.

Specifically, the percentages of traditional public schools and public charter schools that had more than 50 percent White enrollment were lower in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 (55 vs. 63 percent and 30 vs. 40 percent, respectively). A similar pattern was observed for traditional public schools and public charter schools that had more than 50 percent Black enrollment (8 vs. 10 percent and 22 vs. 26 percent, respectively). In contrast, the percentages of traditional

public and public charter schools that had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment were higher in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 (17 vs. 14 percent and 29 vs. 20 percent, respectively), as were the percentages of traditional public and public charter schools that had no majority racial/ethnic group enrollment (18 vs. 11 percent and 18 vs. 12 percent, respectively).

Patterns in majority racial/ethnic group enrollment in private schools were similar to those observed in traditional public and public charter schools in 2019-20 and 2009-10. Lower percentages of private schools in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 had more than 50 percent White enrollment (70 vs. 75 percent) and had more than 50 percent Black enrollment (7 vs. 8 percent), while higher percentages of private schools in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 had more than 50 percent Hispanic enrollment (6 vs. 5 percent) and had no majority racial/ethnic group enrollment (14 vs. 10 percent).

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools, by school locale: School year 2019–20**

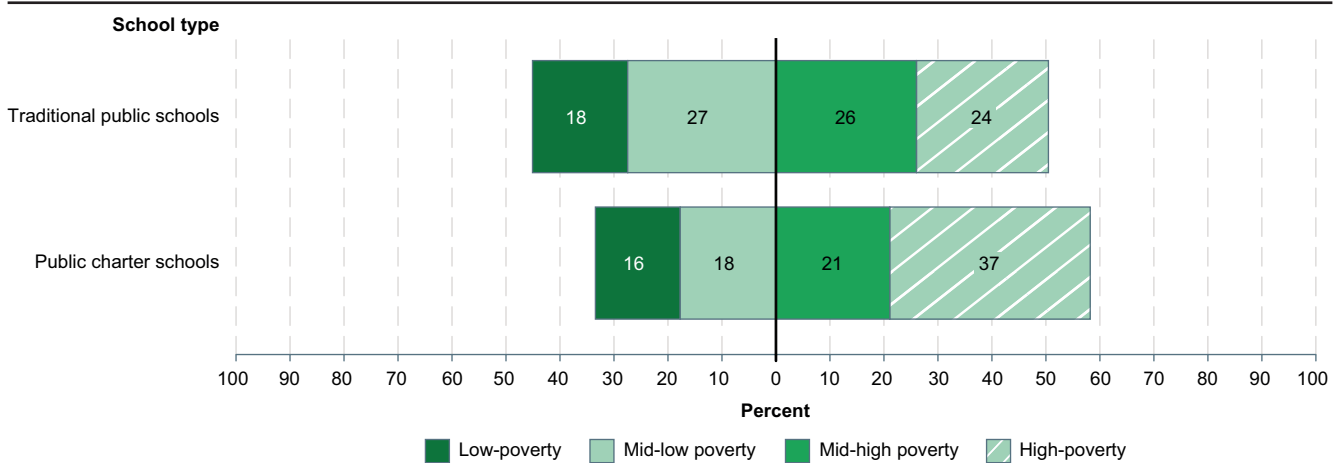


NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2019–20; Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2019–20; Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 205.40 and 216.30.

The distribution of traditional public, public charter, and private schools varies by locale. 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 2019-20. For example, some 57 percent of public charter schools were in cities, compared with 25 percent of traditional public schools. Meanwhile, 12 percent of public charter

schools were in rural areas, compared with 29 percent of traditional public schools. The highest percentage of traditional public schools were located in suburban areas (32 percent). This was also true of private schools. In 2019-20, a higher percentage of private schools were in suburban areas (38 percent) than in cities (34 percent), rural areas (19 percent), and towns (8 percent).

**Figure 4. Percentage of traditional public schools and public charter schools, by percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: School year 2019–20**



