

A STUDY OF
COLORADO
CHARTER
SCHOOLS
2023 EDITION

Dr. Paula Noonan

CHARTER SCHOOLS LEGISLATION FROM 1993
PUBLIC MONEY
PRIVATE MONEY
PRIVATE GOVERNANCE

District Charter Schools

- Money from district taxpayers
- Money from state coffers
- Managed by private boards
- 112,000 students distributed across 166 schools managed as individual schools or in networks

Charter schools may solicit funds from foundations, philanthropists, individuals

Charter School Institute

- Money from state coffers
- Managed by private board appointed by Governor, confirmed by State Senate
- 23,013 students distributed across 43 schools under CSI authority



CO CHARTER SCHOOLS' LAY OF LAND

252 schools, more or less

137,000 students more or less

8 serve k-12

66 serve elementary

133 serve middle

37 high school

Several serve special education

Upper grades preferred marketing target

CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD TYPES

Self Appointed: Limited Parent membership and/or minimal to no membership selection disclosure

Elected or Appointed with Parent Participation and disclosure

DSST: Denver Schools of Science and Technology: members selected by sitting board

The Classical Academy: elected by school community

KIPP Colorado: undisclosed board selection and board by-laws

James Irwin Charter School Network: elected from schools with 2 at-large

University Prep: undisclosed board selection and by-laws

The Vanguard Schools: elected from members of Vanguard Schools

Rocky Mountain Prep: one parent of 8 members; undisclosed board selection

The Pinnacle Charter: selected by board; 5 members from parent community

National Heritage Academies: board appoints board members

Firestone Charter Academy: elected parents, community members

Ascent Classical Academies: appointed, no membership disclosure

Windsor Charter Academy: elected parents plus two community members

STATE STATUTE AND REGULATION WAIVER REQUESTS
JOINTLY REQUESTED BY [REDACTED]

CHARTERS AND
WAIVERS

Automatic State
Waivers:

Some charters give minimal disclosure of automatic state waivers or no disclosure at all. Yet these waivers have many implications for ethics, employment policies, curriculum and text book selection, and overall delivery of quality education.

- 22-7-1014(2)(a)
- 22-9-106
- 22-32-109(1)(f)
- 22-32-109(1)(n)
- 22-32-110(1)(h)
- 22-32-126
- 22-63-201
- 22-63-202
- 22-63-203
- 22-63-204
- 22-63-205
- 22-63-206
- 22-63-301
- 22-63-302
- 22-63-401
- 22-63-402
- 22-63-403
- 301-81

Example of Automatic State Waiver
'Disclosure' displayed on charter school
website

CHARTERS MAY OPT OUT OF
THE STATE EDUCATOR
EVALUATION SYSTEM EVEN
THOUGH IT PROMISES
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES
FOR EVERY COLORADO
STUDENT

“The statewide **Teacher Quality Standards** provide a shared understanding of the essentials of great teaching—a common vision.” **CDE**

“Just as the **Colorado Academic Standards** provide common expectations for student learning, the **Teacher Quality Standards** outline the knowledge and skills required of an excellent teacher.” **CDE**

“The **Teacher Quality Standards** are foundational to providing **every student with what they deserve**—excellent teachers who are consistently supported in their efforts to improve their practice and influence student learning in new and powerful ways.” **CDE**

Educator Effectiveness for State of Colorado

LIMITED FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE AND TRANSPARENCY

- About **\$2.2 billion of public dollars** go to charters each year in per pupil funding.
- Additional **millions of dollars** funnel to charters through their fundraising activities without public oversight.
- The public has an interest for **fiduciary and good government reasons** to know if public and private funds are blended, where private funds come from, what specific requirements may be placed on private funds, and how the funds are spent.

		Prior Year	Current Year	
Activities & Governance	1	Briefly describe the organization's mission or most significant activities: <u>THE MISSION OF [REDACTED] IS TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND CHARACTER TRAITS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE AND CAREERS</u>		
	2	Check this box <input type="checkbox"/> if the organization discontinued its operations or disposed of more than 25% of its net assets.		
	3	Number of voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1a)	3	11
	4	Number of independent voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1b)	4	11
	5	Total number of individuals employed in calendar year 2022 (Part V, line 2a)	5	480
	6	Total number of volunteers (estimate if necessary)	6	NONE
	7a	Total unrelated business revenue from Part VIII, column (C), line 12	7a	NONE
7b	Net unrelated business taxable income from Form 990-T, Part I, line 11	7b	NONE	
Revenue	8	Contributions and grants (Part VIII, line 1h)	7,075,603.	14,670,063.
	9	Program service revenue (Part VIII, line 2g)	31,093,287.	33,458,527.
	10	Investment income (Part VIII, column (A), lines 3, 4, and 7d)	-88,292.	505,426.
	11	Other revenue (Part VIII, column (A), lines 5, 6d, 8c, 9c, 10c, and 11e)	-53,729.	-9,924.
	12	Total revenue - add lines 8 through 11 (must equal Part VIII, column (A), line 12)	38,026,869.	48,624,092.
	Expenses	13	Grants and similar amounts paid (Part IX, column (A), lines 1-3)	48,557.
14		Benefits paid to or for members (Part IX, column (A), line 4)	NONE	NONE
15		Salaries, other compensation, employee benefits (Part IX, column (A), lines 5-10)	26,015,494.	29,389,754.
16a		Professional fundraising fees (Part IX, column (A), line 11e)	NONE	NONE
16b		Total fundraising expenses (Part IX, column (D), line 25)	124,328.	
17		Other expenses (Part IX, column (A), lines 11a-11d, 11f-24e)	14,085,453.	12,133,724.
Net Assets or Fund Balances	18	Total expenses. Add lines 13-17 (must equal Part IX, column (A), line 25)	40,149,504.	41,545,197.
	19	Revenue less expenses. Subtract line 18 from line 12	-2,122,635.	7,078,895.
	20	Total assets (Part X, line 16)	14,636,055.	21,380,406.
	21	Total liabilities (Part X, line 26)	2,729,723.	14,388,780.
22	Net assets or fund balances. Subtract line 21 from line 20	11,906,332.	6,991,626.	

