

EDUCATION

# The incredible savings private and home schooling families offer taxpayers

By Chris Cargill  
President

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**MOUNTAIN STATES**  
POLICY CENTER





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## Introduction

Expanding education choice will no-doubt be on the mind of legislators who return to state capitols during their 2025 legislative sessions. Some states have been eager to expand their choice offerings, while others have been more reluctant.

One of the most common arguments made against offering more choice options for families is that it would be too expensive for state taxpayers, or that families who choose to send their child to a school outside of the public K-12 system should be left to fend for themselves financially.

These arguments center the conversation of choice on money, rather than on what's best for the child's education. They also have a fatal flaw: they ignore the overwhelming savings – in the billions of dollars – that private and home school families are voluntarily offering to the state by paying their taxes while refusing the government offering of public schooling.

Few policymakers – if any – thank families who make that choice. Few public school leaders recognize the value of a strong choice system that can help relieve overcrowding and allow them to focus *more* dollars on the classroom – dollars that should have been allocated to a child's education.

A public accounting of the private and home school savings has, to our knowledge, never been released. That is, until the publication of this report.

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

*On average, the state of Idaho now spends \$8,472 per student, per year on K-12 schooling. This does not include large sums at the local level, approved via levies and bonds, as well as any federal dollars.*

*Idaho does not require reporting on schooling outside of the K-12 system, and as a result, estimates are often the only data available.*

**Idaho**

*Public education spending & enrollment*

The Gem State is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, with more than 300,000 K-12 public school students. Over the past decade, Idaho’s public school enrollment has grown nearly nine percent. However, like most other states, those numbers could have been higher were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic which has seemingly kept enrollment flat. As a percentage of the eligible population, public school enrollment in Idaho has declined to 77.1% as of the 2023-24 school year.

Like many other states, Idaho has dramatically increased K-12 spending over the past decade. In fact, Idaho has more than doubled the state allocation to public education. On average, the state of Idaho now spends \$8,472 per student, per year on K-12 schooling.<sup>5</sup> This does not include large sums at the local level, approved via levies and bonds, as well as any federal dollars. In some of the state’s largest districts, the amount spent per student increases to as much as \$15,000 per student, per year.

	K-12 Public School Enrollment	K-12 Public School Enrollment (as %)	Public Charter Enrollment (as %)	*Private School Enrollment	*Private School Enrollment (as %)	*Home schooling students	*Home schooling students (as %)
2023-24	318,660	77.1%	8.4%	17,207	5.4%	19,438	6.1%
2022-23	318,979	79.8%	8.8%	18,181	5.7%	20,095	6.3%
2021-22	316,159	81.3%	8.4%	14,227	4.5%	19,918	6.3%
2020-21	310,653	80.0%	9.6%	14,290	4.6%	18,949	6.1%
2019-20	311,191	81.5%	7.7%	14,314	4.6%	24,895	8.0%
2018-19	307,228	81.6%	7.1%	15,054	4.9%	19,048	6.2%
2017-18	300,520	82.7%	6.5%	15,627	5.2%	18,031	6.0%
2016-17	298,787	83.0%	6.5%	14,341	4.8%	17,030	5.7%
2015-16	283,332	83.6%	6.2%	12,749	4.5%	16,149	5.7%
2014-15	291,022	83.3%	6.2%	9,636	4.4%	17,752	6.1%

\*Indicates estimate based on data compiled from State Board of Education and U.S. Census bureau

*Private school enrollment and home schooling*

It is more challenging to provide exact data on the number of private school students throughout the state of Idaho. Idaho does not require reporting on schooling outside of the K-12 system, and as a result, estimates are often the only data available.<sup>6</sup> In 2021-22, for example, we estimate that at least 14,227 students attended the 160 private schools in Idaho, equaling about 4.5% of the

<sup>5</sup> Idaho K-12 education spending, Idaho General Fund, years 2014-2024, available at <https://legislature.idaho.gov/iso/bpa/budgetinformation/agency/?YEAR=2024&FA=2.Education&DFP=Public%20School%20Support>  
<sup>6</sup> Engage by EdChoice, Exploring where America’s students are educated, 2024, available at <https://www.edchoice.org/engage/2024-edchoice-share-exploring-where-americas-students-are-educated/>

