

Colorado K-12 Per Pupil Expenditures from 2021-22 to 2023-24

Colorado’s Financial Transparency report provides a useful look at school level spending across Colorado charter and district operated schools. Financial Transparency Reports published by the Colorado Department of Education allow spending comparisons across Colorado schools and districts using consistently reported statewide data.¹ In the analysis below, Momentum uses three years of school-level expenditure data to compare charter and district school spending across available categories.

The most recent year’s expenditure data (2023-24) shows that charter schools spend 81%, or \$3,351 on average, per pupil less than district schools. The two prior school years show a comparable percentage discrepancy, though with a slightly smaller dollar gap. Additional details below.

The CDE data is school level, and broken down into overall funding, federal funding, and state/local funding levels; as well as by the site (school level) and each site’s share of central expenditures (district expenses on the school’s behalf). Based on the state’s data methodology,² charter schools do not have central expenditures.³ For comparison purposes across school types, the different categories of expenditures used by CDE are combined into a consistent final dataset as shown in the table below.

Variables From Original Dataset	Variables in Final Dataset
“Site level – Federal” + “Site Share of Central Expenditures – Federal”	Overall Federal
“Site level - State/Local” + “Site Share of Central Expenditures - State/Local”	Overall State/Local
“Total School Expenditures”	Total School

CDE’s overall dataset includes 1,905 schools in 2023-24, both charter and district-run. As part of the data cleaning process, various groups of schools were removed from the dataset to make this analysis as comparable as possible (see table below for counts by year):

1. Schools with zero PK-12 membership,
2. Schools with PK only membership,
3. Any school whose district did not have a charter school located within its district boundaries (determined for each year, so a district may be included in one year, but not the next),
4. Schools with negative expenditure values, and

¹ ESSA Financial Transparency Reports: <https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sffinancialtransparency>

² CDE Data Methodology: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/financialtransparency/methodology>

³ Over the three years of data, there are only five instances of a charter school with a non-zero central expenditure value.

- Schools that had a total per pupil expenditure over 3.5 standard deviations from the average to remove what are potential data errors (the maximum per pupil value in the original dataset was \$504,412). Ten schools were removed in this step (some were removed from multiple years, others in only one school year), and eight of the ten either serve special populations (alternative, adult/CTE, or special education) or provide learning through atypical means.⁴

School Count of Original Dataset, Groups of Schools Removed and Final Dataset

Year	Original Count	No Students	PK Only	In a District			Final Count
				without Charters	Negative Expenditure	Outlier Expenditure	
2024	1,905	46	46	403	1	7	1,402
2023	1,930	33	51	401	0	3	1,442
2022	1,912	9	51	401	0	7	1,444

The resulting dataset of 1,402 schools shows charter schools spending 81% of their district-run peers in 2023-24 in the table below.

Federal Spending: The three years of available data shows charter schools spending a high of 94% (2021-22) of what district schools spend, decreasing over the three years to a low of 62% (2023-24), this is perhaps tied to federal ESSER funds.

State and Local Spending: The average of state and local expenditures has stayed relatively the same, with the last two years showing that charter schools spend 82% of what district schools spend, up from 80% in 2021-22.

Summary of Average Per Pupil Expenditures by School Year

Year	Charter % of District Amount	Average of Total Expenditures	Average of Federal	Average of State/Local	Number of Schools
		2021-22	81%	94%	80%
	Charter	\$12,198.19	\$1,070.49	\$11,127.71	263
	District	\$14,993.49	\$1,141.84	\$13,851.65	1,181
2022-23	82%	86%	82%		
	Charter	\$13,497.07	\$1,064.52	\$12,432.55	260
	District	\$16,381.11	\$1,233.23	\$15,147.88	1,182
2023-24	81%	62%	82%		
	Charter	\$14,074.16	\$795.55	\$13,278.61	257
	District	\$17,425.52	\$1,277.57	\$16,147.95	1,145

⁴ The average total per pupil across the dataset is \$16,292.29 and the standard deviation is \$13,585.60