



School Choice Definitions

School choice means empowering parents with the freedom to choose the best educational environments for their children – from traditional public schools to public charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, online learning, and homeschooling. The following are definitions of school choice policies and programs that are frequently discussed during National School Choice Week. Remember: each state and locality has different policies.

Public School Open Enrollment

Open enrollment policies provide increased education options within the traditional public school system. Open enrollment allows parents to select the best public schools for their children, regardless of where those schools are located. Depending on the state or locality, this means that parents can choose any public school within a district (intra-district school choice), or, in some cases, outside of their home district (inter-district school choice).

Public Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that are allowed the freedom to innovate while being held accountable for student achievement. Charter schools are always public schools and they are not allowed to charge tuition. Charter schools must accept all students who enroll, as long as space is available. These schools can be created or managed by school districts, state authorizing boards, universities, mayors, nonprofit organizations, or other businesses, depending on the state.

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools are public schools that are funded by taxpayers and do not charge tuition. These schools are created by individual school districts, groups of school districts working together, or partnerships between districts and colleges or universities. Magnet schools are based on specific themes. For example, some magnet schools focus on math and science, while others focus on performing arts, technology, robotics, aviation, foreign languages, and more. Students in these schools do not just learn about these topics, though. They are required to demonstrate proficiency in all subject areas.

Private School Choice

Private school choice programs are created by individual states to give parents greater access to private schools for their children. These include many different types of private schools, such as independent and non-religious schools, schools affiliated with different faiths and religions, schools that serve children with special needs, and boarding and military academies. More than half of U.S. states have created scholarship programs to help make private and nonpublic schools more accessible to children and families.

Private school choice programs can take several different forms, including:

- *Opportunity scholarship programs*, which allow parents to use all or part of the tax funding set aside for their children's education to choose private education.
- *Tax credit scholarship programs*, which allow individuals and corporations to receive state tax credits for donating to nonprofit organizations that provide tuition assistance for children.
- *Personal tax credits and deductions*, which allow parents who send their children to private schools to receive state income tax credits, or deductions.
- *Education savings accounts*, which allow parents to access the state and/or local funds set aside for their child for a variety of educational needs, including private education.

Online Learning and Course Access

Virtual academies instruct students through online or digital curricula. These schools are free public schools, managed by state authorities or independent public providers such as school districts and charter schools. Students in these schools are paired with specific teachers, and they pursue coursework and take tests just like students in traditional, brick-and-mortar schools.

In addition, some states permit students in nonpublic schools to participate in public online courses in addition to their brick-and-mortar schooling through dual enrollment or "course access." This allows parents to customize the educational experiences of their children by combining online learning with homeschooling or private education.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is the process of parents educating children in the home. Parents provide curriculum and instruction to their children, sometimes with the assistance of community homeschool groups, collaborative organizations, or online support curriculum.

While homeschooling is permitted in all 50 states, each state has its own homeschooling rules and policies. Specific legal requirements for homeschooling vary from state to state, but may include homeschool notification, record keeping, and academic assessment.