

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Study Looks at Sophomores' Achievement, Activities, and Values

This month, Outlook continues the summary of findings from A Profile of the American High School Sophomore in 2002, a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Since way back when, parents have been badgering teenagers about spending their free time wisely. But whereas once televisions and telephones were a teen's biggest time wasters, in today's Internet era, iPods, xBoxes, and instant messaging can also consume countless hours. Indeed, the temptation to forego schoolwork for immediately pleasurable and less productive pursuits may be stronger than ever. But how exactly do high school students handle the temptation? How do they fill their nonschool time? How many hours do they spend doing homework, engaging in extracurricular activities, working for pay, or using the computer?

These are some of the questions posed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in its Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002). The initial wave of the massive study looks at high school sophomores through a nationally representative sample of 15,362 students in public and private schools. Subsequent waves will follow the cohort through the end of high school and into college and the workforce. The first report, titled *A Profile of the American High*

School Sophomore in 2002, looks at what 10th-graders think of their schools and teachers (topics examined in the May issue of Outlook). Released in March 2005 and updated just last month, the report also examines how sophomores spend their time, how well they perform in reading and math, what values they hold dear, and what expectations and plans they have for the future (all topics examined in this article).

Time Use

Are students who spend more time studying, more likely to wind up with rewarding careers and fulfilling lives? Sophomores in private schools probably hope so. On average, they spend two to three hours more each week on homework than their counterparts in public schools (tables 1 and 2). They also devote more time to extracurricular activities and less time to working for pay (table 2).

Time spent with the books seems to pay off. The study shows an association between student achievement and hours devoted to homework. Sophomores who

ranked in the lowest quartile on composite scores of achievement in mathematics and reading set aside only eight hours each week for homework, while students who achieved in the highest quartile devoted 13 hours a week. Although studies like this cannot confirm causal connections, the data at least show a correlation

between study time and achievement: as one variable goes up, so does the other.

To no one's surprise, the study shows that computers, which have become increasingly available in school and at home, consume a considerable portion of a teen's time. Whereas sophomores spend 10.4 hours each *week* on homework, they spend 3.4 hours each *day* on computers. To some

degree, homework time and computer time overlap. Sophomores set aside 1.2 hours of their computer time each day to do schoolwork, and presumably some of that work is homework. But that still leaves 2.2 hours each day on the computer for nonschoolwork. About three-fourths of sophomores say they use a computer at least once each week for fun. Computer use does not vary all that much by school sector (table 3).

Reading and Math

Students participating in the study were tested to determine how well they have mastered specific skills and knowledge in reading and mathematics. Students in private schools had higher levels of mastery than students in public schools (table 4). In mathematics, for example, at level 3, which measures a student's ability

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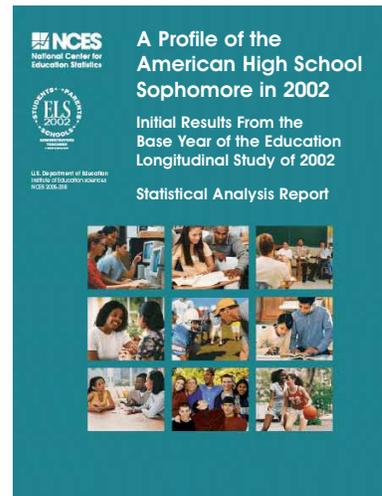


Table 1. Average number of hours per week high school sophomores spent on homework in and out of school

Homework Hours	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Total hours of homework	10.2	12.4	13.4
Homework hours spent in school	4.7	4.5	5.0
Homework hours spent out of school	5.5	8.0	8.4



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Table 2. Average hours per week spent on the following activities

Type of Activity	Public	Catholic	Other Private
School-sponsored extracurricular activities	4.4	6.6	6.1
Additional reading not assigned by school	2.7	2.4	2.8
Doing homework outside of school	5.5	8.0	8.4
Working for pay*	15.3	11.8	11.4

*Reflects hours for those sophomores who were employed during the 2001-02 school year (approximately 39 percent of sophomores).

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to solve simple problems “requiring the understanding of low-level mathematical concepts,” more than 67 percent of private school students demonstrated proficiency, compared to 45 percent of public school students. In level 2 of reading, which measures the “ability to make rela-

public school counterparts.