Part II Signature Block

Under penalty of perjury, I declare that I have examined this return, including accompanying schedules and statements, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it is true, correct, and complete. Declaration of preparer (other than officer) is based on all information of which preparer has any knowledge.

A map of Colorado showing various school districts. The map is color-coded to represent different charter school categories. A central white box with a black border contains the title 'COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOL CATEGORIES'. The map shows a mix of colors across the state, with a concentration of dark red areas in the western and southern parts, and more blue and light orange areas in the northern and central parts. Major cities like Denver, Boulder, Fort Collins, and Vail are labeled.

COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOL CATEGORIES

Denver charters

CSI charters

Non-Denver, Non CSI charters

A map of Denver, Colorado, showing the city's layout with major roads and landmarks. The map is overlaid with a large number of blue location pins, indicating the locations of charter schools. The pins are densely packed in the central and northern parts of the city, with some scattered in the southern and eastern areas. The text "WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT DENVER CHARTER SCHOOLS" is centered on the map in a white box.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT DENVER CHARTER SCHOOLS

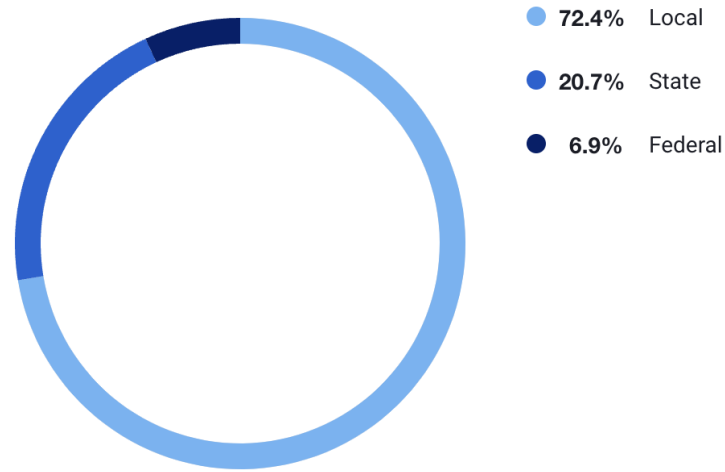
DENVER CHARTER DOLLARS

- Equal per student funding from DPS budget (72% local, 20% state, 5% federal)
- Many Denver charters receive substantial additional funding from foundations, philanthropists, individuals
- Much is not known about how these dollars are collected, whether they're blended with public dollars, whether there are strings attached, or if there's proper separation of spending between public and non-public work.

Total Revenue

\$1,588,186,000

Revenue by Source



Revenue per student

\$17,236

Total current expenses

\$1,202,856,000

Expenses per student

\$13,529

DENVER CDE PERFORMANCE RANKING 53.9: IMPROVEMENT

24 Charters
above 53.9

- 11 middle schools, 7 elementary, 6 high schools

23 Charters
below 53.9

- 11 middle schools, 7 elementary, 5 high schools

DENVER CHARTERS ARE SEGREGATED

Segregated by Location:

