

EXPLORING SOUTH CAROLINA'S PRIVATE EDUCATION SECTOR

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OVERVIEW

Exploring South Carolina's Private Education Sector is the ninth entry in the *School Survey Series*.¹ This brief synthesizes information about South Carolina's private schools from a survey conducted by EdChoice.

Though the Palmetto State currently has two school choice programs—a tax-credit scholarship and an individual tax credit—further analysis or expansions of these programs may depend on the private school sector's ability to service such an expansion.² These survey data, which include South Carolina private schools' open seats, tuition and fees, regulatory concerns, and interest in school choice programs, paint a clearer picture of the state's private school landscape.

Recently, the South Carolina general assembly has considered expanding its educational choice options via a proposed education savings account (ESA) program, which, if enacted, could be used by children with special needs, low-income students, children of active-duty military members, and students in or adopted from foster care. Traditionally, 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 September 20 to December 19, 2017, EdChoice administered a first-of-its-kind survey about these types of choice programs and more to South Carolina's private K–12 schools. This brief provides a descriptive analysis of the results of that survey.

KEY FINDINGS

- Private schools in South Carolina have at least 7,730 open seats with a projected estimate closer to 20,000 open seats for K–12 students
- Half of the state's private schools are already familiar with education savings accounts (ESAs)
 - 64 percent would or probably would participate in a general ESA program
 - 58 percent would or probably would participate in the proposed Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Account program
- More than two-thirds of private schools are familiar with tax-credit scholarships
 - 30 percent of schools that are not currently participating in the state's tax-credit scholarship program would consider participating
- Private schools' biggest regulatory concerns are regarding curriculum and instruction, admission and enrollment, teacher certification and licensure, and paperwork and reporting
- 79 percent of private schools serve students with special needs
- 57 percent of private schools provide some form of financial assistance to students

See the Survey Project and Profile, Survey Methodology and Data Sources, and the South Carolina Private School Survey Questionnaire at www.edchoice.org/SCSchoolSurvey.

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

Of the schools taking part in the EdChoice survey, cautious estimates show the state’s private schools have at least 7,734 open seats across grades K–12. Note that this is an estimate provided directly by the 105 private schools in this survey that responded to enrollment questions. The projected estimate for South Carolina’s total private school sector is closer to 20,000 open seats for K–12 students.

T1 Open Seats in Respondent South Carolina Private Schools (2017–18)

Private School Grade Level	Number of Open Seats
TOTAL	7,734
Prekindergarten	317
Kindergarten	419
Elementary School	1,759
Middle School	1,075
High School	1,287
Ungraded	85

number of respondent schools = 105; item response rate = 30%
Note: Subtotals do not add up to the total because open seats in respondent Catholic schools were not disaggregated by grade level.

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

We asked South Carolina private schools how familiar they were with the concept of ESAs for K–12 education. Half of the private schools (50%; 51 of 103 schools)

indicated they were already familiar with ESAs. More than one-third of South Carolina private schools (35%; 36 of 103 schools) said they were “not at all familiar” with ESAs, meaning they may not have heard of such programs prior to taking the survey.

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

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	35%
Somewhat Familiar	15%
Not Too Familiar	16%
Not At All Familiar	35%

number of respondent schools = 103; item response rate = 29%

If enacted, would schools participate in an ESA program?

When provided with the aforementioned general ESA definition and asked if they would participate in an ESA program open to public school students, nearly two out of three respondent private schools (64%; 66 of 103 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 23 percent of schools (24 of 103 schools) said “maybe.” Eight schools (8%) said they probably would not participate, and five schools (5%) said they would not participate.

Interest in ESA participation was high in general, but we also asked South Carolina schools about their interest in participating in a proposed ESA program in the state. Senate Bill 622 and House Bill 4308 are ESA bills carried over from the 2017 legislative session to the 2018 South Carolina General Assembly. Those bills, if enacted, would create the Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Account program, an ESA which would be available for certain students with special needs, students who qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch, students who are in or have been adopted from foster care, and children of active-duty military members and those killed in the line of duty.³ Sixty schools (58%) said they would or probably would participate in the proposed Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Account program. Twenty-nine schools (28%) said they would “maybe” participate, and 14 schools (14%) said they would not or probably would not participate.

