

Issue Brief

School Choice

3/31/05

What some people say:

Public education is a monopoly.

Some people believe that public education offers a one-size-fits-all approach with very few choices for students. In fact, Colorado is a national leader in offering a wide array of options for how children are educated within the public school system. Some choices are provided by law and others by individual school district policy.

Facts:

Here's a brief summary of educational choice options in Colorado:

- 1. Charter schools** – The fall 2003 enrollment in the State of Colorado included 31,529 students in 96 charter schools. *Source: Colorado Department of Education*
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/ch03pm.pdf>
- 2. Choice within a district** – Colorado law allows children to attend any school in their home school district on a space available basis.
- 3. Choice between districts** – Colorado law allows children to attend school in any school district on a space available basis. Fall 2003 out-of-district enrollment was 35,752 students. *Source: Colorado Dept of Education*
- 4. Title I choice** – Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation requires school districts to offer free transportation from low-performing schools in order to allow students to attend higher performing schools in the district.
- 5. Special education choice** – Federal law and state statutes allow school districts to place students with an Individual Education Plan into private facilities in order to accommodate the child's special needs. The cost of this program is paid by the student's home school district.
- 6. Post-secondary option** – The post-secondary enrollment options allow high school juniors and seniors to enroll in courses at Colorado institutions of higher education. When the courses count toward high school graduation, tuition is paid by the student's school district.
- 7. Magnet/option/alternative schools** – Some districts have special schools that feature a specific philosophy such as Montessori or Core Knowledge. Schools also may specialize in particular areas (e.g. the arts, vocational education, or technology).

Districts also may have alternative schools for at-risk youth or students who have dropped out of school.

8. Specialized programs – Special programs such as a gifted and talented program and the International Baccalaureate operate within a neighborhood school.

9. Online learning – Web-based courses on the Internet are a growing option for students. Choice range from supplemental courses to complete programs leading to a high school diploma.

Challenge(s):

Providing choice is more expensive than traditional schooling. Smaller and more specialized schools cost districts more money. It's less expensive to operate one larger school than several smaller schools (i.e. efficiency of scale). Also, districts are faced with managing fewer resources to educate the majority of students in regular education in order to serve a smaller number of students in specialized schools.

Issue Briefs are published by the Colorado Association of School Boards
and the Colorado Association of School Executives

