

Findings from  
the  
**condition**  
of **education**  
2002

# Private Schools



## A Brief Portrait

 **NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS**

U.S. Department of Education ■ Office of Educational Research and Improvement ■ NCES 2002-013

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August 2002

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**Suggested Citation:**

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait*, NCES 2002-013, by Martha Naomi Alt and Katharin Peter. Washington, DC: 2002.

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## Preface

*The Condition of Education* summarizes important developments and trends in education using the latest available data. The report, which is required by law, is an indicator report intended for a general audience of readers who are interested in education. The indicators represent a consensus of professional judgment on the most significant national measures of the condition and progress of education for which accurate data are available. The 2002 print edition includes 44 indicators in six main areas: (1) enrollment trends and student characteristics at all levels of the education system from early childhood education to graduate and first-professional programs; (2) student achievement and the longer-term, enduring effects of education; (3) student effort and rates of progress through the educational system among different population groups; (4) the contexts of elementary and secondary education in terms of courses taken, teacher characteristics, and other factors; (5) the contexts of postsecondary education; and (6) societal support for learning, parental and community support for learning, and public and private financial support of education at all levels.

The 2002 edition also includes a special analysis that examines private schools, how they differ by type (Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian), and how they differ from public schools. To make the special analysis available to audiences interested in elements of diversity among private schools, the special analysis is reprinted here as a separate volume.

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# Private Schools: A Brief Portrait

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## Introduction

Private schools are owned and governed by entities that are independent of any government—typically, religious bodies or independent boards of trustees. Private schools also receive funding primarily from nonpublic sources: tuition payments and often other private sources, such as foundations, religious bodies, alumni, or other private donors. In contrast, state and local education agencies (districts) and publicly elected or appointed school boards govern public schools. At some schools, parent/teacher organizations or similar groups also play a role. Public schools receive nearly all their funding from local, state, and federal governments, supplemented occasionally by grants/donations from corporations and foundations, and parent- or student-initiated fundraising activities.

Choice is another defining characteristic of private schools: families choose private education, and private schools may choose which students to accept. In contrast, public school districts generally assign students to particular schools, and those schools usually accept all students assigned. However, public school systems are expanding school choice options through magnet and charter schools, open enrollment, and similar offerings, and, in a few instances, through publicly funded vouchers. Families with sufficient financial resources have always been able to choose a public school by choosing where to live, but school choice options are also increasingly available for others. Thus, public school districts are sometimes selective about who attends specific schools, and families may have some choice within the public

sector as well. The proportion of public school children attending a chosen school (rather than the school assigned by residence location) has increased in recent years (*indicator 29*, U.S. Department of Education 2002). In 1999, for example, 16 percent of public school students in grades 1–12 attended a school the family had chosen, up from 12 percent in 1993.

Nonpublic governance and enrollment choice are features that all private schools share, but there is wide variation within the private sector on many measures. This analysis highlights some elements of diversity among private schools (detailing some differences among three broad groups of private schools: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian) and notes several aspects that differ between the public and private sectors overall. More detail about the types and affiliations of private schools and their staffs, as well as additional comparisons between the public and private sectors, can be found in Broughman and Colaciello (2001); Baker, Han, and Keil (1996); Henke et al. (1996, 1997); McLaughlin (1997); and in a forthcoming NCES report on private schools.

Although this analysis compares *averages* for the private and public sectors (and for three private school types), no inferences can be drawn from these data about causality. Any number of variables distinct from school sector and type may contribute to inputs and outcomes. For example, student characteristics such as socioeconomic status (SES), prior achievement and support for learning at home, and motivation level may influence student outcomes, independent of the sector of school attended. Characteristics of schools such as enrollment size, community type, and student body composition may also affect outcomes, regardless of school sector. Further research may attempt to identify which variables contribute to certain outcomes—for example, a study may compare achievement of private and public school students while controlling for characteristics like SES—but that is beyond the scope of this brief analysis.

The data presented are from the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999–2000), the National Assessment of Educational Progress High School Transcript Study of 1998 (NAEP:1998), the NAEP:2000 student achievement tests, and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, “Fourth Follow-up” (NELS:1988/2000). Further information on these surveys can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/>.

## Schools and Students

In 1999–2000, approximately 27,000 private schools, with 404,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers, enrolled 5.3 million students (table 1). These schools accounted for 24 percent of all schools in the United States, 10 percent of all students, and 12 percent of all FTE teachers.<sup>1</sup> Private schools have maintained their share of total school enrollments throughout recent decades at roughly 10–11 percent, with growth rates parallel to those of public schools (U.S. Department of Education 2001b). Schools that had some of grades 1–12, or equivalent ungraded classes, are included in the SASS:1999–2000 data and discussion that follow; these schools may or may not also offer kindergarten or preschool grades. Analysis of public sector SASS:1999–2000 data includes traditional public and public charter schools and their staffs (and excludes Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded schools and their staffs).<sup>2</sup>

Seventy-nine percent of all private schools had a religious affiliation in 1999–2000: 30 percent were affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, and 49 percent with other religious groups (figure 1). The remaining 22 percent were nonsectarian. Although Catholic schools accounted for 30 percent of the total number of schools, they enrolled 48 percent of all private school students. Each of these three types of private schools can be further disaggregated into three more specific types. In addition, private schools may belong to one or more associations, reflecting either a particular religious affiliation, a special program or pedagogical emphasis, or some other element of the school. Broughman and Colaciello (2001) show in table 15 the numbers of schools that belong to a wide range of associations.

**Table 1.—Percentage and number of schools, students, and full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers in each sector and in each of three private school types: 1999–2000**

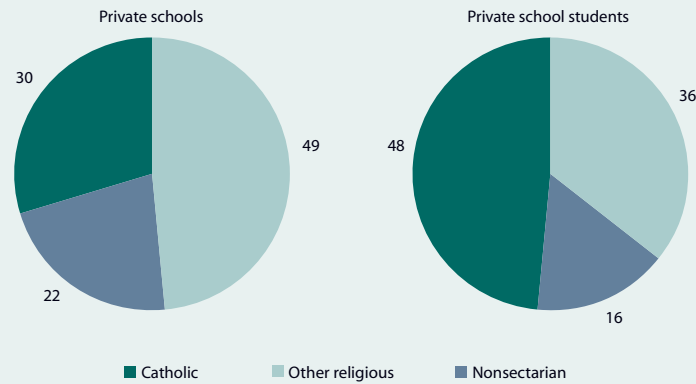
Sector	Percentage of total:			Number:		
	Schools	Students	Teachers (FTE)	Schools	Students	Teachers (FTE)
Public	75.7	89.6	87.8	84,735	45,366,227	2,905,658
Private	24.3	10.4	12.2	27,223	5,262,849	404,066
Private school type	Percentage of all private:			Schools	Students	Teachers (FTE)
Catholic	29.8	48.4	37.6	8,102	2,548,710	152,102
Other religious	48.7	35.6	37.9	13,268	1,871,851	153,071
Nonsectarian	21.5	16.0	24.5	5,853	842,288	98,893

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.



