

Community Choice Schools Commission

December 5, 2023
Montana State Capitol Building, Room 102
1301 E 6th Avenue, Helena, MT
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Agenda Packet Contents:

1. Consent Agenda: Minutes from 11.1.23
2. Proposed Agenda for 12.5.23
3. Reading Material:
 - a. Rustic Renaissance: Education Choice in Rural America by Jason Bedrick and Matthew Ladner, Ph.D.
 - b. Bluum at Five: Helping Good People Start Good Schools 2015
 - c. Bluum: Let Learning Grow Annual Report 2022
4. Meeting Evaluation
5. Robert's Rules of Order Quick Reference Sheet

Community Choice Schools Commission Meeting Minutes

November 1, 2023
Montana State Capitol Building, Room 102
1301 E 6th Avenue, Helena, MT

Call to Order

Chair Schreiber called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM and led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Kris Stockton took Roll Call, and the Chair read the Statement of Public Participation and welcomed guests.

Commission members present: Ms. Trish Schreiber, Chair; Ms. Cathy Kincheloe; Ms. Dee Brown; Ms. Katy Wright; Mr. Mark Hufstetler; Mr. Jon Rutt. Dr. Katey Franklin-excused. Board of Public Education staff present: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist. Guests: Mr. Dylan Klapmeier, Education Policy Advisor for Governor Gianforte; Ms. Jenny Murnane Butcher, Montanans Organized for Education; Ms. Jane Hamman, Board of Public Education member; Dr. Jim Goenner, National Charter School Institute; Mr. Pad McCracken, Legislative Services; Ms. Julia Pattin, Legislative Services; Mr. Ben Lindquist, Arcadia Education; Ms. Heather Irving; Ms. Judy Snow.

*****Items are listed in the order in which they are presented*****

Item 1 Approval of Consent Agenda

Member Wright moved to approve the Minutes and Agenda. Motion seconded by Member Brown.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Item 2 Chairperson Welcome Statement; Jon Rutt, self-introduction

Chair Schreiber thanked everyone for attending the meeting and gave opening remarks regarding the purpose of the Commission, a brief overview of the scheduled presenters, and how the meeting is organized. New member Mr. Jon Rutt introduced himself to the Commission and reviewed his educational and professional background.

Item 3 Discussion/Training: Dr. Jim Goenner, President and CEO of National Charter School Institute: What It Means to Be an Authorizer: An Introductory Conversation

Chair Schreiber introduced Dr. Jim Goenner to the Commission and reviewed his professional background, specifically his experience with public charter schools. Dr. Goenner discussed his work with the National Charter School Institute, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to helping families find the best educational pathway for their children. Dr. Goenner discussed the impact authorizers can have and how they can change education for students, how to create conditions where excellence can thrive, and what schools want from their authorizers. Dr. Goenner answered members' questions.

Item 4 Discussion/Presentation: Pad McCracken, Research Analyst Legislative Services Division and Julia Pattin, Fiscal Analyst Legislative Fiscal Division: An overview of traditional school funding in Montana with Q&A

Mr. Pad McCracken and Ms. Julia Pattin presented an overview of school funding in Montana, discussing how monies are allocated, how funding is distributed, and a general overview of how the school funding formula works for traditional public schools in Montana. Ms. Pattin displayed a new interactive tool available to the public on the Legislative Services website. The tool displays district budgets, adopted budgets, and district maps which are all available for public information. Mr. McCracken and Ms. Pattin answered members' questions.

Item 5 Action: Officer Elections for Vice Chair and Treasurer

Chair Schreiber opened the floor for nominations for Treasurer.

Member Hufstetler nominated Member Rutt for the position of Treasurer. Motion seconded by Member Wright.

Member Rutt accepted the nomination.

Member Rutt was elected to the position of Treasurer by unanimous vote.

Chair Schreiber opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair.

Member Brown nominated Member Wright for the position of Vice Chair. Motion seconded by Member Kincheloe.

Member Wright accepted the nomination.

Member Wright was elected to the position of Vice Chair by unanimous vote.

Item 6 Discussion/Training: Ben Lindquist from Arcadia Education: CREDO and Understanding CMOs, EMOs, Free Standing Charter Schools, and CSOs: An Introductory Conversation

Chair Schreiber introduced Mr. Ben Lindquist to the Commission. Mr. Lindquist discussed the different types of charter schools that operate around the country, how charter structures differ based on state law, the types of schools and students served by charter schools, how authorizers work in different states, and how for-profit and not-for-profit entities assist charter schools in handling centralized services. Mr. Lindquist answered members' questions.

Future Agenda Items

Chair Schreiber discussed meeting length and frequency, noting that upcoming trainings scheduled may require monthly meetings through spring 2024. Members discussed options for meeting length and days of the week which work best.

Chair Schreiber discussed future training which may require an overnight stay in a location which the Commission can choose and a possible out-of-state trip to Boise, Idaho to meet with their the Bluum Foundation to tour charter schools, see their offices, meet with school founders and local philanthropists. Chair Schreiber asked everyone to consider if perhaps combining these events (training and school tours) into a two-night stay makes sense. Vice Chair Wright suggested that each member send the Chair an email with the best dates for them for an overnight or out-of-state trip.

Chair Schreiber asked members to consider possible committees which should be formed and possible action items or business for next meeting. She requested members bring prepared motions for committee formations to the December meeting.

Public Comment

Mr. Ben Lindquist recommended who to contact in Idaho at the Bluum Foundation regarding any possible trips to Idaho.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Community Choice Schools Commission Meeting Agenda

December 5, 2023

Montana State Capitol Building, Room 102

1301 E 6th Avenue, Helena, MT

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

	Estimated Time	Details
Call to Order	10:00 a.m.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pledge of Allegiance 2. Roll Call 3. Statement of Public Participation 4. Welcome Visitors
Note to the Public		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action may be taken on any item listed on the Choice Commission agenda. Per §2-3-103 MCA, <i>the Choice Commission encourages public comment on any item prior to final action.</i> 2. All times are approximate and may change as reasonably necessary.
Agenda		
Item 1	10:05 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Action: Consent Agenda Adoption: Minutes from 11/1/23 ◇ Action: Agenda Adoption
Item 2	10:10 p.m.	Chairperson Welcome Statement
Item 3	10:15 p.m.	Discussion/Presentation: State Procurement Laws presented by Anna Lubick and Natalie Peeterse of the State Procurement Bureau of The Department of Administration
Item 4	11:15	Discussion/Presentation: Matt Ladner, Senior Fellow EdChoice: Rustic Renaissance, lecture and Q&A
Recess	12:45 p.m.	Recess
Item 5	1:15 p.m.	Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shall the Commission form any committees at this time other than the standing Executive Committee?
Item 6	1:30 p.m.	Discussion/Presentation: Marc Carignan CFO Bluum, A Glimpse at Section 15 Funding of CCSA; Terry Ryan, CEO Bluum, The Role of Philanthropy and the Charter School Program Grant, lecture and Q&A
Future Agenda Items	3:30 p.m.	Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continued committee discussion (Item 5) if needed 2. Discussion items for future meetings
Public Comment	3:45 p.m.	This time will be provided for public comment on items not listed on the agenda. This meeting is open to the public both in person and electronically. For those wishing to give virtual public comment, please contact bpe@mt.gov to request the Zoom link for the meeting. Members of the public who have joined virtually on Zoom may "raise their hand" at the appropriate time to participate after being recognized by the Chairperson. Written public comment may be submitted to the Executive Director of the BPE at bpe@mt.gov and will be shared with the Commission members and included as part of the official public record.
Adjourn	4:00 p.m.	
Note to the Public		<p>**Agenda items are handled in the order listed on the approved agenda. Items may be rearranged unless listed "time certain." Public comment is welcome on all items listed as "Action" and as noted at the end of each meeting.</p> <p>**The Choice Commission will make reasonable accommodations for known disabilities that may interfere with an individual's ability to participate in the meeting. Individuals who require such accommodations should make requests to the Board of Public Education as soon as possible prior to the meeting start date. You may write to: Kris Stockton, PO Box 200601, Helena MT, 59620, email at: kmstockton@mt.gov or phone at 406-444-0302.</p>

SPECIAL REPORT

No. 264 | JANUARY 9, 2023

Rustic Renaissance: Education Choice in Rural America

Jason Bedrick and Matthew Ladner, PhD

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SPECIAL REPORT

No. 264 | JANUARY 9, 2023

CENTER FOR EDUCATION POLICY

About the Authors

Jason Bedrick is Research Fellow in the Center for Education Policy at The Heritage Foundation.

Matthew Ladner, PhD, is Director of the Arizona Center for Student Opportunity at the Arizona Charter School Association.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/sr264>

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Rustic Renaissance: Education Choice in Rural America

Jason Bedrick and Matthew Ladner, PhD

No one school can meet the needs of all children who just happen to live nearby. Families in rural areas deserve more education options. By embracing education choice policies, state lawmakers can deliver on the promise of America's education system and ensure that all children have access to the learning environment that best meets their individual needs. Policymakers who want to increase education options for rural families should enact education choice policies, such as K–12 education savings accounts, and broaden charter school laws to make it easier to open them in rural areas.

Executive Summary

Opponents of education choice often make two arguments about its effect on rural areas: (1) Education choice will not help in rural areas because there are few or no alternatives to the district school system, and (2) education choice will destroy the district school system because so many students will leave for alternative options. These two claims are mutually exclusive. They cannot both be true, but they can both be—and indeed *are*—false.

The dearth of education options in rural areas has been greatly exaggerated. About seven in 10 rural families live within 10 miles of a private elementary school. Children in rural areas can attend charter schools in states with policies that have fostered the creation of charters in rural areas. In Arizona, more than eight in 10 students live in the same zip code as at least one charter school. Rural areas are seeing the rise of microschoools, a modern reimagining of the one-room schoolhouse. Additionally, high-quality virtual schools are available to anyone with a decent Internet connection—which is becoming increasingly available in rural America. Families in rural areas have access to more education options than ever before.

The most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for Arizona—the state with the greatest access to education choice—do not support the claim that education choice has been harmful to the rural district schools. Indeed, the best available evidence indicates that education choice is the rising tide that lifts all boats.

Policymakers who want to increase education options for rural families should enact education choice policies, such as K–12 education savings accounts, and broaden charter school laws to make it easier to open them in rural areas.

Introduction

When Lisa and Leonard Biehl visited Mormon Lake in Arizona—renowned for its breathtaking scenery as well as its hiking and fishing—they fell in love with the place. A few years later, in March 2021, they made it their permanent home. Leonard found a job as a firefighter and Lisa worked at home.

The Biehls just had one challenge to overcome—enrolling their three children, ages five, seven, and 10, in school. Mormon Lake Village is a rural community, so small that it does not have its own public school. Many families there send their children to the closest public school system in Flagstaff, about 30 miles away. However, while Flagstaff provided buses for high school students in the Biehls' area, there was no public transportation for K–8 students. The prospect of driving two 60-mile roundtrips a day, five days a week, to take their children to school was highly impractical, so the Biehls sought other education options.

Fortunately for them, Arizona has a vibrant education sector with a plethora of options. A family friend told the Biehls about Sequoia Choice, an online charter school, and they decided to give it a try. “Our kids are learning a lot,” says Lisa. “It’s a little bit tougher than [what] they were used to, and there’s a lot of content, but they’re settling in nicely. They understand what they have to do and, for the most part, they’re pretty independent.”

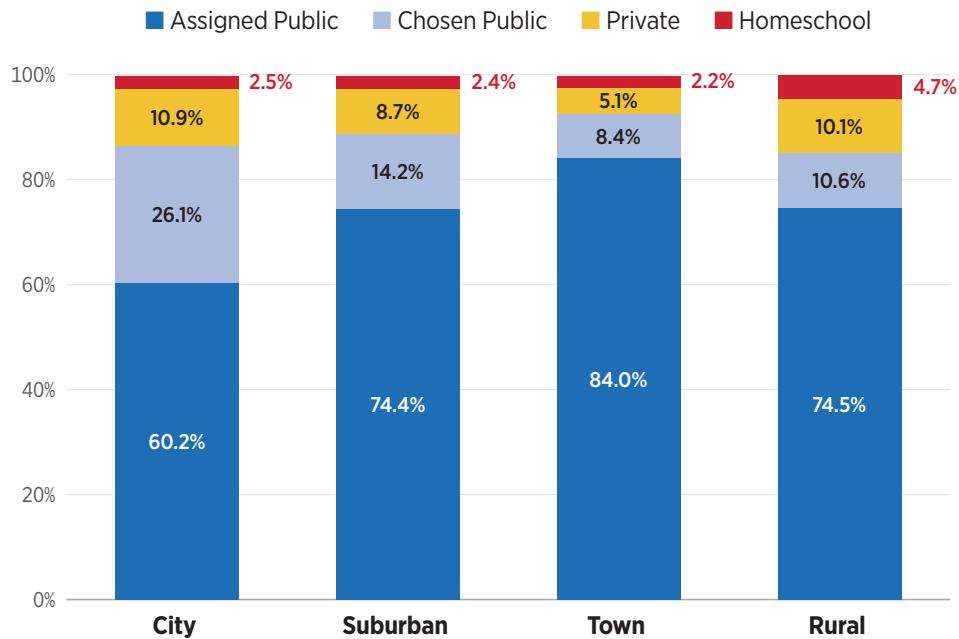
The Biehls soon found that they enjoyed the freedom and flexibility that online learning afforded them. There is no set schedule, so their children can take breaks when they want to, and it is easier to plan family vacations or go on impromptu outings. Most of the classes are pre-recorded and students can arrange one-on-one time with teachers via Zoom. Despite the lack of in-person instruction, Lisa says that her children are receiving more personal attention than when they attended public schools. They enjoy it so much that they do not want to return to a traditional classroom environment.

Education in Rural America

According to the most recent data, about 14 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, down from 16 percent in the 2000 census.¹ As shown in Chart 1, according to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, about 85 percent of rural K–12 students in America attend a public school, either assigned or chosen (such as charter schools, magnet schools, or out-of-district public schools).² Similar to urban areas,

CHART 1

Distribution of K–12 Enrollment, 2019



SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2021, “Percentage Distribution of Students Ages 5 Through 17 Attending Kindergarten Through 12th Grade, by School Type or Participation in Homeschooling and Selected Child, Parent, and Household Characteristics: Selected Years, 1999 Through 2019,” National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_206.20.asp (accessed November 14, 2022).

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about 10 percent of rural students attend a private school. Nearly 5 percent of rural students are homeschoolers, which is about twice the proportion of students in cities, suburbs, and towns.

What constitutes a rural area? The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” as “any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area.”³ As “urbanized areas” have populations of 50,000 or more, and “urban clusters” have populations between 2,500 and 50,000 residents, that means that the Census Bureau considers all areas with populations below 2,500 residents to be rural. However, other definitions abound. Agencies across the federal government use more than 70 different definitions of “rural.”⁴

As Michael McShane and Andy Smarick note in their book, *No Longer Forgotten: The Triumphs and Struggles of Rural Education in America*, perhaps “a better understanding of rurality is cultural.”⁵

Rural communities share several common characteristics. They are often small and close-knit. Generally speaking, a significant portion of the community is in some way tied to the land—through farming, mining, drilling, or something similar. And, they are typically isolated. Major cultural and civic institutions are more frequently found in cities and suburban areas with more population density—meaning rural families need to travel some distance to take advantage of large hospitals, professional sports stadiums, shopping malls, and the like.⁶

Of course, rural areas also differ from each other. An Appalachian coal mining community, a Navajo reservation in the Sonoran Desert, oil drillers in the frozen tundra of Alaska, and potato farmers in Idaho might all live in rural areas, but their communities and cultures are distinct. Nevertheless, they face many similar challenges related to access to education, reliable Internet service, and transportation options.

Rural Americans also share many concerns with their urban counterparts. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, similar proportions of urban residents (50 percent) and rural residents (46 percent) say that drug addiction is a major problem in their local community. Rural adults are somewhat more likely to say that job availability is a major problem (42 percent), but a considerable share of urban residents (34 percent) and suburban residents (22 percent) say the same.⁷

Still, some challenges are more acute in some areas than in others. According to Pew, rural Americans are more likely than urban dwellers to list as pressing problems access to public transportation (43 percent vs. 19 percent) and access to high-speed Internet (24 percent vs. 13 percent). Both of those challenges can, in turn, reduce access to a wide variety of education options.

