

Council for American Private Education

CAPEoutlook

Voice of America's private schools

Federal Report Looks at Crime and Safety in Schools

One of the top expectations parents have of schools is that they be safe and secure. Mothers don't want their sons to be threatened or hurt; fathers don't want their daughters taunted or bullied, and everyone wants schools where learning can occur without fear, disruption, or disorder.

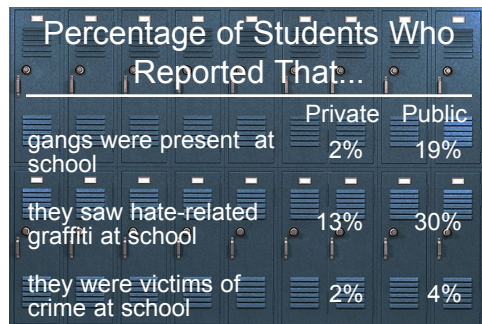
A recent federal report describes in great detail how well schools are meeting those expectations. Produced by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the U.S. Department of Justice, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2013* offers the most recent data on what it describes as "the current state of school crime and safety across the nation," covering such topics as "victimization, teacher injury, bullying and cyber-bullying, school conditions, fights, weapons, availability and student use of drugs and alcohol, [and] student perceptions of personal safety at school."

Data by Type of School

The document examines the data through various filters, including the type of school students attend. According to the report, "In 2011, a higher percentage of students ages 12–18 attending public schools reported being victimized than students attending private schools (4 vs. 2 percent)." The measure covers criminal victimization at school during the previous six months, including theft, violent crimes, simple assault, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault. Looking at theft alone, it turns out that the "percentage of students reporting theft was also higher at public schools (3 percent) than at private

schools (1 percent) in 2011."

It should be noted, however, that the term "at school" is defined rather expansively to include the school building itself, school grounds, a school bus, and even the trip to and from school.



school, compared with 2 percent of students attending private schools." Similarly, "approximately 30 percent of public school students reported seeing hate-related graffiti at school compared with 13 percent of private school students."

Bullying

Bullying continues to be a problem in both public and private schools. "Twenty-eight percent of public school students reported being bullied at school, compared with 21 percent of private school students." A positive development is that the percentages in 2011 were lower than in 2007, "when 32 percent of public school students and 29 percent of private school students reported being bullied at school."

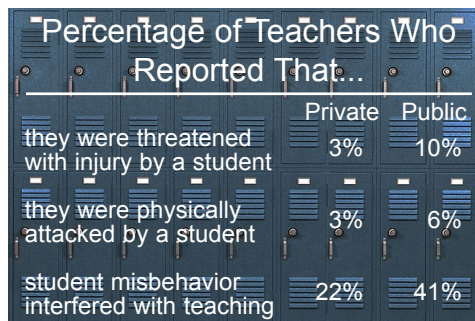
Specific types of bullying varied by sector as well. "Higher percentages of public school students than of private school students also reported that they were made

fun of, called names, or insulted (18 vs. 14 percent), were the subject of rumors (19 vs. 13 percent), were threatened with harm (5 vs. 2 percent), and were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on (8 vs. 5 percent)."

Looking at two additional measures of school safety, in 2011, "a higher percentage of students in public schools (4 percent) than of students in private schools (2 percent) reported being afraid of attack or harm at school" and "a higher percentage of students in public schools (5 percent) than in private schools (2 percent) reported avoiding one or more places in school" because of such fear.

Teachers

Concerns about personal wellbeing often inform a teacher's decision on where to work. Teachers tend not to like being subject to sassy backtalk, let alone threats and violence. The report notes, "During the 2011–12 school year, a higher percentage of public than private school teachers reported being threatened with injury (10 vs. 3 percent) or being physically attacked (6 vs. 3 percent) by a student from their school."



Of course, bad behavior in the classroom generally does not take on such extreme forms. The report notes: "A higher percentage of public school teachers (41 percent) than of private school teachers (22 percent) reported that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching in 2011–12. In addition, 38 percent of public school teachers reported that student tardiness and class cutting interfered with their teaching, compared with 19 percent of private school teachers." [photo ©alswart/Dollar Photo Club]

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Marco Rubio and Condoleezza Rice Promote Parent Choice

Two prominent national figures offered striking insights recently about why parents should be able to choose their child's school. U.S. Senator Marco Rubio and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice shared the stage November 20 as keynote speakers at the National Summit on Education Reform in Washington, DC. Journalist Juan Williams moderated their discussion.

Dr. Rice, who as a child attended segregated schools in Birmingham, Alabama, said that those who struggled for equality back in the 1960s "would be disappointed today in what is available to minority kids and to poor kids." She said the new civil rights challenge is to win "a high quality education for every child."

