

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Parent Satisfaction Highest in Private Schools

Private school parents are significantly more satisfied with the schools their children attend than are parents from other sectors, including public charter schools and public district schools. That finding comes from two new studies released by *Education Next*, a scholarly journal on school reform published by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance at the Harvard Kennedy School.

The first study (reported here) looked at results from a survey, commissioned by *Education Next* in May and June of 2016, of a nationally representative sample of 1,571 parents with children in school. The second study (reported on page 2) analyzed results from a survey of over 17,000 families conducted in 2012 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The second study's larger sample size allowed for a deeper dive into population subgroups.

### Five Key Characteristics

The report on the *Education Next* poll (*What Do Parents Think of Their Children's Schools?* by Samuel Barrows, Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West) examined parent satisfaction levels across five key school characteristics: teacher quality, discipline, expectations for achievement, safety, and instruction in character and values. The researchers found that "parents in the private sector are far more satisfied with most aspects of their children's schools than are parents with children in district

schools." Satisfaction levels for charter school parents "typically fall between those of parents using schools in the district and private sectors."

Comparing charter school parents and district school parents, the report notes, "The difference in the share of parents who are very satisfied for the five key characteristics is, on average, 13 percentage points." Then matching charter school par-

ents with private school parents, the report continues: "We observe lower levels of satisfaction with charter schools than with private schools. For the five key characteristics, the private school advantage is 12 percentage points, on average."

### Teacher Quality

An online interactive graphic of the findings provides the precise percentages of parents from each sector who indicated various degrees of satisfaction with a particular aspect of their child's school. For example, 46 percent of private school parents were very satisfied with teacher quality in their school, compared to 32 percent of charter school parents and 23 percent of public school parents. Another 40 percent of

private school parents said they were satisfied (rather than very satisfied), bringing the total satisfaction percentage to 86. Total teacher quality satisfaction levels for public charter schools and public district schools were, respectively, 72 percent and 74 percent.

### Character and Values

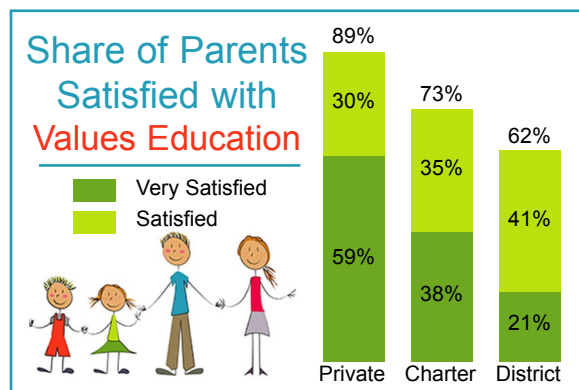
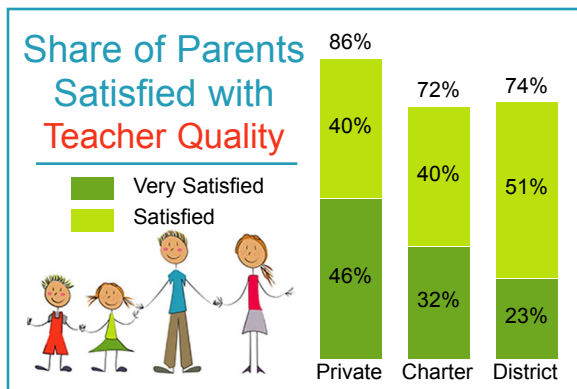
Parents were also asked how satisfied they were with the school's instruction in character and values. Again, the percentage of private school parents very satisfied with character/values education (59 percent) was significantly higher than the percentages of parents in charter schools (38 percent) and district schools (21 percent).

In other key characteristics, the share of very satisfied private school parents similarly outstripped percentages in the other sectors. Regarding school discipline, the percentages of very satisfied private, charter, and district parents were, respectively, 46, 34, and 17 percent; regarding the school's expectations for student achievement, they were 53, 38, and 25 percent; and for school safety, they were 60, 38, and 28 percent.

The study also looked at the degree of variation within each sector in how parents perceive schools and found that private school parents were the most uniform in their support. Commenting

on this finding in an EdNext podcast, Paul Peterson said, "There are so many differences within the private sector, but the one thing they seem to have in common is they've found a way to satisfy parents."

