

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

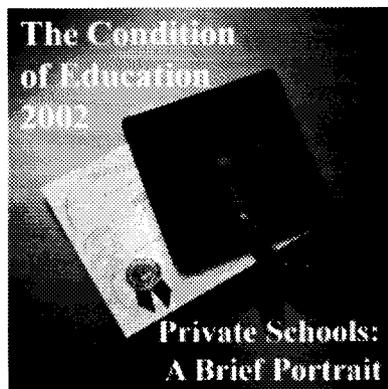
June 2002 • Number 276

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New Government Report on Private Schools

Data on Student Outcomes, School Climate, Staff Perceptions

Each year, no later than the first day of June, the National Center for Education Statistics reports to Congress on the condition of education. Perhaps because of a lively national interest in private education, this year's report includes a special analysis titled *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait*. The study shows some startling differences between private schools and public schools—differences that range from school size to school climate, from teachers to leadership, and from course requirements to student achievement.



First, some basic statistics: There were 27,000 private schools in the United States in 1999-2000, enrolling 5.3 million students, and employing over 400,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers. That translates into 24 percent of all schools in the country, 10 percent of students, and 12 percent of teachers. It seems private schools have staying power. As the report puts it, they have "maintained their share of total school enrollment throughout recent decades at roughly 10-11 percent, with growth rates parallel to those of public schools."

Time was when the overwhelming majority of private school students attended Catholic schools. In 1969, Catholic schools accounted for 85 percent of

private school students nationwide; today, however, they enroll 48 percent. Thirty-six percent of students attend what the report calls "other religious" schools, and 16 percent attend nonsectarian schools.

A greater share of private schools (42 percent versus 24 percent) are located in urban communities, though a greater share of public schools than private schools (45 percent versus 40 percent) are in suburban communities or large towns. Less than a third of public schools (31 percent) and a fifth of private schools (18 percent) are located in rural areas.

School Size/Class Size

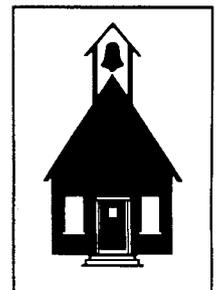
School size and class size are smaller in private schools than public schools. According to the report, "Research suggests that small/intermediate sized schools and relatively small classes can have advantages, including possibly leading to higher achievement." In 1999-2000, the average private school enrolled 193 students, compared to 535 students in public schools. Eighty percent of private schools and 29 percent of public schools had enrollments under 300 students. Class size for self-contained classrooms averaged 18.9 students in private schools and 20.9 in

public schools. For departmentalized classrooms, the average class size was 18.8 for private schools and 23.6 for public schools. The report notes some research that shows "placing students in small groups tends to foster close working relationships between teachers and students, thus enhancing learning, particularly among at-risk students and those in the early grades." The average student/teacher ratio was 13.2 to 1 in private schools and 15.6 to 1 in public schools.

Teacher Influence

Teachers in private schools have more influence on school policies and teaching practices than their counterparts in public schools. When it comes to practices such as selecting teaching techniques, evaluating students, selecting textbooks and materials, choosing content, and disciplining students, private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to see themselves as having a lot of control (table 1). And in matters of policy, the report notes substantial sector differences in the percentage of teachers who see themselves as having a lot of influence in establishing curriculum, setting student performance standards,

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setting discipline policy, and evaluating teachers (table 2). In short, the data suggest that private schools trust the

Table 1. Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of control over various teaching practices

	Private	Public
Selecting teaching techniques	92.5	87.4
Evaluating and grading students	92.4	89.1
Determining homework quantity	87.3	87.9
Disciplining students	85.5	73.3
Choosing content and skills to teach	75.0	56.7
Selecting textbooks, materials	70.6	54.1

professional judgement of teachers and value their counsel.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Private school teachers are more satisfied with their jobs than public school teachers—not a trivial finding, especially during a teacher shortage (table 3). They are also more content about class size and more likely to say they receive lots of support from parents. By substantial margins, they are more likely to agree that most colleagues share the school’s mission and that staff cooperative effort is high. The report notes the significance of the last two items this way: “A school’s professional climate, in particular the existence of a strong shared purpose among staff members and cooperative interactions among people at the school, is likely to contribute to its effectiveness.”

