



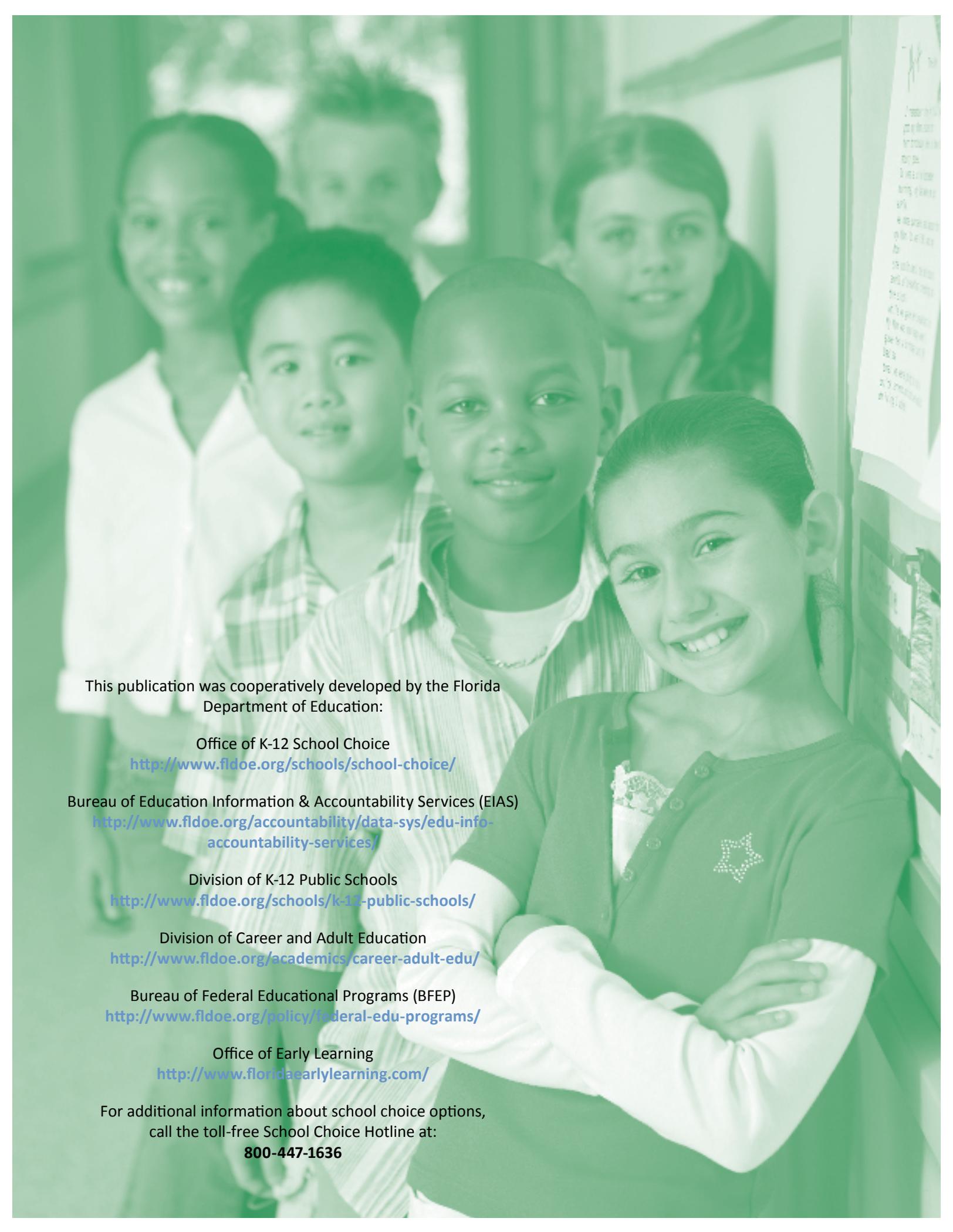
SCHOOL  
**CHOICE**  
Florida Department of Education  
*Your Child • Your Choice*

# School CHOICE Options

*Florida Continues to Lead the Nation*

Preparing Students for Success

MARCH 2015



This publication was cooperatively developed by the Florida  
Department of Education:

Office of K-12 School Choice

<http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/>

Bureau of Education Information & Accountability Services (EIAS)

<http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/>

Division of K-12 Public Schools

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Office of Early Learning

<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/>

For additional information about school choice options,  
call the toll-free School Choice Hotline at:

**800-447-1636**



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## Florida: Empowering Parents and Students with High-Quality School Choice Options

Educational research has suggested repeatedly that educational outcomes are improved when parents are actively involved in the education of their children. There are many ways that parents can be involved, but perhaps the most important and fundamental is in choosing an educational program that best meets the unique needs of a child. Access to an array of safe school environments and quality educational programs empowers parents to become managers of their children's education. Providing high-quality school choice options allows parents to compare and then select the best learning environment for their students.

Florida continues to lead the nation in school choice options, and hundreds of thousands of families and students take advantage of these opportunities. The latest data provided by school districts indicate that more than twenty-seven percent (27%) of Florida's K-12 public school students have chosen a school other than the one to which they were assigned. Additionally, thousands more participate in other options including virtual education, private schools, and home education.



