

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students More Likely to Be Ready for College

Students with diplomas from private high schools are considerably more likely to be ready for college than those with diplomas from other schools, according to data from ACT, which produces a standardized test for college admission that carries the same name.

Eighty-five percent of 2015 graduates of religious and independent schools who took the ACT met or exceeded the test's college readiness benchmark

score in English, compared to 61 percent of graduates from public schools. The share of students who met or surpassed the benchmark scores in other subjects was also higher in private schools (reading – 66 percent vs. 44 percent; math – 60 vs. 40; science – 55 vs. 36).

More than 1.9 million students, an estimated 59 percent of 2015 high school graduates, took the ACT. Just over 10 percent of ACT-takers, or 197,645 students, graduated from private schools.

ACT released on August 26 *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015*, its annual report on the readiness of high school graduates for college. At CAPE's request, the company compiled comparable data for private school graduates.

ACT reports that students who meet the college readiness benchmarks “are more likely to persist in college and earn a degree than those who don't.” Specifically, the benchmarks represent “the minimum score students must earn on each of the four ACT subject tests to have about a 75 percent chance of earning a grade of C or higher and a 50 percent chance of earning

a B or higher in a typical credit-bearing first-year college course in that subject area.”

Average ACT scores for 2015 graduates of private schools well exceeded the national average. The ACT mean composite score for 2015 private school graduates

was 23.8, compared to 20.7 for public school graduates (see table). Moreover, the private school advantage remained steady across all subject areas: English

– 24.2 vs. 19.9, reading – 24.3 vs. 21.0, math – 23.1 vs. 20.6, and science – 23.2 vs. 20.7.

The ACT scoring scale ranges from 1 to 36, and seemingly small differences in the scale score can represent significant percentile shifts.

For example, an ACT English score of 20 has a national percentile rank of 52 among all ACT-tested students in the class of 2015, meaning that 52 percent of graduates who took the ACT English test scored a 20 or below. But an English scale score of 24 places a student at the 73rd percentile. In other words, a four-point scale difference on the English test represents, at least in this example, a 21-point percentile difference.

In every racial and ethnic subgroup,

ACT-tested students in private schools outscored their public school counterparts. For example, Hispanic students in private schools had a composite score of 22.3, while Hispanic students in public schools scored 18.6. And private school African American/Black students scored 19.6, compared to 16.9 for the same group in public schools.

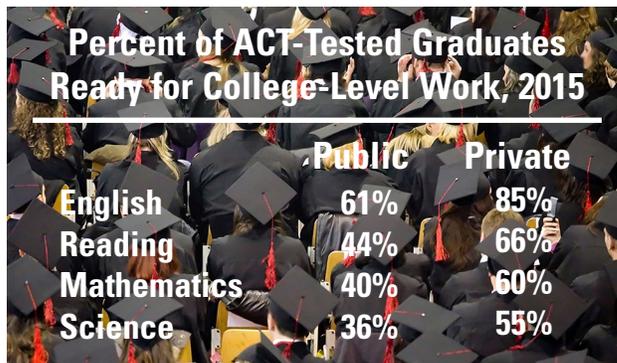
One factor contributing to the higher ACT scores among private school students may be the number of students taking a “core or more” curriculum, defined as “four or more years of English AND three or more years each of math, social studies, and natural science.” Seventy-one percent of public school students and 79 percent of private school students met the “core or more” standard.

Private school students helped lift national average ACT scores. The mean ACT composite score for 2015 graduates was 21.0. The average for public school students (20.7) fell under the national mean by three-tenths of a point, while the average score for private school students (23.8)

exceeded the national mean by 2.8 points.

The overall story on college preparation, according to ACT, is that graduates “continue to make little progress” when it comes to college readiness. “The needle is barely moving on college and career readiness, and that means far too many young people will continue to struggle after they graduate from high school,” said ACT Chief Executive Officer Jon Whitmore.

[Photo © dinostock/Dollar Photo Club]



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 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
- 35 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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NAEP Results Disappoint, But Vary by Type of School

Media outlets were all aflutter late last month with news about the surprisingly disappointing results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Theories abounded, and sometimes collided, as to why performance in reading and math at grades 4 and 8 was either down or stagnant. The economy, test fatigue, curriculum changes, demographics, and sundry shifts in education policy were variously cited as potential culprits.

As always, the performance of students varied by type of school. However, noticeably absent from the 2015 results were breakouts for private schools. Although enough Catholic schools (a subcategory of private schools) participated in NAEP to yield results for that sector, the response rate among other private schools fell well below the 70 percent threshold required to produce separate private school findings, a blow to the private school community.

Lifting the Average

Still, those private (including Catholic) schools that did administer the test likely helped lift overall national results, which reflected the performance of all participating schools, public and private.

