

**The K-12 Education Landscape in Ohio**  
**A Review of Public, Private and Charter Schools by County**  
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**Setting the Stage**

Public education is the mainstay of K-12 education opportunities for Ohio families and communities. Because education is fundamental to self-governance, the Ohio Constitution mandates the funding and operating of a free nonsectarian system of public education that welcomes all students. State resources are allocated to local school districts governed by locally elected boards of education. The Constitution requires the state to provide adequate funds to support student learning and to distribute funding in an equitable way to ensure that education quality does not depend on where a student lives.

Ohio law also requires all children between the ages of 6 and 18 to attend school. Families who do not want to participate in their public schools, may homeschool their children, or if a school is nearby, can use a private school, a charter school, or a non-chartered nonpublic school. The standards, professionalism, fiscal and academic accountability, separation of church and state, and requirements for transparent governance embedded in the public education system do not apply in these nonpublic alternatives.

Families have always had many options for educating their children but public funds were reserved for public schools. Prior to 1995 when the legislature approved the first private school tuition voucher program, the cost of these options was a personal responsibility. Reserving public funds for nonsectarian, inclusive public schools made the common good the driving purpose and helped protect the separation of church and state. Now public funds are also available for religious and personal preferences.

**Table 1: Enrollment by Legal K-12 Education Option – 2023-24 School Year – Source: DEW Reports Portal**

<i>Education Provider</i>	<i>Enrollment</i>
Public Schools*	1,543,834
Charter and STEM Schools	121,084
Chartered Nonpublic Schools	173,156
Non-chartered Nonpublic Schools	Not Available**
Homeschool	53,051
Total	1,891,125

\*This includes schools operated by local school districts, joint vocational districts, and Education Service Centers.

\*\* Non-chartered Nonpublic Schools do not report enrollment.

**Statewide and County Data on K-12 Alternatives**

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) oversees K-12 education in Ohio and collects information about all of the legal K-12 options. DEW reports statewide enrollment data for each school year, for public, private, and charter school students. This information is also available by county for Ohio's 88 counties. Lists of Charter schools, Chartered Nonpublic schools (private schools) and Non-Chartered Nonpublic schools are on the website with the county where they are located. The website

posts a list of Non-chartered Nonpublic schools, but does not collect any information about the students who attend.

Ohio is a diverse state and the education landscape in each county varies. Options are much more limited in counties without population density. While public schools are everywhere, Charter schools, Chartered Nonpublic schools and Non-chartered Nonpublic schools are not. Statewide data is helpful for some purposes, but data by county provides a better picture of what is available to families in each county. This information makes it easier to identify local priorities for state spending on education. The information also clarifies state policies that are in the interest of residents and the lawmakers who represent them.

Public schools include the traditional schools operated by local school districts, joint vocational schools and Education Service Center operated regional schools. A handful of STEM schools are a subset of charter schools. This analysis focuses on school district operated public schools and does not include STEM schools.

**Appendix A** lists for each county the 2023-24 school year enrollment totals for public schools, private schools, and charter schools. It also lists the number of nonpublic schools including Chartered Nonpublic (private), Charter, and Non-Chartered Nonpublic schools located in that county in the 2024-25 school year. Counties are listed in alphabetical order.

This information makes it possible to examine the education landscape that is specific to each county. It is the basis for identifying patterns of use from the county perspective. This analysis identifies the distribution at the county level of each alternative to schools operated by the state's 609 school districts, and the relative importance of public schools in each county.

Table 2 summarizes for each school category – public, private and charter schools – the number of counties with a similar number of schools in that category. This helps identify what is typical for most of Ohio's counties, and where each alternative has the greatest presence. The information is also arrayed on Map 1. This information is the basis for the following observations.

### **Chartered Nonpublic Schools**

Private schools in Ohio are called Chartered Nonpublic Schools. They are the largest and oldest K-12 education alternative. Private schools preceded public schools in the state. Most were created by religious groups to impart their beliefs as part of the daily school experience. Students attending these schools are eligible for a publicly funded tuition voucher. This is the class of schools that is eligible for other state support including student transportation, and payments for administrative costs.

