

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## High Levels of Satisfaction Among Private School Parents

Parents with children in K-12 private schools are much more satisfied with their schools than are parents with children in public schools, according to a new report from the federal government. Specifically, 79 percent of students in private schools have parents who report being “very satisfied” with their schools, compared to 52 percent of students in assigned public schools and 62 percent of students in chosen public schools. High levels of satisfaction among private school parents also extend to opinions about their children’s teachers, academic standards of the school, order and discipline at the school, and interactions with school personnel.

Released in April 2010 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the report, titled *Trends in the Use of School Choice: 1993 to 2007*, relies on data from the National Household Education Survey (NHES) to look at enrollment trends, student characteristics, and parent satisfaction in four types of schools: religious private schools, other private schools, assigned public schools (i.e., schools to which students are assigned by the district), and chosen public schools (i.e., schools that parents select). About 73 percent of school children in 2007 attended assigned public schools; 16 percent attended chosen public schools; 9 percent attended religious schools, and 3 percent attended private schools that were not religiously affiliated. The percentages of students in each sector have changed since 1993, when 80 percent of students attended assigned public schools; 11 percent were in chosen public schools; 8 percent were in religious schools, and 2 percent in other private schools. Religious schools and other private schools each increased their share of students by 1 percent between 1993 and 2007, while the share of students in chosen public schools grew by 5 percent and that of assigned public schools fell by 7 percent.

In 2007, 76 percent of children in religious schools and 74 percent of children in other private schools had parents who said they were very satisfied with the teachers their students had, compared to 57 percent of children in assigned public schools and 64 percent of children in chosen public schools.

Parents of 82 percent of religious school students and 79 percent of other private school students were very satisfied with the academic standards of their school, as were the parents of 56 percent of students in assigned public schools and 66 percent of students in chosen public schools.

When asked about the interactions between parents and school staff, the parents of 75 percent of religious school students and 73 percent of other private school students were very satisfied, as contrasted with the parents of 48 percent of students in assigned public schools and 57 percent of students in chosen public schools.

And when it came to order and discipline, 83 percent of religious school students, 80 percent of other private school students, 55 percent of assigned public school students, and 61 percent of students in chosen public schools had parents who said they were very satisfied with that particular aspect of the school their child attended.

### Parent Involvement

Students in private schools were more likely than those in public schools to have parents who participated in school

activities. As the report put it: “In 2007, a higher percentage of students in private schools (both religious and nonsectarian) compared with students in assigned or chosen public schools had parents who attended a general school meeting (97 and 98 percent vs. 88 and 87 percent, respectively), attended a school event (88 and 84 percent vs. 72 and 72 percent, respectively), and volunteered or served on a committee (69 and 62 percent vs. 37 and 42 percent, respectively).”

Also, 84 percent of students in religious schools and 87 percent of students in other private schools had parents who attended a parent-teacher conference, compared to 72 percent of students in assigned public schools and 77 percent of students in chosen public schools.

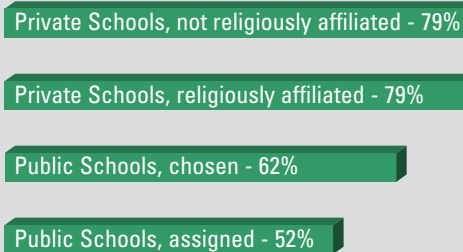
### Private School Enrollment Trends

Between 1995 and 2007, the share of the nation’s students who attended private schools varied between 10 percent and 12 percent (the 2007 figure). Within the private school community, trends have varied by religious affiliation, with the share of students in Conservative Christian schools and nonsectarian private schools increasing during that period.

### Diversity

Minority students make up 27 percent of the student population in religious schools and 31 percent in other private schools. Students with disabilities ac-

#### Percentage of students in grades 3-12 in 2007 whose parents were very satisfied with their schools



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**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

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## Private School Students Take Tough Courses

Students in private high schools take more rigorous courses in math and science than their public school counterparts, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Seventy-five percent of private high school graduates in the class of 2004 completed high-level math courses (i.e., trigonometry, statistics, precalculus, or calculus), compared to 48 percent of public high school graduates. In science, 83 percent of Catholic school graduates and 89 percent of graduates from other private schools completed one or more courses in chemistry I, physics I, chemistry II, physics II, or advanced biology, compared to 67 percent of public school graduates.

The data are included in the *Digest of Education Statistics 2009*, an imposing 700-page volume published last month by NCES. The authors offer a crisp description of the digest's sweeping purpose: "to provide a compilation of statistical information covering the broad field of American education from prekindergarten through graduate school." Hundreds of tables and thousands of pieces of information can be found in the compendium. Readers with an interest in private education can discover, for example, how many children attend private schools in the United States, the average tuition their parents pay, the percentage of private school seniors who participate in interscholastic sports, and a host of other information.

