

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Public Bullish on Independent Schools

American adults know the traits of a quality education and believe independent schools are more likely than public schools to reflect those traits. That's the upshot of a recent national poll on the public's perceptions of independent schools.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) commissioned the survey in November 2006 and released the results in June 2007.

One phase of the survey asked adults over the age of 18 to rate 20 characteristics of educational quality on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important. Respondents were asked to consider traits such as the ability of schools to maintain discipline, keep class size small, teach val-

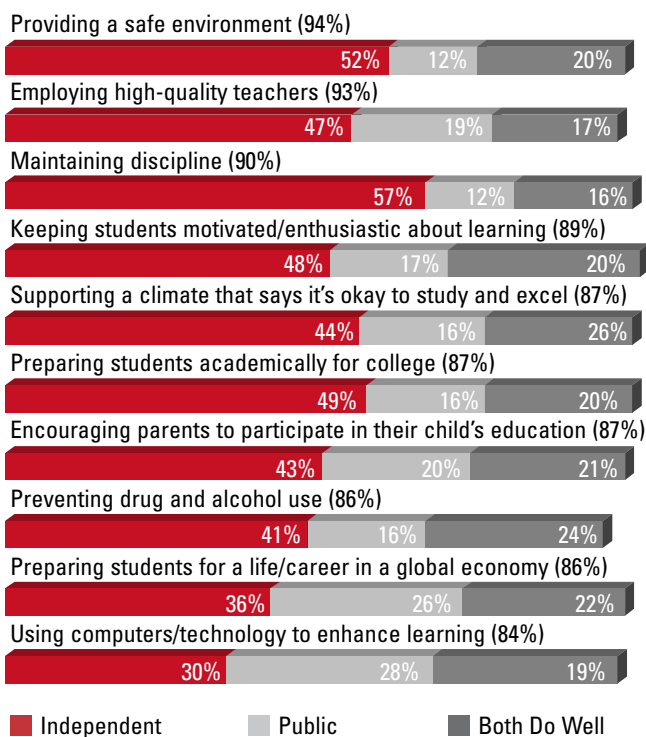
ues, and prepare students for college. It turns out that the quality ranked most important was the provision of a safe environment, with 94 percent of respondents rating the trait an 8, 9, or 10. Employing high quality teachers was a close second with 93 percent of respondents ranking it highly important. (The chart below lists the top-ten traits in order of importance to participants.)

Almost all the quality markers flagged in the survey are issues that parents routinely raise when evaluating schools. But one that stands out, and that might surprise administrators, is the interest in programs preparing students for a life and career in a global economy. The sentiment may reflect a growing public concern,

fueled by recent reports, that the nation's educational system is not up to speed in getting students and the country ready to compete globally.

As to which schools do a better job of realizing the qualities associated with educational excellence, more respondents believed independent schools surpassed public schools on all top-ten indicators. Fifty-two percent of adults thought independent schools were better than public schools when it comes to providing a safe environment, while only 12 percent of adults thought public schools were better in that regard. Another 20 percent of respondents thought both kinds of schools did equally well. (The chart shows responses for each of the other top-ten traits.)

### Top 10 Traits of Quality Schools and the types of schools likely to display them



Among 20 traits of schools, those listed here were ranked by respondents as the ten most important characteristics of a quality education. The numbers in parentheses are the percentages of respondents who rated the trait as 8, 9, or 10 in importance on a scale of 1 to 10. The numbers in the bars for "Independent" and "Public" are the percentages of respondents who said the particular type of school does a better job of realizing the trait. The numbers in the bar for "Both Do Well" are the percentages of respondents who saw both types of schools achieving the feature equally.

### Cost and Choice

The cost of independent schools is a barrier that prevents many parents from choosing them. Not surprisingly, the survey found that if cost and distance were neutralized, far more families would choose such schools than is currently the case. Related to cost and choice, the survey also found that respondents "value the ability to choose the best schools for their children," with roughly three-fifths supporting tax policies and vouchers to encourage choice.

### Poll's Purpose

According to NAIS, the survey, which was conducted by Shugoll Research, had three objectives: "assess attitudes toward quality education; assess awareness and perceptions of independent schools; and compare perceptions of independent schools to perceptions of public schools." School leaders who understand what the public expects from quality schools can learn to communicate how their schools match up with public expectations. The report's authors believe that the findings

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# CAPE

## 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  
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  
31 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
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**Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$25. ISSN 0271-1451**

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## Congress to Decide on Loan Forgiveness for Teachers

Congress is getting ready to reconcile the House and Senate versions of a college cost-reduction bill, and the outcome will carry important consequences for religious and independent schools.

At stake is whether college loan-forgiveness provisions apply to all educators or only to those in public schools. The House version of H.R. 2669 includes private school teachers in the benefit; the Senate version does not. Congress has a tradition of treating private school educators equitably in college loan-forgiveness programs, so the Senate version represents a serious and troubling departure from that tradition.

