

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students Take AP Exams at Above-Average Rates

Last month, more than two million high school students endured more than four million Advanced Placement (AP) exams in an effort to get a jump on college credit and demonstrate college readiness.

A lot is riding on those exams. Students who do well can cut college expenses or take upper-level college classes. College credits earned in high school can also pave the way for a double major or a semester overseas. The College Board, which publishes the exams, says students who attain an AP score of 3 or higher not only earn higher GPAs in college than their peers, but are also more likely to actually graduate.

With AP courses serving as one indicator of the extent to which high schools challenge students and prepare them for college, CAPE obtained from the College Board summary data about AP exams and scores for students in private schools who took the tests in 2014.

It turns out that private school students took 455,009, or 11 percent, of the 4,022,216 AP exams taken by U.S. students in public and private schools in 2014. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that private secondary schools enrolled only 7.8 percent of the nation's secondary school students in 2013-14. Thus, private schools accounted for a disproportionately high number of AP exams.

College-Ready Performance

The numbers are even more impressive when examining the share of students who scored 3 or higher, the benchmark generally accepted by colleges for awarding credit. Students in public and private high schools received a grade of 3 or higher on 2,364,319 AP exams in 2014, a combined success rate of 59 percent. But of the 455,009 AP exams taken by students in private schools, 324,524 yielded a 3+ score, for a success rate of 71 percent. In

other words, private schools, which again enrolled 7.8 percent of high school students, accounted for 14 percent of all AP exams on which students achieved scores predictive of college success.

The mean AP score for private school students in 2014 was 3.24, and the mean score for public school students was 2.82.

Exam Ratio

How does the number of AP exams taken in 2014 compare with the number of enrolled students? NCES estimates there were 14,639,000 students in grades 9-12 in public schools in 2013-14 and 1,235,000 students in the same grades in private schools. In 2014, the ratio of AP exams to students was 24 percent in public schools and 37 percent in private schools. Put another way, 24 AP exams were administered for every 100 public school students and 37 exams were administered for every 100 private school students. What's more, the ratio of successfully completed AP exams (i.e., those receiving a score of 3 or higher) to students was 14 percent in public schools and 26 percent in private schools. Keep in mind that total enrollment in grades 9-12 is the denominator in these calculations, even though most AP examinees are 11th and 12th graders.

Achievement Gaps

Gaps in AP scores between black students and white students are narrower in private schools than in public schools. The average AP score for black students in 2014 was 2.01 for students in public schools and 2.72 for students in private

schools. For white students the average score was 2.99 in public schools and 3.27 in private schools. Simple subtraction yields a black/white achievement gap of 0.55 in private schools and 0.98 in public schools.

African American students in public

and private schools in 2014 took 284,126 AP exams. Private school students accounted for 18,325, or 6.4 percent, of those exams and 11.5 percent of exams with a score of 3 or higher—scores predictive of college success. In

public schools, the percentage of AP tests taken by African American students that yielded a score of 3 or higher was 28.9 percent, while in private schools it was 54.9 percent, a figure approaching the 58.8 percent average national AP success rate for all students in public and private schools.

Higher Scores Across the Board

The private school AP score advantage held true for every racial and ethnic group whose results are reported by the College Board. Specifically, private school scores exceeded public school scores by the following margins: American Indian/Alaskan (0.52); Asian/Asian American (0.21); Black/African American (0.71); Mexican American (0.61); Puerto Rican (0.50); Other Hispanic (0.71); White (0.28); Other (0.48); All Students (0.42).

Of the 34 AP exams offered by the College Board, the three most popular among private school students were United States History (53,475), English Literature and Composition (49,571), and English Language and Composition (46,552).

Number of Exams	455,009
Mean Score	3.24
Number Scoring 3+	324,524
Percent Scoring 3+	71%

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- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
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- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
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- National Association of Episcopal Schools
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a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
Executive Director: Joe McTighe

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$35. ISSN 0271-1451

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NY Gov. Cuomo Launches Major Drive for School Choice

New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo unveiled new school choice legislation last month and immediately engaged in a whirlwind tour across the state to promote it. With appearances in Long Island and a Buffalo suburb on May 12, and at various locations in Brooklyn on May 17, Cuomo called on voters to urge legislators to pass the bill in the current session, scheduled to end June 17.

“This is not about politics; it’s not about religion,” said the governor. “It’s about fairness, and it’s about choice, and it’s about opportunity.”

Calling education the “gift that we give the next generation,” Cuomo said the question is, “Who is going to make the decision about the child’s education?” His answer was clear: “That decision should remain with the parent.”

But choice requires options, said Cuomo. Schools have to exist and parents have to be able to afford them. “That’s what the education tax credit does,” he said. “It gives parents the real choice, and it gives them real options, and it keeps religious schools open, and it makes it affordable for parents who are low- and middle-income. And that to me is inarguable.”

