

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students Have College Admission Advantage

A college degree is universally regarded as a ticket to success in life. But getting into a college, especially a good one, can be a challenge these days for the more than three million students who graduate high school each year. And it's a challenge for which not every student is equally prepared, according to a new report from the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC).

NACAC's 2005 survey of high school guidance counselors shows a disparity in college-going rates between students in private schools and those in public schools. Private school counselors reported that 94.9 percent of their students enrolled in four-year colleges, while public school counselors said that 49.6 percent of their students did so. Another 26.6 percent of public school graduates and 5.1 percent of private school graduates enrolled in two-year colleges.

What accounts for the higher college-attendance rate of private schools? One factor might be the attention paid to the college admission process. The private schools that responded to the survey were smaller than the public schools and had

schools had an average caseload of 289 students, while those in private schools had a caseload of 167 students, 42 percent less than the public school number.

The number of counselors in a school who focus exclusively on getting students into college may also contribute to success in the admission process. When maneuvering the obstacle course that leads to college entry, it helps to have a knowledgeable guide. As the NACAC's report puts it, "Students face additional challenges without a strong counselor to help them." The survey found 77.2 percent of private high schools and only 20.9 percent of public high schools had at least one counselor whose only responsibility was postsecondary admission.

The importance of the college admission process in private schools was evident in other ways as well. When asked to

rank on a scale of 1 to 4 (with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important) the priority given to "helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education," private school counselors had

an average ranking of 1.45, and public school counselors had an average ranking of 2.08. The ranking correlates with another measure: the percent of time spent by counselors on postsecondary admission counseling. Counselors in private schools

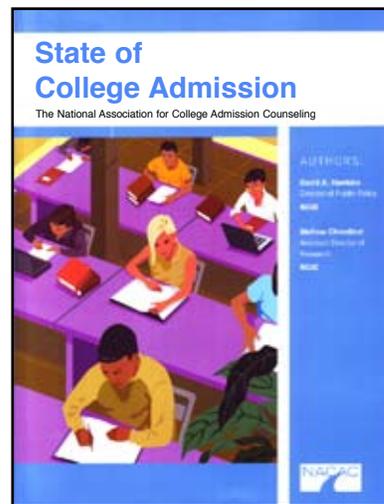
spent 58 percent of their time on that task, while those in public schools devoted 25 percent of their time on the same work, less than one-half the private school

amount. The report also notes that the "public school disadvantage is further compounded by high student-to-counselor ratios. The result is that the average public school student receives only about one-half of the college counseling services as the average private school student."

In a related survey of college admission officers, NACAC found that the top factor in admission decisions is perfor-

mance in college preparatory courses. Colleges are especially impressed with good grades in beefed-up coursework, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), actual college courses through dual enrollment, and other advanced or college-level coursework. Private secondary schools, known for the strength of their curriculum, have significantly higher percentages of students enrolled in college prep courses, according to the survey of high school counselors. The mean percent of students who took AP courses was 20.2 for public schools and 46.5 for private schools. The mean percent of students who participated in an enriched curriculum was 30.4 for public schools and 53.2 for private schools. The percent of students who participated in the IB curriculum was 2.2 for public schools and 2.8 for private schools.

The NACAC report, entitled *State of College Admission 2006*, is available online at <<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/ProfessionalResources/Research/SOCA.htm>>.



Mean Percent of 2005 Graduates from NACAC Survey Respondent Schools Who Enrolled in College

Type of College:	Public High Schools	Private High Schools
Four-year college	49.6	94.9
Two-year college	26.6	5.1

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2005

many more college admission counselors per student. Mean enrollment in the public schools was 1,008, while enrollment was 619 in private schools with a religious affiliation and 123 in private schools without one. Counselors in public secondary

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- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- 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
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

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NCES Publishes Two Reports on Private Schools

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released two reports in the past year on the performance of private school students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), one of them the focus of much debate.

The first report, *Student Achievement in Private Schools*, covered NAEP assessments from 2000 to 2005 in grades 4, 8, and 12, the three levels at which NAEP is administered. Published in December 2005, the report found that private school students in all grades “had higher average scores in reading, mathematics, science, and writing than their counterparts in public schools.” Regarding scores for racial and ethnic groups, the report said this: “In private schools overall, in every case but one, students from each racial/ethnic category [white, black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander] had higher average scores than their counterparts in public schools in the most recent assessment year. The one exception was in grade 4 mathematics, where there was no statistically significant difference between the average scores of Asian/Pacific Islander students in public schools (246) and in private schools overall (249) in 2003.”

The report also noted that private school students registered superior results when students were sorted by the extent of formal education their parents experienced. “In almost all cases, the average scores of students in all types of private schools were higher than those of their counterparts in public schools for each reported level of their parents’ education.”

The NCES report was not able to explain why private school students performed above the national average because researchers were not able to measure or control for all the variables that help account for student success, whether they be in-school factors or out-of-school factors. As the report put it: “There are many reasons why the performance of one group of students differs from another, including factors that are not measured in NAEP.”