Rural communities also have distinctive strengths. For example, rural residents are more likely to know and trust their neighbors. About four in 10 rural residents say that they know all or most of their neighbors, while less than a quarter of city dwellers say the same. More than six in 10 Americans in rural areas have a neighbor they would trust with a set of keys to their home, compared to fewer than half of urbanites.⁸ Rural residents are also more likely than urbanites to say that they are satisfied with their family life (49 percent vs. 43 percent). Families in rural areas can draw on this greater fount of social capital when seeking to overcome the challenges described above.

The Pandemic and the Rise of Education Choice

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents nationwide awakened to the need for education choice. Whether frustrated by unnecessarily long and union-driven school shutdowns, low-quality instruction via Zoom video, or the general lack of responsiveness of their assigned schools to their children's needs, parents realized that their children would be better off with more education options.

There is a growing disconnect between parents and public schools over the values taught in school.

Parents also got a peek inside the classroom and were often disturbed by what they saw. In a 2022 poll commissioned by the American Federation for Teachers—one of the nation's two largest teachers' unions—44 percent of respondents in seven key battleground states said that they believed that “[p]ublic schools often go too far in promoting a political agenda in the classroom.”⁹ When asked to list their top four “biggest problems” in education from a list of 12 possible concerns, half of respondents expressed concern that “education has become too politicized”—more than any other issue. When asked who was to blame, one-third said that “Democrats and liberals are more responsible,” while 28 percent blamed Republicans and conservatives.

There is a growing disconnect between parents and public schools over the values taught in school. In a 2022 Pew survey, only half of public school parents said that the teachers and administrators at their child's school share their values, compared to eight of 10 private school parents.¹⁰

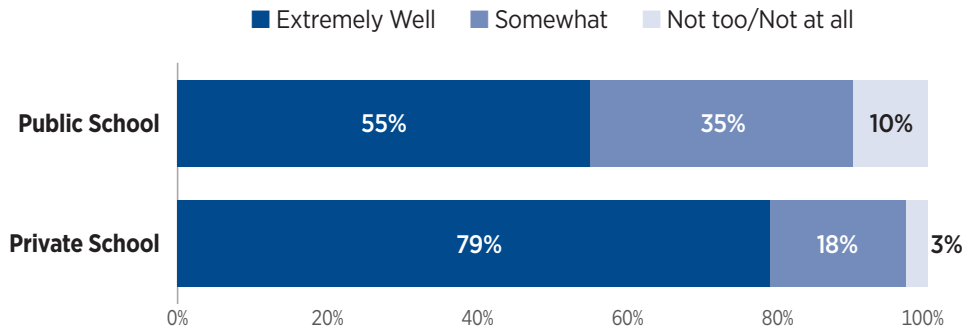
The disconnect over values is especially frustrating for parents who feel stymied in their attempts to influence what their children learn in public schools. Only 38 percent of public school parents expressed high satisfaction with the level of input they have on what their children learn in school.¹¹ By contrast, 61 percent of private school parents were extremely or very satisfied with their level of input.

The level of parental satisfaction with their children's school quality also varies considerably by sector. In the Pew survey, eight of 10 parents of children enrolled at private school expressed strong satisfaction with the quality of their child's education, while only 55 percent of public school parents were very satisfied.¹² (See Chart 2.)

CHART 2

Parents' Satisfaction with Their Children's Education

Percentage of parents of K-12 students saying they are ____ satisfied with the overall quality of the education their children are receiving at school:



SOURCE: Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Parents Differ Sharply by Party Over What Their K-12 Children Should Learn in School," Pew Research Center, October 26, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/10/26/parents-differ-sharply-by-party-over-what-their-k-12-children-should-learn-in-school/> (accessed December 16, 2022).

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These frustrations over educational quality and content in traditional public schools have translated into record-high levels of support for education choice policies, which empower families to choose the learning environments that align with their values and best meet their children's individual learning needs. Public support for education choice policies—such as K-12 education savings accounts (ESAs), school vouchers, and tax-credit scholarships¹³—was already high and rising even before the pandemic, but the public school system's response to COVID-19 accelerated the trend. As shown in Chart 3, 74 percent of respondents to a June 2021 RealClearOpinion poll supported school choice policies that give "parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs," up from 68 percent in the year before the pandemic.¹⁴

Support for choice policies is strong in rural areas, too. In the March 2022 Texas Republican primary, Proposition 9 asked voters whether "Texas parents and guardians should have the right to select schools, whether public or private, for their children, and the funding should follow the student."¹⁵ Voters answered in the affirmative by a margin of 88 percent to 12 percent. Some of the highest levels of support came from the most rural counties in Texas, including Culberson (97 percent), Edwards (89 percent), Kent

(87 percent), McMullen (90 percent), Kenedy (100 percent), Roberts (87 percent), and Terrell (90 percent).

Likewise, a survey conducted in January 2022 found that 70 percent of rural Oklahomans supported school choice, while only 25 percent opposed it.¹⁶ School choice garnered even higher levels of support among Oklahoma Republicans (78 percent) and earned the support of a plurality of the state's Democrats (47 percent). Contrary to the conventional wisdom that public school employees uniformly oppose school choice, the poll found that current public school employees in Oklahoma were evenly split on the issue (45 percent both in favor and opposed), while former public school employees were more inclined to support school choice (56 percent in favor versus 41 percent opposed).

High levels of support for education choice policies have, in turn, translated into historic legislative victories. In 2021, 19 states enacted seven new education choice policies and expanded 23 existing ones.¹⁷ Not only was this a record high in terms of quantity, but the quality of the legislative proposals also exceeded that of previous years. Whereas most of the existing education choice policies had been limited to certain needy populations, like low-income families or students with special needs, the 2021 proposals tended to make education choice available to a larger swath of the public.

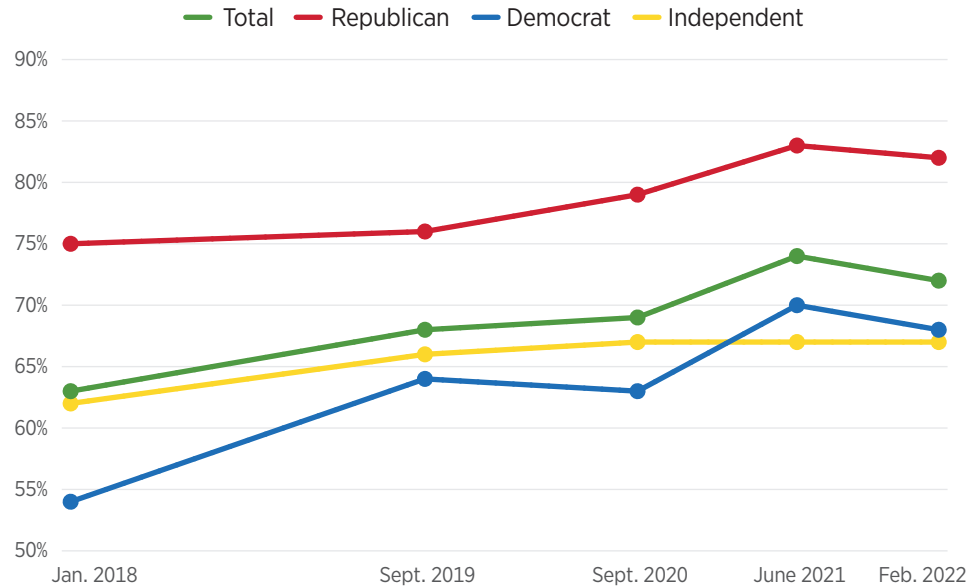
The most expansive education choice policy enacted in 2021 was in one of the nation's most rural states. West Virginia's Hope Scholarships, K–12 ESAs that parents can use to customize their children's education, are available to all West Virginia students who are either switching out of a public school or entering kindergarten.

Kentucky and Missouri also enacted ESA policies that are available to about half of families in each state.¹⁸ Florida and Indiana each expanded both their tax-credit scholarship and school-voucher programs so that more than 60 percent of Floridian students and nearly 80 percent of Hoosier students are eligible. New Hampshire enacted an ESA for which about one-third of students are eligible. Oklahoma increased the number of students who could receive a tax-credit scholarship more than seven-fold. As a result of the legislation enacted nationwide in 2021, at least 3.6 million additional students became eligible to participate in the new education choice programs in seven states and about 878,300 additional students became eligible to participate in the expanded choice programs in 14 states.¹⁹

In 2022, Arizona went even further, expanding eligibility for its ESA to all its 1.1 million K–12 students, making it the gold standard for education choice.²⁰ The move was very popular among Arizona citizens, two-thirds of whom support ESAs according to a Morning Consult survey in October

CHART 3

Public Support for Education Choice



	Jan. 2018	Sept. 2019	Sept. 2020	June 2021	Feb. 2022
Total	63%	68%	69%	74%	72%
Republican	75%	76%	79%	83%	82%
Democrat	54%	64%	63%	70%	68%
Independent	62%	66%	67%	67%	67%

SOURCES:

- 2018: American Federation for Children, “Re: Fourth Annual School Choice Survey Research Results,” January 18, 2018, <https://www.federationforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/1-18-18-AFC-2018-National-School-Choice-Release-Memo.pdf> (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2019: American Federation for Children, “National Poll by RealClear Opinion Research Shows Strong School Choice Support,” December 6, 2019, <https://www.federationforchildren.org/national-poll-realclear-opinion-strong-school-choice-support/> (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2020: Tommy Schultz, “Support for School Choice Surges as Schools Start,” American Federation for Children, September 23, 2020, <https://www.federationforchildren.org/support-for-school-choice-surges-as-schools-start/> (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2021: American Federation for Children, “New Poll: School Choice Support at All-Time High,” June 29, 2021, <https://www.federationforchildren.org/new-poll-school-choice-support-at-all-time-high/> (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2022: American Federation for Children, “New Poll: Overwhelming Support for School Choice,” June 28, 2022, <https://www.federationforchildren.org/new-poll-72-support-for-school-choice/> (accessed November 14, 2022).

2022.²¹ Arizona parents are even more supportive, with 77 percent favoring ESAs. It is no wonder then that a local anti-school-choice group failed to gather enough signatures for its petition to refer the ESA expansion to the ballot.²²

Research on Education Choice

Parents support education choice because it works for their children. Choice policies empower families to choose the learning environments that align with their values and meet the individual learning needs of their children. Of 17 studies on the effects of education choice policies on participating students' test scores, 11 found a positive effect while only three found any negative effects on test scores.²³ Additionally, five of seven studies found that choice policies have positive effects on high school graduation and college matriculation while none found any negative effects. Not surprisingly, 30 of 32 studies find positive effects on parental satisfaction.

Nevertheless, opponents of education choice have raised concerns about the effects of education choice policies on public schools.²⁴ Sure, *participating* students might benefit, but what about all the children “left behind” in the public schools? If students—and the funds attached to them—leave the public system for educational alternatives, how can the public school system survive?

Parents support education choice because it works for their children.

Fortunately, the research literature overwhelmingly finds that education choice policies foster healthy competition that have the net effect of improving public school performance. There have been 28 empirical studies on the effects of education choice policies on the academic performance of students who remain at their traditional public schools.²⁵ Of these, 25 find statistically significant positive effects on test scores, while only two find small negative effects and one finds no visible effect.²⁶ Education choice is the rising tide that lifts all boats.

Does Education Choice Work in Rural America? The overwhelming conclusion of the research literature is that education choice policies improve outcomes, but some critics suggest that the positive effects of these policies might be confined to urban and suburban areas.

First, education choice opponents claim that there are few or no options from which to choose in rural areas. For example, Sigal Ben-Porath, a professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania, claimed that “many school systems, especially in rural areas, are too small to offer a choice—if there’s only one school in the area, that’s the one you attend.”²⁷ The National Coalition for Public Education claims that education choice policies “don’t provide an actual choice for students living in rural areas” because the nearest private school is far away, therefore “students would often be required to endure long, costly commutes.”²⁸

On the other hand, if a plethora of education options do exist in rural areas, perhaps the competition will be too great for the traditional public schools to bear. Although urban and suburban schools tend to improve in response to greater competition, perhaps the smaller rural public schools will deteriorate or even shut down.

Opponents of education choice often make both these claims: (1) education choice will not benefit students in rural areas because there are no alternatives to the public school system, and (2) so many children will leave the public schools that the schools will be significantly or even mortally harmed. The two claims cannot be true simultaneously—if there are no alternatives, there will also be no harm from students leaving for those alternatives—but they can both be false.

Part I below details how the education options in rural areas are far more numerous and accessible than the critics portray. Moreover, in states with robust education choice policies, like Arizona, the number of alternatives to the public school system has significantly increased over time. Part II shows how public schools in rural areas with robust education choice policies have not only not been harmed but have demonstrated significant improvement over the past two decades.

Part I: Education Options in Rural America

Conventional wisdom holds that most rural families only have two options for educating their children: their assigned public school or home-schooling. In reality, most rural families have far more options, including private schools, charter schools, microschools, and virtual learning. Rural areas have more access to education options than ever before.

Private Schools. Opponents of school choice, like the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), claim that choice policies “don’t provide an actual choice for students living in rural areas who have little, if any, access to private schools.”²⁹ According to NCPE, choice policies—such

as school vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and K–12 education savings accounts—would not help rural students because even if their families “are able to use a voucher, they are generally required to endure long, costly commutes.”

The reality for rural families is quite different from the choice opponents’ narrative. Although it is true that rural families have fewer private options than urban or suburban areas, most rural families live near at least one private school. A 2017 study by the Brookings Institution found that about seven in 10 rural families live within 10 miles of a private elementary school, compared to about nine in 10 students nationwide.³⁰ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 10 percent of private school students live in rural areas, compared to 15 percent of public school students.³¹ Additionally, about 10 percent of students in both rural and urban areas attend private school.³²

About seven in 10 rural families live within 10 miles of a private elementary school, compared to about nine in 10 students nationwide.

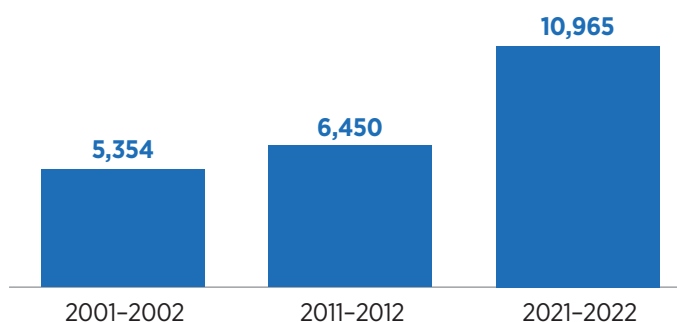
Critics of school choice often assume a static marketplace in education, but the reality is more dynamic. They point to the relative lack of private options under the existing system as proof that school choice policies would only benefit a small number of students. However, choice policies have the potential to increase private school options in rural areas.

For example, since Florida enacted its tax-credit scholarship policy 20 years ago, the number of private schools in Florida’s 30 rural counties has grown from 69 to 120.³³ Meanwhile, private school enrollment in those counties has more than doubled, from 5,354 rural private school students in the 2001–2002 academic year to 10,965 students in 2021–2022, according to state data. (See Chart 4.) Over the past 15 years, the percentage of rural students in Florida enrolled in private school has increased from 4.2 percent to 7.3 percent.³⁴ According to Step Up for Students, Florida’s largest scholarship organization, about 70 percent of private school students in Florida’s 30 rural counties use school choice scholarships.³⁵

During the 2021–2022 academic year, nearly 180,000 Florida students statewide used a tax-credit scholarship, school voucher, or ESA to access the learning environment of their family’s choice.³⁶

CHART 4

Private-School Enrollment in Florida's Rural Counties



SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on data from:

- Florida Department of Education, "PK-12 Public School Data Publications and Reports: Students," 2022, <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.html> (accessed November 7, 2022).
- Florida Department of Education, "PK-12 Public School Data Publications and Reports: Archive," 2022, <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/archive.html> (accessed November 7, 2022).
- Kids Count Data Center, "Public School Student Enrollment in Florida," <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5342-public-school-student-enrollment#detailed/5/1861,1863,1866,1871,1873-1874,1878-1885,1887,1889,1891-1893,1897-1899,1903,1906,1920-1922,1924-1926/false/2029,1069,463/any/11865> (accessed November 7, 2022).

