

EXPLORING TEXAS'S PRIVATE EDUCATION SECTOR

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OVERVIEW

Exploring Texas's Private Education Sector is the eighth entry in the *School Survey Series*.¹ This brief synthesizes information about Texas's accredited private schools from a survey conducted by EdChoice, in collaboration with the Texas Catholic Conference and the Texas Private Schools Association.

Educational choice has come to the forefront of Texas education policy conversations. For years, organizations have pushed for tax-credit scholarships, a type of school choice program that allows taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships.²

More recently, Gov. Greg Abbott suggested educational choice programs could help alleviate issues regarding the state's services for students with special needs.³ One type of program—education savings accounts (ESAs)—has served students with special needs in other states, providing students more flexibility than tax-credit scholarships and resulting in high parental satisfaction. ESAs allow parents to withdraw their children from public district or charter schools and receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses. Those funds may cover only educational expenses, such as private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, community college costs, and even other higher education expenses.

From April 7 to May 31, 2016, EdChoice administered a first-of-its-kind survey about these types of choice programs and more to Texas's private K–12 schools in collaboration with the Texas Catholic Conference and the Texas Private Schools

KEY FINDINGS

- Accredited private schools in Texas have at least 31,650 open seats with a projected estimate closer to 127,000 open seats for K–12 students
- 27 percent of schools are familiar with education savings accounts (ESAs)
 - 63 percent would or probably would participate in an ESA program open to all students
- 39 percent of schools are familiar with tax-credit scholarships
 - 73 percent would or probably would participate in a tax-credit scholarship program open to all students
- Schools are mostly concerned with regulations regarding paperwork and reporting, testing and accountability, setting of curriculum and instruction, and school admissions and enrollment guidelines
- 73 percent of private schools serve students with special needs
- 95 percent of private schools administer at least one nationally norm-referenced test

Association. This brief provides a descriptive analysis of the results of that survey.

See the Survey Project and Profile, Survey Methodology and Data Sources, data on Unaccredited Schools and the Texas Private School Survey Questionnaire at www.edchoice.org/TXSchoolSurvey.

Do Texas’s private schools have available seats for new students?

Of the schools taking part in the EdChoice survey, cautious estimates show the state’s accredited private schools have 29,485 open seats across K–12. Note that this is an estimate provided directly by the 333 private schools in this survey. The projected estimate for Texas’s total accredited private school sector is closer to 127,000 open seats for K–12 students.

T1 Known Open Seats in Respondent Private Schools (2015–16)

Private School Grade Level	Number of Open Seats
TOTAL	31,650
Prekindergarten	2,165
Kindergarten	2,040
Elementary School	11,221
Middle School	8,826
High School	6,708
Ungraded	690

number of respondent schools = 333; item response rate = 29%

Are schools familiar with the concept of education savings accounts (ESAs)?

Texas private schools were asked how familiar they are with the concept of ESAs for K–12 education. Slightly more than one out of four private schools (27%; 78 of 288 schools) indicated they were already familiar with

ESAs. Nearly two out of five Texas private schools (38%; 110 of 288 schools) said they were “not at all familiar” with ESAs, meaning they may not have heard of the concept prior to the survey provided directly by the 333 private schools in this survey. The projected estimate for Texas’s total accredited private school sector is closer to 127,000 open seats for K–12 students.

T2 Texas Private Schools’ Familiarity with Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	4%
Somewhat Familiar	23%
Not Too Familiar	35%
Not At All Familiar	38%

number of respondent schools = 288; item response rate = 25%

If enacted, would schools participate in an ESA program?

When provided with the previous ESA definition and asked if they would participate in an ESA program open to all students, nearly two out of three respondent private schools (63%; 182 of 288 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 25 percent of schools (71 of 288 schools) said “maybe.” In other words, they would consider participating. Twenty-three schools (8%) said they probably would not participate, and 12 schools (4%) said they would not participate.

Schools were asked if they would be interested in participating in an ESA program that would *serve only students with special needs*.⁴ More than one-third of the respondent private schools (36%; 105 of 288 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 32 percent of schools (91 of 288 schools) said “maybe.” In other words, they would consider participating. More than one out of five schools (22%; 63 of 288 schools) said they probably would not participate, and one out of 10 schools (10%; 29 of 288 schools) said they would not participate (see Table 3).