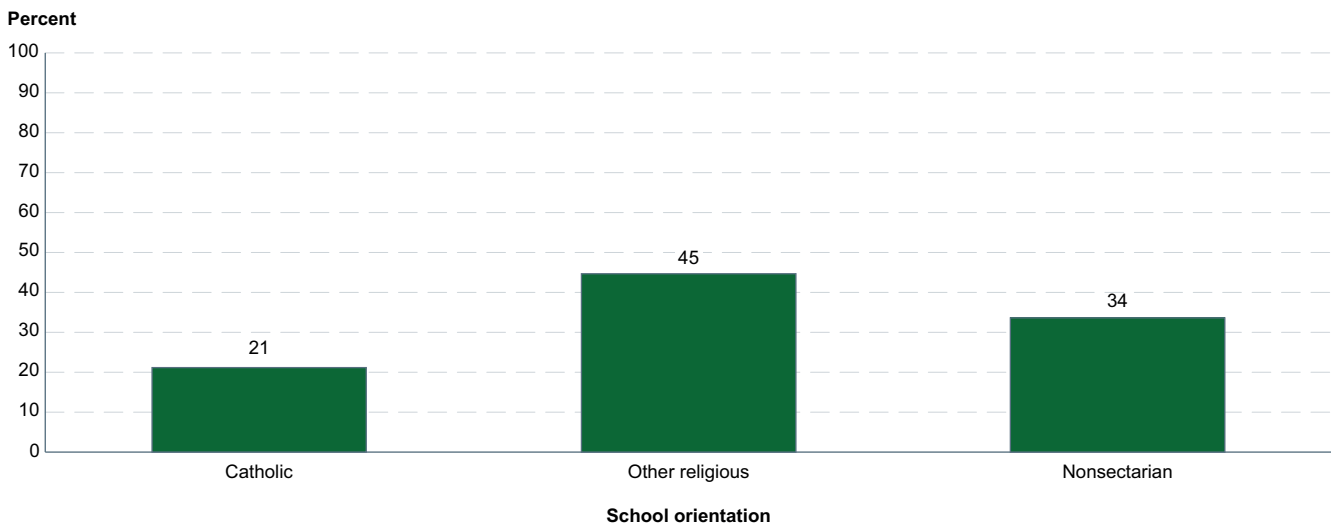
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Students with household incomes under 185 percent of the poverty threshold are eligible for FRPL under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In addition, some groups of children—such as foster children, children participating in the Head Start and Migrant Education programs, and children receiving services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—are assumed to be categorically eligible to participate in the NSLP. Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a “process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications” (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). Also, under the Community Eligibility option, some nonpoor children who attend school in a low-income area may participate if the district decides that it would be more efficient to provide free lunch to all children in the school. For more information, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp>. The category “Missing/school does not participate” is not included in this figure; thus, the sum of the FRPL eligibility categories does not equal 100 percent. 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,” 2019–20; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), “Public School File,” 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 216.30.

Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) is a common measure of poverty in public schools.<sup>7</sup> In this indicator, low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for 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. In school year 2019-20, about 37 percent of public charter schools were high-poverty schools, compared with 24 percent of traditional public schools. In contrast, the percentages of schools that were low-poverty, mid-low poverty, and mid-high poverty were higher among traditional public schools (18 percent, 27 percent, and 26 percent, respectively) than among public charter schools (16 percent, 18 percent, and 21 percent, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 5. Percentage distribution of private schools, by school orientation: School year 2019–20**



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 205.40.

Private schools in the United States may or may not have a religious affiliation. In this indicator, private schools are grouped into the following categories: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian (i.e., not religiously affiliated). In school year 2019–20, some 21 percent of private schools were Catholic, 45 percent had another religious affiliation, and 34 percent were nonsectarian. The size of private schools varied by religious orientation. For example, a

lower percentage of Catholic schools (4 percent) than of nonsectarian schools (37 percent) and other religious schools (36 percent) were very small (i.e., had fewer than 50 students). In addition, a higher percentage of Catholic schools (5 percent) than of nonsectarian schools (2 percent) and other religious schools (3 percent) were very large (i.e., had 750 or more students).

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> In this indicator, the United States refers to the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- <sup>2</sup> Of these 98,500 public schools, about 3,500 were magnet schools and 690 were virtual schools. Virtual schools are defined as having instruction during which students and teachers are separated by time and/or location and interact via internet-connected computers or other electronic devices. For more information, see *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, [Table 216.10](#).
- <sup>3</sup> See indicator [Public Charter School Enrollment](#) for additional information about charter schools and charter school legislation.
- <sup>4</sup> Prekindergarten schools are defined as schools that offer prekindergarten only. Elementary schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades K through 4 than higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades 5 through 8 than higher or lower grades.
- <sup>5</sup> Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that offer more of grades 9 through 12 than lower grades.
- <sup>6</sup> Other schools are defined as schools that offer all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools. Ungraded schools are defined as schools that offer ungraded education only.
- <sup>7</sup> Students with household incomes under 185 percent of the poverty threshold are eligible for free or reduced-price

lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In addition, some groups of children—such as foster children, children participating in the Head Start and Migrant Education programs, and children receiving services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—are assumed to be categorically eligible to participate in the NSLP. Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a “process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications” (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). Also, under the Community Eligibility option, some nonpoor children who attend school in a low-income area may participate if the district decides that it would be more efficient to provide free lunch to all children in the school. For more information, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp>.  
<sup>8</sup> In school year 2019–20, some 15 percent of public charter school students and less than 5 percent of traditional public school students attended schools that did not participate in FRPL or had missing data. No data on the percentage of students eligible for FRPL were collected for private schools in school year 2019–20.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 101.20, 205.40, and 216.30

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

**Glossary:** Catholic school; Elementary school; Enrollment; Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; Middle school; National School Lunch Program; Nonsectarian school; Other religious school; Other/ungraded school; Prekindergarten school; Public charter school; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Secondary school; Traditional public school