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Arizona is another state with robust education choice options that allow families to select private schools, including in rural areas. Nearly 7 percent of Arizona students use tax-credit scholarships or ESAs to access private learning options.³⁷ Contrary to the assertion of school choice opponents in Arizona that choice policies "provid[e] no benefit to rural communities,"³⁸ thousands of rural students attend private schools using tax-credit scholarships.

Precise numbers are hard to come by in the Grand Canyon State as the Arizona Department of Education does not compile enrollment data for private schools. Moreover, other data sets do not disaggregate rural and non-rural enrollment. However, the available data suggest significant growth in private schooling in rural areas of Arizona over the past decade.

Seven Arizona counties are considered rural by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the five largest of which have private schools.³⁹ Over the past decade, the number of scholarships awarded in these rural counties more than doubled. As shown in Table 1, the number of tax-credit scholarships awarded in these rural counties grew by 163 percent since the 2010–2011 academic year. This

TABLE 1

Tax-Credit Scholarships Awarded in Rural Arizona

County	2010–2011	2020–2021	Change
Apache	189	667	253%
Gila	179	406	127%
Graham	21	65	210%
Navajo	476	817	72%
Santa Cruz	65	491	655%
Total	930	2,446	163%

SOURCES:

- 2020–2021: Arizona Department of Revenue, Office of Economic Research and Analysis, “School Tuition Organization Income Tax Credits in Arizona; Summary of Activity: FY2020/2021,” March 2022, https://azdor.gov/sites/default/files/media/REPORTS_CREDITS_2022_fy2021-private-school-tuition-org-credit-report.pdf (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2010–2011: Arizona Department of Revenue, Office of Economic Research and Analysis, “Private School Tuition Organization Income Tax Credits in Arizona: A Summary of Activity FY 2011,” 2011, https://azdor.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS_CREDITS_2011-sto-report.pdf (accessed November 14, 2022).

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increase tracks with the available private school enrollment data. As shown in Table 2, student enrollment in private schools doubled over the past eight years in the four rural counties for which data were available for both the 2021–2022 and 2013–2014 academic years.

The growth in rural private school enrollment in Arizona over the past decade has not been driven by population growth. In fact, according to an analysis by *The Arizona Republic*, about “150 of the 230 public schools designated rural by the state have lost students since the 2011–2012 school year.”⁴⁰ Moreover, as discussed at greater length in Part II, “[m]any of the schools considered rural that gained enrollment are charter schools, which have proliferated in the past decade in Arizona.”⁴¹ Overall, rural private school and charter school enrollment have increased in Arizona over the past decade as traditional public school enrollment has declined. Nevertheless, as discussed in Part II, academic performance in rural Arizona public schools has improved significantly more than the national average for rural schools over the same period.

States looking to expand access to private schooling in rural areas should follow the lead of Arizona and Florida by enacting education choice policies, such as ESAs and tax-credit scholarships.

TABLE 2

Private-School Student Enrollment in Rural Arizona

County	2013–2014	2021–2022	Change
Apache	507	559	10%
Gila	264	447	69%
Navajo	489	848	73%
Santa Cruz	574	1775	209%
Total	1,834	3,629	98%

SOURCES:

- 2013–2014: Andrew D. Catt, “Exploring Arizona’s Private Education Sector,” EdChoice, December 2016, p. 25, <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Exploring-Arizonas-Private-Education-Sector-by-Andrew-D-Catt.pdf> (accessed November 14, 2022).
- 2021–2022: Private School Review, “Best Arizona Private Schools (2022–23),” 2022, <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/arizona> (accessed November 14, 2022).

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Charter Schools. Charter schools are public schools that are privately operated under a charter granted by a state-approved authorizer. Charter schools have greater autonomy than district-run public schools and are freely chosen by parents. Forty-five states plus Washington, DC, have laws that allow charter schools.

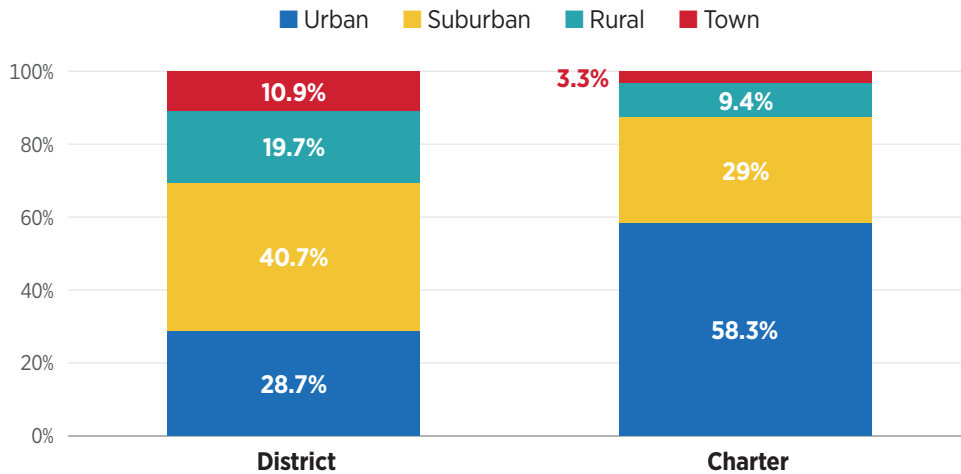
Charter schools are considerably scarcer than private options in rural areas. Although all but a handful of states have enacted a charter school law, a combination of law and practice has concentrated the opening of charter schools in urban areas. According to the Brookings Institution, only 17 percent of rural families live within 10 miles of a charter school, compared to 59 percent of families nationwide.⁴²

Many charter school laws contain provisions preventing the opening of schools in rural areas. The Utah charter law, for instance, focuses approvals of new charter schools in areas with high levels of population growth.⁴³ This may relieve district schools’ growing pains, but it limits the reach of charter schools in many areas of the state. Philanthropy further reinforced the trend as large foundations invested heavily in urban charter schools.⁴⁴

The legal and philanthropic focus on urban centers has induced charter school operators to likewise focus on large cities, which has limited growth in suburbs, towns, and rural communities. Chart 5 presents data from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools on the location of district and

CHART 5

District and Charter Schools, Nationwide, by Community Type, 2019–2020



SOURCE: Yueting (Cynthia) Xu, “Where Are Charter Schools Located?” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, March 9, 2022, <https://data.publiccharters.org/digest/charter-school-data-digest/where-are-charter-schools-located> (accessed November 14, 2022).

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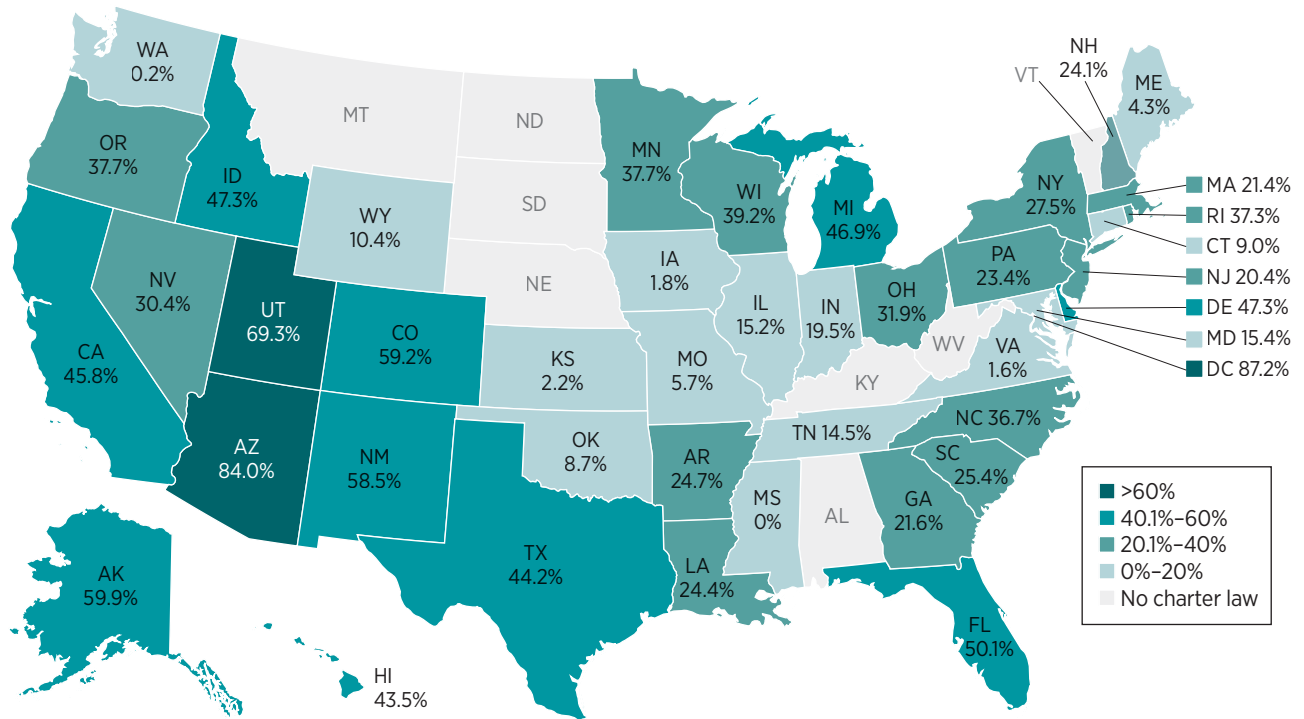
charter schools nationwide by community type. Charter schools have well over twice the concentration in urban areas as districts do, less than half the presence of districts in towns and rural communities.⁴⁵

It need not be this way. Some states have a more robust charter school presence in rural areas, particularly where a state’s charter policy or its administration do not pose significant barriers to opening in rural areas. A 2016 study by the Brookings Institution measured the percentage of students in each state that have access to one or more charter schools in their zip code.⁴⁶ Using data from the 2014–2015 school year, the Brookings study found significant variation across states in terms of families’ access to charter schools. As shown in Map 1, at 84 percent of students with one or more charter schools in their zip code, Arizona had the highest level of access by a wide margin.

Arizona is a prime example of a state where charter schools are accessible in rural areas. As shown in Table 3, Arizona has more charter schools operating in rural areas (64) than the number of charter schools *statewide* in 16 states with charter school laws (Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, and Wyoming).

MAP 1

Percentage of Students with One or More Charter Schools Operating Within Their ZIP Code, 2015



SOURCE: Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Megan Mumford, and Lauren Bauer, "Who Has Access to Charter Schools?" The Hamilton Project, March 17, 2016, https://www.hamiltonproject.org/papers/who_has_access_to_charter_schools (accessed November 7, 2022).

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Mocked by some school choice critics as the Wild West of Charter Schools⁴⁷ for supposedly making it too easy to open and operate charter schools, Arizona shows how prioritizing access need not come at the expense of quality. Arizona's charter school sector, which serves predominantly Hispanic and black students, has led the nation in academic growth on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as the Nation's Report Card—over the past two decades. Moreover, Arizona's charter schools also rank among the highest-achieving in the nation on the NAEP, with scores equivalent to New England statewide averages on all six 2015 NAEP exams (fourth-grade and eighth-grade math, reading, and science).⁴⁸ In the most recent NAEP exams, taken after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in

TABLE 3

Charter Schools by State and Community Type, 2019–2020 (Page 1 of 2)

	Rural	Town	Suburban	Urban
Alabama	1	0	0	3
Alaska	3	12	3	12
Arkansas	19	5	5	54
Arizona	64	32	148	312
California	107	56	428	745
Colorado	35	6	97	128
Connecticut	0	0	2	23
Delaware	3	1	10	7
Florida	76	13	381	206
Georgia	15	5	38	32
Hawaii	19	4	10	5
Idaho	22	11	21	14
Illinois	1	0	6	133
Indiana	4	1	14	83
Iowa	0	1	0	2
Kansas	7	0	0	2
Kentucky	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Louisiana	16	2	18	114
Maine	5	2	0	5
Maryland	1	0	18	32
Massachusetts	2	0	43	41
Michigan	47	9	133	177
Minnesota	32	12	70	129
Mississippi	0	1	0	5
Missouri	0	0	0	77
Montana	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nebraska	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nevada	11	2	22	49
New Hampshire	6	4	12	16
New Jersey	3	0	39	69
New Mexico	3	0	39	69
New York	1	0	18	307
North Carolina	49	21	56	71
North Dakota	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ohio	1	11	53	251

TABLE 3

Charter Schools by State and Community Type, 2019–2020 (Page 2 of 2)

	Rural	Town	Suburban	Urban
Oklahoma	4	1	3	54
Oregon	64	16	29	28
Pennsylvania	4	2	47	154
Rhode Island	7	5	18	7
South Carolina	15	10	40	15
South Dakota	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tennessee	7	5	18	7
Texas	63	18	184	662
Utah	23	7	83	20
Vermont	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	2	0	0	6
Washington	0	2	0	8
West Virginia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wisconsin	28	11	26	169
Wyoming	2	1	0	2
TOTAL	772	288	2,132	4,303

SOURCE: Yueting (Cynthia) Xu, "Where Are Charter Schools Located?" National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, March 9, 2022, <https://data.publiccharters.org/digest/charter-school-data-digest/where-are-charter-schools-located/> (accessed November 14, 2022).

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2022, Arizona charter schools demonstrated scores on the eighth-grade math and reading exams that would rank first and second compared to statewide averages nationwide. Fourth-grade scores demonstrated the negative impact of the school shutdowns in being statistically indistinguishable from the statewide average scores. No science exams have been given since 2015 at the time of this writing.

The secret to Arizona’s success appears to be its approach to accountability. Most states take a top-down approach to accountability, making it difficult to open schools and then subjecting charter schools to significant oversight, with authorizers frequently shutting down schools that fail to meet certain objectives. By contrast, Arizona makes it easier to open charter

schools and awards 15-year charters. The state takes a bottom-up approach to accountability, allowing more innovation and greater access to charter schools and relying on parents to shut down poorly performing schools by selecting better ones. As Matthew Ladner (co-author of this *Special Report*) explained in *Education Next*:

Administrative attempts to close charter schools are often met with fierce parental opposition and lawsuits, but when parents don't like a school, they can simply vote with their feet, either by withdrawing their children from the school or by not choosing it in the first place. It is therefore parents, rather than state officials, who play the primary role in holding Arizona charter schools accountable, in a highly efficient manner. An abundance of K-12 opportunities—including charter schools, district schools, district open enrollment, magnet schools, and private choice programs—gives Arizona parents many exit options. Another key factor contributing to charter school closure may be that Arizona's suburban districts, unlike those in many other states, are actively involved in accepting open-enrollment transfers.⁴⁹

Most Arizona charter schools that cease operation do so due to parents' choices rather than a decision by authorizers. Among the 290 charter schools in Arizona that closed down between 2000 and 2013, the average enrollment in the final year of operation was only 62 students.⁵⁰ The vast majority closed before their charters were scheduled for renewal. Indeed, for the schools for which data were available, the average length of operation of a school that ended up closing was only four years. By contrast, failing district schools tend to remain open forever. When parents have many options, they do not countenance poor performance very long.

Other states should expand opportunities for rural students to attend charter schools by removing regulatory barriers to opening and operating charter schools.

Microschooling. As with the term “rural,” there is no universally agreed-upon definition of a “microschool.” Generally speaking, microschools are small clusters of families that pool resources and collaborate to educate their children.⁵¹ They usually have an in-person instructor who teaches about five to 15 students, although some self-declared microschools enroll as many as 150 students.⁵² Often, though not always, they are affiliated with a larger organization or network of microschools, such as Acton Academy, Adamo Education, Kai Pods, or Prenda.