Both versions of the bill, called the *College Cost Reduction Act* in the House and the *Higher Education Access Act* in the Senate, include a program to allow persons employed in public service to have the balance of their college loans cancelled after 10 years of employment. In the House bill, education is considered a public service, along with work in government, emergency management, law enforcement, legal advocacy at a nonprofit organization, and certain other positions. The Senate bill includes a somewhat similar eligibility list, except that it limits positions to employment in publicly controlled institutions, such as public schools, public early childhood programs, public child care, and the like. Thus, with respect to preK-12 education, the two bills in effect take very different positions on whether the more than six million students in religious and independent schools are part of the public and whether their education is a public service.

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point to a “critical need to regularly and more consistently tell the independent school story.” They call for “re-energized efforts” to “define and describe” the value of independent schools and to explain how schools reflect the “10 characteristics considered most essential to a good education.”

Along those lines, the report offers several practical ways that leaders can communicate how their schools reflect the qualities that parents seek. As a general approach, the report recommends that school communities develop a communications plan that identifies key messages and audiences, describes the school’s contributions to the community, and reaches out

In a letter to lawmakers on the issue, CAPE noted that the equitable treatment of private school educators has been a hallmark of federal loan-forgiveness programs. The Perkins, Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL), and Direct Loan



cancellation programs “all include benefits for comparably situated private school educators in recognition of the public service they perform by helping to educate the public.” CAPE pointed out that the House bill, like the Perkins program, “defines public service in terms of the nature of the work, rather than the governance of the institution in which it takes place.”

The letter also noted that “teachers in private schools are likely to have a real need for loan forgiveness.” Their average base salaries are sub-

stantially less than those of teachers in public schools: \$31,700 vs. \$44,400, according to the latest figures (2003-04) from the National Center for Education Statistics. Further, “a loan forgiveness program for educators that applies only to service in public schools could seriously erode the ability of private schools to recruit teachers and administrators, which in turn could weaken the quality of education for students.”

### Conference Committee to Meet

A House/Senate conference committee is expected to meet soon after Labor Day to reconcile the two bills and present a compromise for both chambers to consider. A list of members of the committee, along with more information about the issue, is available on CAPE’s Web site at <http://www.capenet.org/new.html>.

to media contacts and policymakers. But the report also includes suggestions related specifically to each of the top-ten traits. For example, to respond to the public’s understandable desire for high-quality teachers, the report suggests that school leaders feature the accomplishments and awards of faculty members in print materials and during open-house events. “Showcase teachers’ educational backgrounds, which often correspond to the academic aspirations of students,” the report advises.

A summary of the survey’s findings is available on the NAIS Web site at <http://www.nais.org/files/PDFs/PublicOpinionPollSummary2006.pdf>.

## Faith-Based Programs Help Bridge Achievement Gap

Dr. Matthew Harris recalled the time he was “caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting,” an event that changed his life and ministry. In a moment of reflection after the event he wondered, “What goes on in the life of a kid that he wakes up one morning, gets dressed, loads a gun, and wants to kill somebody?”

In 1986, Harris and his wife, Mary, founded the Project Impact Center at the First Christian Church of Lynwood, CA, where he was pastor. Today, the faith-based organization, with locations in four states, works with other community support services to help young people in tough neighborhoods escape gangs, drugs, and violence. One of its programs is the provision of after-school tutoring through Supplemental Educational Services (SES), a federal program

within the *No Child Left Behind Act* to help students in poor-performing public schools.

Dr. Harris was one of about a dozen presenters during the *Compassion in Action Roundtable* at the White House August 21, sponsored by the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Titled “Real Choices for Educational Improvement: How Faith-Based and Community Organizations Help Bridge the Achievement Gap,” the program highlighted successful SES initiatives, school choice programs, and other educational innovations designed to help narrow the disparity in academic performance between minority and majority students.

“Faith-based and community organizations expand the available options for children, particularly low-income children, to receive the best possible education,” said Jay Hein, director of the White House office that sponsored the event. He described the roundtable event as highlighting “a variety of successful strategies being implemented by these groups to enhance student learning.”

Bishop William Lori, who heads the Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, CT, delivered the keynote address and explained how the Cathedral Cluster of inner-city schools is reversing a previous trend of declining enrollments and deteriorating buildings and is helping to revitalize Bridgeport. He reported that 100 percent of the June 2007 graduates of Kolbe Cathedral High School are headed for college.

Catholic schools in the diocese directly serve public school students through the SES program, which Lori said was valuable not only for

students and teachers, but also for parents. It “broadens their imagination about what might be possible for their kids.” The bishop added, “We are very satisfied with our SES experience.”

Two items prominent on Lori’s wish list for helping low-income students are a new federal tax incentive to encourage corporations to contribute to private school scholarship funds and an expansion into Bridgeport of the federal opportunity scholarship program that currently serves students in the District of Columbia.



Jay F. Hein, director, White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, addresses the August roundtable. (Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Education)

### Corporate Tax Credits

Seth Cohen, headmaster at Spruce Hill Christian School and Center City Academy (SHCS/CCA) in Philadelphia, explained how Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (EITC) is helping families

afford education in religious and independent schools. Businesses in the state can reduce their state tax bill by making contributions to scholarship funds that serve low-income students. Cohen talked about families who want a religious or independent school education for their children but have to weigh tuition costs against more pressing needs like food and shelter. He said SHCS/CCA admits students regardless of a family’s ability to afford full tuition. Almost 60 percent of students at the school receive financial aid, and the state’s corporate tax-credit program helps make that happen.