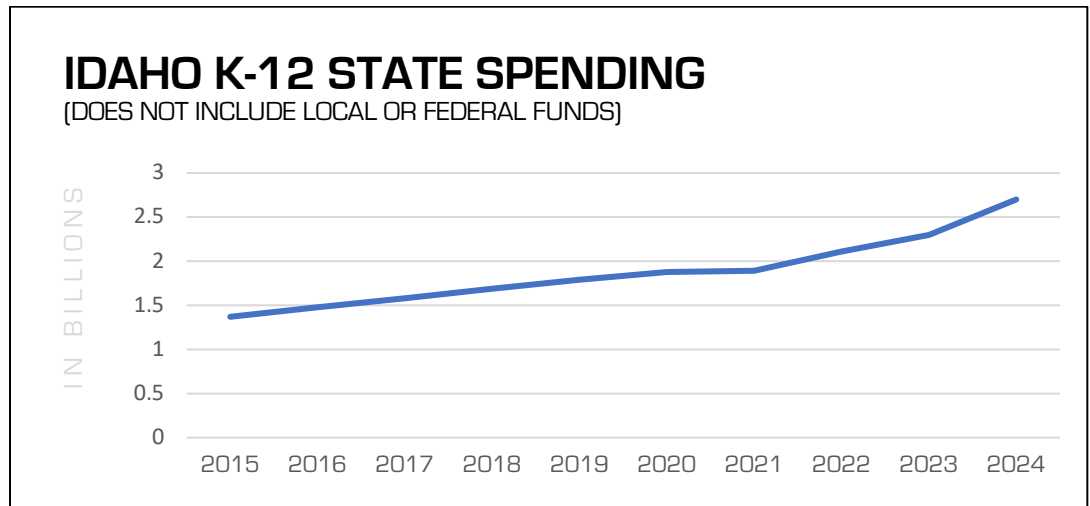


**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

*Based on state estimates of public schooling and data provided by the U.S. Census bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, we can estimate that nearly 20,000 Idaho students are home schooled – or roughly 6.1% of the total population of students.*

entire population of eligible students.<sup>7</sup> In 2023-24, that number reportedly increased to 5.4%, although some national estimates conclude the numbers are slightly higher.<sup>8</sup>

Idaho also does not regulate or monitor home schooling. Therefore, it is difficult to know the exact number of children who learn at home. However, based on state estimates of public schooling and data provided by the U.S. Census bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, we can estimate that nearly 20,000 Idaho students are home schooled – or roughly 6.1% of the total population of students.<sup>9</sup>



	Total State K-12 Spending	Spending Per Public School Student, Per Year (state only)	Total Students in Private & Home schooling	Net Savings to State
2024	\$2.70 billion	\$8,472	36,645	\$310.4 million
2023	\$2.32 billion	\$7,273	38,276	\$278.3 million
2022	\$2.11 billion	\$6,674	34,145	\$227.8 million
2021	\$1.89 billion	\$6,084	33,239	\$202.2 million
2020	\$1.88 billion	\$6,041	39,209	\$236.8 million
2019	\$1.79 billion	\$5,826	34,102	\$198.6 million
2018	\$1.69 billion	\$5,623	33,658	\$189.2 million
2017	\$1.58 billion	\$5,288	31,371	\$165.8 million
2016	\$1.48 billion	\$5,223	28,898	\$150.9 million
2015	\$1.37 billion	\$4,706	27,390	\$128.8 million
<b>TOTAL 10-YEAR SAVINGS:</b>				<b>\$2.089 billion</b>

<sup>7</sup> Idaho K-12 enrollment trends and patterns, by Dr. Bas van Doorn, Idaho State Board of Education, June 5, 2024, available at <https://boardofed.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Demographic-Projections-Final-B-van-Doorn-June-2024.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Private School Review, 2024-25 school year, available at <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/idaho#:~:text=For%20the%202024%2D25%20school,national%20average%20of%2011%25>

<sup>9</sup> Idaho State Dashboard, Private school education, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest-dashboard/state/idaho>

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

*Idaho taxpayers have saved at least \$2 billion over the last 10 years thanks to the families who send children to private school or who home school.*

*Enrollment in K-12 public schools in the Evergreen State peaked in 2019 but has declined by more than 40,000 since Washington state implemented drastic COVID lockdowns and kept schools closed for months on end.*

*The Idaho savings*

The analysis shows more than 36,000 students in Idaho attend class in a private or home school setting, meaning a \$310 million savings to taxpayers in the most recent school year. Over the past decade, families in Idaho who have chosen private, or home schooling have saved the state more than \$2 billion – nearly as much as the entire Idaho K-12 budget.