Extracurricular Activities

While there’s no question that academics is one of the most important components of school, it is by no means the only component. School-sponsored clubs, sports, and other extracurricular activities allow students to learn important skills, not the least being socialization. After-school activities are also one of the reasons that some students go to school. Presented with various reasons for going to school, just over 49 percent of sophomores agreed or strongly agreed

Table 3. Average hours per day sophomores used a computer

Computer Use	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Schoolwork	1.1	1.3	1.3
Nonschoolwork	2.2	2.2	2.0

tively simple inferences beyond the author’s main thought” as well as the ability to “understand and evaluate abstract concepts,” at least 65 percent of private school students proved to be proficient, as opposed to 45 percent of public school students. In fact, in all three levels of proficiency in reading and in all five levels in math, private school students outscored their

with the statement “I play on a team or belong to a club.” (To put this in perspective, 96.5 percent responded the same way to the statement “Education is important for getting a job later on.”) According to the report, private school students were “more likely than public school students to cite sports or other extracurricular

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Table 4. Percentage of sophomores demonstrating proficiency in specific knowledge and skills

Proficiency Level	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Reading 1 (simple comprehension)	88.9	97.6	94.8
Reading 2 (simple inferences and abstract concepts)	44.5	68.3	65.0
Reading 3 (complex inferences and evaluation)	7.6	15.6	17.6
Math 1 (simple arithmetical operations)	91.2	97.9	96.3
Math 2 (decimals, fractions, powers, roots)	65.6	86.4	83.1
Math 3 (simple problem solving)	44.6	68.4	67.2
Math 4 (intermediate concepts)	19.4	31.8	35.3
Math 5 (complex problems; advanced coursework)	0.9	1.3	2.6

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participation as a reason for going to school (67 percent of Catholic, 57 percent of other private, and 48 percent of public school students listed playing on a team or belonging to a club as one of their motivations for going to school)."

The most popular after-school activity for sophomores in 2002

was sports, with 54.8 percent of sophomores

saying they participated. Other favorite activities, as measured by level of participation, were band, orchestra, chorus, and choir (21.5 percent), school plays or musicals (11.5 percent), service clubs (11.2 percent), and hobby clubs (9.5 percent). Participation in extracurricular activities varied by type of school, with private school students more likely to play sports than

Table 5. Percentage of sophomores who participated in various school-sponsored activities

Activity	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Academic club	8.1	11.3	10.5
Sports	53.2	73.1	73.9
Cheerleading	13.8	10.7	15.5
Hobby club	8.9	17.1	14.8
Music	21.2	18.1	33.9
Vocational education	8.8	2.2	3.8

asked, "As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?" private school sophomores (at least 83 percent) were more likely than public school sophomores (70.3 percent) to believe they would eventually attain a four-year college degree or higher.

The study also shows that students in public and private schools share many of the basic life

values relating to work, family, and friends (table 7), although private school students were more likely to say it was important to them to marry the right person, have children, enjoy a happy family life, and have strong friendships. They were also less likely than public school students to

Table 6. Percentage of sophomores who participated in one or more sports

Sports Participation	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Did not participate	46.8	27.0	26.1
Intramural	32.7	35.5	37.0
Junior varsity	27.6	41.6	26.2
Varsity	25.2	37.2	49.7

public school students (tables 5 and 6).

Values and Expectations

No matter what type of school they attend, most sophomores understand the importance of getting a good education (table 7). But when

said that having lots of money was important.

A Profile of the American High School Sophomore in 2002, the base-year report from the ELS:2002 project, is available on the NCES Web site at: <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005338>>.

Table 7. Percentage of sophomores who reported that various life values were very important to them

Life Value	Public	Catholic	Other Private
Getting a good education	82.5	86.8	83.6
Being successful in line of work	86.0	92.2	86.5
Becoming an expert in field of work	71.0	70.4	67.5
Having lots of money	42.7	36.1	33.7
Marrying right person and having happy family life	75.9	82.2	83.2
Having children	46.8	57.0	51.3
Being able to give children better opportunities	80.7	77.1	71.5
Having strong friendships	82.2	89.9	88.3

School Choice Update

School choice initiatives in three states saw setbacks last month, signaling continued challenges for proponents of parental rights in education.

The Houston Chronicle reported that the Texas House of Representatives on May 23 failed, "after a raucous debate and a series of close votes," to approve a proposal that would have provided school vouchers to disadvantaged students in seven urban school districts. "The vouchers would have been for 90 percent of the statewide average public funding per student." The paper said it was the first time in eight years that the House took up the issue.

Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano vetoed a bill May 20 that would have provided corporations with tax credits for contributions to organizations that provide tuition scholarships to help children attend private schools. The veto set off a firestorm of protest from leaders of the legislature who believed the governor had broken a promise to sign the bill. The governor, meanwhile, contended the legislation did not have the five-year sunset provision she had set as a condition for her signature. The mess may be resolved in a special session of the legislature later this year.

