

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Enrollment Declines for First Time in 10 Years

Private school enrollment in the United States declined by nearly 220,000 students, or 4 percent, between 2001 and 2003, according to a government report released in March. The latest count of students (an estimated 5,122,772) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) signaled an end to what had been an uninterrupted increase in growth for the sector since 1993.

Parallel to the enrollment downturn, the number of private schools also declined during the same two-year period from 29,273 to 28,384, a drop of 889 schools or 3 percent.

### 23 Percent of Schools

Measured alongside NCES's count of public schools and their students, private schools in 2003 accounted for 23 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary schools and 9.7 percent of its K-12 students. By comparison, in 2001, the private school student share was 10.2 percent. Between 2001 and 2003, public school K-12 enrollment increased by an estimated 770,000 students, or 1.6 percent.

### Detailed Demographics

The biennial Private School Universe Survey (PSS) provides a detailed picture of private school demographics and is closely followed by the private school community as a barometer of enrollment shifts. But the PSS is not as inclusive as some other NCES publications, which show private schools enrolling over six million students and more than 11 percent of the school-

age population. The higher figures include nursery and prekindergarten students as well as kindergarten students in schools where kindergarten is the highest grade. The PSS counts, by contrast, do not include nursery, Pre-K, or K-terminal enrollment.

Much of the enrollment decline in private schools between 2001 and 2003 can be attributed to the change in the number of Catholic school students, who

now account for 46 percent of the private school population. Catholic school enrollment during the two-year period fell 6 percent, from 2,515,524 to 2,365,220. Conservative Christian schools, which enroll 15 percent of private school students, also saw a 6 percent downturn from 823,469 students to 773,847.

By contrast, at least two types of private schools managed to defy the downward trend by posting modest two-year gains. The count of students in Jewish schools edged up 1.7 percent to 201,901, while the number in nonsectarian schools rose 2.3 percent to 921,993.

The new PSS figures offer fresh evidence of the sharp decline of central-city schools. In 2001 there were 708 fewer

central-city private schools than in 1999, and by 2003 the number plummeted by another 526 schools. In 2003, 9,591 central city private schools enrolled 2,182,282 students, representing an 11 percent drop in schools and a 14 percent decrease in students since 1999.

### State Count

Among states, California had the highest private school enrollment in 2003 (623,105), followed by New York (458,079), Florida (323,766), Pennsylvania (316,337), Illinois (270,490), Ohio (239,323), Texas (220,206), New Jersey (204,732), Michigan (160,049), and Maryland (149,253). Of the top ten states for private school enrollment, all but two (Pennsylvania and Ohio) have state CAPE affiliates.

### Minority Enrollment

NCES figures also show that 23.8 percent of students in private schools in 2003 were members of minority groups. By comparison, minority enrollment in

2001 was 24.1 percent. The 2003 numbers include 9.5 percent black students (down from 9.7 percent in 2001), 8.8 percent Hispanic students (up from 8.6 percent), 4.9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander students (down from 5.1 percent), and 76.2 percent white students (up from 75.9 percent).

### Small Schools

Private schools tend to be small. Thirty-

	Schools	Students
2003-2004	28,384	5,122,772
2001-2002	29,273	5,341,513
# Decrease	889	218,741
% Decrease	3.0%	4.1%

Source: Private School Universe Survey, NCES

	Schools	Students
2003-2004	9,591	2,182,282
1999-2000	10,825	2,540,516
# Decrease	1,234	358,234
% Decrease	11.4%	14.1%

Source: Private School Universe Survey, NCES

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**CAPE** member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
Executive Director: Joe McTighe

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# CAPE Board Approves School Choice Principles

As lawmakers across the country continue to consider tax credits, vouchers, and other incentives to promote parent choice in education, CAPE's board of directors have weighed in on how to construct such programs. At their semi-annual meeting last month, the board approved a statement of principles concerning school choice legislation.

Driven by CAPE's mission to "preserve and promote educational pluralism so that parents have a choice in the schooling of their children," the document maps out, for the first time, those areas of broad consensus within the private school community on important components of school choice legislation. In putting the statement together, CAPE's directors—the CEOs of the nation's major private school organizations—found themselves wrestling with the core issue of how to expand educational freedom while maintaining educational pluralism.

CAPE has long recognized that without diversity in education there is no freedom in education. It has encouraged legislators to avoid provisions that would destroy differences among schools. Specifically, the new document seeks school choice proposals that preserve the right of participating schools to control instructional programs and curricula, to hire staff, and to retain admissions policies. Under such criteria, Montessori schools, for example, could preserve their unique pedagogy; religious schools could hire teachers who share the sponsoring community's beliefs and values, and single-sex schools could retain their identity.

