

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools



## Gallup Poll: Americans Give High Marks to Private Schools

Americans rate private schools significantly higher than other types of schools, according to a Gallup poll conducted early last month and released August 21.

The survey of 1,017 U.S. adults aged 18 and older found that 71 percent of participants regarded independent private schools as excellent or good, while 63 percent gave the same rating to parochial or church-related schools. Charter schools received excellent or good ratings from 55 percent of American adults; home schools from 46 percent, and public schools from 44 percent.

Survey participants were prompted as follows: "I'm going to read a list of ways in which children are educated in the U.S. today. As I read each one, please indicate—based on what you know or have read and heard—how good an education each provides children: excellent, good, only fair or poor."

### Excellent Grades

Looking at just the highest rating, independent schools received an excellent mark from 21 percent of respondents, as did religious schools. Charter schools and home schools were each rated excellent by 14 percent of respondents. But only 5 percent of American adults considered public schools to be excellent.

At the other end of the ratings spectrum, one in five respondents thought public schools were poor.

Gallup surveyed adults who had children in school and those who did not. Its report concluded, however, that the "views of parents with children in K-12 about the quality of the various educational options are largely similar to those of adults without school-aged children."

### D's & R's

But significant differences did emerge based on party affiliation. As the report puts it, "Republicans are more positive than Democrats about parochial, charter, and home school-

ing, and Democrats are more positive than Republicans about public schooling."

The report continues: "Still, both party groups rank private schooling as the most effective, with 76 percent of Republicans and 68 percent of Democrats saying it provides students with an excellent or good education. Parochial schools rank second for both. However, charter schools rank third among Republicans, followed by home schooling and then public schools. For Democrats, charter schools tie with public schools at 48 percent, while home schooling is rated worst at 38 percent."

### Trends

Gallup conducted the same survey only one other time, in 2012. Although the overall rank order is the same in 2017 as it was five years ago, "the percentage of U.S. adults who consider public school education as excellent or good increased by seven percentage points, while positive perceptions of private [i.e., independent]

school education fell by the same amount. Positive ratings of parochial education are also down slightly, by six points, while the ratings for charter schools and home schooling are statistically unchanged."

Looking at the trends by party affiliation, the excellent/good ratings of public schools by Republicans has risen from 30 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2017, while public schools "have improved only slightly among Democrats." The report also notes that over the same time span, "parochial and private [i.e., independent] schools' ratings are either down or unchanged among both groups."

With respect to charter schools, "While the percentage of Republicans considering these types of schools as excellent or good has held steady at 62 percent, Democrats' reviews have fallen from 61 percent positive in 2012 to 48 percent today, perhaps as charter schooling is becoming more closely tied to Donald Trump's administration."

### Implications

Noting that "Americans as a whole believe private and parochial schools do a better job of educating students than public schools do," the Gallup report focuses on what can be done to improve the standing of public education. One suggestion it offers is "the right federal or state public school education policies," though it does not identify what those policies might be. "Another remedy," according to the report, "may be expanding charter schools so that parents of children in failing public schools who can't afford private school have other options for their children."

Oddly, the report makes no mention whatsoever of considering school choice policies that would improve access to the very independent and religious schools that adults believe are doing "a better job of educating students."

[Image © Robert Kneschke / Adobe Stock]

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Rate Types of Schools As...

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Independent	21	50	17	4
Religious	21	42	21	9
Charter	14	41	23	9
Home	14	32	31	15
Public	5	39	35	19



**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
- Council of Islamic Schools in North America
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Jesuit Schools Network
- 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
- Affiliated State Organizations

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**

13017 Wisteria Drive #457  
Germantown, MD 20874  
(tel) 301-916-8460  
(fax) 301-916-8485  
(email) cape@capenet.org

[www.capenet.org](http://www.capenet.org)



## Private School Enrollment Jumps 7 Percent

Enrollment in U.S. private schools advanced a striking 7 percent between 2013 and 2015, according to a government report released last month. The latest biennial count of private school students by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) put K-12 enrollment at just over 4.9 million, up more than 325,000 students since the 2013 census and over 410,000 (9 percent) since 2011. The four-year growth spurt reverses a 10-year downturn between 2001 and 2011.

Mirroring the enrollment growth, the number of private schools also increased—by 957 schools, or 2.8 percent, between 2013 and 2015, and by 3,715 schools, a remarkable 12 percent, since 2011. Private schools accounted for 28 percent of the 123,976 K-12 schools (traditional public, public charter, and private) in the United States in 2015-16.