**Washington**

*Public education spending & enrollment*

Washington state lawmakers are spending more on K-12 public education than ever before. In fact, at more than \$14 billion per year, it makes up roughly 50% of the state’s general fund budget. State only funding is more than \$13,000 per student, per year on K-12. Again, this does not account for local or federal funds, which in some areas push the total to nearly \$20,000.<sup>10</sup>

Enrollment in K-12 public schools in the Evergreen State peaked in 2019 but has declined by more than 40,000 since Washington state implemented drastic COVID lockdowns and kept schools closed for months on end. Still, roughly 87% of the state’s K-12 eligible students attend government-run schools.

	K-12 Public School Enrollment	Public School Enrollment (as %)	Public Charter Enrollment (as %)	**Private School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment (as %)	Home schooling students	Home schooling students (as %)
2023-24	1,073,794	87.3%	0.4%	89,122	8.3%	29,467	2.4%
2022-23	1,077,339	87.4%	0.4%	89,419	8.3%	28,032	2.4%
2021-22	1,074,262	87.4%	0.4%	85,940	8.0%	32,056	2.7%
2020-21	1,077,739	87.0%	0.3%	85,141	7.9%	39,843	3.3%
2019-20	1,115,732	88.9%	0.3%	87,027	7.8%	20,844	1.7%
2018-19	1,107,127	89.0%	0.3%	83,034	7.5%	21,916	1.8%
2017-18	1,103,393	89.9%	0.2%	76,134	6.9%	21,022	1.8%
2016-17	1,092,384	91.1%	0.1%	76,466	7.0%	21,213	1.8%
2015-16	1,079,434	90.6%	0.1%	80,957	7.5%	20,921	1.8%
2014-15	1,067,555	90.6%	n/a	83,269	7.8%	19,610	1.7%

\*Note: Charter schools were not legal in Washington until 2015-16  
 \*\*Estimate

*Private school enrollment and home schooling*

The small number of families able to take advantage of education choice options in Washington is mainly due to state policies. Lawmakers and activists

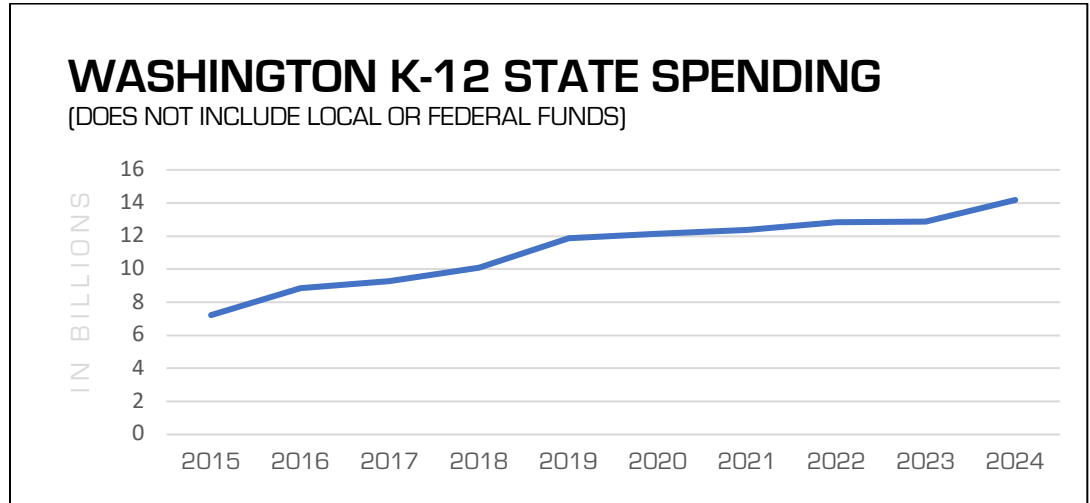
<sup>10</sup> K-12 Education Spending, Washington State General Fund, years 2014-2024, available at <https://fiscal.wa.gov/Spending/SpendHistFundYearChart>

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

*Washington is one of the more tightly regulated home schooling states.*

have put a stranglehold on the expansion of public charter schools, and only those with the financial means can afford to attend private schools.

