

PUBLIC SCHOOLING IN AMERICA

Measuring each state's commitment
to democratically governed schools.



July 2026



NETWORK for
PUBLIC EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For nearly a decade, the Network for Public Education has issued statehouse-by-statehouse report cards holding legislators accountable for how they treat public schools and the children who depend on them. This 2026 Report Card is our most expansive to date, evaluating all 50 states and the District of Columbia across four categories: privatization of public education, protections for homeschooled students, school funding, and conditions for teaching and learning.

What the data reveal is a troubling and consistent pattern. The states most aggressively redirecting public funds toward private alternatives — charter schools, voucher programs, and education savings accounts — are the same states most neglectful of their public schools, their teachers, and their students. Our analysis found a strong, statistically significant negative relationship between the expansion of privatization and public school support ($p < 0.0001$). Privatization and disinvestment, it turns out, go hand in hand.

The stakes have never been higher. At the federal level, the One Big Beautiful Bill embedded the first-ever national tax credit voucher program into law, while \$500 million in federal funding was directed toward charter schools — much of it drawn from terminated teacher-training grants. The U.S. Department of Education is being dismembered piece by piece.

This report is an accounting of how far the same destructive agenda has already advanced, statehouse by statehouse.

The Grades: A Nation Divided

Each statehouse was scored out of 102 possible points and assigned a letter grade. No state achieved a perfect score. Only two states — Nebraska and Vermont — earned an A, each scoring 80 points or above.

Thirteen states earned a B and 13 earned a C, reflecting varying degrees of commitment to public education. At the other end of the scale, six states earned a D, and seventeen states received an F — meaning they failed to meet even 40 percent of our standards for responsible stewardship of public education. Florida ranked last for the third consecutive report card, scoring just 14 out of 102 points. Arizona followed close behind at 18. These are not states struggling against limited resources; they are states that have made active, sustained choices to abandon their public schools while directing public money toward private alternatives with documented records of fraud, discrimination, and academic failure.

Privatization: A Flood of Public Money with Little Oversight

The privatization of K-12 education has accelerated rapidly. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia now fund one or more private school voucher programs, and nineteen states operate Education Savings Account (ESA) programs — the most expansive and least accountable voucher — allowing families to spend public funds on a wide range of private educational expenses through a dedicated debit card. Ten states have made them available to virtually every family regardless of income or need.

The oversight failures are not hypothetical. Arizona's ESA program flagged nearly 84,000 cases of misspending in less than a year, with public dollars spent on diamond necklaces, gaming consoles, and

international travel. Despite this, Arizona's legislature has declined to enact a single reform. In Florida, close to four billion dollars in state education funding now flows annually to voucher programs — nearly one in four state education dollars diverted away from public schools, including to families whose children were never in public schools to begin with.

The charter school sector presents parallel concerns. Forty-seven states have charter school laws, and in the majority of them, private unelected boards govern schools with no term limits and no formal accountability to the communities they serve. For-profit companies manage more than 30 percent of all charter schools in six states. Across 26 states, more than a third of all charter schools that ever opened have since closed, leaving students and families to navigate the disruption. The promised benefits of competition and innovation have, in too many cases, yielded fraud, instability, and the quiet erosion of the public school systems left behind.

Protections for Homeschooled Students: Growth Without Guardrails

Homeschooling is the fastest-growing sector of American education, yet children educated at home remain among the least protected. In most states, the law provides near-absolute freedom to parents with virtually no checks on whether children are learning or safe. Eleven states do not even require parents to notify authorities that they are homeschooling. Most states impose no meaningful assessment of student progress, and only a handful require teachers — including parents — to hold any educational qualification at all.

Documented cases of severe abuse and neglect — some fatal — have occurred when children were removed from school and shielded from mandated reporters under the cover of homeschooling. Reasonable legislation to address these risks has repeatedly stalled under pressure from homeschool advocacy groups. Meanwhile, 19 states now subsidize homeschooling through ESAs or tax credits, providing public money with little to no accountability for how it is spent or whether children are thriving.

School Funding: Who Gets Left Behind

Research firmly establishes that per-pupil spending is linked to student outcomes. Yet in state after state, the choice to fund privatization has come at the direct expense of public school investment. Florida lost every possible point in our school funding category, ranking in the bottom decile for funding level, distribution, and effort, while also paying among the lowest teacher salaries in the country when adjusted for cost of living. Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina, and Tennessee each earned just two of sixteen possible funding points.

By contrast, Wyoming, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, and New York lead the nation in school funding — demonstrating that equitable, adequate investment in public education is a choice, not merely a function of wealth. The gaps between the top and bottom states are not marginal. They represent fundamentally different visions of what public education is for and who it is meant to serve.

Conditions for Teaching and Learning: A Profession Under Stress

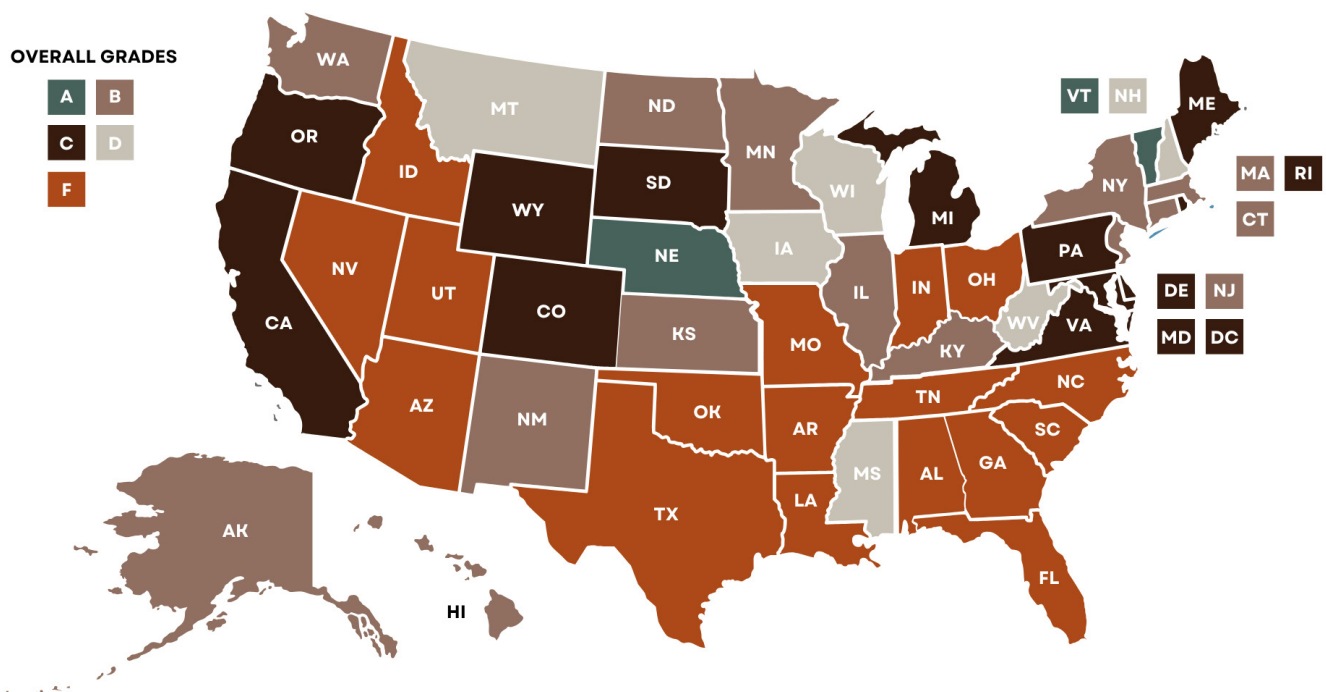
The teacher shortage is real, but it is not uniform. It is worst in the states that have made teaching least attractive — through low pay, the erosion of collective bargaining rights, hostile political climates, and deteriorating working conditions. Our analysis found a strong, statistically significant relationship between teacher attractiveness ratings and the proportion of qualified teachers in a state's classrooms ($p < .001$). States that invest in the profession get more and better teachers; states that do not are increasingly filling classrooms with uncertified instructors.

Student well-being is equally at stake. Nearly half of all states still permit corporal punishment in schools. Many states lack comprehensive protections against bullying and discrimination for LGBTQ students, and two states — Missouri and South Dakota — actively prevent schools from adding such protections to their own policies. New York and Vermont stand out as national leaders, with strong anti-discrimination laws, bans on corporal punishment, favorable student-to-teacher and counselor ratios, and some of the most attractive environments for teachers in the country.

Conclusion

This 2026 NPE Report Card documents a deliberate, well-funded campaign to transform American education — one that is operating simultaneously at the federal level and in statehouses across the country. The consequences fall hardest on the children least able to seek alternatives: those in poverty, those with disabilities, those in rural communities, and those whose families lack the time or resources to navigate a fragmented marketplace of educational options.