\$150 Million Package

According to the governor’s Web site, the *Parental Choice in Education Act* would provide: “(1) Tax credits to low-income families who send their children to nonpublic schools, (2) Scholarships to low- and middle-income students to attend either a public school outside of their district or a nonpublic school, (3) Incentives to public schools for enhanced educational programming (like after school programs), and (4) Tax credits to public school teachers for the purchase of supplies.”

The \$150 million package would include \$70 million in tax credits of up to \$500 per student for families with annual incomes under \$60,000.

Another \$50 million would be available for tax credits to encourage individuals and businesses to donate to scholarship-granting organizations. Since the tax credits would be worth 75 percent of the donation, they would yield \$66.7 million in scholarships.

An additional \$20 million would be available

for tax credits to yield \$26.7 million for education improvement programs in public schools.

Finally, \$10 million would be used to provide tax credits of up to \$200 to educators to offset the out-of-pocket costs of classroom instructional materials and supplies.

Diverse Coalition

According to a poll released May 26 by Siena College in Loudonville, NY, voters in New York City support Cuomo’s proposal by a 14-point margin, though voters in the downstate suburbs and upstate region oppose it. “While white voters oppose the proposal, it is supported by a majority of black, Latino, Jewish, and Catholic voters,” said pollster Steven Greenberg. “It is strongly opposed by those earning more than \$100,000 annually and supported by those earning less than \$50,000,” he added.

The poll was conducted May 18-21 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Commenting on the poll’s findings, Robert Bellafiore, spokesman for the InvestInEd Coalition, which supports the measure, told *The Legislative Gazette*, a newspaper that covers the state legislature, “Rarely, if ever, do you see one issue that unites African Americans and blacks, Latinos, Catholics and Jews like the education tax credit.”

Exemplifying the diverse support, Rabbi David Zwiebel, executive vice president of Agudath Israel of America, a CAPE member, said: “Governor Cuomo has offered a bold new proposal that in significant ways goes even farther than the educational investment tax credit that was under consideration earlier this year. This is a historic development, a tremendous breakthrough for the cause for which we have been advocating for many decades. Kudos to the governor for his vision, his persistence, his political courage!”

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, Roman Catholic archbishop of New York, highlighted the diversity saying, “This is not just a Catholic issue; it is an issue for every parochial, private, or nonpublic school that is devoted to the success of their students. Our students are our greatest treasure and the *Parental Choice in Education Act* is all about supporting them no matter where they go to school.”



NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo promotes school choice on May 12 in Westbury, NY. (Photo: Office of the Governor)

Montana and Nevada Make School Choice History

Last month's *Outlook* noted that April had been a bonanza month for school choice legislation, with measures approved in six state legislatures: Arizona, Arkansas, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, and Tennessee. Governors in four of those states had already signed their respective bills by the end of April, and it looked like Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam would soon do the same (he did on May 19) but that Montana Governor Steve Bullock would not. Well, as expected, Bullock did not sign Montana's school choice bill, but neither did he veto it, thereby allowing the tax credit scholarship legislation to become law on May 11 by default. The surprise move made Montana the 25th state in the country to have one or more private school choice programs.



Nevada

But an even more momentous school choice breakthrough took place on Friday, May 29, when the Nevada legislature approved the nation's first universal education savings account (ESA) program, effectively providing parents of every public school student in the state the chance to direct their child's education. State lawmakers in effect doubled down on school choice by passing their second choice bill of the session, the first being a tax credit scholarship program.

Nevada Assemblyman James Oscarson said the ESA bill "sets a new top standard for school choice in our nation," according to the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

If signed into law by Governor Brian Sandoval, the historic SB 302 would allow parents of children who have attended public school in the state for 100 consecutive days to enter into an agreement with the state to receive a grant equal to 90 percent of the statewide average per pupil support (100 percent for children from low-income families or children with disabilities). The money would be deposited into an education savings account that the parent could use for authorized expenditures, such as private school tuition, tutoring expenses, fees for distance learning programs, and the cost of textbooks.

Participating private schools must ensure that ESA students take either the prescribed state exams in mathematics and English language arts or a norm-referenced achievement examination in mathematics and English language arts each year.

"We are thrilled that Nevada will soon be added to the list of states that offer multiple options and innovative school choice programs to families," said Betsy DeVos, chairman of the American Federation for Children in an AFC news release. She called the vote "a victory for students throughout Nevada who await access to an education tailored to their needs." DeVos went on to thank Nevada Senator Scott Hammond, the bill's sponsor.

The same news release quoted Hammond as saying, "Students today are most successful when they can customize their educational experience to meet their unique needs and this bill provides that opportunity for all Nevada families."

Montana

The new school choice law in Montana will provide individual taxpayers and businesses a dollar-for-dollar tax credit worth up to \$150 for contributions to private school scholarship organizations and/or to an innovative education fund for the state's public schools.

The total amount of tax credits statewide may not exceed \$3 million for each component of the program, but if the aggregate limit is reached in a given year, the state must increase the limit by 10 percent for the succeeding year.