Washington is one of the more tightly regulated home schooling states.<sup>11</sup> Roughly 29,400 students are home schooled in Washington, making up less than 3% of the overall student population.<sup>12</sup> The total number of students home schooling in Washington is less than the state of Idaho, even though Washington’s population is more than three times the size of Idaho.



	Total State K-12 Spending	Spending Per Public School Student, Per Year (state only)	Total Students in Private & Home schooling	Net Savings to State
2024	\$14.18 billion	\$13,205	118,589	\$1.56 billion
2023	\$12.88 billion	\$11,955	117,451	\$1.40 billion
2022	\$12.85 billion	\$11,961	117,996	\$1.41 billion
2021	\$12.38 billion	\$11,487	124,984	\$1.43 billion
2020	\$12.15 billion	\$10,889	107,871	\$1.17 billion
2019	\$11.87 billion	\$10,721	104,950	\$1.12 billion
2018	\$10.07 billion	\$9,126	97,156	\$886.6 million
2017	\$9.28 billion	\$8,495	97,679	\$829.7 million
2016	\$8.68 billion	\$8,041	101,878	\$819.2 million
2015	\$7.22 billion	\$6,763	102,879	\$695.7 million
<b>TOTAL 10-YEAR SAVINGS:</b>				<b>\$11.3 billion</b>

<sup>11</sup> Home schooling requirements by state, U.S. Career Institute, December 2022, available at <https://www.uscareerinstitute.edu/blog/homeschool-requirements-by-state>

<sup>12</sup> Washington State Dashboard, Private school education, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest-dashboard/state/washington>

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

Washington state taxpayers have saved an incredible \$11.3 billion over the last 10 years thanks to the families who send children to private school or who home school.

Montana’s state budget for K-12 has jumped 32% since 2014, to a current total of more than \$873 million per year.

*The Washington savings*

Our analysis shows the state of Washington is now saving more than \$1.4 billion a year thanks to the 118,000 families who send their children to a private school or home school. Over the past ten years, those families have provided the state with more than \$11 billion in savings.

**Montana**

*Public education spending & enrollment*

Unlike in Washington, the population of K-12 public school students has increased nine of the past ten years in the state of Montana. Roughly 150,000 students attend K-12 public schools in the Treasure State, which makes up just under 90% of the total eligible population.

Montana’s state budget for K-12 has jumped 32% since 2014, to a current total of more than \$873 million per year. When just state funds are considered, Montana spends \$5,879 per student, per year.<sup>13</sup>

	K-12 Public School Enrollment	Public School Enrollment (as %)	Public Charter Enrollment (as %)	**Private School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment (as %)	Home schooling students	Home schooling students (as %)
2023-24	148,585	89.2%	0.0%	8,172	5.5%	n/a	n/a
2022-23	150,573	89.1%	0.0%	8,281	5.5%	7,799	4.7%
2021-22	149,198	90.4%	0.0%	6,564	4.4%	7,368	4.7%
2020-21	145,632	88.8%	0.0%	6,844	4.7%	9,868	4.5%
2019-20	149,181	91.3%	0.0%	7,608	5.1%	5,815	6.1%
2018-19	147,785	91.0%	0.0%	7,832	5.3%	5,743	3.6%
2017-18	146,772	91.3%	0.0%	7,778	5.3%	5,390	3.7%
2016-17	146,375	91.0%	0.0%	8,197	5.6%	5,273	3.4%
2015-16	145,319	90.8%	0.0%	8,719	6.0%	5,003	3.3%
2014-15	144,532	91.1%	0.0%	8,238	5.7%	4,954	3.2%

\*Note: Charter schools were not legal in Montana until 2024

\*\*Estimate

*Private school enrollment and home schooling*

Montana’s enormous geographic size and limited population make private schooling more challenging. Still, 5.5% of the state’s eligible population attends a private school and there are 130 private schools in the state.<sup>14</sup> Another 4.5% attend home schooling. The Treasure State is a home school friendly state, with only a handful of requirements.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> K-12 Education Spending, Montana General Fund, years 2014-2024, available at <https://gems.opi.mt.gov/finance-data>

