

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Private School Students Surpass National AP Average

In a cover story that captured the attention of educators across the country, *Newsweek* last May claimed to identify the top 100 public high schools in America. Using a single and controversial measure, the magazine ranked schools on a score produced by dividing the number

of Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) tests taken by all students at a school by the number of graduating seniors. Although anyone familiar with the complexity of life in a high school would cringe at the idea of summarizing any school's worth with a solitary number,

*Newsweek* nonetheless defended its metric as "one of the best measures available to compare a wide range of students' readiness for higher-level work." At the same time, the magazine acknowledged that its method fails to "tell the whole story about a school."

The *Newsweek* controversy aside, research shows strong correlations between a student's exposure to a rigorous high school curriculum and her success in college.

Working on the assumption that Advanced Placement courses are one indicator of how well schools help students work at high levels and prepare for the challenges of college, CAPE obtained summary data

about AP courses in private schools from the College Board, which administers the program.

### Disproportionately High Share

Of the 1,861,154 AP tests taken by students in public and private schools in 2004, private school students took 293,895, or 16 percent. To provide some perspective, U.S. Census Bureau data for 2003-04 show that private schools enrolled 7.5 percent of the country's secondary school students. Thus, private schools account for a disproportionately high

number of AP exams.

The numbers are even more impressive when examining the share of students who score 3 or higher on the AP test's 1-5 scoring scale. (The College Board considers a score of 3 or higher "predictive of college success," and most colleges offer credit for such scores.) Students in public and private high schools received a grade of 3 or higher on 1,145,851 AP exams in 2004. That amounts to a combined success

rate of 62 percent. Students in private schools sat for 293,895 AP exams and scored a 3 or higher on 210,401 of them, for a success rate of 72 percent. Looked

at from a different angle, private schools, which, it is worth repeating, enrolled 7.5 percent of high school students in 2003-04, accounted for 18 percent of all AP exams on which students achieved scores predictive of college success.

The mean AP exam grade for private school students in 2004 was 3.25, and the mean grade for public school students was 2.90.

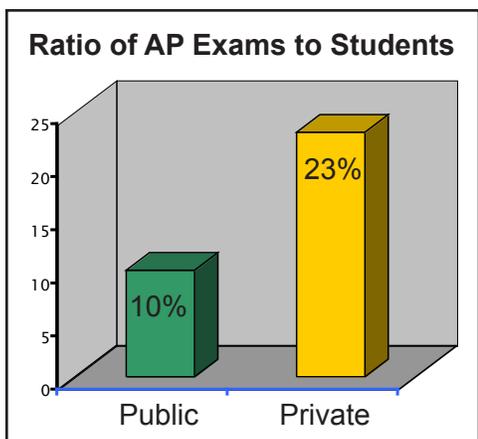
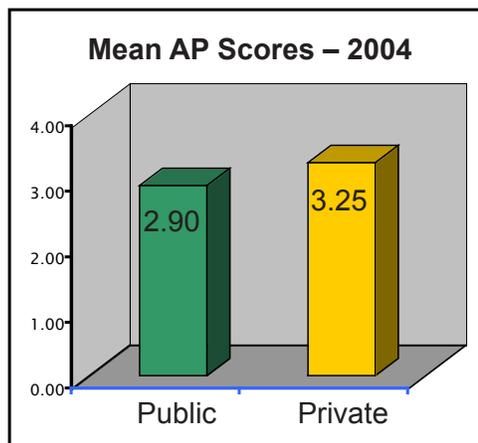
### Ratio of Exams to Students

While *Newsweek* provided the ratio of AP exams to graduates, CAPE is able to provide the ratio of AP exams to student enrollment. CAPE's approach uses the entire high school population as a base, rather than just those students who successfully make it to graduation. In 2004, the ratio of exams to students was 23 percent in private schools and 10 percent in public schools. Put another way, 23 AP exams were administered for every 100 private school students in grades 9-12, and 10 AP exams were administered for every 100 public school students. Keep in mind that total enrollment in grades 9-12 is the denominator here, even though most AP examinees (83 percent, according to the College Board) are 11th and 12th graders.