- DEW lists 717 private schools for 2024-25 school year located in 77 counties.
- The number of private schools per county ranges between 1 and 125.
- Despite the very large number of private schools found in one county, there are no private schools in 11 counties.
- It is typical for between 1 and 4 private schools to be located in the same county. This is the case for 49 counties, more than half the state.
- Private schools are concentrated in 7 counties with more than 10 private schools. Together there are 430 private schools that account for 60% of the private operations in the state. These urban

counties have the most private schools: Stark (20), Lucas (32), Montgomery (35), Summit (40), Franklin (83), Hamilton (95) and Cuyahoga (125).

**Table 2**  
**Distribution by Ohio County of 3 Alternatives to Public Schools:**  
**Chartered Nonpublic Schools, Non-chartered Nonpublic Schools, and Charter Schools**  
**for the 2024-25 School Year**

Number of Schools per County	# Counties with Same Number of Chartered Nonpublic Schools	# Counties with same Number of Non-Chartered Nonpublic Schools	# County with same Number of Charter Schools	# Counties with same Number All Nonpublic Schools
0	11	18	51	2
1	16	20	15	14
2	15	15	5	8
3	15	12	4	8
4	3	3	1	8
<i>0 to 4</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>40</i>
5 to 9	15	6	4	20
10 to 20	7	10	3	15
21 to 40	3	4	3	6
41-125	3	0	2	5
126 to 225	0	0	0	2
<i>6 to 225</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>48</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>88</i>

*Source: ODEW Reports Portal, February, 2025*

### **Charter Schools**

In 1997 the legislature authorized a new form of publicly funded nonsectarian education, a charter school. Charter schools in Ohio are called community schools. STEM schools are a subset of charter schools. Education can be offered on-line or in a brick-and-mortar setting. Some on-line schools service children across the state. Charter schools are privately managed, operate with limited state oversight, and are not part of the public school district where they are located. The state approves authorizing agencies to sponsor charter schools. The schools they sponsor are controlled by private boards who are permitted to contract with private, for-profit management companies to operate their schools. What

started as a pilot project in Lucas County is now available to students on-line statewide, or in person in 38 counties. More than 350 charter schools have closed over the last two decades.

- DEW's Charter school directory for 2024-25 lists 338 publicly funded charter schools. This includes 15 statewide on-line charter schools that draw students from any Ohio community.
- The number of charter schools per county ranges between 1 and 80.
- There are no brick-and-mortar charter schools in 51 counties. Of the 37 counties with at least one charter school, 25 have between 1 and 4 schools, 4 have between 5 and 10 schools, and 8 have more than 10.
- There are 207 charter schools located in the 5 counties that have more than 20 schools in their boundaries. These counties host 61% of the state's charter schools: Hamilton (23), Montgomery (24), Lucas (28), Cuyahoga (76) and Franklin (80).

### **Non-Chartered Nonpublic Schools**

It is also legal for parents to homeschool their children and have them exempted from compulsory attendance laws. Homeschooling takes two forms in Ohio. Parents can teach their own children or groups of families with shared values (primarily religious beliefs) can send their children to a Non-chartered Nonpublic school. Teaching frequently takes place in homes or religious spaces. Both homeschool options require parents to report their decision to local public school districts.

Non-Chartered Nonpublic schools are exempt from most state regulation because of religious or personal opposition to government. They do not receive public funds although legislation introduced in 2024 would have made them eligible to receive vouchers. The state does not collect enrollment information for these entities. They operate outside public accountability.

- The DEW's Non-chartered Nonpublic school list for the 2024-25 school year includes 367 groups in 70 counties. School lists for the last four years show significant changes in the number of schools operating from one year to the next. In previous school year there were 100 more schools listed. This change likely contributed to this year's increases in traditional homeschooling and private school enrollment.
- The number of Non-chartered Nonpublic schools per county ranges between 0 and 35.
- None of these schools are found in 18 counties and 50 counties have between 1 and 4 of them.
- There are 14 counties with more than 10 Non-chartered Nonpublic schools and 4 of them have more than 20 schools.
- There are 105 Non-chartered Nonpublic schools found in the four counties with the largest number of Non-chartered Nonpublic schools and they account for 29% of this category of schools in Ohio. The four counties are: Licking (21), Cuyahoga (24), Summit (25), and Franklin (35). These are large numbers compared to what is typical in most counties, but small compared to the other nonpublic alternatives.