Although complaining about management may be an American pastime,

Table 2. Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies

	Private	Public
Establishing curriculum	67.5	44.3
Setting student performance standards	62.5	37.6
Setting discipline policy	47.9	30.4
In-service training content	35.5	32.5
Evaluating teachers	18.6	8.2
Hiring full-time teachers	14.1	14.5

most private school teachers have some positive things to say about school administrators. A majority strongly agrees that the principal enforces school rules (63 percent), expresses expectations for staff (57 percent), and communicates school goals clearly (61 percent). Six of ten private school teachers regard the administration as supportive and encour-

aging. By contrast, none of those items won strong agreement from a majority of public school teachers.

But when asked whether the principal often discusses instructional practices, only 15 percent of private school teachers and 11 percent of public school teachers said they strongly agree he or she does. Teachers also seem to think their work is not appreciated enough. Less than a majority of private school teachers (40 percent) and public school teachers (26 percent) strongly agree that staff are recognized for good work.

School Leaders

As noted above, most private school teachers agree that their principal communicates the school’s goals clearly, but what exactly is being communicated? Private school administrators are most likely to include academic excellence, religious development, and basic literacy skills among the three most important goals for their school (table 4). Religious development distinguishes private schools from public schools, but within the private school community it also distinguishes religious schools from nonsectarian schools, which enroll 16 percent of private school students. Although 82 percent of principals of Catholic schools and 80 percent of principals of other religious schools identify religious development among their top three goals, only 1 percent of nonsectarian school principals do so. Their top priorities include academic excellence (61 percent), basic literacy skills (64 percent), personal growth/self esteem (65 percent), and self-discipline/work habits (59 percent).

Academic Outcomes

Private school students scored well above the national average in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2000 tests in reading, math, and science (table 5). NAEP scores provide an immediate measure of student achievement, but the report also presents a long-term measure: attainment of a college degree. “[S]tudents who had attended private school in 8th grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor’s or higher degree by their mid-20s (52 versus 26 percent).”

And note this: For students from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES), the advantage of having attended a private school was even more pronounced. Those students were nearly

Table 3. Percentage of teachers who strongly agree with the following statements about school climate

	Private	Public
I am satisfied with teaching at this school	66.4	53.7
I am satisfied with my class size	60.0	35.8
Most colleagues share school's mission	59.9	33.2
Staff cooperative effort is high	56.0	33.9
I receive lots of parent support for my work	42.4	15.6
Rules are consistently enforced by teachers	37.8	22.8

four times more likely than their public school counterparts to have attained a bachelor’s or higher degree (table 6). Private school attendance even seems to overcome a parent’s low-expectations for a child. “[F]or students whose mother’s expectation (in 8th grade) was for them to attain an associate’s degree or less, those who had attended private school completed a bachelor’s or higher degree at a rate about four times that of public school students (30 versus 7 percent).”

The report explains that students from a low SES family who had “completed a calculus course in high school were much more likely than those who had not studied calculus to earn a degree by their mid-20s.” It also notes that students in private schools “are



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more likely than those in public schools to take challenging courses like calcu-

offer high school diplomas require community service, compared to 10 percent of public schools.

Table 4. Percentage of principals who rated each goal among the three most important for their school

	Private	Public
Academic excellence	66	70
Religious development or multicultural awareness*	64	11
Basic literacy skills	51	80
Self-discipline, work habits	47	60
Personal growth, self-esteem	32	32
Specific moral values	24	9
Social skills	12	25
Occupational skills	4	13

*Private school principals were given "religious or spiritual development" to rate, while public school principals were given "multicultural awareness" instead.

lus, and private schools are more likely to require them." Specifically, private high schools require more courses for graduation than public high schools in math, science, social studies, foreign language, and computer science, and the coursework is more likely to include advanced courses in science (chemistry, physic, advanced biology), mathematics (trigonometry, precalculus, calculus), and foreign language (a third year or more) (table 7).

Demanding coursework and high expectations are good for students. As the report states it, "Applying high academic standards—both requiring students to complete high-level, challenging courses and pushing students to strive and excel in their work—is a central schooling component that many experts recommend."