One table focuses on teachers' perceptions about teaching and school conditions. It turns

out that a slightly higher percentage of private school teachers than public school teachers in 2007-08 agreed with the statement "I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school" (96 percent to 93 percent), while about an equal percentage (52 vs. 51 percent) agreed that they were satisfied with their teaching salary.

Private school teachers had perceptions that differed significantly from their public school peers about the support and cooperation they received from administrators, colleagues, and parents. Each of the following statements is followed first by the percentage of private school teachers, and then by the percentage of public school teachers, who somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with it: "The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive" (93, 88). "There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff" (92, 84). "I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do" (88, 64).

Perceptions about school discipline also differed between teachers in the two sectors. For example, only 21 percent of private school teachers agreed that the "level of student misbehavior in this school interferes with my teaching," compared to 36 percent of public school teachers. Further, nearly twice as many public school teachers than private school teachers (33 vs. 18) agreed that student tardiness and class cutting interfered with their teaching.

The Digest is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010013>.



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count for 20 percent of students in religious schools and 24 percent of students in private schools without a religious affiliation. Among all schools, public and private, 24 percent of students have a disability.

### Families and Parent Education

Just over 80 percent of students in private schools come from two-parent families, compared to 72 percent of students in general. Moreover, parents of children in private schools are more likely to have higher levels of education than parents of children in other schools. Thirty-six percent of students in religious schools and 56 percent of students in other private schools have parents with a graduate or professional education, compared to 21 percent of students

in general.

### Charter Schools and Homeschooling

The NCES report also tracks the growth of charter schools. In the 2002-03 school year, approximately 2,575 charter schools served 1.4 percent of the country's public school students, but by 2006, the number of charter schools had grown to 4,132 and their share of public school students had jumped to about 2 percent.

Homeschooling has also shown growth in recent years from 850,000 students in 1999 to over 1.5 million students in 2007, a figure representing 2.9 percent of all students ages 5 to 17.

The NCES report *Trends in the Use of School Choice: 1993 to 2007* is available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010004>.

## Small Private Schools Can Claim Health Credit Right Away

Although the private school community is still sorting through all the ramifications of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* that President Obama signed March 23, one immediate benefit is that certain schools are eligible for a tax credit against health insurance premiums they pay for their employees. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recently posted guidance on the new Small Business Health Care Tax Credit, outlining how the program works and who is eligible.

### Who is Eligible?

Any employer, including tax-exempt employers, who have fewer than 25 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) with average annual wages less than \$50,000 per FTE is eligible for the new credit if

the employer pays at least 50 percent of the cost of health care coverage for some of its workers. For tax-exempt organizations, the credit is worth up to 25 percent of the employer's premium costs through 2013 and up to 35 percent from 2014 onward. The maximum credit is available to organizations with fewer than 10 FTEs that have average annual wages under \$25,000, but lesser credits are available to organizations that employ from 10 and 24 FTEs with average wages between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

### How It Works

The following example illustrates how the program works. A religious childcare center has five full-time employees and eight half-time employees for a total of nine FTEs. Its annual wages are \$220,500, or \$24,500 per employee. If its annual health care costs are \$72,000, the organization is entitled to an annual tax credit of \$18,000 (25 percent) from 2010 to 2013 and \$25,200 (35 percent) from 2014 forward. (The example organization qualifies for the maximum credit because it employs under 10 workers and its average wages are under \$25,000.)

### Calculating the Credit

To qualify for the credit, an employer must pay a uniform share of the premium cost of health care coverage (and no less than 50 percent of the premium) for each employee enrolled in the health plan offered by the employer. If an employer pays, say, 80 percent of the premium and the employee pays 20 percent, only the portion paid by the employer is counted when figuring the credit. Moreover, the amount that counts for the credit cannot exceed

what the employer would have paid under the same arrangement for the small group market in the state or region, an amount determined by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and published on the IRS Web site.

The credit for a tax-exempt employer cannot exceed the total amount of income tax that the employer withholds from its employees' wages combined with the employer's and employees' share of Medicare tax. For a tax-exempt employer that has no taxable income, the credit is refundable.



President Obama signs the health insurance reform bill March 23, 2010. (White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy)

### Figuring FTEs

IRS guidance describes a clear way to calculate the number of full-time equivalent employees. It is simply a matter of dividing the total hours

worked by employees in a year (not to exceed 2,080 for any one employee) by 2,080 and then rounding down the result to the nearest whole number. So, if five employees work 2,080 or more hours each and four employees work 1,000 hours each, the calculation would be  $(2,080 \times 5) + (1,000 \times 4)$  for a total of 14,400 hours, which would then be divided by 2,080, yielding 6.9, which would be rounded down to 6 FTEs. Given the formula, it is easy to see how some employers with more than 25 employees could qualify for the credit, assuming some of those employees work part time.

Once the number of FTEs is calculated, an employer can easily figure the average annual wage by taking the total wages paid by the employer during the tax year, dividing them by the number of FTEs for the year, and then rounding the result down to the nearest \$1,000.