**Figure 1.—Percentage distribution of private schools and students enrolled, by private school type: 1999–2000**



NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

### School location and level

Private schools in 1999–2000 were located primarily in central cities (42 percent) and the urban fringe or large towns (40 percent) (table 2). About 18 percent of private schools were found in rural areas. In contrast, 24 percent of all public schools were in central city locations, 45 percent in the urban fringe or large towns, and 31 percent in rural areas. Most schools—61 percent of private and 71 percent of public—were elementary, but 10 percent of

**Table 2.—Percentage distribution of schools according to community type and level, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Community type			Level		
	Central city	Urban fringe/ large town	Rural/ small town	Elementary	Secondary	Combined
Public	24.1	44.6	31.3	71.4	24.6	4.0
Private	42.4	39.9	17.7	60.8	9.5	29.7
Private school type						
Catholic	46.5	41.3	12.2	82.1	13.9	4.1
Other religious	37.6	38.6	23.8	52.9	6.0	41.2
Nonsectarian	47.4	40.9	11.7	49.5	11.4	39.1

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

private schools and 25 percent of public schools were secondary. Finally, a much higher proportion of private schools (30 percent) were combined schools (usually grades K–12 or 1–12), compared with only 4 percent of public schools.

### School and class sizes

Some research suggests that small/intermediate-sized schools and relatively small classes can have advantages, including possibly leading to higher achievement (Klonsky 1995; Raywid 1995; Lee and Smith 1997), although some of the findings are debated.<sup>3</sup> This research has found that placing students in small groups tends to foster close working relationships between teachers and students, thus enhancing learning (Lee and Smith 1993) particularly among at-risk students and those in the early grades (Lee and Smith 1995; Krueger and Whitmore 2001). Fairly small schools are also believed to promote teachers' commitment to collaborative work and to support the development of a "professional community of learners" that Newmann and Wehlage (1995) consider useful for high student achievement. In addition to the possible advantages of small schools, they may have some disadvantages as well, such as providing a narrower set of programs and services. The smallest high schools may not be able to offer advanced courses because they have too few students, a shortage of qualified teachers, or both. The data in *indicator 27* (U.S. Department of Education 2002), which examines the proportions of students who completed advanced science and mathematics courses in high schools of different sizes, shows that moderate-sized high schools may provide advantages.

- *On average, private schools have smaller enrollments, smaller average class sizes, and lower student/teacher ratios than public schools.*

School size is typically related to the population density of the local area and its age distribution of children; for private schools, local demand for a school's instructional philosophy also contributes to size of enrollment. The average private school had 193 students in 1999–2000, while the average public school had 535 students (table 3). Among private schools, 80 percent had enrollments of fewer than 300, compared with 29 percent of public schools. Within the private sector, Catholic schools had larger enrollments than other types of schools. About 43 percent of Catholic schools had 150–299 students in 1999–2000 (a higher proportion than in the other two school

**Table 3.—Average number of students enrolled and percentage distribution of schools according to enrollment size, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Average school enrollment	Percentage distribution of schools by size				
		Fewer than 50 students	50–99 students	100–149 students	150–299 students	300 or more students
Public	535	4.0	4.3	4.6	16.2	70.9
Private	193	26.1	16.4	12.1	25.8	19.6
Private school type						
Catholic	315	1.1	7.4	10.3	42.7	38.4
Other religious	141	36.8	19.9	11.0	20.6	11.7
Nonsectarian	144	36.4	20.8	17.1	14.3	11.4

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

types), and another 38 percent had 300 or more students. In comparison, 11–12 percent of other religious schools and nonsectarian schools had 300 or more students. About 36–37 percent of other religious and nonsectarian schools had fewer than 50 students. Such small schools were rare, however, among Catholic schools (1 percent) and in the public sector as a whole (4 percent).

The average class size reported by teachers was larger in public schools than in private schools for both self-contained (the norm for elementary grades) and departmentalized classes (typical in middle and upper grades). Teachers in Catholic schools had an average of 23 students in their departmentalized classes, and in public schools the figure was 24 students (table 4). In both Catholic and public schools, however, departmentalized classes were larger than in other religious and nonsectarian schools, where the average class sizes were 17 and 15 students, respectively.

**Table 4.—Average class size, student/teacher ratios, and percentage of schools with a student/teacher ratio less than 10:1, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Average class size		Student/teacher ratio	Percent of schools with a student/teacher ratio less than 10:1
	Self-contained	Departmentalized		
Public	20.9	23.6	15.6	9.7
Private	18.9	18.8	13.2	35.8
Private school type				
Catholic	23.6	23.2	17.2	8.4
Other religious	17.1	16.8	12.5	38.5
Nonsectarian	15.4	14.8	9.1	67.5

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School and Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

The schoolwide student/teacher ratio tends to be smaller than the average size of self-contained or departmentalized classes (shown in table 4) mainly because the student/teacher ratio includes any pull-out, enrichment, and other special classes. Private schools had an average of 13 students per FTE teacher, compared with an average of 16 students per teacher in public schools. Furthermore, 36 percent of private schools had a student/teacher ratio lower than 10:1, compared with 10 percent of public schools.