T3 Texas Private School Responses to Potential Education Savings Account (ESA) Program Participation

Response	Universal ESA	Special Needs ESA
Yes	38%	20%
Probably Yes	25%	17%
Maybe	25%	32%
Probably Not	8%	22%
No	4%	10%
Number of Respondents	288	288

item response rate = 25%

Are schools familiar with the concept of tax-credit scholarships?

Texas private schools were asked how familiar they are with tax-credit scholarships. Nearly two out of five of the private schools (39%; 113 of 289 schools) indicated they were already familiar with tax-credit scholarships. Nearly one-third of Texas private schools (32%; 93 of 289 schools) said they were “not at all familiar” with tax-credit scholarships, meaning they may not have heard of the concept prior to the survey.

T4 Texas Private Schools’ Familiarity with Tax-Credit Scholarships

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	7%
Somewhat Familiar	32%
Not Too Familiar	29%
Not At All Familiar	32%

number of respondent schools = 289; item response rate = 25%

If enacted, would schools participate in a tax-credit scholarship program?

When asked if they would participate in a tax-credit scholarship program open to all students, nearly three out of four respondent private schools (73%; 211 of

290 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 19 percent of schools (54 of 290 schools) said “maybe.” In other words, they would consider participating. Fourteen schools (5%) said they probably would not participate, and 11 schools (4%) said they would not participate.

Schools were asked if they would be interested in participating in a tax-credit scholarship program that would serve **only students with special needs**.⁵ More than one-third of the respondent private schools (35%; 100 of 285 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 33 percent of schools (94 of 285 schools) said “maybe.” In other words, they would consider participating. Slightly more than one out of five schools (21%; 61 of 285 schools) said they probably would not participate, and slightly more than one out of 10 schools (11%; 30 of 285 schools) said they would not participate.

Schools were asked if they would be interested in participating in a tax-credit scholarship program that would serve only **“students with financial and/or academic need.”** Nearly three-fourths of the respondent private schools (72%; 208 of 290 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 21 percent of schools (61 of 290 schools) said “maybe.” In other words, they would consider participating. Thirteen schools (4%) said they probably would not participate, and eight schools (3%) said would not participate.

T5 Texas Private School Responses to Potential Tax-Credit Scholarship (TCS) Program Participation

Response	Universal TCS	Special Needs TCS	Means-Tested TCS
Yes	42%	19%	41%
Probably Yes	31%	16%	31%
Maybe	19%	33%	21%
Probably Not	5%	21%	4%
No	4%	11%	3%
Number of Respondents	290	285	290

item response rates = 25%, 24%, and 25%, respectively

Which private school choice program rules and regulations would concern schools most?

More than three out of four schools (76%; 278 of 368 schools) that responded to the survey shared their concerns about potential rules and regulations from state government for at least one of the categories. On average, respondent schools were most concerned with rules pertaining to:

- paperwork and reporting,
- testing and accountability,
- setting of curriculum and instruction,
- setting of school admissions and enrollment guidelines, and
- accommodations for students with special needs.

Approximately three-fifths of the schools that responded to that question said they would have “very high” or “somewhat high” concerns with regulations concerning paperwork and reporting (61%), setting school admissions and enrollment guidelines (60%), testing and accountability (60%), and the setting of curriculum and instruction (59%).

T6 Texas Private Schools’ Average Concern Level for Specific Rules and Regulations (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)

Rule/Regulation	Average Concern Level
Paperwork and Reporting	3.8
Testing and Accountability	3.8
Curriculum and Instruction	3.7
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	3.7
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	3.6
Tuition and Fees	3.6
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	3.3
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	3.3
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	3.2
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	3.2
Building Safety and Security	3.0

number of respondent schools = 278; item response rate = 24%

T7 Number of Texas Private Schools with Somewhat High or Very High Concern for Specific Rules and Regulations

Rule/Regulation	Number of Private Schools
Paperwork and Reporting	169
Testing and Accountability	168
Curriculum and Instruction	168
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	165
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	146
Tuition and Fees	135
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	112
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	108
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	98
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	91
Building Safety and Security	85

number of respondent schools = 278; item response rate = 24%

Which geographic areas have the most open seats in Texas’s private schools?

