

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## NAEP Math Results Raise Question: Are Reforms Working?

The latest national test results in math show that the progress fourth-graders have been making since 1990 has stalled, while eighth-graders continue to post modest gains. Predictably, the results have prompted debate about whether the assessment and accountability provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) are having their intended effect on student achievement.

Against this backdrop, students in religious and independent schools, which are not subject to NCLB, continue to show a substantial performance advantage over students in public schools. According to the report, "In 2009, the average mathematics score for fourth-graders attending public schools was 7 points lower than the overall score for students attending private schools." Private school fourth-graders had a mean score of 246, compared to 239 for public school students. At eight grade, the private school advantage grew to 14 points (296 to 282). In 2007, the last time the tests were administered, the private/public performance gap was 7 points in fourth grade and 12 points in eighth grade.

Ten points on the 500-point math scale for the National

Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, represent about one full grade level. The average math score for all fourth-graders in 2009 was 240, while the average for eighth-graders was 283, a 43-point difference over four grades.

"While the scores for eighth-graders in math continue to be encouraging, the failure of our fourth-graders to make progress nationally is a cause for concern," said

David P. Driscoll, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP. "With a lack of progress at fourth-grade and large achievement gaps that are relatively unchanged, we need to re-examine our efforts to improve student achievement in math."

### Call to Action

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said the results "are evidence that we must better equip our schools to improve the knowledge and skills of America's students in mathematics." Saying no one should be satisfied with the results, Duncan called for more reforms—"reforms that will accelerate student achievement." He said

the NAEP scores were "a call to action to reform the teaching and learning of mathematics and other related subjects in order to prepare our students to compete in the global economy."

### Achievement Gaps Persist

Achievement gaps among various racial and ethnic groups continued to persist. In eighth grade, the gap between black and white students was 32 points, while the Hispanic/white gap was 26. The eighth-grade gaps showed no significant change in 2009 compared to either 2007 or 1990.

For eighth-graders, both the black/white gap and the Hispanic/white gap were each four points narrower in private schools than in public schools. In addition,

black eighth-graders in private schools scored 12 points, or more than one full grade, higher than their peers in public schools, with the same 12-point advantage also holding true for Hispanic students.

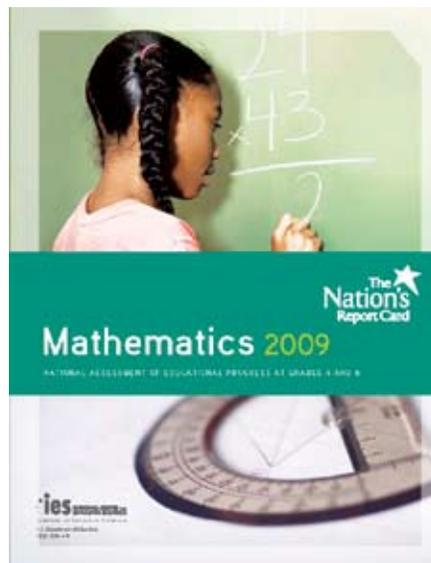
### Achievement Levels

NAEP results are also reported as percentages of students performing at or above three achievement

levels: *basic*, which denotes "partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills"; *proficient*, representing "solid academic performance," and *advanced*, or "superior performance."

Among eighth-graders in 2009, 71 percent of public school students and 85 percent of private school students performed at or above basic; 33 percent of public school students and 47 percent of private school students performed at or above proficient, while students at the advanced level included 7 percent of public school students and 13 percent of private school students. The *No Child Left Behind Act* calls for 100 percent of public school students to be at or above their state's definition of proficient by the year 2014.

A sample of more than 168,000 fourth-graders and 161,000 eighth-graders took the NAEP math assessment this year, drawn from, and representing, a target population of nearly 4 million public and private school students in each grade.



### NAEP Mathematics 2009 Average Scores by Type of School

Grade	Public Schools	Private Schools
Fourth Grade	239	246
Eighth Grade	282	296

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

**CAPE member organizations:**

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

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## CAPE Calls for Equity in Discretionary Grant Programs

Do exemplary private schools exist that could serve as models for education reform across the country? Of course they do. That's why CAPE is protesting the exclusion of religious and independent schools from two discretionary grant programs designed to promote school reform.

In formal comments submitted in October, CAPE urged department officials to amend the proposed priorities for the \$650 million Investing in Innovation Fund, known as "i3," to allow religious and independent schools that have a proven record of serving high-need students to participate. The private school programs, said CAPE, could be examples for improving student achievement on a greater scale.

The i3 fund, part of the economic recovery package enacted earlier this year, is designed to identify and expand programs that have a track record of bringing about student success for high-need students. CAPE's comments, filed October 14, noted that religious and independent schools have an outstanding record of serving students at risk. "By any objective measure of student achievement, such as national and state standardized tests (including NAEP, SAT, ACT), college-going rates, and graduation rates, students in private schools perform well above the national average." CAPE offered as an example of private school success the Cristo Rey Network of Schools, which educates inner-city students through an innovative work-study model and has 99 percent of its graduates accepted into college.

