

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students Show Postsecondary Advantages

The postsecondary experiences of students who attend religious and independent schools are sharply different from those who attend government-run schools, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics. Students in non-government schools are more likely to graduate from high school, pursue a four-year degree, attend a selective college, and aspire to go to graduate school.

The report uses data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), a massive project that is tracking the education and employment experiences of a representative sample of students who were high school sophomores in the spring of 2002. The original cohort included over 15,000 students from about 750 high schools. Updated information was gathered in 2004, when most participants were seniors, and again in 2006, two years after most of them had graduated from high school. The sample group was large enough to allow results to be reported for three types of high schools, named in the study as "public," "Catholic," and "other private" (whether religiously affiliated or not).

According to the report, "By 2006, approximately 2 years after their expected high school graduation date, 88

percent of spring 2002 sophomores had graduated with a diploma." For students in Catholic schools, the percentage of di-

ploma recipients was 98.1 and for students in other private schools it was 96.2.

Overall, 70 percent of tenth-graders in the spring of 2002 had enrolled in some type of postsecondary institution by 2006.

But when broken out by sector, the numbers shifted substantially. While 68.3 percent of students in government schools went on to postsecondary education, 94.2 percent of Catholic

school students and 90.3 percent of other private school students followed suit.

There was also considerable variance by the type of postsecondary education that students pursued. As the report put it, "By 2006, 27 percent of spring 2002 sophomores had enrolled in a 4-year public college or university, 13 percent had enrolled in a 4-year private college or university,

and 27 percent had enrolled in a 2-year institution." The numbers for students in government schools were close to the overall totals: 26 percent in 4-year public colleges; 12 percent in 4-year private colleges, and 28 percent in 2-year institutions. But for religious and independent school students the 4-year college figures surged. Whereas

only 38 percent of government school sophomores eventually enrolled in a 4-year college or university, over 66 percent of sophomores in non-government schools did so. Forty-two percent of Catholic school students enrolled in 4-year public institutions, and 32 percent enrolled in 4-year private institutions, for a total 4-year college enrollment of 74 percent. In other private schools, 29 percent of sophomores went on to 4-year public colleges, while 37 percent went on to 4-year private colleges, bringing the total 4-year college-going rate to 66 percent.

Just as religious and independent school students were more likely to attend four-year colleges than their government school counterparts, they were also more likely to attend selective colleges. Thirty-four percent of spring 2002 high school sophomores in non-government schools initially attended a "highly selective" 4-year postsecondary institution, while 11

percent of government school students did so (see graph). For "moderately selective" colleges and universities the percentages were a little different: 18 percent of public school sophomores initially attended such institutions, compared to 31.3 percent of Catholic school sophomores and 21.3 percent of those in other private schools.

When asked about their educational aspirations in 2006, two years out of high school, students who had attended religious and independent secondary schools as sophomores tended to give very different responses from students who had attended government schools. Fifty-three percent of Catholic high school students

Percentage of 2002 sophomores who attended a 4-year college

Public Schools - 38%

Catholic Schools - 74%

Other Private Schools - 66%

Percentage of 2002 sophomores who attended a "highly selective" 4-year college

Public - 11%

Catholic Schools - 34%

Other Private Schools - 34%

Percentage of 2002 sophomores who in 2006 were intending to obtain a masters degree or higher

Public Schools - 32%

Catholic Schools - 53%

Other Private Schools - 52%

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 - 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
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 - National Association of Episcopal Schools
 - National Association of Independent Schools
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 - Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
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 - 31 Affiliated State Organizations
- a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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New Book Summarizes School Choice Research

For anyone seeking a short, clear, comprehensive, and wonderfully written handbook on research surrounding private schools and school choice, Herbert Walberg's *School Choice: The Findings* fits the bill. Working within a compact and solid organizational framework, Walberg—a distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and project investigator at the Vanderbilt University Center of School Choice, Competition, and Achievement—translates complex concepts into understandable language and presents the evidence in the case for school choice.