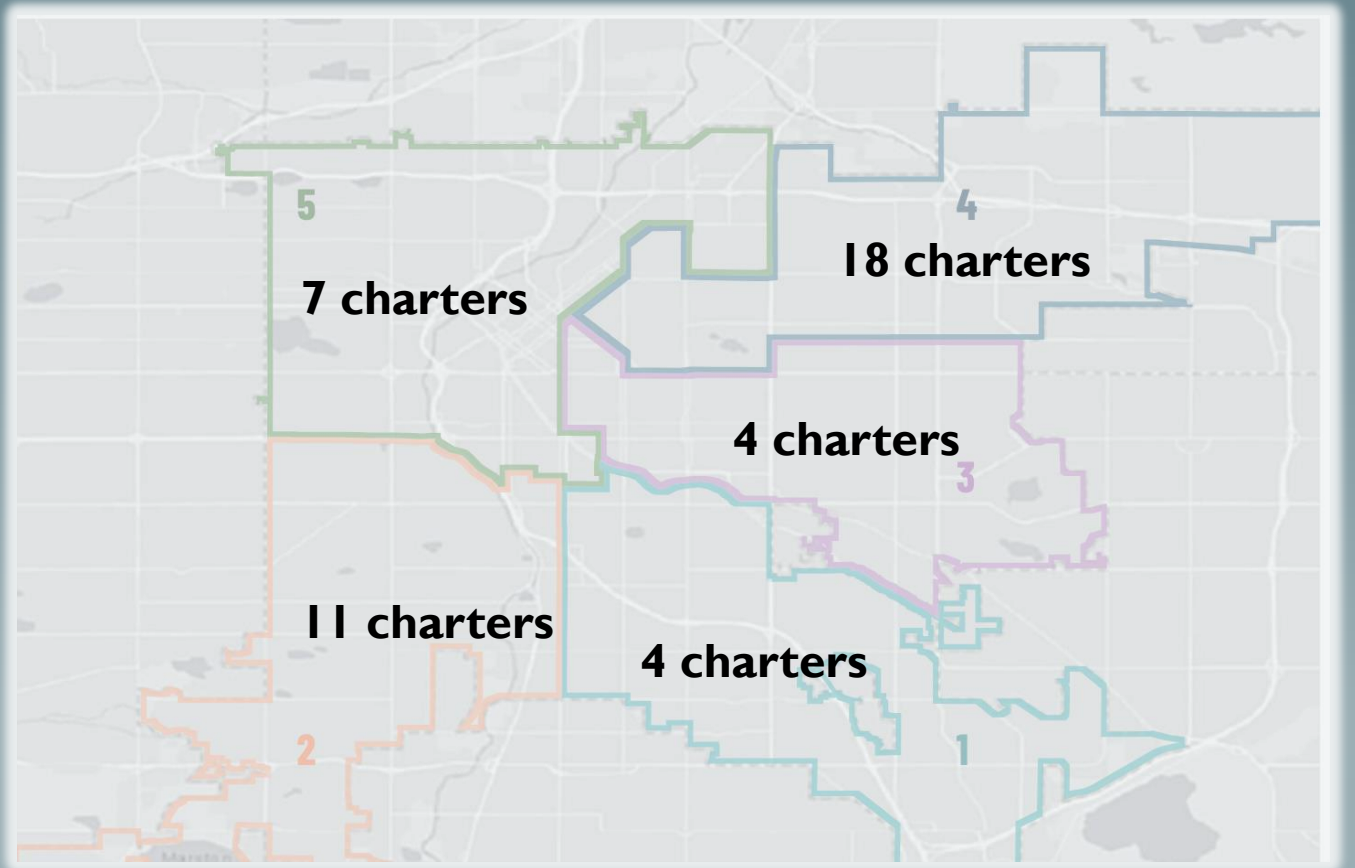
18 in District 4 Northeast

11 in District 2: Southwest

7 in District 5: North west

4 in District 3: Central

4 in District 1: Southeast



Segregated by White or Minority Students:

- **6 Integrated Schools:** 50% to 70 % minority
- **3 Majority White schools:** 0-50% White
- **43 Minority – majority:** 70% to 100% minority



**DEMOGRAPHICS:
FIVE HIGHEST AND FIVE LOWEST**

Five highest ranking DPS charters: 1 elementary, 1 high school, 3 middle schools

- **64.6% Minority**
- **29.6% ELL**
- **8% Disabled**

Five lowest ranking DPS charters: 5 elementary schools

- **87.6 % Minority**
- **46% ELL**
- **15% Disabled**



DENVER CHARTER BOARDS OF
DIRECTORS:
NETWORK SCHOOLS

DSST: 15 members from business, non profits, education, medical community. One former DSST student. Parent representation unknown.

Rocky Mountain Prep: 8 members including charter school financiers, non profit executives, lobbyists and one parent representative.

KIPP Colorado: 13 members including education consultants, non profit executives, financiers, attorneys. No parent representative.

University Prep: 9 Board officers not displayed. 8 members of executive team including manager of recruitment and manager of development and corporate partnerships.



DENVER CHARTER SCHOOLS IN BRIEF

SEGREGATION
 86% charter average to 75% district average

34 Denver charters are 90%+ minority

6 charter schools are integrated



ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

19 Denver charters educate 35%+ ELL

7 35%+ ELL rank above 53.9 score

12 35%+ ELL rank below 53.9 score



SCHOOL GRADES

Charters primarily target upper grades:

33 middle and high schools

14 elementary

5 lowest ranking schools serve lower grades



CHARTER BOARDS

Charter network boards do not reflect communities in schools.

Many have no parent or school representatives

Lack of transparency on where members live and conflicts of interest

Denver School Board and administration do not manage where charters locate, what grades are served, where charters market, how funds are distributed, or whether district goals for meeting every student's needs are followed.