In a sense, microschools represent a 21st-century reimagining of the one-room schoolhouse—simultaneously innovative and yet deeply rooted

in the nation’s history and culture. The original one-room schoolhouses were replaced by larger schools because they could not offer the same depth or breadth of study. But now, with the assistance of technology, micro-schools offer a comprehensive and rigorous education while providing a level of individual attention and personalization that larger schools struggle to achieve.

As with private schools generally, microschoools vary significantly in terms of their pedagogical approach. Some take a classical approach. The Great Hearts Microschool network is affiliated with the popular Great Hearts classical charter school network that serves more than 22,000 students in Arizona and Texas.⁵³ The network’s schools are organized according to the classical trivium—the grammar, logic, and rhetoric learning phases—and emphasize the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. Likewise, the Ecclesial Schools Initiative in Florida “envisions an expanding network of affordable Christian classical schools based in churches and catering primarily to families using state-supported school choice scholarships.”⁵⁴

In a sense, microschoools represent a 21st-century reimagining of the one-room schoolhouse—simultaneously innovative and yet deeply rooted in the nation’s history and culture.

Other microschoools take a more self-directed approach. For example, Acton Academies take children on a “hero’s journey,” using Socratic discussions, project-based learning, and real-life apprenticeships to help students to become “curious, independent, lifelong learners.”⁵⁵ Founded in Austin, Texas, in 2009, Acton Academies now operate over 200 microschoools in the United States and abroad. Wildflower Schools grew out of an MIT Media Lab research project in Cambridge, Massachusetts, into more than 60 microschoools across more than a dozen states in 2014. Wildflower Schools offers a Montessori approach that combines elements of institutional and homeschooling.⁵⁶

Microschoools received much more attention when schools nationwide were suddenly closed for in-person instruction in the spring of 2020. When desperate parents found themselves looking for in-person instruction with

small class sizes to limit potential exposure to the coronavirus, micro-schools offered exactly what many families needed. But even before the pandemic, microschools were already on the rise because they offer greater flexibility, customization, and personalized instruction.

Microschools are especially popular in states like Arizona, where state policies made it easier for them to open and grow. The Prenda microschool network was founded by Kelly Smith in 2018 with just a handful of students. Prenda offers student-directed learning organized around three “modes”—Conquer, Collaborate, and Create—during which students make progress in core academic subjects, learn to work together, and do projects related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), history, the arts, and more.⁵⁷ Each Prenda microschool is run by a “guide” (more like a mentor or coach than a traditional teacher) with classrooms of between five and 10 students. By the 2019–2020 academic year, Prenda had already grown to nearly 900 students in about 100 microschools across Arizona. During the pandemic, it doubled enrollment, growing to 1,827 students in 2022–2023 in Arizona.⁵⁸ Prenda now serves more than 3,000 students in more than 300 microschools in six states.⁵⁹

A part of what made it possible for Prenda to expand so quickly was Arizona’s school choice policies. Some families access Prenda by paying with their state-issued ESAs. Others access Prenda via its partnership with local district schools or EdKey, an online charter school, which means they do not pay out of pocket at all. Prenda microschools have operated in some of the most rural parts of Arizona, including the Apache and Navajo tribal lands as well as Colorado City. From the 2019–2020 school year to the 2022–2023 school year, Prenda enrollment in rural areas grew by 26 percent, from 367 to 464 students.⁶⁰

Microschools have much potential to meet the educational needs of rural families. As Arizona has demonstrated, when states embrace policies that allow parents to choose the learning environments that work best for their children, it makes it easier for innovative options like microschools to take root and grow.

Virtual Learning. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual schooling (also called online schooling, distance learning, or remote learning) took a hit to its reputation, especially as evidence mounted that children learning remotely instead of receiving in-person instruction were suffering significant learning loss.⁶¹ Nevertheless, brick-and-mortar schools attempting to replicate their classroom experiences on Zoom during an emergency should not be conflated with intentional virtual schooling.

A 2020 survey found that parents of children enrolled in virtual schools were much more likely to report that their children “learned a lot” (86 percent) than parents of children enrolled in brick-and-mortar schools that were utilizing remote learning (13 percent).⁶² The survey also asked parents about their school’s performance across four constructs: active learning, communication, pedagogical efficacy, and classroom management. The survey found that parents of students enrolled in virtual schools were “significantly more likely to report that their child engaged in activities associated with active learning, and they agreed that virtual schools outperformed brick and mortar schools when it comes to clear communication, classroom management, and sound instructional practices.”⁶³

It is no wonder, then, that parents are increasingly supportive of virtual schooling. In the 2022 *Education Next* survey, 64 percent of parents said that they would be willing to let their child take some academic courses online, up from 56 percent in 2009.⁶⁴

During the pandemic, virtual schools saw a sharp uptick in enrollment. Stride K12, the nation’s largest virtual charter school operator, saw enrollment grow nearly 40 percent in 2020, up to about 170,000 students nationwide compared to about 123,000 students in 2019.⁶⁵ The nation’s second-largest virtual school network, Connections Academy, reported that its applications had increased by more than 60 percent in 2020.

Although no government agency collects data on where virtual school students live, there is evidence that virtual schools disproportionately serve students in rural areas. As noted, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that about 15 percent of public school students live in rural areas.⁶⁶ By contrast, a survey of Stride K12 virtual school families finds that 38 percent live in a rural area.⁶⁷ In Arizona, rural enrollment in EdKey’s virtual charter school increased more than fivefold over the last decade, from 724 in 2012 to 3,785 in 2022.⁶⁸ During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, EdKey’s rural enrollment spiked to about 4,300 students.

Families choose virtual schools for a variety of reasons. Often, they are attracted to the flexible scheduling that it offers, especially for students with special needs, health concerns, or those involved in elite sports, acting, or similar activities. One mother told a local news affiliate in Atlanta that she chose a virtual school for her son so that he could participate in a special program with the Atlanta Ballet: “Because he dances in the day, he needed a fully asynchronous, fully virtual option that would allow him to kind of pursue his passion, but also, you know, do high school.”⁶⁹ Virtual schools allow students to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule.

Virtual schools also offer a variety of courses that might not be offered in a student's local school, particularly in rural areas. Not all brick-and-mortar schools offer Advanced Placement courses, classes in a wide variety of foreign languages, or specialized programs in STEM or computer programming. Virtual schools can provide access to courses that students might not be able to attend locally.

Of course, access to virtual learning depends on access to high-speed Internet. Rural residents have more difficulty accessing high-speed Internet than suburbanites and city dwellers, but most report that they do have high-speed access. A 2021 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 72 percent rural Americans said they have a broadband Internet connection at home, compared to 77 percent and 79 percent for urban and suburban residents, respectively.⁷⁰ Rural access to high-speed Internet increased by nine percentage points since 2016. In the not-too-distant future, high-speed Internet might be accessible even in the remotest rural areas due to technological advances, such as Elon Musk's Starlink satellite Internet service.⁷¹

Some virtual schools are even beginning to use virtual reality to enhance their students' learning experience. For example, Optima Classical Academy (OCA) in Florida is the first—and so far, only—classical virtual charter school. OCA opened its virtual doors this year and serves students in grades three through eight. Like other classical schools, OCA focuses on delivering “rich content which fosters a natural love for learning and thinking.”⁷² As OCA's founder and CEO, Erika Donalds, explains:

Students learn about historical events, characters, stories, fables, poetry, scientific facts, and mathematical proofs. They read the classics as whole books in great depth and learn to approach books both with motivation to learn and courage to question. The principles of moral character and civic virtue, now absent from most public school classrooms, are fundamental to the classical curriculum.⁷³

However, unlike most classical schools, OCA employs virtual reality to create “an immersive, collaborative, and socially appropriate experience with their instructor and peers unlike any other virtual school available.”

On our virtual reality platform, scholars are immersed together as avatars in a traditional-looking and -feeling VR classroom and can be transported again to whatever learning environment is relevant to the lesson. For example, while our 3rd grade scholars are reading *The Whipping Boy*, they can be in a castle

setting, more closely aligned with the context and setting of the book. Marine biology studies can be done underwater. A study of the United States Constitution can include a visit to the Constitutional Convention. This additional element of learning leads to deeper understanding and better Socratic discourse.⁷⁴

Virtual learning might not be the right fit for every child. But for some, it opens a world of possibilities that they otherwise do not have locally—all without having to leave the rural community that they know and love.

Part II: Effects of Education Choice Policies on Rural Public Schools

Clearly there are more education options in rural areas than skeptics of education choice claim. Yet the wider availability of options might lend credence to their second (albeit contradictory) claim, that a wide availability of education options harms rural public school districts. As anti-school-choice groups, like Save Our Schools Arizona, put it, while education choice policies supposedly “drain resources from all public schools, they disproportionately hurt rural public schools.”⁷⁵ Others go further, predicting that choice policies would create a “death spiral” as families use the choice policies to move their children out of the public school system. As Kathryn Joyce wrote in *Salon*, citing Network for Public Education executive director Carol Corbett Burris:

“When that happens, especially in rural areas, if enough kids leave the system, they leave behind all kinds of stranded costs,” said Burris. Schools will still have to pay staff and keep the lights on, but will receive substantially less support to do so. “Then you have a vicious cycle, where the quality of education in public schools starts to suffer, which means more people leave, and the more people leave, the more the quality of education deteriorates.”⁷⁶

Although 25 of the 28 empirical studies on the effects of education choice policies on public school performance find positive effects, some critics worry that supposed negative effects in rural areas are being masked by the positive effects in urban and suburban areas.⁷⁷ If there is anywhere to test this thesis, Arizona—which has a robust education choice environment, with more than one-third of its K–12 students in rural areas—is the place to examine.⁷⁸

Arizona has consistently ranked as one of the top states for education freedom and choice over the past two decades. Arizona first claimed this title in a 2002 study that ranked all 50 states for education freedom.⁷⁹ The report considered states' policies on district open enrollment, charter schools, homeschooling, and private school choice. In 2021, a replication of this study with more recent data ranked Arizona first in education freedom again.⁸⁰ In 2022, The Heritage Foundation's inaugural Education Freedom Report Card ranked Arizona number two overall (behind Florida) and number one for education choice.⁸¹ Arizona has the highest percentage of K–12 students participating in education choice (7 percent) and the second-highest percentage enrolled in charter schools (19 percent) of any state.⁸²

Arizona has consistently ranked as one of the top states for education freedom and choice over the past two decades.

As noted, 84 percent of students in Arizona have access to at least one charter school in their zip code—the highest percentage in the nation by a wide margin. The state with the next-highest charter school accessibility rate is Utah, but the Beehive State's law focuses charter school expansion on communities with high enrollment growth. Moreover, Utah's private choice programs are restricted to students with special needs. Alaska, Colorado, and New Mexico come next for breadth of reach of their charter sectors, but none of these states have private choice programs. Florida had one or more charter schools operating in half of its zip codes, as well as robust private choice programs. However, Arizona's charter sector reaches 34 percent more zip codes than Florida's. In short, Arizona's choice sectors reach further into rural areas than in any other state.

Arizona lawmakers passed a charter school law and an open enrollment statute in 1994, and three years later they passed the nation's first tax-credit scholarship program. Under the original program, individual taxpayers can donate to a nonprofit organization and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit against their state income tax. The scholarship organization collects these funds and grants scholarships to students to attend private schools. In subsequent years, Arizona lawmakers have repeatedly increased the size of the credit and created new credits against

corporate income taxes. The Arizona Department of Revenue tracks the number of scholarships and the dollar amounts by county in Arizona. All but the two smallest counties in Arizona (Greenlee and LaPaz) have tax-credit scholarship students. Neither Greenlee nor LaPaz currently have a private school in operation.

Are Arizona's rural school districts withering and dying because of school choice, as the critics predicted? Hardly. The National Center for Education Statistics listed 224 regular school districts in Arizona in 1993, the year before choice began. In 2019, the same source listed 226 Arizona regular school districts.⁸³ Since the advent of choice in Arizona, there have been consolidations of rural districts in two counties, the closure of a district in a county without charter or private schools, and one new district created. The overall picture is of relative stability. The news of rural school districts dying because of choice seems to have been greatly exaggerated.

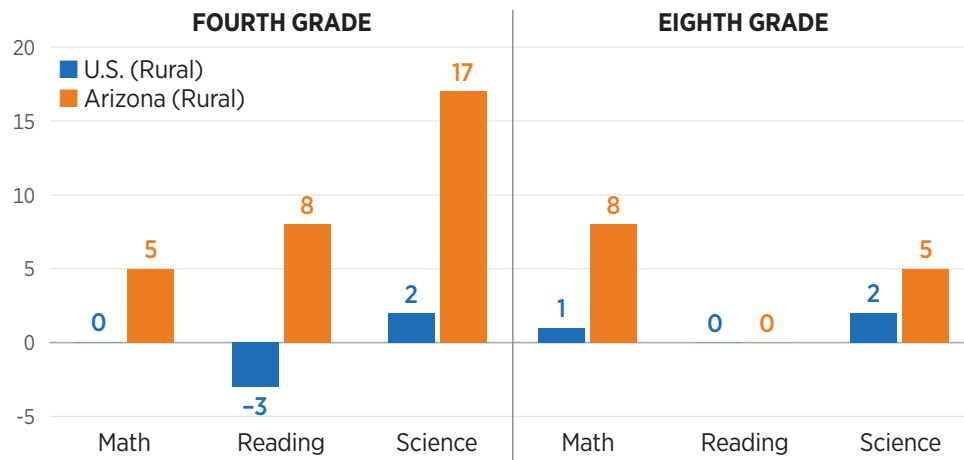
Of course, it is possible for schools to be harmed without shutting down. It could be the case that the rural districts have academically suffered despite their continued existence. Fortunately, the data belie such concerns. The NAEP tests samples of students at the state level and allows the tracking of academic trends in fourth-grade and eighth-grade math, reading, and science.

Charts 6 and 7 show both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic NAEP data for rural students in Arizona and the United States. On the math and reading exams, 10 points approximately represents a grade-level's worth of progress. (Thus one expects a group of fifth-graders to score 10 points higher than a similar group of fourth-graders.) The science exams use a different scale than the math and reading exams, so this rule of thumb does not apply. For each test, the earliest available result (2007 for math and reading, 2009 for science) is subtracted from the most recent pre-pandemic result (2019 for pre-pandemic math and reading scores, 2015 for science) for both Arizona and the United States as a whole. Chart 6 presents the data for each test for the longest period available until the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding school shutdowns (2007 to 2019 for the math and reading tests, 2009 to 2015 for the science results).

The pre-pandemic NAEP scores show no evidence that education choice harms rural schools. Quite to the contrary, rural Arizona students demonstrated progress on five of the six academic exams, often by wide margins. On the sixth exam, Arizona rural students matched the national trend. Although NAEP scores alone cannot prove that Arizona's choice policies led to the increase in academic performance, they nevertheless provide strong evidence against the hypothesis that education choice causes harm.


CHART 6

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Gains and Declines by Test for Rural Students, 2007–2019



NOTE: The time frame is 2007–2019 for math and reading, and 2009–2015 for science, which are the earliest and latest pre-pandemic results for each test.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on the NAEP fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading and math assessments in 2007 and 2019, and science assessments in 2009 and 2015; and National Center for Education Statistics, "Explore Assessment Data," <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/data/> (accessed November 7, 2022).

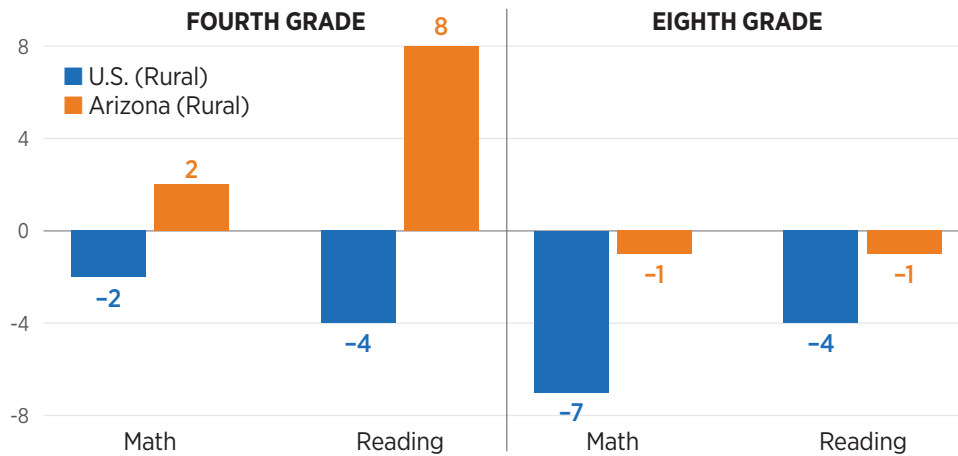
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The NAEP scores show no evidence that education choice harms rural schools. Quite the contrary.

