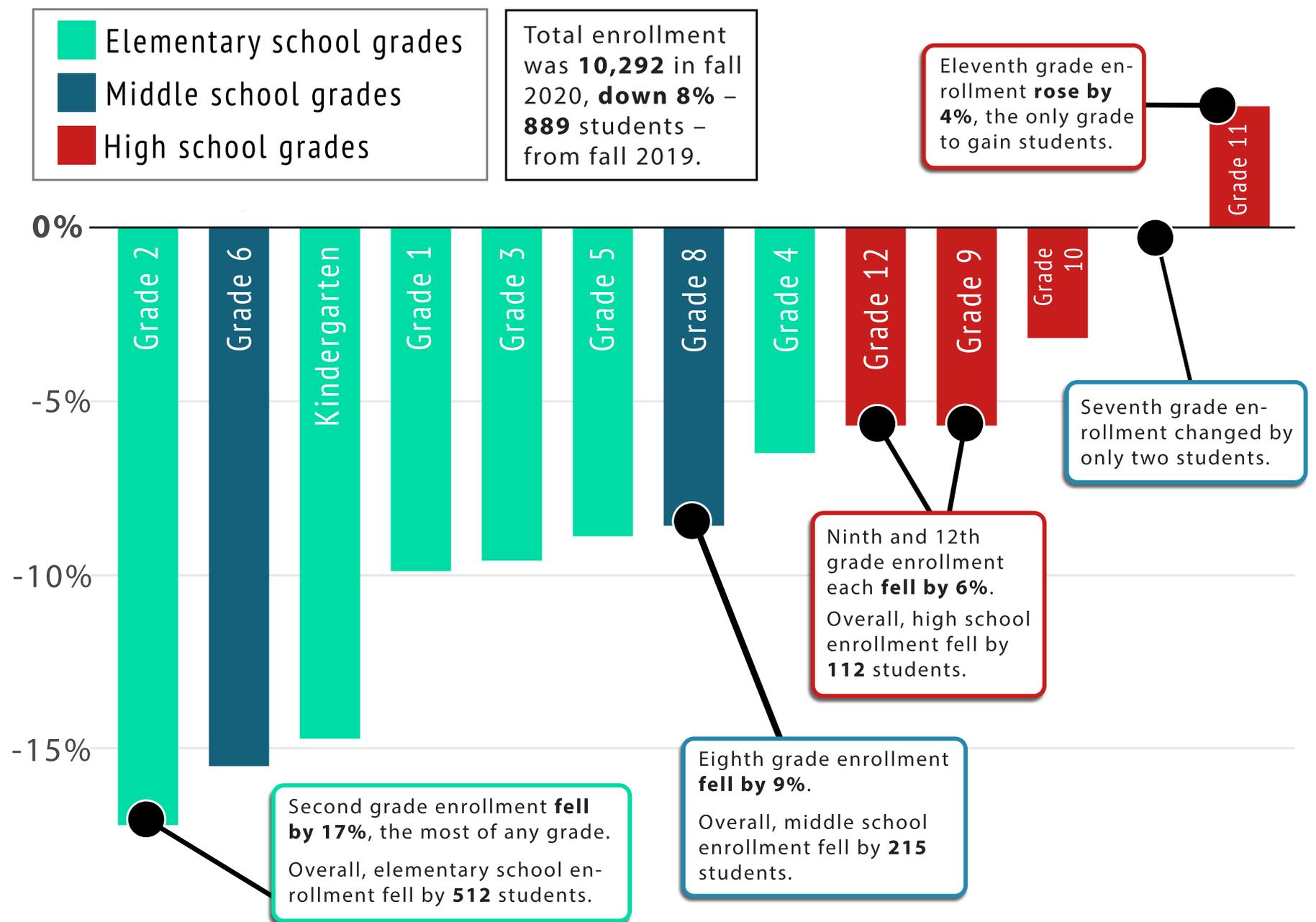


Percent change in enrollment, fall 2019 to fall 2020

by grade, Fauquier County Public Schools



SOURCE: VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hundreds of families turn to home schooling, private schools during pandemic

SCHOOLING, from page 1

Newton said that over the summer of 2020, “we thought long and hard about it. Home schooling wasn’t what we thought it would be. And my daughter really didn’t want me to be her teacher.

“We heard about Belle Meade and decided to test it out. After the first day, my daughter waved at everyone and told them she’d see them tomorrow. It’s the best option for her.”

She added, “I can say with 100% certainty that this school is allowing her to be the person she is meant to be.”

Newton acknowledged that the pandemic has brought with it a lot of negatives, a lot of loss. In fact, she lost her job at a local dental practice for a while, until she was hired back when the business was allowed to open again.

“But the best positive has been finding the school that fit her best. The pandemic gave us the time to take that pause.”

Home schooling

Chanell Maloney and her husband have two children, a son Kade, 5 years old and River, a daughter, who is 7. Before the pandemic, River was attending first grade at Bradley Elementary; Kade was in pre-school at Mountainside Montessori School in Marshall, where his mom also taught physical education part time.

In February, Maloney said, one child had a cold so she kept them home for a week, just to be safe. The pandemic at that time was just beginning to cause concern. The next week, she kept both kids

home after the second had caught the cold.

Maloney said that soon after that she pulled both children from school to reduce the chance of them bringing COVID home and possibly infecting a vulnerable relative. “We pulled them from school as a trial. We thought, ‘Let’s see how this goes.’

“A couple of weeks after that, everyone was home [when schools closed in March]. We found we enjoyed it.”

Maloney said the family had moved to the family farm in December 2019, explaining, “We had these beautiful, epic surroundings to learn from.”

She said the option of teaching her kids at home was something they’d considered before. “We were already toying with the idea of home schooling.” She said that because of the move to the farm, the family would have had to switch elementary schools. “We were in transition anyway,” and since she wasn’t working full time, “it wasn’t a big transition for me to home-school.”

Because the family had had experience with Montessori methods, Maloney didn’t worry about a curriculum. They were used to “child-led learning,” so that spring and summer, that’s what they did.

Maloney describes the “unschooling” they experimented with. “We have baby goats and a pond. I can’t tell you how many ‘pond studies’ we did. We focused on nature-based learning.

“Everything is a learning experience. We did a lot of cooking, measuring; we made clay models of everything. School was like play to them.”

The Maloneys had home-schooling friends “who had the same standards of care,” including masking and social distancing, and their kids

were the same age. “We went over there; they came over here.”

When school started in the fall, Maloney decided to continue home schooling. “I pulled the trigger and got a curriculum.” The curriculum she chose includes common core mathematics, which was new to Maloney. “I didn’t learn math that way!”

The children especially enjoy the science lessons. “We forage and have a natural medicine apothecary here at home. My daughter will be eating out of the yard. Now that the violets are coming in, she’ll be turning purple!”

Maloney admitted that there are challenges. Only 5, Kade gets to choose what he is interested in learning; River’s lessons are more structured. He can be a distraction when “he is having a big emotion day,” she said.

Maloney said the more relaxed nature of home schooling allows her to adjust to the children’s needs. “Sometimes they are frisky or can’t concentrate. I’ll push them out the door and tell them, ‘Go jump on the trampoline.’ They run around for half an hour, come back in and have a snack and we’ll try again. If it’s still not working, we’ll try again the next day.”

She admits that home schooling isn’t for everyone. “My husband [John] says if he had to do it, we wouldn’t be home schooling. I’m probably more patient.”

Maloney said the children both want to home-school in the fall. “I’ve already purchased curriculum for next year. I’m enjoying it. They’re enjoying it. We’ll continue until I’m done with it or they are.”

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