



MARKET ANALYSIS OF U.S. CLASSICAL EDUCATION IN GRADES PK-12 February 2024

In March 2023, Kevin Mahnken published a piece in *The 74* entitled, “Amid the Pandemic, a Classical Education Boom: What if the Next Big School Trend Is 2,500 Years Old” ([source](#))? This article is one in a spate of coverage dating back at least four years.

Bold headlines like Mahnken’s assert terms like renaissance, resurgence, and movement to characterize what is happening in American classical education. The obvious question is: are these claims warranted or the grandiose dream of a few ideological champions? The purpose of this national market analysis is to answer that question by defining the U.S. classical education segment across pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade (PK-12) and examine major generators of continued growth through the foreseeable future.

Operating Definition

Classical institutions, while distinct, share fundamental philosophical and anthropological principles that influence their curriculum, pedagogy, and culture. Such institutions share the aim to cultivate individuals of virtue who can: think, speak, and write with clarity; are grounded in the Western intellectual and moral tradition; and perceive the world as an orderly and comprehensible reality.

Classical educators are inspired by deep dedication to scholastic rigor and the ethical development of their students. Collectively, they endeavor to perpetuate a venerable tradition rooted in the civilizations of Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. At the same time, classical educators frequently differ on such important matters as: the role of classical languages in analyzing seminal texts; the emphasis given to the Judeo-Christian scriptural and metaphysical tradition; and the application of Socratic seminar pedagogy.

Admittedly, defining classical education is complex – sometimes even contentious – which is indicative of the passion and seriousness with which classical educators approach the work. Within collegial circles, there exists a nuanced and ongoing debate over the precise definition of classical education. Some, citing various reasons, even challenge the term 'classical' itself, advocating instead for descriptors like 'liberal' or 'traditional.' With these similarities and differences in mind, Arcadia Education’s team sets forth the definitions, benefits, and distinctives in this document with sincere humility in an earnest attempt to convey the findings and recommendations of this market study.

Benefits of Classical Education

After conducting extensive research, it is evident that classical education is well positioned to have an outsized impact on American education in grades PK-12. Although many elements contribute to a quality classical education, when done effectively, students and families who patronize classical schools gain the following nine primary benefits. In our view, these nine benefits comprise the “value proposition” of classical education for students, families, education champions, and America’s future.



Nine Primary Benefits of a Classical Education	
1. Morality – Respect for Right & Wrong	Through the early reading of Aesop’s fables, recitations of famous works, the study of the Great Books, and Socratic seminars, students learn time-tested values and grapple with human morality – what it meant to ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, and how that understanding has evolved to contemporary times with an elevated view of the dignity of the human person.
2. Pursuit of a Life of Value	In classical education, students are asked to articulate their best insights and make their greatest contributions relative to distinguished luminaries and thinkers from throughout human history. These luminaries and thinkers lived in many nations, were of many ethnicities, and represent currents of human thought globally over thousands of years.
3. Civic Life	Students of classical education learn the importance of civic life and community leadership – primarily in the classroom, then extending to recess, the athletic field and into the oratory, musical, and performing arts – always with an orientation towards living a life of integrity and service to others.
4. Primacy of Family	Classical schools and the families that patronize them instill the importance of family values as essential to tempering self-interest and living a good life – from respectful, monogamous relationships to long-term marriages to committed families raising the next generation.
5. Ethic of Performance	Teachers hold high expectations. Students perform in peer activities and forums from a young age, thereby developing a strong ethic characterized by a passion for rigorous scholarship and performance standards. Classical schools, and the liberal arts colleges from which most classical teachers graduate, frequently distinguish themselves as among the strongest, most vibrant institutions in many American communities.
6. The Intellect vs. Baser Instincts	Students are intellectually developed through the Trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric, alongside the study and debate of the Great Books. Classical education emphasizes cultivating and prizing the intellect above baser instincts.
7. Preparation for Life	Classical schools prepare students for higher education, rewarding careers, and healthy life choices in an integrated, intentional fashion that extends from curricular content and teaching methods. There is no watering down for students who are perceived as incapable of succeeding, but rather, an elevating up with the deeply held conviction that all humans are capable of achieving great heights.



Nine Primary Benefits of a Classical Education Continued	
8. Preparation for the Workplace	By obtaining a classical education in grades PK-12, graduates learn the knowledge and skills to discern vocational callings. They are equipped to apply themselves to the workplace with desirable attributes sought after by employers across fields, such as integrity, trustworthy decision-making, critical thinking, and strong oral and written communication skills.
9. Pride in Education	Classically educated men and women prize education, frequently pursue advanced degrees, and find ways to continue to pursue learning throughout their adult lives. Ultimately, classical education – inspired by Socrates, Plato, and many other celebrated philosophers, scholars, and theologians – is about engaging in the pursuit of nobility and greatness throughout life.