## Level and Distribution of Benefits

The document also addresses the issue of how funds should be distributed to parents who participate in school choice programs. Consistent with sound constitutional precedent, benefits "should flow through parents rather than directly to schools" and should be "substantial enough to allow families to select from a variety of schools." Further, benefits "should vary with family financial need to ensure that families with the greatest

need receive the greatest benefit." And to ensure equitable treatment for needy parents who currently sacrifice to send their children to religious and independent schools, the document insists that families with children already in private schools should be among those eligible for benefits.

## Responsibilities of Schools

Even as they seek to protect the independence of private schools, the CAPE directors recognize that private schools, whether they participate in school choice programs or not, perform a public service and have attendant obligations. The document states that schools "should comply with federal, state, and local requirements that currently apply to private schools, including those relating to civil rights, nondiscrimination, background checks for employees, and student health and safety." It goes on to insist that choice legislation "not give rise to additional regulation of private schools."

Entering the debate over testing and accountability, CAPE's board cautions that test scores in a school choice program "should never be allowed to become a sole or dominant indicator of achievement or failure." The board took the same stance two years ago in a statement on school accountability. Noting at the time that test scores "are seen by some as the ultimate measure of attainment," the board said, "The accountability of private schools for student achievement, teacher quality, and school success cannot be addressed by standardized testing alone or any single scale of measurement." The board went on to call for "a much broader, long-term assessment of outcomes," including measures such as "the family's educational goals for its children, how students do at the next level(s) of schooling, accomplishment in life, and evidence of productive good citizenship."

*The March 2006 statement on principles relating to school choice legislation is available on CAPE's Web site at: <<http://www.capenet.org/new.html>>.*

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one percent in 2003 had fewer than 50 students; 60 percent had fewer than 150 students; 82 percent enrolled less than 300 students, and 93 percent came under the 500 enrollment level. The average private school enrollment in 2003-04 was 181 students.

As for grade span, 61 percent of private schools offered only elementary grades; 9 percent offered only secondary grades, and 30 percent provided a combination of elementary and secondary.

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## Teachers

Private schools employed 425,238 full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers in 2003, about the same number employed in 2001. Almost 50 percent of private school teachers taught in elementary schools; 16 percent taught in secondary schools, and 37 percent in combined schools. Dividing the number of private school students in 2003 (5,122,772) by the number of FTE teachers (425,238) yields an average student/teacher ratio of 12 to 1.

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## Arizona Approves Corporate Tax Credit

On March 29, Arizona became the third member of a trio of states (including Florida and Pennsylvania) that now provide tax credits to encourage corporations to contribute to private-school scholarship organizations. The state legislature approved the measure earlier in the month, and Gov. Janet Napolitano allowed the bill to become law (though without her signature), thus enabling thousands of parents to exercise choice in education.

Arizona now has two tax credit programs relating to private education: a credit of up to \$500 for individual taxpayers who contribute to a school tuition organization (STO), and the new corporate tax credit for any amount contributed to an STO up to a statewide cap of \$5 million for the entire program. Corporate tax credits, which must be pre-approved, will be awarded on a first come, first served basis until the cap is reached.

The new law requires school tuition organizations to use the contributions that qualify for the tax credit only for scholarships to children whose family income does not exceed 185 percent of the income requirements for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Scholarship amounts may not exceed \$4,200 for grades K-8 and \$5,500 for grades 9-12 in 2006, with a \$100 increase in the limitation each subsequent year.

In its initial year, the program is limited to students who are either enrolling in kindergarten or switching from a public school to

a private school. (The student must have attended a public school for the first 100 days of the fiscal year prior to the transfer.) Once in the program, however, a student remains eligible for scholarships up to twelfth-grade. Because of the “switcher” provision, state officials estimate that if enough public school students transfer to private schools on account of the bill, the savings in state aid could more than offset the potential \$5 million revenue loss.

### Requirements for Schools

A private school that enrolls participating students must not discriminate “on the basis of race, color, handicap, familial status or national origin,” must satisfy the requirements of other laws that already apply to private schools, and must annually administer and make available to the public “the aggregate test scores of its students on a nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement test, preferably the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards test.” The law also requires staff who have unsupervised contact with children to be fingerprinted.

School choice advocacy groups applauded the bill’s passage. “Arizona parents finally can breathe a sigh of relief,” said Gordon St. Angelo, president and CEO of the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. “Thousands of children will no longer be forced to attend a school simply because of where they live or how much their family earns. Parents will now be free to choose a school based on what’s best for their child.”

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The grade-level enrolling the most private school students in 2003 was kindergarten, with an enrollment of 465,311. At the other end of the K-12 spectrum was the grade enrolling the fewest students: grade 12, with an enrollment of 303,676.