### Meticulous Description

Providing a meticulous description of private school demographics, the Private School Universe Survey (PSS) is closely followed by the private school community. Granular information within the survey offers details about long- and short-term enrollment shifts within particular segments of the private school community.

As the table to the right suggests, some sectors have seen greater growth over the past quarter century than others. Jewish schools, for example, moved from 3.4 percent of the total private school population in 1991 to 6.1 percent in 2015. In raw numbers, their enrollment grew from 166,949 to 299,255 students in that time span, an increase of 79 percent. In

that same period, Montessori schools had an enrollment hike of 130 percent, going from 54,905 to 126,362. Nonsectarian schools jumped from 724,047 students to 1,069,303, up 48 percent. But even more dramatic was the 800 percent increase in Islamic school enrollment from 4,482

students in 1991 to 40,485 in 2015.

Just like the Jewish schools, Montessori, nonsectarian, and Islamic schools also saw upticks in their share of total private school enrollment. Montessori schools went from a 1.1 percent share in 1991 to 2.6 percent in 2015. Nonsectarian schools grew from 14.8 to 21.8 percent during the same period, and Islamic schools went from 0.1 to 0.8 percent.

### Graduation Rates

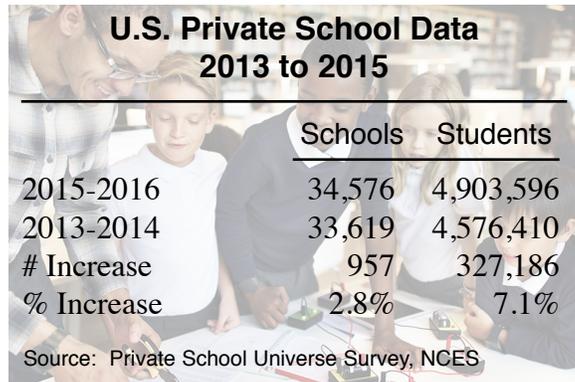
The NCES report provides a wealth of information on multiple aspects of schooling, including pupil/teacher ratio, graduation rates, and college-going rates. According to the report, “Ninety-seven percent of 12th-graders enrolled

in private schools around October 1, 2014, graduated in 2014–15.” Moreover, “Of the 343,252 private high school graduates in 2014–15, some 65 percent attended 4-year colleges by the fall of 2015.”

The report also notes that the “average pupil/teacher ratio in 2015–16 was 10.2 across all private schools.”

The PSS report even offers a breakdown of private school enrollment state by state. One factoid: “In 2015–16, there were 200,000 or more students enrolled in private schools in each of California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas.” Each of those states has a CAPE affiliate.

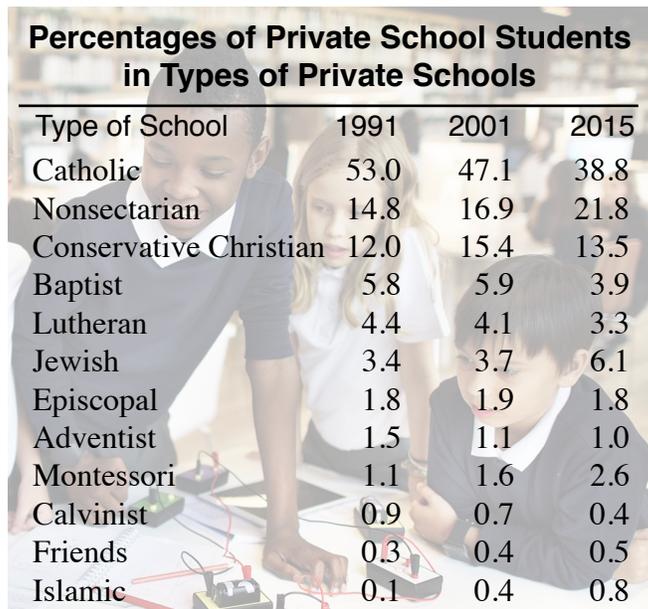
[Image © Rawpixel.com / Adobe Stock]



**U.S. Private School Data 2013 to 2015**

	Schools	Students
2015-2016	34,576	4,903,596
2013-2014	33,619	4,576,410
# Increase	957	327,186
% Increase	2.8%	7.1%