In South Carolina, the House of Representatives on May 4 voted 60-53 to table Governor Mark Sanford's "Put Parents in Charge" legislation, which would have provided tax credits for parents to help offset certain education expenses, including private school tuition. After the vote, Sanford said, "A lot of kids trapped in failing and below average schools lost today, and a whole lot of parents looking to make a difference in the lives of those kids lost, too." The governor pledged to "keep pushing" for choice legislation in the state.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** The average per-pupil expenditure for public schools across the nation in 2002-03 was \$8,041, according to a report released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics. In three states, per-pupil spending exceeded \$11,000: Connecticut (\$11,057), New York, (\$11,961), and New Jersey (\$12,568). The District of Columbia weighed in with expenditures of \$11,847 per pupil.

According to *Revenues and Expenditures for U.S. Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2002-03*: "Current expenditures for public education in 2002-03 totaled approximately \$388 billion. This represents a \$19 billion (5.2 percent) increase over expenditures in the previous school year."

All of this is a roundabout way of getting to this month's fast fact about private schools. Multiplying the \$8,041 national spending average by the 6.25 million students in private schools yields a product of \$50.3 billion—the annual savings to taxpayers that private schools represent.

★ **Lunchroom monitors, reading tutors, teacher aides, chaperones**—they all play a vital role in running a school. And more often than not, they contribute their services freely and generously as volunteers. Private schools are especially blessed with community members who selflessly donate time and talent.

The President's Volunteer Service Award is a way to recognize outstanding

volunteers in your school. Established by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, the award is available to "individuals, families, and groups that have demonstrated outstanding volunteer service and civic participation over the course of a 12-month period." Adults and young adults who volunteer 100 hours or more each year are eligible for the award, as are children 14 and younger who volunteer 50 hours or more. Different awards (bronze, silver, gold) recognize increased levels of hours of service. Recipients receive a personalized certificate of achievement, an official President's Award lapel pin, a congratulatory letter from the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, and a letter from the President of the United States.

Private schools are eligible to become "certifying organizations," which verify that the hours of service have been completed, nominate awardees, and actually order and present the awards.

Summer would be the perfect time to modify next year's volunteer recognition program to incorporate the President's Volunteer Service Award. To find out more about the program and to register as a certifying organization, visit: <http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov/>.

★ With state legislatures acting on school choice initiatives at a dizzying pace, it's hard to keep up with the latest developments. But a new Web site from The Heritage Foundation, a public policy

think tank in Washington, D.C., provides up-to-the-minute information on bills relating to vouchers, tax credits, and a wide

The screenshot shows the Heritage Foundation website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'POLICY RESEARCH & ANALYSIS', 'Heritage home', 'Heritage Research', and 'press room'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'The Heritage Foundation > Research > Education > School Choice > School Choice'. A sidebar on the left lists 'HERITAGE RESEARCH LINKS' including 'Policy Archive: view by date', 'Policy Archive: view by issue', 'Policy Archive: view by type', 'Features', 'Events', 'Heritage Experts', 'Support Heritage', 'Contact Us', and 'Return Home'. The main content area features a 'RESEARCH' section with a link to 'school choice'. Below this is a large graphic for 'CHOICES IN EDUCATION' with the text 'EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE. EVERY SCHOOL IS DIFFERENT.' and the subtitle 'Choices in Education give children a chance to achieve.' At the bottom of the graphic, there are two columns: 'What's Hot' with a link to 'New York Daily News columnist praises charters' and 'Feature' with a link to 'Just Released: Choices in Education: 2005 Progress Report, by Krista Kafer'. A small text box at the bottom of the graphic reads: 'They "live and die by the numbers" because they must close if they don't show student demand and growing. Twenty'.

assortment of other choice incentives.

Want to know the status of the Arizona proposal for tax credits for corporations that donate to scholarship organizations? Just click on Arizona in the interactive map and scroll down to the "Background" section to read the latest developments.

A recent addition to the site is *Choices in Education: 2005 Progress Report* by Krista Kafer, a policy analyst at Heritage. The report concludes that school choice "is in high demand and growing," noting that 11 states and the District of Columbia now have "state-funded scholarship programs or provide tax relief for education expenses or contributions to scholarship funds."

The Heritage site also offers book reviews, links to recent court decisions, and a chronological catalog of school choice research. The URL is <http://www.heritage.org/schoolchoice>.