Public schools remain the only institutions in American life constitutionally obligated to welcome every child, regardless of circumstance. They are governed by elected boards, funded by public taxes, and accountable to the communities they serve in ways no private alternative is required to be. That is not a weakness — it is their defining strength, and it is worth defending.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the following:

Carol Burris, who led the development of the report and is its author. Burris is the lead researcher and the Executive Director of the Network for Public Education.

Education policy researcher **John J. Murphy**, who assisted in data collection and documentation of the report.

NPE Communications Director **Joanna Oszeyczik** formatted all of the tables, maps, and graphics in the report and is responsible for its layout and design.

This report would not have been possible without the effort and commitment of the Board of Directors of the Network for Public Education (NPE), with special thanks to **Diane Ravitch**, President of NPE. Diane generously gave her support, guidance and advice throughout the writing of this report.

Finally, thank you to all of our generous donors who make our work in support of public education possible. A very special thanks to **Lifewings Peak Performance** whose generous grant helped fund the report.

No outside organization contributed to, reviewed or influenced our findings.



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INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade, the Network for Public Education has held statehouses accountable for how they treat public schools and the children who depend on them.

Our early report cards, issued in 2018 and 2022, focused solely on the privatization of public education — the expansion of charter schools and voucher programs — and their effects on public schools, students, and taxpayers. In 2024, we broadened our lens to include school finance, teacher support, and student protections.¹

What emerged was a pattern that was difficult to ignore: the states most aggressively redirecting public funds toward private alternatives were also the states most neglectful of their public schools, their teachers, and their students. Privatization and disinvestment, it turns out, go hand in hand.

This latest investigation confirmed that relationship: we found a strong, statistically significant negative relationship between privatization and public school support ($p < 0.0001$): states that push privatization harder tend to fund their public schools less generously and maintain worse conditions for teaching and learning, while those that reject or limit privatization tend to be more supportive — both financially and in the quality of their teaching and learning environments.

Given that disinvestment in education and privatization go hand in hand, the continuing expansion of privatization is alarming. Conservative legislatures have aggressively expanded private school voucher programs, funneling public money to private schools — and increasingly, to wealthy families who never needed the help. Additional facility support and other legislation seek to advantage charter schools at the expense of public schools. Several states have gone so far as to require taxpayers to pick up the debt if a charter school fails, which the charter lobby, incredibly, [refers to as “moral obligation” laws](#).²

THE DANGER TO PUBLIC SCHOOLING IS PRESENT AND IMMEDIATE

“If America’s public schools cease to exist tomorrow, America would be a better place.”

Tiffany Justice
Founder, Moms for Liberty
Fellow, The Heritage Foundation



The national Republican Party, which once championed local control of public schools, now disparages neighborhood schools as “government schools” and embraces charter schools, homeschools, and vouchers. In 2025, Congress embedded a tax credit voucher program in its budget reconciliation package, the so-called ‘One Big Beautiful Bill’ — a significant and alarming escalation in the push to defund public education. At the same time, Linda McMahon [announced a \\$60 million increase](#) to the Charter Schools Program, bringing its total FY 2025 budget to a historic \$500 million³ — [funded largely by redirecting money](#) from terminated public school teacher-training grants and other canceled programs.⁴

The present Administration’s policies align with those put forth in the Heritage Foundation’s [Project 2025’s agenda for education](#), whose author, [Lindsey Burke](#), now serves as deputy chief of staff for policy and programs at the U.S. Department of Education.⁵ Tiffany Justice, founder of Moms for Liberty, then a visiting fellow in parental rights at the Heritage Foundation, was blunt [when asked by a ProPublica reporter](#) what percentage of children should be in public schools. She replied, “I hope zero. I hope to get to zero.”⁶ She continued, “If America’s public schools cease to exist tomorrow, America would be a better place.”

The agenda is no longer a matter of speculation. The danger to public schooling is present and immediate. The response must be equally decisive — statehouse by statehouse, across every state in the nation. Armed with facts, citizens must demand that their statehouses recognize that public schools are families’ first choice and that they deserve both policy and financial support. This report card provides the facts citizens need to take stock of where their state stands in the struggle to defend the publicly governed, welcoming schools that are the bedrock of our democracy and their community.



METHODOLOGY

OUR STATEHOUSE BY STATEHOUSE RATING METHODOLOGY

This report does not rate states based on test scores, nor does it rate individual schools. Rather, we rate statehouses based on those policies and laws that we know either strengthen or weaken the public schools that the vast majority of their children attend. The laws, policies, and funding enacted by governors and legislatures have a profound effect on whether or not their public schools wither or thrive.

We know that the accelerated funding of charters and vouchers undermines both support and funding for public schools. Therefore, we assign each statehouse a school privatization score, which comprises about half of its overall points.

Privatization, ranks statehouses based on two equally important dimensions. The first is the degree to which lawmakers have aggressively opened the door to charter schools, voucher programs, education savings accounts, and other market-based alternatives designed to compete with the traditional public school system.

The second, and arguably equally consequential dimension is the quality of the legal and regulatory framework that those same lawmakers have erected to safeguard the students and families who enter these alternative systems, as well as the taxpayers whose dollars fund them. The remaining points are reserved for three additional categories: protections for homeschooled students, school funding, and conditions for teaching and learning.

Protections for Homeschooled Students ranks statehouses on how well they protect a frequently overlooked group: students who do not attend formal schools. Incredibly, some states don't require any reporting of homeschooling information at all. In the majority of states, the laws are rigged for near absolute parental freedom, rather than the best interests and the protection of children.



By a 16-point margin respondents said that taxpayers should focus funding on a single, unified public education system rather than funding multiple education systems of public schools, charter schools, and vouchers. Democrats and Independents believe in funding one public school system only, by more than a 2 to 1 margin.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

School Funding ranks statehouses based on how responsibly they fund public education — evaluating both the adequacy and equity of school financing — and on whether they pay teachers a living wage.

Conditions for Teaching and Learning ranks statehouses based on factors that allow teachers and students to thrive, including the proportion of qualified teachers, teaching attractiveness, student-to-teacher and counselor ratios, and protections against discrimination and the use of physical punishment.

ALLOCATION OF POINTS AND OVERALL RESULTS

Each state began with 102 possible points, divided among the four categories listed below. Points were deducted based on the component rating criteria for each category. We then ranked states and converted overall scores to letter grades. Detailed information regarding the individual component assessment, sources used, and assigned points can be found in the Appendix following this report.

- 1. Privatization: Voucher and Charter Expansion and Student Protections (58 points)**
- 2. Protections for Homeschooled Students (4 points)**
- 3. School Funding (16 points)**
- 4. Conditions for Teaching and Learning (24 points)**



States	Overall Score	Privatization	Other
		Voucher, charter expansion & protections for students and taxpayers	Protections for homeschooled students, School funding, Conditions for Teaching and learning
Nebraska	87.5	A	B
Vermont	82	B	A
Kentucky	78.5	A	C
Connecticut	76.5	B	B
New York	76	C	A
New Jersey	75	B	A
North Dakota	73.5	B	C
Illinois	72	B	B
New Mexico	72	B	B
Hawaii	71	B	C
Massachusetts	69	B	C
Washington	69	B	C
Minnesota	66	C	C
Kansas	64	C	C
Alaska	63.5	B	C
Maine	63	C	B
California	62.5	C	C
Oregon	62.5	B	C
Delaware	61.5	B	C
Rhode Island	60.5	C	B
District of Columbia	59.5	C	B
Maryland	59	C	C
Michigan	58	C	C
Pennsylvania	58	D	B
Virginia	58	C	C
South Dakota	57.5	B	D
Colorado	55	C	C
Wyoming	53	D	B
Montana	48.5	D	C
Wisconsin	48.5	D	C
New Hampshire	47.5	F	C
Iowa	47	D	C
Mississippi	43.5	D	D
West Virginia	42.5	F	C
Missouri	39	D	D
South Carolina	38.5	F	C
Nevada	36	D	F
Ohio	33.5	F	C
Tennessee	33	D	F
Georgia	32	F	D
Texas	30	F	D
Utah	29.5	F	D
Alabama	29	F	F
Arkansas	29	F	D
Idaho	27	F	F
Oklahoma	27	F	D
Indiana	25.5	F	F
Louisiana	23.5	F	F
North Carolina	23.5	F	F
Arizona	18	F	F
Florida	14	F	F

PRIVATIZATION

PRIVATIZATION: VOUCHER AND CHARTER EXPANSION AND STUDENT PROTECTIONS

Vouchers

The school voucher movement has its roots in racism. It began in the mid-twentieth century with publicly funded vouchers [designed to allow white children to escape integration](#) in the wake of the Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁸

From the start, the movement was also shaped by libertarian ideologues who believed the marketplace should be free to discriminate. This was laid bare in a [2002 conversation](#) between Pearl Kane of Teachers College and Milton Friedman, widely regarded as the father of the modern voucher movement.⁹ When pressed on the issue, Friedman dismissed concerns about segregation: “Now, there may be some people who want to send their children to a racially segregated school, but in the main, most customers will be looking for other qualities.” In other words, he and his ideological heirs are comfortable with taxpayer subsidies flowing to schools that discriminate — openly or otherwise — trusting consumer preference to sort out what civil rights law, in their opinion, should not.

