

Council for American Private Education

CAPEoutlook

Voice of America's private schools

Private School Students Boost National SAT Scores

The headlines in early October captured some of the story: “2014 SAT Scores Remain Stagnant,” “Student Performance Stalls on SAT.” They reflected what the College Board itself reported: SAT scores for the 2014 crop of high school graduates were stubbornly stuck at levels “similar to other recent senior classes.”

But the fixation on stagnation largely ignored another important element of the story: scores varied significantly by the type of school students attended. It turns out that

students who graduated from religious and independent schools had scores that substantially outdistanced those of students in public schools and actually helped lift the national average. Mean SAT scores for public school seniors were 492 in reading, 478 in writing, and 501 in math. Comparable scores for students in independent schools were 535, 542, and 580. Meanwhile, students in religious schools scored 533, 527, and 537 (see table).

More Than Their Share

Of the 1, 672,395 college-bound seniors who took the SAT, 245,141, or 15 percent, attended private schools. If you compare private school students only to those students for whom the type of school attended was known (121,215 students fell in the “other or unknown” category), the private school percentage reaches 16 percent. That share is itself disproportionately large since only about 8 percent of all high school students in the country are enrolled in private schools. And not only do such schools produce more than their share of high school graduates who take the SAT,

they also produce an above-average share of students who ultimately attend college.

Moreover, the SAT test takers from private schools help boost the national average. Mean SAT scores for all the nation's seniors, regardless of the school they attended, was 497 in reading, 487 in writing, and 513 in math, figures significantly

higher than the scores attained by public school students alone.

Benchmark

The College Board has developed the “SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark,”

designed to “identify students who are likely to be ready to take college-entry, credit-bearing courses in college and not need remediation.” A benchmark score of 1550 on the combined assessments of

college and career workforce training. It's time to do something about it.”

Brighter Picture

Fortunately the picture is not as bleak for students in private schools. Average scores for 2014 seniors in religious and independent schools significantly surpassed the benchmark. For college-bound seniors in independent schools, the combined average SAT score was 1657, or 107 points above the benchmark. The average for religious school students was 1597, exceeding the benchmark by 47 points. Public school students, however, scored 1471, a benchmark deficit of 79 points.

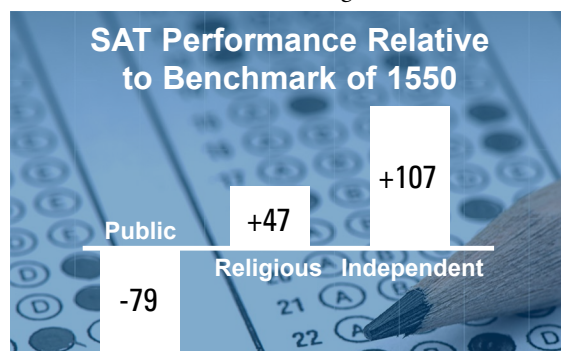
The College Board reports that students who meet the benchmark are more likely to enroll in a four-year college. Seventy-eight percent of benchmark students do so, compared to only 46 percent of students who do not meet the benchmark. Students above the benchmark are also more likely to complete a bachelor's degree within four years. Fifty-four percent of bench-

mark students do so, compared to 27 percent of non-benchmark students. Those attaining the benchmark are also “more likely to complete a high school core curriculum, which is defined

as four or more years of English, three or more years of mathematics, three or more years of natural science, and three or more years of social science and history.”

Cyndie Schmeiser, College Board chief of assessment, said, “The latest SAT results reaffirm that we must address the issue of preparedness much earlier and in a more focused way.”

[Photos: © uwimages/Dollar Photo Club]



SAT Scores Class of 2014			
Schools	Reading	Writing	Math
Independent	535	542	580
Religious	533	527	537
Public	492	478	501
National Mean	497	487	513

of 2014 met or exceeded the benchmark. The College Board reported that the percentage of students meeting the benchmark has also stagnated, remaining “virtually unchanged over the last several years.”

David Coleman, College Board president and CEO, said, “For a long time, institutions like ours have been reporting that too many students aren't ready for

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 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
 Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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13017 Wisteria Drive #457
 Germantown, MD 20874
 (tel) 301-916-8460
 (fax) 301-916-8485
 (email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org

Webinar Helps Schools Develop Value Narrative

At a time when a growing number of attractive educational options are available to parents, what exactly prompts them to choose a private school, sometimes at considerable personal sacrifice? The simple answer is that they value the school more than the alternatives, but the reality is that the traits that tip the scale differ from parent to parent. Understanding what parents value about a school and promoting that value narrative is the key to sustaining private education.

Dr. Steve Robinson, president of the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS), has done considerable thinking, speaking, and writing on value narratives. On October 15, Dr. Robinson offered a webinar for CAPE's board of directors and state CAPE leaders on the importance of developing the value narrative for private school sustainability.

The webinar is now available online.

Why Enroll?

