

**News – For Immediate Release**

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For more information, contact:

Lauren Forte, Communications Manager  
National School Choice Awareness Foundation  
[lauren@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:lauren@schoolchoiceweek.com) | 760-898-8987

## **NEW SURVEY: 81% of California Parents Considered New K–12 Schools for their Children Last Year**

**SACRAMENTO, CA (JAN. 12, 2026)**—California parents showed strong demand for K–12 school choice in the past year, with Golden State families more likely than parents nationwide to choose public charter schools.

According to a survey of 599 California parents released today by the National School Choice Awareness Foundation ahead of National School Choice Week (January 25–31), an estimated 5.1 million California parents of school-aged children considered a new school for at least one of their children in 2025. Overall, 81% of California parents considered a new school for at least one of their children, compared with 75% nationwide. Ultimately, 22% enrolled a child in a new school or learning environment, similar to the national average.

Charter schools accounted for a larger share of new enrollments in California than elsewhere in the country. Among parents who enrolled a child in a new school, 25% chose a public charter school, compared with 17% nationwide.

Parents most often cited practical reasons for searching, including school-level transitions (34%), children entering school for the first time (25%), and moving to a new community (11%). When evaluating options, California parents prioritized a safe, supportive environment (64%), a positive social environment (56%), and a particular educational theme or approach (45%).

Looking ahead, demand shows little sign of easing. Sixty-nine percent of California parents say they are likely to consider a new school for at least one of their children within the next 12 months, exceeding the national rate of 62%.

California families can choose among traditional public schools, public charter schools, magnet programs, private schools, online learning options, and homeschooling or microschools. While charter and magnet schools offer tuition-free public options, many have application deadlines or lotteries. California does not provide state funding for private school tuition, though some families access scholarships through schools or nonprofits, and homeschoolers may receive support through charter-affiliated programs.

“The overwhelming demand for school choice in California is especially notable given the state’s mix of charter schools, magnet programs, online learning, and limited choice within the traditional public school system—but no programs that make private education more affordable,” said Andrew Campanella, president and CEO of the National School Choice Awareness Foundation. “Recent efforts to restrict public charter schools clearly run counter to what parents want. We hope decision-makers look at these results and recognize that California families need more choices, not fewer. And for parents, starting the school search early is critical in a state where supply is limited.”

National School Choice Week, running January 25–31, will offer California parents opportunities to learn more about their education options. More than 1,900 schools and organizations across the state will host events including school fairs, information sessions, open houses, and parent nights. More information is available at [SchoolChoiceWeek.com](http://SchoolChoiceWeek.com).

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#### About NSCAF

The National School Choice Awareness Foundation (NSCAF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We show parents how K–12 school choice can change their children’s lives, and then guide them through the process of finding schools that best meet their children’s needs. Our three charitable programs—National School Choice Week, Navigate School Choice, and Conoce tus Opciones Escolares—raise equal awareness of the public, charter, magnet, private, online, home, and nontraditional education options available for families. We are nonpolitical and do not advocate for or against legislation at any level of government.

#### Survey Details

California results are based on a survey of 599 California parents of school-aged children ages 5–18, conducted December 2–10, 2025, using SurveyMonkey’s national audience panel. The margin of error is  $\pm 4.0$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

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## **QUICK FACTS**

### **California Parents Searching for K-12 Schools for Kids in Record Numbers**

California shows some of the strongest demand for K-12 school choice in the country, with 81% of California parents considering a new school for at least one of their children last year, compared with 75% across the country. In total, 22% of parents enrolled their children in new schools, and one in four of those families selected public charter schools. According to the National School Choice Awareness Foundation's January 2026 survey of 599 California parents:

- Twenty-two percent of all California parents enrolled at least one child in a new school or switched to homeschooling. Changes were most common in the early grades, with 22% of parents indicating they had a child in pre-K, 23% saying their child was in kindergarten, and 23% saying they had a first-grader.
- California parents' searches were driven primarily by practical school-stage transitions. School-level transitions accounted for 34% of searches, followed by children entering school for the first time (25%) and moving to a new community or state (11%). Dissatisfaction with a child's current school or a desire for better fit was cited by 24%.
- California parents prioritized school environment and educational approach when evaluating options. A safe, supportive environment was cited by 64% of parents, followed by a positive social environment (56%) and a particular educational theme or approach (45%).
- California parents who enrolled children selected a mix of public and private options. Traditional public schools in the neighborhood accounted for 27% of enrollments, followed by public charter schools (25%) and private non-religious schools (23%). Charter enrollment was notably higher than the national average.
- California parents who searched but did not enroll said worry about disrupting a child's academic or social life (39%), transportation challenges (29%), and deciding the current school was a better fit after all (26%) were the most common barriers.
- Looking ahead, California parents report elevated intent to continue searching for schools. Nearly seven in ten parents say they are likely to consider a new school for at least one of their children within the next 12 months, exceeding the national rate.