

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Federal Reports Show Enrollment Shifts Within Private Education

The federal government last month released its latest official count of private school enrollment, confirming an overall decline in recent years along with some significant shifts in the share of students among types of private schools.

The data came in two reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), both drawing on the biennial Private School Universe Survey (PSS), a comprehensive tally of the number of private schools, students, and teachers.

As reported in *The Condition of Education 2011*, between 1999 and 2009 the count of preK-12 students attending private schools dropped nearly 9 percent from 6.0 million to 5.5 million, suggesting an average annual loss of less than 1 percent over the past ten years. Meanwhile, the percentage of all U.S. students enrolled in private schools moved from 11.4 percent in 1999 to 10.0 percent in 2009, with regional variations ranging from 14.0 percent in the Northeast to 8 percent in the West (see table).

Within the private school community, enrollment shifts in the past decade have transformed the landscape, with the share of students in Catholic schools declining while that of students in certain other private schools ascended. In 1999, 44.2

percent of private school students in grades preK-12 attended Catholic schools; 14.5 percent, Conservative Christian schools; 21.9 percent, other religious schools, and 19.3 percent attended schools not connected with a religion. But by 2009, those figures had changed, with 39.4 percent in Catholic schools, 13.4 percent in Conser-

vative Christian, 24.4 percent in other religious schools, and 22.8 percent in schools without a religious affiliation.

NCES reported that the majority of

private school students (53.5 percent) in 2009 were enrolled in elementary schools, while 14.3 percent were enrolled in secondary schools, and 32.2 percent in schools that provided programs spanning all grades. Nearly 4 percent of students attended Montessori schools, and 5.2 percent were in programs focusing on early childhood.

Private schools tend to be small. Almost half of their students were in schools with total enrollments under 300. As for location, 41 percent of private school students were in urban schools; 39 percent, suburban schools;

The Condition of Education 2011



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

12.9 percent, schools in a rural setting, and 7.1 percent attended schools located in towns.

In contrast to *The Condition of Education* (COE), which, as its

name suggests, provides data on a stack of education topics, a second report that NCES released last month has a more narrow focus. *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States* deals exclusively with private elementary and secondary education. While offering rich detail, the private school report limits its scope to grades

K-12, omitting the preK counts provided in COE.

According to the report, in the 2009-10 school year, 33,366 private elementary and secondary schools served 4,700,119 students in grades K-12, taught by 437,414 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers.

Private education in the United States is largely faith-based, with 80 percent of students attending 22,731 schools with a religious orientation. Religious schools employ 314,489 FTE teachers, 72 percent of all private school teachers.

The report's detail even extends to enrollment figures grade by grade. Of all the grades covered, kindergarten enrolled the most students (474,483), and 12th grade, the fewest (319,166).

Seventy percent of private schools had enrollments less than 150 students. Average enrollment was 141 students, with the mean for elementary schools at 106 and secondary schools at 283. It would seem that most private school students would find it hard to get lost in the crowd, the average pupil/teacher ratio being 10.7 to 1.

More boys are in private schools (51.4 percent) than girls. In addition, more boys attend single-gender schools than girls, all-boys schools accounting for 2.4 percent of private school students, and all-girls schools, 1.9 percent. The norm is coed schools, enrolling 95.7 percent of students.

Finally, private schools excel in getting students to successfully complete the program. Secondary schools report a graduation rate just over 98 percent.

Percentage of All PreK-12 Students Enrolled in Private Schools in 2009

Northeast	14 percent
Midwest	11 percent
South	9 percent
West	8 percent

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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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
33 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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Sooner State Turns to School Choice

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin signed the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Act May 16, making the Sooner State the eighth state to establish a tax credit scholarship program.

The Oklahoma program allows individuals and corporations to take a state tax credit, starting in the 2013 tax year, for 50 percent of a contribution to an eligible scholarship-granting organization, up to \$1,000 for single taxpayers, \$2,000 for married taxpayers filing joint returns, and \$100,000 for a business or corporation. Total credits among all taxpayers may not exceed \$3.5 million in any given year, with a \$1.75 million cap on corporate credits and another \$1.75 million cap on credits for individuals.

Scholarships under the program are worth up to \$5,000 (\$25,000 for special needs students) or 80 percent of the per-pupil expenditure in the school district where the student lives, whichever amount is greater. Funds may be used to cover tuition, fees, and transportation costs.

Student Eligibility

Students are eligible for scholarships if in the previous school year they attended, or resided in the attendance zone of, a public school identified by the state for school improvement, or if their annual family income does not exceed 300 percent of the amount to qualify for free or reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch Program. (For the 2011-12 school year, the 300 percent annual income threshold for a family of four is \$124,044.) Once a student has received a scholarship, she/he and any siblings in the same household remain eligible for the program until they graduate from high school. Further, students may use the funds at any participating school, with scholarships remaining portable throughout the school year.