Source: Private School Universe Survey, NCES



**Percentages of Private School Students in Types of Private Schools**

Type of School	1991	2001	2015
Catholic	53.0	47.1	38.8
Nonsectarian	14.8	16.9	21.8
Conservative Christian	12.0	15.4	13.5
Baptist	5.8	5.9	3.9
Lutheran	4.4	4.1	3.3
Jewish	3.4	3.7	6.1
Episcopal	1.8	1.9	1.8
Adventist	1.5	1.1	1.0
Montessori	1.1	1.6	2.6
Calvinist	0.9	0.7	0.4
Friends	0.3	0.4	0.5
Islamic	0.1	0.4	0.8

## High Court Says Religious School Can Access State Grant

On June 26, 2017, the last day of its 2016 term, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision in a high-profile church-state case that will likely affect religious schools for decades to come. The court ruled 7-2 that the state of Missouri violated the U.S. Constitution when it excluded a preschool sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia from a neutral and secular grant program providing playground resurfacing materials.

“[T]he exclusion of Trinity Lutheran from a public benefit for which it is otherwise qualified, solely because it is a church, is odious to our Constitution,” said the court.

Chief Justice John Roberts delivered the opinion in the case, known officially as *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*. Justices Kennedy, Alito, and Kagan joined the opinion in full, while Justices Thomas and Gorsuch joined except as to a single footnote. Justice Breyer filed an opinion concurring in the judgment. Justice Sotomayor filed a dissenting opinion, in which Justice Ginsburg joined.

### Immediate Impact

The decision’s ramifications were felt the very next day, when the high court told state supreme courts in New Mexico and Colorado to reconsider two church-state decisions in light of the Trinity Lutheran ruling. The New Mexico case involves the provision of textbooks by the state to private school students, and the Colorado case involves vouchers to allow students in Douglas County to attend private schools.

### CAPE Members

Several member organizations of CAPE had filed friend-of-the-court briefs in the Trinity Lutheran case, including the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). They each issued statements soon after the decision.

The statement from ACSI said, “Faith-based schools do not want the state to interfere in their faith any more than they want to establish their faith as the state religion.... All a faith-based school wanted in this case was to

be treated fairly.” The statement went on to say that the ruling “calls into question state Blaine amendments, which have been used to exclude faith-based institutions from public programs of general application.”

LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison said the decision “demonstrates the support of the principle that the government cannot treat religious organizations differently than other organizations just because of what we believe.” He continued: “Despite this case being about a preschool playground, a seemingly mundane and simple matter, this is a very big win for the fair and equal treatment of religious organizations.”

### Blaine Amendments

Dr. Tom Burnford, president/CEO of NCEA, said, “It is the hope of NCEA that this decision will support efforts to repeal similar Blaine amendments, while allowing all states to provide parents with more choices in selecting the best options for educating their children.”

Calling the decision “a landmark victory for religious freedom,” Catholic Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, said the decision “marks a step in the right direction toward limiting the effects of the pernicious Blaine amendments that are in place in many states around the country.” He noted that the amendments “stem from a time of intense anti-Catholic bigotry in many parts of the country,” and said he was “glad to see the Supreme Court move toward limiting these harmful provisions, which have restricted the freedom of faith-based organizations and people of faith to serve their communities.”

In a reaction from another member of CAPE, Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel’s Washington director and vice president for federal affairs, said the decision was “one of the most significant rulings on religious liberty in many generations, and it bodes well for the future in providing a full measure of equality for American persons and institutions of faith.” He said he hoped and believed the ruling would “find widespread application to many areas, including school choice and security grant programs that are of vital interest to the Orthodox Jewish community.”

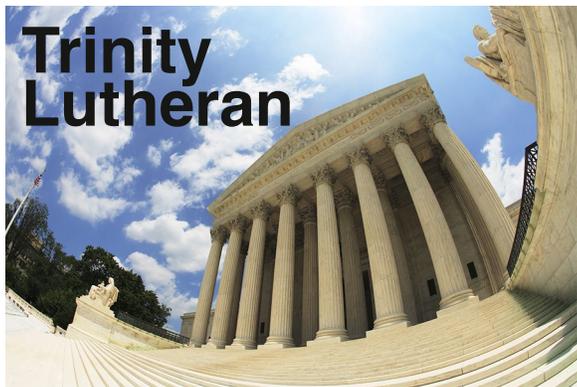


photo: fstockfoto/Shutterstock.com

## Summer of Choice

A busy summer for school choice was capped at the end of August in Illinois, where the Democratic-controlled house and senate approved tax credit scholarship legislation as part of an education spending bill that was swiftly signed by Republican Governor Bruce Rauner.

