

# New Utah Data Points To Growing Homeschool, Private School Enrollment During COVID-19

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*SALT LAKE CITY, Utah* – New public school enrollment numbers give the best glimpse yet at how the pandemic is reshaping education in Utah.

The results of an enrollment survey from Oct. 1 will be released during a [Utah State Board of Education](#) meeting Thursday. The KSL Investigators were given early access to the data.

One clear trend: a drop in kindergarten enrollment.

## Oct. 1 Data Trends: Kindergarten Enrollment Drops

Kindergarten enrollment across Utah dropped by 1,518 students for the 2020-2021 school year. That's a 3% decrease from last year.

Most years, Utah sees an increase in kindergarten enrollment of anywhere from 1.5% to 3%.

“We didn’t see the increase in kindergarten enrollment,” said [Scott Jones](#), the deputy superintendent of operations at USBE. “In Utah, it’s not required that kindergarteners enroll or participate in school, so that number that we had predicted for kindergarten enrollment was not there.”



USBE Deputy Superintendent Of Operations Scott Jones. (KSL-TV)



Chanell Price is homeschooling her children, who are in third grade and kindergarten, through an online charter school. (KSL-TV)

In fact, the last time kindergarten enrollment was this low was in 2010, when enrollment documented on Oct. 1 that year was 47,757 students.

The unique circumstances created by the pandemic prompted Layton mother Chanell Price to teach her 5-year-old daughter, Jennifer, at home.

“Early childhood is so important and so crucial to give them a good base and a good start,” Price explained.

Price is already passionate about learning and school. She enjoys reading and writing in a journal alongside her mom in a basement classroom.

“Kindergarteners need consistency and I just didn’t feel like the school could give that this year,” Price added.

Price also homeschools daughter Adalynn, 8, who is in third grade through a [program, My Tech High](#), which is administered by the Tooele County School District.

Adalynn has dyslexia.

“With doing the hybrid schedule, I knew she wouldn’t be able to get the reading help she needed,” Price said.

## **Oct. 1 Data Trends: Growth In Homeschool, Charter & Virtual Options**

The Price family mirrors another trend in the latest enrollment numbers.

The number of Utah students who transferred to homeschool more than tripled at the beginning of this school year compared with the previous year, especially among elementary and middle school grades.

And charter schools in Utah have seen a 2.1% increase in enrollment, with 1,625 more kids enrolled over the same time period.

- [Deseret News: Utah Legislature authorizes substantial enrollment increases for 2 online charter schools](#)

Online and virtual school enrollment data also saw a notable increase. In the 2019-2020 academic year, 14,755 students were enrolled. In the current 2020-2021 academic year, 26,605 students are enrolled in online and virtual schools across Utah. That is an increase of 11,850 students.

Utah Virtual Academy's enrollment cap was raised to 1,500 and Utah Connections Academy was raised to 1,000.

According to an analysis by the USBE, this data equates to a single-year increase of 80% in online and virtual school enrollment from last year to this year.

## **Oct. 1 Data Trends: Private School Enrollment Increases 25%**

The number of students who transferred to private schools in Utah increased by 25% at the beginning of this school year compared with the previous year. Much of that was among higher grades.

Enrollment at [American Heritage School](#) – one of Utah's largest private schools – mimics the state data.



“For our on-campus program, we have had our largest ever application wave to the school, which included 231 new admissions for this school year,” said Principal Grant Beckwith.

With only 910 total K-12 students enrolled on-campus at the private school in American Fork, those new students make up a quarter of the student body population.

Although Beckwith acknowledges that COVID-19 resulted in some of their families needing to leave the school, in some cases due to the cost of tuition, he says the net was growth. The principal describes it as “churning” both ways.

“We had 150 who applied and were admitted for this new offering of a part-day, reduced price tuition model we call ‘[AHS Essentials](#)’ – just offering the very most essential subjects to parents and reducing that tuition by about half,” Beckwith said. “And we had nearly 2,000 students who joined our existing online programs that we’ve been developing through the years, as well as about 80 who joined another pilot program called ‘[AHS Online](#).’”

Beckwith said this program is a “fully mentored, video-rich classroom product” for students around the world that want to have a teacher present to provide instruction

“[[It’s] one of the most exciting increases in enrollment the American Heritage School has seen in a long time,” he said.

Two of Kurt and Meagan Christensen’s four kids went to school in the Alpine School District – Utah’s largest school district – before making the switch this fall to American Heritage.

Meagan Christensen is a former teacher and understands the challenges.

“They have a lot of things to handle,” she said about the district. “There’s a lot of students that they take care of, and a lot of different needs that they have to cover.”

“We wanted to make sure our children didn’t miss key milestones,” her husband added



*Kurt and Meagan Christensen moved their two students from the Alpine School District to American Heritage in the wake of COVID-19. (KSL-TV)*

After remote learning proved difficult for their children last spring, the couple felt that the private school could better handle COVID-19.

“If we’re threat level orange, this is what will happen. If we need to go to remote for a period of time, this is what can happen,” Kurt Christensen said, explaining American Heritage’s plans to respond to any necessary changes brought on by the pandemic.

It remains to be seen whether the decline in Utah’s public school enrollment will be permanent.

USBE officials plan on doing another enrollment survey in January.

Those numbers are important because they determine the amount of funding public schools receive from the state. A school that drops in enrollment will get less money the following year. By doing multiple enrollment surveys during this unique school year, the state board hopes to have a more complete picture.

Members of the Christensen family said they’ll take things one day at a time.

“We’ll see from year to year, and we’ll make decisions that are best for our kids in that particular year,” Meagan Christensen said.

The USBE’s [monthly board meeting](#) takes place [virtually](#) on Thursday, Nov. 5 beginning at 9 a.m. The full numbers for the Oct. 1 enrollment data will be presented and reviewed during the meeting. Funding adjustments will also be directed to staff, based on the data.