In September 2022, the NAEP released the first post-pandemic scores in fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading. The results around the nation were devastating. On the long-term trend assessment, math performance fell for the first time in the test's history while students' reading scores showed the biggest declines in 30 years.⁸⁴ The main NAEP scores released in October also showed "unprecedented declines in math and significant dips in reading achievement."⁸⁵ Yet, as shown in Chart 7, although Native American populations in rural parts of Arizona were especially hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, Arizona's rural NAEP trends remained favorable compared to the nation as a whole.

CHART 7

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Gains and Declines by Test for Rural Students, 2007–2022



SOURCE: Authors calculations based on the NAEP fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading and math assessments in 2007 and 2022; and National Center for Education Statistics, “Explore Assessment Data,” <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/data/> (accessed November 7, 2022).

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The NAEP gives examinations to random samples of students across states, creating the possibility of sampling error for student subgroups. A group of Stanford scholars, however, has created a data source based on state academic examinations, and thus with a much broader set of information. Stanford University’s Educational Opportunity Project has linked state testing data across the country and includes measures of academic growth for the 2008–2018 school year by state, county, school district, and individual public school (private schools are not included). Arizona shows the highest statewide rate of academic growth overall, as well as the highest rates for low-income students (by a wide margin) and for middle-income and high-income students (narrowly).⁸⁶

Arizona’s rural schools, districts, and counties also show high levels of academic growth. In fact, rural Santa Cruz County shows the highest rate of academic growth of any county in Arizona—an annual average of 17 percent more learned per year above a single grade level. Charter schools contributed directly to this high level of academic growth. Arizona’s rural charter school students averaged a rate of annual learning 20 percent above a single grade level per year.⁸⁷

The Arizona experience with rural school choice since 1995 does not support the notion that school choice will “destroy” or even damage rural education outcomes. Indeed, Arizona’s results indicate that it is more likely that rural students and families benefit from having access to a wide variety of learning options.

Conclusion

Rural areas have far more education options than the opponents of education choice claim. Private schools, charter schools, microschools, and virtual learning are accessible to most students in rural areas and policymakers can expand access by enacting robust education choice policies. Additionally, Arizona’s experience shows that education choice policies spur the creation of new options and the expansion of existing ones, including in rural areas.

Moreover, contrary to the scaremongering by opponents of education choice, there is no evidence that the expansion of education options in rural areas has any negative effects. Indeed, the best available evidence suggests that choice and competition are the rising tide that lifts all boats, including in rural areas.

Education choice can also be a very popular policy initiative in rural areas. As noted, Texas Republican primary voters supported a ballot proposition endorsing education choice by a margin of 88 percent to 12 percent. In several of the most rural parts of Texas, voters supported education choice with between 87 percent and 100 percent of the vote. Likewise, in Oklahoma, a 2022 survey found that 70 percent of rural Oklahomans supported school choice, while only 25 percent opposed it.

Rural families whose children are not well served by their assigned school often face the difficult choice between subpar education and leaving the community they love. Rural families who have access to a wide variety of high-quality education options are more likely to stay and avail themselves of those options.

Policymakers who want to expand access to education options in rural parts of their state should:

1. **Enact universal K–12 ESAs.** ESAs empower families with the freedom and flexibility to customize their children’s education. Families can use ESAs to pay for private school tuition, microschooling, virtual learning, tutoring, textbooks, homeschool curricula, transportation, and more. Families can even roll over unused funds to save for future

education expenses. ESAs can provide rural families with access to a wider variety of education options and create an incentive for education providers to serve rural areas.

- 2. Expand charter school policies.** Policymakers should make it easier to open and operate charter schools, generally, and in rural areas, specifically. States with restrictive, top-down regulations tend to have very few charter schools. In a misguided effort to ensure quality, they too often make charter schools inaccessible. By contrast, states like Arizona prioritize accessibility, making it easier to open charter schools and relying on bottom-up, parent-driven accountability to ensure quality. Policymakers should reduce barriers to entry for charter operators, allow multiple charter authorizers, grant longer charters, and reduce red tape.

No one school can best meet the needs of all the children who just happen to live nearby. Families living in rural areas deserve more education options. By embracing education choice policies, state lawmakers can deliver on the promise of America's education system and ensure that all children have access to the learning environment that best meets their individual needs and helps them to achieve their full potential.

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BLUUM AT FIVE

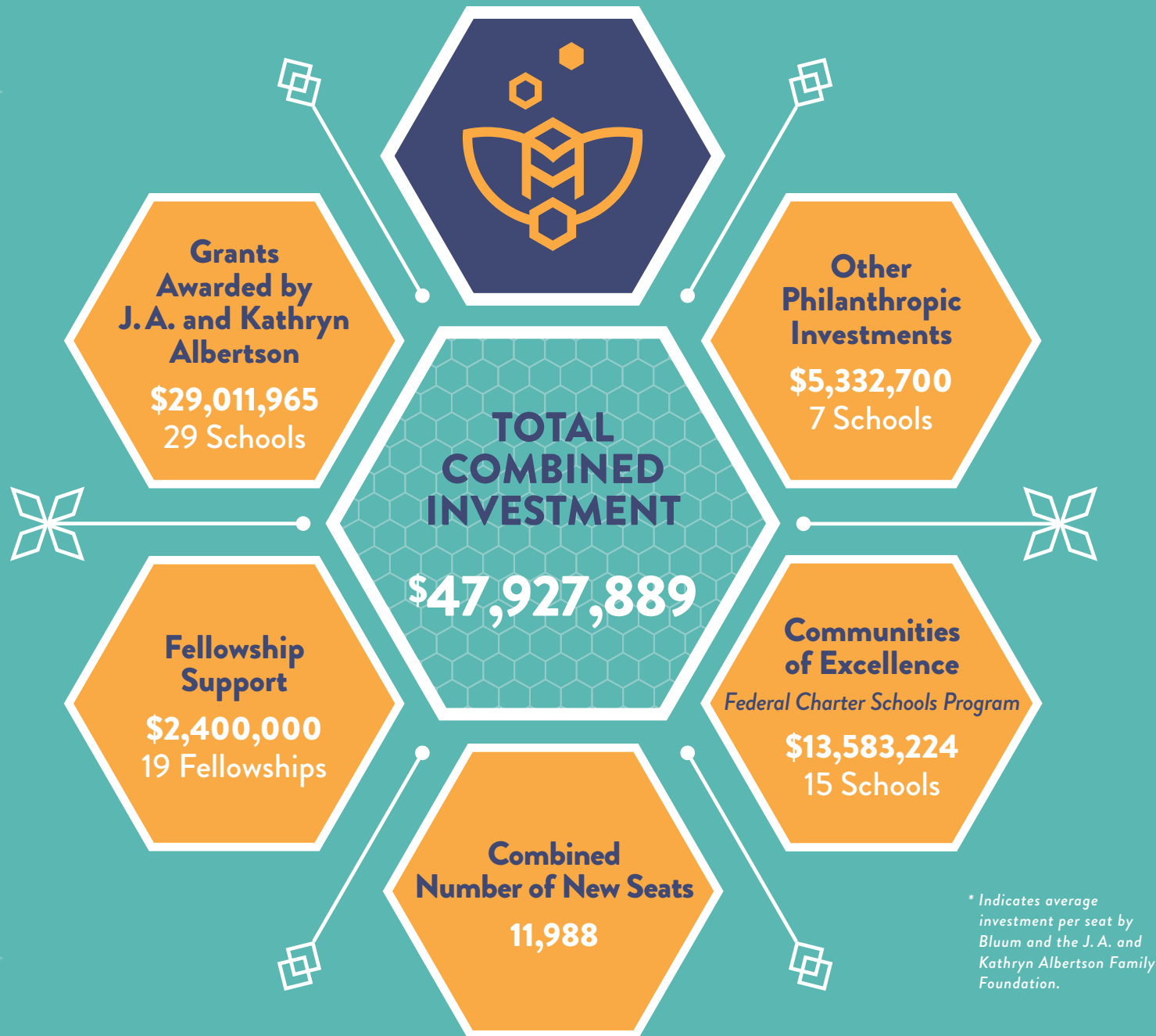
HELPING GOOD PEOPLE START GOOD SCHOOLS



2015

INVESTMENT SUMMARY

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** Indicates average investment per seat by Bluum and the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation.*

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WE BELIEVE



That school choice helps families, children, and educators achieve more and do better.

WE ARE COMMITTED



To ensuring that Idaho's children reach their fullest potential by cultivating great leaders and innovative schools.

ABOUT BLUUM



Bluum is a nonprofit organization helping Idaho become a national model for how to maximize learning opportunities for children and families.

Bluum empowers and supports educators who take risks and put children first by:

- ✦ Developing innovative leaders;
- ✦ Growing successful school models;
- ✦ Sharing research and learning innovations;
- ✦ Providing school support and management help.

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HELPING GOOD PEOPLE START GOOD SCHOOLS:

BLUUM AT FIVE

by Alan Gottlieb

AFTER FIVE YEARS OF OPERATION, BLUUM—the Idaho nonprofit committed to developing innovative schools and supporting great leaders to run them—has left an indelible mark on the Gem State’s educational landscape.



Its work between 2015 and 2020 will deliver more than 10,600 new, high-quality seats for children in the network’s growing portfolio of 25 high-performing schools. Bluum’s working relationships with Building Hope and other financing organizations has also brought to Idaho state-of-the-art new facilities for many of its fledgling schools.

That alone represents a huge impact on Idaho education. But Bluum’s impact extends beyond the schools it has helped open. It’s not a stretch to say that Bluum has altered, for the better, the education trajectory of Idaho, a state that has struggled historically to provide an adequate education to the majority of its students. Bluum schools regularly outperform the state’s other public schools on most measures of academic success.

Because Bluum is agnostic about a school’s governance model, it has worked not only with charter schools, but with district-run schools and private schools as well. This agnosticism can and should serve as a model for education advocates in other states.

In addition, the Bluum staff’s deep experience in the charter school sector in Idaho and elsewhere has helped shape Idaho education policy over the past five years. The state’s evolution into one of the most choice-friendly states in the nation has helped Bluum attract top talent, both to staff the organization and to the schools it has helped

open and expand. Bluum’s reputation for helping develop homegrown school models, rather than importing charter management organizations from elsewhere, has also made Idaho attractive to in-state education entrepreneurs.

Although Bluum’s early efforts were funded with generous grants from Idaho’s J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, more recently it also attracted \$22.1 million in federal charter school program dollars, further expanding its reach. All told, Bluum has steered investments totaling almost \$40 million to schools spread across Idaho.

With its reputation firmly established, but much left to accomplish, where does Bluum go in the next five years? Beginning to answer that question is the main purpose of this report.

We interviewed 15 local and national educators and education advocates familiar with Bluum’s work to get their thoughts on where and how Bluum could have the greatest impact in 2021 and beyond. We also conducted a targeted survey, sent to local and national experts, and received about 50 responses. Not surprisingly, we received compelling, at times provocative answers from both the interviews and survey.

Key suggestions that emerged about Bluum’s work going forward, and which we will explore in this report, include:

- ✦ Continuing to promote new school development.



Bluum’s work between 2015 and 2020 will deliver more than 10,600 new, high-quality seats for children in the network’s growing portfolio of 25 high-performing schools.

“Bluum is interested in one main thing: They are trying to provide the best educational platform for any given kid because they want to produce exactly what district-run public schools want to produce: Students who can become contributing members of our society.”

Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

- ✘ Bringing in great school leaders from across the country.
- ✘ Promoting good state and local education policy by educating public officials about what is possible.
- ✘ Providing an array of services to existing Bluum schools, ranging from financial recordkeeping to professional development to succession planning to special education supports to governance development.
- ✘ Hiring “relationship managers” to create formal and informal learning networks among Bluum schools, and between Bluum schools and rural school districts.
- ✘ Increasing Bluum’s focus on rural schools, specifically rural districts that are open to innovation.
- ✘ Striving to develop strong relationships with open-minded school districts, particularly in rural areas of the state.
- ✘ Focusing on serving more diverse students, in particular low-income students, English language learners, and students of color.
- ✘ Building a Bluum reputational brand to enhance the organization’s national footprint, which in turn promotes talent recruitment.
- ✘ Exploring the possibility of getting into charter school authorizing work.

While Bluum has its detractors among the most ardent defenders of the educational status quo, one clear message that emerged from the interviews is that Bluum is widely respected and admired, both in Idaho and nationally. Its open, non-dogmatic approach to school improvement has won it a bipartisan collection of admirers.

“Bluum is not trying to knock district-run public schools out of operation, or say that there is no value in district-run schools,” said Debbie Critchfield, president of the Idaho State Board of Education. “Bluum is interested in one main thing: They are trying to provide the best educational platform for any given kid because they want to produce exactly what district-run public schools want to produce: Students who can become contributing members of our society.”

*St. Ignatius Catholic School
Meridian*







Gem Prep: Nampa
Nampa



BLUUM'S FIRST FIVE YEARS:

A SNAPSHOT

ALTHOUGH OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED AS AN INDEPENDENT NONPROFIT IN 2015,

its origin dates back to 2013, when the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation (JKAF) announced an audacious initiative called “20 in 10.” The initiative’s goal was to “close the gap between mediocrity and excellence in college and career readiness (in Idaho) by creating 20,000 new, high performing charter seats in 10 years.”



Earlier foundation efforts to support charter school growth in less systematic ways had not turned out well for JKAF, according to Jamie Jo Scott, the foundation's board chair.

“We had a long history of giving money to the charter school movement over the 15 years prior to “20 in 10” and Bluum,” Scott said. “We learned a lot about how to give money away really poorly.” The chartering process in Idaho lacked rigor and due diligence, and as a result, schools in some cases got authorized without solid financial or educational plans. They also often entered into untenable building leases. Some struggled to produce strong academic results.

The idea behind “20 in 10” was to get more strategic and systematic about vetting schools before investing in them, and then providing them with all the supports they needed to launch successfully and become sustainable.

Initially, Scott and JKAF envisioned recruiting both national and regional charter management organizations with proven track records, to bring their models to Idaho, and seeding the development of homegrown models. Funding non-network charters and the expansion of existing schools was also part of the initial plan.

Scott wanted to model the “20 in 10” initiative on the Charter School Growth Fund, a national organization that identifies the country’s best public charter schools, funds

their expansion, and helps to increase their impact. The first question was who should run this new organization.

Scott doesn’t remember who introduced her to Terry Ryan, but she quickly concluded that he would be a great fit to run the “20 in 10” initiative. Ryan at the time was living in Dayton, Ohio, where he was Vice-President for Ohio Programs and Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a national education think-tank and Ohio-based charter school authorizer.

“It became obvious to me that he’d be an amazing asset to bring to Idaho and oversee this effort,” Scott recalled. “It took a year to stalk him and convince him and his family to move to Idaho.”

Once Ryan landed in Boise in August 2013, he and the JKAF team began putting together their game plan over the next 18 months. The “20 in 10” effort was rebranded as Bluum in 2015, in part because, under Ryan’s influence, the campaign broadened from exclusively a charter school expansion effort to include any school—charter or district, public or private—that was committed to creating innovative solutions for its students.

“In Terry, Bluum has a strong leader who gets along with everyone and brings a lot of goodwill to the table,” said Nina Rees, president and CEO of the National Alliance



for Public Charter Schools. “Bluum has an attitude of ‘let’s influence change through positivity’ and funding the right things, rather than approaching everything through a political lens.”

Concurrent with Ryan’s hiring, JKAF contracted with Building Hope, a national nonprofit lender with deep expertise in helping schools develop their architectural plans, identify appropriate locations, secure project financing, and manage design and construction phases.