Distinguishing Classical Schools from Other Educational Approaches

Quality classical schools are distinct from other educational approaches or academic models, whether that be Expeditionary Learning, Core Knowledge, International Baccalaureate, STEM, Montessori, Waldorf, or project-based learning. Too often, advocates of novel approaches to education cite recent psychological theories on childhood development. Rather than valuing what educational fundamentals have contributed to the flourishing of humanity over millennia, these advocates rely on the premise that American policymakers, donors, and parents value what is cutting edge, even if such practices have not stood the test of time.

By contrast, classical educators draw upon curricular resources, instructional methods, and a continuous progression in human thought developed and refined over thousands of years. Examples include the Great Books Canon, Socratic seminars, the Trivium, and the Quadrivium, which deeply influence how liberal arts studies are defined and organized. These basic distinctions are important because they help to determine whether or not, and to what extent, classical schools are appealing to American parents and educators alike in a dynamic landscape where innovation is prized.

In no small part because of their timeless appeal, classical schools are becoming increasingly attractive in the United States, and they have the potential to reach a broad cross-section of the school-age population. Below, the matrix sets forth six key differentiators that characterize classical schools in contrast to other academic philosophies. In our review of various academic approaches, these differentiators set classical schools apart from any other schools in the elementary and secondary education landscape.



Key Differentiators from Would-be Competitors	
Cultivation of Virtuous Character	The core of classical education is the development of strong personal character that recognizes and appreciates the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. As Thomas Aquinas and other luminaries taught, the virtues are “skills” that can be learned and that represent a worthy lifelong pursuit for every human being.
Coherence	Classical education has assumed a form that can be remarkably coherent from prekindergarten through 12 th grade. Students gain an education that is rich and deep, typically within a spiraling curricular framework that supports the development of a broad knowledge base and well-integrated worldview. The intentional and systematic coherence is a hallmark of classical education.
Teacher Role Models	Classical schools tend to attract well-educated, idealistic professionals who have themselves benefitted from a classical liberal arts education and who bring advanced subject matter expertise to the subject domains that they teach. Teachers are frequently role models of how virtuous decision-making leads to rewarding careers, loving relationships, and flourishing lives.
High Quality Curricula	Typically, classical schools implement research-based, high-quality, time-tested curricula across core academic subjects. Classical teachers are passionate about and equipped to teach excellently, which translates into well-constructed lessons, rich student learning, and exacting curriculum implementation.
Patriotism & Western Heritage	Graduates of classical education are well versed in government, civilizations, and world history. They understand and respect the United States as a democratic republic that reflects the lineage and advancement of democratic societies dating back thousands of years to ancient Greece and Rome.
The Transcendentals	Classical education serves as an entry point for studying the development of human experience with the transcendent. It does not seek to replace an appreciation for ancient world religions with the secular dogma frequently espoused by U.S. popular culture, which has not stood the test of time.

Support Organizations for Classical Schools

In our market research, Arcadia Education’s team has identified seven national umbrella organizations that provide membership services to classical schools. To varying degrees, these organizations act as promoters, accreditors, conveners, and service providers. There are also a growing number of centrally affiliated classical school networks, a subject addressed later in this national market analysis.



Classical School Support Organizations in the United States
Society for Classical Learning (SCL)
National Association of Private Catholic & Independent Schools (NAPCIS)
Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE)
Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE)
Classical Latin Schools Association (CLSA)
Barney Charter School Initiative at Hillsdale College
Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS)

In addition, there are prominent national institutes and think tanks that support classical education, advance research and scholarship, and host conferences and other events. However, as a general observation, these institutes and think tanks are typically not directly engaged in starting or expanding classical schools to educate more students, families, and communities.

Schools Serving Grades PK-12. Over the past two decades, the biggest growth in classical education has been from preschool through twelfth grade versus higher education, where the classical liberal arts do not appear to be growing. As a point of clarification, this analysis does not address the postsecondary sector, but rather, is limited to elementary and secondary education.

The upward trajectory of classical education across grades PK-12 can be tricky to measure because it is not limited to a single type of school. Rather, there are a growing number of private schools, charter schools, homeschool families, online education providers, homeschool cooperatives (co-ops), and micro-schools delivering a robust classical education.

Below, the chart presents an estimate of schools and students in the 2023-24 academic year.