### School Choice

Another program highlighted during the roundtable was the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), which has grown from serving 341 students when it started in 1990 to more than 19,000 students today. Pastor Steven Robertson, executive director of Destiny High School, where voucher students account for a large share of enrollment, talked about the school’s programs to prepare students for college and careers. The school’s mission is to empower students “so they can achieve academic excellence and ultimately fulfill their life’s destiny.”

Destiny High School is but one of the many outreach programs of the Christian Faith Fellowship Church (CFFC) in Milwaukee, which also runs the Destiny Youth Plaza, a multi-purpose youth and family center, and the Darrell L. Hines College Preparatory Academy of Excellence, a charter school named after the church’s pastor.

## Federal Program Survey Released

Forty-three percent of the nation’s private schools had one or more students who received services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) during the 2004-05 school year, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Education. That makes IDEA the federal education program with the highest percentage of private school participation. Next in line is Innovative Programs (Title V-A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*) with a 20 percent school participation rate; Improving Teacher Quality (Title II-A), also 20 percent; Safe and Drug-Free Schools (Title IV-A) at 19 percent; Educational Technology (Title II-D) with 16 percent, and Title I, also 16 percent.

Titles II-D, IV-A, and V-A are the focus of the private school community’s “Keep 2-4-5 Alive” campaign to urge Congress to adequately fund those programs.

The report, based on a sampling survey of public school districts and private schools conducted during the 2005-06 school year, also showed that 44 percent of private schools and 80 percent of Catholic schools participated in one or more programs under ESEA.

Of the private schools that did not participate in any ESEA program, representatives of nearly 60 percent said they made a conscious decision not to do so, while representatives of 40 percent said they had no knowledge of the programs.

The latter finding raises questions about the effectiveness of the provisions in ESEA that require public school officials to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with private school officials about federal programs available to students and teachers. The private school community is working to beef up the consultation provisions in the upcoming reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which contains ESEA.

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## CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** At a time when tough courses in math and science are seen as an essential way to ensure the country's competitiveness in the global economy, private high school graduates continue to earn credits in advanced coursework in these subjects at levels higher than public school graduates.

A new report from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 51 percent of Catholic school graduates and 57 percent of other private school graduates completed precalculus or calculus courses in 2004, compared to 31 percent of public school graduates. In science, 52 percent of Catholic school graduates and 56 percent of other private school graduates took chemistry I and physics I plus at least one additional advanced course in science (chemistry II, physics II, or advanced biology), compared to 34 percent of public school graduates.

The report, *Advanced Mathematics and Science Coursetaking in the Spring High School Senior Classes of 1982, 1992, and 2004*, is available at <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007312>>.

★ CAPE continues to grow. Our two newest members are the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools (WELS).

According to the latest figures (2003-04) from the National Center for Education Statistics, the Wisconsin Synod sponsors 367 schools enrolling more than

32,000 students, and ACTS includes 237 schools serving more than 37,000 students.

The two new members of CAPE have distinctive missions. The WELS Commission on Parish Schools "exists to guide and assist WELS congregations in advancing the Gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools." Those schools "exist to educate children, strengthen families, and serve the church with the power of teaching that is deeply rooted in the Bible and fully expresses the love of Jesus."

ACTS seeks "to join with Christian teachers and schools to build Christian leaders for the 21st century who are empowered by the Holy Spirit." Its vision statement goes on to say, "We will seek and promote Christ-centered, Bible-based, Holy Spirit-directed solutions to the education challenges facing our world today." Its focus is on schools and teachers associated with the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions.

With the two additional members, the CAPE coalition now includes 18 national organizations and 31 state affiliates that together represent more than 80 percent of the nation's private school enrollment.

★ Efforts to reauthorize the *No Child Left Behind Act* went into high gear August 27 when Representative George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, and other high-ranking members of the committee

unveiled a bipartisan draft of language to reauthorize Title I. The draft is prelude to the introduction of the full NCLB bill sometime in September.

In recent months, CAPE and its member organizations have offered committee staff several suggestions on ways to improve services to private school students and teachers (see CAPE's issue paper at <<http://www.capenet.org/pubpol.html>>), and the proposed draft incorporates some of those suggestions. But the reauthorization process still has a long way to go, and the proposed language is likely to undergo several revisions before final passage. Stay tuned.

★ School choice initiatives in states have been growing by leaps and bounds in recent years. In fact, the surge in voucher and tax-credit programs makes it hard to keep up with what's been enacted where. But a brand new publication from the Office of Non-Public Education at the U.S. Department of Education now makes it easy to stay on top of developments.

*Education Options in the States* is a comprehensive online catalogue of choice programs across the country, providing a description of each state's program(s), the number of participants, amount of assistance, and links to more information, including authorizing statutes. Handy tables provide useful summaries of every school choice law enacted as of August 2007. Find it at <<http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/choice/educationoptions/>>.