### K-12 Student Participation in Florida's School Choice Options

Year	Total K 12 Public School Student Membership	Number of Students Attending Schools Based on Parental School Choice Options	Percent of Students Attending Schools Based on Parental School Choice Options
2013-14	2,746,883	753,648	27%
2012-13	2,717,142	810,145	30%
2011-12	2,691,360	780,881	29%
2010-11	2,664,628	714,836	27%
2009-10	2,634,382	682,283	26%
2008-09	2,650,451	650,451	25%
2007-08	2,652,684	645,184	24%
2006-07	2,946,463	667,115	23%
2005-06	2,901,455	656,988	23%
2004-05	2,912,326	645,442	22%

Florida Department of Education, Educational Choice Options by School, Survey 2 Final Data

While having the greatest number of educational options is a significant accomplishment, Florida continues to focus on improving the quality of those options available to parents. Every student should have the right to a meaningful, challenging, and first-class education that prepares them for college, career, and life. During the past few years, Florida has expanded proven programs allowing more students to benefit from high-quality choices.

A parent understands the needs of his or her child better than anyone else, and no one is more committed to a child's success than his or her parent(s). Florida policy makers understand this, and have worked to give parents as many high-quality educational options as possible.





more chances for parental involvement. While authorized by local school districts, charter schools are largely free to select their curriculum and instructional models and provide an array of programs and choices to underserved groups of students. Over 229,000 students attended charter schools in Florida during 2013-14.

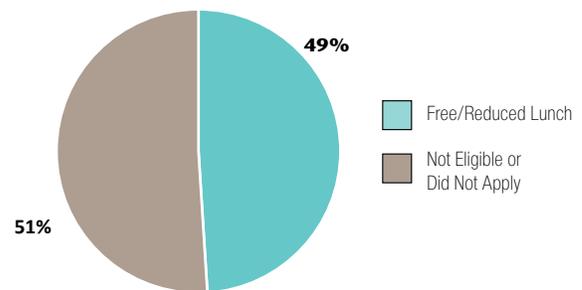
Approximately forty-nine percent (49%) of students that attended charter schools were eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program during the 2013-14 school year.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools operated by an independent non-profit governing board. Since 1996, charter schools have played a key role in increasing parental options in public education and providing innovative learning opportunities for Florida students. With 615 charter schools operating during the 2013-14 school year, Florida ranked third in the nation for both the number of charter schools and students. From schools specializing in the performing arts to focusing on technical training, Florida’s charter schools cover the spectrum of educational needs.

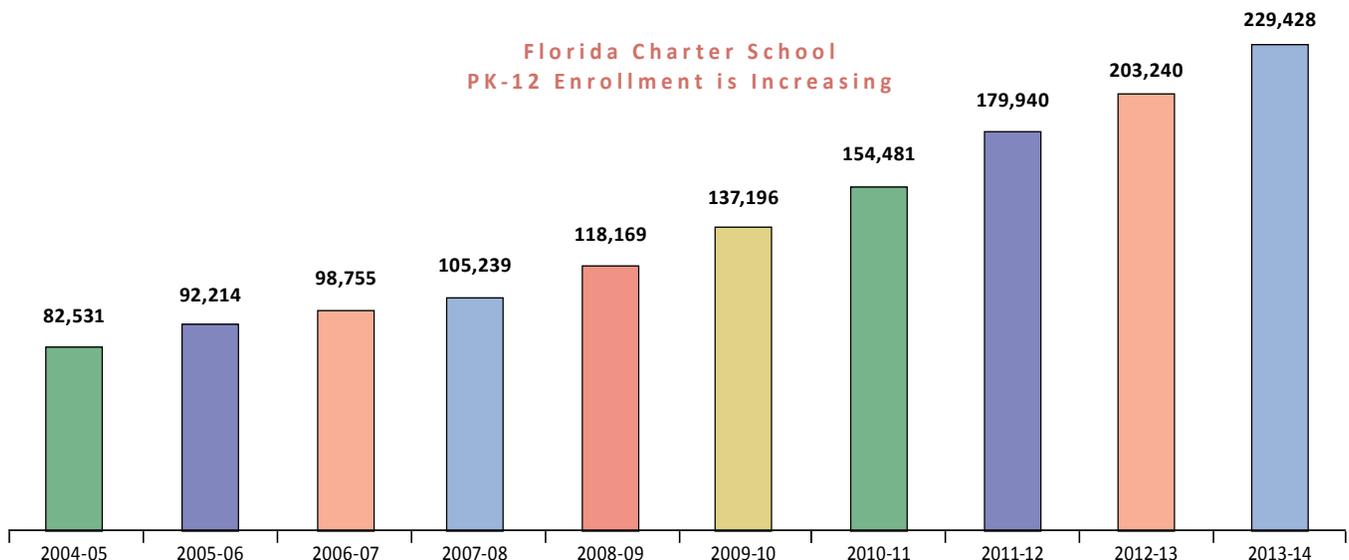
Florida’s charter schools strive to provide students with a variety of effective instructional delivery methods, rigorous and challenging curriculum and

**Charter School Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch**

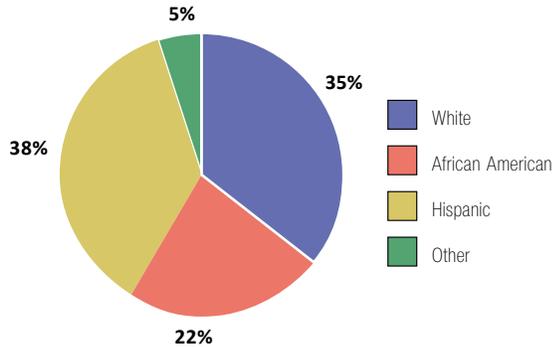


Thirty-eight percent (38%) of students enrolled in charter schools in the 2013-14 school year were Hispanic, white students represented the next largest population with 35% participation, followed by African Americans with 22% participation.

