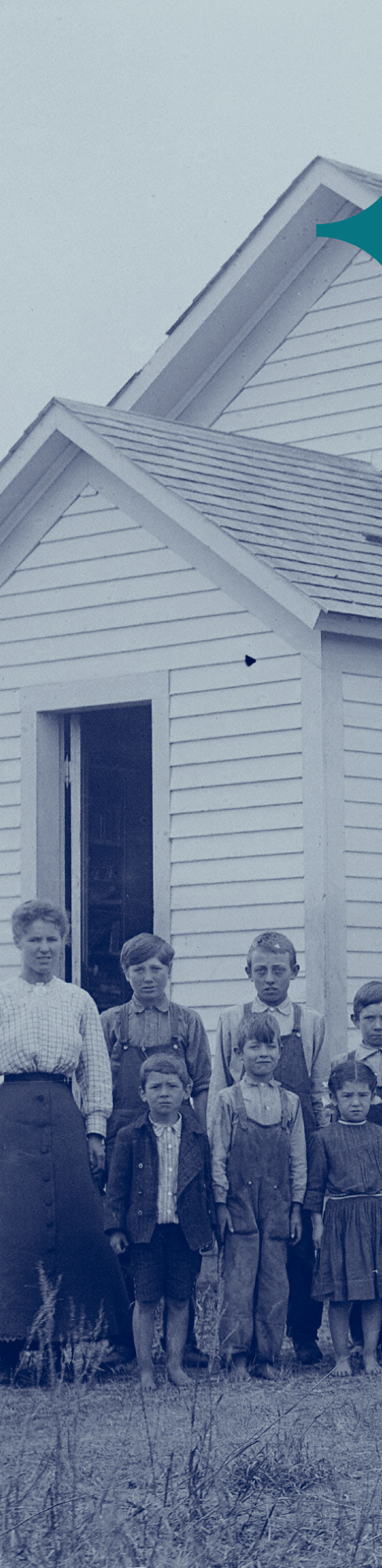




A History of Public Education and the Assembly of Services

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August 2022

Beta 
BY BELLWETHER



Introduction

Since its founding, the United States has experienced numerous transitions — the economy has shifted from agricultural to industrial to technological; our political institutions have been challenged, have survived, have strengthened, and been challenged again; our social structures have relinquished *de jure* segregation and discrimination, even as *de facto* injustices remain. Throughout, American schools have adapted. Locally sponsored schools that mostly taught young white children reading, writing, and arithmetic in the early 19th century have been replaced by a vast system of public schools that aims to prepare all children, from all walks of life, to flourish as adults.

A companion brief to this report, *Some Assembly Required: How a More Flexible Learning Ecosystem Can Better Serve All Kids and Unlock Innovation*, explores the benefits and risks of a more flexible learning ecosystem that has the potential to “foster new and more customized solutions outside large and inflexible systems; break down barriers between school, family, and community to support every aspect of a child’s growth and development; and tailor supports for students furthest from opportunity.” These changes would challenge some assumptions about the role that schools can — or should — play in meeting all the needs of all the students in their care. It is therefore important to chart how the traditional school came to exist as we know it today — as a hub through which students receive a wide range of academic and non-academic supports.

Three interwoven developments in America’s school system intersect with broader shifts in the nation’s economy, politics, and social structures — as well as our nation’s ideals: the policies and practices that influenced how schools gradually expanded to offer more supports, the legal and social structures that have made schools at times both exclusionary institutions as well as engines of equity and economic and social mobility, and the court cases that illustrate more than a century of push-and-pull between centralized systems and individual freedoms.

Public schools have gradually expanded the academic and non-academic support they provide to students

What we think of as a school today — in which students attend school outside their home and learn from unrelated adults — dates to the early colonial period, inspired by the system of education English-speaking settlers brought with them to the New World and eventually to its fledgling democracy. **As early as the 18th century**, dame schools¹ and grammar schools² provided students from families with modest means the opportunity to learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. For families with wealth and social standing, private tutors were common, while others sent their children to Latin grammar schools³ for extended education in the classics and preparation for entrance into college. But most students, especially those living and working on family farms, had little access to learning beyond what their own parents could provide.