A grayscale map of Colorado serves as the background. Several location pins are placed across the state, with some labeled with school names: 'High Point Academy' in the north-central region, 'Salida Montessori Char...' in the west-central region, 'Pueblo' in the south-central region, and 'Animas High School' in the southwest. The words 'United States' are faintly visible in the upper right, and 'Colorado' is visible in the center. A white rectangular box with a black border is centered on the map, containing the main title.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CSI CHARTER SCHOOLS

2023 CSI PERFORMANCE RANKING: 58.1

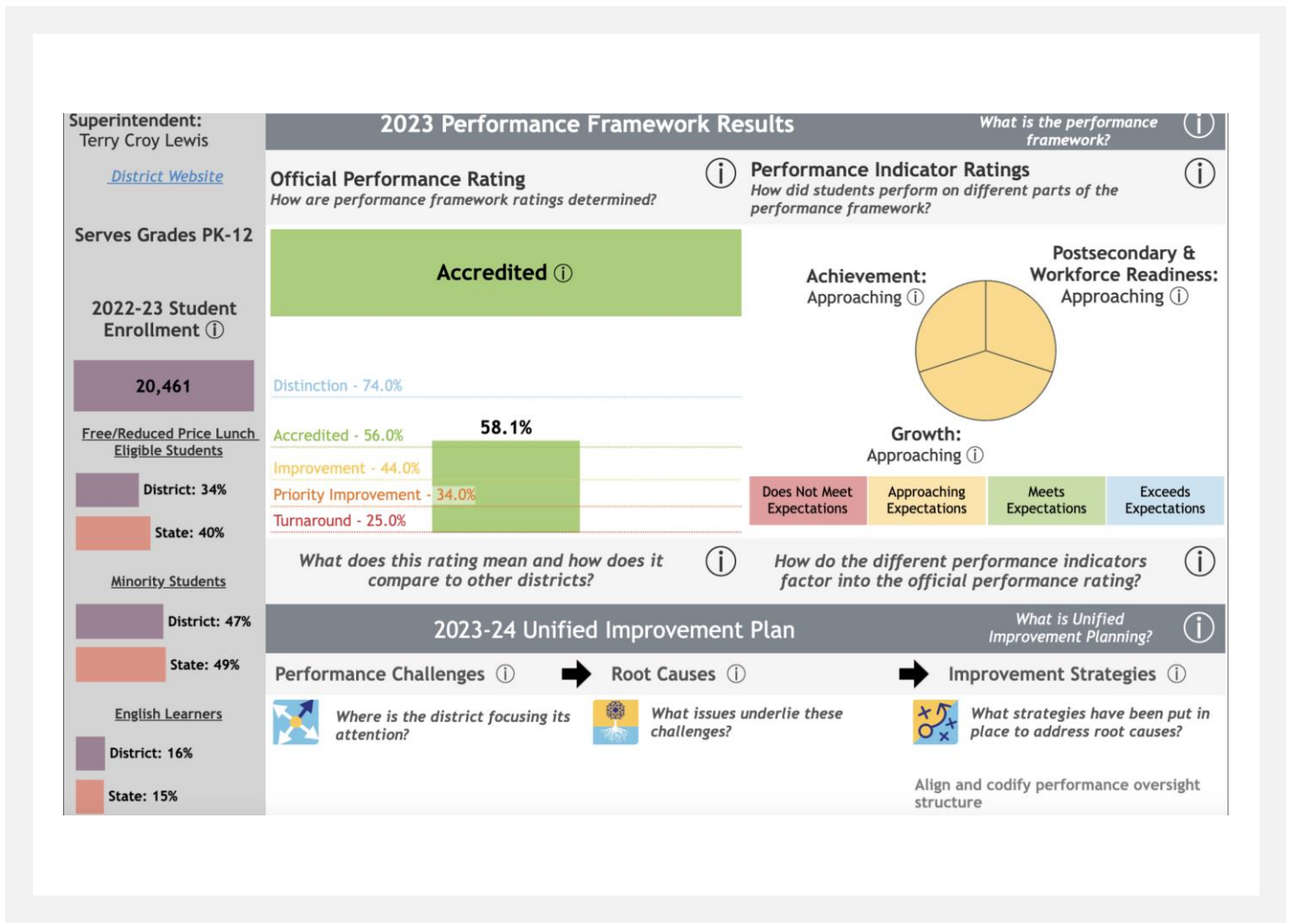
Enrollment: 23,013

43 schools

FRL: 34%; State 40%

Minority: 47%; State 49%

ELL: 16%; State 15%



CSI CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING

2023 in school total spending:
\$235,736,126

Total funding including capital:
\$311,897,912

Most from general fund, disadvantaging districts without CSI charters.

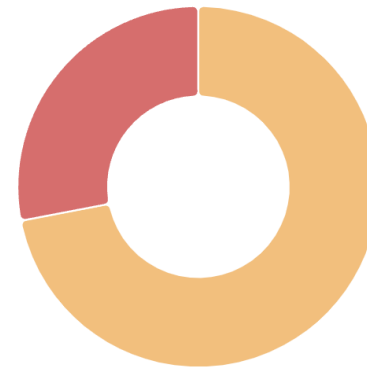
- 2023 federal funds per student: **\$853**
- 2023 state funds per student: **\$9383***
- 2023 capital dollars:
\$76,161,786

*Local district funds are not used to support CSI schools

Total District-Allocated Spending ⓘ

\$311,897,912

Totals may not sum due to rounding ⓘ



Learning Environment ⓘ

\$168,783,145

[View Learning Environment Breakdown](#)



Operations ⓘ

\$66,952,981

[View Operations Breakdown](#)

CSI CDE PERFORMANCE RANKING 58.1: ACCREDITED

12 Improvement
CSI Charters

12 Improvement Schools: 49.4 average ranking
71% minority; 35% ELL
6070 students

12 Distinction
CSI Charters

12 Distinction Schools: 80 average ranking
27% minority; 4% ELL
8028 students

Douglas County Re 1 (0900)
620 WILCOX STREET CASTLE ROCK, CO 80104

Superintendent: Erin Kane
[District Website](#)

