

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Private School Students Surpass SAT Benchmark

The College Board reported last month that “only 43 percent of SAT takers in the class of 2012 graduated from high school with the level of academic preparedness associated with a high likelihood of college success.”

The findings reflect the percentage of students who met or exceeded the SAT College & Career Readiness Benchmark, a combined score of 1550 on three SAT tests (critical reading, writing, and mathematics), “which research shows is associated with higher rates of enrollment in four-year colleges, higher first-year college GPAs, and higher rates of retention beyond the first year.” Specifically, the 1550 score “indicates a 65 percent likelihood of achieving a B- average or higher during the first year of study at a four-year college,” claims the College Board.

“This report should serve as a call to action to expand access to rigor for more students,” said College Board President Gaston Caperton. “Our nation’s future depends on the strength of our education system. When less than half of kids who want to go to college are prepared to do so, that system is failing. We must make education a national priority and deliver rigor to more students.”

### School Differences

Performance against the SAT benchmark varied by type of school. For college-bound seniors in public schools across the nation, the combined average

SAT score was 1477—73 points shy of the benchmark—while the average for religious school students was 1594 (44 points above the benchmark) and that for independent school students was 1667, exceeding the benchmark by 117 points.

Similarly, in each of the subjects tested, SAT scores for college-bound seniors in religious and independent schools were significantly higher than the national average. Mean SAT scores for students in public schools

were 481 in writing, 491 in reading, and 505 in math, while comparable scores for students in religious schools were 529, 531, and 534. Students in independent schools scored 548, 539, and 580.

Among SAT class of 2012 students for whom a high school is known, 10 percent attended a religiously affiliated school, 6 percent attended an independent school, and 84 percent attended a public school.

That translates into 151,408 students from religious schools, 94,846 from independent schools, and 1,284,459 from public schools. For 133,766 students, the type

of high school was “other or unknown.” Overall, roughly 1.66 million students in the class of 2012 took the SAT, the largest class in the test’s history.

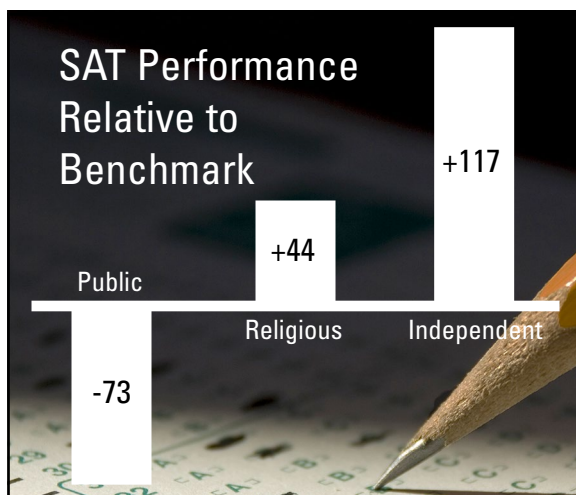
### Drop in Scores

According to the College Board, “The number of students taking the SAT in each graduating class has increased 6 percent since 2008, while critical reading scores have declined four points, writing scores have declined five points, and mathematics scores have remained stable during that time.”

For students across the nation in the class of 2012, regardless of type of school, mean SAT scores were 488 in writing, 496 in critical reading, and 514 in math. Standard deviations were 114 in writing and reading, and 117 in math. The 50th and 75th percentile scores in writing were, respectively, 480 and 560; in reading they were 490 and 570, and in math, 510 and 600.

According to the College Board, the SAT “is a highly reliable and valid standardized measure of college readiness used in the admission process at nearly all four-year colleges and universities in the United States.” The company says that the content on the SAT “reflects the reading, mathematics, and writing curricula taught

in high school classrooms. The College Board also claims that the test is “a fair and valid predictor of college success for students of all backgrounds.”



Schools	Writing	Reading	Math
Independent	548	539	580
Religious	529	531	534
Public	481	491	505

**CAPE member organizations:**

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- 33 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
Executive Director: Joe McTighe

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## Private School Students Exceed National Average in Writing

In the age of image sharing, text messaging, and Facebook, are students able to write a readable paragraph? The federal government last month released results from an assessment of the writing skills of the nation's students, and the findings were mixed.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing 2011 report, 80 percent of eighth-grade students across the nation scored at or above the Basic level of achievement, denoting "partial mastery of the prerequisite skills and knowledge fundamental for proficient work," but only 27 percent scored at or above the Proficient level, demonstrating "solid academic performance."

### Varied Results

Results varied by type of school. Ninety-two percent of private school students and 79 percent of public school students scored at the Basic level or higher. Forty-one percent of private school students and 26 percent of public school students scored at or above the Proficient level (see chart).

On the test's 300-point measurement scale, with the mean set at 150 and a standard deviation of 35, the average score for eighth-grade students in private schools was 164, while that for students in public schools was 149. By way of reference, the 50th percentile score for the nation

was 151; the 75th percentile score was 175, and the score at the 25th percentile was 127.