The consequences are well documented. [Study after study has found](#) that school choice programs generally increase segregation.¹⁰ Vouchers go further still — enabling outright discrimination with public money.

A 2023 [investigation by Education Voters of PA](#) found that every single voucher school in their random sample engaged in some form of discrimination — based on LGBTQ status, disability, academic ability, religion, or pregnancy.¹¹ One school, [Dayspring Christian Academy, states explicitly in its application that merely supporting the rights of LGBTQ students is grounds for denial of admission](#) — or expulsion.

Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia now have one or more voucher programs. We identified 73 programs, from traditional voucher programs to tax credit programs for scholarships to private schools, or individual credit programs that support nonpublic school students only. Most states with vouchers have multiple programs, including some that allow families to double-dip, applying for funding from multiple programs.¹²

Traditional vouchers

Traditional vouchers are grants of public funds to support a student’s tuition at private elementary or secondary schools. As of May 20, 2026, there were 19 traditional voucher

DAYSPRING CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

“[Lancaster, Pennsylvania] retains the right to refuse enrollment to or to expel any student who engages in sexual immorality, including any student who professes to be homosexual/bisexual/transgender or is a practicing homosexual/bisexual/transgender, as well as any student who condones, supports, or otherwise promotes such practices (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:27).”

programs across 11 states and the District of Columbia. Ohio alone has five programs. In the states with traditional voucher programs, vouchers may be used in either religious or non-sectarian schools.

Three states (New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont) have programs similar to conventional vouchers, called town tuition programs. These programs allow families who do not have a public school in their town to receive a per-pupil allotment to pay tuition at either a neighboring public school or a private school. Although the laws in Maine and Vermont prohibit taxpayer dollars from being used at religious schools, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled such restrictions unconstitutional in 2022 in [Carson v. Makin](#).¹³

For purposes of this report, we included town tuition programs in the voucher category for a total of 22 programs across 13 states and D.C.



When respondents were asked to choose what worries them about vouchers, lack of oversight to prevent misuse of funds came out on top at 29%.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

Nontraditional vouchers

Most state constitutions prohibit the use of taxpayer money to fund religious schools. To get around these restrictions, state legislatures have created programs that funnel money to individual parents, donors, or corporations instead of directly to schools. These indirect voucher programs take several forms, including Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), Tuition Tax-Credit Scholarship Programs, and Individual Tax Credit Programs. Some combine tax credits with ESAs, while others offer tax deductions directly to parents — but the result is the same: public money finding its way to private religious institutions through a legislative backdoor.

Education Savings (or Scholarship) Accounts (ESAs), also called Education Freedom Accounts, are the most damaging and irresponsible of all voucher programs. They have become the favored program of the libertarian far-right, whose ultimate goal is for tax dollars to follow the child.

ESAs redirect public school funding — typically 90% of what a district would have spent per pupil — into individual accounts that families can use for approved educational expenses. Eligible uses commonly include private elementary and secondary school tuition and fees, online learning programs, tutoring and therapy services, trips, homeschooling curricula, and college coursework. Wide latitude is given regarding what is considered to be an educational expense.

Funds are held in accounts established in the student's name and are generally accessed via a dedicated debit card. Despite their use of public dollars, ESA programs operate with remarkably little oversight — no standardized assessments, no performance benchmarks, and no systematic mechanisms to evaluate their impact on student academic outcomes.

This regulatory gap carries serious consequences. With minimal accountability structures in place,

ESA programs present significant opportunities for fraud and misuse of public funds — risks that have already materialized in several states with established programs.

A recent audit of the Arizona ESA program, the Empowerment Scholarship Account, flagged almost 84,000 cases of misspending between December 2024 and October 2025. [ABC15](#), an Arizona news service, identified purchases that included “diamond necklaces, lingerie, jet ski rentals, gaming consoles, and designer purses.”¹⁴

As of May 20, 2026, nineteen states had at least one ESA program funded directly or through tax credits: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Tuition Tax-Credit Scholarship Programs (TTCs) grant credits to businesses and individual taxpayers against state income taxes for contributions to nonprofit School Tuition Organizations (STOs) or Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). STOs/SGOs then award tuition grants to families for private schools and other educational expenses. The size of the tax credit varies by state, with some states offering a 100% dollar-for-dollar credit. As of May 2026, 18 states have TTCs. Because some have multiple programs, there are 22 programs overall.

The *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, signed into law by President Trump, created the first-ever federal tax credit scholarship program — essentially a national school voucher program. Participation is voluntary: each state must affirmatively opt in to make its residents eligible. As of May 20, 2026, [31 states have opted in](#), even though the Treasury Department has not yet released the full program regulations.¹⁵

Arizona’s billion-dollar school voucher program has become a hotbed of mismanagement and abuse, with roughly one in five participating families making purchases that violated program rules – draining over \$10 million in taxpayer money on items like condoms, lingerie, diamond rings, wedding gifts, wide-screen televisions, iPhones, gift cards, trips to Disneyland, international travel, and even parents paying money directly to themselves. Rather than catching the problem, state officials made it worse by implementing a policy that automatically greenlit all purchase requests under \$2,000, allowing 2.3 million transactions totaling \$654 million to be processed without any meaningful scrutiny.

Criminal fraud compounded the bureaucratic failure, including one scheme where out-of-state fraudsters invented dozens of fake children to pocket over \$110,000 in voucher money. Despite all of this, Arizona’s legislature has declined to enact a single reform, leaving a program with proven, systemic weaknesses to continue operating without adequate oversight or accountability.

Individual Tax Credit Programs: In addition to TTC programs, some states give individual tax credits for educational expenses at private schools or homeschools. We included the programs of nine states designed to subsidize private school and/or homeschool students. We did not include the modest programs of Illinois and Minnesota that included public school students.

Some of these programs offer subsidies large enough to eliminate the state tax bill of high-income earners. Wisconsin's program, for instance, provides credits of up to \$4,000 per elementary student and \$10,000 per high school student enrolled in private school.

Because there is no income limit, high-income families with higher tax payments are favored in this system. Oklahoma's program provides a tax credit of \$5,000 to \$7,500, with a \$1,000 credit for homeschoolers.



Sixty-eight percent of all states with one or more voucher programs do not require background checks for teachers in private schools or homeschools.

Significant Findings: Vouchers

- Nineteen states publicly fund homeschooling through ESAs, tax deductions, or credits, with few, if any, checks on instructional quality or student progress. In some states, including South Carolina, which prohibits funding to homeschoolers, homeschooling families “unbundle” services to evade the law’s restrictions.
- Ten states - Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming have 100% eligibility for ESA vouchers—a giveaway that will, in all probability, result in the defunding of public schools, significant tax increases, or insolvency.
- In every voucher state, students with disabilities lose their rights under IDEA when they agree to take a voucher to attend a private school, which is not covered by the law.
- Only the District of Columbia requires all students in their voucher program to take the same state tests as their public and charter school counterparts.
- Twenty-seven voucher states (87%) do not require teachers in private schools that take vouchers to be certified.
- Only the District of Columbia forbids voucher schools from discriminating in entrance requirements based on religion. Maine, Maryland, and Vermont are the only states that expressly prohibit discrimination in voucher schools based on student LGBTQ status.
- Sixty-eight percent of all states with one or more voucher programs do not require background checks for teachers in private schools or homeschools.

- Seventeen voucher states (55%) have at least one program that pays 60% or more of what would have been spent to educate the child in a public school. This is especially concerning because many voucher programs give tax dollars to students who have never attended a public school and whose families have no need for tuition support. In these cases, the state takes on considerable spending debt with no savings.
- According to the [Florida Policy Institute](#), in FY 2024–25, nearly four billion state tax dollars were funneled to the state’s voucher programs, with more than half going to the ESA voucher.¹⁶ Nearly one in four state education dollars now flow to private/home-school options in Florida. That is because the program, like many of the new ESA programs, gives vouchers to families whose children are already in private schools or homeschools — a gift of taxpayer funds for those who, in the past, made a choice and then paid their own way.

Charter Schools

Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws, although Kentucky’s funding of charter schools was recently declared unconstitutional. The states without charter laws are Nebraska, South Dakota, and Vermont.

Whether charter schools are truly public schools is subject to ongoing debate. In his [2023 decision](#) striking down Kentucky’s charter law, Judge Phillip J. Shepherd of Kentucky’s Franklin County Circuit Court clearly outlined why charter schools were not public schools according to Kentucky’s Constitution.¹⁷

He specifically mentioned the following: their exemption from traditional oversight and regulation; enrollment caps, thus shutting out some children; for-profit management that provides no “guardrails that ensure these tax dollars are used for a public purpose;” and governance by a board not elected by the public.