### How to Claim the Credit

For a for-profit employer, the credit is claimed on the company's annual income tax return, but the claim process is still unclear for tax-exempt employers. A Q&A document issued by the IRS last month states, "For a tax-exempt employer, the IRS will provide further information on how to claim the credit."

In mid-April, the IRS began notifying small businesses and tax-exempt organizations about the program via postcard. The mailing "is intended to get the attention of small employers and encourage them to find out more," IRS Commissioner Doug Shulman said. For more detailed information about the program, visit <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=220809,00.html>.

## Illinois Choice

Illinois is poised to make school-choice history. Any day now, state lawmakers may approve a voucher program to help students in many Chicago public elementary schools attend a religious or independent school.

Observers have not missed the irony of Democrats and Republicans in the Land of Lincoln assembling a strong bipartisan coalition to offer children hope, change, and opportunity, while some federal-level leaders and lawmakers who hail from Chicago or Springfield have effectively destroyed such hope by killing a similar program in Washington, D.C.

Introduced in the Illinois Senate by the Rev. Sen. James Meeks and in the House by Rep. Kevin Joyce, both Democrats from Chicago, the bill would provide low-income students in designated schools with a voucher worth the cost of private school tuition or the amount of per-pupil state aid received by Chicago public schools, whichever is less.

In March, the Democratic-controlled Senate voted 33 to 20 for a bill targeting students in poor-performing public schools. On April 30, the House approved, by voice vote, an amendment to include students in overcrowded schools. Now the House and Senate must approve the amended measure before it goes to Governor Pat Quinn for his signature.

Writing in the *Chicago Tribune* April 21, Rev. Meeks and Andy McKenna, Jr., former chairman of the Illinois Republican Party, called the bill a way to spend the state's money "much more effectively," a necessity since Illinois is "running out of money." They argued that not only does the voucher program save the state money (more than \$182 million over 12 years, according to the Illinois Policy Institute) but also "serves students better." Their closing point: "In America, every child should have a dream, and every dream should have a chance."

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## CAPE notes

★ Rhode Island Governor Donald L. Carcieri spoke at a rally at the State House April 28 in support of his proposal to double the current \$1 million cap on the state’s tax credit for business donations to private school scholarship organizations. “I’m a huge believer that the ladder up is education,” Carcieri told the program’s supporters, according to *The Providence Journal*. “It’s clear to me that the need is enormous.”

Carcieri included the tax credit increase in his FY 2011 budget proposal, calling the program “fiscally prudent for the state, as the majority of these scholarship students would otherwise be in the public school system at a much higher cost to us.” He went on to describe the programs as “allowing families in need to have the opportunity to pursue academic success in the setting that is right for them.”

According to the Rhode Island Scholarship Alliance, the program last year assisted over 500 families with an average scholarship of roughly \$2,000. The alliance estimates that nearly 90,000 families qualify for the program, which requires family income under 250 percent of the federal poverty level.

*The Providence Journal* noted that Carcieri is calling for an increase in the program “at a time when the state faces a projected \$220 million deficit.” And while the article included predictable comments from a lobbyist for the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers, who denounced the expansion while the state is cutting edu-

cation spending, it also pointed out that advocates claim “the program can actually save the state money.”

For more information about the program, visit <[www.rischolarshipalliance.org](http://www.rischolarshipalliance.org)>.

★ Speaking of saving a state money, though on a much larger scale, Florida Governor Charlie Crist signed Senate Bill 2126 on April 22, expanding the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTCSP). Earlier in the month, the Florida House of Representatives approved the measure 95-23, following Senate passage in March by an equally overwhelming 27-11 vote. A government report estimates that the program saves taxpayers \$1.49 in state education funding for every dollar lost in corporate income tax revenue.

“The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program offers families an invaluable opportunity to choose a learning environment that gives their children the best chance for success,” said Governor Crist in connection with the signing. “I am confident Florida will continue to provide more educational opportunities and options with the partnership of the business community through great programs like this.”

As a prelude to passage, families in Florida made history March 24 by participating in what is reported to be the largest U.S. rally ever in support of school choice legislation. Over 5,000 parents and students came to Tallahassee to rally for the tax credit initiative.

The new bill hikes the scholarship amount per student from its current fixed level of \$3,950 to a percentage of public school per-pupil funding, moving from 60 percent of what is called the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) operating formula to an eventual cap of 80 percent. The cap on contributions eligible for the tax credit also jumps—from \$118 million this year to \$140 million next year, with conditional percentage increases going forward. Further, the new law bumps up the income eligibility levels for voucher recipients.

According to the governor’s office, “Last year, more than 27,000 Florida students benefited from the scholarships in about 1,000 private schools throughout the state.” That number is expected to grow as a result of the new legislation. State officials estimate the program is saving Florida taxpayers \$39 million a year.

For more information about the program, visit <[www.stepupforstudents.org/](http://www.stepupforstudents.org/)>.

### Helping Schools Help Families



  
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