T3 Would Private Schools Participate in an Education Savings Account (ESA) Program?

Response	General ESA	Equal Opportunity ESA
Yes	43%	43%
Probably Yes	21%	16%
Maybe	23%	28%
Probably Not	8%	9%
No	5%	5%
Number of Respondents	103	103

item response rate = 29%

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

We asked South Carolina private schools how familiar they are with tax-credit scholarships, of which one for students with special needs already exists in the state.⁴ More than two-thirds of the private schools (68%; 70 of 103 schools) indicated they were already “very” or “somewhat” familiar with tax-credit scholarships. About one in seven South Carolina private schools (15%; 15 of 103 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 South Carolina Private Schools' Familiarity with Tax-Credit Scholarships

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	51%
Somewhat Familiar	17%
Not Too Familiar	17%
Not At All Familiar	15%

number of respondent schools = 103; item response rate = 29%

Do schools participate in South Carolina’s tax-credit scholarship program? If not, would they?

When asked if they currently enroll students participating in South Carolina’s Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children tax-credit scholarship program, more than six out of 10 (62%; 62 of 100 schools) said they participate in the program. A third of the private schools surveyed (34%; 34 of 100 schools) do not currently enroll students participating in the program, while four of the schools (4%) were unsure whether or not they currently enrolled tax-credit scholarship students.

T5 Private Schools Participating in South Carolina's Tax-Credit Scholarship (TCS) Program

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Yes	62%
No	34%
Don't Know/Not Sure	4%

number of respondent schools = 100; item response rate = 28%

Sixty-one schools responded with the number of tax-credit scholarship students they enroll. Respondent private schools have enrolled a total of 823 tax-credit scholarship students for the 2017–18 school year, with an average tax-credit scholarship enrollment of 13 students per school. Based on most recent data, respondent schools that enroll tax-credit scholarship students represent 55 percent of the tax-credit scholarship-participating school population and enroll 42 percent of the state’s tax-credit scholarship student population.⁵

We then asked schools that were unsure or do not currently enroll tax-credit scholarship students whether they would be interested in participating in the existing tax-credit scholarship program for students with special needs. Half of the schools (51%; 19 of 37 responding schools) said they would or probably would participate. Ten schools (27%) said “maybe,” while eight schools (22%) said they would not or probably would not participate. In 2016–17, 112 schools participated in the program, per the most recent data available.⁶

T6 Would Private Schools Participate in South Carolina’s Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Program?

Response	Percent of Private Schools
Yes	30%
Probably Yes	22%
Maybe	27%
Probably Not	14%
No	8%

number of respondent schools = 37; item response rate = 10%

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

More than four out of five schools (83%; 96 of 115 schools) that responded to the survey shared their concerns about potential rules and regulations from state government for at least one of the categories listed. On average, respondent schools were most concerned with rules pertaining to:

- curriculum and instruction,
- school admissions and enrollment guidelines,
- tuition and fees,
- paperwork and reporting, and
- teacher/staff certification and licensure.

More than two-thirds of the schools that responded to this question said they would have “very high” or “somewhat high” concerns with regulations regarding curriculum and instruction (74%; 71 of 96 schools), setting school admissions and enrollment guidelines (72%; 69 of 96 schools), and teacher/staff certification and licensure (68%; 65 of 96 schools). Just one-fifth of schools (20%; 19 of 96 schools) expressed “very high” or “somewhat high” concerns about regulations concerning building safety and security.

T7 South Carolina Private Schools’ Average Concern Level for Specific Rules and Regulations (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)

Rule/Regulation	Average Concern Level
Curriculum and Instruction	4.3
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	4.3
Tuition and Fees	4.1
Paperwork and Reporting	3.7
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	3.7
Testing and Accountability	3.6
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	3.5
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	3.3
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	3.1
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	3.1
Building Safety and Security	2.9

number of respondent schools = 96; item response rate = 27%

T8 Number of South Carolina Private Schools with Somewhat High or Very High Concern for Specific Rules and Regulations

Rule/Regulation	Number of Private Schools
Curriculum and Instruction	71
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	69
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	65
Paperwork and Reporting	61
Testing and Accountability	59
Tuition and Fees	58
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	52
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	26
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	25
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	23
Building Safety and Security	19

number of respondent schools = 96; item response rate = 27%

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

Of the private schools that responded to the survey, Greenville County had the most open K–12 private school seats during the 2017–18 school year. The county seat, the city of Greenville, also had more open K–12 private school seats than any other city in the state, based on respondents. In addition:

- Four of the top 10 cities with the largest number of open private school seats were located in South Carolina’s Lowcountry region, including North Charleston (630 open seats), Charleston (408 open seats), Ridgeland (370 open seats), and Mount Pleasant (224 open seats), and
- Charleston County had 71 percent as many open seats as Greenville County.