Dispersed throughout the report are a few other statistical tidbits. For example, in 2003-04 the average length of the private school year in days was 180, and the average length of the school day in hours was 6.7. The male/female

student ratio was 50.6 to 49.4 percent. Nearly 96 percent of private schools were coed schools;

2.0 percent were all-girls schools, and 2.8 percent were all-boys schools. Finally, high schools reported in the 2003-04 survey that the previous year’s (2002-03) high school graduation rate was 98.1 percent.

*Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2003-2004 Private*

*School Universe Survey* is available on the NCES Web site at: <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2006319>>.

## Preparing for a Pandemic

Health experts continue to be concerned that the virulent H5N1 bird influenza virus may change into a form that could be easily transmitted from person to person. Because humans would have no history of immunity to the novel virus, it could spread rapidly, causing serious illness across the globe.

Knowing that education is essential for dealing with a pandemic and for lessening its impact, government officials have established a comprehensive Web site (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>) that explains what a pandemic is, assesses risks, and advises the public about prudent preparations. It will also monitor whatever outbreaks might develop.

Health officials warn that if a pandemic were to take hold, children and schools would be a likely path of transmission. Last month, the federal government released checklists to help schools (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/schoolchecklist.pdf>) and child-care facilities ([http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/child\\_care.pdf](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/child_care.pdf)) protect the health and safety of their students and staff in the event of a pandemic. The agencies that produced the checklists, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), plan to provide model plans and training exercises in the near future.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings had this to say about preparing for a potential pandemic: “When it comes to preparing our school community—from preschool all the way to college—there are three steps to take: talk to local health officials and work together to develop a plan; train teachers and administrators to implement the plan; and teach students and parents so they understand what to do in the event of a pandemic. Not Stop, Drop, and Roll—Talk, Train, and Teach.”

Return service requested

## CAPE notes

★ Fast Facts About Private Schools: Sixty-two percent of private secondary schools and 56 percent of public secondary schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses for college credit. (Source: Table 10, *Characteristics of Schools, Districts, Teachers, Principals, and School Libraries in the United States: 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey*, National Center for Education Statistics, March 2006.)

★ Severe weather warnings, terrorist activity, public-safety hazards—they can happen in a blink, and school officials need to know the instant they do.

Alerts about national, regional, or local emergencies are now available through the All-Hazards NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) network. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have collaborated to upgrade the old weather-only network to include homeland-security-related information.

Inexpensive all-hazards weather radios are available at electronics stores and are easily programmed to receive warnings related to specific geographic areas. They remain silent until an alert is about to be broadcast. U.S. Department of Education officials recommend placing the radios in the school's main office or other strategic locations where they can be monitored throughout the day. More information about using the radios in schools is available at: <[http://www.ercm.org/views/documents/NOAA\\_NewsletterV214.pdf](http://www.ercm.org/views/documents/NOAA_NewsletterV214.pdf)>.

★ The U.S. Department of Education has released additional guidance regarding federal assistance for the education of students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. *Volume II Frequently Asked Questions: Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students* clarifies several issues relating to students in private schools.

Perhaps the most consequential clarification is that students who originally attended a school damaged by the hurricanes are considered displaced and eligible for federal assistance if the school's physical location had to change as a result of the hurricane. "This would include schools that moved to other buildings, including other schools or non-school buildings, or were operating the entire school on the original site using portables or other temporary structures such as tents" (question 57). However, "If the school in which students were enrolled on August 22 is still operating in the same facility, in whole or in part, the students attending it are considered to be attending the same school in which they were initially enrolled and would not be eligible displaced students" (question 58).

Another section of the document explains that although private schools enrolling displaced students must waive tuition for such students up to the amount covered by the federal assistance, they need not waive tuition in excess of that amount (question 75). (For most schools, the issue is immaterial since they waived all tuition for displaced students from the start.)

The answer to question 61 advises that parents of displaced students who attended an eligible private school in a given district prior to December 30, 2005, but then moved to a different private school in a different district in the course of the school year have to submit a separate application for federal assistance in each school district.

The new Q&A document, as well as other information about the *Hurricane Education Recovery Act*, is available on the Web site of the U.S. Department of Education at: <<http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/proginfo/index.html>>.

★ The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* brought about significant changes in how states and school districts must serve students with disabilities enrolled by their parents in private schools. In March 2006, the U.S. Department of Education released a Q&A document to address many of the issues surrounding IDEA services to private school students.

How must school district officials consult with private school officials in identifying and serving students? What is the process for making decisions with respect to the services to be provided to eligible children with disabilities? These and a score of other important questions are answered in the document, which is available on the USDE Web site at <<http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/faq-parent-placed.pdf>>.