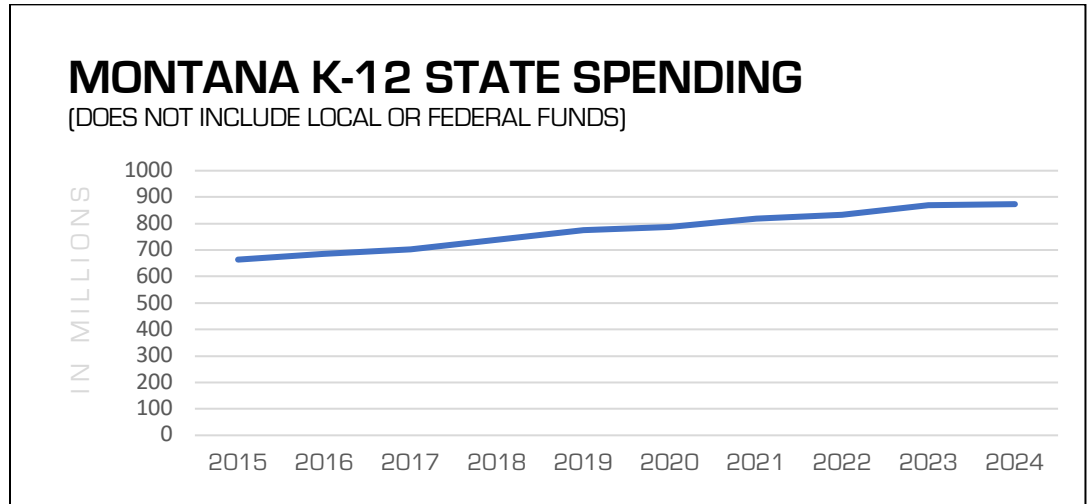
<sup>14</sup> Montana State Dashboard, Private school education, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest-dashboard/state/montana>

<sup>15</sup> Montana Home Schooling Laws, Home School Legal Defense Association, available at <https://hslsda.org/legal/montana>

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

Montana is one of the last states to legalize public charter schools, but so far, no public charter schools have opened.

Montana is one of the latest states to legalize public charter schools, but as of the publication of this research, no charter schools have opened.<sup>16</sup> Montana lawmakers also recently approved more choice options for students, including a special needs Education Savings Account.<sup>17</sup>



	Total State K-12 Spending	Spending Per Public School Student, Per Year (state only)	Total Students in Private & Home schooling	Net Savings to State
2024	\$873.6 million	\$5,879	8,172*	\$48.0 million**
2023	\$870.4 million	\$5,780	16,080	\$92.9 million
2022	\$832.4 million	\$5,579	13,932	\$77.7 million
2021	\$817.7 million	\$5,614	16,712	\$93.8 million
2020	\$787.5 million	\$5,278	13,423	\$70.8 million
2019	\$775.8 million	\$5,249	13,575	\$71.2 million
2018	\$739.4 million	\$5,037	13,168	\$66.3 million
2017	\$703.5 million	\$4,806	13,470	\$64.7 million
2016	\$685.3 million	\$4,715	13,722	\$64.6 million
2015	\$664.0 million	\$4,594	13,192	\$60.6 million
<b>TOTAL 10-YEAR SAVINGS:</b>				<b>\$710.6 million</b>

\*Montana home schooling data not yet available for 2024  
 \*\*Does not include home schooling student savings

<sup>16</sup> The money allocated to Montana’s new charter schools, by Alex Sakariassen, March 2024, Montana Free Press, available at <https://montanafreepress.org/2024/03/05/montana-charter-schools-legislative-funding/>

<sup>17</sup> Montana Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Education Savings Accounts, available at [https://opi.mt.gov/Families-Students/Parent-Resources/Education-Savings-Account#:~:text=The%20Education%20Savings%20Account%20\(ESA,parents%20in%20their%20child's%20education.](https://opi.mt.gov/Families-Students/Parent-Resources/Education-Savings-Account#:~:text=The%20Education%20Savings%20Account%20(ESA,parents%20in%20their%20child's%20education.)