In 2015, Bluum supported the development and/or expansion of seven public charter schools, one private school, and the state’s first district-run innovation school. The schools promised to deliver more than 5,200 new seats and brought in \$11.2 million in grant funding from JKAF.

That same year, Bluum launched its Idaho New School Fellowship program, to recruit, develop, and place top talent in Idaho’s growing new school sector. This program also attracted national philanthropic funding to the Gem State and the support of partners like the KIPP Fisher Fellowship.

Bluum selected its first two fellows in 2015 from a pool of 44 applicants spanning 13 states. Amanda Cox and Brad Petersen, veteran educators, came onboard with a vision to create two schools, but quickly joined forces to develop and

launch Future Public School, a diverse, STEM-focused K-8 school in Garden City.

The fellowships program has been “a really good mechanism to get good people interested in launching or replicating a school,” Ryan said. “It has paid dividends for us.” It also provides Bluum with a way to “take risks without being all in,” he said: “A six-figure investment in a fellowship might yield a great new school, worth an investment of millions of dollars. Or it might produce a plan that never bears fruit, as has been the case a couple of times. Better to find that out, Ryan said, before parents, students and staff commit to something that ultimately fails.”

By 2017, Bluum’s network had expanded from nine schools to 13.

Three were new schools that together embodied Bluum’s theory of action. One of the new entries was a private, Catholic school; one was a public charter school (Brad and Amanda’s Future Public School, which opened in 2018 in a gleaming new facility), and one was a district innovation school in the Nampa school district. They shared a deep commitment to serving diverse student populations.

All three schools, the Bluum team believed, were potentially replicable, meaning that once they proved themselves, they could expand their footprint and serve more students and communities.



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By 2017, Bluum's network had expanded from nine schools to 13.



In its 2017 annual report, Bluum explained its new schools philosophy this way:

“These are homegrown models and an important part of the story. Bluum is open to supporting national charter management organizations with proven track records that wish to operate in Idaho. Programs developed locally, whose founders have a deep understanding of the culture of our state and the needs of its children, are the best possible leaders for a new generation of excellent schools.”

It was also in 2017 that Bluum added two new fellows: veteran Caldwell School District educators Monica White and Matt Strong. They had a vision for a charter Career and Technical Education school that would fill a serious gap in their community: Creating a system of excellence for traditionally underserved students by partnering with local industry and businesses. Like Future Public School, Elevate Academy would open in a new building made possible by the collaboration of Bluum, Building Hope, and JKAF.

The daunting task of planning and opening a new school was eased somewhat by the fellowship opportunity. “The

biggest gift is the gift of time,” Monica White said. “What it has done is make the program so much stronger than it would have been if we’d done it as a second, nighttime job.”

In 2018, Bluum not only celebrated the opening of Future Public School. It also paved the way for the opening of Elevate Academy in 2019, and welcomed a new fellow, retired Air Force Colonel Stephen Lambert, who had plans to open a classical academy in 2019 in the town of Fruitland on the Oregon border. Treasure Valley Classical Academy, part of the national Barney Charter School Initiative, would operate out of a fully renovated, 90-year-old middle school building in the heart of town.

Bluum also supported the expansion of a successful International Baccalaureate school, Boise’s Sage International, into rural Middleton, with Forge International slated to open in a new building in 2019.

Perhaps the biggest news of 2018, however, came when Bluum, as part of the Idaho Communities of Excellence consortium, won a \$17.1 million federal Charter School Program grant. The grant, which extends through 2023 and was increased to \$22 million in 2019, allows Bluum to make competitive sub-grants to new and expanding charter schools across Idaho.

The successful application pledged that a total of at least 19 subgrantee schools would participate in the grant program over its five-year term. Nine would be start-up public charter schools, while five would be expansion and five would be replication schools.

“It’s great to have the funding, but the federal grant also places a whole new set of eyes onto the work and that is a very positive thing,” said Bluum board chair Toby Prehn.

By 2020, the federal grant had supercharged Bluum’s already impressive expansion. Bluum’s reach had grown to the extent that it supported 25 charter schools in all corners of the state. By the end of 2020,





Elevate Academy, Caldwell

15 subgrantee schools had received federal Charter School Program grant funding of \$13.58 million, and over the next five years are projected to serve 7,008 students.

Bluum-affiliated schools were gaining a national reputation for strong performance. “One of our favorite statistics from 2019 was from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data that showed if Idaho’s public charter schools were in their “own state,” they would be the number-one ranked state in America on 8th grade math and number two on the 8th grade reading NAEP assessment,” the organization’s 2019 annual report stated.

The fellowship program also expanded in 2019, and by the end of 2020 there are a total of 21 current and former fellows.

School leaders offered high praise for the Bluum team for its logistical, tactical, and moral support. Bluum’s back office

services for charter schools were described as a lifesaver by several heads of new schools. They singled out Bluum’s chief financial officer, Marc Carignan, for special praise.

“You have to have a strong support system to launch a new school or else it takes a whole lot more work,” said Anthony Haskett, whose MOSAICS Public School K-8 charter opened in Caldwell in 2020.

“When it comes to the back office services they have been providing, I have come to rely on Bluum for finances, budgets, cutting checks, keeping track of when things are due. There are all these nuances to running a school that a district office takes care of for district schools that charter leaders have to fulfill. Bluum lifts a huge burden off of us.”

Although 2020 was the strangest of years, Bluum continued its work at full speed. During the year, seven new schools joined Bluum’s portfolio, and will be opening in the

“The [CSP] federal grant also places a whole new set of eyes onto the work and that is a very positive thing.”

Toby Prehn, Bluum Board Chair

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next couple of years. They ranged from the newest campus of charter network Gem Prep, in Meridian, to Kootenai Classical Academy in far northern Idaho.

Three schools opened in 2020: Island Park Elementary School in the small eastern Idaho town of Island Park; MOSAICS Public School in Caldwell; and the CSP grant-funded Hayden Canyon Charter School in Hayden.

Seven New School Fellows, and one School Finance Fellow, came onboard as well during 2020. These fellows are planning schools that will open across the state in the near future. Further, with financial support from JKAF, Bluum began piloting a \$1.5 million all-day kindergarten program across 17 partner schools.

Even a quick review of Bluum’s first five years makes it clear that the Idaho education landscape looks very different today than it would have had Bluum not come onto the scene. Continuing support from the federal CSP grant through 2023 means that Bluum’s ambitious growth will continue for another couple of years.

But what, beyond continuing to do its excellent work on new school development, support, and replication, can Bluum do to expand its reach and influence, and to make Idaho schools better for more kids?

That’s the question we will attempt to answer in the next section of this report.

“One of our favorite statistics from 2019 was from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data that showed if Idaho’s public charter schools were in their “own state,” they would be the number-one ranked state in America on 8th grade math and number two on the 8th grade reading NAEP assessment.”

— Bluum’s 2019 Annual Report



*Gem Prep: Pocatello
Chubbuck*



BLUUM'S NEXT FIVE YEARS: PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE SURVEY WE CONDUCTED FOR THIS REPORT SHOW THAT BLUUM has established a solid reputation from which to build among educators, education policymakers, and advocates, both locally and nationally. Survey respondents overwhelmingly (more than 80 percent) said Bluum has had a major impact on Idaho public education, and 98 percent of those respondents said the change has been positive.



Well over half of respondents described Bluum as an organization dedicated to creating thousands of seats in strong new schools, regardless of governance model. This shows that the Bluum message about governance agnosticism has broken through. The term most frequently used to describe Bluum's approach was "entrepreneurial."

We also asked people to describe Bluum's brand. Here, answers diverged more widely. Responses included "quality," "innovation," "solutions-based," "supportive of school leaders," "courageous," "driving school choice," and "creative."

The question that engaged survey respondents most was "what would you like to see Bluum accomplish in its next five years?" Based on answers to this question, we selected 15 people for follow-up interviews. From those interviews, 10 clear themes emerged.

BLUUM SHOULD DO MORE OF WHAT IT HAS DONE SO SUCCESSFULLY UP TO NOW.

Recruiting strong leaders, giving them time and resources to design great new schools or expand schools that work well, then helping them secure or build facilities and open new schools represents an enormous accomplishment. Bluum



should continue working with Building Hope and JKAF to make this its central focus. It's highly unusual for a state to have an organization with so much expertise and so many resources at its disposal. This strategy works especially well in Idaho because the state's student population continues to grow and with it demand for quality new school seats.

"More charters, and a greater variety of charters," is how former Idaho State Senator and Senate Education Committee Chairman Dean Mortimer described how Bluum should focus its efforts over the next five years. "I believe competition in education needs to come back and come to the forefront. No real change will occur until competition, entrepreneurialism and student and parent engagement are the focus."

But opening new schools for the sake of adding 20,000 new seats should no longer be the goal, said Toby Prehn, Bluum's board chair. "Five years ago we had a goal of building a certain number of seats in charter schools in a certain number of years. I wouldn't want to build the wrong school in the wrong place with the wrong management team to meet goals of seats by a date on the calendar. I would rather miss the goal but achieve the results," Prehn said.

"I believe competition in education needs to come back and come to the forefront. No real change will occur until competition, entrepreneurialism and student and parent engagement are the focus."

Dean Mortimer, Former Idaho State Senator & Senate Education Committee Chairman

BLUUM SHOULD EXPAND ITS SERVICES TO PROVIDE ONGOING ASSISTANCE TO EXISTING SCHOOLS.

Bluum has proved more than adept at identifying and recruiting talented people and supporting them while they plan and open schools. As those schools mature, Bluum needs to keep an eye on the ball and ensure that the schools remain high-quality over the long term. That was the consensus of several people interviewed.

There are several steps Bluum should take to support the long-term viability of the excellent schools it has helped create. Several people suggested that Bluum hire at least one ‘relationship manager’ who would stay in regular, close contact with established Bluum schools. These staff members would connect school leaders to resources able to provide ongoing technical assistance, training, and logistical support in a variety of areas.

“There is a whole other support services group that is really required when you are already an operating school,” said JKAF’s Scott. “Maybe you need help dealing with personnel issues or performance issues or college and career advising. Bluum is still really heavy on successful start-ups and back office support.”

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Toby Prehn, Bluum Board Chairman

Scott said Bluum shouldn’t “miss the fact that more than 20 of these schools are operational now and dealing with issues of running and growing a school.”

Equally important, the relationship manager would connect Bluum schools to one another. Roger Quarles, JKAF’s executive director, said that once Bluum’s initial financial and logistical support ends, there would be great value in formally promoting connections among its operating schools. “There needs to be an ongoing value-add to being part of the Bluum network,” Quarles said.

These staff connectors could also help open relationships between Bluum schools and rural districts, which face struggles common to all schools but often lack resources to find solutions. “Bluum has the benefit of being on the ground and having those connections around the state,” said Vanessa Fry, interim director of the Idaho Policy Institute at Boise State University.

“They could be a liaison and connect district schools to resources in a way that might feel less threatening than if it came from the Idaho Department of Education.”

Another service Bluum could provide to its established schools would be either to provide or pay for ongoing professional development for Bluum school leaders, staff, and board members. Unlike school districts, which offer professional development regularly (albeit often of middling quality), charter schools frequently are left to fend for themselves in this regard.

Also inviting non-Bluum charters into these opportunities would be a benefit to Idaho education, said Jason Bransford, CEO of Gem Innovation Schools, a successful Bluum-supported, Idaho-based charter school network. “The non-Bluum charters, many of them, are out there doing their own thing, like pirate ships. I don’t even know most of their leaders. They operate in a vacuum. I don’t see their people at conferences or on webinars. They are not getting the opportunity to learn from others. It’s not healthy for anyone.”



MOSAICS Public School, Caldwell

Finally, Bluum could provide a key service to its older schools by stepping in with assistance at key moments, particularly when a leadership change or board transition is imminent. Terrence Moore, a charter school veteran from Colorado now preparing to open the Kootenai Classical Academy with Bluum’s support, said charters that run on the energy and vision of founding leaders and boards often founder when those initial transitions occur.

“I don’t want to give Terry and the rest of them more work than they already have, but long-term, looking at their strategic goals, I’d think they would want to keep the great things they are doing in place. This is an area they might want to think about.”

BLUUM COULD CONSIDER BECOMING A CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER.

Bluum has proven adept at helping charter schools launch successfully. Could the next possible step be to have Bluum become an entity that also authorizes new charters?

This idea isn’t wholly within Bluum’s power to realize, of course. Under current Idaho law, only school districts, the Public Charter School Commission, and universities have chartering authority, so new legislation would have to expand authorizing to qualified nonprofits like Bluum. But, other states allow nonprofit authorizers and Ryan helped start one of the first nonprofit authorizers in the country with the Fordham Foundation in Ohio, and Greg Richmond knows as much about successful authorizing as anyone in the country.

Some people interviewed for this report advocated for this to be part of Bluum’s future. Debra Hedden-Nicely, a Bluum fellow who will open the Boise-based Cardinal Academy for pregnant and parenting teens next fall, had her school approved by the commission in December 2020. Because she and her co-founders had operated a similar school within the Boise district, which the district closed, they felt their only avenue for approval was through the commission.

“That seems very narrow to me. You just have that one shot at it,” Hedden-Nicely said. “It really comes down to the commission staff. That’s who looks at it closely. It just feels more public-schoolish than charter entrepreneurialism.”

BLUUM SHOULD PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON RURAL SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT.

As its reach has expanded over the first five years, Bluum has made more inroads into rural communities. Bluum schools now range from as far north as Rathdrum, to Salmon, to eastern Idaho and Island Park, Idaho Falls and Pocatello, across the Treasure Valley and out to Fruitland on the Oregon border.

One of the organization’s stated goals in its 2019 annual report is “improving the quality of school options available to students in rural communities.” And two rural Bluum partner charters—Upper Carmen Public Charter and North Idaho STEM Charter Academy, were among the top 10 schools statewide on the Idaho Reading Indicator.

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But the needs of rural schools remain acute, and the remoteness of many Idaho communities coupled with low population density mean that in many cases there is limited capacity to open a new school. In some places, there simply aren't enough students. This means that as Bluum continues to expand, rural work might increasingly be dependent on forging strong relationships with rural districts.

“Seventy percent of Idaho is rural schools. There are no choices there,” said State Board of Education President Debbie Critchfield. “The solution obviously isn't to stand up a new charter school in a district with eight students. In those situations, the partnering piece is always the successful piece. In small, rural areas that don't have the resources or opportunities of more urban areas, partnering with an entity like Bluum would elevate everyone.”

Bluum could become a partner with such districts, using best practices gleaned from its successful charters to help rural, district-run schools innovate and improve. One idea floated by Bryan Hassel, co-president and founder of Public Impact, a national education consulting firm based in North Carolina, is for Bluum to help promote what he called “remote teacher leadership.”

Having strong teacher leaders has been proven to boost student achievement, but in some settings, in-person teacher leadership isn't feasible. “If you are the only math

North Idaho STEM Charter Academy, Rathdrum



teacher in a school in rural Idaho, there's no team and no team leadership,” Hassel said. “But if you had an excellent teacher in Twin Falls who led a team of four teachers in four different high schools around the state, they could have a couple of team meetings a week to go over content and go over data about student learning.”

Co-teaching virtually, modeling lessons, and doing observations could all be features of such a remote teacher leadership program run by Bluum, Hassel suggested.

Bluum's Ryan is enthusiastic about the potential for partnering with rural districts, though he is clear-eyed about the challenges involved. “We want to be more than just a charter school group, we've been clear about that,” he said. “I'd like to do more to expand the supports we are able to offer local communities so we are not just helping open charters.” In some cases that could mean working with community groups or community colleges, he said.

FOR RURAL AREAS, BLUUM COULD DEVELOP MICRO-VERSIONS OF ITS SUCCESSFUL MODELS TO EXPORT

One idea Ryan has pondered is taking Bluum's more successful school models and creating “micro-versions” that could be attached to existing rural schools, or even delivered remotely. He cited three examples of Bluum schools where this could work.

The first is Elevate Academy, the CTE school in Caldwell. Many smaller rural districts lack the capacity to offer a range of career and technical education classes because of a shortage of students, experienced teachers and equipment. But if Bluum could facilitate remote learning classes that rural kids could log into, that would solve at least part of the problem. For CTE specifically, access to equipment might be a tougher issue to tackle.