### **Basic Take Aways About the Location of Alternatives to Public Schools by Ohio County**

During the 2024-25 school year 1,422 private, charter, or non-chartered nonpublic schools are dispersed across Ohio. Public schools are the only K-12 education resource in Meigs and Vinton county. At least one school that is not a public school can be found in the other 86 counties.

A small number of nonpublic options is typical in rural counties. When the number of schools in all three categories are counted for a county, 40 counties have between 1 and 4 nonpublic schools. Private schools are the most common, but a mix of one or two schools from two categories is also typical. All but two of these counties have fewer than 10,000 public school students.

While the number of nonpublic alternatives is limited in most counties, there are a few urban counties with more than 10 schools in more than one nonpublic alternative. Butler County and Licking County both have more than 30 nonpublic alternatives.

More than 53% of the nonpublic schools in Ohio are concentrated in 8 counties that have a mix of more than 40 nonpublic schools. A total of 750 nonpublic schools are located in these counties: Stark (42), Lorain (49), Lucas (65), Montgomery (77), Summit (84), Hamilton (131), Franklin (198), and Cuyahoga (225). Nonpublic schools have a significant effect on public school enrollment and public spending in these counties.

### **Enrollment in Public, Private and Charter Schools**

The number of nonpublic schools located in a county determines how many schools compete with the public schools for students and public funds. Enrollment data makes it possible to see what impact those schools have on public school use.

With the adoption of the first phase of the Fair School Funding Plan in 2021, public schools, private schools and charter schools are now in the same line item in the state budget. At the community level they compete for students, and at the state level they compete for funding.

Appendix A includes enrollment data for the 2023-24 school year by county for three options: public schools, private schools and charter schools. Public school enrollment is then calculated as a percentage of the enrollment in these three publicly funded options for each county.

This analysis does not include Non-chartered Nonpublic schools because they are not required to report enrollment data. It also excludes charter school students enrolled in statewide on-line schools. The DEW website no longer reports the residence for students in these schools. The 15 statewide on-line schools are listed on Appendix B. They are not included in the charter school enrollment reported on Appendix A. These schools enrolled 31,205 students or about 27% of the 117,258 charter school students reported for the 2023-24 school year. The other 85,913 attend an in-person school or a local E-school.

Every student who uses a charter school or a private school reduces the state funding awarded to the state's public schools. Because the state funds all of these options, it also means public spending on the alternatives goes up. An individual choice has consequences for all the children who attend a public school. Every time a student leaves a public school costs rarely decrease but funds for those who remain are diminished. This is especially important in rural schools where the public schools are the primary education resource and essential community institution, and in urban districts where the concentration of private options has significant consequences for public education.

Enrollment data indicates:

1. Public education is the dominant education source in every Ohio county. Public school students by county account for between 73% of the charter, private and public school students in that county and 100% in 10 rural counties.

2. Students in Ohio’s rural communities attend public schools. When examining public, private and in-person charter school enrollment,
  - In 47 counties public school students make up between 95% and 100% of the K-12 students using the three options, and 44 of them are counties with fewer than 10,000 students.
  - 100% of students in 10 rural counties attend a public school.
  - Public school students account for between 90% and 94% of the students in 29 more counties. All but two of these counties has fewer than 10,000 public school students.
3. In mid-sized counties, public schools play a smaller role than in most of Ohio’s counties. There are 7 counties where between 80% and 89% of the students are public school students. Except for Huron and Geauga counties, these counties have more than 10,000 students.
4. Public schools play the smallest role in six urban counties where public school enrollment is below 80%. They are Montgomery (79%), Franklin (78%) Summit (77%), Lucas (74%), Cuyahoga (74%), and Hamilton (73%).
5. Private and charter schools are concentrated in the 6 urban counties where less than 80% of students attend a public school. There are between 65 and 225 nonpublic options in each of these counties. Together, public school students in these counties make up 39% of the state’s public school enrollment. At the same time, 67% of the state’s private school students and 81% of the charter school students in the state attend school here.

**Table 3**  
**Presence of Nonpublic Schools In Counties with Smallest % Students Enrolled in Public Schools**  
**Public School Enrollment as a % of Public, Private and Charter School Enrollment 2023-24 School Year**

County	% Public	# Private Schools	# Charter Schools	# Non-Chartered Schools	Total Nonpublic Schools
Montgomery	79%	35	24	18	77
Franklin	78%	83	80	35	198
Summit	77%	40	19	25	84
Lucas	74%	32	28	5	65
Cuyahoga	74%	125	74	23	225
Hamilton	73%	95	23	13	131

**Key Observations**

A county-by-county review of educational opportunities in the state indicates that the distribution of public, private, charter, and non-chartered alternatives is not uniform across Ohio.