2023-24 Classical School Enrollment in Grades PK-12	Schools	Enrollment
Christian evangelical classical schools	1,024	231,025
Catholic classical schools	308	60,060
Classical public charter schools	219	125,227
Classical schooling at home or through co-ops / micro schools		261,209
Total	1,551	677,521

To arrive at this count, we collected school listings from the seven organizations listed earlier. We cross-referenced them with each other to eliminate duplicate entries. In some cases, we obtained school-level enrollment figures while, in other cases, we could only secure membership enrollment estimates. We used these estimates to extrapolate the total enrollment for each listed segment.

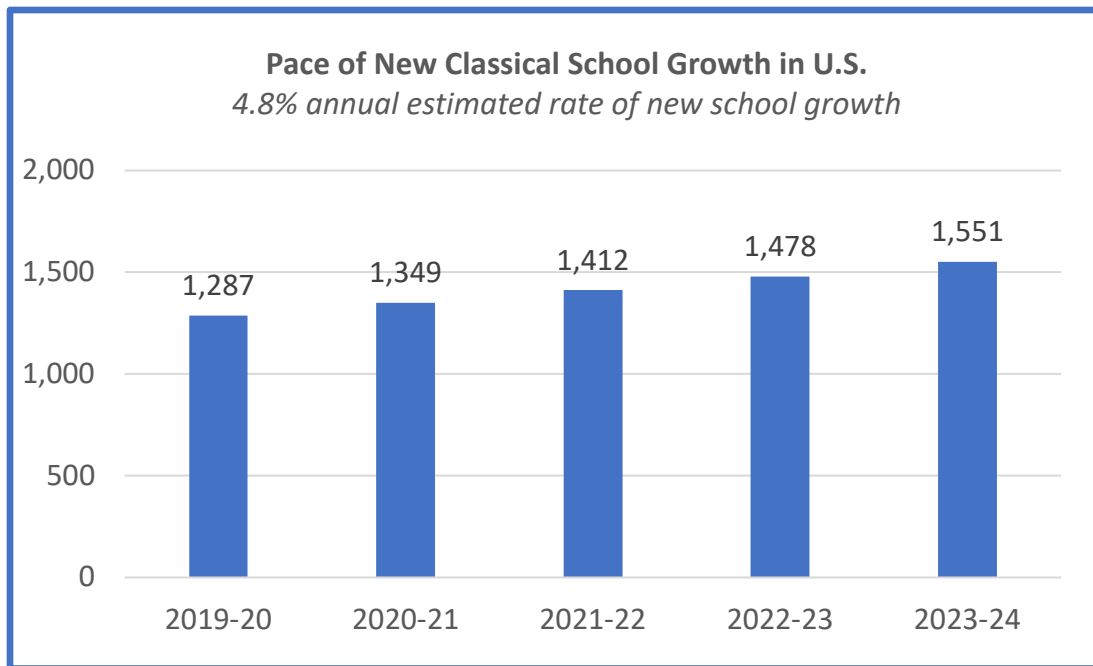


In addition, we conducted research on classical providers who deliver online schooling to establish an enrollment estimate for the home-based segment. In this research, we were able to identify 50 online providers of holistic classical education. In compiling this estimate, we did not attempt to factor in the total universe of homeschoolers using piecemeal classical curriculum, instructional methods, or materials. Rather, we sought to establish how many students are benefitting from a rigorous, holistic classical education experience reasonably equivalent to a brick-and-mortar offering.

Overall, this chart reflects a conservative compilation. We do not believe that it overstates the number of schools or students. Specifically, we did not include schools that deliver a classically oriented curricular model, like the Core Knowledge Sequence, or publishers of classical education materials for parents, such as *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*.

School Growth Trajectory. From 2020 to 2022, the Pandemic made it more challenging for founding groups to open new classical schools for in-person learning, especially standalone schools. Thus, we focused on establishing the growth rate of new school openings from 2019 to 2023, which includes when many families transitioned to and from remote learning at home but is not limited to that window of time.

The following bar graph estimates the national growth rate of classical schools. This estimate reflects school growth rates from the three largest umbrella organizations for Christian classical schools, the Association of Classical Christian Schools, the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, and the Society for Classical Learning. It does not attempt to capture the growth in total student enrollment in classical schools or at-home classical education, which may have been much higher due to the Pandemic.





DRIVERS OF UNDERLYING DEMAND

The primary objective of this landscape mapping thus far has been to examine the “school supply side” of the PK-12 classical education market. In this section, we want to turn to the “demand side” – evidence that families of school-age children are seeking a classical education. On this front, the evidence is manifold and exciting, even if it requires careful discernment to draw a direct link to the growth of classical schools. In this brief synopsis of parent demand, we want to characterize recent school choice patterns and expressed values of American families, particularly homeschoolers.