Serves Grades PK-12

2022-23 Student Enrollment: 61,144

Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible Students: District: 11%, State: 40%

2023 Performance Framework Results

Official Performance Rating: Accredited

Performance Indicator Ratings: Achievement: Meets, Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness: Meets, Growth: Meets

Distinction - 74.0% **72.4%**

Accredited - 56.0% **72.4%**

Improvement - 44.0%

Priority Improvement - 34.0%

Turnaround - 25.0%

Does Not Meet Expectations | Approaching Expectations | Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations

Cherry Creek 5 (0130)
4700 SOUTH YOSEMITE STREET GREENWOOD VILLAGE, CO 80111

Superintendent: Christopher Smith
[District Website](#)

Serves Grades PK-12

2022-23 Student Enrollment: 50,535

Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible Students: District: 30%, State: 40%

2023 Performance Framework Results

Official Performance Rating: Accredited

Performance Indicator Ratings: Achievement: Meets, Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness: Meets, Growth: Meets

Distinction - 74.0% **64.6%**

Accredited - 56.0% **64.6%**

Improvement - 44.0%

Priority Improvement - 34.0%

Turnaround - 25.0%

Does Not Meet Expectations | Approaching Expectations | Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations

Charter School Institute

Superintendent: Terry Crox Lewis
[District Website](#)

Serves Grades PK-12

2022-23 Student Enrollment: 20,461

Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible Students: District: 34%, State: 40%

Minority Students: District: 47%, State: 49%

English Learners: District: 16%, State: 15%

2023 Performance Framework Results

Official Performance Rating: Accredited

Performance Indicator Ratings: Achievement: Approaching, Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness: Approaching, Growth: Approaching

Distinction - 74.0% **58.1%**

Accredited - 56.0% **58.1%**

Improvement - 44.0%

Priority Improvement - 34.0%

Turnaround - 25.0%

Does Not Meet Expectations | Approaching Expectations | Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations

2023-24 Unified Improvement Plan

Performance Challenges → Root Causes → Improvement Strategies

Where is the district focusing its attention? | What issues underlie these challenges? | What strategies have been put in place to address root causes?

Align and codify performance oversight structure

Denver County 1 (0880)
1860 LINCOLN ST. DENVER, CO 80203

Superintendent: Alex Marrero
[District Website](#)

Serves Grades PK-12

2022-23 Student Enrollment: 83,002

Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible Students: District: 63%, State: 40%

2023 Performance Framework Results

Official Performance Rating: Improvement

Performance Indicator Ratings: Achievement: Approaching, Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness: Approaching, Growth: Meets

Distinction - 74.0% **53.9%**

Accredited - 56.0% **53.9%**

Improvement - 44.0%

Priority Improvement - 34.0%

Turnaround - 25.0%

Does Not Meet Expectations | Approaching Expectations | Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations

Jefferson County R-1 (1420)
1829 DENVER WEST DR. BLDG #27 GOLDEN, CO 80401

Superintendent: Tracy Dorland
[District Website](#)

Serves Grades PK-12

2022-23 Student Enrollment: 74,769

Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible Students: District: 33%, State: 40%

2023 Performance Framework Results

Official Performance Rating: Accredited

Performance Indicator Ratings: Achievement: Approaching, Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness: Approaching, Growth: Meets

Distinction - 74.0% **62.2%**

Accredited - 56.0% **62.2%**

Improvement - 44.0%

Priority Improvement - 34.0%

Turnaround - 25.0%

Does Not Meet Expectations | Approaching Expectations | Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations

UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION CSI

By Geography

Colorado Springs: **6 schools** – 1 k-6; 3 k-8; 1 k-12;
1 6-12

Aurora: **6 schools** – 1 pk-k; 1 pk-6; 1 pk-8; 3 9-12;

Fort Collins/Windsor: **5 schools** – 1 k-5; 1 pk-6; 2
6-12;

1 k-11

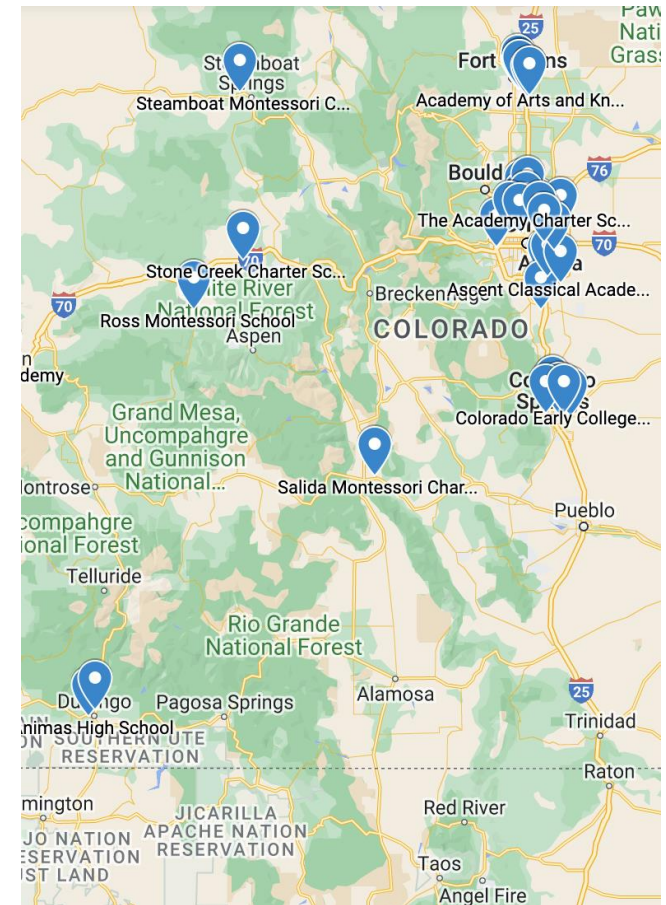
North Jefferson County: **3 schools** – 1 5-8; 1 6-12;
1-k-12