Examining why parents decide to enroll their children in private schools, Robinson puts forth a formula that involves three factors: the family's ability to pay tuition, the value differential, and competing values. The ability to pay is largely dependent on annual income, family savings, financial aid, and other resources (for example, grandparents who generously cover the cost of tuition). Value differential is the difference between the perceived value of the private school and that of alternative schools (typically public schools). Competing values are the other activities and commodities that compete for a family's discretionary income. A second car, a bigger house, or a trip to Europe might qualify.

The more a family can afford tuition and the more it sees the school as valuable, the greater the chances of enrollment. But if alternative schools are attractive and the pull of competing values is strong, the likelihood of enrollment decreases.

Value Narrative

Of all the factors in play during an enrollment decision, the one variable that a private school can largely influence is how parents perceive the school's value. That is what the value narrative is all about. Robinson describes the narrative as "the overarching story of what makes the school special," and he argues that perfecting

the value narrative is the "one thing that schools can do to have the greatest impact on sustaining enrollments and thereby sustaining the school financially."

Delivering What Families Value

One way to develop the narrative is to assess what families really value and how the school is performing against those values. To help with that process, Robinson has developed a matrix that charts, on the vertical line, the attributes that families value, and on the horizontal line,

the qualities the school delivers. The elements that families highly value and the school does very well constitute the sweet spot of the value narrative. Attributes that families want and the school doesn't do well are opportunities to improve the school's

value. And qualities that parents have no interest in are potential hindrances or distractions for the school—unless, of course, they are essential components of the school's central mission.

Robinson cautions that when school officials begin an honest inventory of what parents want and how the school measures up, they should suspend preconceptions. He calls it a "useful and healthy exercise" for administrators to forget about what they think parents want and instead survey the community to discover what is actually the case.

Value Narrative Survey

SAIS has developed a value narrative survey that schools can use to determine the value that parents and other stakeholders place on specific qualities (for example, school safety, academic rigor, caring teachers) and how they think the school measures up. The report covers multiple items in eight different categories (curriculum and programming, faculty, athletics, fine arts, clubs and other curriculars, safety, preparatory, diversity, technology) and identifies for each item and category the alignment (or lack thereof) between stakeholder expectations and the school's perceived performance. More information about the survey is available at www.sais.org/surveys.

Dr. Robinson's webinar, which was produced by the Southern Association of Independent Schools, is available on the SAIS YouTube channel at <http://youtu.be/5dfMeKFwFuI>.



Satellite Broadcast Delivers Professional Development

Educators are often agog about using the latest instructional technology to improve student learning, but how quick are they to use it to advance their own learning? The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), a member of CAPE, recently demonstrated that digital instruction is not just for students. The organization recently used cutting-edge technology to deliver an array of professional development opportunities to 12,000 educators assembled at 132 satellite sites across the United States and around the world.

Called NEXUS Live, the event, which took place October 16-17, was broadcast from Woodstream Christian Academy in Mitchellville, MD, where the sanctuary was transformed into a network-quality studio with state-of-the-art set design, lighting, and sound. Multiple cameras (one on a crane), roving mics, and even a green room for next-up presenters conveyed a clear commitment to technical excellence.

The lineup of instructors was impressive as well, including Dr. Robert Marzano, a noted education researcher; Jon Bergmann, a pioneer in the “Flipped Classroom” movement, and Drs. Harry and Rosemary Wong, authors of *The First Days of School*, a guide to effective teaching.

Shared Journey

ACSI President Dr. Dan Egeler, who also serves as CAPE’s treasurer, spoke on the power of relationships, challenging teachers to engage in “quiet acts of honor” that can change the lives of students forever. He reminded participants that “spiritual formation is a pilgrimage, a shared journey between teacher and learner.” Students mature spiritually through authentic communities of faith in which all participants grow together.

Drawing from the work of Dr. Christine Pohl, a Christian ethicist, Egeler identified four traits of healthy faith communities: hospitality, gratitude, truth telling, and promise keeping. He expanded on the last two.

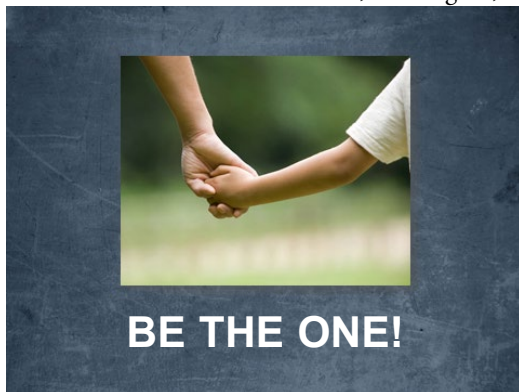
Truth Telling

Egeler explained that because most people want to be good or at least appear to be good, we are “prone toward hypocrisy, duplicity, and deception” as a device for keeping up appearances, enhancing our image, and covering up

failures. Truthfulness is often a struggle, and “a community that is truthful will not necessarily be tidy.” However, part of being truthful is being vulnerable, which he called “daring greatly.” “We must dare to show up and let ourselves be seen,” he said, adding that a willingness to be vulnerable is a measure of the depth of one’s courage.

