

# cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

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## Private Schools Outpace National Average on AP Exams

In an age bent on providing students with a more challenging curriculum, Advanced Placement courses serve as a gold standard of rigorous coursework. Exemplary secondary schools are often measured by how many AP courses they offer, and exemplary students, by how many AP courses they take.

Considered college-level coursework, enough AP credits can propel a student well along the way toward a degree. The trick, however, is not only taking an AP course, but doing well on its difficult, standardized, high-stakes final exam. (Colleges generally require a score of 3 or greater on a rating scale of 1 to 5.)

But not every student has the same chance to take AP courses, and among those who take them, the success rate varies dramatically. According to data provided to CAPE by the College Board, which administers the AP program, private school students seem to have an edge. They are not only more likely than the general high school population to take AP courses, but also more likely to attain a score of 3 or higher.

Ten percent of private secondary school students took AP exams in 2001, double the 5 percent national rate. Although they only enrolled 8 percent of all students in grades 9-12, private schools accounted for 16 percent of all AP test takers.

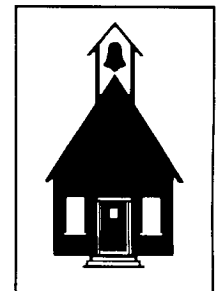
The share of students who successfully completed AP courses in private schools (i.e., scored 3 or greater) was also higher than the national average. Students in public and private high schools took a total of 1,359,683 AP exams in 2001 and received a grade of 3 or greater on 834,076 exams. That amounted to a national success rate of 61 percent. The breakout for private schools shows that those students sat for 220,167 AP exams and scored a 3 or greater on 154,620 of them, for a success rate of 70 percent. Looked at from a different angle, private schools, which, it is worth repeating, enrolled only 8 percent of high school students in 2000-01, accounted for 19 percent of all AP exams on which students scored 3 or above.

Because closing the achievement gap between minority and majority stu-

dents is a national priority, an examination of AP results by race is instructive. Although private schools enrolled 6 percent of black high school students last school year, they accounted for 10 percent of black AP test takers and 18 percent of all AP exams on which black students scored a 3 or higher.

Although the percentage of black students who took AP exams in public and private schools was lower than the average for all students, black students in private schools were 1.78 times more likely to take an AP exam than black students in general, and once they took the exam, their success rate was 68 percent higher than the average success rate for blacks.

The difference in the black/white success rate (calculated by dividing the number of exams receiving a score of three or greater by the number of exams taken) was also narrower for private school students than for the nation as a whole. As mentioned above, for all students in all schools the AP success rate in 2001 was 61 percent. The rate varied by race. For white students it was 64 percent; for black students, 31 percent—a difference of 33 points. But in private schools, the success rate for white students was 71 percent, and for black students it was 52 percent—a



### Advanced Placement Exams High School Students - 2001 *private schools and all (private and public) schools*

	Private	All
Percent of Enrolled Students Taking AP Tests	10	5
Percent of AP Test Takers Scoring 3 or Above	70	61

Continued  
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# Private School Students Above Average on Science Tests

Perhaps one reason the drop in twelfth-grade science scores announced last month by the National Center for Education Statistics was so unsettling is that the country knows, now more than ever, that survival depends on brainpower.

While the performance of fourth- and eighth-grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2000 science test remained about the same since the test was

four years ago, then our hopes for a strong 21st-century workforce are dimming just when we need them most."

There was, however, a glimmer of good news within the science report: the scores of private school seniors shot up six points from four years ago.

On average, twelfth-grade students in 2000 posted a score of 147 on a 300-point scale; private school students scored 161. The eighth-grade national average was 151, and for private schools it was 166. At the fourth-grade level, the figures were 150 and 163.

What's more, the performance gap between minority and majority students was substantially narrower in private schools than in public schools, a significant result given the national concern about the persistent disparity in minority/majority achievement. For example, at the eighth-grade level, while the difference between the performance of black students and white students nationally was 40 points, it was 30

## NAEP 2000 Science Scale Scores

4th Grade	Private Schools	All Schools
All Students	163	150
White Students	167	160
Black Students	140	124
Hispanic Students	148	129

8th Grade	Private Schools	All Schools
All Students	166	151
White Students	170	162
Black Students	140	122
Hispanic Students	151	128

12th Grade	Private Schools	All Schools
All Students	161	147
White Students	163	154
Black Students	143	123
Hispanic Students	147	128

## NAEP Science Scale Score Change from 1996

	Private Schools	All Schools
4th Grade	0	0
8th Grade	+4	+1
12th Grade	+6	-3

last administered in 1996, the scores for twelfth-graders dropped three points. The disappointing results for seniors prompted Education Secretary Rod Paige to call the decline "morally significant." He noted that twelfth-grade scores are "the scores that really matter," and warned, "If our graduates know less about science than their predecessors

points in private schools. Similarly, the Hispanic/white gap nationally was 34 points, but only 19 points in private schools.

