

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students Exceed National ACT Averages

The percentage of students who are ready for college-level coursework is significantly higher in non-government schools than government schools, according to data compiled by ACT, the college admission examination company.

Seventy-nine percent of 2008 graduates of religious and independent schools who took the ACT met or surpassed the test's college readiness benchmark score in

English, compared to 67 percent of ACT-tested public school graduates. The share of students who met the benchmark scores in other subjects was also higher in private schools (math - 51 vs. 41; reading - 63 vs. 51; science - 34 vs. 27).

According to the ACT, college readiness benchmarks "indicate whether students are ready to succeed (highly likely to earn a 'C' or higher) in specific first-year, credit-bearing college courses in those subject areas." The company says the benchmarks "are more informative and important measures of college readiness than average scores because they provide more detailed information."

Even so, actual average ACT scores for students in private schools were also significantly above the average scores for students in public schools. The ACT mean composite score for 2008 private school graduates was 22.4, compared to 20.9 for public school graduates, and the private school advantage remained steady across all subject areas: English - 22.6 vs. 20.3, math - 22.1 vs. 20.9, reading - 22.9 vs. 21.2, and science - 21.6 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 50 among recent high school graduates (i.e., graduates from 2006, 2007, and 2008), meaning that 50 percent of graduates who took the ACT English test scored a 20 or below. But an English scale

score of 23 places a student at the 69th percentile. In other words, a three-point scale difference on the English test represents a 19-point percentile difference.

A record 1,421,941 students from the class of 2008 took the ACT. Fourteen percent of ACT-takers, or 192,204 students, graduated from private schools, a disproportionately large share given that private schools enrolled an estimated 9.6 percent of all graduates in 2008, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Sixty percent of the estimated 320,000 students who graduated from private schools in 2008 took the ACT, compared to 43 percent of all high school graduates.

In every racial and ethnic subgroup, private school ACT-takers from the class of 2008 outscored their public school counterparts. Hispanic students in private schools had a composite score of 20.6, while Hispanic students in public schools scored 18.5. Private school African American/Black students scored 17.4, compared to 16.9 for the same group in public schools. And the scores for Caucasian American/White students in private schools (23.1) represented a 1.2-point advantage over those for the identical public school cohort (21.9).

The scores of private school students also exceeded those of public school students on ACT subtests. Fifty-nine percent of private school students and 43 percent of public school students scored above a 10 on the usage/mechanics subtest in English. (Subtest scores run from 1 to 18.) The percentages of students scoring above 10 on other subtests also showed a private school advantage: rhetorical skills - 64 percent vs. 49 percent; social studies - 59 percent vs. 48 percent; arts/literature - 64 percent vs. 52 percent; pre/elementary algebra - 60 percent vs. 50 percent; algebra/coordinate geometry - 55 percent vs. 46

percent; plane geometry/trigonometry - 55 percent vs. 47 percent.

The performance of students in private schools helped lift national average ACT scores.

The average ACT composite score

for 2008 graduates was 21.1. The average score for public school students (20.9) fell

Percent of ACT-Takers in the Class of 2008 Who Are Ready for College-Level Coursework

Subject Tests	Public Schools	Private Schools
English	67%	79%
Mathematics	41%	51%
Reading	51%	63%
Science	27%	34%

Source: ACT

Average ACT Composite Scores Class of 2008

Student Groups	Public Schools	Private Schools
All Students	20.9	22.4
African Am./Black	16.9	17.4
Hispanic	18.5	20.6

Source: ACT

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School Crime Rates Drop

Is school crime rampant in the United States? According to a report released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics, the vast majority of students—95.7 percent, to be precise—say they have *not* been victims of crime at school. What’s more, the percentage of students who have been victims has dropped significantly since 1995.

The report presents results from a 2005 survey that asked students ages 12 through 18 about victimization that may have taken place during the previous six months either on school property or on the way to or from school.

The 4.3 percent of students who said they had been victims of crime included 3.1 percent who were victims of theft and 1.2 percent who were victims of violent crime. In other words, three out of four school-crime victims were theft victims.

The study breaks out some statistics by the type of school students attend. According to the report, “Three percent of students who attended public schools reported being victims of theft, compared to 1 percent of students who attended private schools.” Further, the share of public school students who said they were victims of any crime (4.4 percent) was higher than the share of private school students reporting the same (2.7 percent). Roughly one percent of students in public and private schools claimed to be victims of violent crime.

The report draws from data provided by the 2005 School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the 2005 National Crime Victimization Survey

(NCVS). NCVS is “the nation’s primary source of information on crime victimization and the victims of crime in the United States,” and the SCS is a companion piece designed “to collect information about school-related victimization on a national level.”