T9 Top 10 South Carolina Cities with the Largest Number of Open K–12 Seats in Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Open K–12 Seats
Greenville	851
Columbia	675
North Charleston	630
Sumter	433
Charleston	408
Ridgeland	370
Myrtle Beach	321
Cheraw	245
Simpsonville	244
Mount Pleasant	224

number of respondent schools = 105; item response rate = 30%

T10 Top 10 South Carolina Counties with the Largest Number of Open Seats in Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Open Seats
Greenville	1,286
Charleston	914
Richland	711
Horry	500
Sumter	433
Jasper	370
York	368
Chesterfield	352
Dorchester	352
Aiken	271

number of respondent schools = 105; item response rate = 30%

Which geographic areas have the most respondent private schools?

Nearly one-fifth (19%) of the South Carolina private schools that responded to the EdChoice survey are situated in the state’s two largest cities, Charleston and Columbia.⁷ Charleston-area cities accounted for three of the nine top spots among respondent school cities.⁸

About one in seven of the state’s respondent private schools are located in Greenville County (14%; 16 of 115 schools).

T11 Top Nine South Carolina Cities with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Private Schools
Columbia	12
Greenville	10
Charleston	8
Sumter	6
Myrtle Beach	5
North Charleston	5
Aiken	4
Florence	4
Summerville	4

number of respondent schools = 115; item response rate = 32%

T12 Top 11 South Carolina Counties with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Private Schools
Greenville	16
Charleston	14
Richland	13
Horry	8
Aiken	6
Beaufort	6
Sumter	6
Berkeley	5
Chesterfield	4
Florence	4
York	4

number of respondent schools = 115; item response rate = 32%

The minimum combined tuition and fees charged at any level is \$90 and the maximum combined tuition and fees charged at any level is \$28,005. Focusing on the median amounts may offer a more representative picture of South Carolina private schools while minimizing outlier effects.

Three-fourths of South Carolina private schools (75%) charge less than \$6,000 for prekindergarten, more than those that charge the same range for kindergarten and elementary school grades (73% and 67%, respectively). About three-fifths of South Carolina private schools (59%) charge the same range for middle school grades and a higher proportion of South Carolina private schools (64%) charge the same rate for high school grades.

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 \$5,275 or less for elementary school grades, \$5,412 or less for middle school grades, and \$5,425 or less for high school grades.