As we enter this discussion, it is important to point out that, in general, we consider homeschooling to be highly diffuse. Parents who report homeschooling frequently have their children: (a) enrolled in online academies or courses; (b) participating in homeschool cooperatives; (c) engaged in micro-schools or learning pods; (d) receiving various forms of tutoring or test prep; and/or (e) participating in coursework, athletics, clubs, and experiences at brick-and-mortar schools. What distinguishes homeschool families, then, is the primary ownership that parents are taking for managing their children’s education with the help of supplemental providers and resources.

Indicator #1. Increasingly Choice-Driven Landscape

Early in 2024, the *National School Choice Awareness Foundation* published the results of a national survey conducted in January 2024 ([source](#)). The report, titled *New Year, New School: U.S. Parents View K-12 School Choice as the “New Normal” in 2024*, disseminated the findings of two census-balanced surveys of a combined 2,595 U.S. parents of school-aged children. The authors observed, “In record numbers, moms and dads across the U.S. are doing more than just imagining. They are considering, searching for, and finding new schools that best meet their kids’ needs.”

Key findings included:

- 72% of parents considered a new school, 63% searched for one, and 44% chose a new school.
- 65% of parents desire more information concerning educational options for their children.
- 50% of parents have spoken about school choice with friends or family within the last month.
- Among parents who searched for a new school, the search included public charter schools 28% of the time and private or faith-based schools 24% of the time. Full-time online schools, homeschooling, and micro-schooling searches were reported by 22%, 20%, and 6% of respondents each, respectively.

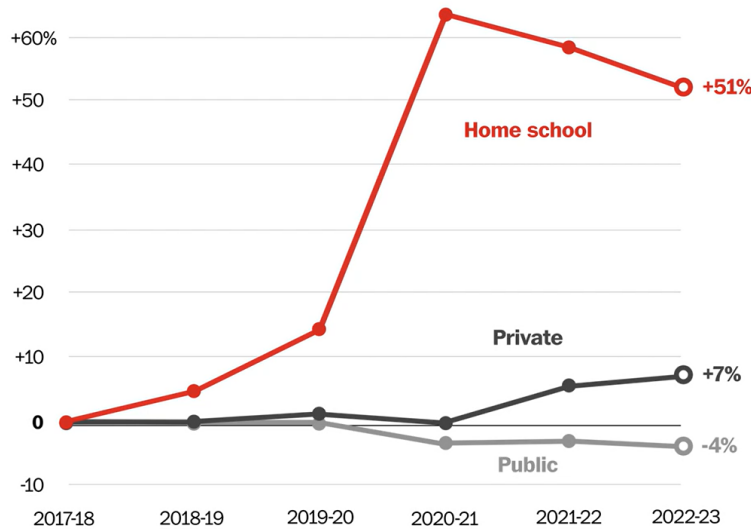
Indicator #2. Diminishing Reliance on Public Schools

On October 31st, the *Washington Post* reported on a study of homeschooling in America ([source](#)). As part of a multi-part series called “Home-School Nation,” the study’s authors examined the growth of homeschooling during and since the Pandemic. As the line graph below illustrates, documented homeschooling growth rates have, over the past 4 years, far outpaced private school growth and precipitated a decline in public school enrollment.



Home schooling's rise from fringe to fastest-growing form of education

A district-by-district look at home schooling's explosive growth, which a Post analysis finds has far outpaced the rate at private and public schools



Although it is not yet clear where parents will choose to enroll their children as the Pandemic experience recedes, it is amply clear that a broader swathe of parents than ever before are taking responsibility for their children's education without continuing reliance on traditional public schools.

Indicator #3. Changing Parent Priorities, Especially Among Homeschoolers

What are homeschool families seeking? Our team has two different reference points for answering this question, one empirical and the other experiential. Let's start with the empirical.