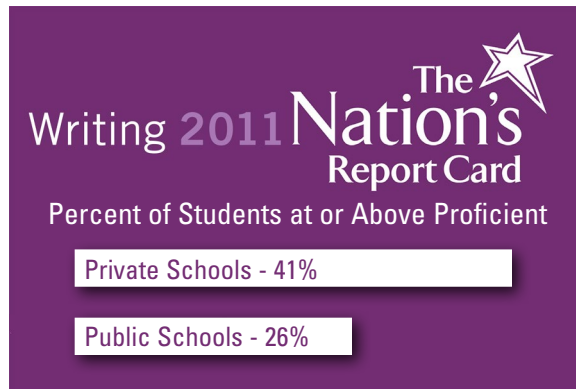
### Groundbreaking

The 2011 writing assessment was groundbreaking in that for the first time ever, NAEP used computers to measure writing proficiency. In keeping with the new assessment, the National Assessment Governing Board, which establishes policy for NAEP, defined writing as "a complex, multifaceted and purposeful act of

communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a variety of language resources and technological tools."

"The pace of written communication in today's environment reflects the transition to an

information-based economy built on complexity and efficiency," said David P. Driscoll, chairman of the Governing Board. "The Nation's Report Card's new computer-based design captures students' ability to respond clearly and accurately in real-world, on-demand situations and allows NAEP to collect information about how students use technology in developing and editing their writing. These data tell us how well students are writing using the technology they will have in higher education and the workplace."



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absolutely do that." He urged the private school community to "challenge us hard as we think about that."

On the waiver issue, the secretary said he wanted to pursue that matter "off-line," saying there should be a "thoughtful conversation" on the topic with key staff.

### Lots of Frustration

Nathan Diament told the secretary that the private school community is feeling "a lot of frustration" when it comes to the implementation of federal education programs. He called on the department to identify "clear best practice models" and "real metrics" to demonstrate what equitable participation is supposed to look like. Diament also urged the department to require transparency from states and districts on how much money should be set aside for private school services, the cost of those services, and

how funds are spent. As a third point, Diament said there should be oversight by the department with consequences in order to ensure equitable services. For starters, he suggested that the next round of Race to the Top funding should include a criterion regarding the successful implementation of equitable services. Summarizing his message, Diament said clear best practice models, transparency, and oversight with consequences "could really move the ball down the field in a way that is meaningful to our schools and our children."

Secretary Duncan called Diament's points "great suggestions." He said the department should work on "coming up with the right metrics and transparency" and said the responsibility for oversight "is totally on us." Urging the private school community to keep pushing hard on that point, Duncan said, "The lack of transparency, the lack of accountability is not acceptable."

## Secretary Duncan Meets with Private School Leaders

It's common knowledge that U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is a basketball die-hard. He co-captained the varsity team at Harvard (where he graduated *magna cum laude*) and even played professionally in Australia for several years. But participants at the U.S. Department of Education's annual conference for private school leaders September 27 learned a fresh piece of Duncan basketball trivia. Despite his 6-foot-4-inch height, he doesn't tend to jump high and dunk during games. "I would love to jump high; I just can't do it...It just didn't quite happen for me," said the secretary.

Duncan also shared some other personal particulars. He reminded the group that he himself attended a private school growing up and "received an amazing world-class education" that "shaped me profoundly." Noting the "night and day" difference in quality between the education he receive and the one afforded less fortunate children residing just a short distance from his neighborhood, Duncan said the disparity "is why I do this work." He added, "What I just desperately want for this country is for every single child to have a chance to go to a great school—public, private, nonprofit, faith-based. We just need a lot more good schools in this country and a lot less bad schools." The secretary called for collaboration between the public and private sectors in pursuit of the point where "every single child in this country is given a great education."

### Three Interlocutors

In a forum suggestive of a television news panel, Duncan dialogued on stage with three interlocutors: Robert Witt, executive director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools; Sr. Dale McDonald, director of public policy at the National Catholic Educational Association, and Nathan Diamant, executive director for public policy at the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations.

Saying that innovation is the "responsibility of private education," Robert Witt invited Secretary Duncan to consider the potential for change that might exist when public and

private schools work together. He announced the upcoming formation of a new coalition, the National Network of Schools in Partnership, in which private schools will pair up with public schools to advance educational equity through innovation. Witt invited Secretary Duncan to leverage department resources to boost the coalition's work.

The secretary said the new entity has "potentially huge positive implications for the country," and added, "Whatever I can do to help, count me in."

### Three Problems

Sr. Dale McDonald outlined three problems surrounding the equitable participation of private school students in federal education programs, explaining that all three could be addressed through regulations or guidance issued by the Department of Education.

The first problem is that the department has decided that funds for certain set-asides in Title I are to be carved out by districts before they calculate funds for equitable services to private school students. The upshot has been a "great diminishment in the ability of our students to participate," said McDonald.

A related problem is that the department's new waivers program for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act renders equitable services for private school students dependent on how districts decide to use certain freed-up funds. By way of example, if a district uses such funds for its focus schools, those funds are exempt from the requirements of equitable participation.

