



Educational Freedom and Stewardship

Public education is not a program. It's a civic infrastructure. When it works, it transforms lives, supports families, encourages educators, strengthens communities, and makes Idaho a great place to live, work, and play.

Since its founding in 1890, Idaho has long valued freedom and limited government control. In 1997, Idaho's legislature began advancing educational freedom by passing a law allowing for the establishment of charter public schools. This began to withdraw the exclusive monopoly the state had given to 117 school districts, making them the sole provider of public education within their boundaries. This year, over 42,500 students are being educated in 84 charter schools that operate throughout the state. Overall, Idaho's charter schools deliver results for students and families. (See graphs below).

Moving from Assignment to Choice

Moving beyond the assignment model of public schooling, Idaho gave students, families, and educators greater individual liberty, allowing them to become active consumers, rather than passive recipients. This is a fundamental power shift because when families have options, schools need to earn trust by living their mission and meeting the needs of students and families. This shift also pushes schools to change and improve because they can no longer take their right to operate, their constituents, and their public funding for granted.

The question for policymakers is no longer about whether educational freedom should be allowed to flourish, but rather how to steward it responsibly for the common good. This is essential and evolving work. Before chartering, oversight and accountability were designed for a uniform, district-run system. State education departments, local school boards, and other regulatory agencies primarily focused on inputs like staffing rules, seat-time requirements, program approvals, funding categories, audits, and process checks. The central question was usually, "Did you follow the rules?"

Done well, chartering asks a better question, "Did you deliver on what you promised students and taxpayers?" To answer this question, professional judgement must be exercised. This is the responsibility given to charter school authorizers, and for more than 80% of Idaho's charter public schools, that means the Public Charter Schools Commission.

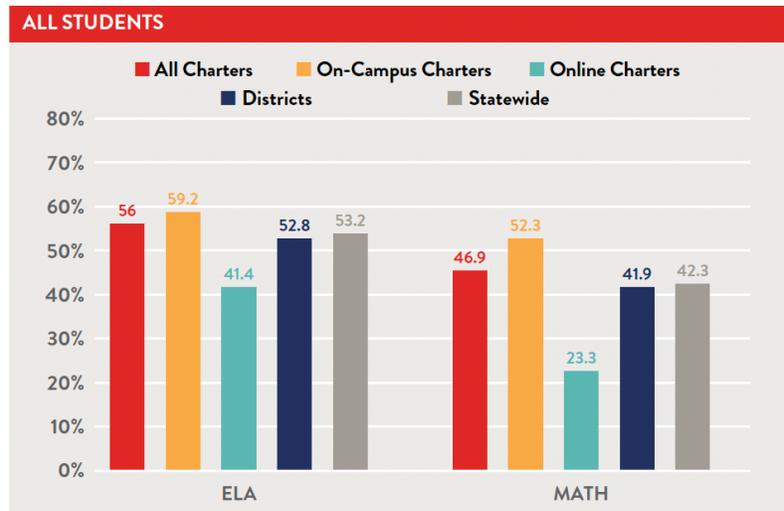
Charter School Authorizing Matters

Authorizing matters because it is how educational freedom earns credibility and trust. From its start, Idaho affirmed that political power is inherent in the people and that government exists to secure liberty, not manage every outcome. Opening public education through chartering honors this principle. It creates space for innovation, local judgement, and mission driven schools.