### Narrower Achievement Gap

A continuing challenge in American education is the achievement gap between white students and black students. Unfortunately, the gap persists in the AP program, with African American students significantly underrepresented and their scores significantly lower. Still, exam rates and scores are dramatically higher in private schools than public schools, and the black/white achievement gap is significantly narrower.

The average AP score for African Americans in 2004 was 2.03 for students in public schools and 2.75 for students



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# CAPE

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Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.  
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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Friends Council on Education  
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National Association of Episcopal Schools  
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National Catholic Educational Association  
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Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education  
Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools  
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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in private schools. For white students the average score was 2.99 in public schools and 3.27 in private schools. Simple subtraction yields a black/white achievement gap of 0.52 in private schools and 0.96 in public schools, nearly twice the private school gap.

African American students in public and private schools in 2004 took 86,840 AP exams. Private school students accounted for 8,357, or 9.6 percent, of those exams and 16.8 percent of exams with a score of 3 or higher—scores predictive of college success. In public schools, the percentage of AP tests taken by African American students that yielded a score of 3 or higher was 29.2 percent, while in private schools it was 55.3 percent, a figure approaching the 62 percent average national AP success rate for all students in public and private schools.

Among African American students in grades 9-12 in 2004, the ratio of AP exams to students was 2.87 percent in public schools and 9.61 percent in private schools.

## Higher Scores Across the Board

The private school AP score advantage held true for every racial and ethnic group whose results are reported by the College Board. Specifically, private school scores exceeded public school scores by the following margins: American Indian/Alaskan (0.54); Asian/Asian American (0.29);

Black/African American (0.72); Latino—Chicano/Mexican American (0.48); Latino—Puerto Rican (0.49); Latino—Other (0.40); White (0.28); Other (0.45); All Students (0.35).

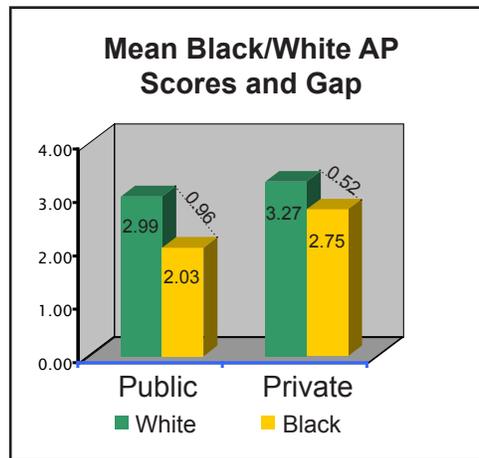
## AP Summary Data

Earlier this year the College Board released its first-ever *Advanced Placement Report to the Nation*, which showed an increase in the percentage of high school students succeeding in AP courses. According to the College Board, “every single state and the District of Columbia saw a greater proportion of its class of 2004 score a 3 or higher [on one or more AP exams] than occurred within its class of 2000.”

Nationally, 14,144 schools participated in the AP program in 2004, including 11,196 public schools and 2,948 private schools. The typical school offers seven different AP courses.

Of the 34 AP exams offered by the College Board, the ten most popular among private school students were: English Literature and Composition (40,473); US History (39,684); Calculus AB (29,863); English Language and Composition (25,136); Biology (19,623); European History (14,939); U.S. Government and Politics (14,540); Spanish Language (13,133); Chemistry (12,243); Statistics (8,696).

Among all AP exam takers, the three most popular exams (in rank order) were U.S. History, English Literature, and English Language.



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of the extent of services to children in private schools.

On another reporting matter, CAPE offered language that would require school districts to transmit to their state education departments the signed affirmations from private school officials confirming that timely and meaningful consultation has taken place.