[image © dglimages / Adobe Stock]



**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
- 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

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## Second Study Confirms High Parent Satisfaction Levels

In a **second study on parent satisfaction**, released by *Education Next* the same day (December 13) as the study described on page 1, authors Albert Cheng and Paul E. Peterson analyzed the results of a survey of more than 17,000 households conducted in 2012 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). According to an *Education Next* news release, the large sample size permitted “comparisons of parent satisfaction within race, income, and other categories.”

The researchers classified students as attending one of four types of schools: private schools, public charter schools, public schools to which students were assigned by their school district (reported as “district” schools in the charts on this page), and district-run public schools that parents were able to choose (e.g., magnet schools).

The NCES survey asked parents how satisfied they were with the school their child attended and with various specific aspects of the school, including teachers, academic standards, order and discipline, and the way the school staff interacts with parents. Respondents indicated they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied.

The study’s authors report the following: “Although parents in all four sectors report high levels of satisfaction with their child’s school, the percentage saying they are ‘very satisfied’ varies by school type.” In particular, they write, “Satisfaction levels are the highest among private-school parents, with parents at charter schools and district schools of choice reporting lower, but similar, rates of satisfaction.”

Several findings illustrate the point. Eighty-one percent of private school parents said they were very satisfied with their child’s school, compared to 63 percent of charter school parents, 56 percent of assigned-district-school parents, and 61 percent of chosen-district-school parents. When it comes to the academic standards of

their child’s school, 82 percent of private school parents said they were very satisfied, as did 68 percent of charter school parents, 55 percent of assigned-district-school parents, and 64 percent of chosen-district-school parents.

Regarding teachers at their child’s school, the percentages of very satisfied private, charter, assigned-district-school, and chosen-district-school parents were, respectively, 78 percent, 63 percent, 57 percent, and 58 percent; regarding order and discipline, they were 83 percent, 66 percent, 56 percent, and 63 percent; and regarding the way school staff interacts with parents, they were 75 percent, 59 percent, 49 percent, and 55 percent.

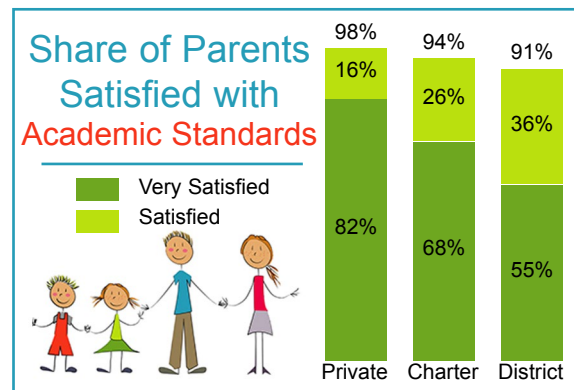
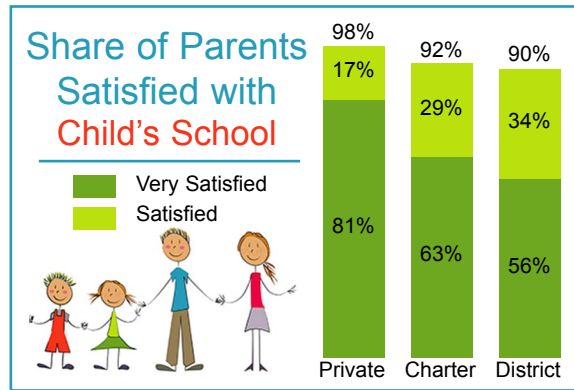
Looking at the results through the filter of family income, the report notes, “Both high- and low-income families express higher levels of satisfaction with their school if it is in the private sector rather than the charter sector.” In particular, “The difference in satisfaction levels between a charter school and a private school is 15 percentage points for low-income families and 8 percentage points for high-income families.” The latter difference was not found to be

statistically significant.

The report goes on to note that taking the average across all indicators, “the difference in the share of low-income families who are ‘very satisfied’ with aspects of their child’s private school is 25 percentage points, which is similar to the difference of 22 percentage points among high-income families.” The finding led the authors to suggest that “school vouchers or other programmatic interventions that expand families’ access to private schools have a good chance of boosting levels of parental satisfaction.”

When it comes to race and ethnicity, “With the exception of Asian parents, parents of all ethnicities prefer private schools to charter schools by a double-digit margin.”