Of the private schools that responded to the survey, Tarrant County had the most open K–12 private school seats during the 2015–16 school year. San Antonio had more open K–12 private school seats than any other city in the state.

- Arlington had nearly the same number of open seats San Antonio had. Houston and Midland had slightly more than nine-tenths (92% and 91%, respectively) the number of open seats San Antonio had (see Table 8).
- Harris County had a more than four-fifths (84%) the number of open seats Tarrant County had (see Table 9).

T8 Top 10 Texas Cities with the Largest Number of Open Seats in Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Private School Open Seats
San Antonio	2,769
Arlington	2,715
Houston	2,561
Midland	2,524
Dallas	1,385
Fort Worth	1,164
Brownsville	928
Corpus Christi	738
Austin	622
Waco	494

number of respondent schools = 333; item response rate = 29%

T10 Top Nine Texas Cities with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Private Schools
Houston	50
San Antonio	33
Dallas	23
Austin	19
Fort Worth	14
El Paso	10
Corpus Christi	8
Arlington	6
Midland	6

number of respondent schools = 368; item response rate = 32%

T9 Top 10 Texas Counties with the Largest Number of Open Seats in Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Private School Open Seats
Tarrant	4,637
Harris	3,910
Bexar	2,872
Midland	2,524
Dallas	2,053
Cameron	1,140
Denton	763
Nueces	738
Collin	628
Travis	586

number of respondent schools = 333; item response rate = 29%

T11 Top Nine Texas Counties with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Private Schools
Harris	70
Bexar	34
Dallas	31
Tarrant	27
Travis	16
Collin	10
El Paso	10
Nueces	9
Denton	7

number of respondent schools = 368; item response rate = 32%

Which geographic areas have the most respondent private schools?

Nearly one-third (29%) of the Texas private schools that responded to the EdChoice survey are situated in Houston, San Antonio, or Dallas (106 of 368 schools).

Nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of the state's respondent private schools are located in Harris County (70 of 368 schools).

What is the cost of combined tuition and fees among private schools?

Half of private schools for which combined tuition and fee data are available charge \$5,995 or less for elementary, \$6,500 or less for middle school grades, and \$8,800 or less for high school grades.

At all levels there are some especially expensive schools that create the gaps between “average” and “median” private school tuition and fee rates seen in the first accompanying table. The minimum combined tuition

and fees charged at any level is \$100 and the maximum combined tuition and fees charged at any level is \$495,500.

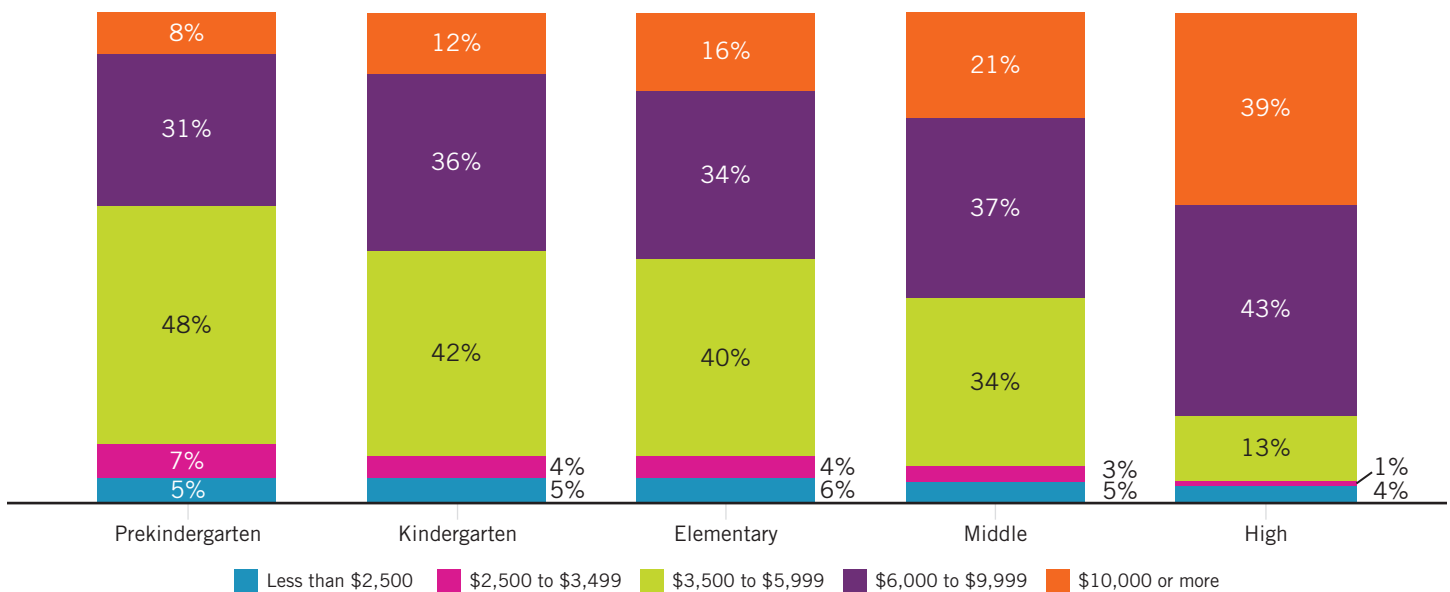
Approximately three-fifths of Texas private schools (61%) charge less than \$6,000 for prekindergarten, whereas closer to half charge the same range for kindergarten and elementary school grades (52% and 50%, respectively). More than two-fifths of Texas private schools (42%) charge the same range for middle school grades and nearly one-fifth of Texas private schools (18%) charge the same rate for high school grades.