At least one alternative to the local public schools operated by one of Ohio’s 609 school districts, is available in 86 counties. However, each alternative has a limited reach and a limited presence in at least 75 counties where more than 90% of students attend a public school. In most Ohio counties private and charter schools play either no role or a minor role.

Private schools and charter schools are concentrated in 6 counties. Most of the state funding for nonpublic schools is going to these six counties that educate 39% of the state’s public school students, 67% of the state’s private school students, 81% of its in-person charter school students.

Because of the large number of charter and private schools in these counties, public school enrollment is below 80%, a significant departure from what is typical in 75 Ohio counties where the percentage is 90% or more. Public school students account for between 73% and 79% of the students enrolled in public, private and in-person charter schools in Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Lucas, Summit, Franklin and Montgomery counties. Public schools in these urban counties face significant competition for students and resources from the large number of private and charter schools concentrated in these counties.

### **Ohio Priorities**

The Ohio Constitution requires lawmakers to fund a system of public schools, but for the last 25 years the legislature has been reluctant to fulfill that obligation. During the same time period lawmakers created charter schools, which are publicly funded but privately operated, and made tuition vouchers available to private schools, thereby diverting precious state resources from the public system that is everywhere and includes everyone.

In FY 2021 the legislature took the first steps toward improving public school funding, but prioritized support for private school students. Vouchers now cost about \$ 1billion a year, a drag on the state budget which without some legislative restraint will continue to grow. Private school funding has become a serious barrier to funding the universally available public system.

Public school funding must be the priority for Ohio. Public education is available everywhere; is the dominant education provider in every county; and is the cornerstone institution of rural communities, urban neighborhoods, and small towns. When enrollment in public schools, private schools and charter schools is combined for each county, 95% or more of the children in 47 counties attend a public school. Those counties are rural Ohio.

Any time a student leaves a public school it reduces the funds available to the students left behind. There is a double impact if that student uses a voucher to pay tuition. School privatization at public expense is the most common in Ohio's urban counties. Because charter schools and private schools are concentrated in a few urban counties, a significant share of the state's education resources are being directed into urban counties to schools that don't exist in most of the state, and away from the public schools in those counties and most of Ohio.

Rural taxpayers are helping to fund private and charter opportunities in urban Ohio, an expense which does not bolster local opportunity. Deferred spending on public schools caused by increased spending on nonpublic alternatives is harmful and costly to communities everywhere and especially harmful in the communities where public schools are the only education resource.

Investing in Ohio's public schools and containing nonpublic school costs are essential to improving education for the majority of Ohio students and for all 88 counties.