Promise Keeping

Another “key pillar of a healthy community of faith,” said Egeler, is promise keeping. He



called promises “the internal framework for every relationship and every community” that serve as hidden supports, which are often unnoticed until they collapse. Educators need “to help our children learn to assess the kinds of commitments they should make,” ensuring that such com-

mitments are appropriate, realistic, and centered on others.

And they need not be grand commitments. Sometimes promise keeping is simply a matter of being faithful to one’s everyday responsibilities, so teachers should regularly recognize students who, say, consistently do their homework or live up to classroom expectations of good behavior.

Be the One

Egeler closed with the Gospel passage about 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus, with only one of them returning to give thanks and praise. He challenged teachers to be the exception. “Be the one to live a life marked by consistent quiet acts of honor. Be the one to live a life that intentionally embraces hospitality. Be the one to live a life that cultivates a heart of gratitude. Be the one to live a life that has the courage to be transparent, vulnerable and embrace truth telling and thereby dare greatly.”

Upcoming Rebroadcast

ACSI, which is comprised of nearly 24,000 member Christian schools in more than 100 nations, has been sponsoring an annual NEXUS event since 2011. The 2014 edition will be rebroadcast November 24–25 to 16 sites in several states, Grand Cayman, and Haiti.

More information about NEXUS is available on ACSI’s Web site at: <www.acsiglobal.org/home-2/events/nexuslive-2014>.

[Note: Egeler’s quotes are from his speaker notes.]

Healing Divisions

Private schools help heal religious divisions. That’s the premise of a recent article by Dr. Greg Foster, senior fellow with the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Published by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, the article challenges a recent ruling by an Oklahoma County district court judge declaring a state voucher program for special-needs students unconstitutional. The order has been stayed pending appeal.

Foster argues that if Oklahoma “wants to be a state where people of many beliefs share the public square in peace, there are both principled and practical reasons to expand school choice as far as possible.” He goes on to declare that “school choice is actually one of the best ways ever discovered to promote religious freedom, pluralism, and peace,” noting that a “large body of empirical research (reviewed by Patrick Wolf in an article titled ‘Civics Exam’ in the journal *Education Next*) finds that private school students are more likely to support civil rights for those whose beliefs they find highly unfavorable.”

Why are private schools better at teaching tolerance? One possible reason, says Foster, “is that private schools are more effective at teaching in general. If they teach math and reading better, why not respect for the rights of others?”

But more important is that private schools “can not only tell you that you should respect others, they can tell you why.” They have the freedom to offer an explanation to students based on a comprehensive worldview. Public schools, on the other hand, “cannot ground moral imperatives in a view of the universe that justifies them.” Any substantial explanation they might give would likely offend certain parents.

You can read Foster’s full article at <www.ocpathink.org/articles/2832>.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Dr. Temple Grandin, an animal scientist who was diagnosed with autism as a child, shares insights about education in a moving **two-minute video** from the American Montessori Society.

Grandin talks about her passion for art as a child, an ability encouraged by her mother and teachers. “If I hadn’t had art, I would have gone nowhere,” she says.

Noting that Montessori schools incorporate a great deal of hands-on activities, Grandin decries the absence of such activities in other schools. People have different styles of thinking, she explains, describing herself as a “total visual thinker.”

The video’s powerful message is that “the world needs all kinds of thinkers” and Montessori education “values each child as a unique individual and recognizes that children learn in different ways.”

★ As Texas prepares for its 84th legislative session, which starts in January, the Texas Private Schools Association (TPSA), an affiliate of CAPE, is working to educate lawmakers and the public about the benefits of tax credit scholarships. In a recently-released video, TPSA Executive Director Laura Colangelo explains that such a program would allow corporations to donate

to a nonprofit scholarship organization in exchange for a state tax credit. The scholarship organizations would then distribute funds to help “families in need who want to choose private schools for their children.” Colangelo emphasizes that the program “is not a voucher” and does not take away “any money that was dedicated to public schools.” Instead, it is a “way for corporations to use their tax money in a way that they see fit.” View the video at <http://youtu.be/RQrTeaKB9es>.

★ Organizations looking to start a private school in states with school choice programs now have a handy resource, thanks to Andrew Catt, a research analyst for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. Released October 30, *The School Starter Checklist* compiles statistical data for each state’s choice program along with the regulations affecting private schools in the state.

“As parent demand for educational options continues to grow,” writes Catt, the compilation is part of the foundation’s “ongoing effort to address the supply side of private school choice and thus meet the diverse needs of America’s students.” The checklist is available on the foundation’s Web site at www.edchoice.org.

★ Thanks to a ruling October 27 by the New Mexico Court of Appeals, religious school students in the state can continue to receive textbooks and other education media generally available to all the state’s students. The New Mexico Association of Nonpublic Schools (NMANS), a state CAPE affiliate, was an intervenor in the case.

Plaintiffs challenged the Instructional Material Law on grounds that it violated several provisions of the state’s constitution, including the state’s Blaine amendment, which prohibits using state funds “for the support of any sectarian, denominational or private school.”

“Today’s ruling allows state legislatures to focus on educating children, regardless of where they go to school,” said Eric Baxter, senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which, along with New Mexico firm Modrall Sperling, represented students and NMANS in defending the law.

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