



## DEMANDING A CHANCE: PARENTS' DEMAND FOR CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS CONTINUES TO GROW

- Nearly **80 PERCENT** of parents surveyed support allowing parents to choose their child's public school, regardless of where they live, including over 50 percent who strongly support it.
- Over **70 PERCENT** of parents favor having a charter school open in their neighborhood, whether there already is one in their community or not.
- Before hearing a definition or any information about charter schools, about half of the parents surveyed had a **FAVORABLE OPINION** of them. After hearing a definition, that rose to nearly three-quarters.
- Of those parents who have charter schools in their community and are interested in sending their child to one, but don't, over half cited **ACCESS PROBLEMS** as the reason.
- **THIRTY PERCENT** of parents surveyed would be interested in sending their child to a charter school.

The first charter school law was passed 25 years ago in Minnesota. Between 1992 and 2015, the number of charter public schools has gone from zero to nearly 7,000 in 43 states and D.C., enrolling about 3 million students—with most of that growth occurring in the past 15 years. Despite this growth, charter schools comprise less than 7 percent of the 100,000 public schools in the U.S. and only 6 percent of the nearly 50 million public school students.

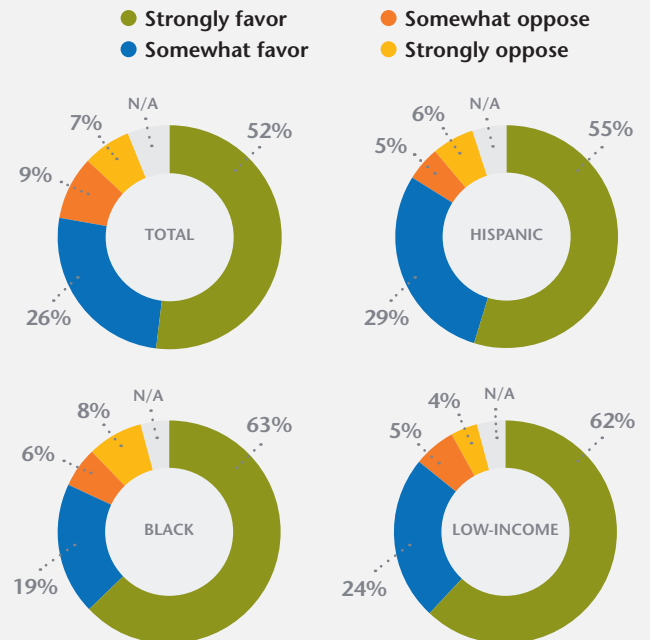
We know that there are not enough charter schools to meet the demand from parents who want to choose them, because each year hundreds of thousands of students end up on wait lists, particularly in urban districts. But what about parents who do not have access to a charter school or parents who could choose a charter school, yet don't? The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools recently commissioned a nationally representative survey of 1,003 parents of school-aged children. These parents do not necessarily live in a community, or even a state, with charter schools, and they may not know much about them. But we wanted to gauge their impression of charter public schools and find out more about their decision on where to send their child to school.

**One clear finding is that the idea of allowing parents to choose which public school their child should attend, rather than assigning students to a school based on where they live, has taken hold. More than half of the parents surveyed are strongly in favor of public school choice, including high percentages of minority and low-income parents.**

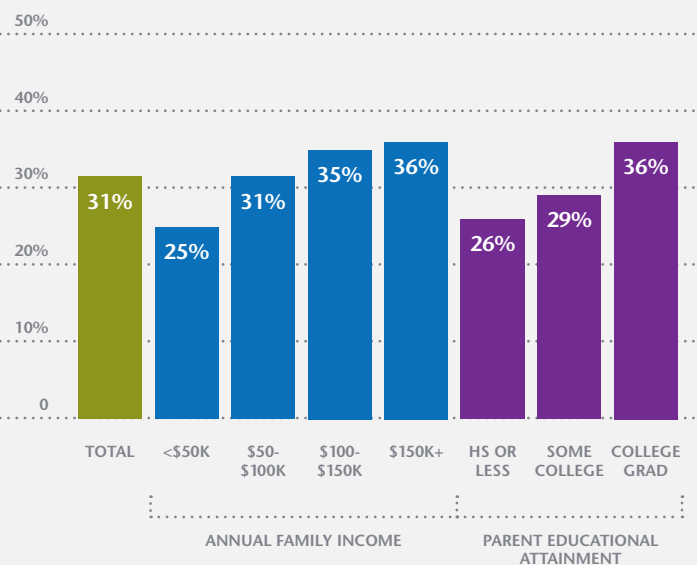
Some parents are already able to exercise some choice over their child's school, by moving to a neighborhood for its schools. But this privilege appears to depend on a family's circumstances.