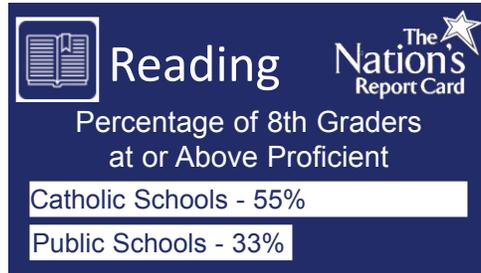
The average reading scale score for eighth-graders attending Catholic schools (284) was 20 points higher than the score for students attending public schools (264). In fourth grade, the public/Catholic difference in reading was 16 points (237 vs. 221). And in math, the Catholic school advantage was 12 points in grade 8 (293/281) and 7 points in grade 4 (247/240).

Higher Proficiency Levels

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which oversees the administration of the tests, also presents results as percentages of students meeting various achievement levels. As the accompanying charts demonstrate, a significantly higher percentage of Catholic school students scored at or above the proficient level than public school students. Fifty-five percent of Catholic school eighth-graders reached that mark in reading, compared to 33 percent of eighth-grade students in public schools. In eighth-grade math, 44 percent of Catholic school students and 32 percent of public school students reached

or exceeded the proficient level.

According to NCES, students performing at or above the proficient level on NAEP assessments demonstrate “solid academic performance” and “competency over challenging subject matter.”

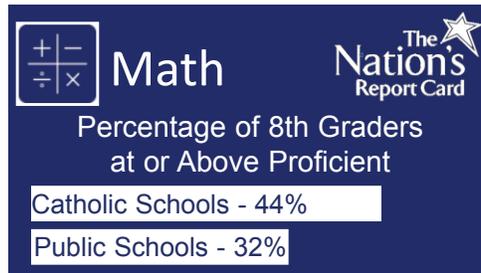


Thousands Tested

The NAEP reading assessment was administered to 139,000 fourth-graders and 136,000 eighth-graders in early 2015. The math assessment was given to 140,000 fourth-graders

and 137,000 eighth-graders.

To make certain that samples are reflective of the population in question, NAEP requires “that participation rates for original school samples be 70 percent or higher to report national results separately for public and private schools.” According to NCES, the weighted national school participation rate for the 2015 assessments in



reading and mathematics was 97 percent for grade 4, with 100 percent for public schools, 61 percent for private (including Catholic) schools, and 83 percent for Catholic schools alone.

At grade eight, the school response rate was 96 percent, including 99 percent for public schools, 56 percent for private schools, and 80 percent for Catholic schools. Because overall participation rates for private schools did not meet the 70 percent standard, results could not be reported.

NAEP math tests cover five content areas: number properties and operations; measurement; geometry; data analysis, statistics and probability; and algebra. Offering examples of skills students should have, the National Assessment Governing Board says that fourth-grade “proficient” students should be able to “divide a three-digit whole number by a one-digit whole number,” and proficient eighth-graders should be able to “translate a verbal statement into an equation.”

In reading, which covers literary text and informational text, students are asked “to locate and recall, to integrate and interpret, and to critique and evaluate.” Proficient students in fourth grade should be able to “explain the importance of character to story action using an example as support,” and proficient eighth-graders should be able to “evaluate information in an expository passage to form and support an opinion.”

House Approves DC Opportunity Scholarship Bill

The U.S. House of Representatives last month approved HR 10, the *Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Reauthorization (SOAR) Act*, which reauthorizes the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) through 2021.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), the primary sponsor of the bipartisan measure and a fervent supporter of the OSP from its start, had set passage of the bill as a top priority before he gave up the speaker's gavel in late October.

In an impassioned intervention during the House debate October 21, Boehner called the program a "lifeline" for children, saying it has served 6,100 students since being established in 2004. "Last spring 90 percent of 12th-graders using the opportunity scholarships graduated, and 88 percent enrolled in a two- or four-year colleges," said the speaker. "Of the 1,400 students in the program this year, 87.4 percent would have been in a school that the government has identified as in need of improvement." He added, "These are the kinds of results parents dream of for their kids."

Best Champions Are the Kids

Boehner said that although his name is on the bill, "the best champions of this program are some of the most fearless kids you will ever see. Not only did they have to overcome the doubts of the education establishment, they also had to withstand efforts by some of the most powerful people in this city to kill this program."

The only federal K-12 private school choice program in the country, the OSP got its start in 2004 while Boehner was chair of the Education and the Workforce Committee. It was renewed in 2011, upon Boehner's insistence, as part of a bipartisan spending bill signed by President Obama. Although the program is technically not up for renewal until next year, the speaker wanted to ensure its survival before he left office.

New Provisions

As approved by the House, HR 10 requires participating private schools to be accredited by a recognized accrediting body, and provides any currently non-accredited school five years to secure accreditation. The bill also establishes a new evaluation of the program that would mea-

sure academic achievement, parent satisfaction, student safety, retention rates, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates. The performance of students participating in the program is to be assessed by the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, employing math and reading tests used by public schools in the District of Columbia.

Member Support

Several CAPE member organizations greeted the bill with great enthusiasm. Dr. John Storey, senior director for the Northeast region at the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), noted the program "gives options to parents and students in D.C. who need those options most," and said ACSI member schools in the district "are grateful to serve parents for whom both academic strength and Christian faith are priorities."