Thirty states and the District of Columbia have some form of school choice. Illinois is the 18th state with tax credit scholarships.

The Illinois initiative provides a 75 percent tax credit for donations by individuals or corporations to nonprofit organizations that award private school scholarships to low- and middle-income students. Capped at \$75 million in tax credits, the program could yield \$100 million in scholarships.

On a matter related to potential federal tax credit legislation, the Illinois bill prohibits corporate donors from directing contributions to particular subsets of schools (e.g., Montessori schools), but allows individual donors to do so. Contributions may not be claimed as federal income tax deductions.

School choice was also on the march in other states this summer. North Carolina enacted an education savings account (ESA) program for children with special needs. Ohio raised the value of vouchers under its scholarship program for children in Cleveland. Florida did the same for its statewide tax credit scholarship (TCS) program and also expanded eligibility for its ESA program for special needs students. Kansas extended its corporate tax credit program to individual donors. Nevada increased the cap on its TCS program. New Hampshire expanded the list of eligible TCS expenses and also authorized towns without public schools to give grants to students to attend private nonsectarian schools. And on the judicial front, the Georgia Supreme Court unanimously upheld that state’s tax credit scholarship program.

## CAPE notes

★ Should every school serve everyone? That was the provocative question discussed during a forum this summer at the Cato Institute, a think tank in Washington, DC. Panelists—including Lindsey Burke from the Heritage Foundation, Neal McCluskey from Cato, Joe McTighe from CAPE, and A. D. Motzen from Agudath Israel of America—tackled, in a thoughtful and direct way, whether any discrimination in admissions and employment should be allowed under government-funded school choice programs. A video of the instructive discussion is available on Cato’s Web site at [cato.org/events/should-every-school-serve-everyone](http://cato.org/events/should-every-school-serve-everyone).

★ The 2017 *Education Next* survey of public opinion on education shows that opposition to tax credit scholarship programs has softened since last year. In the 2016 poll, 29 percent of the public opposed the idea. This year, just 24 percent oppose it. According to the report, “Tax credits continue to command the highest level of support among all choice proposals. Fifty-five percent of respondents favor the idea, a level not noticeably different from last year.” With Illinois adopting a tax credit scholarship program last month, 18 states now have them.

In another school choice finding—one that seemed to capture most of the headlines—the poll also found a significant drop in public support for charter schools. As a news release from *Education Next* put it, “In a dramatic change of opinion over

the past year, support for charter schools has declined by 12 percentage points, from 51 percent last year to only 39 percent this year (36 percent opposed).”

★ What are the elements of high school that really engage students? Last June, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a report on a national survey of students designed to answer that very question. Titled *What Teens Want from Their Schools*, the 80-page report received considerable attention with its identification of “six subgroups of students with varying engagement profiles.”

But what got our attention was Appendix B, which sorted student responses to a number of questions by the type of school they attended. Some selective findings: “Students in private (religious) schools do the most homework....When given a choice [of any nearby school to attend], private school students are more likely to choose their current school.... Compared to private school students, public school students (districts, charters, and magnets) are least likely to feel safe while in school.” Responses to many more questions are available in the full report, which may be downloaded at <https://edexcellence.net/publications/what-teens-want-from-their-schools>.

★ State CAPE representatives met in Portland, OR, during two days in July for their annual summer institute. Organized by Mark Siegel of the Oregon CAPE and

chaired by Suzie Hanson of the Washington CAPE, the event included:

- high-caliber presentations from top national school choice leaders representing the American Federation for Children (John Schilling), EdChoice (Leslie Hiner), and EdTaxCredit50 (Peter Murphy);
- an overview of ESEA and the new ombudsman provision by Jenay Morrissey at the USDE;
- passionate talks by Mark Siegel and Aimee Gruber (Enrollment Management Association) on ensuring a healthy future for private education;
- a review of foundational public policy arguments for pluralism by Johns Hopkins University scholar Ashley Berner;
- a collection of useful tips on telling the private school story from communications consultant Randan Steinhauer.

The State CAPE Network continues to shine as a remarkable resource for advancing private education. CAPE is grateful for the talented leaders who work each year to put the summer institute together.

★ The Institute for Justice recently released a must-read report debunking a dozen myths associated with school choice programs. Starting with the myth that choice programs take money from public schools, IJ Senior Attorney Tim Keller systematically and cogently responds to the most prevalent false claims about choice. The document is available for download at: [ij.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/sc\\_v5-1.pdf](http://ij.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/sc_v5-1.pdf).