Although the Massachusetts Bay Colony established North America's first requirement in 1642 to teach children to read and write, and added a requirement in 1647 for communities to establish public schools,⁴ it would take time before full and equitable implementation. Over a century later, after the nation was founded, public schools became increasingly common, in part due to the efforts of reformers like Horace Mann as well as federal legislation that required states entering the union to put aside land for the development of local schools.⁵ Alongside the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and waves of immigration, the Common School Movement emerged as the systematized and expansive approach that continues to define the public education system we have today.

In the **1830s**, the Common School Movement began in Massachusetts under Mann. Mann is considered America's first strong advocate for public education, which he envisioned as "free and universal, nonsectarian, democratic in method" and provided by professional teachers.⁶ The goal of this movement was to use public funding to build schools in every community that would teach citizens how to participate in a democracy and embed "nonsectarian Christian moral values" in students.⁷ The common school expanded coursework from reading, writing, and arithmetic to include grammar, geography, history, and rhetoric, among other subjects.⁸

The common school evolved **between 1850 and 1910**, enhancing coursework and supplemental activities. Schools' support for English language learners dates to this era. By 1900, a dozen states had responded to immigration by adding bilingual education laws authorizing bilingual instruction as requested by parents, with the second languages — which included French, Spanish, German, Cherokee, Norwegian, Czech, Italian, and Polish⁹ — determined by local populations.

1600

1800

1850

Schools in the **second half of the 19th century** also began to offer art, music, and science classes. One indication of the expanded adoption of art and music education in schools is the National Education Association's (NEA) creation of art and music departments in 1883 and 1884, respectively. Science instruction also became more deliberate at the end of the century due to the Industrial Revolution's technological advances and scientific progress. When the NEA's "Committee of Ten" proposed a standardized high school curriculum in 1892, it included science for all students, placing it on equal footing with math, reading, and writing.¹⁰

The school health movement, which began in the mid-1800s but picked up speed in the **early 1900s**, led schools to hire nurses. New York City was the first major city to hire school nurses in 1902. These nurses provided home visits, treated sick children, and collected resources for families based on observed need.¹¹ As the school nurse movement spread across America, states also began to pass legislation mandating health instruction and/or physical training, known as "gymnastics" or gym class.¹² While only three states passed laws requiring physical education before 1915, after World War I, 28 states had passed these laws, and by 1929 physical education was required by 46 states.¹³

The **last half of the 19th century** also saw schools add sports and extracurriculars to the slate of services and supports they provided. Not only did these experiences supplement the academic coursework students received, but also the programs provided extended supervision for children of parents who worked longer hours than the typical school day. Although competitive sports were played at some of the earliest private and boarding schools in America, interscholastic sports, in particular boys' tennis and track, began to appear in public schools between 1890 and 1900, often created through student initiatives.¹⁴ Also, in the 1890s, high schools started adding gymnasiums to their facilities, increasing the opportunity for both physical education classes and sports such as basketball.¹⁵ The number of extracurriculars also increased throughout the 19th century, modeled after newspapers, literacy and debate clubs, and other college activities.¹⁶

In addition to sports and extracurriculars, public schools in the **late 19th century** worked to meet the needs of students' out-of-school time by providing supervision through after-school and summer school programs. After-school programs emerged late in the 19th century, often in the form of drop-in centers initially known as "boys' clubs."¹⁷ By 1900, the national push for a relatively "standard" calendar of 180 school days took hold,¹⁸ and many urban districts responded by providing what were initially called "vacation schools" in the summer designed to encourage play, provide industrial training, and supervise young kids.¹⁹ The demand for safe, supervised care of students both after school and over the summer would continue in the decades ahead as more women entered the workforce and other demographic shifts occurred.²⁰

The **1900s and 1910s** saw the emergence of broader counseling and guidance services within public schools. Frank Parsons, who worked for