T11 Combined Tuition and Fees Amounts for Texas Private Schools

Grade(s)	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
OVERALL	\$8,893	\$6,000	\$100	\$495,500
Prekindergarten	\$7,355	\$5,405	\$100	\$199,800
Kindergarten	\$7,127	\$5,850	\$100	\$122,000
Elementary School	\$8,728	\$5,995	\$100	\$465,500
Middle School	\$11,121	\$6,500	\$100	\$495,500
High School	\$11,604	\$8,800	\$500	\$81,000

number of respondent schools = 322; item response rate = 28%

F1 Texas Private School Tuition Ranges by Grade Level (2015–2016)



T12 Fee Amounts for Texas Private Schools

Grade(s)	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
TOTAL	\$967	\$524	\$25	\$45,000
Registration/Application	\$360	\$250	\$25	\$11,000
Textbooks	\$296	\$300	\$50	\$800
Technology	\$458	\$100	\$10	\$25,000
Transportation	\$523	\$150	\$5	\$3,000
Uniforms	\$662	\$150	\$15	\$20,000
Other	\$689	\$250	\$10	\$32,000

number of respondent schools = 292; item response rate = 25%

What do private schools charge in fees?

Half of schools for which fee data are available charge \$524 or less, and the Texas private schools for which fee data are available charge \$25 to \$45,000 in total fees. Those fees are in addition to the tuition that schools charge students. The fee category in which Texas schools charge the most, on average, is “Other,” which includes those for classroom supplies, athletics, field trips, after care, and general student activities.

What proportion of Texas private schools offers some form of financial assistance, and how much do they offer?

More than four-fifths of the state’s private schools for which tuition data are available (82%) provide some form of tuition assistance. Half of those schools

provide financial assistance to more than one-fifth of their students (22%), and half of those schools provide \$1,300 or more in financial assistance.

What proportion of Texas private schools educates students with special needs?

For the schools that responded to this question, an estimated one-fourth of students attending Texas private schools (24%) had special needs in 2015–16, on average (see Table 14).⁶ Comparatively, slightly less than one-tenth of Texas public school students (9%) had special needs in 2014–15.⁷

However, it is important to note that, in 13 of the respondent schools, students with special needs made up the entire student body, so the median proportion of students (11%) may be more important for comparisons. A median of that data point could not be found for Texas public schools.

T13 Tuition Assistance Provided by Texas Private Schools

	Average	Median
Percentage of Students Receiving Financial Assistance (Including Discounts)	32%	22%
Tuition Assistance Per Student	\$2,150	\$1,300

number of respondent schools = 265; item response rate = 23%

T14 Texas Private Schools' Percentage of Students with Special Needs

Student Profile	Average Percent of Private School's Students	Median Percent of Private School's Students
504 Plan	9%	5%
Autism	6%	2%
Developmental Delay	7%	2%
Specific Learning Disability	11%	5%
Speech or Language Impairment	5%	2%
Other Special Need(s)	6%	3%

number of respondent schools = 196; item response rate = 17%

What proportion of the state's private schools enrolls students with special needs?