On top of the more challenging coursework, many private high schools

Table 5. Average scale scores for NAEP 2000 assessments

Grade	Private	Public
Grade 4		
Math	238	226
Science	163	148
Reading	234	215
Grade 8		
Math	287	274
Science	166	149
Grade 12		
Math	315	300
Science	161	145

also require students to serve the community as a condition for graduation. Forty percent of private schools that

Commenting on the achievement of private school students, the report acknowledges that private schools "have advantages from the

outset that many public schools cannot match, stemming from the choice by students and their families to participate in private education." But the report

Table 6. Percentage of 1988 8th graders attending public or private school who had completed a bachelor's or higher degree by 2000

Family socio-economic status	Private	Public
Lowest quartile	24.4	6.6
Middle two quartiles	38.6	22.3
Highest quartile	69.1	56.9
All quartiles	52.2	26.1

goes on to say that "requiring students to tackle difficult course materials, developing consistent commitment from staff to meet clearly communicated goals, and maintaining a school climate that extols learning may well contribute to better achievement at schools in either sector."

Schools and Staffing Survey

A major source of data for the NCES report on private schools was the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), the country's most extensive survey of public and private schools, their teachers, and administrators. On May 31, NCES released a separate overview of the SASS data collected during the 1999-2000 school year. The report contains some fascinating findings. Herewith some examples:

- The average age of private school teachers is 42; the average age of public school teachers is 42.3.

- The average starting salary for teachers in private schools is \$20,302; for teachers in public schools it is \$25,888.
- Private elementary schools are more likely than public elementary schools to offer students extended day, before-school, or af-

Table 7. Percentage of 1998 high school graduates taking advanced academic level courses in high school

	Private	Public
Science	81	60
Mathematics	70	39
Foreign language*	55	28

*Completion of a third or higher year of study

ter-school daycare programs (65 percent versus 47 percent).

- Public school teachers were more likely than private school teachers to report that physical conflicts among students were a problem in their school (5 percent versus 1 percent), that robbery or theft was a serious problem (2.4 percent versus 0.9 percent), that they were threatened with injury in the past 12 months (9.6 percent versus 3.9 percent), and that they were physically attacked in the past 12 months (4.2 percent versus 2.2 percent).

Private Schools: A Brief Portrait, a special analysis section of The Condition of Education 2002, is available on CAPE's Web site at www.capenet.org/new.html and on the NCES Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002025>. Data reported in the special analysis are from the following surveys: NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999-2000), the National Assessment of Educational Progress High School Transcript Study of 1998 (NAEP:1998), the NAEP:2000 student achievement tests, and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, "Fourth Follow-up" (NELS:1988/2000). Information about these surveys can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/>.





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• Results released last month from an assessment of student achievement in U.S. history show that the nation's students seem to be growing in knowledge about their country, though they're still a long way from knowing it well.

Average scores for fourth- and eighth-graders were higher in the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) 2001 U.S. history assessment than in 1994, when the test was last given. Twelfth-grade performance, however, remained, statistically speaking, unchanged.

Students in private schools scored above the national average (for details, go to <http://www.capenet.org/new.html>). According to Gary Phillips, deputy commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "At all three grades, students in nonpublic schools showed higher average performance than those in public schools."

The NAEP report states, "Knowledge of United States history is an important component of effective citizenship." In 1999, NCES released results from the NAEP civics assessment, also

designed to measure how well students are prepared to meet their responsibilities as citizens. Above-average private school scores in civics and history show private schools are second to none in instilling democratic principles and preparing good citizens.

• "If I were making policy on the basis of these data alone, I would say African-American kids should go to private schools." That's what researcher Michael T. Nettles said at a recent conference at the Brookings Institution. He was talking about an analysis of data relating SAT performance to rigorous coursework in high school.

Lynn Olson reported Nettles' comments and research in the May 22 edition of *Education Week*. Ms. Olson described one of Nettles' discoveries this way: "In one of the most striking findings, the almost 200-point gap in combined math and verbal SAT scores between white and African-American students turned out to be almost half as large in private, nonreligious schools, and more than one-fourth as large in Roman Catholic and other religious schools. That proved to be the case even after adjusting for characteristics commonly associated with nonpublic

schools, such as smaller school size and a more academically focused curriculum."

• Harvard professors Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell were at the Brookings Institution last month to discuss their new book, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*. Based on randomized field trials on the effects of privately funded vouchers in New York City, Dayton, and Washington, DC, the book documents the positive effects of vouchers on African-American students. After three years of using vouchers to attend a private school, the three-city average scores of African-American students rose 6.6 national percentile points on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Scores for students in New York City rose 9.2 points, closing the black/white achievement gap by nearly half.

• U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige last month announced the names of 172 secondary schools selected as Blue Ribbon Schools for 2001-2002. The list includes 145 public schools and 27 private schools. More information about the program, including the names of recognized schools, is available on CAPE's Web site at www.capenet.org.