### Special instructional approaches and programs

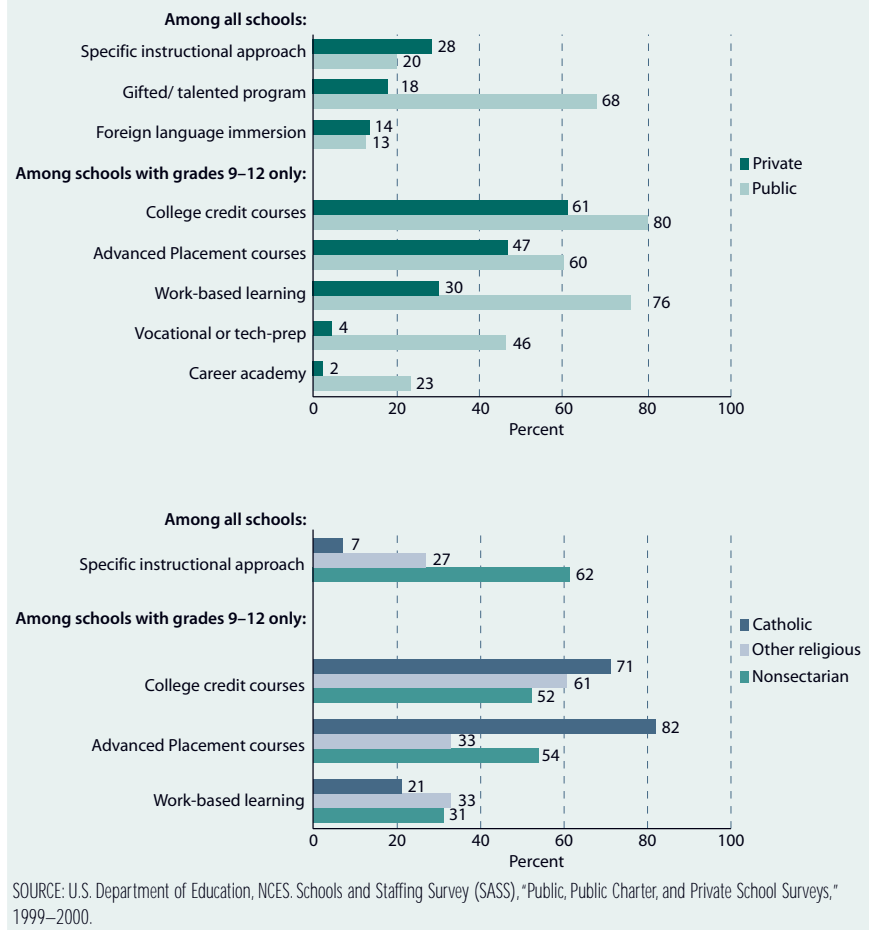
Private schools may be established specifically to implement a particular instructional approach, such as Montessori, or a specific curricular focus. Some public schools have adopted special approaches as well, but the public sector included a smaller proportion of such schools than did the private sector in 1999–2000 (20 versus 28 percent) (figure 2). However, public schools were more likely than private schools to offer many specialized programs and courses—for example, gifted/talented programs; Advanced Placement (AP) and college credit courses; and career academies, vocational courses, and work-based learning. About 13–14 percent of schools in each sector offered a foreign language immersion program. (Figure 2 shows the percentages of all schools that had a specific instructional approach, a gifted program, and foreign language immersion, while the other measures in figure 2 are restricted to schools with grades 9–12.)

Among private schools, nonsectarian ones were the most likely to use a specific instructional approach (62 percent), compared with other religious (27 percent) and Catholic schools (7 percent). Large proportions of Catholic high (or combined) schools provided AP and college credit courses (82 and 71 percent, respectively), higher percentages than those in either other religious or nonsectarian schools. Catholic schools with grades 9–12 were less likely than other religious schools to have work-based learning programs.

### Demographic characteristics of students

Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in schools offer academic and social benefits in a society where students need to work well in heterogeneous groups in school, jobs, and social settings (e.g., Coleman et al. 1966; Eaton 2001; Schofield 2001). In addition, research suggests that diversity in a school's enrollment can help low-income and minority students increase their achievement and attainment, reduce dropout rates, and improve critical thinking skills and the ability to understand opposing viewpoints. (Syn-

Figure 2.—Percentage of schools offering particular instructional approaches or special programs, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000



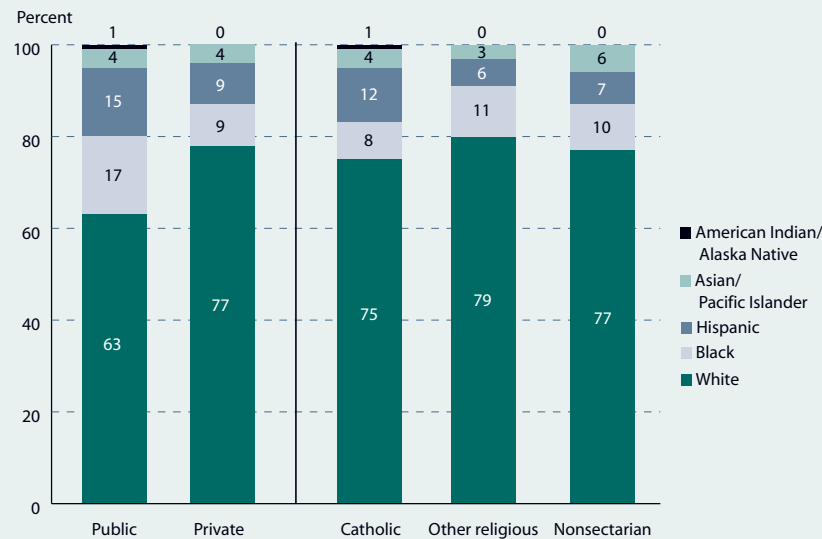
theses of research on these topics can be found in St. John 1975; Cook 1984; Wells and Crain 1994; and Schofield 1995.) Student populations in private and public schools and in different types of private schools vary on some basic demographic measures, including race/ethnicity, limited-English proficiency (LEP) status, and the family’s socioeconomic background.

- *There are differences in the racial and ethnic diversity in public and private schools.*

In 1999–2000, 77 percent of all private school students were White, compared with 63 percent of all public school students (figure 3). The private school sector as a whole had lower proportions of Black and Hispanic students than the public school sector as a whole, and no difference was detected between the sectors in the proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander students. Some earlier research (Greene 2001) found that individual private school students were more likely than those in public schools to be in racially mixed classrooms. Enrollment patterns in public schools more closely replicated neighborhood segregation in housing. In Catholic schools, 12 percent of students were Hispanic, a higher proportion than in the other types of private schools.

Public schools were more likely than private schools to have any minority students in 1999–2000, as well as to have high concentrations of minority students (more than 30 percent) (table 5). Although many private schools had a racially diverse student body, about 14 percent had no minority students, compared with only 4 percent of public schools. Catholic and nonsec-

Figure 3.—Percentage distribution of students according to race/ethnicity, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000



NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Estimates of 0 are less than 0.5 percent.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

**Table 5.—Percentage distribution of schools according to concentration of minority students, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	None	1–10 percent	11–30 percent	31–50 percent	51 percent or more
Public	3.9	35.8	20.2	12.8	27.3
Private	13.9	36.1	23.3	7.9	18.7
Private school type					
Catholic	4.7	49.5	19.2	5.3	21.4
Other religious	24.0	30.4	21.4	9.1	15.0
Nonsectarian	3.8	30.7	33.4	8.9	23.2

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

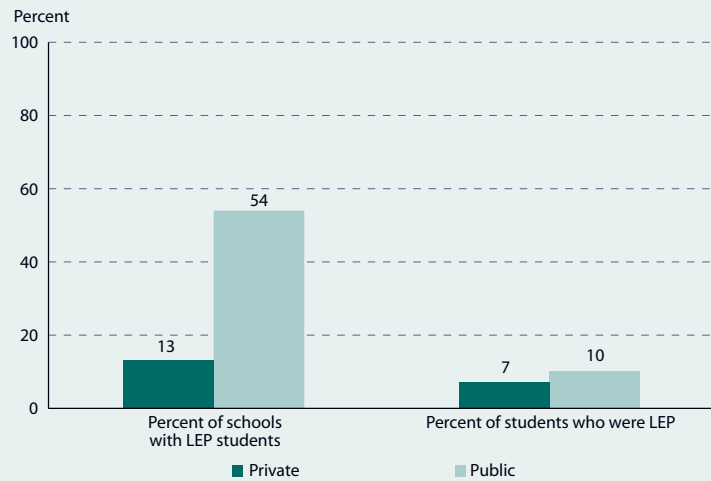
tarian schools were about as likely as public schools to have some minority students (95–96 percent of each group did), contrasted with 76 percent of other religious schools. Relatively few other religious schools had 51 percent or more minority students (15 percent), compared with Catholic (21 percent), nonsectarian (23 percent), and public schools (27 percent).