HLM Report

In July 2006, NCES released its second report exclusively devoted to private schools. Entitled *Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling*, the report focused on results from the 2003 NAEP assessments in reading and mathematics for grades

4 and 8. Examining the average scores of the students who took the NAEP test, the report found that private school students posted an advantage of 10 points in grade 4 math, 16 in grade 8 math, 19 in grade 4 reading, and 21 in grade 8 reading (table 1-2). According to NCES officials, 10 points on the NAEP scale is roughly equivalent to one grade level, so the 21-point spread in grade 8 reading represents a difference of more than two grades.

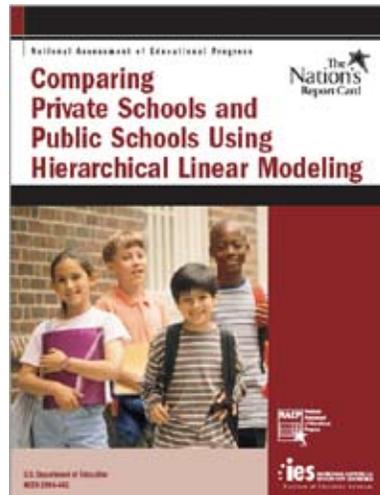
But in addition to reporting the average scores of the students who took the tests, the NCES report examined the differences in NAEP scores between public school students and private school students after attempting to take into account selected characteristics of schools and students, including gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch, participation in Title I, and other factors. The idea was to compare results for a filtered,

hypothetical set of students, rather than the actual students who attend the types of schools involved. But the filtering process was not without its flaws. For example, if a private school did not participate in the federal school lunch program or Title I (and many private schools, for a variety of reasons, do not), all the students in the school were deemed ineligible for either program, regardless of their actual eligibility.

The report cautioned that because of the heterogeneity of public schools and private schools, “an overall comparison of the two types of schools is of modest utility.” It also offered several other caveats, including an acknowledgement that the study may not have captured all the relevant variables that help account for student success, and another acknowledgement that because the data were obtained from an observational study rather than a randomized experiment, “the estimated effects should not be interpreted in terms of causal relationships.”

Harvard Study

Within weeks of the release of the NCES report, researchers from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government announced results of their own analysis of the same data, reaching significantly different conclusions. Whereas the NCES report found a rough parity in the performance of the filtered group of private school students and public school students, researchers



Congress Approves, President Signs, Career Ed Bill

Congress approved sweeping changes to the federal law governing career and technical education, reauthorizing what is known as the Perkins Act and extending it through 2012. President Bush signed the bill August 12.

The law includes a new provision that opens the door for the participation of private secondary school students in public school programs funded under the act.

“This legislation is a culmination of a bipartisan effort to increase academic rigor in our career and technical programs and to ensure students have the skills necessary to enter the workforce or to continue to an institution of higher learning,” said House Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Mike Castle (R-DE).

Echoing Castle’s praise for the bill, Chairman Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) said, “Career and technical education is fundamental to our efforts to improve academic achievement at all levels so our nation remains competitive in the face of a rapidly changing global economy. Each year, millions of students enrich their secondary and postsecondary educational opportunities through participation in career and technical education, and this legislation fulfills a commitment to improving the performance-levels of those students.”

Under the new Perkins program, school districts may, upon written request, use funds made available under the act to provide for “the meaningful participation” in career and technical education programs of private secondary school students who reside within the district. As a result of this provision, enterprising school districts could allow private school students to take part in courses that develop technical skills like computer repair, programming, or automobile maintenance. Creative partnerships could be formed between public and private schools to help meet the career education needs of all

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Paul E. Peterson and Elena Llaudet, using what their press release called a “preferred methodology,” identified a “consistent, statistically significant private school advantage.”

Contending that some measures of student background characteristics in the NCES study were flawed because they relied on participation in certain federal programs, the Harvard researchers used measures provided by the students themselves.

“When you use participation in federal programs as a measure of a student’s family background, you under-count the number of disadvantaged students in the private sector. Public schools are expected to participate in these

students in the district.

To help ensure that services proceed smoothly, the law calls for school district officials to consult, upon written request, “in a timely and meaningful manner” with private school officials regarding the participation of private secondary school students in programs funded by the act.

A carry-over provision from the previous Perkins Act broadens partnership possibilities even further by permitting school districts that use federal funds for “in-service and pre-service career and technical education professional development programs” for teachers, administrators, and other personnel to include, upon written request, the participation of comparable private school personnel in such programs.

Compared to the legislation that was ultimately enacted, the version of the Perkins reauthorization bill that the House approved last year was actually more specific in requiring school districts to serve private school students in an equitable manner. But public school groups as well as Senate Republicans and Democrats balked at the House provisions and insisted on language that permitted, rather than required, services to private school students. The Senate position prevailed in the conference committee on the bill.