1900

1910

Massachusetts' Civic Service House, is credited with creating the first vocational guidance program in 1909.²¹ This program channeled students into the workforce to become "productive members of society."²² Legislation designed to promote vocational training began with the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, which focused on agriculture and home economics.²³ The 1936 George-Deen Vocational Law resulted in expanded opportunities for students to explore additional options in areas such as business and sales.²⁴ Eventually, the increase in expanded vocational guidance would lead schools to create counselor roles in support of students' overall well-being.²⁵

In the **1940s**, the National School Lunch Act passed, allowing families to complete applications for schools to provide a nutritious lunch free of charge or at a reduced price to eligible students, based on income.²⁶ Further nutritional support came in the **1960s**, when breakfast was added to the public school package as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. In particular, the 1966 Child Nutrition Act aimed to "strengthen and expand food service programs for children."²⁷ It authorized a school breakfast program to supplement the ongoing lunch program, among other nutritional supports, meaning low-income students could now receive two meals daily at school.²⁸

The **1970s** introduced changes designed to better support the mental and physical needs of every student. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, better known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed. This law requires states and school districts to protect the rights of, meet the needs of, and improve outcomes for children with disabilities.²⁹ Students with a wide range of disabilities, ranging from learning differences to the autism spectrum to physical disabilities to serious emotional disturbances, are today entitled to services, such as physical and/or occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, accommodations in teaching methods and materials, or additional support from a classroom aide.³⁰

The **1960s and 1970s** began a reevaluation of school counseling services that continues today, beginning with a call for the "development of a comprehensive program approach to school counseling."³¹ School counseling services have long struggled to balance the competing demands of the educational, vocational, and social-emotional needs of students.³² In response, the **1980s and 1990s** found states adopting models for and expanding school counseling programs to support all three aspects of student life.³³ Training programs were started that helped school districts "plan, design, and implement comprehensive school counseling programs," to meet these multifaceted student needs.³⁴

For most of the **late 20th and early 21st centuries**, public schools continued to provide a broad assembly of offerings and services, in some cases enhancing existing programs or expanding them to include more students. For instance, following the enactment of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, schools with existing athletic teams enhanced these programs to include more sports and more female participants.³⁵ By the 2010s, many schools were providing free lunch (and sometimes breakfast) for all students regardless of income eligibility.³⁶

1940

1960

1970

1980

1990

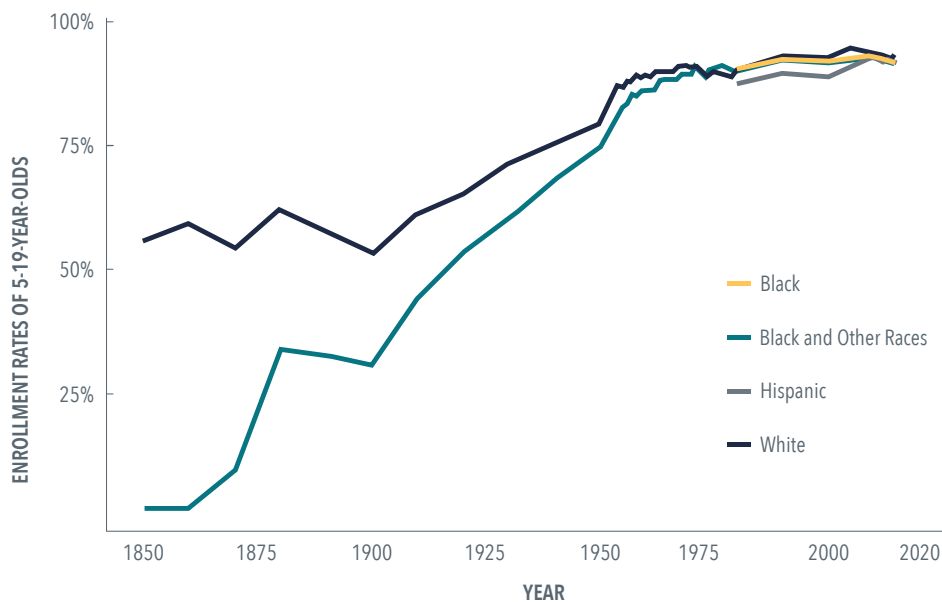
Present

Schools have expanded not only what they do but also whom they serve

As schools provided an ever-increasing scope of services, as outlined above, the population of students served by public schools also expanded, often with a refocused purpose based on the perceived needs of society and of each student population (Figure 1). At least five groups of students experienced this expansion, in some cases in ways that marginalized rather than supported them.