**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

Montana taxpayers have saved nearly \$711 million over the last 10 years thanks to the families who send children to private school or who home school.

Wyoming has a unique funding formula for public schools, using a pool of different revenue sources that can be used to fund school districts adequately.

*The Montana savings*

The analysis shows Montana taxpayers have saved \$710.6 million over the past ten years thanks to the number of families sending their children to either a private school or deciding to home school. That savings is nearly enough to pay for one year of the state’s total K-12 spending.

**Wyoming**

*Public education spending & enrollment*

Roughly 90,000 students attend K-12 public schools in Wyoming. These numbers have steadily declined since 2014.<sup>18</sup> Still, a large percentage of the state’s eligible children – 93.4% - attend one of the 361 public schools.

Wyoming has a unique funding formula for public schools, using a pool of different revenue sources that can be used to fund school districts adequately.<sup>19</sup> As a result, despite its small population, Wyoming’s K-12 allocation of more than one billion dollars each year for K-12 public education remains remarkably consistent. This equals roughly \$16,649 per student, per year, and includes local funds.<sup>20</sup>

	K-12 Public School Enrollment	Public School Enrollment (as %)	Public Charter Enrollment (as %)	**Private School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment (as %)	Home schooling students	Home schooling students (as %)
2023-24	90,297	93.4%	0.7%	1,625	1.8%	4,241	4.1%
2022-23	91,640	93.4%	0.7%	1,649	1.8%	3,917	4.1%
2021-22	91,992	93.2%	0.7%	2,023	2.2%	3,937	3.9%
2020-21	91,938	93.3%	0.6%	2,022	2.2%	4,299	4.0%
2019-20	93,832	93.7%	0.6%	1,970	2.1%	2,914	3.6%
2018-19	93,029	94.1%	0.6%	1,767	1.9%	2,532	3.4%
2017-18	92,976	94.8%	0.6%	1,487	1.6%	n/a*	3.0%
2016-17	93,261	95.2%	0.5%	1,492	1.6%	n/a*	2.7%
2015-16	94,002	95.7%	0.5%	1,410	1.5%	2,296	2.3%
2014-15	93,303	95.4%	0.5%	1,679	1.8%	2,316	2.4%

\*Data not available  
 \*\*Estimate

<sup>18</sup> Wyoming Dashboard, National Center for Education Statistics, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest-dashboard/state/wyoming>

<sup>19</sup> School finance policy in Wyoming promotes equity between districts, by Satya Marar, Reason Foundation, July 20, 2020, available at <https://reason.org/commentary/school-finance-policy-in-wyoming-promotes-equity-between-districts/>

<sup>20</sup> Wyoming K-12 education spending, Wyoming General Fund, years 2014-2024, available at <https://wyoleg.gov/2023/Databook/Education%20Finance%20Information/1-K-12%20Finance/c-K-12%20Appropriations.pdf>

**KEY INFORMATION COLUMN**

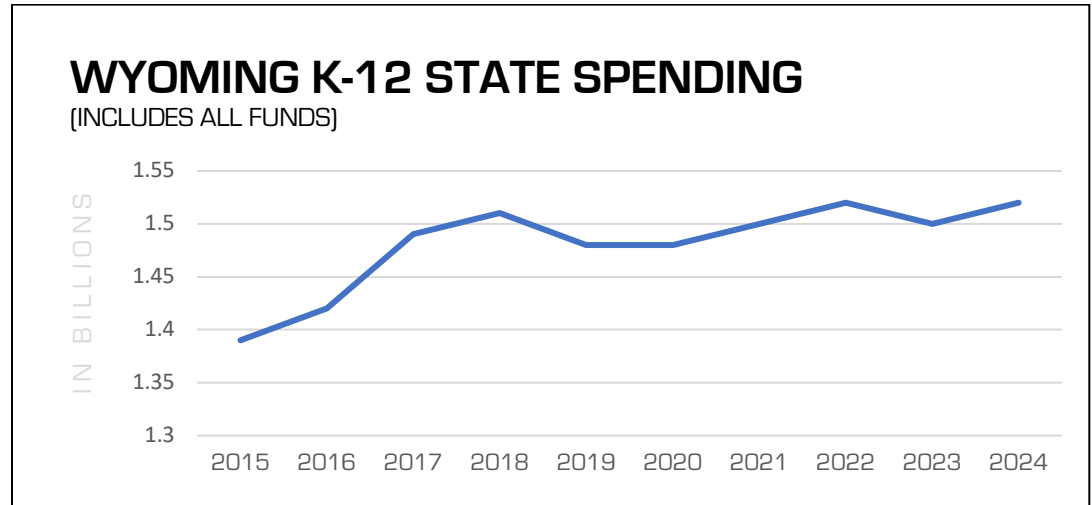
Only 1.8% of the state’s eligible population of students attends a private school in Wyoming, while 4.1% are home schooled. There are only 30 private schools throughout the entire state.