The third issue is that sometimes the department creates discretionary programs outside the realm of equitable participation. McDonald urged the secretary to involve the Office of Non-Public Education when designing new programs and to presume that private school students should be included to the extent allowed by the law and the U.S. Constitution.

Secretary Duncan responded that the creation of new programs to which private school students have access "makes a lot of sense to me," adding, "There is no question we should

## Choice Advocates

Two interesting school-choice developments unfolded last month.

First, actress Viola Davis (*Doubt, The Help, Won't Back Down*) offered a succinct and impassioned case for choice during an interview with Jay Leno on *The Tonight Show*. In her own words:

"I am a parent. And as a parent, I have a child and I know that the only way she's going to get a part of the American Dream is through education. And so if that great education is a public school, I'm going to send my kid to the public school. If that great education is a charter school, I'm going to send my kid to a charter school. If it's a private school, I'll send her to a private school. I think that it's about wanting to do what's best for your kid."

A video clip is available at [www.capenet.org/new.html](http://www.capenet.org/new.html).

Second, the American Center for School Choice (ACSC) established an ecumenical Commission on Faith-based Schools. According to a news release, the immediate tasks of the commission are to: "1) expand public understanding and appreciation of the role of faith-based schools in American education, especially in low-income communities; and, 2) address the need for expanding publicly funded school choice to increase a family's ability to choose from among a full range of options, including a faith-based school."

"It is essential that the right and freedom of parents to choose the best education for their children be recognized, and we believe this commission will make an important contribution toward that goal," said Peter Hanley, ACSC's executive director.

"Faith based schools are precious assets, not only for the families they serve, but for the nation. Families have a right to choose faith based schools, and a wise nation should support their choice," said Michael Guerra, chairman of the commission.



U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan stays low in the 2012 Sprint NBA All-Star Celebrity Game. Official Department of Education photo by Paul Wood.

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## CAPE notes

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced September 7 the names of 269 schools identified by the U.S. Department of Education as the National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2012.

Schools were selected either because their standardized test scores in reading and math placed them among the top-performing schools in the nation or state, or because they served disadvantaged students and made extraordinary progress in improving performance.

Fifty private schools were among the awardees this year. Each state's commissioner of education nominates public schools for the award, and CAPE nominates private schools. All winning schools will be honored at an awards ceremony November 12-13 in Washington, D.C.

"Our nation has no greater responsibility than helping all children realize their full potential," Duncan said. "Schools honored with the National Blue Ribbon Schools award are committed to accelerating student achievement and preparing students for success in college and careers. Their work reflects the conviction that every child has promise and that education is the surest pathway to a strong, secure future."

The department officially describes the program as honoring "public and private elementary, middle, and high schools where students perform at very high levels or where significant improvements are being made in students' levels of achievement."

More information about the program, is available at [capenet.org/brs.html](http://capenet.org/brs.html).

### Private School Awardees

(By State)

**Arkansas** – Little Rock Christian Academy, Little Rock • **California** – Stonybrooke Christian School, Ladera Ranch • Tehiyah Day School, El Cerrito • **Connecticut** – Corpus Christi School, Wethersfield • Our Lady of Mercy School, Madison • St Dominic School, Southington • St Joseph School, Danbury • **District of Columbia** – Blessed Sacrament School, Washington • **Florida** – Holy Family Catholic School, Jacksonville • Westlake Christian School, Palm Harbor • **Georgia** – First Presbyterian Day School, Middle School, Macon • **Illinois** – School of St Mary, Lake Forest • Ss Peter & Paul School, Naperville • St Athanasius School, Evanston • St Francis Xavier School, Wilmette • St John of the Cross, Western Springs • St Luke Parish School, River Forest • St Mary of the Woods, Chicago • St Patrick School, Washington • **Kansas** – St Thomas Aquinas High School, Overland Park • **Kentucky** – Christian Academy School System: Rock Creek Elementary School, Louisville • Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills • St James Catholic

Regional School, Elizabethtown • Seton Catholic School, Lexington • St Henry District High School, Erlanger • **Maryland** – Father Andrew White S.J. School, Leonardtown • Notre Dame Preparatory School, Towson • St Augustine School, Elkridge • St Peter's School, Olney • **Missouri** – St Gerard Majella Catholic School, Kirkwood • **Nebraska** – Mount Michael Benedictine School, Elkhorn • VJ and Angela Skutt Catholic High School, Omaha • **New Jersey** – Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, Tenafly • Reverend George A. Brown Memorial School, Sparta • St Leo the Great School, Lincroft • St Paul School, Princeton • St Philip the Apostle School, Clifton • St Vincent de Paul Catholic School, Stirling • St Joseph School, Mendham • Visitation Academy, Paramus • **New York** – St Martin de Porres School, Poughkeepsie • **North Carolina** – Immaculata School, Durham • **Ohio** – Holy Family School, Stow • Our Lady of the Elms Elementary School, Akron • St Dominic School, Shaker Heights • St Edward School, Ashland • **Texas** – St Anthony of Padua Catholic School, The Woodlands • St Thomas Aquinas School, Dallas • **Virginia** – Holy Cross Academy, Fredericksburg • St Edward-Epiphaney School, Richmond, VA