- *Private schools are less likely than public schools to enroll LEP students or students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program.*

Limited-English proficient students may introduce other students to different cultures and languages and help native English speakers learn foreign languages. Nonetheless, teaching LEP students also adds complexity to educators' tasks and creates new staffing and training challenges for schools. In 1999–2000, 13 percent of private schools had any LEP students, who accounted for an average of 7 percent of total enrollment in these schools (figure 4). In contrast, 54 percent of public schools had any LEP students, and they accounted for 10 percent of the student population on average in these schools. Private schools do not participate directly in federally funded LEP programs and so they may be less likely than public schools to identify and count the number of LEP students enrolled.

Although direct measures of SES are not readily available, the Schools and Staffing Survey collects information on the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. (The eligibility rate for the National School Lunch Program is a reasonable proxy for the incidence of school poverty in public schools but a less reliable measure in private schools. Approximately

Figure 4.—Percentage of schools serving LEP students and, in those, percentage of students who were LEP, by sector: 1999–2000



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

25 percent of private school respondents in 1999–2000 did not know whether any of their students were eligible.<sup>4</sup>) Virtually all public schools (99 percent) had students eligible for subsidized lunches, about twice the percentage for private schools (49 percent) (table 6). Among schools participating in the subsidized lunch program, 42 percent of students at public schools and 10 percent at private schools, on average, were eligible.

Catholic schools were much more likely than the other two types of private schools to have any students eligible for subsidized lunches (69 percent versus 38–40 percent). Among private schools that participated in the program, nonsectarian schools had a higher average proportion of students eligible for free lunches than did Catholic and other religious schools (30, 7, and 6 percent, respectively).



**Table 6.—Percentage of schools that had any students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and, in participating schools, the average percentage of students who were eligible, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Percentage of schools with any eligible students	Percentage of students eligible
Public	98.8	42.5
Private*	49.5	10.4
Private school type		
Catholic	68.9	6.9
Other religious	38.3	6.3
Nonsectarian	39.7	29.5

\*About 25 percent of private school respondents did not know whether any students enrolled would be eligible for the National School Lunch Program.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000.

## School Climate and Staff Perceptions

Research has examined the links between teachers' perceptions of a school's professional climate, on the one hand, and teachers' effectiveness and job satisfaction on the other (for example, see Mitchell, Ortiz, and Mitchell 1987; Rosenholtz 1991). In one extensive study of Catholic high schools, a range of attributes were found to contribute to school effectiveness, including the staff's communal organization to advance shared goals; principals having primary decisionmaking authority for most school management matters; teachers' commitment to the academic, spiritual, and social development of students (which encompassed providing extra help when needed and supporting extracurricular activities); and an atmosphere of mutual respect among everyone in the school (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993). Elements of staff opinion and school climate discussed here include teachers' sense of shared purpose, collegiality, and cooperative efforts; teachers' evaluations of principals' leadership and support; and principals' top goals for the school.

### Teachers' control over teaching practices and influence on school policies

- *Private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to report having a lot of influence on several teaching practices and school policies.*

For most teaching practices—selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, disciplining students, choosing course content and skills to teach, and selecting textbooks and materials—private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to report having a lot of influence on school policymaking (table 7). (Public schools are often required to follow the decisions of state and/or district officials regarding curricular content and textbooks.) However, though differences between the sectors were found, some of these policies were common in both types of schools: more than 85 percent of teachers in public and private schools thought that they had a lot of control over selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, and determining homework quantity. Few differences were detected among the three private school types on most measures in table 7, but nonsectarian school teachers were more likely than Catholic or other religious school teachers to report having a lot of control over the content and skills to teach and selecting textbooks and materials.

**Table 7.—Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of control over various teaching practices, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Selecting teaching techniques	Evaluating and grading students	Determining homework quantity	Disciplining students	Choosing content and skills to teach	Selecting textbooks, materials
Public	87.4	89.1	87.9	73.3	56.7	54.1
Private	92.5	92.4	87.3	85.5	75.0	70.6
Private school type						
Catholic	93.8	93.7	89.7	86.8	73.1	69.4
Other religious	91.5	91.5	84.8	85.8	70.4	64.5
Nonsectarian	92.3	91.7	87.5	83.0	85.0	81.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

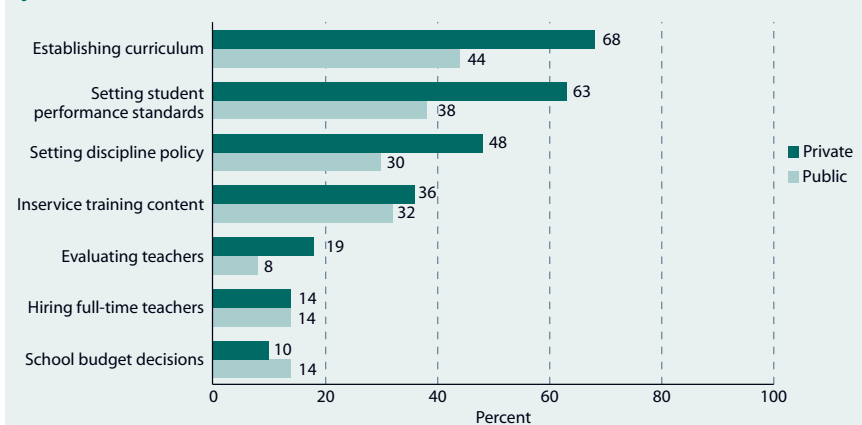
In four areas of school policy linked closely with teaching—establishing curriculum, setting student performance standards, setting discipline policy, and evaluating teachers—the sector differences were substantial (table 8 and figure 5). For example, 68 percent of private school teachers said they had a lot of influence on establishing curriculum, compared with 44 percent of public school teachers. In addition, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to say that they had a lot of influence on setting student performance standards (63 versus 38 percent) and on student discipline policy (48 versus 30 percent). In contrast, no difference was detected between the two sectors for teachers' reported influence on teacher hiring