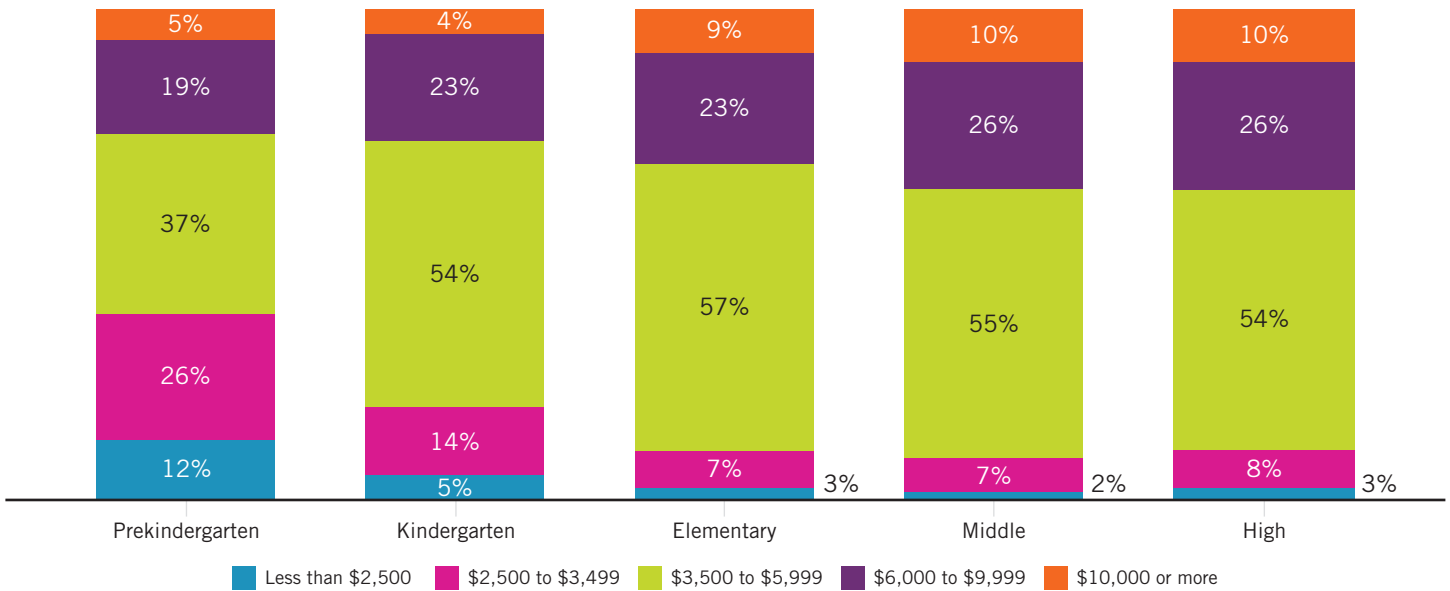
At all levels there are some especially expensive schools that create substantial gaps between “average” and “median” private school tuition and fee rates.

T13 Combined Tuition and Fees Amounts for South Carolina Private Schools (2017–18)

Grade(s)	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
OVERALL	\$6,071	\$5,210	\$90	\$28,005
Prekindergarten	\$5,001	\$4,001	\$100	\$28,005
Kindergarten	\$5,448	\$4,950	\$90	\$19,950
Elementary School	\$6,140	\$5,275	\$90	\$19,950
Middle School	\$6,361	\$5,412	\$2,000	\$23,200
High School	\$6,343	\$5,425	\$2,000	\$23,400

number of respondent schools = 102; item response rate = 29%

F1 South Carolina Private Schools' Combined Tuition and Fees Ranges by Grade Level



number of respondent schools = 102; item response rate = 29%

What do private schools charge in fees?

Half of schools for which we collected fee data charge \$400 or less, and the South Carolina private schools for which fee data are available charge a range of \$50 to \$1,600 in total fees. Those fees are in addition to the tuition that schools charge students. The fee category for which South Carolina schools charge the most, on average, is for textbooks. Fees related to technology were, on average, the least-expensive fee category of South Carolina private schools.

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

More than half of the state's private schools for which tuition data are available (57%; 58 of 102 schools) provide some form of tuition assistance. Half of those schools provide financial assistance to more than one-fifth of their students (23%), and half of those schools provide \$1,000 or more in financial assistance per student.

T14 Fee Amounts for South Carolina Private Schools

Grade(s)	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
TOTAL	\$433	\$400	\$50	\$1,600
Registration/Application	\$195	\$150	\$8	\$800
Textbooks	\$257	\$250	\$75	\$657
Technology	\$68	\$50	\$20	\$300
Transportation	\$75	\$75	\$25	\$125
Uniforms	\$127	\$140	\$15	\$200
Other	\$232	\$133	\$30	\$1,000

number of respondent schools = 65; item response rate = 18%

T15 Tuition Assistance Provided by South Carolina Private Schools

	Average	Median
Percentage of Students Who Receive Financial Assistance (Including Discounts)	23%	10%
Tuition Assistance Per Student	\$2,060	\$1,000

number of respondent schools = 58; item response rate = 16%

What proportion of South Carolina private schools' students have special needs?

For the schools that responded to this question, estimates show, on average, one out of seven students who attended South Carolina private schools (14%) had special needs in 2017–18.⁹ This is slightly higher than the proportion of South Carolina's public school students (12% in 2015–16).¹⁰

However, it is important to note that in three of the respondent schools students with special needs made up the entire student body, so the median proportion of students (10%) may be more useful for comparisons. A median of that data point could not be found for South Carolina public school students.