**Florida Charter School PK-12 Enrollment is Increasing**



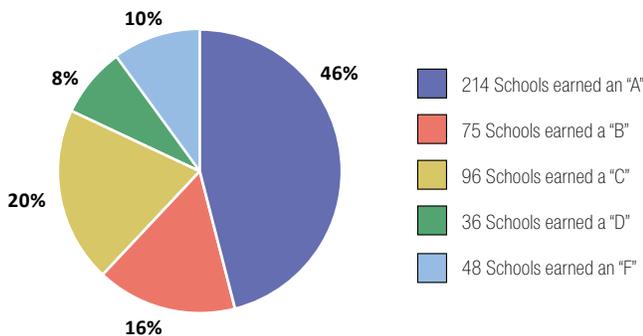
Race/Ethnicity of Charter School Students



## Charter Schools Measuring Up to the Challenge

In 2013-14, sixty-two percent (62%) of the graded charter schools earned a school performance grade of “A” or “B”. As reported in the 2012-13 Student Achievement Report, charter schools performed better than the state average in 152 out of 177 comparisons of student proficiency, student learning gains, and achievement gap. The full report can be found at [http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7778/urlt/0085505-charter\\_student\\_achievement\\_2013.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7778/urlt/0085505-charter_student_achievement_2013.pdf)

2014 Charter School Performance Grades



## CHARTER TECHNICAL CAREER CENTERS

The State of Florida had two charter technical career centers with a total enrollment of 4,502 students for the 2013-14 school year. These centers and their sponsors are:

- First Coast Technical College (FCTC) – St. Johns County School Board
- Lake Technical College (LTC) – Lake County School Board

The charter technical career centers provide comprehensive and innovative technical education programs, services, and customized training to meet the needs of citizens, business, and industry.

Charter technical career centers aim to develop a competitive workforce that supports local business, industry, and economic development; and creates a training and education model reflective of marketplace realities. The career centers offer an array of career educational opportunities using school-to-work, technical, academy, and/or magnet school models to provide pathways for lifelong learning, career mobility and to enhance career and technical training.

A charter technical career center may be formed by creating a new school or converting an existing school district or Florida College System institution program to charter technical status. The center operates under a charter granted by a district school board, a Florida College System Board of Trustees, or a consortium of one or more district school boards and Florida College System Boards of Trustees.

# VIRTUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

**State Virtual School:**

- Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

**District-level Virtual Programs:**

- School District Virtual Instruction Programs (VIP)
- District Franchises of FLVS
- District Virtual Course Offerings
- Virtual Charter Schools

Florida students have more access to online learning courses than students in any other state. Florida has the largest and most successful state virtual school in the United States, Florida Virtual School (FLVS). Through the School District Virtual Instruction Program (VIP), all school districts in Florida offer full-time and part-time virtual instruction programs for students in grades K-12. Many districts also operate franchises of the Florida Virtual School. Additionally, school districts may offer individual online courses to students in and outside of traditional school settings. All of Florida’s virtual schools and programs are designated by state law as school choice options.

Teachers in these programs must hold Florida teaching certificates and the curriculum must align with state standards. Full-time public school students participate in state assessments, and full-time schools and programs receive school grades through Florida’s accountability system.

## Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

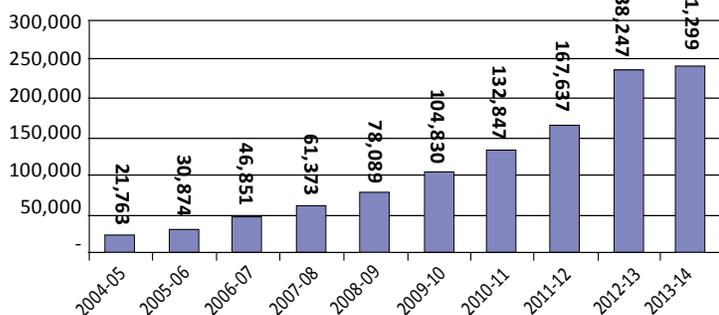
Florida Virtual School has led the way in making online education accessible to Florida students. The school was created in 1997 and had 77 semester enrollments the first year. FLVS currently offers more than 140 online courses, including general education courses, as well as Advance Placement (AP) and Honors Program options for middle and high school students. In 2013-14, more than 192,820 public, private, charter, and home education students completed more than 377,508 semester courses. FLVS offers a limited part-time elementary school program. For more information on these part-time schools, please visit [www.flvs.net/](http://www.flvs.net/)

FLVS also operates two full-time schools for Florida’s students in grades K-12. FLVS partnered with Connections Academy to provide its full-time program. The full-time high school began issuing diplomas in 2012-13. Over 5,100 K-12 students completed the program in 2013-14. For more information about the FLVS full-time schools, please visit [www.flvsft.com/](http://www.flvsft.com/)