- First was an expansion of education to all genders and a broader age span.
- Second was the expansion of education to immigrant populations for Americanization, a process designed to align new citizens with cultural and political norms of their adopted country.³⁷
- Third was the expansion of education to Native Americans to assimilate them into the American system.
- Fourth was the expansion of education for Black and formerly enslaved Americans, an ongoing struggle to overcome exclusion, segregation, and discrimination.
- Finally, in the late 20th century, education services expanded to special education populations.

Figure 1: Enrollment Rates of 5-19-Year-Olds, 1850 Through 2018



Sources: Thomas D. Snyder (ed.), "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait," National Center for Education Statistics, 14.

Overall expansion

Before the establishment of public schools, education was disproportionately available to students who were white males under the age of 14. They learned the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic in various settings, including church-schools, locally and privately operated schools, and work apprenticeships.³⁸ Education provided the basics to those who could afford it.

Beginning in the 1830s, the Common School Movement worked to create publicly funded schools in every community that would serve all students, regardless of gender, race, or class.³⁹ The movement sought to transform both rural and urban students into “patriotic, law-abiding citizens.”⁴⁰ The pre-Civil War South, largely void of the influencing factors of urbanization and industrialization, didn’t participate in creating common schools. White children in the South, if educated outside the home, typically attended parent-organized or tuition-charging schools.⁴¹ By 1880, about 58% of American children ages 5 to 19 were enrolled in school, with similar participation for males and females.⁴² That same year, the enrollment rate for Black children was 34%, also similar across gender.⁴³

Immigrant expansion

The expansion of common schools across the country coincided with the passage of compulsory education laws in the late 19th century and early 20th century that significantly expanded the population of students enrolled in public schools. Compulsory attendance laws were first established in 1852 by Massachusetts; by the 1910s, almost every state had these laws in place. These laws varied by state and required all children, male and female, to attend school between specified ages, usually requiring attendance from ages 8 to 14.⁴⁴

These laws were designed, in part, to bring “lower class and immigrant families who did not already send their children to school” into the public education system.⁴⁵ An increase of European immigrant children who could not speak English resulted in a shift in the purpose of public education to include Americanization: immersing these students in the language and culture of the country’s founders, often at the expense of their own heritage.⁴⁶



Native American expansion

Native American students also faced a disruptive educational experience. From the founding of America, the purpose of Native American education was seen as a “‘civilizing’ or ‘assimilation’ process.”⁴⁷ Those who wanted to assimilate “young Indian children” into the “white men’s beliefs and value systems” viewed the boarding school as the solution.⁴⁸ Beginning in 1860, Native American Boarding Schools were federally funded, with the first school established on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington state.⁴⁹ The first off-reservation boarding school was established in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1879.⁵⁰ The federal government mandated attendance, so Native American families were forced to send their children to schools designed to separate them from their languages and culture.⁵¹ Beginning in the 1900s, some efforts were made to improve educational opportunities for Native American students, but Indigenous people were not consulted about these planned reforms, furthering the long-standing gap between what Native communities desired and what the government provided.⁵²

In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act shifted from the federal policy of assimilation through the boarding school system to introducing Native American history and culture in schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.⁵³ In 1972, the Indian Education Act was passed, acknowledging the unique needs of Alaska Native and American Indian students.⁵⁴ In part, this legislation was designed to focus on Native Americans’ education needs while reaffirming the “special responsibility” of the federal government to serve these populations.⁵⁵

In 2006, the oversight agency known as the Office of Indian Education Programs became the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The mission of BIE is to provide quality educational opportunities aligned with tribal cultural and economic needs in support of well-being.⁵⁶ Currently, the BIE serves about 46,000 Native American students in 183 schools across 23 states on 64 reservations.⁵⁷