Judge Shepherd’s decision was upheld this year in a [unanimous decision of the Kentucky Supreme Court](#). Citing a previous decision, the justices noted, “We cannot sell the people of Kentucky a mule and call it a horse, even if we believe the public needs a mule.” They continued, “Innovation is welcome. Circumvention is not.”¹⁸

Both the district and the Supreme Court of Kentucky were correct in pointing out that charter schools are not open to all, even beyond their enrollment caps. In 2002, Wagma Mommandi and Kevin Welner of the National Education Policy Center and the University of Colorado co-authored [School’s Choice: How Charter Schools Control Access and Shape Enrollment](#).¹⁹ These practices shape student bodies



Overall, respondents’ biggest concern with charter schools was fraud or financial mismanagement. Disruptive closings and drawing funds and students from public schools were also top concerns.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

with children who are easier to teach and families who are more involved.

Kentucky’s law is not alone in its failings. In the vast majority of states that allow charter schools, private unelected boards govern those schools — with no term limits and no formal accountability to the communities they serve. Only Alaska, Kansas, Maryland, and Virginia prohibit this arrangement. A handful of states permit a mix of governance models. Still, the majority of charter school states go further, legally requiring that charter boards be run by independent nonprofits.

The debate regarding the “publicness” of charter schools has taken on new importance as the question of whether charter schools can be religious schools weaves its way through the courts.

Non-classroom-based charter schools

While most charter schools are brick-and-mortar institutions, a growing sector operates entirely online — and is largely run by for-profit corporations.

This includes full-time virtual charters, blended schools that split time between in-person and online instruction, and a newer homeschool model in which a charter school sponsors and funds a family’s home education, often with an online component. [This homeschool charter arrangement](#) funnels public money directly to families in the form of curriculum and cash, effectively creating a fully funded homeschool program even in states without ESA vouchers — while the charter skims a cut off the top.²⁰

The problems with online charters, however, run deeper than financial opportunism. These schools are frequently [in the news for fraud](#), and their academic track record is dismal — a fact acknowledged even by many who support the charter school movement more broadly.²¹

Like voucher schools, charter schools are subject to fewer regulations and less oversight than neighborhood public schools. As with voucher schools, this has resulted in significant concerns regarding accountability, accessibility, fiscal responsibility, and academic quality.

At the end of this report, the Appendix explains how points were deducted from states with charter schools.

Definition of a common school (public school) in Kentucky

“Common school” means an elementary or secondary school of the state supported in whole or in part by public taxation.

No school shall be deemed a “common school” or receive support from public taxation unless the school is taught by a certified teacher for a minimum school term as defined by KRS 158.070 and every child residing in the district who satisfies the age requirements of this section has had the privilege of attending it.

Significant findings: Charters

- Although charters claim they are open to everyone via a lottery, thirty-nine states give enrollment preferences to students beyond returning students, siblings, and disadvantaged students. Four states allow charter schools to shape enrollment using academic and talent screening. North Carolina offers [enrollment privileges](#) to tuition-paying foreign exchange students and the students of selected private pre-schools.²² Florida gives exclusive enrollment privileges to the employees of businesses that service The Villages, a retirement community whose developer started a charter school.
- Ten states (including the District of Columbia) enrolled 12% or more of their public school students in charter schools. In the District of Columbia, 44% of nonprivate enrollment is in charter schools (down from 48% in 2024). However, in nine states, the proportion of students in charter schools is two percent or less.
- Thirty-four states either do not require that charter school students be taught by certified and licensed teachers or allow so many exceptions that any existing regulations are meaningless. States with special charter school certifications were included in the thirty-four.
- Thirty-seven states allow entirely virtual, online schools; thirty-two enable for-profit corporations to run them. This is despite significant evidence that students in such schools make poor academic progress and have extremely [low graduation rates](#) that hover around 50%.²³ In twelve states, more than one in four charter students are in an online school.
- In 39 states, for-profit companies are permitted to manage nonprofit charter schools. One common arrangement — known as a “sweeps” contract — allows a for-profit management company to

Will the Supreme Court greenlight religious charters, and if so, will that also greenlight discrimination?

A recently released [National Education Policy Center \(NEPC\) brief](#) warns that the Supreme Court is poised to deliver a “one-two punch” that would allow taxpayer-funded religious charter schools to discriminate and be shielded from civil rights and accountability laws. However, the authors argue this outcome can only affect states where private, independent organizations govern charter schools. The remedy is to restructure charter governance so that public entities – such as local school districts and elected school boards – create, staff, and govern all charter schools. Beyond protecting civil rights, the brief argues, district governance also brings stronger financial oversight, reduced fraud risk, and gives communities a democratic voice in how charter schools are built and run.

handle a school’s day-to-day operations while receiving the bulk of its public funding in return. Critics argue this structure effectively transfers both financial control and decision-making authority away from the nonprofit and into private hands. This practice is especially prevalent in six states — Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, and West Virginia — where for-profit companies manage more than 30% of all charter schools.

- In 26 states, charter school closures are such a serious issue that more than 31% of all of the state’s charter schools that ever had enrollment have closed. In six states, this “churn rate” exceeded 50%.
- The majority of charter states allow owners or employees of the management corporation (EMO or CMO) that operates the school to serve on the school’s nonprofit and supposedly independent board. Nearly all allow potential conflicts of interest between the charter school and its service providers. In some states, those related party transactions are not even required to be disclosed.
- Under the guise of “innovation,” the lack of public transparency is well-documented and appalling. Only one state, Ohio, makes the contracts between charter schools and their management companies accessible on the state education department website. That lack of transparency also extends to the management corporations that run virtually every aspect of the school.

CHARTERED FOR PROFIT II: PANDEMIC PROFITEERING



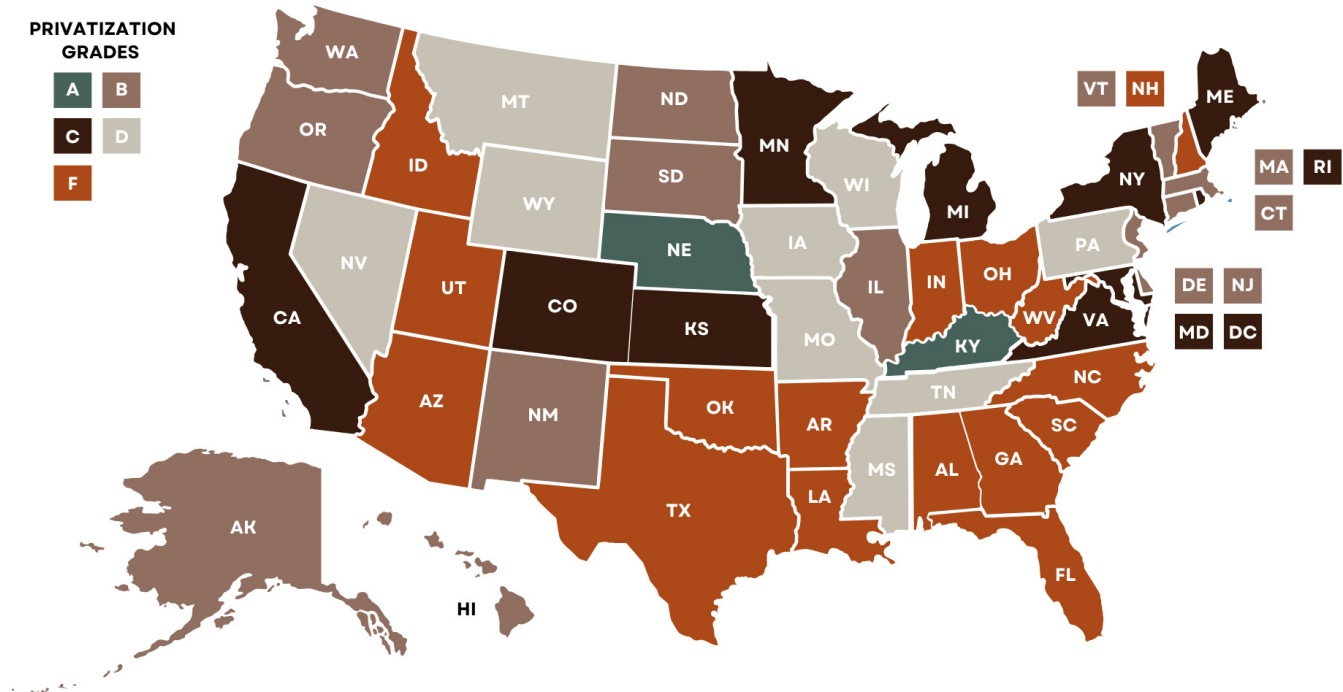
For a comprehensive understanding of the for-profit charter sector, we recommend our 2021 report, *Chartered For Profit: The Hidden World of Schools Operated For Financial Gain*, and our 2023 report, *Chartered for Profit II: Pandemic Profiteering*.

The charter lobby has not given up on its goal of “making all public schools function like charter schools”. The Indianapolis Public School District will now be run not by an elected school board but by a [new mayor-appointed board](#), stacked, in part, with charter school leaders.

In Florida, charter chains can claim space inside virtually any public school with unused seats – rent-free and at district expense. Within days of this rule taking effect, charter operators had sent at least [690 letters of intent to co-locate](#) inside public schools across 22 counties.