Walberg argues that although the United States leads the world in "income, wealth, military power, and cultural influence," its schools "are behind those of most other economically advanced countries in both effectiveness and efficiency." Moreover, school productivity, "the ratio of achievement to spending," is on the decline "since achievement (the numerator) remains relatively low and spending (the denominator) is rising."

Within this setting, Walberg notes that citizens and policymakers "are interested in the possibility that school choice may increase educational performance," and he offers a rich analysis of relevant research to suggest that it does.

The quality of the research is essential for Walberg. He sets aside some research that does not "measure up to modern social science research standards," and holds high regard for "empirical research" regarded as "scientific in the applied fields such as medicine, epidemiology, agriculture, engineering, psychology, and increasingly in education and the social sciences." And for anyone who has ever struggled with how and when claims of causation (as opposed to correlation) can be justified by various types of research,

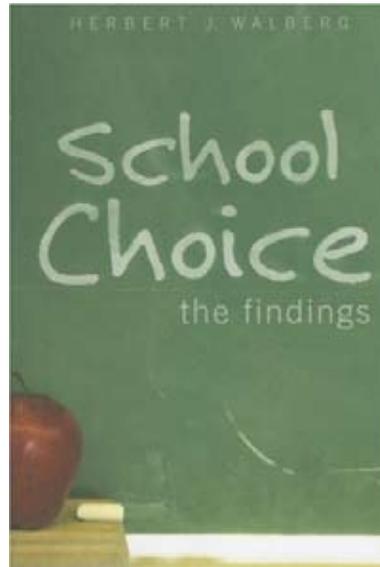
Walberg provides the answer with readable, jargon-free explanations of "randomized field trials," "quasi-experiments," and "correlational analyses." He has an uncanny ability to state matters clearly and precisely and to distill the essential meaning from large and complicated ideas.

Walberg devotes chapters to reviewing research on charter schools, voucher programs, private schools, and school choice within geopolitical areas such as cities, counties, and states. He also looks at levels of parent and public satisfaction with school choice initiatives. A concluding chapter summarizes the findings and presents 20 possible positive effects across a matrix of four forms of choice (charter schools, vouchers, private schools, and competition) and five educational outcomes: point-in-time academic achievement, value-added achievement gains over time, cost efficiency, consumer satisfaction, and certain civic values. He says, "The evidence supports every single one of

the 20 possible choice effects, and evidence is conclusive rather than suggestive for 14. It is statistically improbable that these overall results arose by chance."

In a summary statement at the end of the book, Walberg writes, "In short, given these overall findings and the consistency of the evidence, it may be confidently concluded that school choice generally works better than public school monopolies." He goes on to say: "It is ironic that Americans, who regard themselves as free—perhaps as having the freest country in the world—have so little choice when it comes to their children's education. It is tragic that policy leaders, including governors, legislators, and school boards, have done so little to remedy that situation."

The book is available at amazon.com.



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and 52 percent of other private school students said they were expecting to obtain a masters degree or higher, an aspiration matched by 32 percent of public school students. Moreover, 17 percent of Catholic school students and 21 percent of other private school students expected to obtain a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent degree, compared to 10 percent of public school students.

In sum, the report shows that religious and independent secondary schools account for a

disproportionately high share of students in the nation who attend four-year colleges, enroll in the most selective postsecondary institutions, and aspire to advanced degrees.

The NCES report *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at the Initial Postsecondary Experiences of the High School Sophomore Class of 2002*, which was released October 16, 2007, is available on the Web at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008308>.

New Study on High School Performance

A new study finds that students in private secondary schools “made better academic gains than students in public schools, even after controlling for race, income, parental education and family composition.” Dr. Greg Forster, senior fellow at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, examined data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002), a massive undertaking by the National Center for Education Statistics to track a representative cohort of students from tenth grade through high school and beyond. Forster’s study looks at students who were sophomores in 2002 and seniors in 2004.