Black and formerly enslaved expansion

Black students in the North and the South historically experienced exclusionary education practices. In the North, Black student attendance increased during the 19th century but only rarely met or exceeded white enrollment percentages.⁵⁸ Before the Civil War, it was against the law to educate enslaved individuals in the South.⁵⁹ After the war, schools were racially segregated, and Black students attended overcrowded schools housed in inferior facilities with few resources, few teachers, and limited books.⁶⁰ Despite this, post-Civil War Black families “were determined to win the educational opportunities that formed the basis of citizenship” and sought to use their new political power to expand universal public education.⁶¹



The second half of the 20th century was notable for a focus on civil rights and legislation designed to serve every student more equitably in America. In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” educational facilities for white and minority students were unconstitutional, violating the U.S. Constitution’s equal protection clause.⁶² Segregation was found by the court to have a “hugely detrimental effect on the education and personal growth of African American children.”⁶³

After the court decision, many white families moved out of their diverse communities, creating de facto segregation for the students of color left behind.

Today, one in six students attends a public school where 90% or more of their peers represent the same racial group.⁶⁴ According to recent research, white-Black segregation in large school districts has increased over the last 30 years by 35%.⁶⁵

Special education expansion

Before the 1975 passage of IDEA, many students with exceptionalities were “denied access to education and opportunities to learn.”⁶⁶ Public schools in 1970 educated only one in five students with disabilities; many states had exclusionary laws prohibiting public education for “children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or had an intellectual disability.”⁶⁷

IDEA resulted in bringing many special education students back into their neighborhood schools rather than attending institutions or separate schools that were previously the only option. Policies governing special education today prioritize students’ inclusion in the “least restrictive environment” possible.⁶⁸

The expansion of public school services has coexisted with expansions outside the system

While the Common School Movement evolved into the comprehensive system of public schools we have today, it didn't do so in a vacuum. More students and their families participated in public schooling, but others continued to forge paths outside the system — often igniting fierce debates about the public nature of schooling, the balance between uniformity and customization, and shared versus individual benefits. As far back as national enrollment data is available, some families have enrolled their children in private rather than public schools, and about one in 10 families continues to do so (Figure 2).⁶⁹ Home-schooling has included about 2-3% of school-age children in recent decades (before a spike during the COVID-19 pandemic)⁷⁰ after becoming a more common and mainstream practice in the late 20th century.

Some families have consistently looked to private schools, home-schooling, or other out-of-system

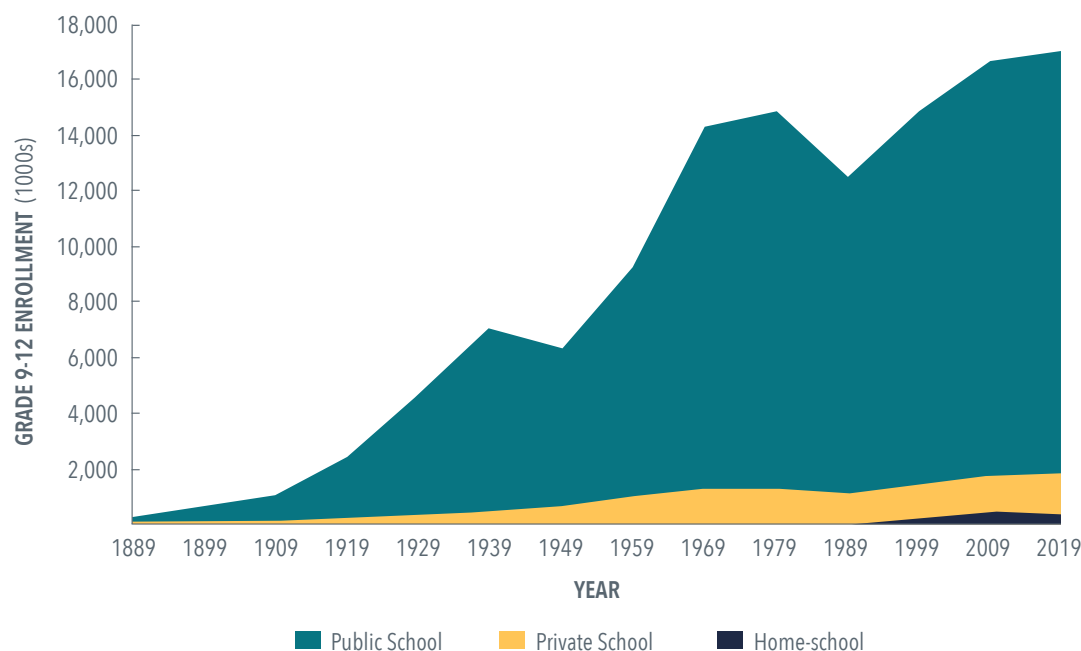
solutions in response to exclusionary policies and practices in the public school system.