PRIVATIZATION GRADES

Voucher, charter expansion & student protections



Alabama	F	Kentucky	A	North Dakota	B
Alaska	B	Louisiana	F	Ohio	F
Arizona	F	Maine	C	Oklahoma	F
Arkansas	F	Maryland	C	Oregon	B
California	C	Massachusetts	B	Pennsylvania	D
Colorado	C	Michigan	C	Rhode Island	C
Connecticut	B	Minnesota	C	South Carolina	F
Delaware	B	Mississippi	D	South Dakota	B
District of Columbia	C	Missouri	D	Tennessee	D
Florida	F	Montana	D	Texas	F
Georgia	F	Nebraska	A	Utah	F
Hawaii	B	Nevada	D	Vermont	B
Idaho	F	New Hampshire	F	Virginia	C
Illinois	B	New Jersey	B	Washington	B
Indiana	F	New Mexico	B	West Virginia	F
Iowa	D	New York	C	Wisconsin	D
Kansas	C	North Carolina	F	Wyoming	D

PROTECTIONS FOR HOMESCHOOLED CHILDREN

Homeschooling, once predominantly found in rural areas among religious fundamentalist families, is now the fastest-growing education sector. Formerly considered in conflict with states' compulsory education laws, a series of court cases with implications for homeschooling left the practice unchallenged as it grows.

A [technology-based industry](#) has emerged to support homeschooling, incentivized as thirteen states now subsidize homeschooling through vouchers or tax credits.²⁴ This new industry has a vested financial interest in homeschooling and is marketing its services to families.

In addition, charter schools have popped up to support homeschoolers, providing resources, giving parents an “allowance,” and taking a heavy cut of public funding for themselves. These schools, which California classifies as non-classroom-based charter schools, mask the number of students who are, for all intents and purposes, homeschooled. These charter schools for homeschoolers compete for parents by offering educational funds that parents [can self-direct](#) for anything from sailing lessons to field trips to Disneyland—all paid for by taxpayers.²⁵

In Arizona, homeschooling families have used ESA vouchers for [state-approved recreational purposes](#), including the purchase of wide-screen televisions, diamond necklaces, trampolines, and expensive LEGO toy sets.²⁶ Although homeschooling via charter schools requires students to take the state test, in Arizona, no evidence of learning is required of families who take ESA funds [worth 90 percent](#) of what would have been spent on their child had they attended the neighborhood public school.²⁷

Even as homeschooling growth has accelerated, laws to protect the homeschooled child have not. Through the relentless pressure exerted by the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HLDA), co-founded by right-wing Evangelical Michael Harris, even the most modest legislation designed to protect homeschooled children from educational or physical neglect and abuse has been opposed with breathtaking ferocity. Since our last report, only one state, Nebraska, has enacted homeschool reform—placing a [14-day delay](#) on a child being pulled from school for homeschooling once a child protective service investigation has begun.

Raylee Browning was eight years old when she [died of abuse and neglect](#) in 2018. Her teachers had reported concerns to Child Protective Services – but rather than triggering intervention, [her abusers](#) removed her from school and began homeschooling, shielding her from further scrutiny.

West Virginia lawmakers have introduced legislation in response, but the bill has stalled across multiple legislative sessions under sustained pressure from homeschool advocacy groups.

Meanwhile, [Iowa loosened its already minimal homeschooling oversight](#) to allow any number of students to be taught by a paid private instructor, with no background checks, safety protections, or requirements.

In 2013, the [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#) was formed to promote laws protecting children from abusive homeschooling.²⁸ Founded by adults who were themselves homeschooled, their advocacy work includes a database of stories of brutal neglect, including homeschooled children [murdered](#), [sexually assaulted](#), [imprisoned](#), and [starved](#)—all of which rarely attract national attention.²⁹ Although some students who attend brick-and-mortar schools are also victims of child abuse, they are seen regularly by adults outside of the home—adults who are trained mandated reporters. Thus, while the frequency of abuse may be similar, mistreatment in the homeschool environment can quickly escalate undetected, resulting in [more severe consequences for children](#).³⁰



Yet despite well-documented instances, the HDLA quickly mobilizes its members and fights any attempts at laws to protect homeschooled children or lessen the possibility of educational neglect. After horrendous incidents of the abuse of children, some of which resulted in death, California, Michigan, West Virginia, and Wisconsin [attempted to pass reasonable legislation](#).³¹ In each case, the bills were shut down when opposition organized.

The homeschool environment is the most unsupervised sector of schooling, thus making taxpayer subsidies the most indefensible.

At the end of this report, the Appendix explains how points were deducted for lax homeschooling laws.

Significant Findings: Protection for Homeschooled Students

- Eleven states do not require parents to report that they are homeschooling their children. Fourteen states require only a one-time notice, with no annual follow-up.
- Only two states, Arkansas and Pennsylvania, have laws to protect homeschooling students from the perpetrators of violent crimes (Pennsylvania) or from registered sex offenders (Arkansas).
- Two states (Nebraska and Tennessee) prevent parents from starting homeschooling during a Child Protective Services investigation. No state monitors homeschool families with a history of interactions with social services.
- In most states, how homeschooled students are progressing academically is unknown. Only eight states require a standardized test, a portfolio, or work. An additional handful require the parent to assess without an obligation to share results with the local school district. Most states do not require any verification of student learning, allowing the parent to issue a diploma.
- Six states — Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Mississippi, Utah, and Virginia — do not have mandated instructional subjects, time requirements, or any requirements regarding the assessment of learning.

- Only 11 states require that parents have even a minimal education requirement to homeschool — a GED.
- Only one state, Pennsylvania, did not lose any points on the five factors we considered: notification of homeschooling, minimal parental education requirements, mandated assessments, mandated curriculum, and a criminal background check. Four states, Alaska, Indiana, Iowa, and Oklahoma, lost every possible point.³² While having no regulations around homeschooling, Oklahoma allows parents to deduct \$1,000 from their tax bill for homeschooling expenses.³³



SCHOOL FUNDING

[Research has firmly established](#) a positive correlation between per-pupil spending and student learning outcomes, making funding a critical factor in the quality of education students receive.³⁴ To identify the most meaningful comparative funding measures, this analysis draws on data from the Education Law Center (ELC), a national nonprofit that has advocated for fair and equitable school funding, racial justice, and effective school reform for more than fifty years. Their annual report, [Making the Grade](#), analyzes and compares public school funding across all fifty states and the District of Columbia using three measures of funding fairness.³⁵

For the category School Funding, we include the following three measures, based on ELC's 2025 Making the Grade report, which used data from the latest available school year: 2022-23.

Funding Level – cost-adjusted, per-pupil revenue from both state and local sources.

Funding Distribution – a measurement of the gaps in how funding is distributed to schools that serve high proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Funding Effort – the effort states make to support PK-12 public education based on the state's wealth as measured by its gross domestic product (GDP).

We also included one additional measure: **Average Teacher Salaries** – The average 2024-25 teacher salary for each state, which we adjusted based on the state's cost of living.

Significant Findings: School Funding

- Florida lost every possible point in this category. It is in the bottom decile in all three finance categories and the lowest state group for teacher salaries adjusted for cost of living. Unsurprisingly, it was also among the states with the highest percentage of underqualified teachers, a rating to be discussed in the next section, Conditions for Teaching and Learning.
- Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina, and Tennessee earned only two of sixteen possible points, providing dismal and inequitable support for their public schools.
- The state that did the best job of financing public education is New York, followed by Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Wyoming.
- States in the bottom eleven for adjusted teacher salaries are Hawaii, with the lowest average salary adjusted for cost of living (\$40,360), followed closely by Florida, Maine, Arizona, Montana, North Carolina, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Vermont, South Dakota, and Alaska. Four of these states also receive low grades for funding their schools based on their ability to pay.



46% of respondents identified lack of funding as the greatest challenge facing public schools – the top factor among ten. Only 14% identified teacher unions as a problem.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Right-wing political forces have mounted a coordinated campaign against public education — eroding trust in neighborhood schools, creating hostile working conditions for teachers, and withdrawing support from the students who depend on them the most.

Florida’s governor recently signed [two bills](#) that weaken teacher unions and strip away collective bargaining rights. To demonstrate his hostility towards collective bargaining, he chose May 1, the day that celebrates workers’ rights, to sign the laws.³⁶

At the same time, numerous states have enacted laws that make [the lives of transgender students](#) significantly more difficult, while not fully protecting all LGBTQ students from bullying and discrimination.³⁷ Nearly half of all states still permit corporal punishment in schools, despite the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) calling for a nationwide ban on physical discipline in both public and private schools.³⁸

With these and other conditions in mind, we evaluated a range of factors that shape the daily experiences of students and teachers in every state — and examined how those factors interact to reveal broader patterns. Below is an explanation of each factor used in our scoring.