T16 South Carolina Private Schools' Percentage of Students with Special Needs

Student Profile	Average Percent of Private Schools' Students	Median Percent of Private Schools' Students
With Special Needs	14%	10%
Without Special Needs	86%	90%

number of respondent schools = 77; item response rate = 22%

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

Of those schools that responded to the question, nearly eight out of 10 (79%; 78 of 99 schools) enrolled at least one student with special needs in 2017–18.

T17 South Carolina Private Schools Enrolling Students with Special Needs

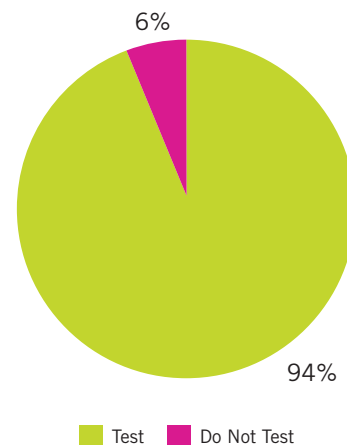
Student Profile	Number of Private Schools	Percent of State's Private Schools
Yes	78	79%
No	21	21%

number of respondent schools = 99; item response rate = 28%

Do South Carolina private schools test their students annually?

More than nine out of 10 South Carolina private schools (94%) require their students to take a nationally norm-referenced test to measure student academic performance. Of those schools, more than two-fifths (41%; 38 of 93 schools) reported they administered the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).

F2 South Carolina Private Schools Administering Nationally Norm-Referenced Test(s)

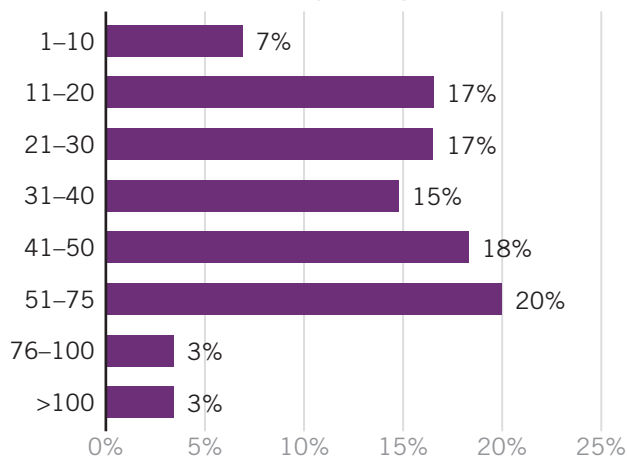


number of respondent schools = 99; item response rate = 28%

How many years have South Carolina private schools been operating?

Based on survey responses, South Carolina private schools have been operating for an average of 40 years (started 1978 or after), with a median operating length of 38 years (started 1980 or after). The newest school has been operating for one year, while the oldest school has been open and operating for 150 years, according to survey responses.

F3 Number of Years South Carolina Private Schools Have Been Operating



number of respondent schools = 115; item response rate = 32%

NOTES

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

²EdChoice (2018), *The ABCs of School Choice: The Comprehensive Guide to Every Private School Choice Program in America, 2018 Edition*, p. 121 and p. 143, retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ABCs-of-School-Choice-2018-Edition-1.pdf>

³Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Account Act, S. 622, 122nd Session of the South Carolina General Assembly, 2017–18, accessed February 13, 2018, retrieved from http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess122_2017-2018/bills/622.htm; Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Account Act, H. 4308, 122nd Session of the South Carolina General Assembly, 2017–18, accessed February 13, 2018, retrieved from http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess122_2017-2018/bills/4308.htm

⁴EdChoice (2018), *The ABCs of School Choice: The Comprehensive Guide to Every Private School Choice Program in America, 2018 Edition*, p. 121, retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ABCs-of-School-Choice-2018-Edition-1.pdf>

⁵Authors' calculations; Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷U.S. Census Bureau Population Division (2017), Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016 (South Carolina) [data set], accessed February 15, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/demo/popest/total-cities-and-towns.html>

⁸Charleston, North Charleston, and Summerville are all located in the Charleston-North Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area.

⁹Students with special needs were defined on the survey 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.

¹⁰U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey Special ED Data", 2015-16 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Directory Data", 2014-15 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Membership Data", 2015-16 v.1a, accessed February 13, 2018 via ELSI tableGenerator, <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>

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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.