Unequal

A problem today, said Rice, is that "we have a public school system that is, at its very essence, unequal." Parents of means can move to a wealthy community where the schools are good or can choose a private school. But poor children, many of whom are minority children, are "stuck in failing neighborhood schools." She said the message of choice advocates is to "give parents who don't otherwise have a means a chance to send their children to a school that might work for them." To be sure, the public school system has to be fixed, she said, but "in the meantime, we can't afford to lose generation after generation of kids."

Immoral and Outrageous

Senator Rubio said that in a nation "that has distinguished itself across history by equality of opportunity," it is "immoral and outrageous that the only people in America today that do not choose where their children go to school are poor people."

To those who argue that school choice takes money from public schools, Rubio's response is that the "money doesn't belong to the school," it "belongs to the kids." Society has to be honest that unless a child who attends a failing school gets into a better learning environment, the child is "going to struggle to succeed." He said some parents may choose a faith-based school, others a school that specializes in a particular focus, but they need to have choices. "The fed-

eral government loves to tell people what to do with money," he said. "I would love the federal government to turn over more of that money to states to allow the states to design innovative ways to use Title I or Head Start to provide choices."

Bigger and Better Dreams

To illustrate the power of choice, Senator Rubio told the story of a single mother, struggling to pay the bills, whose child was able to go to a faith-based school. The child is not only learning to read and write, but is also growing in faith. Horizons have been expanded, and dreams of the future are "bigger and better." He said there are "tens of thousands" of such stories across the country. The notion that government personnel "somehow are going to love and care about that child more than that child's mother" is "ridiculous," he said.

Variety and Competition

Drawing from her experience in post-secondary education, Secretary Rice said that "the great thing that the university system has in the United States—from community colleges to great research universities, to liberal arts colleges—is we have variety, so that somebody can be in an environment that is best for them." In addition to variety, there is competition. "If you are a university that can't compete for students, pretty soon you are probably going to be out of business," she said.

Against the argument that public money should not allow children to attend religious schools, Rice's response is simple: "Take away Notre Dame's Pell Grants." She explained, "At the tertiary level, we support faith-based and religious schools with federal dollars through federal funding of students through all means of financial aid. I see nothing wrong with the similar principle for secondary education."

In the end, said Rubio, "schools don't raise children; families raise children. Schools are a tool available to those families to equip those children to be successful...and have better lives than their parents." Offering choice "is one of the best things we can do to be pro family."



Senator Marco Rubio and Dr. Condoleezza Rice share the stage at the National Summit on Education Reform, November 20 in Washington, DC. (photo by Eric Draper)

Experts Discuss School Accountability

A recent gathering in Washington featured a panel of school reform experts discussing how to design an accountability component for a parent choice program in a way that preserves the autonomy of private schools. Suffice it to say that achieving a balance between accountability and autonomy is not an easy feat.

Three Principles

Michael McShane, a research fellow in education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, served as moderator of the lively discussion, which took place November 20 in Washington, DC, at the National Summit on Education Reform. McShane framed the dialogue by establishing three principles. “The first thing is that things that are designed to do one thing are not often good at doing something else,” he said in formulating the first principle. Thus, test-based accountability systems created to help ensure a quality program for children forced to attend a particular public school based on their place of residence do not necessarily translate well to programs involving parent choice within a robust marketplace of options.

“The second thing to always keep in mind,” said McShane, “is that regulations have costs.” The more rules and regulations the state imposes on schools, the less those schools are inclined to participate.

Finally, said McShane, polls suggest that one reason families are fleeing public schools is to escape standardized testing and a prescribed curriculum. An accountability system that imposes a state test and a matching curriculum thwarts that goal.

Accountability Model

Scott Jensen, senior strategist at the American Federation for Children, offered a model for accountability involving three components: administrative, financial, and academic. The goal of administrative accountability, said Jensen, is to make sure students are safe and schools are complying with basic rules, such as those relating to health, employee background checks, civil rights, and reporting requirements. Financial accountability ensures that schools are sustain-

able financial institutions and are spending money from the program in accordance with the program’s purposes.

But academic accountability, according to Jensen, is the “most difficult area and the hardest to achieve.” The goal is to avoid prescribing inputs and instead to focus on student outcomes. Specifically, the federation recommends that states look at academic growth over a year’s time along with long-range attainment, such as graduation rates and college acceptance rates.



Michael McShane, research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, chairs a panel on school accountability at the National Summit on Education Reform, November 20 in Washington, DC. (photo from summit video)

Two Types of Tests

Adam Peshek, state policy director for school choice at the Foundation for Excellence in Education, examined the distinction in accountability programs between state tests and norm-referenced tests. He said state tests are criterion-referenced tests that “are tied to the state standards” and linked to the state curriculum.