- **The Use of Corporal Punishment** — Corporal punishment, when used to discipline a student, uses pain or physical discomfort to stop unwanted behaviors. This may involve paddling, shaking, hitting, or restricting a child in a position for some time to inflict discomfort. Children with disabilities and Black students are significantly more likely to receive corporal punishment than their white peers, according to [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#).³⁹
- **Bullying and Discrimination** — American LGBTQ+ youths experience bullying at high rates, [identifying it as the second most significant problem they face](#).⁴⁰ Bullying affects not only students’ mental health but also their ability to progress academically. We therefore rated states on whether or not their bullying laws, as well as their discrimination laws, have sufficient protections for all students by explicitly including prohibitions against discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ+ students.
- **Student-teacher and Student-counselor Ratios** — Lower student-to-teacher and student-to-counselor ratios promote better teaching and learning. [Numerous studies](#) have shown the academic benefits of smaller class sizes, especially for low-income, early learners.⁴¹ [Reductions in student/counselor](#) ratios have been associated with better academic outcomes, as well as a reduction in disciplinary infractions.⁴²
- **Collective Bargaining** — Collective bargaining rights for teachers and school employees are essential to building a well-paid, stable, professional workforce — and ultimately to student success. Contracts cover far more than wages and benefits; in recent years, unions have embraced “bargaining for the common good,” bringing community members and students directly into the process. Benefits like pensions attract and retain quality educators, serving the interests of schools and communities alike.



58% of respondents chose Qualified Teachers as the top attribute of public schools.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

- **Conditions that Attract High-Quality Teachers**--Our students deserve well-prepared, qualified teachers. Unfortunately, many factors, including low pay, falling prestige, stress, and safety concerns, have all contributed to fewer young people entering the profession. That means that our students are increasingly being taught by teachers who are not fully certified or teach outside of their area of certification.

We therefore included the following measures in our state-by-state evaluation of conditions for teaching and learning:

- The proportion of underqualified teachers in each state.
- A rating of teacher attractiveness as determined by the Learning Policy Institute, which includes compensation, working conditions, school resources, teacher turnover, and the percent of employed uncertified teachers.

Significant Findings: Conditions That Promote Teaching and Learning

- New York and Vermont do the best job of creating the best conditions for teaching and learning, when considering all of the factors listed above. Their student anti-bullying and discrimination laws were comprehensive. Corporal punishment is explicitly forbidden. They had relatively low teacher/student and counselor/student ratios. Teachers are allowed to bargain collectively, and they scored well (within the top quintile) on the [Learning Policy Institute's teacher attractiveness rating](#).⁴³
- Arizona was at the bottom. It was in the lowest quintile for teacher attractiveness and teacher qualifications, teacher/student ratios, and counselor/student ratios. Additional states with low scores were Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and Louisiana.
- The relationship between the percentage of qualified teachers and the state's teacher attractiveness rating was both positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$). That means that states that are more attractive to teach in have higher percentages of qualified teachers. Kentucky, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming were in the top decile on both ratings. The states with the worst scores in both were Arizona, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, and North Carolina.
- On those measures that directly impact students' physical and emotional safety (bullying, corporal punishment, and non-discrimination laws), eighteen states do the best job protecting students: California, Colorado, D.C., Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.
- Missouri and South Dakota provide no protections for students on the above. Missouri's state law actively permits corporal punishment (South Dakota is silent). They are also the only states that [prevent schools or districts from adding protections for LGBTQ students](#) into their nondiscrimination policies.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION: THE STAKES HAVE NEVER BEEN HIGHER

This report tells a clear and troubling story. Across the country, statehouses are making deliberate choices — choices that defund neighborhood schools, strip teachers of dignity and professional standing, leave vulnerable children without protection, and redirect billions of public dollars to private alternatives that are too often beyond public control. These are not accidents of policy or the unintended consequences of well-meaning reform. They are the predictable results of an ideological campaign, decades in the making, whose architects have been candid about their ultimate goal: the elimination of public education as Americans have known it.

That goal is no longer distant. It is being pursued in budget reconciliation packages in Washington, in voucher expansion bills in state capitals, in the quiet gutting of teacher training grants, and in the systematic dismantling of the accountability structures that protect students and taxpayers alike. When a prominent leader of this movement openly declares [that she hopes zero percent of American children attend public schools](#), and when that sentiment finds expression in the policies of a sitting federal administration, the moment demands more than concern. It demands action.⁴⁵

What the Data Tell Us

The grades in this report are not merely academic assessments influenced by demographics or changing test standards. **They are a measure of how seriously each statehouse takes its obligation to the children who attend public schools within its borders.** Seventeen states earned an F -- meaning they failed to meet even 40 percent of the standards we set for responsible stewardship of public education. Florida, at the bottom of the list for the third consecutive report card, scored only 14 out of 102 possible points. Arizona followed close behind. These are not outliers struggling against limited resources. They are states that have made active, funded, and sustained choices to abandon their public schools while directing public money toward private alternatives with little oversight, scant accountability, and documented records of fraud, discrimination, and academic failure.

The patterns across categories are impossible to ignore:

- States that most aggressively expand vouchers and charter schools are the same states that underfund their public schools, underpay their teachers, and provide the weakest protections for students. Our analysis found what statisticians consider a moderate/strong relationship with a probability of occurring well beyond chance between the expansion of irresponsible “choice policies.”
- States with the most expansive ESA programs have produced the most egregious fraud — with public dollars spent on diamond necklaces, jet ski rentals, and gaming consoles while children’s educational needs go unmet.
- States that strip teachers of collective bargaining rights are the same states with the lowest teacher attractiveness ratings, the highest proportions of underqualified teachers, and the most hostile conditions for learning.
- States that resist homeschooling oversight are, in many cases, the same states subsidizing it — providing public money with no accountability for how it is spent or whether children are learning at all.

The overlap is not coincidental. Privatization and disinvestment are two sides of the same coin.

What is at Stake

Public schools are not merely institutions that deliver academic instruction. They are the places where children of every background, ability, faith, language, and circumstance are welcomed — not as paying customers, but as members of a community with an equal right to learn. They are governed by publicly elected boards, funded by public taxes, and accountable to the public in ways that no charter management company, no ESA vendor, and no private religious school is required to be.

That openness — that unconditional welcome — is precisely what distinguishes public schools from every alternative being promoted in their place. Charter schools limit enrollment. Voucher schools can expel students for who they are. ESA programs can be looted with a debit card. Homeschool arrangements can shield children from scrutiny they may desperately need. Public schools cannot do any of these things. That is not a weakness. That is their defining strength, and it is worth defending.

When public schools are weakened — through funding cuts, through the diversion of students and dollars, through the erosion of the teaching profession — the consequences fall hardest on the children least able to seek alternatives: children in poverty, children with disabilities, children in rural communities, children whose families lack the time, resources, or access to navigate a fragmented marketplace of educational options. The grand promise of school choice has never been equally available to all families. For those left behind in underfunded, understaffed public schools, it is no choice at all.

What Must Be Done

This report card is not an exercise in despair. It is a map — a statehouse-by-statehouse accounting of where the fight stands, and where it must be taken. The states at the top of our rankings — Nebraska and Vermont — demonstrate that it is possible to protect public schools, support teachers, fund education equitably, and resist the pressure to privatize. Their example is not a fantasy. It is a blueprint.

For everyone who reads this report, the call is the same, and it is urgent:

Parents and community members must show up — at school board meetings, at legislative hearings, and at the ballot box. The politicians making these decisions are accountable to voters, and they must be reminded of that. Organized, sustained community pressure has stopped harmful legislation before and can do so again.

Educators must continue to speak out — about what their students need, about what their working conditions have become, and about the consequences of policies that their legislators may never see firsthand. Their voices carry authority that no think tank report can replicate.

Advocates and organizers must connect the dots — between the voucher bill in the statehouse and the school that closes the following year, between the charter scandal in the news and the students left



“When local public schools close, it often harms the surrounding community and drives down home values.” 70% of respondents agreed.

Source: 2026 NPE/YouGov Survey

without a school, between the federal tax credit program and the local district that can no longer afford an art teacher or a counselor. The public needs help seeing the full picture.

Policymakers who believe in public education must act with the same urgency as those who seek to dismantle it. That means not only defending existing programs, but advancing affirmative legislation: stronger accountability for charter schools, tighter oversight of voucher spending, meaningful protections for homeschooled children, restored funding for teacher preparation, and policies that make teaching an attractive and sustainable profession.

A Final Word

For nearly a decade, the Network for Public Education has issued these report cards because we believe that democracy requires an educated citizenry, and an educated citizenry requires schools that are open to everyone. Public education is not a relic of the past to be disrupted and replaced. It is one of the most consequential commitments a society can make to its future — a promise that every child, regardless of circumstance, deserves a quality education in a safe and welcoming school.

That promise is under assault. The assault is organized, well-funded, and operating at every level of government simultaneously. But its desired outcome is not inevitable, and it is not unstoppable. Statehouse by statehouse, community by community, election by election — the defense of public education is both possible and necessary.



APPENDIX: GRADING CRITERIA AND SOURCES

What follows are our four categories with all components under each, along with an explanation of how we deducted points from each state, beginning from a 102-point baseline.