**Table 8.—Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Establishing curriculum	Setting student performance standards	Setting discipline policy	Inservice training content	Evaluating teachers	Hiring full-time teachers	School budget decisions
Public	44.3	37.6	30.4	32.5	8.2	14.5	14.0
Private	67.5	62.5	47.9	35.5	18.6	14.1	9.9
Private school type							
Catholic	59.0	56.2	45.1	33.5	13.7	9.8	6.9
Other religious	68.0	65.3	50.7	35.0	17.0	11.4	11.0
Nonsectarian	79.4	67.6	47.6	39.3	28.4	24.6	12.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

**Figure 5.—Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies, by sector: 1999–2000**

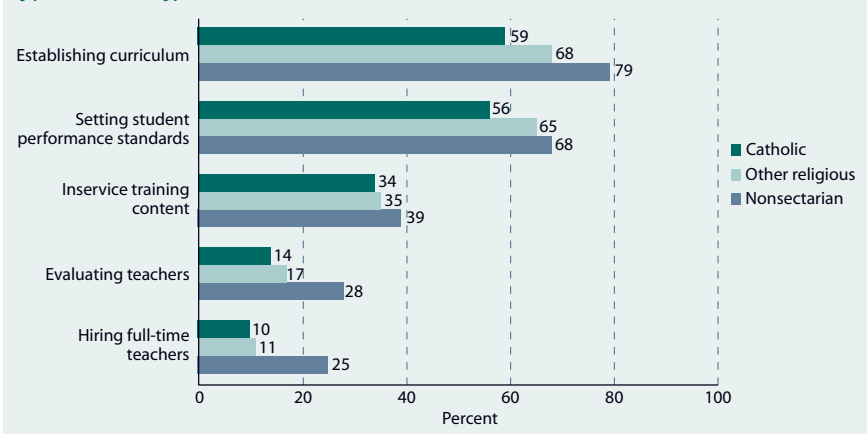


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

decisions (about 14 percent for each). In addition to hiring decisions, teachers in both sectors were unlikely to think they had a lot of influence on the content of inservice training, school budget decisions, or evaluating teachers. (However, the sectors did differ on these matters; for example, 19 percent of teachers in private schools versus 8 percent in public schools thought they had a lot of influence on teacher evaluation.)

Teachers in nonsectarian schools were more likely than Catholic or other religious school teachers to say they had a lot of influence on establishing curriculum, evaluating teachers, and hiring full-time teachers (table 8 and figure 6). In addition, nonsectarian school teachers were more likely than Catholic school teachers to report having a lot of influence on setting student performance standards and on deciding teachers' inservice training content.

**Figure 6.—Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies, by private school type: 1999–2000**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

**Teachers' ratings of school climate and management**

A school's professional climate, in particular the existence of a strong shared purpose among staff members and cooperative interactions among people at the school, is likely to contribute to its effectiveness. As an illustration, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that when teachers feel a sense of community at their schools, they can better communicate consistent goals to students and collaborate more effectively on raising student achievement. Similarly, another study (Bryk and Driscoll 1988) found that teachers who work toward shared goals express higher job satisfaction and have lower absentee rates than do other teachers. Among the elements that shape a school's climate are several examined in this section: the extent to which the staff shares a commitment to the school's central mission, teachers collaborate and share ideas, parents support teachers' work, the principal provides

clear direction and priorities to the staff, and the administrators communicate expectations clearly and enforce rules of student conduct.

- *Private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to report being satisfied with teaching at their school.*

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999–2000) data indicate that teachers in private schools for the most part have positive views about their jobs and the extent of staff cooperation and collegiality at their school. For example, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to “strongly agree”<sup>5</sup> that they were generally satisfied with teaching at their school (66 versus 54 percent) and with their class size (60 versus 36 percent) (table 9). In addition, greater proportions of private school than public school teachers agreed that teachers consistently enforce rules of behavior, that most colleagues shared their beliefs about the school’s central mission, and that cooperative effort among the staff was high. Moreover, teachers at private schools (42 percent) were much more likely than teachers at public schools (16 percent) to state that they received a great deal of support from parents for their work. No differences were detected between sectors or among private school types in the percentage who agreed that they consciously coordinated course content with other teachers.

Teachers at other religious schools agreed with five positive statements about their school’s professional climate and working conditions at higher rates

**Table 9.—Percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with various statements about the school’s professional climate and working conditions, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	I am satisfied with teaching at this school	I am satisfied with my class size	Most colleagues share school’s mission	Staff cooperative effort is high	I receive lots of parent support for my work	I consciously coordinate courses with other teachers	Rules are consistently enforced by teachers
Public	53.7	35.8	33.2	33.9	15.6	38.0	22.8
Private	66.4	60.0	59.9	56.0	42.4	39.3	37.8
Private school type							
Catholic	62.9	46.5	55.3	50.2	40.0	37.4	36.8
Other religious	71.3	67.7	72.3	63.5	48.1	41.4	41.9
Nonsectarian	64.1	68.0	47.4	53.1	37.1	38.8	33.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys,” 1999–2000.

than those of teachers at Catholic and nonsectarian schools. Topics of these statements concerned satisfaction with teaching at the school in general, colleagues' shared beliefs about the school's mission, staff cooperative effort, support from parents, and teachers' consistent enforcement of rules.

■ *A majority of private school teachers express positive opinions about their principal and their school's management.*

Most private school teachers agreed that their principal enforced school rules, expressed expectations for staff, and clearly communicated the kind of school he or she wanted (table 10). A majority of private school teachers also agreed that the administration was supportive and encouraging and that necessary materials were available. For each of these aspects, as well as thinking that staff members were recognized for doing a good job, public school teachers were less likely than private school teachers to agree with the positive statement. Indeed, no more than 50 percent of teachers in public schools agreed with any of these statements.

Within the private sector, teachers at other religious schools were more likely than those at the other two private school types to agree with several statements regarding school management: that the administration was supportive and encouraging, that their principal enforced school rules, that school goals were communicated clearly, and that staff members were recognized for doing a good job. Forty-six percent of other religious school teachers

**Table 10.—Percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with various statements about the school's principal and management, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Principal enforces school rules	School goals are communicated clearly	Administration is supportive and encouraging	Necessary materials are available	Principal expresses expectations for staff	Staff are recognized for good work	Principal often discusses instructional practices
Public	47.4	48.1	41.8	37.2	49.7	25.7	11.0
Private	62.7	61.3	59.8	60.2	56.5	39.8	15.4
Private school type							
Catholic	59.2	59.1	56.1	53.2	55.9	36.5	14.1
Other religious	68.3	66.4	67.3	64.0	60.5	45.7	18.1
Nonsectarian	59.4	56.5	53.6	64.5	51.1	35.7	12.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000.

agreed with the last statement, compared with about 36 percent of teachers in the two other school types.