[image © dglimages / Adobe Stock]



## Foxx Named Chairwoman of House Education Committee

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives have selected Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) as chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in the 115th Congress.

“My colleagues have entrusted me with a significant responsibility,” said Foxx, who promised to “hold government institutions to the highest standards of accountability and transparency, with a constant eye towards eliminating waste and inefficiency.”

### Choice Advocate

An ardent supporter of parental freedom in education, Dr. Foxx comes to the committee leadership position with a solid voting record on school choice. In the 112th Congress, she supported House Amendment 305, which would have created opportunity scholarships for military dependent children with special education needs. In the same Congress she voted yes on HR 471 to reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DC-OSP). Years later, in the 114th Congress, she signed on as a cosponsor of the DC-OSP reauthorization bill.

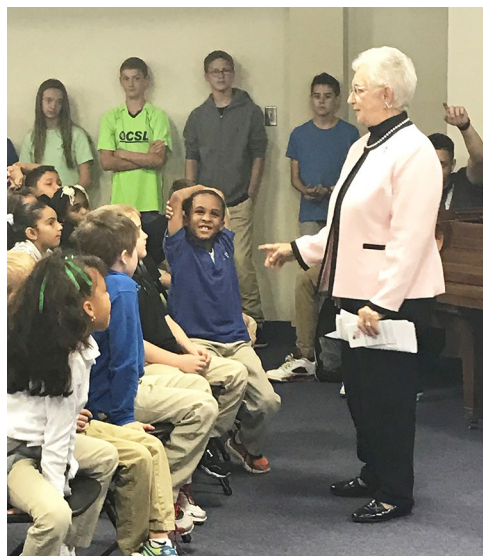
On another issue of interest to private education, Dr. Foxx cosponsored HR 5 in 2015, a bill to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which ultimately evolved into the *Every Student Succeeds Act*.

This past October, Dr. Foxx joined representatives from Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina to visit North Hills Christian School in Salisbury, NC, where, according to the *Salisbury Post*, she told students during an assembly, “You’re fortunate that you live in a country that gives you the freedom to choose your schools.”

### Education and Career

Dr. Foxx earned a bachelor’s degree, a master of arts degree, and an Ed.D. from the University of North Carolina. She served as a research assistant, instructor, and administrator in higher education within the state and eventually became president of Mayland Community College.

Prior to her election to the U.S. House in 2004, Dr. Foxx served for 10 years in the North Carolina Senate.



Rep. Virginia Foxx speaks to students October 26, 2016, at North Hills Christian School in Salisbury, NC. (photo: <http://foxx.house.gov/photos/>)

Known as a tireless worker in Congress, Dr. Foxx apparently cultivated that habit early on. According to a recent profile in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “she started working as a weaver at age 12 to help support her family. In the mornings, before school, she’d milk the cows, carry water, and bring in wood for the fire. After school, she’d do it all again.” The piece goes on:

“Even today, at 73, she works 16-hour days, arriving at the U.S. Capitol building at 7:30 and staying until midnight to answer constituents’ letters.” Her office sports a desk plate that reads, “Trust God, Work Smarter, Work Harder.”

Asked by the *Chronicle* reporter “what drives her to keep up her punishing schedule,” Foxx replied: “I love what I do. Someone told me a long time ago I was a missionary at heart. I guess that’s true.”

### Frugal Drill Sergeant

Foxx has a reputation for being tough when necessary. One journalist described her as “half-grandmother, half-drill sergeant,” and Rep. Luke Messer (R-IN) told *Politico*, “She reminds you of the toughest teacher you had. When she taps the chalkboard and says time to listen, everybody stops.”

She’s also frugal. As the *Chronicle* piece puts it, “She shops at thrift stores, uses water recycled from her washing machine to water her plants, and takes food from receptions back to her office for lunch.”

Add to all that a deep devotion to her faith. Dr. Foxx recently published *God Is in the House*, a collection of essays from Christian colleagues in Congress on the role of faith in their lives. In her own essay she reveals, “[M]y constant prayers are for His wisdom and guidance to direct my life.”

### Committee Plans

As for her plans as chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Dr. Foxx recently told *Politico*, “I’m going to push to diminish the role of the federal government in everything it’s in that isn’t in the Constitution.” She added, “I definitely don’t think the Department of Education has any business doing all the things that it’s doing.”

