

# Colorado's Independence Academy more than doubles in size while keeping its teachers and culture

*Colorado's Independence Academy more than doubled in size, keeping its teachers and culture and putting each child at the heart of its work.*

GRAND JUNCTION, CO, UNITED STATES, October 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In Grand Junction, Independence Academy has grown fast by putting each child at the heart of everything it does.

[Independence Academy Charter School](#), home to hands-on learning in Grand Junction, Colorado, more than doubled its enrollment, and its results, teachers and culture remain strong. It went from 236 students in 2019 to 525 in 2026.

Teachers and families have stayed loyal along the way, with teacher retention at 98% and student retention at 97%.

Careful planning supports rapid growth

Independence Academy, known as IACS, is a charter school, meaning it is public but has more say over how it teaches and operates. Its rise has been well managed, and a possible high school is among the options now under consideration.

Every decision weighs both children's daily experience and long-term stability. Each staff member should have a voice in those choices and room to grow and lead. Family input matters



Independence Academy Charter School



Lisa Gonsalves, Executive Director

too, so the expansion reflects the community IACS serves.

Financially, IACS has strengthened its operations. It has secured and managed \$13.4 million in grants and capital funding for buildings and other long-term needs. Reserves, the savings kept for the future, rose 35% over three years, and upgrading facilities has been a focus as enrollment climbs.



Home to hands-on learning in Grand Junction, CO

The investment extends to people.

Staff get support for their professional development, employees have paid maternity leave, and recruiting and retaining talented educators sits at the top of the list.

"To me, these accomplishments belong together," says Lisa Gonsalves, executive director of Independence Academy Charter School. "We have expanded opportunity for students while investing in the people and resources that make their success possible."

Lessons reach beyond the textbook

The IACS approach rests on one idea: every child learns differently and lights up over different things. That belief drives the expeditionary model, in which children learn through hands-on projects and real-world applications rather than textbooks alone. Ideas come alive in conversation, creative work, the arts and STEM, short for science, technology, engineering and math, with reading woven into every subject.

Classes lean on Socratic discussion, where classmates wrestle with open questions and build on one another's ideas. Teachers listen closely to what they ask and the thinking they bring. Projects and performances then give each child a chance to show what they have learned, and more than one way into the material.

Instruction and support are tailored to each learner, and lessons lay a strong foundation in core academic skills. The aim is for children to leave as confident critical thinkers who communicate clearly, work well with others and own their learning. Academically, the model delivers: IACS earned the district's highest science scores on CMAS, Colorado's statewide tests. It also ranks among the top performers in elementary and middle school math and English language arts.

Every child finds a path

At IACS, each child is known personally, strengths and needs alike, and smaller classes make that

possible. From there, every learner gets the right mix of support and challenge. A special services team works alongside teachers for those who need extra help, so everyone experiences one connected community. The academy also keeps one of the lowest student incident rates in its district, a reflection of the safe, supportive culture its team has built.

Children ready for more can join RISE for accelerated learning. CREATE brings art into other subjects, and SOAR invites young explorers to discover the world around them. Clubs, field trips and partnerships across Grand Junction take learning outside the classroom, connecting children with new people and opportunities.

Families are essential partners. Open communication and conversations with teachers and staff build relationships that make it easier to work together for every child. Family events and performances fill the campus with parents, caregivers and local residents. The arts and event spaces give young people a stage and a real sense of belonging.

Progress here is measured in more than grades. The team notices and encourages the moment a child takes an academic risk, works through a challenge or finds a passion in the arts. Families add to that picture by sharing what they see. Every one of those moments points back to one aim.

"Our goal is for every student to feel known, supported, and challenged to grow," says Gonsalves.

### About Independence Academy Charter School

Independence Academy Charter School is an expeditionary public charter school in Grand Junction, Colorado, where every student is known as an individual. It pairs high academic expectations with hands-on projects, the arts, STEM and Socratic discussion. Its RISE, CREATE and SOAR programs offer accelerated learning, arts integration and real-world exploration. Since 2019, enrollment has grown from 236 to 525 students, with 98% teacher retention and 97% student retention.

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