Florida's Public K-12 Virtual Education Options				
Virtual Program/School	School Numbers	Program Type	Grade Levels Served	Student Eligibility
<b>STATE LEVEL</b>				
Florida Virtual School (FLVS)	Grades K-5 (0700) Grades 6-8 (0500) Grades 9-12 (0600)	Part-Time	Grades K-1 and 6-12 Grades 2-5	All students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
Florida Virtual School Full-Time (FLVS FT)	Grades K-8 (0300) Grades 9-12 (0400)	Full-Time	Grades K-12	All Students
<b>DISTRICT LEVEL</b>				
District Virtual Instruction Program (VIP)	Provider (7001) District (7023)	Full-Time Part-Time	Grades K-5 Grades 6-12 Grades K-1 Grades 2-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455 All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
District Franchise of FLVS	7004	Same as FLVS	Same as FLVS	Same as FLVS
District Virtual Course Offerings	7006	Part-Time Full-Time	Grades K-1 Grades 2-12 Grades K-5 Grades 6-12	All students Eligibility per s. 1002.455 All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
Virtual Charter School	Individually Assigned on MSID	Full-Time	Grades K-5 Grades 6-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455

Student eligibility criteria in s. 1002.455, F.S., include prior-year Florida public school attendance, military dependents who recently moved to Florida, siblings of current virtual students who were also enrolled in the virtual program at the end of the previous year, students eligible to enter grades K-1 and students in grades 2-5 enrolling in full-time virtual programs

Student Participation In Virtual Education Programs



### School District Virtual Instruction Program (VIP)

Beginning in the 2009-10 school year, school districts in Florida have offered at least one full-time virtual instruction program (VIP) option for their students in grades K-12. School districts have a number of options for offering this virtual instruction for their students.

They are able to:

- Contract with FLVS;
- Establish a franchise of FLVS;
- Contract with virtual program providers approved by the Department of Education;
- Enter into an agreement with another school district, virtual charter school or with a Florida college;
- Enter into a multi-district agreement; or
- Operate their own program.

Over 8,300 full-time students participated in district virtual instruction programs in 2013-14.



### District Franchises of FLVS

Fifty-six (56) school districts and two university lab schools currently operate franchises of FLVS. District franchises use district teachers to teach FLVS courses. FLVS also provides district franchises with teacher training and mentoring, leadership training, and many learning resources and tools. In 2013-14, franchises reported approximately 78,106 semester completions. District franchises serve public, charter, home education, and private school students in grades 6-12. In addition, district franchises can now offer elementary courses.

### District Virtual Course Offerings

School districts may offer individual online courses for students enrolled in the district. In addition, students from other districts may enroll in these courses. The district may offer K-12 online courses for any course included in the Florida Course Code Directory.

### Florida Online Course Catalog

Florida launched its new Florida Online Course Catalog in July 2014. This catalog includes information about available online courses offered by school districts, Florida Virtual School and approved private providers. This catalog provides an opportunity for school districts, Florida Virtual School and approved private providers to showcase the online courses they offer and for parents and students to browse the catalog to see what online course choices are available. As of April 2015, the catalog included over 9,000 online courses. The web link for this catalog is: <http://app4.fldoe.org/coursecatalog/>





## CONTROLLED OPEN ENROLLMENT

Each district school board may offer controlled open enrollment within their public school systems. Controlled open enrollment is a public delivery system that allows school districts to make student school assignments using parents' indicated preferential school choice as a significant factor. The controlled open enrollment program shall be offered in addition to the existing choice programs such as virtual instruction programs, magnet schools, alternative schools, special programs, advanced placement, and dual enrollment.

Controlled open enrollment emphasizes the rights for families to choose among existing public schools. Instead of being assigned to a public school by a school district based on attendance zones, parents may choose other schools in the district or, if not geographically feasible, from within established zones or boundaries within the district. These options are outlined in the district's controlled open enrollment plan.

School districts report student data for educational choice each August via the state's Automated Student Information Data Base. As reported for the 2013-14 school year, over 240,936 students in 49 of the state's 67 school districts, or about 8.8% of the total number of students enrolled in the state, attended a Florida public school through the districts' controlled open enrollment program.

## OTHER PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS

Various choices are available across Florida to meet the unique learning needs of every school district's students and families. The most common form of public school choice is offering a variety of courses and electives to meet graduation requirements for high school and allowing students to select the courses that will best meet their learning needs. Other choice options offered by districts include magnet schools, career and professional academies, dual enrollment, and intensive nationally and internationally recognized instructional programs.

### Magnet Schools

Magnet schools and magnet programs offer a specialized curriculum to students outside the school's normal attendance boundaries. These programs may include a particular theme or focus such as mathematics, science, technology, communications, international affairs, business or performing arts. A magnet school is defined as an elementary, middle, or high school that offers, to all students enrolled in that particular school, a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

Magnet programs differ slightly from a magnet school as the special curriculum is offered to a cohort of students as opposed to the entire school. In Florida, 544,284 students participated in 489 magnet schools or magnet programs in 29 Florida school districts during the 2013-2014 school year.

## Career and Professional Academies

Career and professional academies are small, personalized learning communities within a high school or middle school that select a subset of students and teachers for a two-, three-, or four-year span. Students enter a career and professional academy through a voluntary process. They must apply and be accepted with parental knowledge and support. A career and professional academy includes the following essential elements:

- A small learning community
- A rigorous academic curriculum with a career theme
- Partnerships with employers, the community, and higher education

By design, these three essential elements of a career and professional academy are central to the design of academic programs that are rigorous, relevant, and relational. Academies draw on the students' interest in learning about some feature of the world of work, and integrate career-specific curriculum and instruction into core academic curriculum.