Archbishop George Lucas, chairman of the Committee on Catholic Education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote that the OSP "gives crucial support to low-income and minority families and children," noting that the "average family in the program makes less than \$22,000 per year," and "97 percent of participating children are African American and/or Hispanic."

Post Editorial

The Washington Post even weighed in with an editorial strongly supporting the bill, which pointed out that polling "has shown 74 percent of D.C. residents support the voucher program, which, despite the specious claims of critics, has improved outcomes for its students without taking a dime from regular public schools."

Next Steps

Although the House approved the bill by a comfortable majority, 240 to 191, the outcome in the Senate is less certain. The Senate could consider a similar measure, S 2171, sponsored by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Cory A. Booker (D-NJ), Ron Johnson (R-WI), and Tim Scott (R-SC), although no timetable for action has been set. Ultimately, the bill will likely be attached to some "must pass" piece of legislation that President Obama will be inclined to sign. [Photo: ©photobyjimshane/Dollar Photo Club]

Hello, Mr. Speaker

Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives October 29, succeeding John A. Boehner of Ohio and ensuring that a staunch champion of school choice will continue to occupy the speaker's chair.

Speaker Ryan has a history of strong support for the right of parents to choose their child's school, the latest example being his vote last month in favor of the SOAR Act to reauthorize the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (see related story).

As the Republican vice presidential candidate in 2012, Ryan staked out a solid position in support of choice.

At a campaign event in Ocala, Florida, on October 18, 2012, he said: "Look, we don't want to sit in Washington and micromanage your schools. We don't believe all the best ideas lay in Washington where bureaucrats micromanage. We believe in choice; we believe in competition; we believe in giving parents control over their children's education. Whether that's getting the kid stuck in an inner city school out of a failing school and into a better school, or whether it gives you the ability and right to take over and control your child's education by educating her yourself, that's the kind of freedom we want you to have and preserve in this country."

The following week in Cleveland, Ohio, he talked about a recent visit to the Cornerstone School, an independent school in Detroit, which he described as an "amazing place" where "you can feel a culture of responsibility and achievement all around you." He said, "Every child in America should have this kind of opportunity. Sending your child to a great school should not be a privilege of the well-to-do."

Ryan attended Catholic elementary school as a child, and his own children do the same today.



Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ John A. Boehner of Ohio delivered an emotional farewell address to the House October 29, describing himself as “just a regular guy humbled by the chance to do a big job.”

Boehner listed some of the accomplishments of his speakership: reforming entitlements, reducing spending, forestalling tax increases, and banning earmarks. But he reserved for final mention the following unmistakable reference to one of his most cherished achievements, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: “And every day in this capital city, there are hundreds of kids from the toughest neighborhoods who are finally getting a chance at a decent education.” The line was met with bipartisan applause.

Boehner described his life as “a chase for the American Dream,” saying that in this country “you can do anything” if you’re willing to work hard and make the necessary sacrifices.

The speaker’s final advice to colleagues was simple and straightforward: “[I]f you just do the right things for the right reasons, good things will happen.”

★ Are Jewish views of education tax credits changing? That’s a question explored by Ron Reynolds, executive director of the California CAPE (the California Association of Private School Organizations, or CAPSO), in a [fascinating article posted on CAPSO’s Web site](#).

Reynolds explores the implications of a “[Statement on Jewish Vitality](#),” recently is-

sued by “a highly diverse group of thought leaders” within the Jewish community in the United States.

Reacting to the “declining number of engaged Jews,” the statement suggests several activities that can “build Jewish social networks,” “convey Jewish content,” and “target peer groups of Jews at crucial stages of life.” Among the suggestions is this: “Several states have adopted tax policies that offset day school tuition. The Jewish community should support such efforts and find other ways to make day schools more affordable.”

Reynolds describes the proposal as “a bombshell to some on the Jewish political left” and then proceeds to provide a thoughtful overview of American Jewish positions on school choice, public education, and the separation of church and state. He writes that the new statement “could signal a sea change in broader Jewish attitudes toward and involvement in school choice advocacy,” and may prove to be “a watershed moment in the history of the school choice movement.”

The piece is well worth a read. And while you’re on [CAPSO’s Web site](#), be sure to subscribe to the free and popular “Mid-Week E-Mailer” for timely information about private education in California and for Ron’s always-thoughtful commentary.

★ The [Montessori Public Policy Initiative](#) (MPPI), a collaboration of the American Montessori Society and Association Montessori International/USA, two

members of CAPE, sponsored its first-ever retreat for state advocates October 25-27 in Washington, DC.

The breakthrough event focused on the public policy opportunities and challenges facing Montessori education and featured an impressive lineup of presenters, including Deputy Assistant Secretary Libby Doggett from the U.S. Department of Education, Jim Cultrara from the NYS Coalition for Independent and Religious Schools, and Rebecca Pelton from the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE).

Bringing together national and state leaders who advocate for Montessori education, MPPI’s mission is to “create a groundswell of activism” to advance Montessori “through public consensus, shared interests, and efforts at the local, state and federal levels of public policy.” The new group plans to “create and maintain an organizational structure” to promote “public policy and advocacy efforts.”