### Principals and school leadership

Principals' instructional leadership can include observing teachers in the classroom and providing constructive evaluations, requiring teachers to work collaboratively, providing substantive training in teaching methods, and working directly with teachers to develop new curricula or teaching techniques. In one study (Larsen 1987), high-achieving schools had principals who visited classrooms and talked to teachers frequently about instructional methods and content. These principals also explained the school's goals clearly to staff and learned from other schools' notable curricula and methods. Despite the presumed usefulness of strong instructional leadership (Louis and Miles 1990; Leithwood 1992), principals for the most part are not discussing instructional practices often with teachers (table 10, last column), perhaps because of overwhelming demands for their time (Pierce 2000). Elmore (1999–2000) found from his observations that “few administrators of any kind or at any level are directly involved in instruction. Principals who develop the skills and knowledge required to become instructional leaders do so because of their own preferences and values—and often at some cost to their own careers.”

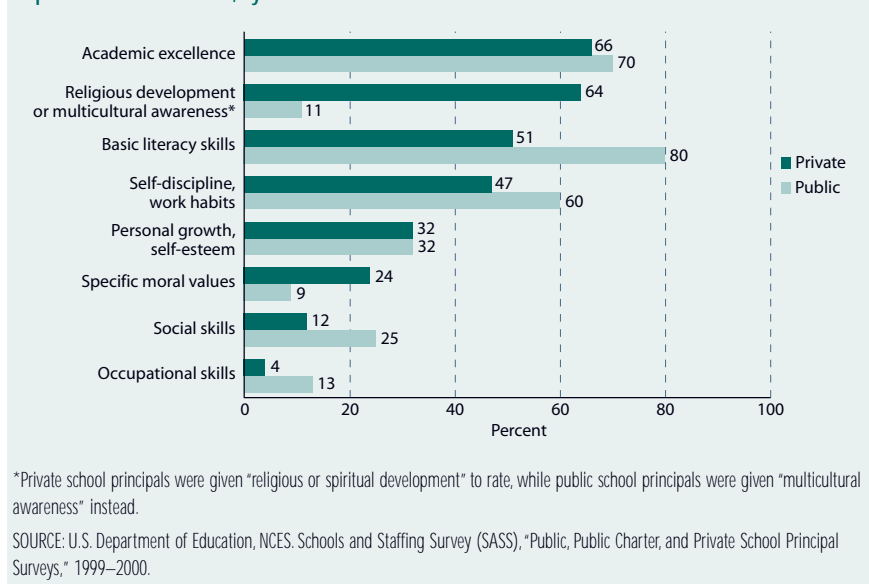
- *Most principals are not engaging teachers on instructional practices on a frequent basis—in either sector.*

Most private school teachers thought their principal performed well in enforcing rules, communicating expectations and goals, and supporting teachers, as discussed above. However, SASS:1999–2000 data indicate that private schools did not show much of an advantage in principals' leadership on instruction. Teachers in both sectors were unlikely to report that the principal often discussed instructional matters with them: 15 percent in the private sector and 11 percent in the public sector agreed that their principals did so (table 10).<sup>6</sup> Teachers in other religious schools were more likely to say that their principals frequently discussed instruction than those in either Catholic or nonsectarian schools.

The principal's top-priority goals, if communicated effectively to teachers and other staff, can influence both daily practices and the professional cli-

mate at the school. Public school principals in 1999–2000 were most likely to name among their top three goals building basic literacy skills in core areas like reading, writing, and mathematics (80 percent) (figure 7). Other goals cited frequently by public school principals were encouraging academic excellence (70 percent) and developing self-discipline and good work habits (60 percent). Principals in private schools were about equally likely to include academic excellence (66 percent) and fostering religious/spiritual development<sup>7</sup> (64 percent) among their highest three goals. Literacy skills (51 percent) and developing self-discipline (47 percent) were also included often as top three goals in private schools.

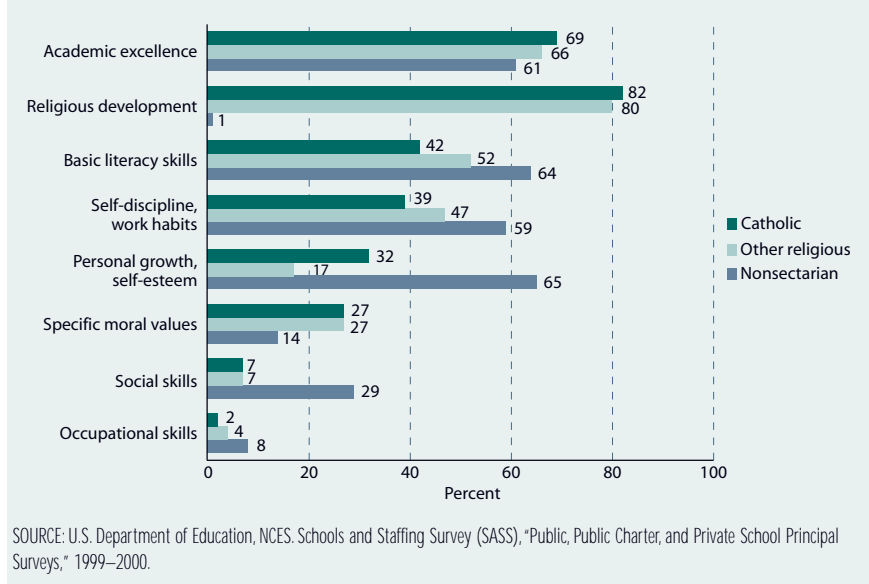
**Figure 7.—Percentage of principals who rated each of eight educational goals among the three most important for their school, by sector: 1999–2000**



The percentage of all private school principals who included religious development as a top goal disguises the large differences across school types for this measure: principals in Catholic and other religious schools cited religious development more often than any other goal (80–82 percent of these principals cited it), while hardly any nonsectarian school principals did so (1 percent) (figure 8). At both types of religious schools, academic excellence was included as a high-priority goal by 66–69 percent of the principals (second after religious development), followed by two other goals: building lit-



Figure 8.—Percentage of principals who rated each of eight educational goals among the three most important for their school, by private school type: 1999–2000



eracy skills (42–52 percent) and developing self-discipline (39–47 percent). Promoting self-discipline was included more frequently than teaching specific moral values by Catholic and other religious school principals.

Nonsectarian school principals had a somewhat different pattern of priorities: between 59 and 65 percent included developing personal growth/self-esteem, literacy skills, academic excellence, and promoting self-discipline among their top three goals. In addition, nonsectarian school principals were more likely than those at the other two school types to include social skills development (29 versus 7 percent at Catholic and other religious schools). About 59 percent of nonsectarian school principals included developing self-discipline among their top three goals, more than the 47 percent at other religious schools, which in turn was more than the 39 percent at Catholic schools. Principals' ratings for teaching basic literacy skills followed a similar pattern by school type. About 27 percent of both Catholic and other religious school principals included teaching specific moral values, roughly twice the 14 percent for principals of nonsectarian schools.