Norm-referenced tests, on the other hand, provide schools with more flexibility in curriculum design and are already being used by the vast majority of private schools. Peshek and the foundation prefer norm-referenced tests because they “provide information on student learning,” which is the goal of an accountability system, and at the same time allow private schools “to maintain their autonomy.”

Regarding the latter point, Peshek notes that private schools have existed before school choice programs and will likely exist after them. “They have their own way of doing things, and they are around because they’re doing something that parents want.” What’s more, they exist despite the fact that “there’s a 100 percent free alternative right down the road.” The existence of private schools “is a sign that there’s a need out there that’s not being filled in public schools.” Accountability policy should ensure that the ability to innovate is not stifled and that schools can continue to meet family needs.

The final panelist, Doug Tuthill, president of Step Up for Students, affirmed the use of norm-referenced tests in accountability programs, explaining that the tax credit scholarship program in Florida requires participating schools to administer annually a test approved by the state. All the major commercially available norm-referenced assessments are on the state’s list.

School War Truce

In a recent blog for *Education Week*, Michael McShane, research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (see story left), offered terms for a possible truce between liberals and conservatives in the school reform war. McShane’s premise is that people on both sides of the debate have “caricatured views of their ideological opponents and are choosing to highlight what divides them, rather than what unites them.”

One unifying concept, says McShane, is that both sides want to break up “unresponsive, monolithic institutions” of education and to empower “the little guy.” Similarly, both sides oppose “centralization and rote test-based accountability systems.” Given these similar goals, the question becomes, which “system of governance” best achieves them?

McShane suggests that school choice might be the answer, “as allowing people choice can circumvent the need for centralized standards and accountability and open up schooling to community-based organizations.”

But certain conditions have to be met. For starters, “the amount of the voucher (or scholarship or whatever PC thing you want to call it) would have to accurately reflect what both sides think a child’s education costs.”

Second, “local community organizations would need to have first crack, and the necessary supports, to create schools for students.” McShane believes that “if schools grew organically within communities, they would engender much more support.”

“Third, schools must have the freedom to pursue the pedagogical orientation that they want.”

McShane sums up his truce conditions this way: “No coercion. No centralization. Community voices. Small democratic institutions (with families ‘voting’ with their feet). Freedom to be diverse. Liberals and conservatives can get behind this.”

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Shaun R. Harper, professor at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, is co-editor of the forthcoming book *Advancing Black Male Student Success From Preschool Through PhD*. As director of the university's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, Harper once wrote an eye-opening report that served as a precursor of his new book. Entitled "**Black Male Student Success in Higher Education**," the report, released in 2012, revealed a fascinating pattern of black male achievement.

Harper's report looked at 219 black male undergraduates from 42 colleges and universities who had been "successful in an array of postsecondary educational settings." Specifically, these students "had earned cumulative grade point averages above 3.0, established lengthy records of leadership and active engagement in multiple student organizations, developed meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom, participated in enriching educational experiences (for example, study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and summer research programs), and earned numerous merit-based scholarships and honors in recognition of their college achievements."

It turns out that a full 27 percent of those successful students had attended private high schools. That's actually a remarkable number, since nationally only 8 percent of all high school students attend private schools.

★ A study recently released by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice has found that 10 voucher programs that help students switch from public to private schools have saved taxpayers at least \$1.7 billion over the twenty-year period from 1990-91 to 2010-11.

"As policymakers consider ways to balance their state budgets in 2015, school vouchers absolutely must be a part of their toolkits," said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the foundation. "Parents already are demanding school choice."

The report is available at <www.ed-choice.org/SchoolVoucherAudit>.

★ What happens when parents relate to schools as empowered consumers, rather than assigned clients? *The School Choice Journey: School Vouchers and the Empowerment of Urban Families* explores that question, and the findings are revealing.

Written by Patrick J. Wolf, distinguished professor of education policy at the University of Arkansas, and Thomas Stewart, president of Patten University in Oakland, California, the book tells the stories of families who receive vouchers under the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. "We documented the challenges these families faced. Their journey culminated in a surprising, courageous, and ultimately successful fight to renew the program," Wolf said.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige said the book "illuminates how well-crafted policies and practices can help

urban families secure valuable education opportunities for their children."

Howard Fuller, professor of education at Marquette University, said the book "provides scholarly insights into the reality low-income urban families face as they move from marginalized to empowered participants in their children's education."

★ On the eve of New Year's Eve, Florida Chief Circuit Judge Charles Francis dismissed a lawsuit by the state's teachers union against the state's Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts (PLSA) program. PLSAs allow parents to direct state funds toward the programs and services that best meet their child's needs.

"The court's decision is a win for all students in Florida, especially special needs students and their parents and shows how out of touch the status quo of the education system is," said Kevin P. Chavous, executive counsel of the American Federation for Children.

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