In the case of private schooling, Catholic families sought private school options when public schools taught Protestant values and beliefs.⁷¹ In the 19th century, anti-Catholicism was on the rise in America,⁷² and Protestant religious practices in public schools were common. At least until the Supreme Court ruled against school prayer in the early 1960s, it led to a rapid expansion of parochial schools.⁷³ For instance, by 1870, roughly 19% of New York City children — more than 22,000 — were attending Catholic schools.⁷⁴

Also in the early 20th century, after the collapse of Reconstruction and the emergence of Jim Crow laws, formerly enslaved Americans in the South were shunted into meagerly funded and segregated schools. Philanthropically funded Rosenwald schools — established in a partnership between Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington — offered these families another solution.⁷⁵

When integration began after *Brown v. Board of Education*, many white families also sought out suburban public schools or private school options that served a uniformly white student population.⁷⁶

Figure 2: Grade 9-12 Public and Private School Enrollment Since 1889



Source: [National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 201.20."](#)

[National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 206.10."](#)

With the passage of compulsory education laws, home-schooling became a fringe and even illegal practice for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Though *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* ostensibly granted families the ability to opt out of the public school system, it wasn't until *Wisconsin v. Yoder* in 1972 that the Supreme Court confirmed families' right to home-school and it wasn't until 1993 that all 50 states had home-schooling policies.⁷⁷ Distinct from the home-schooling practiced on the American frontier before the mid-19th century, the home-schooling that gained traction in the late 20th century in many cases involved political and religious beliefs (e.g., political liberals seeking idealistic, alternative societies; religious parents looking to reinforce conservative Christian values).⁷⁸



Home-schooling today, while still attracting families seeking either a more progressive or more conservative educational environment, also includes an increasingly diverse range of family interests. Home-schooling is often chosen by parents of children who have been bullied or underserved. In some cases, students with special athletic, artistic, and other talents are home-schooled for more convenient scheduling. Most recently, many more Black families have sought to home-school their children, with anecdotal data suggesting a desire to ensure their children have identity-affirming educational experiences.⁷⁹

Finally, families have long sought supplemental learning experiences for their children outside of school. By the mid-20th century, increasing interest in attending college drove some parents, particularly middle- and high-income white parents, to seek tutoring and

supplemental learning experiences for children such as summer camps, private tutoring, and club sports. In 2001, President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) leveraged supplemental supports to help address the achievement gaps between racial and socio-economic subgroups. NCLB required Title I schools "in need of improvement" to provide Supplemental Educational Services (SES), including tutoring from state-approved providers, free of charge.⁸⁰ Participation in SES was never high⁸¹ and the federal requirement to offer SES was waived in 2011.⁸² Since then, many schools have sought to provide supplemental tutoring to students through individual initiatives at the school or district level, or by partnering with third-party organizations.⁸³

Throughout the history of the United States, families have sought alternatives or supplements to public schools. A series of seminal rulings from the Supreme Court have increasingly leaned toward expanding rather than limiting families' choices.