Appendix A: K-12 Education Options by Ohio County - Enrollment and # Schools

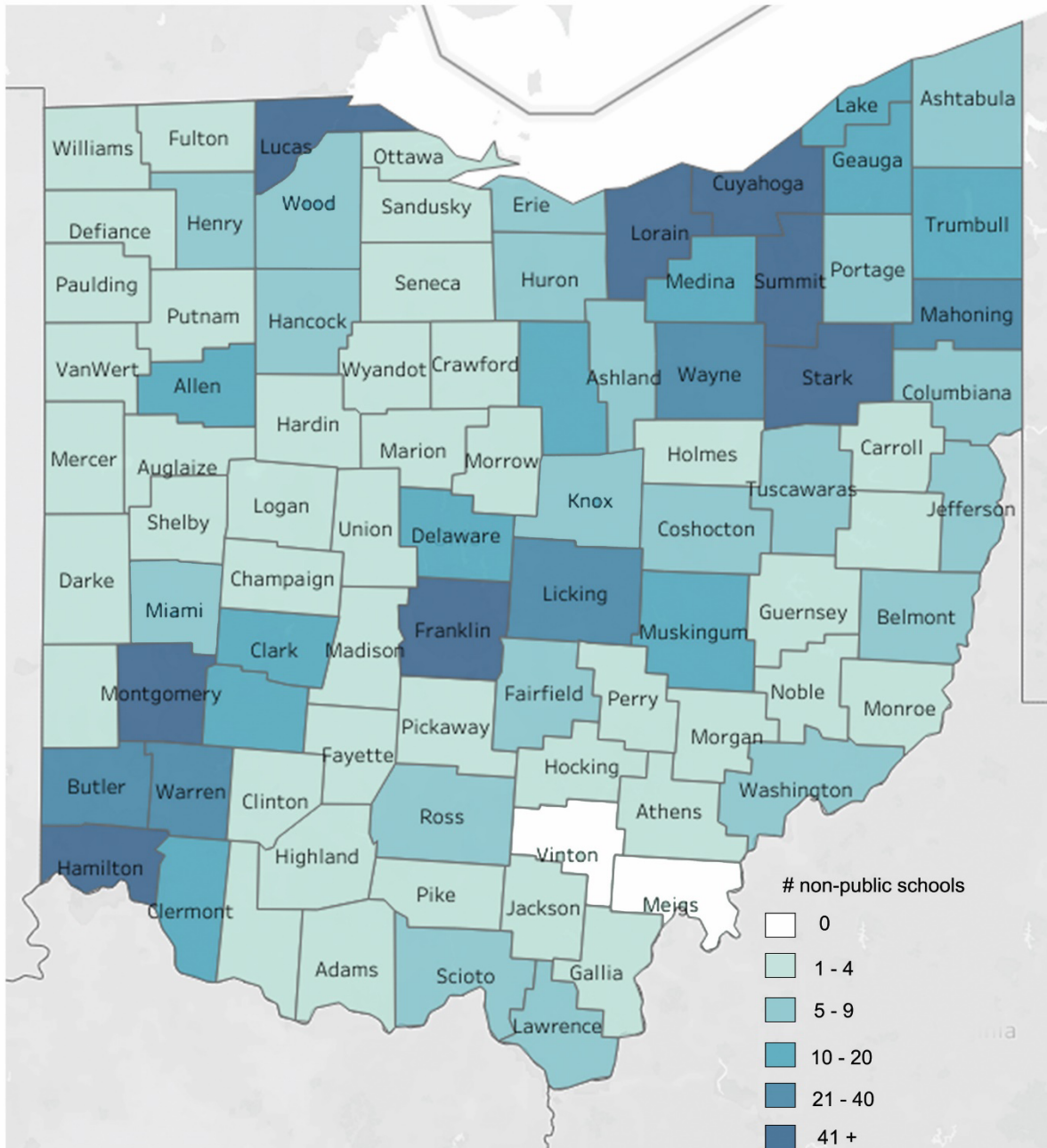
Source: Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, Reports Portal