School Eligibility

Participating private schools must be accredited by the state board of education or by an accrediting association approved by the board; must comply with all applicable health and safety codes; must not discriminate in admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability, and must ensure “academic accountability to parents and guardians of students through regular

progress reports.”

Additional requirements apply to scholarship-granting organizations, which must be nonprofit entities, must distribute at least 90 percent of their revenue in scholarships, and must ensure

that the portion of scholarships awarded to low-income students is at least equal to the portion of such students in the state.

Organizations may not limit scholarships to a single school or to certain types of schools.

Another Victory

“This legislation is another victory in a year of nationwide progress toward the goal of giving families access to effective educational options for their children,” said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the

Foundation for Educational Choice. “More parents now will have the power to choose the best education for their children. Most importantly, more children will have the chance to receive an education that prepares them for success in life.”

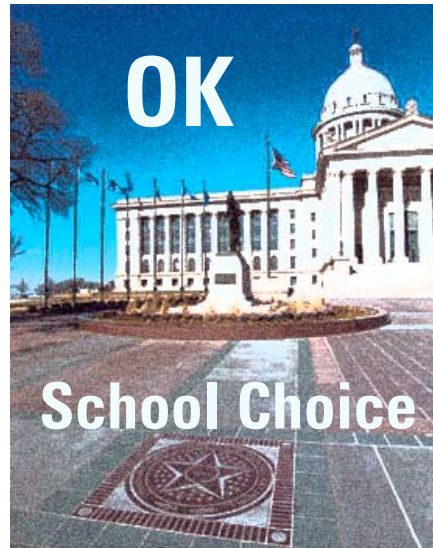
Enlow praised the bill’s sponsors, Sen. Dan Newberry (R-Sand Springs) and Rep. Lee Denney (R-Cushing), for their outstanding effort in helping to secure passage.

Newberry said the bill “is very important to Oklahoma kids and it gives underprivileged children opportunity to succeed and receive the education they deserve.” He said the measure would save tax dollars by cutting enrollment in public schools.

Rep. Denney said the bill “is about helping kids.” As quoted in the *Stillwater NewsPress*, she added: “This is designed to help parents of those kids who know their kids are in a failing situation and need a better opportunity. If this program saves one kid and gets them the education they need, then it has made a difference.”

Exciting Changes

Bill Price, chairman of the Oklahoma School Choice Coalition, called the program “another example of the exciting changes taking place in Oklahoma.” He continued, “It provides an incentive for Oklahomans to invest in the education of our state’s children. It empowers parents with the ability to choose the best education for their kids. It rewards schools and teachers. And it gives more children in our state access to effective educational options.”



Proposed ESEA Flexibility Raises Concerns

The U.S. House of Representatives made a significant move May 25 toward revamping the role of the federal government in education when its Committee on Education and the Workforce approved the first in a series of bills to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). The *Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act* (H.R. 1891) would eliminate more than 40 elementary and secondary education programs, including several, such as Even Start and Enhancing Education Through Technology, in which students in religious and independent schools participate.

“This is an important step toward streamlining and simplifying the federal footprint in education,” said Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN).

The bill is expected to pass the House, though its fate in the Senate is uncertain.

A second bill soon to be considered by the committee will provide states and school districts with greater flexibility in how they use federal education funds. In an op-ed piece in the *Indianapolis Star* May 10, Kline made the case for flexibility this way: “Too often, federal education dollars come bundled with myriad requirements, rules and restrictions that can tie the hands of educators and undermine schools’ ability to meet the unique needs of students. That’s why we are developing a proposal that will give states and local school districts the freedom to target taxpayer resources where they’re needed most. If a school determines greater resources are better spent on reading or new technologies, it should be free to adjust its budget to reflect the reality of its classrooms.”

Likely to be introduced sometime in June, the bill is said to provide school districts the authority to transfer funds within and among all ESEA programs in order to better meet student needs. For example, Title I funds, which are used to serve disadvantaged students, could be moved into Title II for teacher training, or vice versa, depending on how a district decides the money should best be used. According to one report, funds could even be transferred out of ESEA into programs funded by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) to improve services to students with special needs. The choice would be the district’s.

Concern has surfaced within the private school community that such flexibility could

jeopardize the equitable participation of students and teachers in religious and independent schools unless some safeguards are put in place. CAPE has advised House members that “an unrestricted grant of flexibility could jeopardize equitable services by allowing districts to use the funds as ever they wish.” Were districts to move funds from programs that require equitable services into programs that do not, the services



could be lost. To avoid this outcome, CAPE has proposed that the legislation include the requirement currently found in Title I and elsewhere that funds generated by the count of students in a district who attend religious and independent schools be used for the benefit of those students, regardless of how a state or district ultimately elects to “flex” its funds.

When Congress first enacted ESEA back in 1965, it determined that federal education aid should be directed in an equitable way toward helping all children in need, regardless of the type of school they attend. CAPE is merely looking to ensure that this long-standing principle prevails in any legislation that provides flexibility in spending.