In analyzing states' actions to protect and defend public education, we sought the most recent information we could obtain from reliable sources. If an update to the law was known to us, we used that update rather than the listed source.

CATEGORY #1: Privatization: Voucher and Charter Expansion and Protections

Traditional and non-traditional voucher programs

Expansion and financial implications

Total number of programs:

States lost .5 points for each active voucher program operating in the state: voucher, ESA, tax credit, or individual tax credits or deductions if they applied to private school and/or homeschool families only.

Source: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025.](#)

Voucher eligibility:

States lost points based on the student eligibility rate of their most expansive program.

0 point deducted: 25% or less.

1 point deducted: 26%-40%.

2 points deducted: 41% -75%.

3 points deducted: 76%-89%.

4 points deducted: 90% or greater; universal or near universal eligibility.

Please note that in states with multiple programs, with the exception of universal vouchers, this is an underestimate. Because students can choose from various programs and, in some cases, obtain funding from more than one program, this rating reflects the most expansive program only. In addition, some programs have regional boundaries. Therefore, all ratings are estimates.

Source: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025.](#)

Family income limits:

States lost 2 points if they had at least one voucher program that did not consider family income when distributing vouchers.

Source: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025.](#)

Funding for homeschooling:

States lost points if they provided taxpayer funding for homeschooling. Points were deducted as follows:

1 point deducted: A voucher, or a credit of not more than \$1,000.

1.5 points deducted: Vouchers are in place, but with extensive restrictions.

2 points deducted: If homeschoolers received a voucher commensurate with private school voucher amounts.

Source: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025](#).

Public funding diverted to voucher programs:

States lost 0-4 points depending on how closely their most generous voucher program funding approached the funding they gave to public schools. Points were deducted as follows:

0 points deducted: programs in which the proportion of funding for the most generous voucher program was below 20%.

1 point deducted: if the proportion was between 21% to 40%.

2 points deducted: if the proportion was 41% to 60%.

3 points deducted: if the proportion was 61% to 95%

4 points deducted: if the proportion was above 95%.

Source: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025](#).

Student protections:

States lost 2 points if they had at least one voucher program that did not outlaw discrimination in admission based on religion. It lost an additional 2 points if it had one or more programs that did not prohibit discrimination based on LGBTQ status.

Source: A review of state laws, December 2023.

States lost 2 points if they did not require voucher recipients to take the same state tests as their counterparts in public and charter schools.

Sources: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025](#). A review of state laws.

Requirements for teacher certification:

States lost 2 points if they had at least one program that allows students to be taught in private schools or subsidized homeschools by uncertified teachers. States lost 3 points if there was no

requirement that the uncertified teacher hold a bachelor's degree.

Sources: [EdChoice: School Choice in America 2025](#), and review of voucher laws and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement Office of Non-Public Education's [State Regulation of Private Schools Database](#).

Required background checks for teachers and employees:

States lost 1 point if they had at least one voucher or subsidized homeschool program that does not require background checks for teachers and employees.

Sources: [American Federation for Children Growth Fund's Guidebook](#) and a review of state laws.

State accreditation required of private schools directly or indirectly accepting voucher funds:

States lost 2 points if they had at least one voucher program that doesn't require state accreditation of the private school. They lost 1 point if the unaccredited school was at least obligated to apply.

Sources: [American Federation for Children Growth Fund's Guidebook](#), a review of state laws, and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement Office of Non-Public Education's [State Regulation of Private Schools database](#).

Opt-in to the Federal tax credit voucher program: Any state that has opted into the federal tax credit voucher program as of May 12, 2026, lost two points.

Source: [Ed Week](#)

Charter Schools

Expansion:

States lost 0-4 points based on the percentage of students enrolled in charter schools relative to the total enrolled in both public and charter schools. Points were deducted as follows:

0 points deducted: No charter school enrollment reported.

1 point deducted: Less than 5% of all students classified as attending a public school are enrolled in a charter school.

2 points deducted: Between 6% and 11% of all students classified as attending a public school are enrolled in a charter school.

3 points deducted: Between 12% and 20% of all public school students classified as attending a public school are enrolled in a charter school.

4 points deducted: More than 20% of all public school students classified as attending a public school are enrolled in a charter school.

Sources: The NCES Database of the Common Core of Data 2024-2024 School Year. Enrollment in charter schools.

Charter churn:

States lost 0-2 points depending on the level of charter churn in their state, calculated from the NCES Database of the Common Core of Data, inclusive of the school years 1998-99 through 2024-25. The churn rate was computed by dividing the number of closed charter schools by the total number of charter schools that ever appeared in the CCD database. Only schools that reported student enrollment were included.

0 points deducted: 0-10%.

1 point deducted: 11-30%.

2 points deducted: 31% or more.

Source: Analysis of the Common Core of Data 1998-2025 conducted on behalf of the Network for Public Education by Ryan Pflerger, Ph.D.

Controlled growth:

States lost between 0 and 2 points depending on whether there were meaningful controls on the growth of charter schools. Controls included firm caps and/or the ability of community school boards to determine whether a charter school opens.

0 points deducted: firm caps or school board decision not overturned.

0.5-1.5 points deducted: based on the NCCSA rating of the effectiveness of any cap or other mechanism to control growth.

2 points deducted: no limits in the law on charter growth.

Sources: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' [Charter Law Database](#), archived February 2023, and a review of state laws. For more details on each state's caps and restrictions, see the National Center for Charter School Accountability's (NCCSA) ratings of charter laws found [here](#).

Responsible authorizing:

States lost between 0 and 2.5 points based on an analysis of their authorizing policies. Factors included were the number and quality of authorizers, authorization periods, authorizer review mandates, and authorizer reporting mandates.

0 points deducted: Only authorizers are school district boards of education.

0.5 – 2.0 points deducted: Based on the NCCSA rating of authorization laws.

2.5 points deducted: Caps that leave ample room for growth or that have expansion clauses. Fees are structured to motivate authorization and reauthorization, periods of authorization that exceed five years. Incomplete or weak reporting requirements.

Sources: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ [Charter Law Database](#), archived February 2023, and a review of state laws. For more details on each state’s charter authorizing laws, see the National Center for Charter School Accountability’s (NCCSA) ratings of charter laws found [here](#).

Percent of charter students in online charter schools or charter “homeschools”:

States lost between 0 and 4 points depending on the percentage of charter school students in online schools or “homeschool” charter schools.

0 points deducted: none.

1 point deducted: 1%-10%.

2 points deducted: 11%-25%.

3 points deducted: 26%-39%.

4 points deducted: 40% or more.

Sources: The NCES Database of the Common Core of Data 2024-2024 School Year. Enrollment in full or face virtual charter schools.

Fiscal drain on resources:

States lost between 0 and 5 points depending on the degree to which their charter funding laws drained district, state, and federal resources to create a parallel system of public education.

The more special funding streams are created for charter schools, and the more districts are burdened to provide services like facilities or access to sports and clubs, the more points are lost.

0 points lost: No fiscal impact on taxpayers.

1-5 points lost: Based on NCCSA ratings of the fiscal impact of charter schools on public schools and taxpayers.

Sources: A complete review of states’ funding laws by two independent researchers. For more details on each state’s charter funding, see the National Center for Charter School Accountability’s ratings of charter laws found [here](#).

Protections for students:

States lost between 0 and 2.5 points in this category, based on two criteria: whether charter schools are genuinely open to all students without favoritism, and whether their teachers are

properly qualified.

While charter schools routinely claim to welcome every student, nearly all states permit enrollment practices that gradually shape a school’s student body over time — through preferencing systems, exclusionary policies, or other forms of special access that benefit some students at the expense of others. States lost points where these privileges were allowed under state law.

On teacher qualifications, states also lost points if their charter laws did not require teachers to hold state certification, or if they allowed so many exceptions that the requirement became effectively meaningless.

0 points lost: No charter law or complete open enrollment without restriction or favoritism. All teachers are certified.

0.5 -2.0 points lost: Based on the extent of enrollment privilege allowed and exemptions to teacher certification laws.

2.5 points lost: Multiple categories of enrollment privileges. No teacher certification requirements.

Sources: The Education Commission of the States 50-State Comparison. [Does the state specify the students who may be given enrollment preferences?](#) Education Commission of the States 50 State Comparison. [Do teachers in a charter school have to be certified?](#) and [Charter Law Database](#), archived February 2023, and a review of state laws.

Multi-school charter contracts or multi-school contract boards:

Rather than make each charter proposal go through a rigorous approval process, some states allow charter chains to open new “campuses” under one charter holder and/or allow one board to oversee multiple charter schools, thus reducing oversight and direct governance. States lost 2 points if state law allows either practice or practice and 1 point if state law is silent, but the practice is occurring.

0 points lost: Multi-school contracts and boards are not allowed.

1 point lost: State law is silent, but the practice is occurring.

2 points lost: State law allows either practice.

Source: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ [Charter Law Database](#), archived February 2023.

Public status and community input:

States lost up to 2.5 points based on two governance factors: whether the charter school was overseen by an elected public body or a private entity, and the degree to which state law required

community input in the charter school's establishment.