## Academic Coursetaking and Student Outcomes

Student achievement, high school graduation requirements, and courses completed

- *Private school students generally perform higher than their public school counterparts on standardized achievement tests.*

As with earlier results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), private school students performed higher than public school students on the NAEP:2000 tests.<sup>8</sup> Their average scores were above those of public school students on the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading test and on the 4<sup>th</sup>-, 8<sup>th</sup>-, and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade science and mathematics proficiency tests (table 11). See *indicators 7, 10, 11, and 12* (U.S. Department of Education 2002) for detailed data on student performance, including differences by many variables beyond school sector.

Table 11.—Average science, mathematics, and reading scale scores for 4<sup>th</sup>-, 8<sup>th</sup>-, and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders, by sector: 2000

Sector	Scale score		
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12
	<b>Science</b>		
Public	148	149	145
Private	163	166	161
	<b>Mathematics</b>		
Public	226	274	300
Private	238	287	315
	<b>Reading</b>		
Public	215	—	—
Private	234	—	—

—Not applicable.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. (2002). *The Nation's Report Card: Science 2000* (NCES 2002–451); (2001) *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2000* (NCES 2001–517); (2001) *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2000* (NCES 2001–499).

Applying high academic standards—both requiring students to complete high-level, challenging courses and pushing students to strive and excel in their work—is a central schooling component that many experts recommend (Newmann 1992; Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Gamoran et al. 1997). Earlier research has found not only that private high school students take more

advanced mathematics courses than those in public high schools but also that the type of private school may matter (Lee et al. 1998). Students at Catholic high schools in that study completed more advanced mathematics than students in “independent, selective” private schools, even after adjusting for measures including prior achievement in mathematics, school selectivity, and family SES. (The independent, selective schools cited are a subset of the nonsectarian group discussed here; one difference is that the latter includes special education schools. Students in Catholic schools in the study varied more in academic skill and family SES than did students in the more selective independent schools.)

■ *Private high schools typically have more demanding graduation requirements than do public high schools.*

Compared with public schools, private schools required more coursework (in 4-year high school programs) in 1999–2000 in social studies, mathematics, science, foreign language, and computer science (table 12).<sup>9</sup> Private schools required on average 3.1 years of mathematics, while public schools required 2.7 years, for example. The figures for foreign language study also differed: 1.5 years at private schools but 0.5 years at public schools. In addition, about 40 percent of private schools required some form of community service for high school graduation, four times the rate for public schools (10 percent). Nonsectarian schools required an average of 3.3 years of math-

**Table 12.—Average years of high school study required for graduation in selected subjects, and percentage of public and private schools\* that had a community service requirement, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000**

Sector and type	Average years of study required						Percent that require community service
	English	Social studies	Mathematics	Science	Foreign language	Computer science	
Public	3.90	3.10	2.73	2.41	0.46	0.52	9.9
Private	3.94	3.33	3.13	2.67	1.51	0.88	39.8
Private school type							
Catholic	3.96	3.15	3.05	2.59	1.81	0.87	73.1
Other religious	3.92	3.39	3.09	2.68	1.35	0.92	30.7
Nonsectarian	4.02	3.28	3.32	2.71	1.79	0.74	41.9

\*Restricted to schools that grant high school diplomas (district data on requirements were applied to public schools). Columns 1–4 were further restricted to schools reporting for 3- or 4-year high school programs, and columns 5 and 6 to schools reporting for 4-year high school programs.

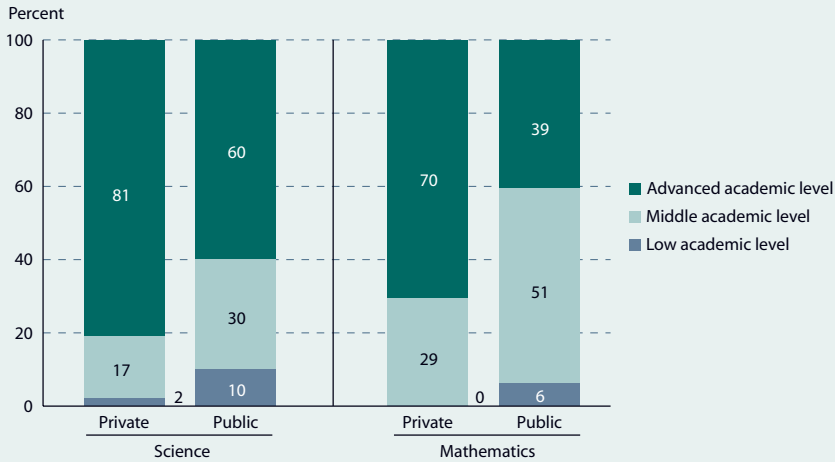
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School District, and Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys,” 1999–2000.

ematics, compared with 3.0–3.1 years for the other two types of private schools. Catholic schools were quite likely (73 percent) to require some community service for graduation, more so than the other two types.

- *Private school graduates are more likely than their peers from public schools to have completed advanced-level courses in three academic subject areas.*

Findings from the NAEP High School Transcript Study of 1998 (*indicator 27*, U.S. Department of Education 2002) show that 1998 private high school graduates were more likely than public high school graduates to have completed advanced courses in science and mathematics (figure 9). Advanced science courses include chemistry, physics, and advanced biology; advanced mathematics courses include trigonometry, precalculus, and calculus. In a parallel pattern, private school graduates were about twice as likely as their public school counterparts to have completed the third (or higher) year of study in a foreign language (55 versus 28 percent) (*indicator 34*, U.S. Department of Education 2001a). Completing intermediate-level and even advanced courses is often required for admission to selective colleges and universities.

**Figure 9.—Percentage distribution of 1998 high school graduates according to highest level of science and mathematics courses completed in high school, by sector**



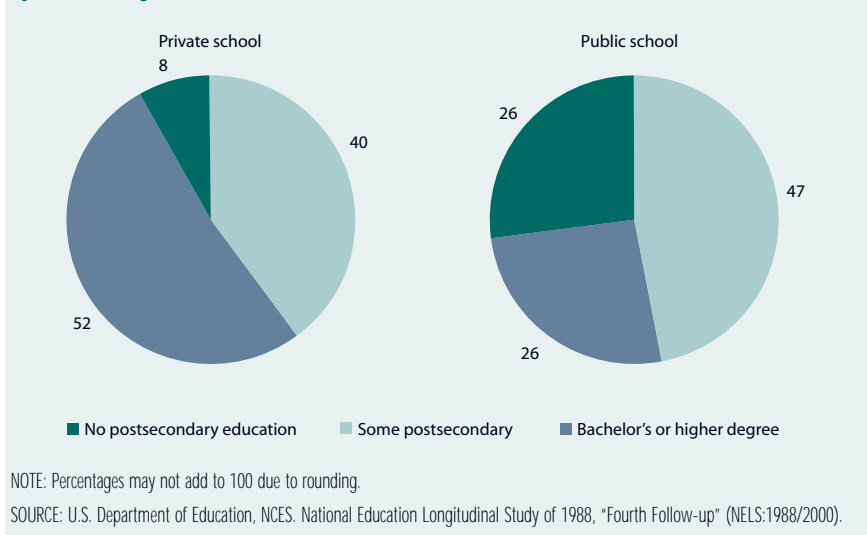
NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Estimate of 0 is less than 0.5 percent.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) High School Transcript Study, 1998.