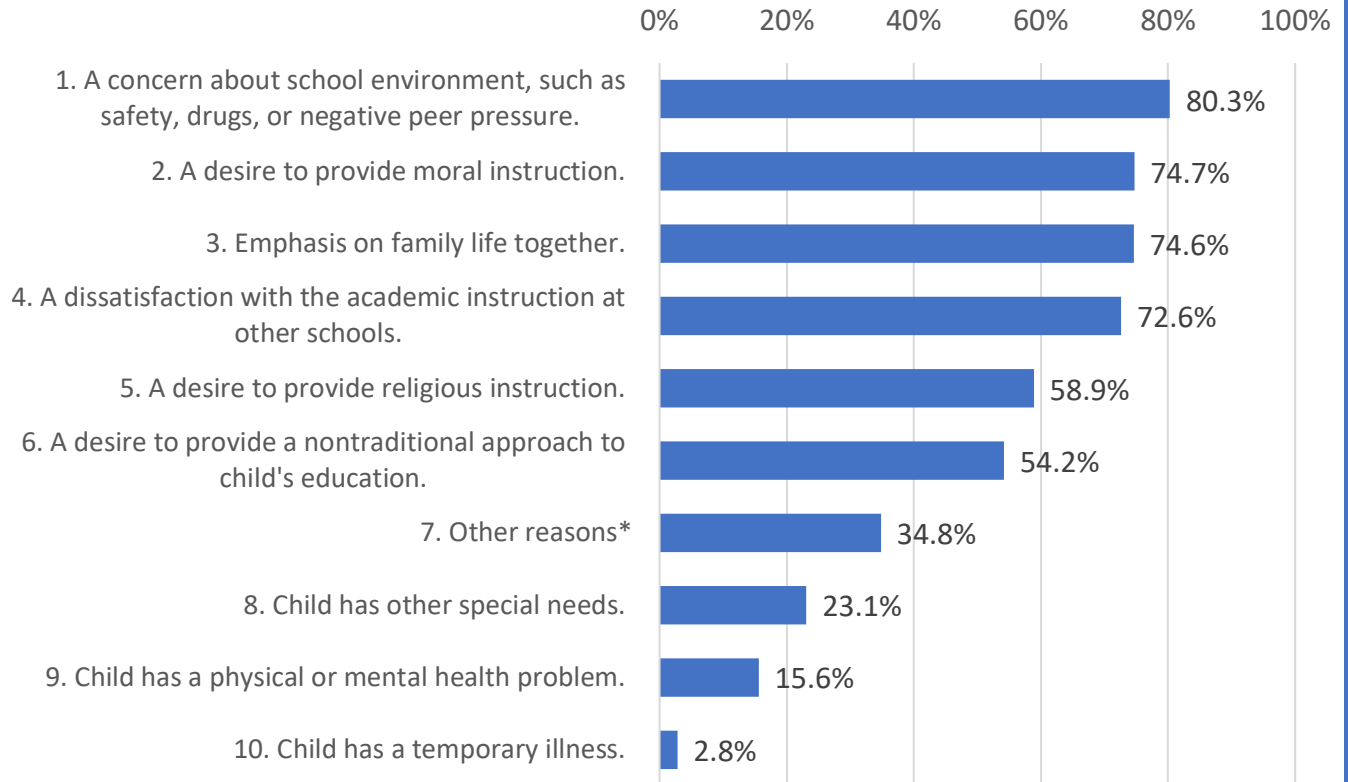
In our research, the most often cited source for gauging why parents decide to homeschool is the National Household Education Survey (NHES) administered by the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. DOE ([source](#)). After administering its survey in 2019, the NHES reported the findings contained below.

As the survey results show, parents who opt to homeschool do so for a number of reasons. Among the top most cited priorities are that parents want are a safe environments for their children, a moral education, and are generally dissatisfied with other available options.



Reasons for Homeschooling

Source: 2019 National Household Education Survey



**In addition to selecting listed reasons, parents could also write in "another reason." Other reasons that parents gave for homeschooling include child being bullied, finances, travel, and a more flexible schedule. This category also includes children whose parents responded "no" to all response options provided in the questionnaire, including "another reason."*

Millions of new families have begun schooling at home over the past three years. These families may have begun homeschooling because they were frustrated with the school closures and many disruptions precipitated by Covid-19. Or they may have recognized that, once their children were being educated remotely, they were not getting the healthy educational and moral experience that parents expect from schools.

From what we can see in the statistics, most of these families have opted out of traditional public schools to exercise various choice options including online offerings, micro-schools, and private schools. If these post-Pandemic trends align with the primary concerns expressed by those families surveyed in 2019, the findings reflect a potent view of demand-side sentiment, values, and priorities.

For Arcadia's team, the second reference point for considering what homeschool families want is an experiential one.



The key question tied to this reference point is whether families are (a) choosing to homeschool as their top preference; or (b) choosing to homeschool because they lack access to brick-and-mortar schools that deliver what they want. Undoubtedly, for some it is the former. Over the past two decades working in charter and private school settings, however, our team's experience has been that many families transition their students from homeschooling into culturally aligned brick-and-mortar options so as to benefit from the support and opportunities a more conventional setting affords. This transition has proven especially true as students age into the secondary grades 9-12 where academic results and associated scholarship opportunities can dramatically influence postsecondary pathways for students.