By Grade Level

27 Elementary

26 include 8th grade

18 through through high schools





**CSI BOARD OF DIRECTORS
43 SCHOOLS
\$311,897,912 BUDGET**

Business Sector:

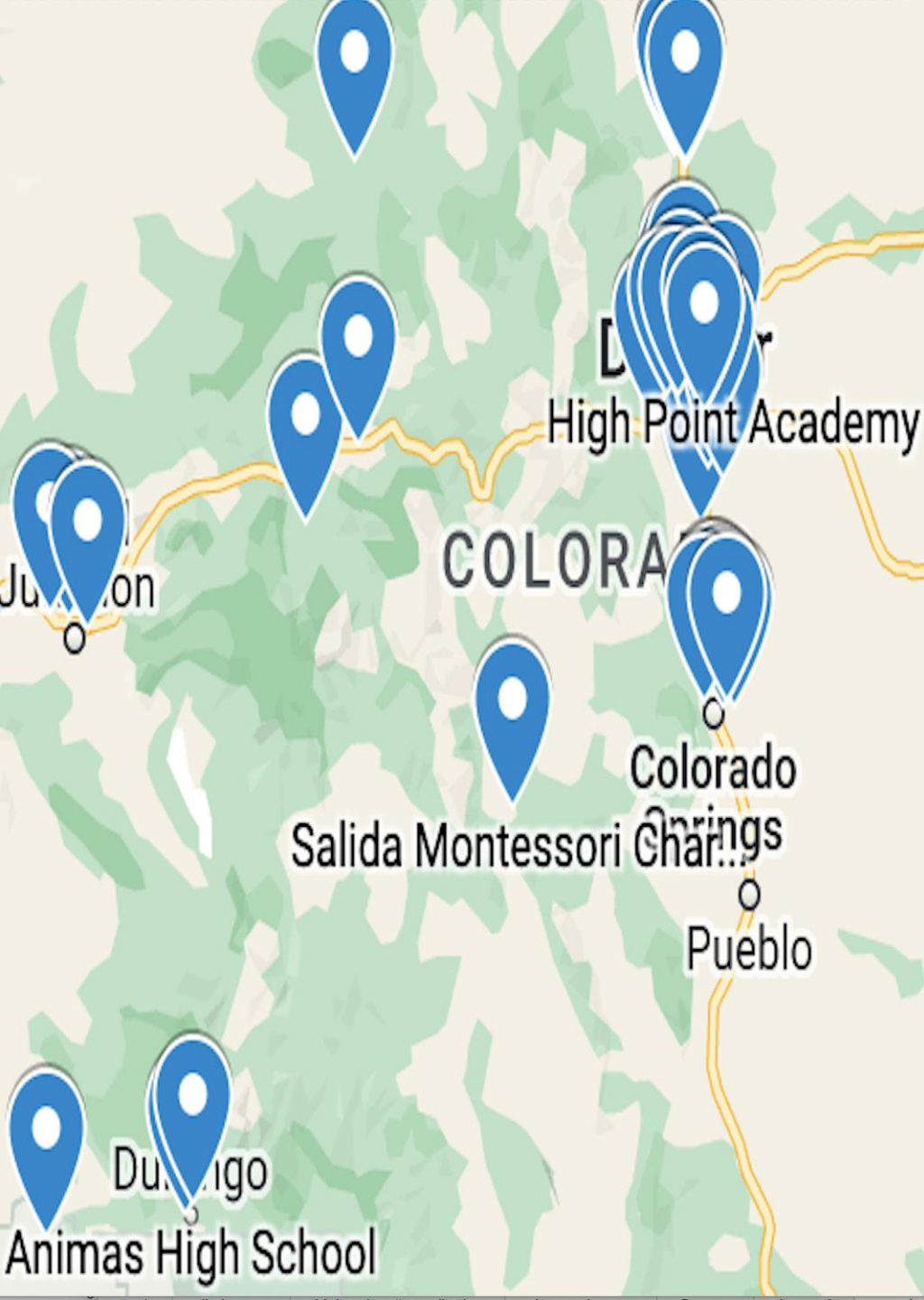
Andrew Karow, Deborah Hendrix,
Damion Lee Natali, Jill Anschutz

Government Affairs/Lobbying:

Ross Izard

Charter School Advocacy and Leadership:

Brenda Bautsch Dickhoner, Nicholas Martinez.
Kenny Smith



CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE IN BRIEF

RANKINGS

12 Schools Improvement:
71% minority, 56% FRL; 35% ELL

13 Schools Distinction:
27% minority, 22% FRL; 4% ELL

11 Schools Accredited:
58% minority; 48% FRL; 23% ELL

7 Insufficient data



GRADE LEVELS

11 serve elementary

35 serve middle school

11 serve high school



MONEY

Total Operations and Capital:
\$311,817,912

School Operations
\$235,736,126

Per Student from State:
\$13509



CHARTER BOARD

4 Business sector

1 Lobbying, public affairs

3 Charter advocacy and leadership

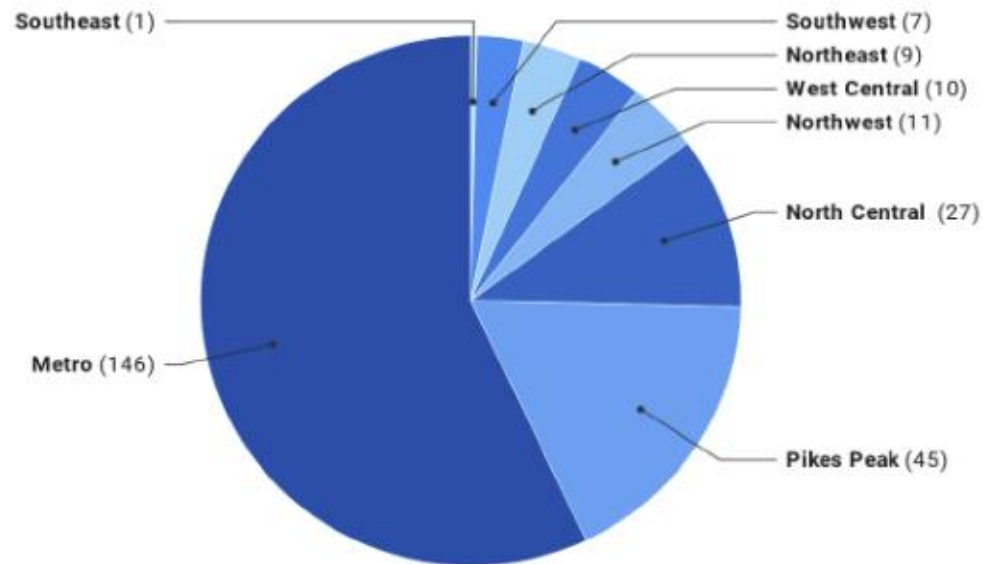
No members with reported teaching or K-12 school administration background

A grayscale map of Colorado serves as the background. Numerous location pins are scattered across the state, with some labeled with school names. Visible labels include 'High Point Academy' in the north-central region, 'Salida Montessori Char...' in the west-central region, 'Pueblo' in the south-central region, 'Animas High School' in the southwest, and 'Dodge' in the southeast. The text 'United States' is partially visible on the right side of the map.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT DISTRICT CHARTER SCHOOLS

District Charter School Distribution

- Concentrated in metro areas between Denver and Colorado Springs at 191 schools
- Northern span 47
- South span has 8