There is reason for concern. When ESEA was reauthorized as the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001, equitable services for private school students and teachers began to break down. Under Title I, for example, funds set aside for Supplemental Educational Services, public school choice, and school improvement were reserved for public-school-only uses, even funds generated by the count of private school students. In Title II-A, flexible funds directed by districts away from professional development and toward class-size reduction or teacher recruitment/retention are not available for equitable services to private school teachers. The lesson is that flexibility has to be coupled with strong provisions relating to equitability.

If designed correctly, a program of flexibility could work for everyone. In addition to asking Congress to safeguard the fundamental principle of equitability, CAPE has also proposed that the new legislation provide school district officials and private school officials similar flexibility in applying funds generated by private school students to meet the needs of those students. Such flexibility would be consistent with the overall intent of the proposed legislation.

Choice Expands

Lawmakers in Florida and Georgia have recently approved legislation to expand existing school choice programs, continuing the streak of states electing to enhance educational opportunities for students.

Florida Governor Rick Scott is expected soon to sign HB 965 and HB 1329. The former amends the state’s corporate tax credit scholarship program by allowing corporations to take a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donations to a scholarship-granting organization up to 100 percent (rather than the current 75 percent) of their state income tax liability. Meanwhile, HB 1329 extends the state’s scholarship program for students with disabilities to any child who has a Section 504 accommodation plan longer than six months under the federal *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. The new law opens the program to an expanded pool of students, allowing their parents to place them in schools that best meet their needs.

In Georgia, Governor Nathan Deal signed HB 325 into law on May 12, which extends the state’s scholarship tax credit program to additional students, namely, those entering first grade. (The program is currently open to students who had attended public schools the previous year as well as any student entering pre-kindergarten or kindergarten.) The new law also clarifies that once a student is eligible for the program, he or she remains eligible until graduation, the age of 20, or enrollment in a public school.

Additional provisions include a requirement that the maximum scholarship amount awarded does not exceed the average state and local expenditures per student in Georgia’s public schools.

Betsy DeVos, chairman of the American Federation for Children, called the law “an important step in ensuring that Georgia families are getting the access to educational options they deserve.”

Return service requested

CAPE notes

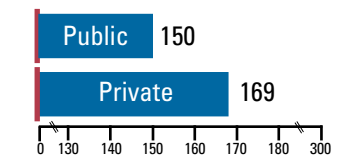
★ Results from the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics were released last month, showing how public and private school students in grades 4, 8, and 12 “responded to questions designed to measure the civics knowledge and skills that are critical to the responsibilities of citizenship in America’s constitutional democracy.”

Scores are reported on a 300-point scale for each grade. In grade 8, a scale score of 131 represents performance at the 25th percentile, while 155 represents the 50th percentile, and 175 the 75th percentile. The average eighth-grade scale score for public school students was 150, and the average for private school students was 169 (see graphic). For all students combined (public and private), the average was 151.

Results are also provided as the percentage of students at various levels of performance: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. In 2010, 20 percent of grade 8 students in public schools scored at or above the proficient level on the civics assessment, compared to 38 percent of students in private schools.

In a briefing to release the results, Jack Buckley, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which oversees the administration of NAEP, said that eighth-grade students who scored at or above the proficient level would be

2010 NAEP Civics, Grade 8
Average Scale Scores



likely to respond correctly to questions such as those asking them to: “identify an action the U.S. can do to influence other countries in a foreign policy issue; analyze the message in a political cartoon; and recognize a role performed by the Supreme Court.”

Buckley said students were tested on five areas of civic knowledge: “civic life, politics, and government; foundations of the American political system; the U.S. Constitution and the principles of American democracy; the United States and world affairs; and the roles of citizens in American Democracy.” The test also measured intellectual skills, including “identifying and describing; explaining and analyzing; and evaluating, taking, and defending a position.” Participatory skills and civic dispositions were also measured.

★ U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan last month announced the names of 141 high school seniors, including 41 from private schools, as the 2011 U.S. Presidential Scholars. According to a USDE press release, “The students have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership, citizenship, service, and contribution to school and community.” They will be honored at events in Washington, DC, in June.

“The U.S. Presidential Scholars exem-

plify what dedication to achievement and setting high standards can symbolize for all youth,” Duncan said. “The Department of Education congratulates these students on their artistic and academic accomplishments.”

★ *Read It LOUD!* is “an early literacy outreach campaign raising awareness about the profound positive impact that reading aloud has on children, their success in school and in life.” The project, cosponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, has as its mission: “To help close the literacy gap by motivating parents to read aloud to their children and...where needed...providing them the books and support to do so.” Part of the project includes getting parents, grandparents, and others to sign a promise to read aloud to children for at least 10 minutes a day. For more information and lots of resources, visit <www.readitloud.org>.

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