Thus, we believe it is no stretch to assume that, if there were ready, affordable access to quality classical schools all over the nation, many families would discontinue homeschooling to avail themselves of such brick-and-mortar options.

SCHOOL GROWTH GENERATORS

As we conducted this mapping and synthesized our findings, we identified seven generators contributing to the growth of the U.S. classical schools in grades PK-12.

Generator #1. Affiliated School Networks. Although the great majority of classical schools are standalone institutions, a growing number are affiliated with networks. These networks are assuming a number of different forms. Some are centrally managed, some benefit from a common set of back-office services, some hold a particular religious worldview, and some draw upon teaching-and-learning resources in various forms.

- In the charter school space, centrally managed networks of brick-and-mortar schools are called non-profit charter management organizations (CMOs) and for-profit education management organizations (EMOs). After 20 years of growth, approximately 1 in 4 students in public charter schools are served by CMO's and EMO's.
- In the private school space, a relatively nascent set of non-profit organizations are building school networks in different states with a few, such as the Chesterton Schools Network and Regina Caeli, crossing state lines to build national or even international networks of schools. These private school networks are taking a range of different forms.
- In the online education space, there are long-standing, reputable providers of classical curricula and materials, such as Classical Conversations, Well-Trained Mind, Memoria Press, Veritas Press, Classical Academic Press, and Christianbook.com, providing academic content to affiliated schools and homeschool co-ops.

As part of our research, we have identified at least 25 school networks including the three types characterized above. All these networks have affiliated schools across at least four locations. A few are offering online schools with remote enrollment as well.

There are many advantages to having organizations that centrally start, promote, and support



networks of classical schools.

These advantages include brand recognition, consistency of quality, access to qualified talent, financial sustainability, the capacity to systematically start new schools, fundraising strength, shared services support and efficiency, and continuity in leadership succession. As such, we expect to see a larger share of new classical schools opened as an extension of centrally affiliated networks.

Generator #2. School Growth Philanthropy. While foundations have made grants to advance research and scholarship in the general field of classical education for many years, there has not been large-scale philanthropy dedicated to incubating and starting new classical schools. Over the last eight years, that has changed. As one example, the Barney Charter School Initiative represents one of the most ambitious attempts to open new classical schools nationwide. Through its close tie to Hillsdale College, the Barney Initiative is drawing upon significant philanthropy to support its new school development programs. As a second example, the Herzog Foundation, a relatively young philanthropy, supports the growth of Christian schools nationwide. Through its programs, the Foundation's leadership sponsored the opening of 29 Christian classical schools in 2023 and anticipates that 39 such schools will open in 2024. As a third example, Great Hearts Academies (GHA) is a not-for-profit network of 42 brick-and-mortar classical academies and two online programs. Over the past 21 years, GHA's leadership has been very successful in fundraising to support its multi-state expansion. In the 2023-24 year, GHA serves 28,027 students in grades K-12 across all sites and is growing at a pace of approximately 10 percent annually.

Generator #3. School Choice Expansion. Today, and for the first time in the nation's history, the growth of private schools is being stoked by the passage of state education savings accounts (ESA's) legislation. Although it is too soon to tell, this development is anticipated to substantially increase the number of families seeking to enroll their children in classical private schools with new access to the necessary funding.

Over the past two years, school choice programs have expanded significantly. Ten states – Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and West Virginia – now have passed universal school choice into law making all families eligible for funding that can be applied outside of their public school ([source](#)). Six of those states have passed education savings accounts, which are the most flexible.

As the Foundation for Education Excellence explains, “Education scholarship accounts empower families with the freedom to pursue the education options best suited to their individual needs and aspirations. ESAs are state-supervised spending accounts containing a child's education funds that can be used to pay for a variety of educational services. With an ESA, parents direct their children's education funding to the state-approved schools, courses, programs and services of their choice— plus unused funds can be saved for future K-12 and college expenses” ([source](#)).

In the 2022-23 year, the Foundation reports that there were a total of 127,059 students using ESA's ([source](#)). As new programs become available, the eligible population is growing exponentially. For example, in Florida alone, there are 430,000 students signed up for ESA's under the state's universal eligibility expansion program.



Through these and other forms of school choice such as vouchers and tax credits, more and more families have access to private school options that were previously out of reach. These programs have the potential to significantly expand access to classical education by reducing both the perception and reality of financial barriers to paying tuition and fees for private schools.

Generator #4. Christian Classical School Renaissance. In June 2023, the Society for Classical Learning issued the “2023 SCL Thriving Schools Study” ([source](#)). The study’s authors report, “In 2010, there were about 140 classical Christian schools in operation. Today, there are over 700!” As part of the study, SCL conducted a survey of 147 schools, which found that the average Christian school enrolls 230 students. Across grades K through 12, the survey respondents indicated that they have substantial room to grow their enrollments.