Existing regulations on IDEA include language that in effect reminds states and school districts of their freedom to exceed the minimum requirements of federal law in serving private school students with disabilities. The proposed regulations omit this reminder, and CAPE believes the effect of that omission could be an inadvertent signal that IDEA now prohibits services in excess of federal requirements. CAPE has asked the department to retain this provision, arguing that states and school districts should

not be deterred in any way, inadvertently or otherwise, from offering additional services to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Finally, CAPE's comments ask for an amendment requiring that the process for developing a child's individual education program take into account the child's social and cultural background. The regulations require consideration of such factors in determining whether a child is a child with a disability; the proposed amendment would logically extend consideration of the child's social and cultural background to the IEP process.

The U.S. Department of Education will be reviewing comments and revising the regulations over the next several months, with the hope of publishing final regulations before the end of the year. CAPE's comments on the proposed regulations are available at [www.capenet.org/new.html](http://www.capenet.org/new.html).

## CAPE Offers Comments on Proposed IDEA Rules

All summer long, thousands of bleary-eyed advocates have been pouring over 112 pages of the Federal Register, parsing each sentence and probing each phrase to determine the precise meaning of the proposed regulations for implementing the new federal law governing the education of children with disabilities. To be sure, these assiduous monitors have not overlooked a single section, paragraph, or clause in their determination to meet the September 6 deadline for offering comments.

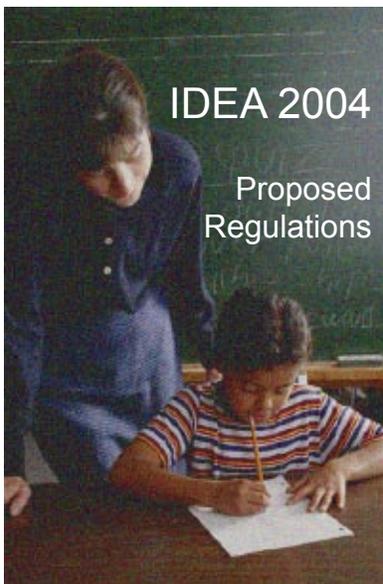
The private school community has been playing an active role in the review and comment process. Because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 includes important new changes affecting students placed by their parents in private schools, and because the final regulations will be the final word on putting those changes into practice, CAPE and a number of its member organizations have been hard at work scrutinizing the sections of the proposed rules that relate to services for students in private schools. The cooperative review effort, coordinated by Michelle Doyle of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has resulted in various groups individually and collectively submitting comparable comments to the U.S. Department of Education, both supporting the department's proposed regulations and occasionally offering suggestions for change.

### Autonomy in Hiring

CAPE's comments support the department's affirmation in the regulations that requirements relating to public school teachers do not apply to private school teachers. Respecting the autonomy and independence of private schools, neither the No Child Left Behind Act nor the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act imposes requirements on private school teachers. CAPE's position is that private schools, which are directly accountable to parents, should be free to hire teachers that reflect the particular community's standards of excellence and approach to pedagogy.

CAPE also supports a provision in the proposed regulations that clears up any lingering murkiness about which private school students public school districts must serve. IDEA 2004 requires school districts to find and evaluate

“parentally placed children with disabilities attending private schools located in the local educational agency.” For some reason, the new law's insistence that private school children who attend school in the district should be the focus of the district's efforts, rather than private school children who reside in the district (the previous law's standard), has been misinterpreted by some. The proposed regulations, however, clearly reflect the intent of the statute on this point.



### Similar Evaluations

Among its suggestions for amending the regulations, CAPE offered language clarifying that school districts must evaluate private school children with disabilities a way that is similar to the evaluations they provide comparable students in public schools. CAPE also wants the regulations to reflect the intent of

both the House and Senate that the majority of services to children with disabilities in private schools be direct services, that is, services provided directly by a professional to a child. (Sometimes school districts choose to serve private school students indirectly, such as through consultations with teachers.) CAPE also proposed a requirement that services to children in private schools be provided on site unless there is a compelling rationale for the services to be provided off site.