During 2013-14, 1,816 career and professional academies operated in 66 Florida school districts (including Florida State University School and Florida Virtual School), focused on areas including hospitality and tourism, health science, engineering and technology education, architecture and construction, and information technology. The total number of students enrolled in career and professional academies decreased from 235,276 in 2012-13 to 222,664 in 2013-14.



## Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment allows eligible high school students, whether they are enrolled in public, private, or home education, to enroll in postsecondary courses. Students can simultaneously earn credit toward high school graduation and a college degree or technical certificate. All 28 institutions in the Florida College System and some state universities in Florida participate in dual enrollment. Students are permitted to take dual enrollment courses on a part-time basis during school hours, after school, or during the summer term. Dual enrollment students do not have to pay registration, matriculation, or laboratory fees.

## Advanced Placement (AP) Program

The College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) Program is a highly respected national curriculum consisting of more than 30 rigorous high school courses and standardized exams that allow students an opportunity to earn college credit. AP subjects range from art to statistics. Students who earn a qualifying score of 3 or above on an AP exam can earn college credit, depending on the college or university. Students in Florida's public secondary schools enrolled in AP courses do not have to pay to take the AP exams.



## Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Program

The Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Program is a widely recognized curriculum and examination program modeled on the British precollege curriculum and “A-Level” exams. Florida’s public colleges and universities provide college credit to students who successfully passed AICE exams. Students can earn up to 30 postsecondary semester credits by participating in this program. Students in Florida’s public secondary schools enrolled in AICE courses do not have to pay to take the required examinations.

## International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program is a rigorous pre-university course of study leading to internationally standardized tests. The program’s comprehensive two-year curriculum allows its graduates to fulfill requirements of many different nations’ education systems. Students completing IB courses and exams may be eligible for college credit. The award of credit is based on scores achieved on IB exams. Students can earn up to 30 postsecondary semester credits by participating in this program at the high school level. Approximately 42 high schools in Florida participate in the IB program. Students in Florida’s public secondary schools enrolled in IB courses do not have to pay to take the exams.



## VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION PROGRAM

Florida was one of the first states in the nation to offer free prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds regardless of family income. The Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program prepares early learners for success in kindergarten and beyond. Children must live in Florida and be 4 years old on or before September 1 of the current year to be eligible. The program helps to build a strong foundation for young students using educational materials that are appropriate for various stages in a child’s development.

VPK is an essential component of Florida’s school choice programs. Parents can choose from different educational settings and various program options. Private child care centers, public schools and specialized instructional services providers offer VPK programs.

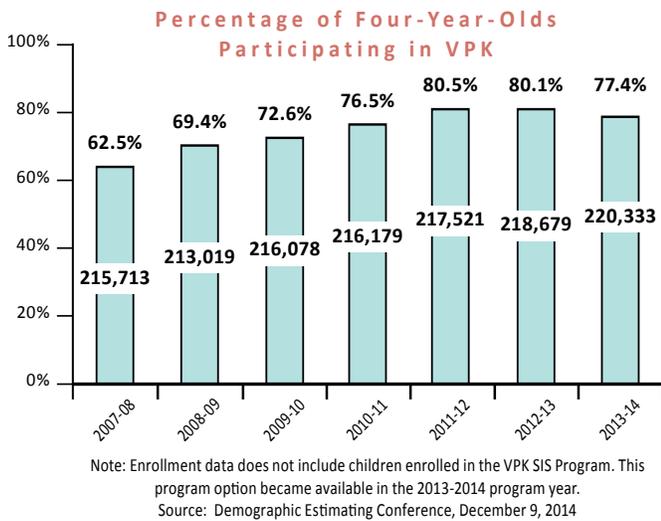
There are three VPK program options. The school-year program provides 540 hours of instruction with class sizes of no more than 20 children. A summer program includes 300 instructional hours and class sizes no larger than 12 students. Parents who have 4-year-old children with special needs may choose the VPK Specialized Instructional Services educational program, in which certified or licensed professionals provide instruction in individual or small group settings. This option requires the child to have a current individual educational plan (IEP) from a local school district.



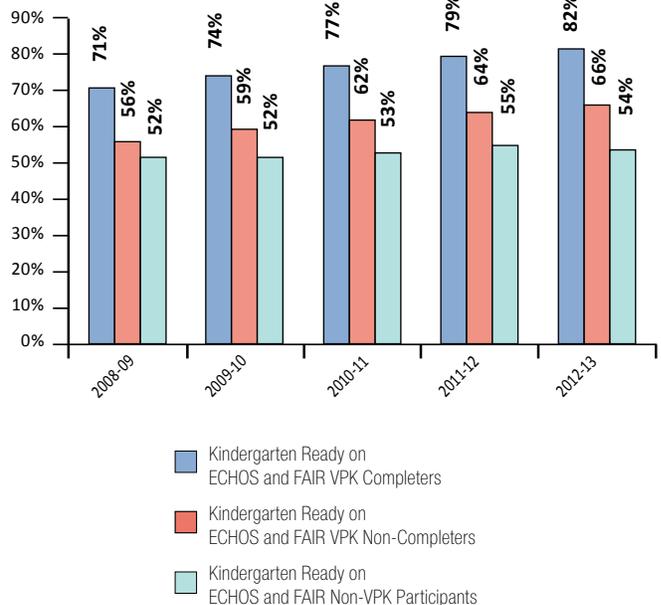


Since the program started about 10 years ago, VPK student participation has grown substantially. About 77 percent of all Florida 4-year-olds attend VPK.