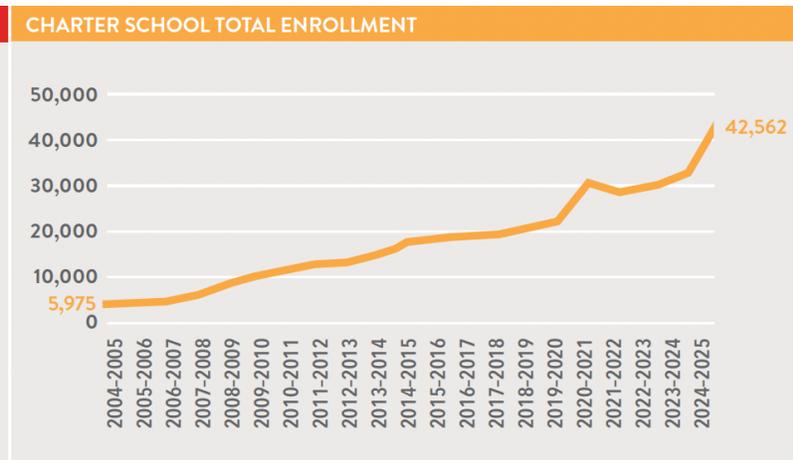
Article IX of Idaho’s constitution makes it clear that it is “the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.” This is the foundation for why state lawmakers have a responsibility to ensure educational freedom provides the people of Idaho with a system of public education that is free, accessible, and worthy of the public trust.

As educational freedom expands and makes the Idaho system of public education more pluralistic, the core question becomes how to govern it responsibly.

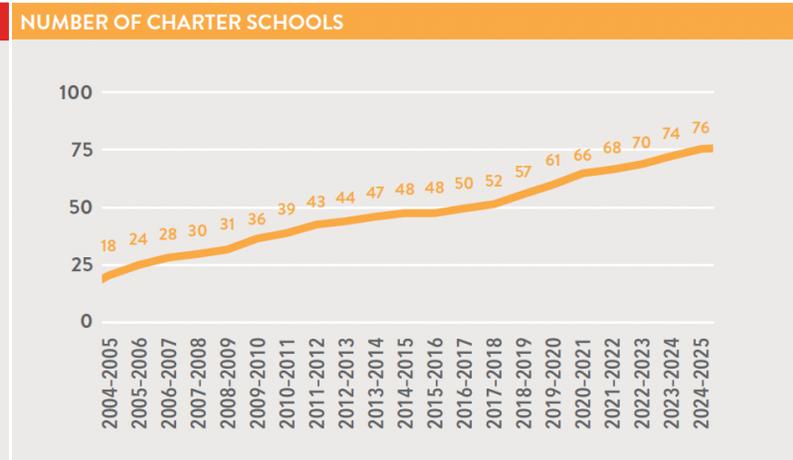
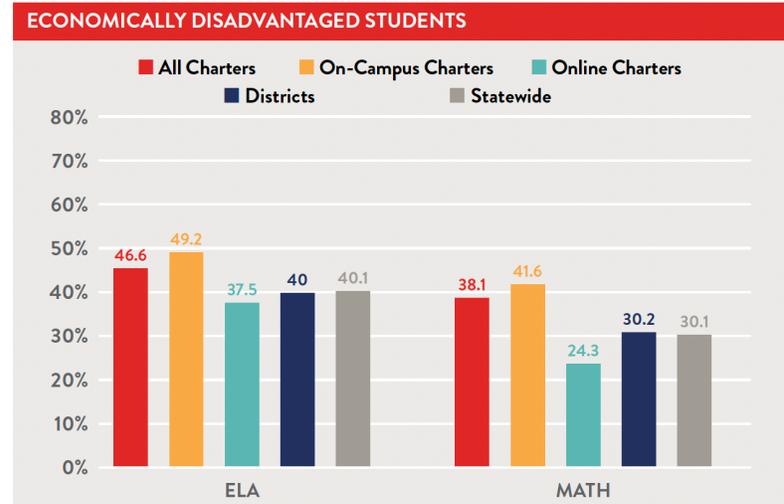
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY CHARTER TYPE



PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS



Source: IDE Public School Finance Data.
Note: Total numbers include pre-K students in two years.



Source: IDE Public School Finance Data.

Source: IDE 2025 ISAT Results.
Note: Charter results are weighted average of charter schools with reported data, and do not include data censored for small sample sizes. Charters housed in traditional districts are included in traditional district results. Weightings between schools depend on reported sample size data, which may be redacted for some groups in some schools.