Another school program Ryan believes could work remotely could be International Baccalaureate, offered at the established Sage and newer sister school Forge International. “There are surely kids in rural Idaho who would love to get an IB diploma, but the classes just aren’t available to them.” But Ryan sees this as a readily solvable problem and something Bluum could tackle in the next five years.

The third model Ryan sees as readily transferable to remote learning for rural districts is the Barney Charter School Initiative classical academies. Barney looks for schools that can accommodate 720 students in grades K–12. While a school on that scale is impossible in some rural areas, some form of what Ryan called “micro-schooling” could be a viable option.

Bluum would have to explore a governance model for these schools. Ryan raised the possibility of a new structure that might require legislation. But he said Bluum was committed to exploring these possibilities.

Creating micro-schools tethered to Bluum would likely require significant investments in technology and connectivity for small rural districts, which would allow them to tap into the offerings of larger schools in more populated areas.

BLUUM SHOULD PLACE INCREASED EMPHASIS ON SERVING STUDENTS FACING CHALLENGES

As Bluum continues to assist in the opening of new schools, it should also continue intensifying its focus on underserved student populations like special education, English language learners, and low-income.

Schools like Elevate Academy, where 100 percent of the students are classified as at-risk and 90 percent are from low-income families, and Cardinal Academy, for pregnant and parenting teens, show that Bluum is committed to following this path.

“We want to work with preexisting, well-established organizations like the Salvation Army and the Idaho Youth Ranch to use charters as an innovation to serve young people in their communities for whom current educational arrangements aren’t working very well,” Ryan said.

BLUUM SHOULD DEVELOP A NATIONAL ‘REPUTATIONAL BRAND’

Jamie Scott and Roger Quarles of JKAF were emphatic on the need for Bluum to develop what they called a ‘reputational brand.’ What, exactly, does it mean to be a Bluum school or a Bluum fellow? How can those become household words, at least among educators looking to spread their wings?

Becoming known nationally for its entrepreneurial spirit and the opportunities it offers ambitious educators would help Bluum attract even more national talent to Idaho. “I have been pleasantly surprised by how strong the fellowship has been, and how much talent it has drawn in,” Scott said. “But I have questions about where we go from here. Is that pipeline in danger of drying up? How do we keep it flowing?”

She cited the Colorado-based Charter School Growth Fund as a model for Bluum to follow when it comes to developing a widely recognized brand. Scott said being



Forge International School, Middleton

known as a Charter School Growth Fund school confers a lot of prestige onto schools—“a badge of honor,” as she described it. Bluum, similarly, needs to become a household name, at least among educators.

One way to build this brand is to formalize the fellowship program further, so that fellows feel they are going through a shared, structured experience with a cohort of peers.

Quarles framed the question this way: Once start-up and launch funding is spent and a Bluum school is up and running, “what then is the value add of being part of the Bluum network? What is the component that makes it a valuable resource beyond start-up funding?”

Quarles and Scott challenged Ryan and his team to grapple with those questions early in their next five years.

CONTINUE WORKING TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER EDUCATIONAL AND CHARTER ORGANIZATIONS

Young, brash, and cash-rich, Bluum is at times viewed by older organizations as the 800-pound gorilla squeezing them out and dominating the landscape. Ryan and his team have done their best to offset this with outreach and communication, but in some quarters resentment lingers.

“Because Bluum is active, well-funded and working diligently on accountability, the other groups feel a bit of natural animosity because they are struggling a bit more,” said Mortimer, the outgoing Senate Education Committee chair. “There needs to be more outreach and communication from Bluum, if not an attempt to be inclusive.”

KEEP UP THE ACTIVE ROLE OF INFORMING ELECTED OFFICIALS ABOUT CHARTER AND OTHER EDUCATION ISSUES

While Bluum, as a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, cannot lobby, its education and outreach efforts to legislators have proved influential and helpful to the charter sector over the past

five years. Legislators and school leaders alike said they would like that work to continue.

“Every year it has been, ‘what can we do next that will offer a really big benefit for the schools?’” said Chris Yorgason, an attorney who has advocated for and worked with Idaho charter schools over the past 15 years. “The Bluum team is good at figuring out how far we can push and where we can push, and sometimes it’s a two- to three-year process, but it is helpful to have someone thinking strategically about these issues.”

Retiring Senator Mortimer said Bluum has been diligent about spending time with key legislators and keeping them informed. “They have been and should continue to be very involved,” Mortimer said.

CONSIDER EXPORTING THE BLUUM MODEL TO OTHER STATES

Bluum’s success in Idaho means expanding the model into other states merits consideration. Scaling up to this extent would, of course, pose a host of challenges. Idaho might be unique in that its small size and distinctly libertarian bent makes it an especially welcoming environment for an organization like Bluum. And there are few if any other states where one single funder wields the influence of a JKAF in Idaho. And, the work of Bluum benefits from the growing student population in the Gem State.

Still, said Nina Rees of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Bluum has the potential to follow in the footsteps of the Charter School Growth Fund and become a national, or at least multi-state player.

“Both organizations have done tremendous things and their model has worked, and they have the potential to grow their networks in multiple places,” Rees said. “It becomes a strategy for funding education that will ultimately serve low-income families. Bluum now has a track record that would allow it to take the playbook and replicate it.”

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Nina Rees, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools





Gem Prep: Meridian, Meridian



CONCLUSION:

ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES

IN JUST FIVE YEARS, Bluum has had a major and overwhelmingly positive impact on K–12 education in Idaho. The breadth and depth of its accomplishments in so short a time is remarkable. It’s hard to say with certainty whether its next five years can match the first five. But, as the previous section illustrates, people immersed in Gem State education have abundant ideas for how Bluum can branch out and continue to build its influence and impact.

The Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare public education’s weaknesses and fault lines like no other event in the past several decades. As technological change accelerates, schools have struggled to keep pace. Larger systems have proved incapable of pivoting quickly enough to serve many students.

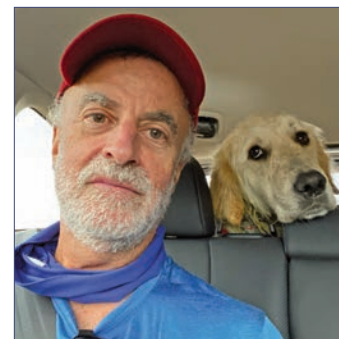
This provides an enormous opportunity for an agile organization like Bluum to press its advantage and continue developing innovative schools with leaders who understand the new challenges and opportunities education faces now and for the foreseeable future. It also should help school districts become more open to the kind of outside assistance Bluum could provide, particularly in small, rural districts. If ever there was time to put a foot on the gas and continue full speed ahead, that time would be now.

“You’ve got to have the kind of energy of Terry and his team. They wake up, get to work right away, and they don’t stop,” said Steve Farkas, a New York-based research group that has worked with Bluum on several research projects.

“They fail now and then, get knocked down, get right back up again and keep going. That’s what it takes.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Gottlieb is a Colorado-based writer, editor, journalist, communications consultant, and nonprofit entrepreneur who owns Write.Edit.Think, LLC. He founded EdNews Colorado, which later merged with Gotham Schools to form Chalkbeat.



MEET OUR TEAM



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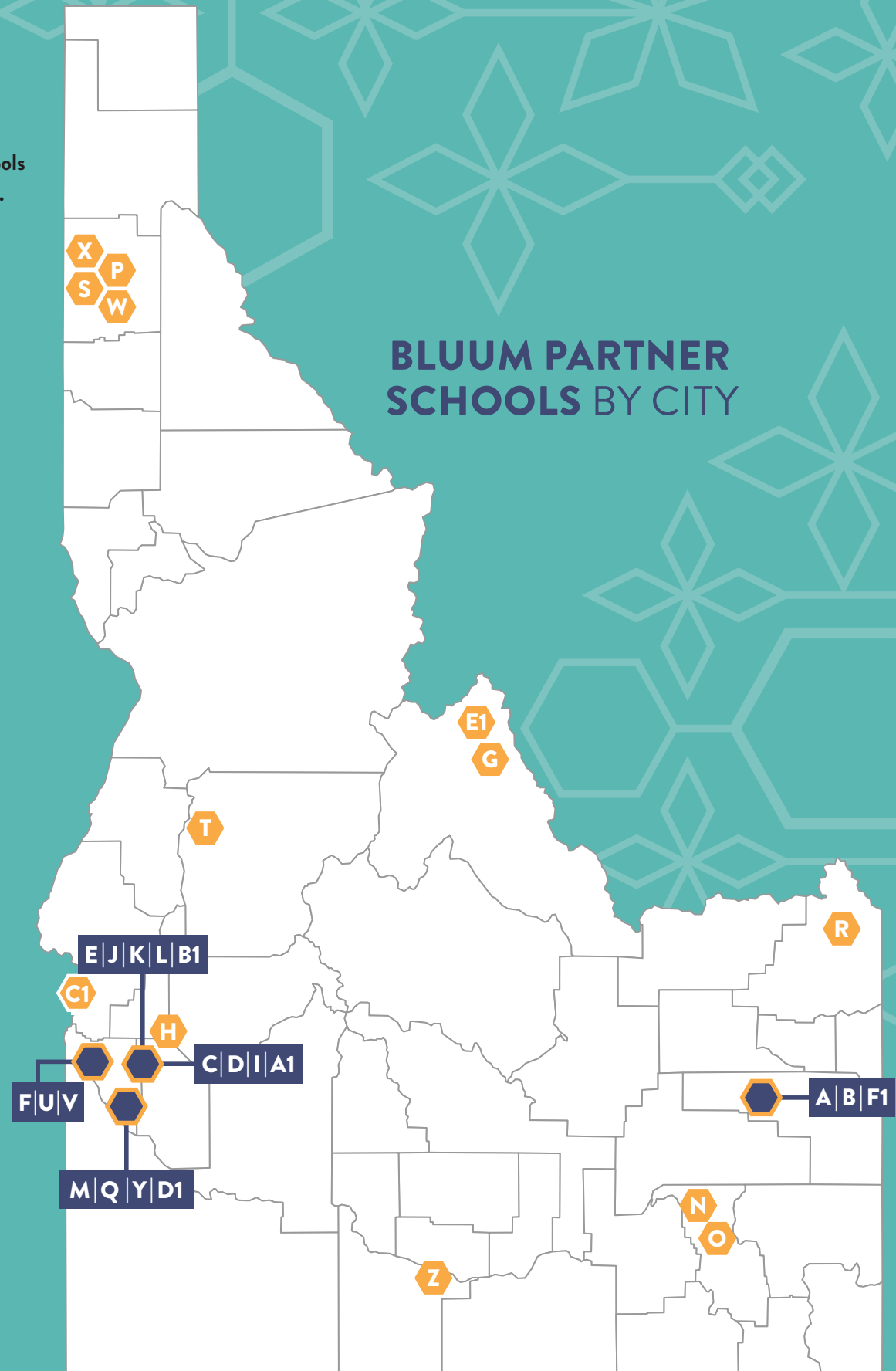
Renita Thukral
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

INVESTMENTS IN IDAHO'S FUTURE

From the rolling farmland of the Palouse Prairie to the far reaches of forested mountains, Bluum has funded 32 schools in varied types of communities throughout our great state.

- A** Alturas International Academy, Idaho Falls
- B** Alturas Preparatory Academy, Idaho Falls
- C** Anser Charter School, Garden City
- D** Cardinal Academy, Boise
(Deborah Hedden-Nicely & Emily Bergstrom Fellowship)
- E** Compass Public Charter School, Meridian
- F** Elevate Academy, Caldwell
- G** Fernwaters Charter School, Salmon
- H** Forge International School, Middleton
- I** Future Public School, Garden City
- J** Gem Prep: Nampa, Nampa
- K** Gem Prep: Meridian, Meridian
- L** Gem Prep: Meridian North, Meridian
- M** Gem Prep: Meridian South, Meridian
- N** Gem Prep: Pocatello, Chubbuck
- O** Grace Lutheran High School, Pocatello
- P** Hayden Canyon Charter School, Hayden
- Q** Idaho Arts Charter School, Nampa
- R** Island Park Elementary, Island Park
- S** Kootenai Classical Academy, Coeur d'Alene
(Terrence Moore Fellowship)
- T** McCall Community School, McCall
- U** MOSAICS Public School, Caldwell
- V** Elevate Academy Nampa, Nampa
(Jewels Carpenter & Phil Diplock Fellowship)
- W** Elevate Academy North, North Idaho
(Marita Diffenbaugh Fellowship)
- X** North Idaho STEM Charter Academy, Rathdrum
- Y** Pathways in Education, Nampa
- Z** RISE Charter School, Kimberly
(Kimberly School District)
- A1** Sage International School, Boise
- B1** St. Ignatius Catholic School, Meridian
- C1** Treasure Valley Classical Academy, Fruitland
- D1** Treasure Valley Leadership Academy, Nampa
- E1** Upper Carmen Charter School, Upper Carmen
- F1** White Pine Charter School, Ammon

BLUUM PARTNER SCHOOLS BY CITY





BLUUM

LET LEARNING GROW

702 W IDAHO STREET, SUITE 600
BOISE, ID 83702

2022



BLUUM

LET LEARNING GROW

ANNUAL REPORT

BLUUM PARTNER SCHOOLS BY COMMUNITY (2022)

From the rolling farmland of the Palouse Prairie to the far reaches of forested mountains, Bluum has supported 37 schools since 2014 in varied communities throughout our great state.

37 Schools
20 Communities
Charter | District | Parochial

NORTHERN

- 1 North Idaho STEM Charter Academy, Rathdrum
- 2 Hayden Canyon Charter School, Hayden
- 3 Elevate Academy North, Post Falls

CENTRAL

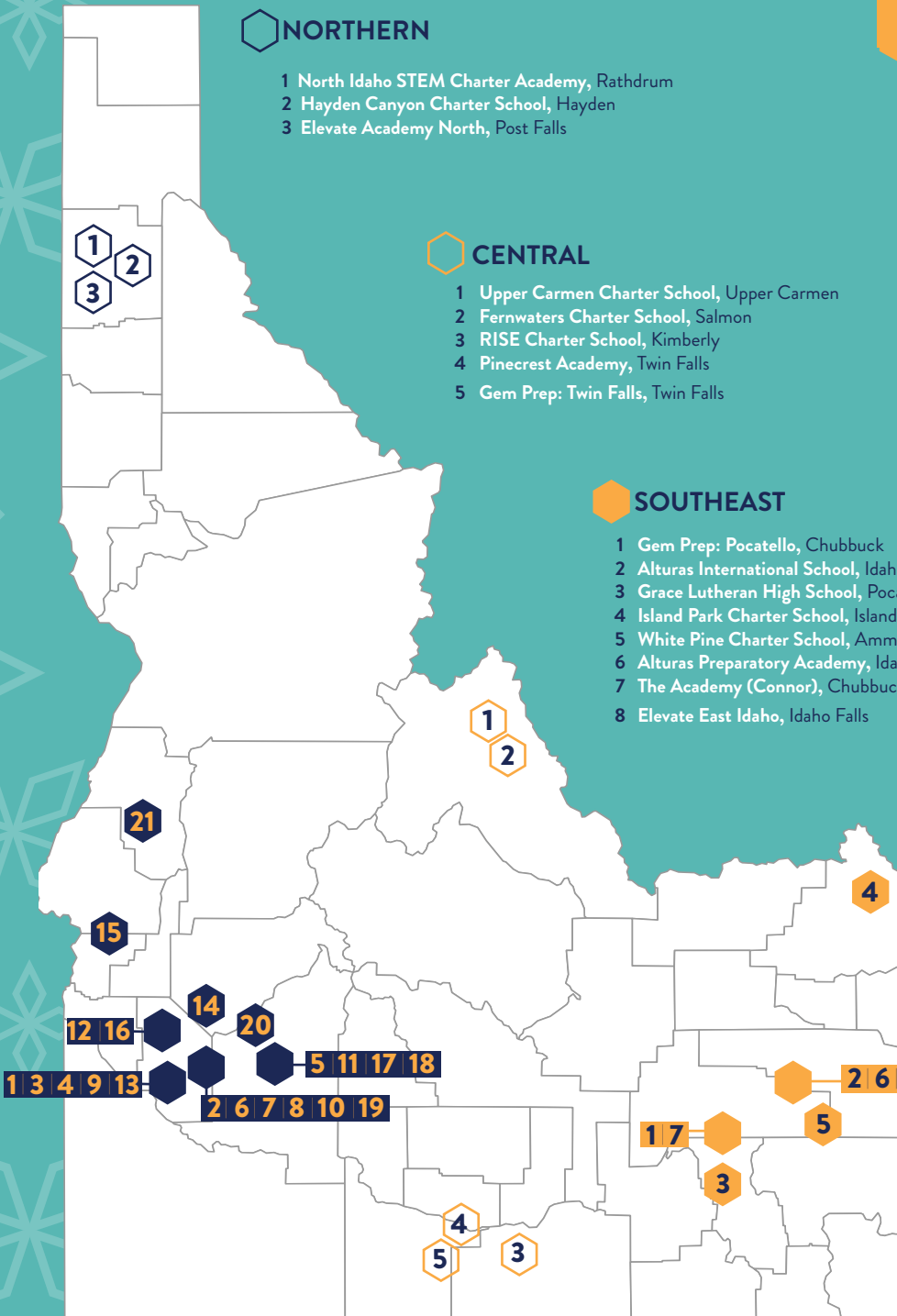
- 1 Upper Carmen Charter School, Upper Carmen
- 2 Fernwaters Charter School, Salmon
- 3 RISE Charter School, Kimberly
- 4 Pinecrest Academy, Twin Falls
- 5 Gem Prep: Twin Falls, Twin Falls

