Distribution of Public and Private Schools: Wisconsin

In the United States, about 91% of students—more than 49 million—attend one of the nation's 99,000+ public schools.[1] Approximately 29,727 private schools educate 4.7 million (less than 9%) of the nation's students. Most private schools (83.4%) are in or close to urban or suburban areas; only 16.6% are in distant or remote regions.[2] A 2017 study found that only one third of students in rural areas have access to a private school within a 5-mile radius.[3] Most private schools (66%) have a religious orientation.

Why look at public and private school distribution?

As of January 2025, 34 states have policies in place to provide vouchers to parents to pay for non-public school costs.[4] School vouchers—sometimes referred to as tax-credit scholarships, universal school choice, or education savings accounts—allow funding systems to use public funds for private schools. The U.S. Congress is also considering legislation that would utilize the tax code to create a type of school voucher program for families that use non-public schools. This analysis of public and private school distribution provides information on where vouchers would likely be allocated.

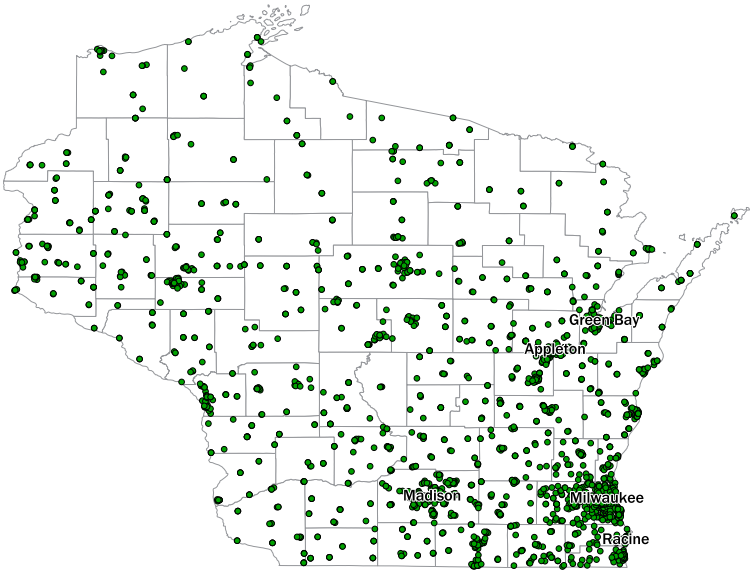
Wisconsin facts

The following information comes from the National Center for Education Statistics for the 2021–22 school year.

Key facts:

- There are 2,243 public schools in Wisconsin.
- There are an estimated 886 private schools in Wisconsin—28.3% of all schools in the state. An estimated 85 of these private schools are nonsectarian.
- Wisconsin's private schools educate 14.0% of students in the state.
- 64.9% of private schools in Wisconsin are in urban or suburban areas.

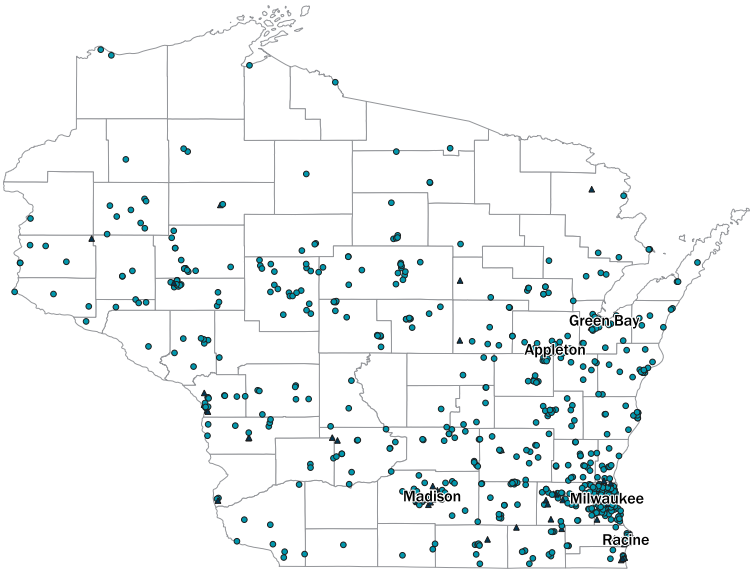
Figure 1. Public Schools in Wisconsin, 2021–22



- Public schools

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Common Core of Data*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/ccddata.asp (accessed 02/28/2025).