Wyoming taxpayers have saved \$707 million over the last 10 years thanks to the families who send children to private school or who home school.

*Private school enrollment and home schooling*

Only 1.8% of the state’s eligible population of students attends a private school in Wyoming, while 4.1% are home schooled. There are only 30 private schools throughout the entire state. Charter schools are also few and far between in Wyoming.

Enrollment in both private and home schooling jumped during the COVID-19 pandemic but remains similar to what it was nearly a decade ago.



	Total K-12 Spending (includes state & local)	Spending Per Public School Student, Per Year	Total Students in Private & Home schooling	Net Savings to State
2024	\$1.52 billion	\$16,649	5,866	\$97.6 million
2023	\$1.50 billion	\$16,433	5,566	\$91.4 million
2022	\$1.52 billion	\$16,542	5,960	\$98.5 million
2021	\$1.50 billion	\$16,598	6,321	\$104.9 million
2020	\$1.48 billion	\$16,017	4,884	\$78.2 million
2019	\$1.48 billion	\$15,968	4,299	\$68.6 million
2018	\$1.51 billion	\$15,940	1,487*	\$23.7 million*
2017	\$1.49 billion	\$16,216	1,492*	\$24.1 million*
2016	\$1.42 billion	\$15,898	3,706	\$58.9 million
2015	\$1.39 billion	\$15,325	3,995	\$61.2 million
<b>TOTAL 10-YEAR SAVINGS:</b>				<b>\$707.1 million</b>

\*Does not include home schooling data

\*\*Does not include home schooling student savings

*The Wyoming savings*

With Wyoming’s unique funding mechanism for public schools, per student amounts spent each year are relatively high. We can calculate that taxpayers

**KEY INFORMATION  
COLUMN**

*Various education choice proposals cost less than a third of what private and home schooling families are saving the state, according to the research.*

**Nothing in this publication shall be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation.**

have saved more than \$707 million over the past ten years thanks to the roughly 6,000 families that have either sent their child to a private school or home schooled.

**Conclusion**

Families who choose to send their child to a private school or decide home schooling is best do so for a variety of reasons. Some may be religious, while others may need a better educational environment.

Too many families considering such an arrangement are forced into financial difficulty, most being required to pay twice – once for the system they don’t use, and again for the option that works better for their child.

The various education choice proposals discussed in Idaho, for example, have had a price tag of anywhere from \$50 to \$90 million per year – less than a third of what private and home schooling families are saving the state, according to the research.

There have been zero proposals seeking to reimburse families for the entire amount that would otherwise have been spent on their K-12 education. This means states collect more money for a benefit they do not provide, despite the educational promises made in nearly every state constitution.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more than 24 years, Chris Cargill has worked in communications and public policy. Chris has deep roots in our region and is a graduate of Gonzaga University with a degree in broadcast communications and political science. His experience includes a decade in television news as well as 13 years for another state based think tank.



Chris' work has been published in the Idaho Statesman, The Coeur d'Alene Press, The Helena Independent Record, the Spokesman-Review, The Seattle Times, the Tri-City Herald and Real Clear Policy, as well as many other regional newspapers. He is also a familiar voice on radio stations throughout the region.

Chris is a member of the American Enterprise Institute's Leadership Network.

Chris & his wife Lisa are the proud parents of two boys, including one who has special needs - one of the many reasons why he is so passionate about education choice options for families.

In his spare time, Chris spends time with family, serves on his local city council, and enjoys whatever down time he can in the great outdoors on his family property in North Idaho.