County	Public School Enrollment 2023-24	Private School Enrollment 2023-24	Charter School Enrollment 2023-24	Total Enrollment All Schools	% Public	# Private Schools 2024-25	# Charter	# Non-Chartered nonpublic 2024-25	Total Non-Public
Adams	4,111	166	0	4,277	96%	1	0	0	1
Allen	13,745	1,918	276	15,939	86%	7	2	10	19
Ashland	5,471	223	86	5,780	95%	2	1	2	5
Ashtabula	11,459	744	0	12,203	94%	3	0	3	6
Athens	6,269	30	0	6,299	100%	1	0	0	1
Auglaize	7,241	124	80	7,445	97%	1	1	2	4
Belmont	8,048	500	0	8,548	94%	5	0	3	8
Brown	6,073	161	0	6,234	97%	2	0	0	2
Butler	53,521	4,191	1,324	59,036	91%	12	6	15	33
Carroll	2,316	0	0	2,316	100%	0	0	1	1
Champaign	5,953	0	0	5,953	100%	0	0	3	3
Clark	18,199	1,168	591	19,958	91%	6	4	4	14
Clermont	24,845	1,687	0	26,532	94%	9	0	3	12
Clinton	5,926	276	0	6,202	96%	1	0	1	2
Columbiana	12,167	674	127	12,968	94%	3	2	4	9
Coshocton	4,276	252	0	4,528	94%	2	1	3	6
Crawford	5,695	140	0	5,835	98%	3	0	1	4
Cuyahoga	128,311	32,838	13,112	174,261	74%	125	76	24	225
Darke	7,342	187	0	7,529	98%	2	0	0	2
Defiance	5,674	156	0	5,830	97%	2	0	2	4
Delaware	34,748	2,045	0	36,793	94%	8	0	10	18
Erie	10,231	691	586	11,508	89%	4	3	1	8
Fairfield	25,526	958	0	26,484	96%	5	0	2	7
Fayette	4,146	0	0	4,146	100%	0	0	1	1
Franklin	170,536	23,045	23,808	217,389	78%	83	80	35	198
Fulton	7,940	215	0	8,155	97%	3	0	0	3
Galia	3,910	195	0	4,105	95%	1	0	3	4
Geauga	9,028	2,131	0	11,159	81%	8	0	3	11
Greene	20,538	1,432	134	22,104	93%	8	2	1	11
Guernsey	4,291	60	0	4,351	99%	1	0	1	2
Hamilton	99,992	28,950	8,804	137,746	73%	95	23	13	131
Hancock	11,093	511	167	11,771	94%	3	1	5	9
Hardin	3,806	0	36	3,842	99%	0	1	3	4
Harrison	1,829	0	36	1,865	98%	0	1	0	1
Henry	3,947	215	0	4,162	95%	3	0	2	5
Highland	6,676	233	0	6,909	97%	1	0	2	3
Hocking	3,434	135	0	3,569	96%	2	1	0	3
Holmes	3,201	0	0	3,201	100%	0	0	1	1
Huron	8,464	1,132	0	9,596	88%	5	0	0	5
Jackson	4,552	210	0	4,762	96%	1	0	1	2
Jefferson	8,325	845	0	9,170	91%	3	0	3	6
Knox	7,013	207	0	7,220	97%	3	0	8	11
Lake	27,376	3,072	0	30,448	90%	14	1	2	17
Lawrence	8,220	168	0	8,388	98%	2	0	6	8