### Annual Reporting

Another CAPE suggestion relates to annual reporting. A key provision in IDEA 2004 is the requirement that school districts record and report to the state education agency the number of private school children evaluated, the number determined to be children with disabilities, and the number served. This new data will provide for the first time an effective means for monitoring compliance with these critical provisions of the statute. CAPE is seeking an amendment that would require state education departments to collect and transmit annually to the U.S. Department of Education the data on services to private school students that they collect from school districts. CAPE is also requesting that the department include such data in its annual report on IDEA, thus providing lawmakers, educators, and the public with a comprehensive assessment

## New IDEA Memo on Private Schools

Everyone agrees that the Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) includes significant changes in how school districts must serve students with disabilities in private schools. But the timetable and process for implementing those changes—especially during the interim between when the law took effect (July 1, 2005) and when the final regulations will be promulgated (expected by December 2005)—have been the source of some confusion. A recent memorandum to chief state school officers from the U.S. Department of Education has helped clear up the confusion.

The USDE memo provides guidance on what agency is responsible for delivering services to parentally placed private school children with disabilities and how the agency is to determine the share of federal funds it must set aside to serve those children.

Like its predecessor, IDEA 2004 requires each school district to spend a proportionate amount of its federal IDEA funds on students with disabilities in private schools. Under the previous IDEA, the funds were calculated based on the number of private school students with disabilities residing in the district, but under IDEA 2004 they are calculated based on the number of students attending private schools within in the district. The USDE memo is crystal clear on this point.

Because school districts may not yet have an accurate count on the number of students with disabilities attending private schools in September 2005, the department has advised states and districts to use, for the 2005-06 school year only, “the best available data” to calculate the proportionate amount of funds to be expended on those children.

A copy of the USDE memorandum is available online at [www.capanet.org/new.html](http://www.capanet.org/new.html).

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## CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** The College Board last month touted the upswing in SAT math scores for the high school class of 2005. “The average SAT math scores continued their strong upward trend increasing from 518 in 2004 to 520 this year,” read the press release. Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, added, “I am encouraged by the improvement demonstrated in math, a fundamental skill that students need to succeed in college and, later, in a highly competitive global marketplace.”

Overlooked in the news release, however, was the significant role played by private school students in the math uptick. It turns out that public school math scores in 2004 and 2005 actually stayed stagnant at 515, while religious and independent schools logged gains—from 531 to 534 for religious schools and from 574 to 577 for independent schools. Private school students account for 17 percent of SAT test takers, although they only enroll about 7.5 percent of the nation’s secondary school students. As for the verbal component of the SATs, public school students scored 505, religious school students 539, and independent school students 553, yielding a national average of 508.

★ Here’s new evidence of how the phrasing of a poll question can sway the results. In its annual poll on public attitudes toward education, which was released last month, Phi Delta Kappa asked, “Do you favor or oppose allowing students

and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?” Thirty-eight percent of respondents said they favored the idea, and 57 percent opposed it.

But in a Harris Interactive poll commissioned by the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, the question was asked this way: “Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose any school, public or private, to attend using public funds?” The results were dramatically different, with 60 percent favoring and 33 percent opposing.

The Friedman Foundation’s poll was conducted August 12-15, 2005, among a nationwide sample of 1,000 adults 18 and over. “The issue is too important to muddy the waters with biased polls,” said Robert C. Enlow, the foundation’s executive director.

★ A new report from the National Governors Association recommends that states consider a host of school choice initiatives, including “providing state tax or financial assistance for students to attend private or parochial K–12 schools.”

Regarding vouchers and scholarships to

private schools, the report notes the following: “Some research shows the threat of voucher competition can spur underperforming schools to improve at a greater rate than underperforming schools that are not facing such a threat. Some random

assignment studies also indicate higher levels of achievement for students attending private schools using a voucher.”

“This publication will be a valuable tool for governors and other policymakers to help implement school choice options, as well as improve and expand existing school choice policies,” said Dane Linn, director of the NGA Center’s Education Division. “Many governors find providing

students and parents with greater choice in the available educational options creates a more competitive environment. In turn, competition helps spur schools to improve performance and better meet the needs of their students.”

The report, *Providing Quality Choice Options in Education*, is available as a PDF document from the Web site of the National Governors Association at [http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/EDUCATION\\_CHOICE.PDF](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/EDUCATION_CHOICE.PDF).