The study calls the private school “effect” on student growth between tenth grade and twelfth grade “substantial in size.” Using standardized “T” scores, where the mean is set to 50 and virtually all students score between 25 and 75, Forster found that between 2002 and 2004, “Scores of private school students grew an additional one point out of 50.” To provide context to what might otherwise appear to be a small advantage, the study compares the private school difference with differences associated with other factors considered to influence school success. “Racial and ethnic differences accounted for up to one point of growth; differences in family income among those making at least \$15,000 accounted for up to one point; having both parents live at home accounted for 0.3 points, and parental education accounted for up to 0.7 points.”

In another measure of how substantial the effect is, the study notes that if the benefits realized between tenth grade and twelfth grade were also realized in all grade levels, “a student who attended private school for 12 years would reach a level of academic achievement six points higher out of 50, or 12 percent of the total spectrum from the highest to the lowest students, than that same student would have achieved with the equivalent years of public school education.”

The study focuses on results in math achievement tests, which were administered to students in 2002 and 2004. Achievement tests in reading were only administered in 2002, precluding measures of growth two years later. But the study claims that “this is not a great loss, since reading scores are typically much more influenced by demographic factors than math scores. By focusing on math, we improve our ability

to isolate the effect of school quality from other factors.”

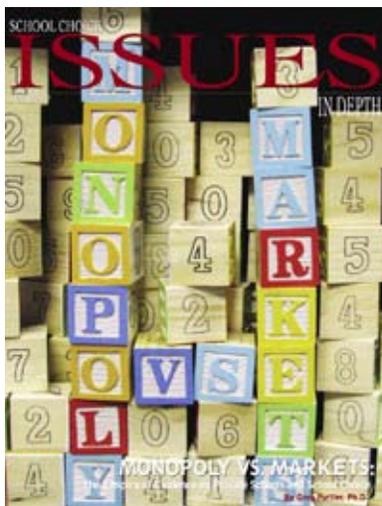
The study, which also looks at a wealth of earlier statistical studies on private schools and school choice, asserts, “The finding that private schools produce greater academic achievement confirms similar findings from a large body of previous research, including studies using optimal ‘random assignment’ methods.”

On another front, Forster also examined the ELS data to look at race relations in public and private schools, which show great similarity. “Tenth graders in both kinds of schools have almost exactly the same numbers of close friends of other races, and characterize the race relations at their schools in very similar ways (though private school students are somewhat less likely to say that students of different races fight often at their schools).” And drawing on related findings, the study notes, “Previous research has shown that private schools in voucher programs have much lower levels of segregation than public schools in the same cities.”

Dropout rates were another focus of the study, with the ELS data showing that tenth-grade students in private schools were less likely than their counterparts in public schools to drop out of school before twelfth grade. The study urged caution in interpreting this result since “removing the effects of student selection is much more difficult in analyses of dropout rates than it is in analyses of test scores.” Also, because the study started when students were at the end of tenth grade, any students who had dropped out of high school before then were not counted.

As part of the report, Forster reviewed other research relating to private schools and school choice programs and found that they convey several benefits. “They improve the academic outcomes of public schools through healthy competition; provide better special education services; do a better job of inculcating civic participation and tolerance for the rights of others; provide about the same level of protection against staff misconduct; and produce large fiscal savings for both state budgets and local public school districts.”

The study, entitled *Monopoly Versus Markets: The Empirical Evidence on Private Schools & School Choice*, is available on the Web site of the Friedman Foundation at <<http://www.friedman-foundation.org>>.



No State Church

“Don’t make public schools a state church.” That’s the provocative title of an opinion piece about freedom of choice in education published October 25 in *The Christian Science Monitor*. Penned by Thomas Hunt and James Carper, education professors at, respectively, the University of Dayton and the University of South Carolina, the essay argues that “schooling in the United States should be determined by the rights of conscience of parents.” Moreover, parents who choose schools outside the government-operated system should “not have to pay twice as the price of liberty of conscience.”