Readiness Rates show how well all school-year and summer providers prepare students for kindergarten using results of the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS). FLKRS is based on *2011 Florida Early Learning and VPK Standards for Four-Year-Olds* that describe what a 4-year-old should know and be able to do by the end of VPK.



**Florida Kindergarten Ready on ECHOS and FAIR 2008-2013**



More importantly, results from screening in kindergarten show that VPK works. In 2012-13, 82 percent of children who completed the VPK program were ready for kindergarten, while only 54 percent of children who did not attend VPK were kindergarten ready.

Early learning coalitions across the state have information to help parents choose a VPK program for their family. VPK Provider Profiles include provider readiness rates and licensing reports. Kindergarten

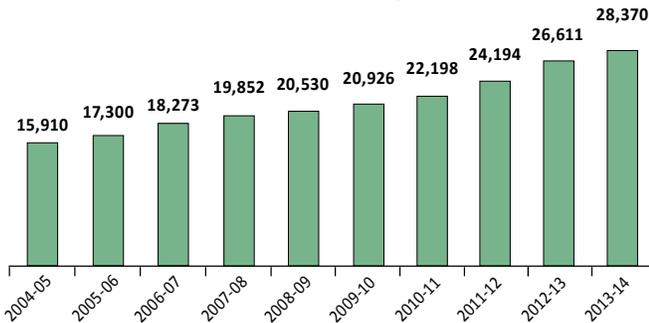
## K-12 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

Florida provides a variety of school choice options, including four scholarship programs. The scholarship programs allow parents unprecedented choice among public and private schools. During the 2013-2014 school year, more than 91,700 students participated in a scholarship program.

### John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program

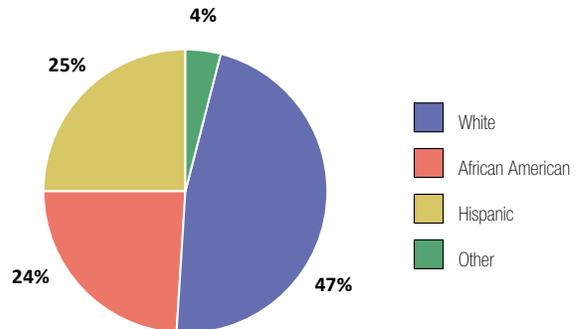
The John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program, commonly known as the McKay Scholarship Program, offers parents of students with disabilities the opportunity to make informed choices about the best academic environment for their children. To be eligible for a McKay Scholarship, students with disabilities must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Accommodation Plan (for more than six months), and must have been enrolled and reported for funding by a Florida school district the year prior to applying for a scholarship. Students in military families from other states or countries may also be eligible. Parents have the option of choosing another public school or applying for a scholarship for their child to attend an eligible private school.

McKay Scholarship Program Student Participation



Forty-seven percent (47%) of all students who participated in the McKay Scholarship Program in 2013-14 were white. Hispanic students represented the second largest student group with 25% participation, followed by African-American students with 24% participation.

Race/Ethnicity of McKay Scholarship Students

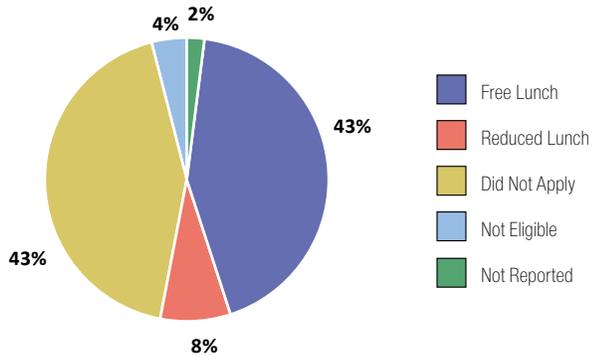


Grade Level Distribution of McKay Scholarship Students

Grade	Students	Percent
K	794	2.8%
1st	1,143	4.0%
2nd	1,423	5.0%
3rd	1,962	6.9%
4th	2,292	8.1%
5th	2,559	9.0%
6th	3,221	11.4%
7th	3,214	11.3%
8th	2,990	10.5%
9th	2,553	9.0%
10th	2,273	8.0%
11th	1,948	6.9%
12th	1,998	7.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,370</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

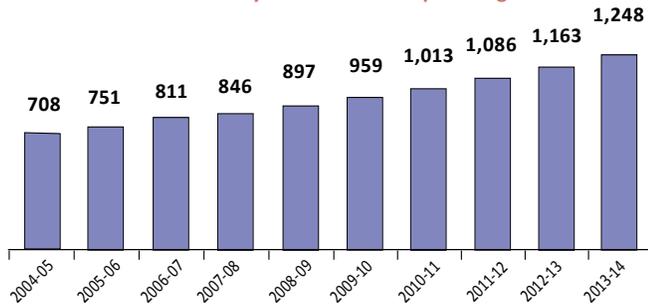
Of students receiving McKay Scholarships in 2013-14, 36% were enrolled in grades K-5, 33% in grades 6-8, and 31% in grades 9-12. Slightly over two-thirds (69%) of the McKay Scholarship students were male. Fifty-one percent (51%) of all McKay students were eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-price Lunch Program, an indicator that their families had limited financial resources.

**McKay Scholarship Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch**



The McKay Scholarship Program offers parent-directed choices and student-directed funding. During the 2013-14 school year, \$183.9 million was paid to scholarship program participants. Scholarships for individual students enrolled during the 2013-14 school year ranged from \$4,539 to \$19,990, with an average scholarship amount of \$7,278. In 2013-14, 28,370 students from 1,248 private schools participated in the McKay Scholarship Program. Private schools participating in the program must document compliance with eligibility requirements specified in law.