SOUTHEAST

- 1 Gem Prep: Pocatello, Chubbuck
- 2 Alturas International School, Idaho Falls
- 3 Grace Lutheran High School, Pocatello
- 4 Island Park Charter School, Island Park
- 5 White Pine Charter School, Ammon
- 6 Alturas Preparatory Academy, Idaho Falls
- 7 The Academy (Connor), Chubbuck
- 8 Elevate East Idaho, Idaho Falls

SOUTHWEST

- 1 Idaho Arts Charter School, Nampa
- 2 Compass Public Charter School, Meridian
- 3 Gem Prep: Nampa, Nampa
- 4 Treasure Valley Leadership Academy, Nampa
- 5 Sage International School, Boise
- 6 Gem Prep: Meridian, Meridian
- 7 Gem Prep: Meridian North, Meridian
- 8 Gem Prep: Meridian South, Meridian
- 9 Pathways in Education, Nampa
- 10 St. Ignatius Catholic School, Meridian
- 11 Future Public School, Garden City
- 12 Elevate Academy, Caldwell
- 13 Elevate Academy Nampa, Nampa
- 14 Sage International School, Middleton
- 15 Treasure Valley Classical Academy, Fruitland
- 16 MOSAICS Public School, Caldwell
- 17 Anser Charter School, Garden City
- 18 Cardinal Academy, Boise
- 19 Doral Academy, Meridian
- 20 Idaho Novus Classical Academy, Garden City
- 21 Mountain Community School, Tamarack



INVESTMENT SUMMARY

2015-2022



NEW SCHOOLS OPENED IN 2022

Elevate Academy Nampa
Grades 6-12 | 486 New Seats

Elevate Academy North
Grades 6-12 | 308 New Seats

Gem Prep: Meridian South
Grades K-12 | 574 New Seats

INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Idaho charter schools. Over the last decade, the state's overall K-12 enrollment has grown by about 55,000 students, almost 20% of that new enrollment (10,422 students) has been in the state's public charter schools. The Gem State boasts a robust mix of single-site schools, as well as several emerging charter school networks.

The Elevate Academy Network is successfully addressing an unmet demand with their 6-12th grade CTE model designed specifically for at-risk students. American Classical Schools of Idaho will work in coming years to offer their classical academic model to communities across the state.

Gem Innovation Schools, Idaho's very first homegrown charter school network, is leveraging their high-performing online school to pioneer their innovative Learning Societies in Lewiston and Emmett.

Bluum is excited about three schools that will open in the next couple of years: Elevate Academy East in Idaho Falls, Gem Prep: Twin Falls, and Idaho Novus Classical Academy at Avimor, a planned community north of Boise.

GREAT LEADERS



For the past five years, Bluum has offered the Idaho New School Fellowship to help elevate top education talent into the ranks of Idaho’s public school leadership. This is the engine that drives all of our work with schools.

In 2022, Bluum welcomed Bruce Sims (left) and Vincent Kane (right) to the New School Fellowship Cohort, to participate in a two-year program that prepares future leaders to develop and launch an effective, innovative, and financially sustainable public charter school.

BLUUM SCHOOL LEADER COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The Community of Practice provides Idaho school leaders with training sessions and camaraderie that enable them to increase the rate of student learning at their schools.

90% of these leaders agreed or strongly agreed that each session made them more effective in their jobs.

More importantly, many participating schools saw significant increases in student achievement, and credit the development they received through the Community of Practice with enabling them to make these gains for their students.

110 Program Hours
40 Leaders
Charter | District | Parochial

COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

2022 FEDERAL CSP PROGRAM RULE CHANGES



The U.S. Department of Education released a bevy of proposed and – in our view and that of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools – onerous changes to rules and requirements for subgrant applicants to the CSP program. Because the USDOE CSP program has supported new charter school growth in our fast growing state, Bluum led a group of Idaho parents to Washington D.C. to join over 1,000 charter school supporters and parents from across the country to advocate against the rule changes. For this work Bluum earned an Eddie Award from the PIE Network, sharing the honor with several other organizations for “Best Defense” around advocacy work.

CREDIT ENHANCEMENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITES GRANT

The US Department of Education (USDOE) awarded Bluum a competitive \$3.5 million CSP Credit Enhancement Grant. Bluum will use this grant to help support predevelopment costs for new charter school facilities. Financing the predevelopment phase of charter facility projects represents a real – and risky – challenge for new charters; this grant will allow Bluum to help schools navigate this pinch point.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Through the *Communities of Excellence* Federal Grant Program, we are committed to providing high-quality technical assistance to subgrantee schools and beyond. Civil Rights in Today’s School Environment, the Special Education Leadership Fellowship, are two highlights among ongoing teacher coaching, change management, and additional academic supports provided throughout the year.

Charter School Governance: The Essential Guide video series remains among the most-visited pages on our website. <https://csp.bluum.org/charter-governance-guide/>

FEDERAL CSP GRANT FUNDING

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AWARDED



CSP HIGHLIGHTS
as of June 2022

\$18,639,773
MILLION

24
SCHOOLS

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

“Idaho public charter school performance remains high compared to the performance of Idaho’s traditional schools.”

NAEP scores released in 2022 held much troubling news for the performance of American students and offered some lessons for Idaho. NAEP is considered the “Gold Standard” for evaluating student performance over time across the nation’s schools. The 2022 results were a painful reminder of the impact of COVID-19 and school shutdowns on our students’ academic performance in Math and English.

In Idaho, 4th-graders scored far behind their 2019 scores. In reading, Idaho’s 4th-graders saw their average scale score decline from 223 to 215, and in math from 242 to 236. Truly troubling was the percentage of students performing below basic. In reading, this number jumped from 31% to 39% and in math from 18% to 24%.

Fourth-graders attending public charter schools outperformed these Idaho averages in both 2019 and 2022, but also saw a real decline in both reading and math performance. In reading, Idaho public charter schools saw a drop in scale score from 236 to 225 and in math from 251 to 238. As with traditional schools, public charters saw an increase in students at below basic from 2019 to 2022. In reading, this number jumped from 17% to 28% and in math from 10% to 23%.

Idaho students held their ground academically better than their peers across the country, which is likely a reflection of our schools reopening earlier than in other states and the fact many of our children still live in households with intact families that could provide learning opportunities when schools closed.

TABLE 5
2022 8th Grade NAEP Performance by Jurisdiction - Reading

Rank	Jurisdiction	Student Group	Average Scale Score
1	DoDEA	All	282
2	Idaho	Charters	276
3	New Jersey	All	270
4	Massachussetts	All	269
5	Utah	All	265
6	Connecticut	All	264
7	Idaho	All	264
8	Vermont	All	264
9	Colorado	All	263
10	New Hampshire	All	263

TABLE 6
2022 8th Grade NAEP Performance by Jurisdiction - Math

Rank	Jurisdiction	Student Group	Average Scale Score
1	DoDEA	All	292
2	Idaho	Charters	291
3	Massachussetts	All	284
4	Idaho	All	282
5	Utah	All	282
6	New Jersey	All	281
7	South Dakota	All	281
8	Wisconsin	All	281
9	Wyoming	All	281
10	Minnesota	All	280

Despite the impact of COVID on student learning, Idaho public charter school performance remains high compared to the performance of students in Idaho’s traditional schools, and in 2022 they were some of the highest performing students in the nation across grades and subjects tested.

For NAEP data referenced in this article see: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE>



RESEARCH & RESOURCES

IDAHO CHARTER SCHOOL MARKET ANALYSIS



Commissioned by Bluum and prepared by Public Impact, the *Idaho Charter School Market Analysis* provided insight on Idaho's new school growth and needs in two key ways:

- A population growth projection analysis to estimate future growth in school-age populations in each county and the state overall, and
- A quality seats analysis to identify areas in Idaho with the greatest need for high-quality school options.

The analysis guided the conversation around growth and the need for more public schools throughout the year in Idaho Ed News, KTVB, and the Moscow Pullman Daily News.

BUILDING FOR SUCCESS IN IDAHO



With continued growth in student enrollment, public schools in Idaho—both traditional school districts and charter schools—have struggled to keep up with the need for new and expanded school facilities.

To help illuminate the scale of the facility financing challenges in Idaho, and most importantly to offer up solutions, especially for public charter schools, Bluum partnered with the Florida-based Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd) to generate the policy brief *Building for Success in Idaho*.

PARENTS GUIDE TO CHOOSING A SCHOOL IN IDAHO



To ensure every child has the opportunity to reach their maximum potential, Idaho has created a marketplace of schools and learning opportunities. Our *Parents' Guide* was the second-most visited page on our website in 2022. It helps parents understand their options for choosing the right type of education for their child(ren). We believe that providing information about Idaho's many — and growing number — of learning choices can help parents make smarter decisions about what may work best for their families.

IN THE NEWS



Community Choice Schools Commission Meeting Evaluation

Name:

Meeting Date:

Please rate the following statements on a 1 to 5 scale according to:

- 5= strongly agree
- 4= agree
- 3= neutral
- 2= disagree
- 1= strongly disagree

Statements	5	4	3	2	1
The Commission meeting materials prepared me well for the meeting.					
I received the agenda packet in time to prepare for the meeting.					
Commission members came prepared to the meeting and ready to conduct business.					
The meeting was well facilitated.					
We focused most of our time on that which is most important.					
We used our time in the meeting room well today.					

The best part of the Commission meeting today was:

The meeting could have been better if we:

ROBERTS RULES CHEAT SHEET

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

The above listed motions and points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask for vote by actual count to verify voice vote	"I call for a division of the house"	Must be done before new motion	No	No	No	None unless someone objects
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Take up matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

The motions, points and proposals listed above have no established order of preference; any of them may be introduced at any time except when meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed from the first chart (Motion to Adjourn, Recess or Point of Privilege).

PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MAIN MOTION

NOTE: Nothing goes to discussion without a motion being on the floor.

Obtaining and assigning the floor

A member raises hand when no one else has the floor

- The chair recognizes the member by name

How the Motion is Brought Before the Assembly

- The member makes the motion: *I move that (or "to") ...* and resumes his seat.
- Another member seconds the motion: *I second the motion* or *I second it* or *second*.
- The chair states the motion: *It is moved and seconded that ... Are you ready for the question?*

Consideration of the Motion

1. Members can debate the motion.
2. Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor.
3. The maker of the motion has first right to the floor if he claims it properly
4. Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion.
5. Debate can be closed only by order of the assembly (2/3 vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.

The chair puts the motion to a vote

1. The chair asks: *Are you ready for the question?* If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.
2. The chair says: *The question is on the adoption of the motion that ... As many as are in favor, say 'Aye'. (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say 'Nay'. (Pause for response.) Those abstained please say 'Aye'.*

The chair announces the result of the vote.

1. *The ayes have it, the motion carries, and ...* (indicating the effect of the vote) or
2. *The nays have it and the motion fails*

WHEN DEBATING YOUR MOTIONS

1. Listen to the other side
2. Focus on issues, not personalities
3. Avoid questioning motives
4. Be polite

HOW TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT YOU WANT TO DO IN MEETINGS

MAIN MOTION

You want to propose a new idea or action for the group.

- After recognition, make a main motion.
- Member: "Madame Chairman, I move that _____."

AMENDING A MOTION

You want to change some of the wording that is being discussed.

- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by adding the following words _____."
- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by striking out the following words _____."
- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by striking out the following words, _____, and adding in their place the following words _____."

REFER TO A COMMITTEE

You feel that an idea or proposal being discussed needs more study and investigation.

- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move that the question be referred to a committee made up of members Smith, Jones and Brown."

POSTPONE DEFINITELY

You want the membership to have more time to consider the question under discussion and you want to postpone it to a definite time or day, and have it come up for further consideration.

- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move to postpone the question until _____."

PREVIOUS QUESTION

You think discussion has gone on for too long and you want to stop discussion and vote.

- After recognition, "Madam President, I move the previous question."

LIMIT DEBATE

You think discussion is getting long, but you want to give a reasonable length of time for consideration of the question.

- After recognition, "Madam President, I move to limit discussion to two minutes per speaker."

POSTPONE INDEFINITELY

You want to kill a motion that is being discussed.

- After recognition, "Madam Moderator, I move to postpone the question indefinitely."

POSTPONE INDEFINITELY

You are against a motion just proposed and want to learn who is for and who is against the motion.

- After recognition, "Madame President, I move to postpone the motion indefinitely."

RECESS

You want to take a break for a while.

- After recognition, "Madame Moderator, I move to recess for ten minutes."

ADJOURNMENT

You want the meeting to end.

- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move to adjourn."

PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW A MOTION

You have made a motion and after discussion, are sorry you made it.

- After recognition, "Madam President, I ask permission to withdraw my motion."

CALL FOR ORDERS OF THE DAY

At the beginning of the meeting, the agenda was adopted. The chairman is not following the order of the approved agenda.

- Without recognition, "Call for orders of the day."

SUSPENDING THE RULES

The agenda has been approved and as the meeting progressed, it became obvious that an item you are interested in will not come up before adjournment.

- After recognition, "Madam Chairman, I move to suspend the rules and move item 5 to position 2."

POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

The noise outside the meeting has become so great that you are having trouble hearing.

- Without recognition, "Point of personal privilege."
- Chairman: "State your point."
- Member: "There is too much noise, I can't hear."

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

You are going to propose a question that is likely to be controversial and you feel that some of the members will try to kill it by various maneuvers. Also you want to keep out visitors and the press.

- After recognition, "Madame Chairman, I move that we go into a committee of the whole."

POINT OF ORDER

It is obvious that the meeting is not following proper rules.

- Without recognition, "I rise to a point of order," or "Point of order."

POINT OF INFORMATION

You are wondering about some of the facts under discussion, such as the balance in the treasury when expenditures are being discussed.

- Without recognition, "Point of information."

POINT OF PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

You are confused about some of the parliamentary rules.

- Without recognition, "Point of parliamentary inquiry."

APPEAL FROM THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR

Without recognition, "I appeal from the decision of the chair."

Rule Classification and Requirements

Class of Rule	Requirements to Adopt	Requirements to Suspend
Charter	Adopted by majority vote or as proved by law or governing authority	Cannot be suspended
Bylaws	Adopted by membership	Cannot be suspended
Special Rules of Order	Previous notice & 2/3 vote, or a majority of entire membership	2/3 Vote
Standing Rules	Majority vote	Can be suspended for session by majority vote during a meeting
Modified Roberts Rules of Order	Adopted in bylaws	2/3 vote