The CAPE filing also pointed out that "numerous well-implemented, well-designed, large-scale experimental studies have documented the effects of various private school programs." By way of example, CAPE noted that Patrick Wolf, the lead researcher for the U.S. Department of Education's gold-standard study of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, which allows students to attend religious and independent schools, recently reported that the program "has proven to be the most effective education policy evaluated by the federal government's official education research arm so far."

### Enlist All Exemplary Schools

"If the Education Department is interested in finding and scaling-up successful programs to improve performance, close the achievement gap, and prepare students for college, the workplace, and life," said CAPE, "it should enlist the efforts

of all schools—public and private—that have a history of exemplary accomplishment."

### Race to the Top

In August, CAPE offered comments on the department's notice of proposed priorities, for the Race to the Top Fund (RTTT). CAPE urged the department to require applicant states to serve private school students and teachers equitably under RTTT in ways that meet the specific needs of such students and teachers.

### Equitable Benefits

CAPE referenced a longstanding principle of federal education programs, which dates back to the establishment in 1965 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, namely, the principle that federal programs that benefit public school students and teachers should provide equitable benefits to comparably situated private school students and teachers. Such equity is mandated in much of federal education law and is based not only on a commitment to fairness, but also on the practical recognition that America's children are educated in a variety of schools and that the nation is best served when all its children are well-educated.

Noting that the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) section of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (ARRA), of which RTTT is a component, is permissive in allowing the equitable participation of private school students, CAPE urged the department to exercise the broad statutory discretion it was given in awarding grants under RTTT by requiring or encouraging applicant states to serve private school students and teachers equitably.

### Investment in a National Treasure

"Religious and independent schools educate the public, contribute to the common good, save taxpayers billions of dollars annually, provide parents with choice in education, and produce informed, caring, and committed citizens," noted the CAPE document. "Their positive effect on students, families, neighborhoods, public school systems, and cities has been dramatic." Stating that officials within the Obama administration understand the value and importance of private schools, the document proposed that "assisting students and teachers in such schools represents a commitment to all children, a preference for equity, and an investment in a national treasure."



## “Let Me Rise” Video Promotes DC Scholarship Program

Kevin Chavous, cofounder and chair of Democrats for Education Reform, would like President Obama to recall his roots, because Chavous believes community organizer Obama would have stood with children and families in support of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. Speaking at the premier in Washington of a powerful video about the program titled *Let Me Rise*, Chavous said the activist Obama of earlier days would have talked with the scholarship families, would have appreciated the struggle they face every day, and would have understood “that hope is a fragile commodity.”

The 30-minute video that Chavous unveiled provides a personal look at the scholarship initiative through interviews with the parents and students whose futures are on the line pending a decision by Congress about the program. Narrated by veteran NPR news analyst Juan Williams and produced by The Heritage Foundation, the video captures in eloquent detail the profound impact of school choice on particular families and children.

Williams says in the video that he has seen many political debates in the course of his career in Washington, but none was more disappointing than when the scholarship students got “caught in the crosshairs” this year of various powerful interest groups. “You’ve got to stand with the kids,” says Williams. And in a plea to opponents of the program, he says, “These are real people that you’re hurting.”

Since 2004, thousands of families, whose average annual income is less than \$22,000, have benefited from the program. A number of those parents and students offer direct and moving testimony about the program’s success throughout the video. Various speakers describe the program as a “godsend,” a “blessing,” and say children are “excelling” and now “have a future.” They urge lawmakers to “look at us...talk to us, listen to us.”

The video is available on the Voices of School Choice Web site ([www.voicesofschoolchoice.org](http://www.voicesofschoolchoice.org)), which promotes the right of parents to choose their child’s school. The site also fea-

tures several short-length videos, including a particularly moving one about the effect that a private school scholarship had on President Obama. In 1971, a 10-year-old Obama received a scholarship to attend the Punahou School in Hawaii. The school had a profound effect on his life, which he later described this way: “There



Kevin Chavous, chair of Democrats for Education Reform, fires-up participants at the “Save School Choice” rally September 30. (Alliance for School Choice photo)

was something about this school that embraced me, gave me support and encouragement, and allowed me to grow and prosper. I am extraordinarily grateful.” As the clip points out, President Obama now has an opportunity to ensure that similar children get the same chance he did—the chance for a future full of hope.

Chavous is currently featured in a 30-second ad that is airing in the DC metropolitan area. The ad starts with a quote from President Obama: “We’re losing several generations of kids, and something has to be done.”