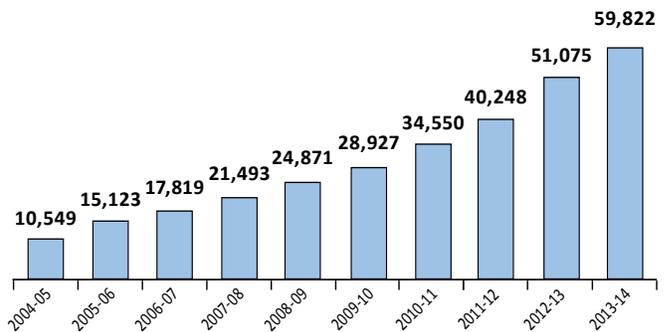
**Private School Participation in the McKay Scholarship Program**



## Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, formerly the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program, was established in 2001 to encourage private, voluntary contributions from corporate donors to non-profit scholarship funding organizations (SFOs) that award scholarships to children from low-income families. In 2009, the program was expanded to include credits against the insurance premium tax for contributions to eligible non-profit SFOs, and has since been expanded to include credits against severance taxes on oil and gas production, self-accrued sales tax liabilities of direct pay permit holders, and alcoholic beverage taxes on beer, wine, and spirits. The maximum amount in tax credits the state could award for fiscal year 2013-14 was \$286 million. This program expands educational opportunities and school choice for children of families that have limited financial resources.

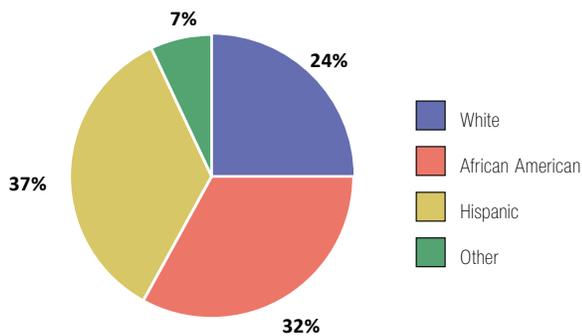
**Student Participation in Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program**



Scholarships of \$274.5 million were awarded to a total of 59,822 students enrolled in 1,429 participating Florida private schools during the 2013-14 school year. Participation in 2013-14 reflected an enrollment increase of seventeen percent (17%) from the 2012-13 school year. In order to be eligible for a Florida Tax Credit Scholarship, a student must qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or be on the direct certification list, or be placed in foster care. Approximately 37% of students who participated in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program in 2013-14 were Hispanic. African-American students comprised the next largest population with 32%, followed by white students at 24%.



**Race/Ethnicity of Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Students**



### Scholarship Funding Organizations and Private Partners

Scholarship funding organizations (SFOs) are responsible for the receipt and distribution of funds to eligible and participating private schools in Florida. In 2013-14, the scholarships to attend an eligible private school were worth \$4,880 for private school tuition and fees. Scholarships to attend a public school in an adjacent district were worth \$500 per student for transportation.

For the 2014-15 school year, two SFOs are eligible. The scholarship amount for 2014-15 is \$5,272.

### Personal Learning Scholarship Account Program (PLSA)

The PLSA is different than other state scholarships in that it provides parents the opportunity to create a truly customized educational program for their child.

The PLSA is open to Florida students in kindergarten

through 12th grade with one of the following disabilities: autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Spina bifida, Williams syndrome or Intellectual Disability (severe cognitive impairment). Also, kindergarten students deemed “high risk” because of developmental delays may be eligible.

Students must have either an Individual Education Plan (IEP) from a Florida school district or a formal diagnosis from a licensed physician or psychologist. Students entering kindergarten must be 5 on or before Sept 1. Students entering first grade must be 6 on or before Sept 1. Students can participate in the PLSA scholarship as part of home education; however, they cannot be enrolled in a public school or be receiving any other state-sponsored scholarship (McKay Scholarship or the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship).

The scholarship amount varies according to grade, county and disability, but the average amount in 2014-15 is approximately \$10,000. Scholarships will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Parents can use the funding to pay for a variety of approved services, equipment and materials. These may include tuition and fees at an eligible private school, applied behavior analysis services, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapy, physical therapy, services from listening and spoken language specialists, full-time private tutoring, virtual programs or online courses, exam fees, contract services from school districts, contributions to the state prepaid college program, instructional materials such as digital devices and assistive technology, and curriculum materials.



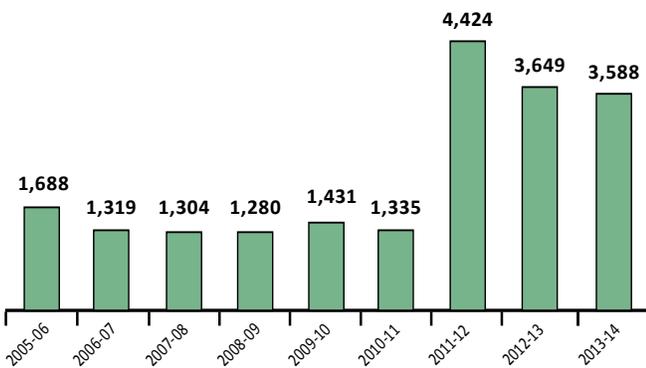
## Opportunity Scholarship Program – Public School Option

The Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) created under Florida’s A+ Education Plan reflects the state’s commitment to provide quality educational opportunities to students. The Opportunity Scholarship Program allows parents to choose a higher-performing public school if their children attend, or are assigned to attend, a failing Florida public school.