The new program takes effect January 1, 2016, and defines a student scholarship organization as a charitable organization exempt from federal income tax that allocates not less than 90 percent of its revenue to scholarships. Any school-age child in the state is eligible for a scholarship, which may not exceed 50 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure in the state's public schools. Scholarship organizations may not limit access to a particular school; nor may donors direct their contributions to specific students or schools.

Participating private schools must administer a nationally recognized standardized test and make the results available to parents. If a school has students in eighth-grade or eleventh-grade, it must administer the test in those grades and make the overall results public on either the school's Web site or the Web site of the state's Office of Public Instruction. Schools must also satisfy any health and safety requirements that apply to private schools in the state.

[Map images ©niroworld/Dollar Photo Club]

Tale of Two Boys

Freddie Gray and Derrell Bradford grew up in the same neighborhood: Sandtown-Winchester in Baltimore, now known for the protests and riots in April that followed Freddie Gray's death. The neighborhood, writes Bradford in a recent [column](#), constitutes "the census tract that is home to more inmates in the Maryland correctional system than any other."

Frederick Douglass High School, whose students were seen on TV hurling rocks at police, was Derrell Bradford's zoned public school. He says he could have been Freddie Gray "but for the right school and the shining fingertip of providence."

Bradford traveled each day to St. Paul's School for Boys, an Episcopal school with a clear mission: "Seek truth, knowledge and excellence; live by faith, compassion and integrity."

Now executive director of NYCAN, which works for high-quality education for all children, Bradford has been a longtime supporter of parent choice in education.

"I get a lot of resistance for my efforts broadly in education reform and, very specifically, for my work on and deep belief in school choice," he writes. "But it's exactly because you grow up in Sandtown that you know the value of an excellent school which you get to attend regardless of who your parents are, how much money they make, or where you live."

In a [biographical sketch](#) on the NYCAN Web site, Bradford writes: "[N]othing engages me more than working to make sure every kid has the same chance I did to attend a great school or have a great teacher."

To be sure, Derrell Bradford and his colleagues in the school choice movement face a certain urgency. *The Baltimore Sun* reported that in the month of May alone, there were 43 homicides in Baltimore, along with an additional 108 nonfatal shootings.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ On May 28, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released *The Condition of Education 2015*, a 300-page compendium of data on American education presented through 42 indicators that summarize findings from NCES surveys. One indicator looks at the pattern of high school coursetaking. Among the findings: “A higher percentage of 2009 graduates from private schools (85 percent) had taken courses in algebra II/ trigonometry than had graduates from traditional public schools (75 percent), and a higher percentage of graduates from private schools (23 percent) had taken courses in calculus than had graduates from public schools (15 percent). Also, a higher percentage of private high school graduates (44 percent) had taken at least one credit in biology, chemistry, and physics than had graduates from traditional public schools (29 percent).”

★ Also in May, the National Center for Education Statistics released a revised version of a 2013 report on *Parent and Family Involvement in Education*, which, among other findings, confirmed the fact that parents who choose their child’s school are more satisfied with the school and its various characteristics than parents who are assigned a school by the government.

Looking at data from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012 (NHES:2012), the report found that parents of 80 percent of students enrolled in a religious private school in 2011-12 and 81 percent of students in other pri-

rate schools reported being “very satisfied” with their child’s school, compared to the parents of 56 percent of students in public schools to which their children were assigned and 62 percent of students in public schools that parents chose (e.g., charter schools and magnet schools). Higher percentages of private school parents than public school parents were also very satisfied with the teachers their children had and with the academic standards of the school.

★ With Baltimore, MD, under considerable scrutiny in the wake of recent unrest (see related story on p. 3), a new report from the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice is telling. Titled *The Achievement Checkup: Tracking the Post-Elementary Outcomes of Baltimore Need-Based Scholarship Students*, the study looks at “the high school experiences, graduation rates and post-secondary attendance rates of students who received need-based scholarships to attend private elementary schools from the Children’s Scholarship Fund Baltimore (CSFB).”

Although the scholarships are for attendance at elementary schools, “One of the goals of CSFB is to increase high school graduation rates and improve postsecondary education success rates of low-income students living in and near the city.”

According to the executive summary, the study found that “high school graduation rates of the CSFB group were very high, but consistent with the other Chil-

dren’s Scholarship Fund programs that have been studied around the nation.” It turns out that “recipients of the scholarships attended a wide variety of high school types, including regular public neighborhood high schools, Catholic high schools, charter schools, and secular private high schools.” The high schools they attended “were generally well outfitted with college preparation resources, regardless of high school type.” Not surprisingly, the students “with strong college counseling environments in high school were more likely to enroll in college after graduation.”

The authors suggest that “to encourage more school choice students to enter challenging colleges, scholarship organizations should help to connect those students with more college preparatory resources and work with a wide variety of local high schools to provide more low-cost, college preparatory resources to low-income students.”

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