Source: Colorado Department of Education

VIEWING GRADE
LEVEL

GRADES K-5

GRADES 6-8

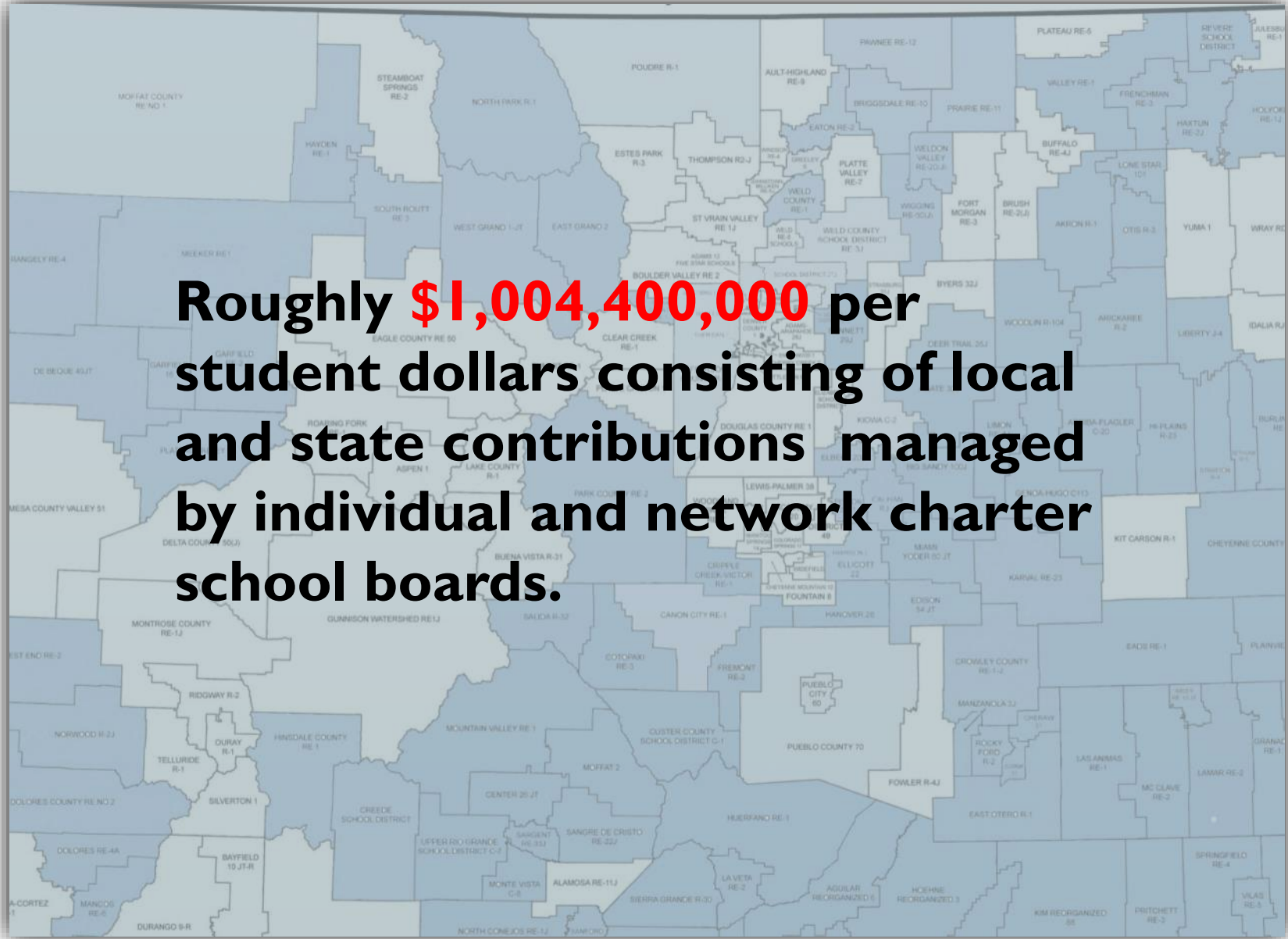
GRADES 9-12

GRADE LEVEL CONCENTRATIONS

- 36 district charters serve elementary schools
- 106 district charters serve middle schools
- 55 district charters serve up to 12th grade

DISTRICT SCHOOL DOLLARS

- Per student funding depends on district funding
- Capital funding comes from various sources in the state and district
- Additional funds from venture capital, foundations, philanthropists, individuals
- 93,000 non CSI, non Denver charter students at \$10,800 per student

A map of Colorado showing the boundaries of numerous school districts. The map is shaded in light blue and includes labels for various districts such as Moffat County, Steamboat Springs, North Park, Estes Park, Thompson, Ault-Highland, and many others. The text is overlaid on the central part of the map.

Roughly \$1,004,400,000 per student dollars consisting of local and state contributions managed by individual and network charter school boards.

DISTRICT SCHOOL AVERAGES
22, 72%+ MINORITY SCHOOLS
10,536 STUDENTS

15 Middle
Schools
6 High Schools

- Average ranking: 51.37
- 86.7 Total Participation

2 Elementary
Schools

- 41% ELL Upper grades concentration
- 68% FRL

DISTRICT SCHOOL AVERAGES
42, 35% TO 72%+ MINORITY SCHOOLS
24,658 STUDENTS

30 Middle
Schools
17 High Schools

- Average ranking: 62.74
- 87 Total Participation

5 Elementary
Schools

- 7% ELL Upper grades concentration
- 28% FRL

DISTRICT SCHOOL AVERAGES
90, 0 TO 35% MINORITY SCHOOLS
52,947 STUDENTS

54 Middle
Schools
31 High Schools

- Average ranking: 70.48
- 86.7 Total Participation

26 Elementary
Schools

- 5% ELL Upper grades concentration
- 9% FRL

DISTRICT CHARTERS IN BRIEF

RANKINGS	CONCENTRATED	MONEY	CHARTER BOARDS
22 Improvement Schools: 72% minority, 68% FRL; 41% ELL 10,536 students	190 Denver and El Paso County metro area schools	\$1,044,00,000 local and state dollars Does not include capital dollars	No consistent standards for board membership
90 Distinction Schools 0% to 35% minority; 9% FRL; 5% ELL 52,947 students	161 Middle and high schools to 36 elementary schools	\$10,800 per student average	No consistent composition related to school populations, representation of parents, or community connection
42 Accredited Schools: 62.4% minority; 28% FRL; 7% ELL 24,658 students	35,200 35% to 90% minority students to 53,000 0-35% minority students	Additional undeclared funds from venture capital, foundations, philanthropists, individuals	No consistent display of board records and access to board members

DISTRIBUTION OF ALL CO PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS TO NON-DENVER CHARTERS BY CATEGORIES

% of CO Schools	All Public Schools	Non-Denver Charter Schools
Elementary	58%	23%
Upper Grades	42%	77%
% of students minority status	49%	34%
% of students ELL	15%	10%

Uneven charter distribution by grades creates challenges for districts planning for transition of children from elementary schools to upper grades with upper grades disproportionately represented among charters.

Non-Denver charters educate substantially fewer minority and ELL students than state averages. This disproportion explains the higher number of schools of accredited and distinction rankings among charters compared to state averages and pressures on districts educating higher proportion of minority and ELL students.