Of those schools that responded to the question, nearly three-fourths (73%; 208 of 284 schools) enrolled at least one student with special needs in 2015–16.

T15 Texas Private Schools Enrolling Students with Special Needs

Enrolled Student(s) with Special Needs	Number of Private Schools	Percent of State's Private Schools
Yes	208	73%
No	76	27%

number of respondent schools = 284; item response rate = 24%

Do respondent schools test their students annually?

More than nine out of 10 Texas private schools (95%) require their students to take a nationally norm-referenced test to measure student academic performance. Of those schools, more than three-fifths (63%; 171 of 272 schools) reported they administered the Iowa Assessments. In addition to the tests listed in the accompanying table, there were 18 other nationally norm-referenced tests administered by accredited Texas private schools in 2015–16.

T16 Top 10 Tests Administered in Texas Private Schools

Tests Administered	Number of Testing Schools	Percentage of State's Private Schools
TOTAL	272	95%
Iowa Assessments	171	60%
Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)	34	12%
TerraNova	27	9%
PSAT	26	9%
Stanford 10	21	7%
ERB	20	7%
SAT	13	5%
ACT Aspire	12	4%
ACT	11	4%
State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)	10	3%

number of respondent schools = 196; item response rate = 17%

NOTES

Education Survey Directory Data,” 2014–15 v.1a, retrieved December 19, 2016 from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>.

¹Although all of the previous surveys in the School Survey Series were administered under the banner of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, the organization changed its name on July 29, 2016 to EdChoice.

²Brooke D. Terry, Paige Perez, and Brittany Wagner (2010), *Helping Parents Pay for Education: Examining Education Tax Credits and Deductions*, Policy Perspective (Austin: Texas Public Policy Foundation), retrieved from <http://www.texaspolicy.com/library/doclib/2010-04-PP10-EdTaxCredits-bt-pp.pdf>.

³Brian M. Rosenthal and Mike Ward (2016, December 15), “Abbott Floats School Choice as Solution to Special Ed Frustration,” *Houston Chronicle*, retrieved from <http://www.chron.com/news/politics/texas/article/Abbott-floats-school-choice-as-solution-to-10794219.php>.

⁴Students within this population may have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 plan, and/or: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or other health impairments.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Students with special needs were defined on this survey question as those having autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or other health impairments.

⁷US Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey Special ED Data,” 2014-15 v.1a, “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Membership Data,” 2014–15 v.1a, and “State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EdChoice Director of State Research and Policy Analysis Drew Catt conducts analyses on private educational choice programs, conducts surveys of private school leaders and supports quality control as EdChoice's research and data verifier.

Prior to joining EdChoice—formerly the Friedman Foundation—in May 2013, Drew served as the program associate for The Clowes Fund, a private family foundation located in Indianapolis that awards grants to nonprofits in Seattle, Greater Indianapolis and Northern New England.

Drew graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in Human and Organizational Development, specializing in Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness. While at Vanderbilt, Drew served as research assistant for North Star Destination Strategies, a community branding organization. During that time, Drew also researched the effects of homeschooling on socialization.

Drew received his Master of Public Affairs in Nonprofit Management at Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs in Indianapolis. He also received his Master of Arts in Philanthropic Studies through the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. While in graduate school, Drew's research focused on teacher performance incentives and cross-sector collaboration. Drew recently received a Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science (GIS) from IUPUI.

Drew is a native of central Indiana and currently resides in downtown Indianapolis with his wife Elizabeth.

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COMMITMENT TO METHODS & TRANSPARENCY

EdChoice is committed to research that adheres to high scientific standards, and matters of methodology and transparency are taken seriously at all levels of our organization. We are dedicated to providing high-quality information in a transparent and efficient manner.

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) welcomed EdChoice to its AAPOR Transparency Initiative (TI) in September of 2015. The TI is designed to acknowledge those organizations that pledge to practice transparency in their reporting of survey-based research findings and abide by AAPOR's disclosure standards as stated in the Code of Professional Ethics and Practices.

For more information please visit edchoice.org/AAPORTI.