Besides releasing scale scores, NCES reported the percent of students performing at or above three achievement levels: basic (partial mastery of fundamental skills and knowledge), proficient (solid academic performance), and advanced (superior performance). At all three grade levels and all three achievement levels, private school students scored significantly above the national average.

To learn more about the NAEP 2000 science results, visit the NCES Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

### Continued from page 1

difference of 19 points. In short, the private school success rate was higher, and the black/white gap was smaller.

*Note: High school enrollment data for October 2000 are from the U.S. Census Bureau. Data on AP test takers and exams for 2001 are from the College Board. All AP data are for students identified as attending a public, private, or parochial school. For the purposes of this article, the private and parochial data were combined and reported as "private."*

## % of Students At Or Above Key Levels in NAEP Science Test

8th Grade	Private Schools	All Schools
Basic	80	61
Proficient	47	32
Advanced	7	4

## School Safety Report Released

It would be comforting if schools were predictably places of peace where students and teachers always felt safe and secure. But sadly, that is not the picture presented in the latest government report on school crime and safety.

"In 1999, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 2.5 million total crimes at school," according to the study released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. On the positive side, the percentage of student crime victims decreased slightly between 1995 and 1999 from 10 percent to 8 percent. And as the victimization rate declined, students seemed "to feel more secure at school now than just a few years ago."

As might be expected, the prevalence of crime at school varied by type of school. "In both 1995 and 1999, public school students were more likely to report having been victims of violent crime during the previous 6 months than were private school students." Violent crime included rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple as-

sault. In 1999, 2.5 percent of public school students and 0.3 percent of private school students ages 12 through 18 reported being the victim of violent crime during the previous 6 months.

School safety affected teachers as well. According to the report, in 1993-94, 341,000 teachers across the nation were threatened with injury by a student and 119,200 were physically attacked by a student. Again, the type of school made a difference. Thirteen percent of public school teachers and 4 percent of private school teachers were threatened in 1993-94, while 4 percent of public school teachers and 2 percent of private school teachers were attacked. Public school teachers in cities were the most at risk. "Teachers in public central city schools were about five times more likely to be targets of threats of injury and about three times more likely to be targets of attacks than their colleagues in private central city schools."

Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2001 can be downloaded from the Web at <http://nces.ed.gov>. The NCES publication number is 2002-113.

## New Study on Graduation Rates

Event dropout rates, status dropout rates, high school completion rates—the world of education statistics is awash with ways to calculate how successful schools are in seeing that high school students stay in school and get diplomas. The Manhattan Institute last month tried to cut through the confusion by issuing a report that computes graduation rates in a straightforward way.

Jay P. Greene, who conducted the research and wrote the report, took what he called a "remarkably simple" approach in calculating the rates. He divided the number of graduates in a given jurisdiction in 1998 by the number of eighth-graders in the same jurisdiction in 1993. Before dividing, he adjusted the eighth-grade count to reflect demographic shifts between school years 1993-94 and 1997-98.

The simple approach yielded startling results. Nationally, only 74 percent of students who were supposed to graduate in 1998 did so. Moreover, the results varied dramatically by race and ethnicity. While the graduation rate was 78 percent for white students, it was 56 percent for African-American students and 54 percent for Latino students.