Chavous then says, “In Washington, DC, something is being done, but President Obama is ending

a program that helps low-income kids go to better schools, refusing to let any new children in. I’m a lifelong Democrat, and I support our president. But it’s wrong that he won’t support an education program that helps our kids learn.”

A young student ends the ad: “President Obama, I need a good education right now. You can help. Do it for me.”

In his remarks at The Heritage Foundation introducing the *Let Me Rise* video, Chavous, a former member of the DC Council, said he was recently asked by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan why the DC scholarship initiative was such a major issue with him, and he told Duncan there is nothing more important than to make sure children are educated and have a promising future. He suggested that the administration’s talk about improving the lives of millions of schoolchildren across the country is problematic against the backdrop of its failure to support the scholarship program, because school reform “starts with educating one child.” If the country can’t educate the 1,700 students in the DC program, “then shame on us, ’cause we can’t do it for anyone else.”

## School Violence

Reacting to the beating death of Chicago high school student Derrion Albert, Education Secretary Arne Duncan last month called for a national dialogue to address youth violence. “We came here today to join with you and with communities all across America to call for a national conversation on values,” Duncan said.

Religious and independent schools have something to contribute to that conversation, just as they have something to add to the discussion about school reform (see story on p. 2).

No school or community of schools is free of hate-related words and actions, but government reports on school crime and safety consistently show private schools to have clear advantages when it comes to student safety and security. In 2007, students in public schools were five times more likely than students in private schools to report that gangs were present at school or that they were personally threatened with harm.

Religious and independent schools transmit more than academic skills. They also teach the lessons that count most in life: lessons about spirituality, ethics, love, values. They offer caring, safe, and nurturing environments. They emphasize the education of the whole child. They combat nihilism by engaging students in discussions about life’s purpose and by calling them to serve others.

In his remarks in Chicago, Duncan said the issue is “about our values. It’s about who we are as a society. And it’s about taking responsibility for our young people to teach them what they need to know to live side-by-side and deal with their differences without anger or violence.”

One way to counter youth violence is to help maintain schools that are known for teaching values and for providing a stabilizing force in the community and in the lives of the students they serve.

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## CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** In 2008, 19 percent of all private schools had students who received services under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). Such services are focused on providing high-need students with extra support in math and reading. (Statistic Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey)

★ Students with special needs in Washington State may now receive services at religious schools thanks to new regulations adopted last month by the state's superintendent of public instruction. The lifting of a state ban on on-site services came in response to a lawsuit filed by the Institute for Justice.

"This is a victory not only for children with special needs but also for educational liberty," said Michael Bindas, a staff attorney with the Institute. "Kids with special needs in this state will no longer be singled out by the government and denied the services they need simply because their parents chose a religious school for them."

The new regulations relate to services provided under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), a federal law that helps fund special education for students with disabilities. A proportionate share of IDEA funds is supposed to be spent on children in private schools. Washington State officials had allowed IDEA services to be provided on site for students in non-religious private schools, but not for students in religious schools.

"The old policy was incredibly disruptive and stigmatizing for kids with special needs," explained Bindas. "No parent should be forced to choose between her child's physical needs and the school she believes is best for her child."

The Washington Federation of Independent Schools (WFIS), a state affiliate of CAPE, worked with IJ on this issue.

★ In more news from the Institute for Justice, last month the Arizona Supreme Court in effect ended legal challenges to Arizona's Corporate Tuition Tax Credit program by agreeing not to review the Arizona Court of Appeals' March 2009 decision upholding the program as constitutional.

"Today's decision brings an end to this frivolous legal challenge to Arizona's Corporate Tuition Tax Credit program," declared Tim Keller, executive director of the Institute for Justice's Arizona Chapter. "The nearly three thousand parents and children relying on this scholarship program may now breathe a sigh of relief being fully reassured that their tax-credit-funded scholarships are constitutional."

★ Sixty-three outstanding elementary and middle school administrators were honored October 23 at an awards banquet in Washington, DC, as 2009 National Distinguished Principals.

The NDP program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of Elementary School

Principals, was established in 1984 to recognize public and private school principals who make superior contributions to their schools and communities. Private school honorees are selected by a special committee that CAPE helps organize.

"Great principals are leaders who can change belief systems, support teachers, and ensure all students have access to good instruction and opportunities to reach their academic potential," Education Secretary Duncan said in connection with the award announcement.

CAPE salutes all award recipients, including those from private schools: Sandy Ammentorp, First Lutheran School Torrance, Torrance, CA; Joann Borchetta, St. Cecilia School, Stamford, CT; Barbara A. Cole, St. John Neumann Catholic School, Columbia, SC; Gail J. Holzer, Redeemer Lutheran School, Oakmont, PA; Mary Jane Koberlein, St. Gerard Majella School, Kirkwood, MO; Kalmen M. Rosenbaum, Torah Day School of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA.

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