These key court cases centered around the constitutional principles of parental rights and the separation of church and state. Specifically, this includes the Establishment Clause, which prohibits the government from establishing a religion, and the Free Exercise Clause, which allows citizens to practice their religion as they choose if it does not conflict with "public morals" or a "compelling" government interest.⁸⁴

In 2022, the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* ruling further reflects the court's evolving interpretation of the Establishment Clause by anchoring on "reference to historical practices and understandings," rather than the previously used understanding of actions as an "endorsement" of religion.⁸⁵ The recent *Espinoza* and *Carson* cases follow a similar track (Sidebar 1). The Supreme Court determined that states could no longer rely on Blaine Amendments to exclude religious schools from private school choice programs.⁸⁶ Many states in the late 19th century passed "Blaine Amendments" to their state constitutions. Named for Senator James Blaine of Maine, these amendments prohibited public education funds or resources from flowing to religious schools or organizations.⁸⁷

1925

Pierce v. Society of Sisters

- Oregon state legislature Compulsory Education Act of 1922 required parents/guardians “to send children between the ages of 8 and 16 to public school in the district where the children resided.”⁸⁸
- Society of Sisters, an organization caring for orphans and other youth through academies or schools, challenged this law, which was initiated by the Ku Klux Klan and Masons and reflected deeply rooted anti-Catholicism, fear of Bolshevism, and discomfort with the increase in immigrant populations.⁸⁹
- The Taft Supreme Court unanimous decision dated June 1, 1925, found the Act to conflict with the “right of parents to choose schools,” the “right of the child to influence the parents’ choice of a school,” and the “right of schools and teachers ... to engage in a useful business or profession.”⁹⁰

1971

Lemon v. Kurtzman

- Pennsylvania and Rhode Island enacted statutes designed to provide state funding for certain aspects of “non-secular, non-public education.” Pennsylvania’s statute, passed in 1968, provided funding for teacher salaries, textbooks, and “instructional materials for secular subjects” to primarily religious schools.⁹¹
- Pennsylvania resident and appellant Alton Lemon (and others) challenged the statute as a violation of the First Amendment’s provision for the separation of church and state.⁹²
- The Burger Court’s unanimous decision dated June 28, 1971, held that Pennsylvania’s (and Rhode Island’s) statutes “constituted an excessive government entanglement with religion” and must be removed.⁹³

1972

Wisconsin v. Yoder

- Wisconsin statute required all parents to send their children to public school through age 16.
- Jonas Yoder and two other parents from conservative religious orders brought a suit against Wisconsin, arguing that their religious beliefs did not support high school attendance.⁹⁴
- The Burger Court unanimous decision dated May 15, 1972, ruled that an individual’s rights under the First Amendment’s free exercise of religion clause “outweighed the state’s interests in compelling school attendance beyond eighth grade.”⁹⁵

2002

Zelman v. Simmons-Harris

- In 1996, Ohio piloted a program in Cleveland to provide tuition aid (vouchers) to students with financial need, permitting parents to enroll students in schools of their choice, including private religious schools.⁹⁶

- Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction and appellant Susan Tave Zelman, along with other Ohio taxpayers, challenged the program as violating the Establishment Clause.⁹⁷
- The Rehnquist Court 5-4 decision dated June 27, 2002, ruled that the voucher program did not violate the Establishment Clause as the individual educational choice was made by parents and not determined or dictated by the government.⁹⁸

2020

Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue

- Montana enacted a tax credit to contributors to private, nonprofit scholarship organizations in 2015 providing scholarships to low-income families. This was shortly followed by "Rule 1," which prohibited using these scholarships to attend religious schools based on a state constitutional prohibition of "direct or indirect" public funding of educational programs with a religious affiliation.⁹⁹
- Petitioner Kendra Espinoza and other parents filed a lawsuit challenging Rule 1.
- The Roberts Court 5-4 decision dated June 30, 2020, ruled that the "no-aid" provision of Rule 1 "discriminated against religious schools" and families sending their children there, "in violation of the Free Exercise Clause."¹⁰⁰

2022

Carson v. Makin

- Local school administrative units (SAUs) in Maine are required to provide school-age children access to a free education. In some communities where public secondary schools do not exist, the SAU can contract with a secondary school elsewhere to provide these services or pay tuition for local students to attend another school. In both cases, an "approved" school is nonsectarian and must meet state or regional accreditation standards.
- David Carson and other litigants sought tuition payments for their children who attended private religious schools.¹⁰¹
- The Roberts Court 6-3 decision on June 21, 2022, ruled that tuition assistance should be provided for students at religious or sectarian schools.¹⁰² They ruled that this does not violate the Establishment Clause or the Free Exercise Clause.