The essay, based on a new book by the authors called *The Dissenting Tradition in American Education*, notes that throughout U.S. history, groups of citizens have elected to educate their children in non-government schools. In the mid-19th century, Roman Catholics fled the common schools to establish their own school system. German Lutherans did the same in what the authors call a “conscience-based dissent from state-sanctioned educational orthodoxy.” Since the 1960s, evangelical Protestants, protesting secularism in public schools, established schools to “educate their children according to the dictates of conscience.” And more recently, homeschoolers are providing their children “an education congruent with their worldview.”

Hunt and Carper claim that the role of government is to “see that the public is educated,” not to mandate “one particular form of education.” They conclude: “When the government privileges a specific set of propositions of knowledge and dispositions of value and belief, it has established the educational equivalent of a state church. Such an arrangement is just as incompatible with liberty of conscience as were the established churches of America’s early history.”

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CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently released results for the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and math for students in grades 4 and 8. Here are some relevant quotes from the reports relating to the performance of students in private schools: “The average mathematics score for fourth-graders in public schools (239) was lower than for students in private schools overall (246) and in Catholic schools specifically (246).” “The average mathematics score for eighth-graders in public schools (280) was lower than for students in private schools overall (293) and lower than for students in Catholic schools specifically (292).” “The average reading score for fourth-graders in public schools (220) was lower than for students in private schools overall (234) and lower than for students in Catholic schools specifically (232).” “The average reading score for eighth-graders in public schools (261) was lower than for students in private schools overall (280) and lower than for students in Catholic schools specifically (282).” Note that the performance gap between students in government schools and those in non-government schools increases from grade 4 to grade 8 in both subjects. A difference in 10 points on the NAEP scales for reading and math is equal to about one grade level.

More information about the NAEP reports is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

★ A sound guiding principle underlies a new publication from the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, and it is this: “[A] free and democratic society requires a diverse educational system in which all parents regardless of financial background have the freedom to choose the type of schooling they think is most suitable for their children.”

Independent Schools and School Choice Legislation in the United States suggests two possible outcomes of the school choice movement: one leading to “a new era of educational freedom...in harmony with the ideals of politically free and independent schools,” and the other bringing about “an oppressive uniform national educational system controlled by the state and federal governments.”

The document has several stated purposes: to provide “basic information on recently enacted educational choice legislation in the United States”; to help readers consider “what such legislation may mean for the future of independent education”; to stimulate “vital dialogue” about school choice, and to provide “facts and resource information for independent school supporters who want to become politically active in the school choice movement.”

The publication is available at http://awsna.org/pubsofinterest/w_perspectives_FINAL.pdf.

★ Sixty-one outstanding elementary and middle school administrators were honored October 18 and 19 as 2007

National Distinguished Principals by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The NDP program was established in 1984 to recognize public and private school principals who make superior contributions to their schools and communities. Private school honorees are selected by a special committee that CAPE helps organize.

CAPE salutes all award recipients, including those from private schools: Mrs. Lynn Domenico, Saint Lawrence Regional School, Lindenwold, NJ; Rabbi Dr. Baruch M. Hilsenrath, Magen David Yeshivah, Brooklyn, NY; Dr. Elena C. Hines, St. Rita School, Dallas, TX; Mrs. Sandra L. Kalin, Bethel Lutheran School, St. Louis, MO; Mr. Spencer R. Perego, St. John Lutheran School, Ellisville, MO; Mr. Thomas J. Sedor, Infant Jesus of Prague School, Flossmoor, IL.

★ The Council of Urban Professionals last month launched a program to provide cash awards to students in New York City who pass AP exams. The initiative, called **REACH** (Rewarding Achievement), focuses on improving the “college readiness of low-income students, especially those from ethnic and racial groups that are underrepresented in higher education,” according to the program’s Web site. Students in 25 public schools and six Catholic schools will receive cash awards of \$500 if they score a three on an AP exam, \$750 if they score a four, and \$1,000 if they score a five.