Figure 2. Private Schools in Wisconsin, 2021–22



Private schools
- Religious
- Nonsectarian

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Private School Universe Survey, 2021–22*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/ (accessed 02/28/2025).

Table 1. Student Enrollment, 2021–22

School type	Wisconsin		United States	
	Enrollment[a]	Percentage	Enrollment[a]	Percentage
Public[b]	829,359	86.0%	49,342,118	91.3%
Private	134,527	14.0%	4,731,303	8.7%

Table 2. Number of Schools, 2021–22

School type	Wisconsin		United States	
	Number of schools	Percentage	Number of schools	Percentage
Public[b]	2,243	71.7%	99,271	77.0%
Private	886	28.3%	29,727	23.0%

Table 3. Location of Private Schools, 2021–22

School location[c]	Wisconsin		United States	
	Number of schools	Percentage	Number of schools	Percentage
Urban/Suburban	574	64.9%	24,782	83.4%
Distant and Remote—Rural and Town	311	35.1%	4,945	16.6%

Table 4. Religious Affiliation of Private Schools, 2021–22

School type[d]	Wisconsin		United States	
	Number of schools	Percentage	Number of schools	Percentage
Religious	800	90.4%	19,628	66.0%
Nonsectarian	85	9.6%	10,099	34.0%

[a] Student enrollment data do not include students who are homeschooled.

[b] Public schools include both district and charter schools.

[c] Urban/Suburban includes schools defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as urban and suburban and schools designated as fringe towns and fringe rural. Distant and remote schools are those located in towns or rural areas that are defined as distant or remote by the National Center for Education Statistics. See National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Locale classifications and criteria*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/locale/definitions (accessed 02/28/2025). The estimates included in these tables for distant and remote schools may be less precise in states with small numbers.

[d] The estimates included in these tables for nonsectarian schools may be less precise in states with small numbers.

Sources: All public and private school data represent the 2021–22 school year, the most recent available for private schools. The source of data for public schools is the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data (https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/). The source of data for private schools is the National Center for Education Statistics Private School Universe Survey (https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/). Data were accessed 02/28/2025.

Research notes

- All public and private school data represent the 2021–22 school year, the most recent available for private schools.
- Public school data are drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Common Core of Data*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/ccddata.asp (accessed 02/28/2025).
- Private school data are drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Private School Universe Survey, 2021–22*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/ (accessed 02/28/2025). On average, 75% of a state's private schools responded to the survey. Percentages mapped vary by state.
- The estimates included in these tables for distant/remote and nonsectarian schools may be less precise in states with small numbers.

Endnotes

1. National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, February). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2022*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/ (accessed 02/28/2025).
2. Urban/Suburban includes schools defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as urban and suburban and schools designated as fringe towns and fringe rural. Distant and remote schools are those located in towns or rural areas that are defined as distant or remote by the National Center for Education Statistics. See National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Locale classifications and criteria*. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/locale/definitions (accessed 02/28/2025).
3. Chingos, M., & Blagg, K. (2017). *Who could benefit from school choice? Mapping access to public and private schools*. The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/who-could-benefit-from-school-choice-mapping-access-to-public-and-private-schools/
4. EdChoice. *School Choice in America Dashboard* [Interactive tool]. https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice-in-america-dashboard-scia/ (accessed 02/28/2025).

Acknowledgments

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Questions? Please contact info@learningpolicyinstitute.org.

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