In total, there were 11,060 Christian evangelical schools in America in the 2020-21 year ([source](#)). For that year, NCES reported that there were 1,365,730 students in grades PK-12 attending those Christian schools with upwards enrollment trends from 2011 to 2021.

Nearly 26% of these Christian schools are now members of either SCL or ACCS, the two umbrella organizations of classical schools highlighted earlier. This growth is not showing any signs of slowing. It should be expected that an increase of Protestant Christian denominational and non-denominational schools will transition to a classical education in large numbers. What is still uncertain is what shape this growth will take. Developments are underway to glean lessons from the CMO and EMO models that could allow for more rapid expansion of proven Christian Classical operators. The next decade will reveal how comprehensive these efforts become.

Generator #5. Catholic Classical School Renewal. In spring 2022, the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE) issued a report that found that 78% of the 47 schools it had surveyed experienced enrollment growth from 2018 to 2022 ([source](#)). Since that report was issued less than two years ago, ICLE has seen its membership increase from 147 to 218 schools across all 50 states and internationally.

In total, there are 5,920 Catholic schools serving 1,693,493 PK-12 students in the 2022-23 year ([source](#)). From 2020-21 to 2021-22, in the midst of the Pandemic, Catholic enrollment increased by 3.7%. From 2021-22 to 2022-23, Catholic enrollment once again increased by 50,805 students or 0.3%.

The average Catholic school enrolls 286 students, but many of these schools are operating in diocesan buildings that could enroll many more students. Over the past 58 years, many Catholic buildings that once housed schools have been leased to early childhood programs, public charter schools, and other youth service programs; we know this because, at their height in 1965-66, Catholic schools served 5.7 million students in America ([source](#)).

Only 3.7% of Catholic schools today are members of ICLE, but many more schools are joining as the classical approach is becoming a strategy for growth among many Catholic education leaders.



If the Catholic church in America were to embrace a renewal of Catholic schools that focused on systematically transitioning schools to classical models, it is possible we could see the more recent growth of Catholic school enrollment become sustained.

Generator #6. Bringing Adjacent Schools into the Fold. Dr. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., a distinguished literary critic, popularized the Core Knowledge Sequence in the 1980's. He started the Core Knowledge Foundation in 1986 to develop curricula and serve as a hub for Core Knowledge schools. Currently, there are 700 Core Knowledge schools in the U.S. Most of these schools are either public charter schools or public district schools that serve grades K-8 ([source](#)).

Notably, many of the most reputable classical schools in the nation use the Core Knowledge Sequence in the primary grades alongside high-quality curricula such as Singapore Math, Saxon Math, Riggs Phonics, Spalding, and other Orton-Gillingham Reading programs. For the purpose of this analysis, we consider Core Knowledge schools to be “classically friendly” but do not consider implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence to be sufficient to constitute a classical education.

Still, as Core Knowledge schools are closely aligned to many of the curricular commitments that undergird the classical approach, a transition to becoming fully classical would not be a major leap. Should a meaningful contingent of the 700 Core Knowledge schools and associated online education providers in America were to formally adopt a classical approach to school management, curriculum, and instruction, the impact could be profound. We estimate that Core Knowledge schools and programs enroll approximately 571,000 students in grades PK-12. If only 10% of these schools transitioned to classical, that would translate to nearly 10% growth for the classical market.

Generator #7. Higher Education Talent Pipelines. Delivering an excellent classical education requires ready access to administrators and teachers with a rigorous liberal arts education and distinguished subject-matter expertise. One of the chief challenges that K-12 classical schools face is how to source, recruit, employ, and retain significant numbers of highly qualified, classically aligned educators. For classical education to continue growing in a high-quality fashion, we believe that this constraint represents the top impediment to new school growth and performance.

However, there are pockets of higher education responding to this growing need. As the number of liberal arts graduates of postsecondary institutions grows, classical schools have more robust pools of talent to fish from. We can safely assume that the parents of many of the over 3.5 million students being homeschooled and the tens of millions more in traditional public schools, would choose quality brick-and-mortar schools if they were readily available. Supply side solutions will be key to meeting the pent-up demand created by school choice policies and the wider shifts in popular culture. Right now, many families do not have quality Christian classical schools close by. As a result, they are left to cobble together the best available online classical resources and instruction that they can afford to deliver at home.