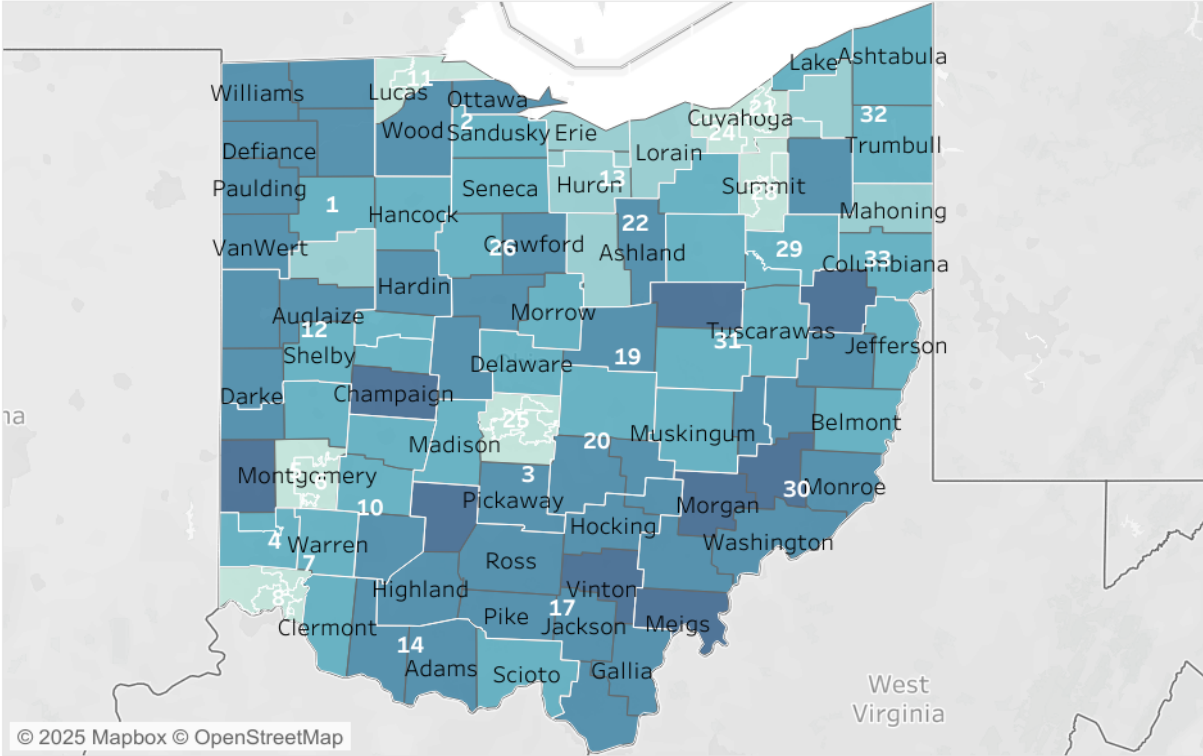
County	Public School Enrollment 2023-24	Private School Enrollment 2023-24	Charter School Enrollment 2023-24	Total Enrollment All Schools	% Public	# Private Schools 2024-25	# Charter	# Non-Chartered nonpublic 2024-25	Total Non-Public
Licking	27,501	1,696	181	29,378	94%	10	1	21	32
Logan	5,666	400	9	6,075	93%	1	0	1	2
Lorain	38,716	4,620	2,626	45,962	84%	20	11	18	49
Lucas	48,969	9,687	7,670	66,326	74%	32	28	5	65
Madison	6,163	102	250	6,515	95%	2	1	0	3
Mahoning	25,092	3,351	2,501	30,944	81%	15	11	1	27
Marion	8,706	129	691	9,526	91%	1	3	0	4
Medina	24,620	1,778	30	26,428	93%	6	1	11	18
Meigs	2,970	0	0	2,970	100%	0	0	0	0
Mercer	7,876	117	0	7,993	99%	1	0	0	1
Miami	15,434	1,095	0	16,529	93%	7	0	3	10
Monroe	1,940	64	0	2,004	97%	1	0	2	3
Montgomery	64,002	9,564	7,281	80,847	79%	35	24	18	77
Morgan	1,625	0	0	1,625	100%	0	0	1	1
Morrow	4,648	172	92	4,912	95%	2	1	2	5
Muskingum	12,919	450	576	13,945	93%	3	3	4	10
Noble	1,806	0	0	1,806	100%	0	0	1	1
Ottawa	4,477	102	0	4,579	98%	2	0	1	3
Paulding	2,855	59	0	2,914	98%	1	0	0	1
Perry	5,549	180	0	5,729	97%	1	0	0	1
Pickaway	9,405	278	0	9,683	97%	2	0	0	2
Pike	4,678	185	0	4,863	96%	2	0	2	4
Portage	19,478	514	0	19,992	97%	4	0	2	6
Preble	5,621	0	0	5,621	100%	0	0	1	1
Putnam	5,837	459	0	6,296	93%	3	0	1	4
Richland	18,792	1,218	2,151	22,161	85%	7	6	1	14
Ross	10,971	572	48	11,591	95%	3	1	5	9
Sandusky	8,728	508	46	9,282	94%	3	1	1	5
Scioto	10,929	586	392	11,907	92%	3	1	2	6
Seneca	7,537	440	189	8,166	92%	1	2	0	3
Shelby	7,418	474	0	7,892	94%	4	0	1	5
Stark	55,079	3,915	1,228	60,222	91%	20	7	15	42
Summit	74,613	10,364	9,397	94,374	79%	40	19	25	84
Trumbull	25,843	1,054	889	27,786	93%	6	5	5	16
Tuscarawas	14,399	396	0	14,795	97%	3	2	2	7
Union	7,765	364	0	8,129	96%	2	0	0	2
VanWert	4,282	78	0	4,360	98%	1	0	0	1
Vinton	1,662	0	0	1,662	100%	0	0	0	0
Warren	38,042	3,644	400	42,086	90%	14	1	10	25
Washington	7,415	214	0	7,629	97%	2	0	3	5
Wayne	14,961	1,028	140	16,129	93%	6	3	12	21
Williams	5,002	145	0	5,147	97%	2	0	1	3
Wood	18,759	999	0	19,758	95%	7	0	3	10
Wyandot	3,130	290	0	3,420	92%	2	0	2	4
	1,517,344	173,176	85,954			717	338	367	1422

MAP 1 TOTAL NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY OHIO COUNTY  
 Charter, Chartered Non-Public and Non-Chartered Non-Public



Maps created by Molly Bryden, Policy Matters and Greta DeMeyer

Public school students as a share of all students by county enrolled in a public school, charter school, and private school



Overlay of Senate Districts: white lines and numbers.