There are nearly 3 million charter school students, which is 6 percent of total public school enrollment. However, 10 percent of parents indicated that a charter would be their first choice—meaning that there could be at least another 2 million students whose parents would enroll them in charter schools if they could. The percentages vary by subgroup, however.

**Do you favor or oppose allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in the community the students attend, regardless of where they live?**



**Did you move to your current neighborhood so that your child/children could attend a specific school—either one they attend now or one they are set to attend in the future?**



Parents who moved to their neighborhood for the schools

In addition to those parents who indicated that a charter school would be their first choice, about 30 percent of parents would be interested in sending their child to a charter school if there were multiple choices available. This interest is approximately the same among parents who have charters in their community and those who do not.

Among the 30 percent of parents who report having charter schools in their community and would be interested in sending their child to one, but don't, only one-third cited their satisfaction with their current school as the reason. Many of these parents appear to have had difficulty in accessing a charter school for reasons such as the schools are too far away or demand was higher than available seats.

Turning to general impressions of charter schools—even with no information about charter schools provided by the interviewer—nearly half of all parents surveyed had a favorable view of them. In fact, even though only 6 percent of public school students attend a charter public school, more than 20 percent of parents have a very positive view of them without any prior information.

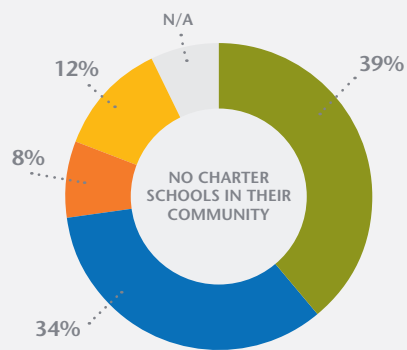
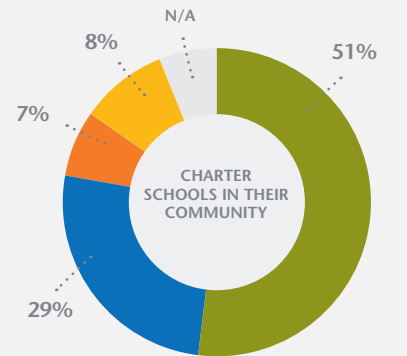
When parents were given the following definition, “Charter schools are public schools that have more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are exempt from many existing public school regulations in exchange for more accountability,” the percentage of parents who had a positive view of them increased to more than 70 percent, and 38 percent had a very positive view. Conversely, there appears to be a consistent group of about 15 percent of parents who are opposed to charter public schools, and this percentage did not change by much after they were given a definition.

Parents had similar views on adding charter schools in their community—whether they already have them or not. Again, those in opposition remain at 15-20 percent, regardless of the charter school presence (or absence) in their community.

The landscape of public education in the U.S. has been changing over the past several decades as parents’ options have expanded. Being able to choose from a number of high-quality options and to select what is best for their child are options that should be available to all parents. This survey makes it clear that most parents agree.

### Would you favor or oppose a charter school opening in your community/neighborhood?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose



\* The National Parent Poll was conducted by Braun Research Incorporated and interviewed 1,003 respondents who are U.S. residents 18+ years old, and parents of children who are preschool through high school age. Statistical results were weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the total sample of interviews is +3.1 percentage points and may be higher for subgroups.

The methodology and questionnaire are available at [PUBLICCHARTERS.ORG](http://PUBLICCHARTERS.ORG).



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