The new program includes accountability provisions and measures success through assessments—components that were hailed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. “Congress deserves credit for making some needed reforms to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education program,” she said. “For the first time, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs will be held accountable for continuous improvement in performance, measured by the academic proficiency of CTE students. Success will be determined through valid and reliable tests, including No Child Left Behind assessments in reading, math, and science.”

programs, while private schools are not,” said Peterson, the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Government and director of Harvard’s Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG).

Still, the researchers warned against making too much of their findings. “The NAEP data collect information from students at only one point in time, so they are too fragile to be used for purposes of estimating the effects of public and private schools,” said Elena Llaudet, a research associate at PEPG. She went on to say, “Our results are not offered as conclusive evidence that private schools outperform public schools but as a demonstration of the dependence of the NCES results on a questionable methodology.”

IDEA Regulations Published

The U.S. Department of Education in August released the much-anticipated final regulations to implement the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* as amended in 2004 (IDEA 2004). The regulations were published in the *Federal Register* on August 14 and will take effect October 13.

“I am pleased that the final regulations were completed before the new school year begins,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. “This gives parents, teachers and administrators time to become familiar with the changes prior to the start of the instructional year.”

The regulations include provisions covering services for children placed by their parents in private schools—provisions that essentially mirror those in the statute. For example, the regulations, like the statute, require school districts to record and report to the state education agency the number of private school children evaluated, the number determined to be children with disabilities, and the number served under IDEA. The new rules also reflect the statute in requiring that a district focus its child-find and service efforts on private school children who *attend* school in a district, rather than private school children who *reside* in the district (the previous law’s standard).

The regulations also make clear that requirements relating to public school teachers do not apply to private school teachers. CAPE supported this provision when it was originally included in the draft regulations, arguing that private schools, which are directly accountable to parents, should be free to hire teachers who reflect the particular community’s standards of excellence and approach to pedagogy.

CAPE’s comparison of the principal private school provisions in the new and old regulations is available at capenet.org/new.html.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** The College Board last month announced SAT scores for the class of 2006, the first class to take the new writing section of the college entrance test. “The addition of writing has made the SAT a better measure of the skills students need to succeed in college and later in life,” said Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board.

Private school students significantly outscored public school students on the writing, verbal, and math sections of the test. The average SAT writing score for public school students was 492, compared to 528 for students in religious schools and 550 for those in independent schools. On the verbal section of the test, public school students had an average score of 500, religious school students 531, and independent school students 544. The math scores were 514 public, 529 religious, 573 independent. Private school students accounted for 17 percent of SAT test takers, although they only **make up** about 8.8 percent of the nation’s secondary school students.

The report on the SAT performance of 2006 college-bound seniors is available at www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2006/national-report.pdf.

★ With hurricane season in full swing, it’s a good time to ask, is my school prepared for an emergency? CAPE has compiled an online collection of resources to help school officials plan for a crisis,

whether a natural disaster, an act of terrorism, or a pandemic disease. The range of free and non-commercial resources includes those provided by government agencies—such as the U.S. Department of Education, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—as well as those provided by private organizations and associations. Topics cover general crisis planning as well as preparations for specific emergencies. The resource page is www.capenet.org/crisis.html.

★ During Children’s Health Month in October, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Children’s Health Protection and Environmental Education (OCHPEE) will host a series of webcasts on topics related to healthy school environments. The topics and schedule are as follows: Safe and Healthy School Environments, an Overview, October 5, from 2 to 3 pm EDT; Healthy High-Performance Schools, October 11, from 2 to 3 pm EDT; Chemical Management in Schools, October 19, from 2 to 3 pm EDT; Healthy Schools Environment Assessment Tool (Healthy SEAT), October 26, from 1:30 to 3 pm EDT. To learn more about the programs and how to sign up, visit: <http://yosemite.epa.gov/ochp/ochpweb.nsf/content/chm.htm>.

★ Many of the more than 1,000 Episcopal schools and early childhood programs across the country will take part in

the annual Episcopal Schools Celebration (ESC) during the first week in October. This year’s theme, *Varieties of Gifts but the Same Spirit*, also serves as the focus for the biennial conference of the National Association of Episcopal Schools, scheduled for November 16-18 in Hollywood, CA.

★ The Third Circuit Court of Appeals issued a **decision** in June affirming the right of a Catholic school to dismiss a teacher who took a public position “inimical to accepted Catholic doctrine.” A teacher of English and religion in 7th and 8th grade at Ursuline Academy of Wilmington, DE, signed her name to a pro-choice advertisement that ran in a local newspaper in connection with the anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade*. The school gave the teacher an opportunity to recant her support of the advertisement or to resign. When she refused either option, the school fired her. A federal district court and then the appeals court upheld the school’s decision.

“The Third Circuit reaffirmed what should have been obvious all along: Title VII was not designed to prevent a religious school from firing a teacher for publicly repudiating the school’s religious teaching,” remarked Anthony Picarello, president and general counsel of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which defended the school. “To rule otherwise would threaten fundamental religious freedom interests of the school guaranteed by the First Amendment.”