Kennedy v. Bremerton School District

- Bremerton, Washington, public high school football coach Joseph Kennedy was fired in 2015 by the school district for post-game individual prayer on the football field.¹⁰³
- Kennedy filed suit against the Bremerton district under the reasoning that his firing violated both the Free Speech and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment.¹⁰⁴
- The Roberts Court 6-3 decision on June 27, 2022, ruled that the Free Speech and Free Exercise clauses protect "personal religious observance from government reprisal."¹⁰⁵

In practice, legislation, and court rulings, the United States has a long history of enabling families to shape their child's education. With the advent of charter schools in the 1990s and the expansion of public school choice within and across districts, more families have some alternatives to choose from (Table 1). Even so, more work is required to ensure that families have equitable access to these options and the support to ensure their children get the education they need and deserve.

Table 1: Overview of Public and Private School Students Served Today

	Public schools 2020 ¹⁰⁶	Private schools 2019 ¹⁰⁷
Total enrollment	49,375,467	5,485,800
White	45.8%	65.6% ¹⁰⁸
Black	15.0%	9.4%
Hispanic	28.0%	11.8%
Asian	5.4%	6.6%
Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.7%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.9%	0.6%
Two or more races	4.5%	5.3%
Free and reduced-price meal; low-income	52.3% (2019) ¹⁰⁹	N/A
English language learner	10.4% (2019) ¹¹⁰	2.6% (2012) ¹¹¹
Special education	14.5% ¹¹²	7.1% (2012) ¹¹³

Conclusion

America's public education system is no longer providing a limited number of services to a small segment of the school-age population. A majority of public-school students (54.2%) are students of color, many of whom have experienced marginalization, racism, and barriers to success at some point in, if not throughout, their educational trajectory. One in 10 students is an English language learner. More than half of today's students are from low-income families. Almost one in every seven students receives special education services under IDEA. All these groups have faced persistent inequities in outcomes that have necessitated the expansion of services designed to provide equitable opportunities to disadvantaged students.

Public schools are at the center of efforts to better meet the needs of *all* students, gradually tasked over the past 150 years with meeting more needs of more students. In the current moment fraught with school-related tensions of a pandemic, school shootings, racial reckoning, and renewed parental involvement due to social and educational concerns, education leaders must determine whether it's fair or reasonable to ask public schools to meet so many consequential student needs and — if not — what an alternative approach might be. ✨

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Beta by Bellwether is an initiative to jump-start bold solutions to structural problems in the education sector. Beta moves beyond imagining a new sector by bringing together viewpoint- and experience-diverse teams from across education to create blueprints and tools for leaders around the United States. Our goal is to help build an education system that better serves all young people — particularly those from systemically marginalized communities — and models a new way forward for the sector. For more, visit bellwether.org/beta.



Bellwether is a national nonprofit that exists to transform education to ensure systemically marginalized young people achieve outcomes that lead to fulfilling lives and flourishing communities. Founded in 2010, we work hand in hand with education leaders and organizations to accelerate their impact, inform and influence policy and program design, and share what we learn along the way. For more, visit bellwether.org.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many individuals who gave their time and shared their knowledge with us to inform our work on this project, including the Advisory Group for their participation in Beta by Bellwether's Assembly initiative. We are particularly grateful to Stand Together Trust for its financial support of this work.

We would also like to thank our Bellwether colleagues Andrew J. Rotherham, Kateland Beals, Linea Koehler, Liz McNamee, and Alexis Richardson. Thank you to Lerner Communications, Valentina Payne, Alyssa Schwenk, Abby Marco, Zoe Campbell, Julie Nguyen, and Amber Walker for shepherding and disseminating this work, and to Matterlab and Super Copy Editors.

The contributions of these individuals and entities significantly enhanced our work; however, any errors in fact or analysis remain the responsibility of the authors.



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