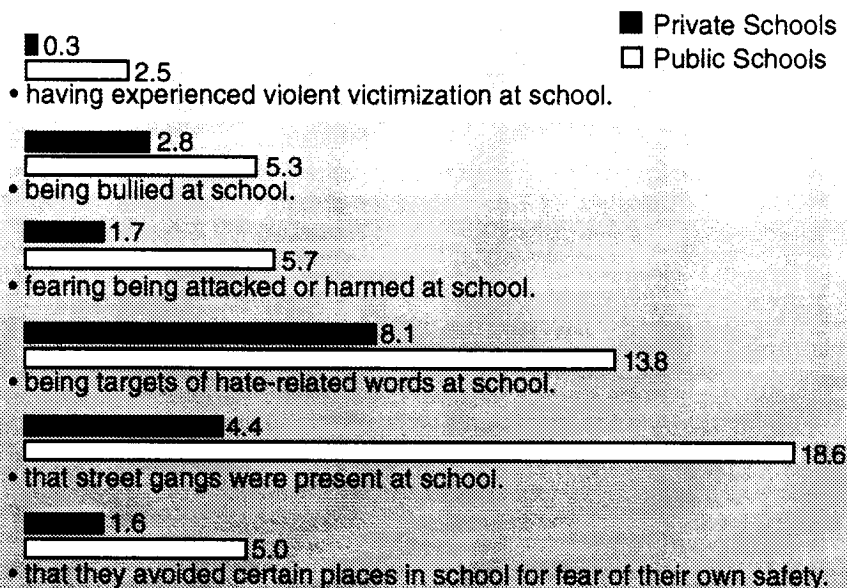
Kaleem Caire, CEO of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), called the results "another indication of the disastrous consequences of trapping low-income families, mostly of color, in education systems in which they have no meaningful options."

The National Center for Education Statistics, in its most recent report on the Private School Universe Survey, said the 1998-99 graduation rate for private schools was 98.4 percent. But NCES calculated the rate by dividing the number of graduates by the number of *twelfth-graders* at the start of the school year, a wholly different formula than that used by Greene. Applying the NCES formula to public schools yields a 1998-99 graduation rate of 91.4 percent.

The Greene report can be downloaded at [www.manhattan-institute.org](http://www.manhattan-institute.org).

### How Safe Are America's Schools?

Percentage of Students, 12-18, who in 1999 reported...



Source: *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2001*



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## capenotes

• As a renewed sense of patriotism surges across the country, the White House has launched a new Web site to help elementary school students learn some important lessons about American freedom. The Freedom Timeline (<http://whitehousekids.gov>) includes five stories that span U.S. history from 1777 to 1948. Though diverse in subject matter (the Statute of Liberty, the March of Dimes campaign, a Quaker spy from Philadelphia, etc.), the stories share a common theme: America as a beacon of liberty. Teachers and parents should find the lesson plan, quiz, and vocabulary list useful; children should find the stories and graphics alluring. And when they finish the Freedom Timeline, kids can take a White House tour with Spotty, the Bush's English springer spaniel, and then learn new words with Barney, the Scottish terrier.

• What's an education philanthropist to do? The need for wholesale school reform couldn't be more obvious, but in the past, dollars distributed across the landscape of need have not always produced the hoped-for harvest.

Believing philanthropists should not waste their money backing no-yield reform projects, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has produced a handbook of advice for wealthy people who want to invest in school improvement. The title speaks for itself: *Making It Count: A Guide to High-Impact Education Philanthropy*.

"A system characterized by equity and excellence: that's our dream...and we believe that nearly every philanthropist who gets involved in education reform shares it," write Chester Finn, Jr., and Kelly Amis, the book's coauthors. "We also believe it is possible."

Finn and Amis back their belief by detailing reform measures that are working. Their spotlight of success centers on standards-based reform and competition-based reform, the latter encompassing privately funded vouchers, charter schools, and education tax measures. The authors regard the two reforms as partners, rather than rivals, seeing standards as providing objective information on how schools are doing, and competition as enabling parents to choose those schools that are doing well.

*Making it Count* lets education donors know in no uncertain terms that if they don't do their homework, their

money can be sucked up by the system without any trace of a difference in the lives of children. The book provides some essential questions for philanthropists to consider and a strategy they can use to produce results and avoid squandering their resources. And though not its purpose, the book can also offer school administrators, especially those responsible for convincing donors to contribute to particular projects, some sound ideas on how to design a program that attracts the success-minded investor.

The handbook is available free on the Foundation's Web site at <http://www.edexcellence.net>.

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COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN PRIVATE EDUCATION • PMB 457 • 13017 Wisteria Drive • Germantown, MD 20874  
Tel: 301-916-8460 • Fax: 301-916-8485 • Email: [cape@capenet.org](mailto:cape@capenet.org) • Web: [www.capenet.org](http://www.capenet.org)  
a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
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