## Educational attainment

- *Private school students are more likely than public school students to complete a bachelor's or advanced degree by their mid-20s.*

Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, “Fourth Follow-up” (NELS:1988/2000) show that students who had attended private school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor's or higher degree by their mid-20s (52 versus 26 percent) and far less likely to have had no postsecondary education (figure 10). Even students from low-SES backgrounds attained higher levels if they had been private school students in 1988. Specifically, 7 percent of students in the lowest SES quartile who had attended public school in 1988 had earned a bachelor's degree by 2000, whereas 24 percent of their private school peers had done so (table 13). In addition, for students whose mother's expectation (in 8<sup>th</sup> grade) was for them to attain an associate's degree or less, those who had attended private school completed a bachelor's or higher degree at a rate about four times that of public school students (30 versus 7 percent). Furthermore, students who came from a low-SES family

Figure 10.—Percentage distribution of 1988 8<sup>th</sup>-graders according to their educational attainment, by sector of 8<sup>th</sup>-grade school: 2000



**Table 13.—Percentage of 1988 8<sup>th</sup>-graders with various backgrounds who had completed a bachelor's or higher degree by 2000**

Student characteristics	Sector of 8 <sup>th</sup> -grade school		Studied calculus by 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	
	Private	Public	Yes	No
Total	52.2	26.1	81.9	25.4
Family socioeconomic status				
Lowest quartile	24.4	6.6	70.9	6.1
Middle two quartiles	38.6	22.3	68.5	21.8
Highest quartile	69.1	56.9	91.0	53.9
Mother's expectation for student's attainment				
Less than bachelor's degree	29.5	7.2	56.7	8.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	56.1	34.6	83.8	33.0

NOTE: The number in row 2, column 1 shows that, among students whose family SES was in the lowest quartile, 24.4 percent of those who had attended private school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade had completed a bachelor's or higher degree by 2000.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, "Fourth Follow-up" (NELS:1988/2000).

but had completed a calculus course in high school were much more likely than those who had not studied calculus to earn a degree by their mid-20s (71 versus 6 percent). Students in private schools are more likely than those in public schools to take challenging courses like calculus, and private schools are more likely to require them, as discussed in the preceding section.

## Conclusion

In addition to differences between schools in the private and public sectors, within each sector, schools vary in size, level, community type, and student populations. Differences in internal management practices, staff cohesiveness, top-priority goals, and professional climate also appear between and within each sector. Some characteristics of private schools vary widely according to the type of school, while others do not.

Private schools overall have fewer students than public schools, and minorities are a lower percentage of the student population. Catholic schools tend to be larger and have greater diversity in enrollment than other types of private schools. Teachers in private schools report that they have wide latitude in deciding how and what to teach, as well as a fairly strong influence on many school policies. Nonsectarian schools, in particular, may give teachers greater influence in shaping their school's activities. In contrast, though the majority of teachers in each private school type agreed with positive

statements about staff cooperation and the school's management, teachers at other religious schools were more likely than other private school teachers to agree strongly with many of these statements. Teachers at other religious schools were particularly likely to give their administrators high marks, and to report that their colleagues shared similar beliefs about their school's central mission and that rules were enforced consistently. Principals at the three types of private schools had different top priorities for their schools, but at least 60 percent in each school type included academic excellence. Public school principals most often cited teaching basic literacy skills as one of their top three goals (80 percent included it), while 51 percent of private school principals did so.

Achievement tests in reading, mathematics, and science show higher average scores for private school students. In addition, private schools tend to require more years of core academic subjects for high school graduation than do public schools, with some variation across school types. Graduates of private high schools have on average completed more advanced courses than public school graduates in science, mathematics, and foreign language. Finally, students who had attended private school in 8th grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor's or higher degree by their mid-20s, and far less likely to have had no postsecondary education.

Private schools have advantages from the outset that many public schools cannot match, stemming from the choice by students and their families to participate in private education. However, requiring students to tackle difficult course material, developing consistent commitment from staff to meet clearly communicated goals, and maintaining a school climate that extols learning may well contribute to better achievement at schools in either sector.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>An additional number of students are schooled at home, outside of the private and public school sectors. In 1999, the estimated number of home-schooled students was 850,000 (Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman 2001).

<sup>2</sup>A public charter school is a public school that, in accordance with an enabling statute, has been granted a charter exempting it from selected state or local rules and regulations. A public charter school may be a newly created school or it may previously have been a public or private school. Traditional public schools include all public schools except public charter schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded schools that are operated by local public school districts. Traditional public schools include regular, special education, vocational/technical, and alternative schools. They also include schools in juvenile detention centers, and schools located on military bases and operated by the Department of Defense.

<sup>3</sup>Some other research has questioned the value of decreasing class sizes in raising achievement, particularly in light of the often high costs of implementing such changes. Hanushek (2000) argues that the quality of additional teachers hired to reduce class sizes is the important variable, rather than smaller class sizes per se. O'Connell and Smith (2000) and Finn and Achilles (1999) found that smaller class size does not substantively change how teachers teach, although the evidence on that question is mixed; see Holloway (2002) for a summary of research on the topic.

<sup>4</sup>Schools that do not participate in federally funded programs like the school lunch program are less likely to know how many students would be eligible because the school's funding is not affected by tracking eligibility.

<sup>5</sup>"Agree" and "agreed" are used hereafter for brevity, but all the data discussed in this section reflect the percentage of teachers who said they strongly agreed with the statement mentioned.

<sup>6</sup>These two percentages do differ but also indicate that principals in both sectors were unlikely to engage teachers on instructional practices often.

<sup>7</sup>Private school principals rated "fostering religious or spiritual development" as one of the eight goals, while public school principals instead rated "promoting multicultural awareness or understanding."

<sup>8</sup>For earlier data about several subjects, see previous editions of two recurring NCES publications: *The Condition of Education* and *The Nation's Report Card*.

<sup>9</sup>Differences for some of the subjects were small but nevertheless statistically significant.



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