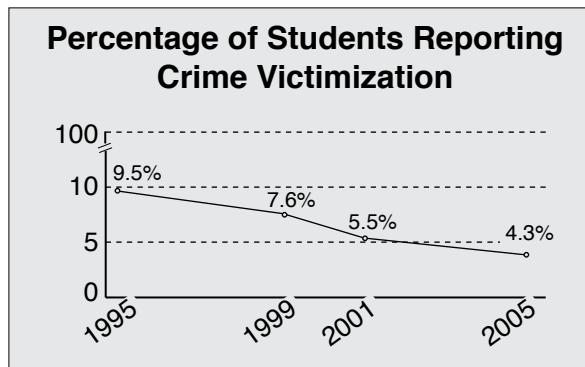
The report and the survey on which it is based define the various types of crime quite precisely. “Theft” includes “attempted and completed purse snatching, completed pickpocketing, and all attempted and completed thefts, excluding motor vehicle theft.” “Violent crime” includes “serious violent crimes and simple assault.” “Serious violent crime” includes

“rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.”

The SCS survey has been conducted six times between 1989 and 2005, allowing policymakers and researchers to examine trends on school crime. Fortunately, since 1995,

the trend lines have been downward. “While 10 percent of students reported being victims of at least one crime at school in 1995, 4 percent of students reported at least one victimization at school in 2005. In 1995, 7 percent reported being victims of theft and 3 percent reported theft in 2005. Three percent of students reported being victims of violent crime in 1995 and 1 percent reported being victims of violent crime in 2005. In 1995 and 2005, less than 1 percent of students reported a serious violent crime.”

The report *Student Victimization in U.S. Schools: Results From the 2005 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey* is available online at <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009306>>.



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under the national average by two-tenths of a point, while the average score for private school students (22.4) exceeded the national benchmark by 1.3 points.

Readiness Levels Stable

According to the ACT, the percentages of 2008 graduates who met or surpassed the company’s college readiness benchmarks in math (43 percent), reading (53 percent), and science (28 percent) “were unchanged compared to last year and were either the same or higher than they were in 2004 to 2006.” The share of students who met the English benchmarks (68 percent)

fell by one percentage point from last year.

“The fact that readiness levels remained stable this year is encouraging given the expanded base of test-takers,” said Richard L. Ferguson, ACT’s chief executive officer and chairman of the board. “The percentages actually represent significantly larger numbers of individual students who are ready for college coursework in each subject area this year.”

“At the same time, we still have far too many high school graduates who are not ready for college-level work,” said Ferguson. “There is much work left to be done to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed at the next level.”

Private School Eighth-Graders Outpace Others

Initial findings from the eighth-grade phase of the *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99* (ECLS-K) show that students in religious and independent schools score above average in academic assessments, and when compared to students in government schools, devote more hours to homework, participate more in school-sponsored activities, and have higher long-term educational aspirations.

The report, released September 2008 by the National Center for Education Statistics, is the latest in a series of reports from a massive study that followed a nationally representative cohort of students in public and private schools who attended kindergarten in 1998-99. The study periodically collects information from the children, their parents, teachers and school administrators, and is designed to yield information about the students' "educational, socio-emotional, and physical development." Extensive data was collected in the fall and spring of kindergarten, the fall and spring of first grade, and the spring of third grade, fifth grade, and eighth grade. The latest report presents early findings from the eighth-grade data, which was collected in 2007.

Academics

The cohort in the spring of 2007 had a mean reading scale score of 167, a mean mathematics scale score of 140, and a mean science scale score of 83. (Scores from the three tests had standard deviations of 27.4, 21.8, and 15.9, respectively.) For students in religious and independent schools, the mean scores were 182 for reading, 148 for mathematics, and 89 for science, placing private school student performance at a considerable advantage.

Besides yielding overall performance, the ECLS-K reading tests provide information on the performance of students with respect to specific reading skills. For example, 64.4 percent of all students and 79.5 percent of private school students are able to demonstrate proficiency in the level 8 skill (evaluation), described as "demonstrating understanding of author's craft and making connections between a problem in the narrative and similar life problems." At the level 9 skill (evaluating non-fiction), 27.8 percent of

all students and 46.1 percent of private school students are able to demonstrate "comprehension of biographical and expository text. And at level 10 (evaluating complex syntax), 6.1 percent of all students and 11.6 percent of private school students are proficient in "evaluating complex syntax and understanding high-level nuanced vocabulary in biographical text."

The mathematics battery also provides data on specific skills, and again it turns out that private school students significantly surpass the

average. At level 7, 67 percent of all students and 80 percent of private school students are proficient when it comes to "using knowledge of measurement and rate to solve word problems." At level 8, 37.1 percent of all students and 49.5 percent of private school students succeed at "solving problems using fractions." And at level 9, 15.9 percent of all students and 22.3 percent of private school

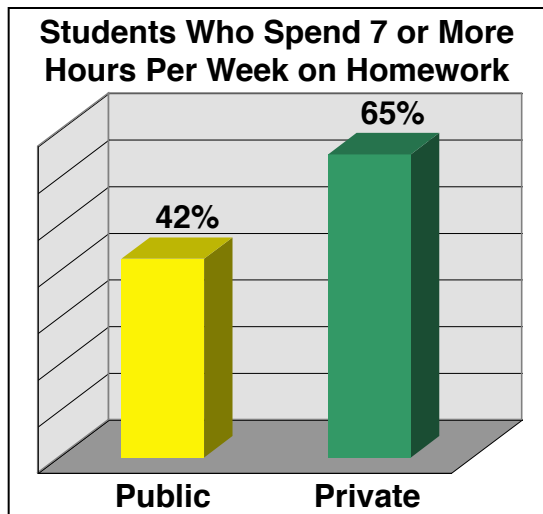
students show skill at "solving word problems involving area and volume."