Outlook Through 2035. As the seven generators just summarized continue to drive growth in classical education, we expect to see an increase in the growth trajectory and enrollment of classical schools. This proliferation will be animated by a widespread change in parent priorities and exercise of school choice that gained traction in the realities of the Pandemic experience. Below, the chart contains a projection of classical schools and enrollment in 2035.



2035 Classical School Enrollment in Grades PK-12	Schools	Enrollment
Enrollment growth in existing Christian classical schools	1,024	300,760
Enrollment growth in existing Roman Catholic classical schools	308	74,305
Enrollment growth in existing classical public charter schools	212	148,400
Startup/conversion of new Christian classical schools	576	144,000
Startup/conversion of new Roman Catholic classical schools	136	33,880
Startup of new classical public charter schools	119	83,475
Transition of adjacent schools to classical models	200	100,000
Growth of quality online/micro/co-op homeschooling options		522,418
TOTAL	2,575	1,407,238
As percent of total K-12 enrollment		2.4%

This projection is premised on several assumptions:

- That existing Christian and Roman Catholic classical schools will increase enrollment by between 20 and 30 percent, which translates into average school size of between 250 and 420 students.
- That enrollment in existing classical charter schools will increase to an average of 700 students, which has already proven to be a successful size replicated by such operators as Great Hearts Academies and such initiatives as the Barney Charter School Initiative at Hillsdale College.
- That the pace of new startups and conversions of Roman Catholic classical schools will continue at the same pace that they occurred from 2019 to 2023.
- That the pace of new startups and conversions of Christian classical schools will increase modestly but remain at approximately 5-7 percent per year from 2024 to 2035.
- That the pace of openings of new classical charter schools will increase modestly but remain at approximately 5-7 percent per year from 2024 to 2035.
- That two hundred “classically oriented” or “classically adjacent” schools will adopt the classical model in a robust fashion, which would bring 100,000 students into PK-12 classical education.
- That twice as many students will begin receiving a rigorous, holistic classical education relative to our 2023-24 estimate.

If these gains can be sustained, we project that a total of 1.4 million students, or 2.4% of all students in K-12 education, could be enrolled in quality classical schools by 2035. In our experience, other initiatives – which have not been factored into this landscape mapping – could materialize, resulting in the potential for largescale gains beyond these projections.



Are there the makings for an American classical education movement? As this market analysis confirms, the conditions are right for such a movement to take shape. Yet before this happens, far more qualified educational expertise, teaching talent, school and sector leadership, as well as institutional capacity are all needed. Building such a movement may start with expanding rigorous, traditional liberal arts offerings in higher education so that a much larger talent pool can be developed to foment accelerated classical school growth.

The strength of the growth trajectory that we are seeing in PK-12 classical education is that national market diversification begets widespread access, affordability, resource generation, and influence. The downside is that this growth is organic, uneven, and variable in quality.

To be unifying, coherent, and impactful, a “movement” must have at its core a shared vision, values, and tenets that attract many new believers and participants to the cause. What the PK-12 classical education movement of America has right now is a relatively loosely connected set of individuals and institutions whose primary focus is on running schools and delivering a quality classical education.

As those who seek to put together the building blocks for a classical education movement, they would do well to draw upon lessons learned from the charter school movement. From 2000 to 2020, the number of charter schools multiplied from 1,989 to 7,823 ([source](#)). During that same period, enrollment leaped from 448,362 to 3,695,769 students. There are a number of lessons to be drawn from the 20+ year experience of the charter school movement, some concerning what to do and some concerning what to avoid.

American education needs to undergo a sweeping remake. The outgoing era, which began in the 1980’s, was defined by a focus on standards, accountability, and innovation. It did not produce superior student outcomes or a vibrant prevailing national culture and identity.

In fact, a forceful argument can be made that PK-12 education has declined for 35+ years, especially when taking Pandemic learning loss into account. Because of the benefits and key differentiators just set forth, classical schools have much to contribute to the future of PK-12 education in America. The hallmark of that future is not heavy government regulation and standardization, which produces regression to the mean, but rather, the pursuit of excellence, an enduring pursuit of classical schools.

Increasingly, traditional district models are underserving children of all demographics. When schools nationwide shut down due to Covid-19, the impacts dramatically accelerated these market sentiments ([source](#)). Many parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds are increasingly of like mind: PK-12 education ought to prioritize a traditional focus on content, instill civic virtues and discourse in every student, and avoid an outsized emphases on popular culture and politics.

Because of the nine core benefits that classical schools offer to families and the six attributes that sharply distinguish them from other schools (see pages 2 and 4), classical schools have a strong case to make for growth. The question is, can they proliferate across America in time to influence the next generation and renew our nation’s prevailing anthropology and civil discourse? A classical education movement is needed, but will the United States get one in time?