For the purpose of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, a school is considered to be failing in the year it received a grade of “F” or its third consecutive “D”.

Historically, the public school option of the Opportunity Scholarship Program has been administered at the school district level. Since the 2005-06 school year, school districts have reported the number of students in their districts participating in the Opportunity Scholarship Program. In the 2013-14 school year, 3,588 students participated in the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

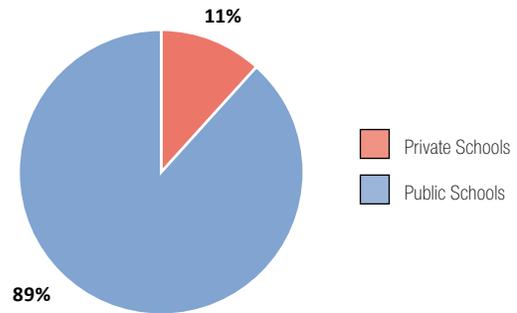
**Opportunity Scholarship Program  
Public School Option Student Participation**



## PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Private schools in Florida reported more than 325,500 students enrolled in 2,309 private schools in Florida during the 2013-14 school year. This represented approximately 11% of the state’s total student enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12.

**PK-12 School Enrollment, 2013-14**

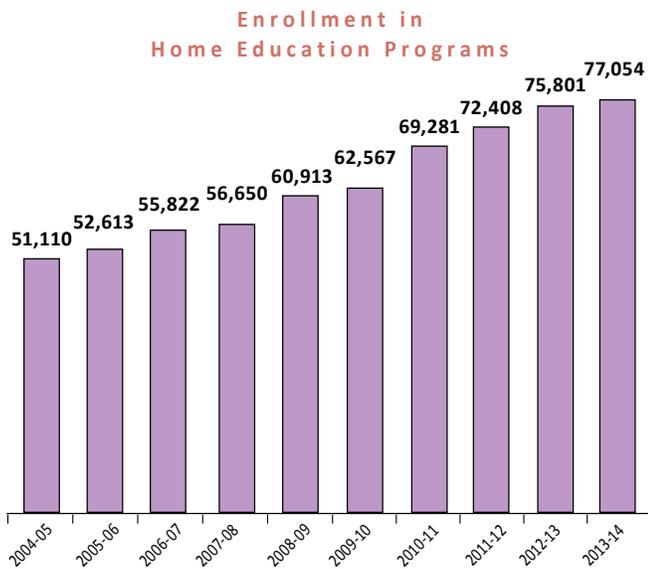


Each private school has a stated purpose and philosophy unique to that school. Some private schools place an emphasis on college preparation, some are vocational-oriented, and others seek to meet the needs of children with particular learning styles. These schools operate with limited regulation by the state, but Florida law does require private schools to meet certain standards regarding health, safety and sanitation.

In addition, each private school is required by Florida law to complete an annual survey that is maintained by the Department of Education as an information database for the public, governmental agencies, and other interested parties. The state is not required to verify the accuracy of the information submitted, and inclusion in the database does not imply state accreditation or approval. The Department of Education and the state’s private school organizations work together in serving Florida’s diverse student population; the relationship is professional, rather than regulatory.

## HOME EDUCATION

Florida is a long-time supporter of home education, and the number of families choosing this education option shows steady growth. Established as an educational choice by the Florida Legislature in 1985, home education programs give parents the freedom to nurture their child’s individual learning style, creativity and intellect. This allows students the opportunity to learn and explore at their own pace, in any location or at any time of the day. More than 77,050 students from 56,689 Florida families, representing every school district, were registered in home education programs in the 2013-14 school year.



Florida law does not require a particular educational background for parents of home-educated students. Parents who home educate their children are able

to customize the curriculum to the needs of each child. However, a portfolio of activities, records and materials showing student work must be maintained for two years and made available to the school district if requested in writing. There is no attendance requirement for home education students, as the learning environment is not restricted to a regular classroom setting. The law allows parents the flexibility to choose from five annual evaluation methods, enabling them to select the best measure of learning for each student. A copy of the evaluation must be submitted to the school district by the parent.

Parents register a home education program with their school district, providing the names, addresses and birthdates of all children who are enrolled in a home education program. Home education students may participate in dual enrollment and are eligible for Florida Bright Futures Scholarships. Children of all ages are home educated across the state, and some enter college straight from their courses of study at home.

## CONCLUSION

School Choice is not about one type of school or system being better than another. It is about providing unique flexibility for parents and students, and giving families greater choice in educational opportunities. Diversity in school structure and programs is crucial to Florida’s goal of preparing all students for college, career, and life. Constructive competition and greater accountability provide an incentive for all schools to improve, and that will always benefit the students and parents.



A photograph of a classroom scene, overlaid with a light blue tint. A female teacher with glasses and a dark vest over a white shirt is leaning over a desk, smiling and looking at a young girl. The girl is looking down at her work. To the right, another young girl is smiling and looking towards the teacher. In the background, other students are seated at desks, and a whiteboard is visible. The overall atmosphere is positive and focused on learning.

## School Choice Benefits for Families and Students

- Promotes increased student achievement
- Increases parental involvement
- Promotes school improvement through constructive competition
- Provides greater accountability within the school system



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