Homework, Activities, and Aspirations

Private school students do more homework each week than public school students. Twenty-six percent of private school students (vs. 21 percent of public school students) say they spent 7-10 hours each week on homework, and 39 percent of private school students (vs. 21 percent of public school students) report spending 11 or more hours per week on homework.

Despite the extra hours tooling over books, students in private schools still manage to devote more time to extracurricular activities. Seventy-three percent say they participate in school sports, 48 percent in drama or music, and 41 percent in club-like activities such as the school newspaper or the photography club. For public school students the participation percentages are 59, 41, and 32, respectively.

Finally, private school students tend to set their sights high. Eighty-five percent of eighth-graders in private schools want to go to college (14 percent don't know yet and 1 percent just want to graduate high school), and 42 percent are looking to get a post-graduate degree, a figure 8 percentage points higher than that for the cohort as a whole.



Federal Budget Update

In recent weeks, Congress passed and President Bush signed two important pieces of legislation affecting students and teachers in private schools.

On October 3, President Bush signed the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008* (HR 1424), also known as the economic rescue legislation. Although the bill's most prominent provision is an authorization of \$700 billion to break up the logjam in the credit markets, a lesser known component includes a two-year extension (through tax year 2009) of the \$250 deduction allowed by teachers in private and public schools for expenses they incur for certain classroom materials. The deduction covers expenses for books, supplies, computers, software, and other equipment and materials used in the classroom by teachers, counselors, principals, or aides who work at least 900 hours during a school year. (More information on the deduction is available from the Internal Revenue Service.)

On September 30, President Bush signed the *Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009* (HR 2638), which provides appropriations through March 6, 2009, for a host of federal agencies and program, including education. Although Congress was unable to pass a regular education spending bill for fiscal year 2009, this stopgap measure will allow funds to continue until a new appropriations measure is passed under the next administration.

The good news is that under the continuing resolution, federal programs that serve students in public and private schools such as Title I, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, and IDEA, will continue at current funding levels. The bad news is that funding for those programs will be revisited early next year against the backdrop of a worsening economic slump.

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CAPE notes

★ Fast Facts About Private Schools: “The number of teachers in private elementary and secondary schools increased 22 percent between 1992 and 2005, and is projected to increase an additional 20 percent between 2005 and 2017,” according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics. The center’s *Projections of Education Statistics to 2017* also notes that the “pupil/teacher ratio in private elementary and secondary schools decreased from 15.4 to 13.5 between 1992 and 2005, and is projected to decrease further to 11.8 in 2017.” By way of context, in all elementary and secondary schools, the number of teachers increased 27 percent from 1992 to 2005 and is expected to grow another 18 percent between 2005 and 2017. The pupil/teacher ratio in all schools dropped from 17.2 to 15.4 between 1992 and 2005, and is projected to reach 14.5 by 2017.

As for elementary and secondary enrollment, private schools increased their count by 7 percent between 1992 and 2005, compared to an upswing in all schools of 14 percent. Private school enrollment is predicted to grow another 5 percent between 2005 and 2017, compared to a projected increase for all schools of 10 percent.

Projections of Education Statistics to 2017 is available online at <<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2017/>>.

★ Private schools increase a country’s overall student achievement and decrease

per-pupil spending, according to findings from a study published in the winter 2009 issue of *Education Next*.

Martin R. West, assistant professor of education at Brown University, and Ludger Woessmann, professor of economics at the University of Munich, looked at assessment data in 29 countries and concluded that competition from private schools improves educational productivity. They used results from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA assesses the abilities of students in mathematics, science, and reading and also collects data on the characteristics of participating students, who are randomly selected to represent their country’s student population.

The researchers’ challenge was daunting: “to measure systematically the causal impact of competition” between public and private schools. They had to eliminate the effects of confounding variables such as a country’s resources or the degree that it values education, or the quality of its public schools. West and Woessmann came up with a unique approach: “In this study, we solve this conundrum by taking advantage of the historical fact that the amount of competition in education today varies from one country to another for reasons that have little to do with contemporary school quality, or national income, or commitments to education. The extent of private schooling stems in large part from the Catholic Church’s decision in

the 19th century to build an alternative system of education wherever they were unable to control the state-run system.” In short, they found that “countries with larger shares of Catholics but without an official Catholic state religion in 1900 have significantly larger shares of privately operated schools in 2003.” Moreover, “private school competition...generates higher student achievement in mathematics, reading, and science today.”

The authors sum up their study this way: “Our findings... speak quite clearly. Competition from private schools improves student achievement, and appears to do so for public school as well as private school students. And it produces these benefits while decreasing the total resources devoted to education.”

The research article “Higher Private School Share Boosts Test Scores” is available for download at <http://media.hoover.org/documents/ednext_20091_54.pdf>.

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