0 points lost: Full community input via an elected public body with community input in the establishment of the charter school.

0.5-2.0 points lost: Based on the combination of the three factors described above.

2.5 points lost: Only independent boards are allowed, with no meaningful input by school districts in the existence or governance of the state's charter schools.

Sources: A review of states' charter laws. For more details on the public governance of each state's charter schools, see the National Center for Charter School Accountability's ratings of charter laws found [here](#).

Protections for taxpayers:

States lost between 0 and 2.5 based on the extent to which state law protected taxpayers against self-dealing and conflicts of interest in nonprofit charter schools. Points were awarded across three criteria:

- For-profit management contracts — whether state law restricted nonprofit charter schools from contracting with for-profit management organizations.
- Related-party transactions — whether state law prohibited financial transactions between charter school service providers and board members or their immediate family.
- Undue influence — whether state law barred owners or employees of an EMO or CMO from serving on the governing board of a school they manage.

0 points lost: For-profit management, related party transactions, and board members are forbidden to be employees of the CMO or EMO.

0.5-2.0 points lost: Based on the combination of the three factors described above.

2.5 points lost: State law allows for-profits, related party transactions, and permits owners and employees of management corporations on the charter board.

Sources: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' [Charter Law Database](#), archived February 2023. Review of state laws and research by the Network for Public Education.

CATEGORY #2: Protections for Homeschooled Students

Notification of homeschooling:

States lost one point if they did not require parents to provide notification that they were homeschooling their child. States lost a half point if they were only obligated to report homeschooling once, not annually.

Sources: [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#) and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Qualifications of the educational provider:

States lost a half point if the provider of education, who in most cases is the parent, was not required to have any educational qualifications. It should be noted that in most states that required qualification, the minimum requirement was a GED.

Sources: [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#) and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Assessment of learning:

States that did not obligate the homeschooling family to assess their child’s learning lost 1 point. States that obligated families to assess but did not require that assessment to be submitted lost a half point.

Sources: [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#) and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Mandated subjects:

States lost a half point if they did not require core subjects to be taught.

Sources: [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#) and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Criminal restrictions:

States lost 1 point if they did not restrict convicted criminals, including child abusers, from supervising homeschooled children or if they allowed families to switch to homeschooling during a Child Protective Services investigation.

Source: [Coalition for Responsible Home Education](#).

CATEGORY #3: School Funding

Funding level:

States lost 0 to 4 points based on the Education Law Center’s measurement of funding from state and local sources—cost-adjusted relative to the national average. The Education Law Center’s methodology can be found [here](#). States lost points as described below.

0 points deducted: States rated “A” by the Education Law Center.

1 point deducted: States rated “B” by the Education Law Center.

2 points deducted: States rated “C” by the Education Law Center.

3 points deducted: States rated “D” by the Education Law Center.

4 points deducted: States rated “F” by the Education Law Center.

Source: [2025 Making the Grade: How fair is school funding in your state?](#)

Funding effort:

States lost 0 to 4 points based on the Education Law Center’s measurement of public school funding within the context of the state’s wealth. The Education Law Center’s methodology can be found [here](#). States lost points as described below.

0 points deducted: States rated “A” by the Education Law Center.

1 point deducted: States rated “B” by the Education Law Center.

2 points deducted: States rated “C” by the Education Law Center.

3 points deducted: States rated “D” by the Education Law Center.

4 points deducted: States rated “F” by the Education Law Center.

Source: [2025 Making the Grade: How fair is school funding in your state?](#)

Funding distribution:

States lost 0 to 4 points based on the Education Law Center’s measurement of the extent to which funding is equitably distributed among low-poverty and high-poverty districts. The District of Columbia and Hawaii are single-district states and, therefore, had no points deducted. Other states lost points, as described below. The Education Law Center’s methodology can be found [here](#).

0 points deducted: States rated “A” by the Education Law Center.

1 point deducted: States rated “B” by the Education Law Center.

2 points deducted: States rated “C” by the Education Law Center.

3 points deducted: States rated “D” by the Education Law Center.

4 points deducted: States rated “F” by the Education Law Center.

Source: [2025 Making the Grade: How fair is school funding in your state?](#)

Teacher salaries adjusted for cost of living:

States were rated on how well they pay their teachers based on the average teacher salary (2024-2025) adjusted for state’s 2025 cost of living.

States lost points as described below.

0 points deducted: States whose adjusted salaries were among the top eleven.

1 point deducted: States whose adjusted salaries were in the second decile.

2 points deducted: States whose adjusted salaries were in the third decile.

3 points deducted: States whose adjusted salaries were in the fourth decile.

4 points deducted: states whose adjusted salaries were in the bottom decile.

Adjusted teacher salaries ranged from a low of \$40,360 in Hawaii to a high of \$81,240 in the state of Washington. Please note that awarding points based on rank is a crude measure of salary information. We recommend the National Education Association's Rankings and Estimates for a more detailed analysis.

Sources: [The National Education Association's Average Teacher Pay Data \(average teacher salary\)](#) adjusted by the [2025 cost-of-living data series](#) of the Missouri Economic and Information Center.

CATEGORY #4: Conditions for Teaching and Learning

Student bullying:

We rated states on the comprehensiveness of their anti-bullying laws, with particular attention to whether those laws protect all students — including LGBTQ students, who are disproportionately affected by bullying.

0 points deducted: States where the law prohibits bullying based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

1 point deducted: States where anti-bullying statutes do not explicitly include sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

2 points deducted: States with laws that explicitly *prevent* schools or school districts from adding LGBTQ protections to their internal anti-bullying laws.

Source: [Movement Advancement Project Safe School Laws](#)

Discrimination:

We rated states on the comprehensiveness of their discrimination laws, with particular attention to whether those laws protect all students — including LGBTQ students.

0 points deducted: States with laws that explicitly include LGBTQ students in non-discrimination policies.

1 point deducted: States with no explicit protections.

2 points deducted: States with laws that *prevent* schools or districts from adding protections for LGBTQ students in their nondiscrimination policies.

Source: Movement Advancement Project. [Safe School Laws: Non-Discrimination](#).

Bans on corporal punishment:

States were rated on whether or not they allow corporal punishment in their schools. States lost points as described below.

- 0 points deducted: States that expressly forbid corporal punishment in their schools.
- 1 point deducted: States that are silent on corporal punishment, thereby permitting it.
- 2 points deducted: States that expressly allow corporal punishment in schools.

Source: [U. S. Department of Education: Key Policy Letters](#) see footnote 6.

Student to teacher ratio:

States were rated on their K-12 student-to-teacher ratio. The smaller the ratio, the better the score. The quintiles determined by the Learning Policy Institute were translated into points.

States lost points as described below:

- 0 points: States in the lowest quintile.
- 1 point: States in the second quintile.
- 2 points: States in the third quartile.
- 3 points: States in the fourth quintile.
- 4 points: States in the highest quintile.

Source: [A State-by-State of the Teacher Workforce by the Learning Policy Institute](#), published in 2024. Sources of the data are identified in the technical supplement found [here](#).

Student to counselor ratio:

States were also rated on their student-to-counselor ratio. The smaller the ratio, the better the score. The quintiles determined by the Learning Policy Institute were translated into points.

States lost points as described below:

- 0 points: States in the lowest quintile.
- 1 point: States in the second quintile.
- 2 points: States in the third quartile.
- 3 points: States in the fourth quintile.
- 4 points: States in the highest quintile.

Source: [A State-by-State of the Teacher Workforce by the Learning Policy Institute](#), published in 2024. Sources of the data are identified in the technical supplement found [here](#).

Collective bargaining:

States were rated on whether teachers and other school staff were allowed to bargain collectively.

States lost points as described below:

0 points: States that allow educators to form a union and bargain collectively.

1 point: State with permissive bargaining rules.

2 points: States that prohibit collective bargaining.

Source: National Education Association. “[Understanding Collective Bargaining](#).”

Uncertified teachers:

States were rated on the percentage of uncertified teachers employed in the state. The quintiles determined by the Learning Policy Institute were translated into points.

States lost points as described below:

0 points: States in the lowest quintile.

1 point: States in the second quintile.

2 points: States in the third quartile.

3 points: States in the fourth quintile.

4 points: States in the highest quintile.

Source: [A State-by-State of the Teacher Workforce by the Learning Policy Institute](#), published in 2024. Sources of the data are identified in the technical supplement found [here](#).

Teacher attractiveness:

The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) rated each state on how attractive it is as a place to teach. Ratings were based on six factors: teacher compensation, working conditions, available resources, teacher qualifications, turnover rates, and state recruitment and retention efforts.

We based our ratings on LPI’s five-point scale of teacher attractiveness. States lost points as described below:

0 points: States in the lowest quintile.

1 point: States in the second quintile.

2 points: States in the third quartile.

3 points: States in the fourth quintile.

4 points: States in the highest quintile.

Source: [A State-by-State of the Teacher Workforce by the Learning Policy Institute](#), published in 2024. Sources of the data are identified in the technical supplement found [here](#).

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