## Soul Craft

David Coleman, president and CEO of the College Board, last month offered a top-ten list of actions and principles to guide both his organization and education in general. Number eight on the list was tightly tied to private schools: “Education is a soul craft.”

Speaking December 2 at the National Summit on Education Reform, organized by the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcellinEd), Coleman said, “I think we may have forgotten an ancient thing: Education...involves the life of the soul.”

Coleman reported that he has spoken to religious school groups across the country “about the special gifts religious education offers to education more broadly.” He identified “productive solitude” as one of those gifts, saying, “In our time, the technology of interruption has outpaced the technology of concentration.”

Back in 2015, Coleman sounded a similar theme during a luncheon address to CAPE’s board of directors and state CAPE representatives. Noting that “any serious academic work and spiritual work” requires “being productive alone,” he observed that the very structure of prayer and religious practice found in religious schools fosters such productive solitude. At the same meeting, he talked about the practice of students in religious schools reverently reading shared texts and letting the words reveal new meaning. Coleman even suggested that the values, ideals, and practices going on in many private schools might serve to inform a broader conversation within American education.

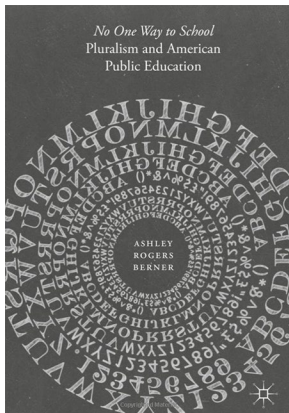
He returned to a related theme at the ExcellinEd event. “We need to recover ancient things within public education, within religious schooling, within our homes if we are going to succeed in education. The time for the stupid division between religious education, public education, homeschooling education must end.”

## CAPE notes

★ “I loved this book. I’ve read a lot of books about education, and they are rarely this clear and thoughtful.” That’s how an anonymous reviewer on Amazon reacted to *No One Way to School*, a new book on pluralism in American education by Ashley Rogers Berner. It’s also how many more readers will likely react. For anyone interested in public policy relating to private and public schools, this book is compulsory reading.

Berner, who is deputy director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, has a gift for presenting complex ideas in understandable and engaging language. A logic and rhythm propels the narrative through political and educational philosophies, Supreme Court jurisprudence, scholarly research, and intricate points of policy. It all leads seamlessly to educational pluralism, “a different way of doing public education,” in which states “fund and hold accountable a wide variety of schools, including religious ones, but do not necessarily operate them.”

The book has already garnered some great endorsements. Martin West, associate professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, calls it a “provocative book” that “traces the challenges facing American education to their root cause.” Andy Smarick, resident fellow



at the American Enterprise Institute and president of the Maryland State Board of Education, writes, “Berner has produced a lucid explanation and an extraordinarily compelling argument in favor of educational pluralism.” And Dmitri Mehlhorn, senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute, describes the work as a “lush and timely” tome that “sketches a transformative vision for the future.”

★ The board of trustees of the National Association of Independent Schools, a member of CAPE, recently tapped Donna Orem as NAIS’s new president.

Board Chair Katherine Dinh called Orem “uniquely qualified” for the position and “well prepared to lead our association into the future.”

Ms. Orem has been with NAIS for 18 years, including 11 as chief operating officer and the past year as interim president.

Responding to the appointment, Orem said she believes in the power of community “to join together to create an even brighter and more equitable future for students.”

★ In another transition within a CAPE member organization, the American Montessori Society announced last month that Dr. Timothy Purnell will be its next ex-

ecutive director, effective August 1, 2017. Purnell, the current superintendent for Somerville Public Schools, NJ, will be succeeding Rich Ungerer, who has led AMS for the past decade.

“Warm, dynamic, and engaging” is how AMS President Joyce Pickering described Dr. Purnell in her announcement of the selection to the AMS community.

“Many of my professional beliefs are deeply rooted in the work of Maria Montessori,” said Purnell. “The rest of the educational world is finally recognizing the underpinnings that have guided the Montessori way for centuries.”

★ National School Choice Week (January 22-28, 2017) will feature more than 20,450 events across the country, easily surpassing 2016’s total of 16,745, according to NSCW organizers. Bottom line: “It will be the largest celebration of educational opportunity in American history.” Find out more at [schoolchoiceweek.com](http://schoolchoiceweek.com).

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