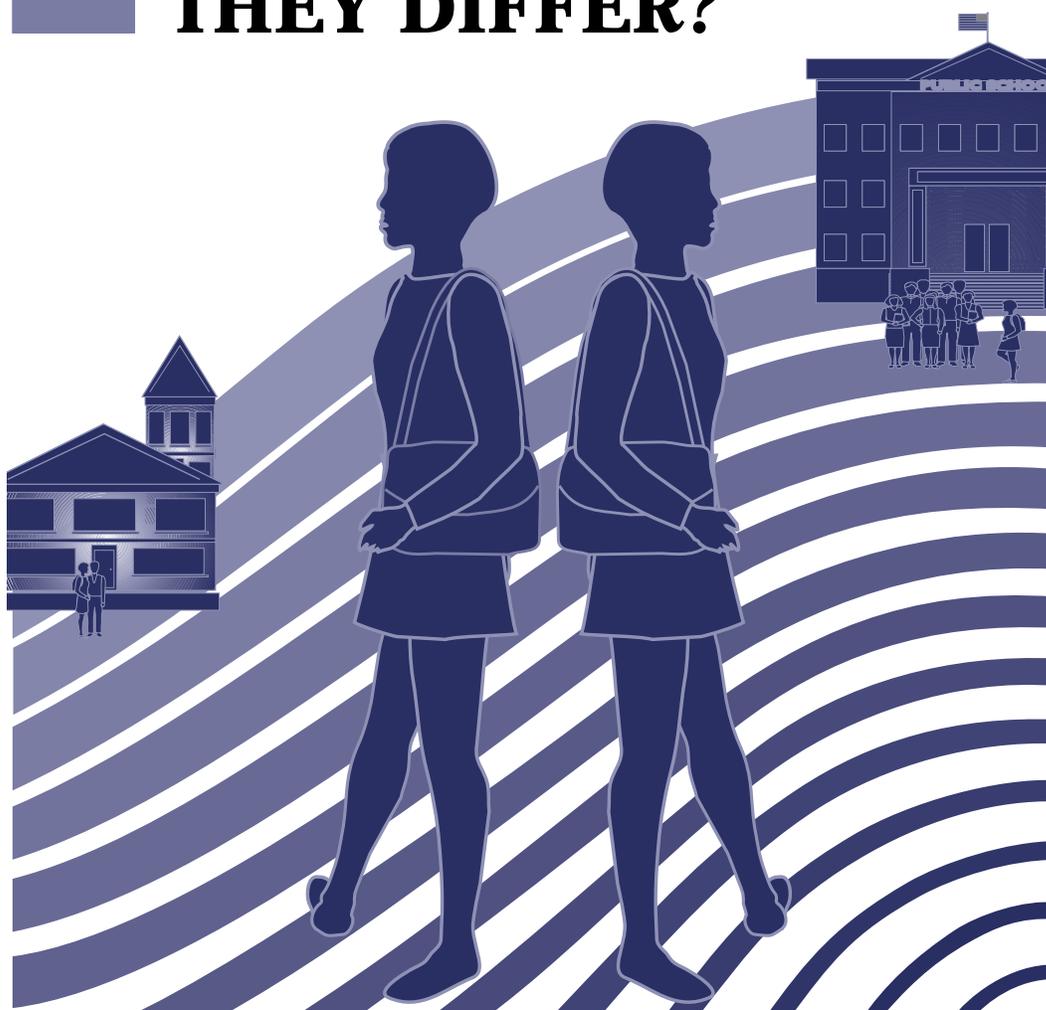

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Findings from
THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 1997

NO.
12

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS: HOW DO THEY DIFFER?



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

NCES 97-983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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July 1997

*The text in this booklet was written by Susan P. Choy, MPR Associates, Inc., and appears in **The Condition of Education, 1997**. Andrea Livingston, Karyn Madden, and Barbara Kridl edited the text, and Leslie Retallick, Don Eike, and Mary Sukkestad designed the graphics and layout.*

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS: HOW DO THEY DIFFER?

About 46 million students are currently enrolled in the Nation's public schools in kindergarten through grade 12, and another 6 million are enrolled in private schools.¹ Because private schools are often perceived to be more successful in teaching students, with at least some empirical basis,² many reform proposals for public schools have looked to the private sector for models to emulate. School choice, small schools, and decentralized decision making, for example, are among the features commonly associated with private education that many have suggested might benefit public schools.

Exactly how do public and private schools differ? To address this question, at least in the aggregate, national data are assembled here to compare public and private schools along a number of important dimensions. The discussion begins with an examination of two fundamental differences between public and private schools: their sources of support and the role of choice in determining where students go to school. Next is a description of the characteristics of the key participants in the education process—students and teachers—and how they differ in the public and private sectors. Following that is a comparison of selected aspects of the organization and management of public and private schools, including school and class size and who makes policy decisions for the school and classroom. Next, the varying circumstances under which teaching and learning take place in public and private schools (the school climate) are examined. The final sections describe differences in academic programs and support services.

The data show many systematic differences between public and private schools, and provide a context in which to consider the debates about the relative merits of various aspects of public and private schooling. However, as public and private schools are compared, it is important to keep in mind the enormous varia-

tion that exists within each sector and the overlap between the two. As Baker, Han, and Keil point out in their examination of organizational differences between public and private secondary schools, “School sector is not a *simple organizational fault line* running through the Nation’s schools.”³ More detail on the nature of the diversity that exists within each sector can be found in other NCES publications.⁴

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

The defining distinction between public and private schools is their different sources of support. Public schools depend primarily on local, state, and federal government funds, while private schools are usually supported by tuition payments and sometimes by funds from other nonpublic sources such as religious organizations, endowments, grants, and charitable donations. In some states, private schools receive public funds for certain services (e.g., transportation).

Tuition at private schools varies considerably by grade level and whether or not the school has a religious affiliation. In 1993–94, the average tuition paid by private school students was about \$3,100, but ranged from a low of about \$1,600 in

Average private school tuition:* 1993–94

School level	Total	Catholic	Other religious	Nonsectarian
Total	\$3,116	\$2,178	\$2,915	\$6,631
Elementary	2,138	1,628	2,606	4,693
Secondary	4,578	3,643	5,261	9,525
Combined	4,266	4,153	2,831	7,056

*Tuition weighted by the number of students enrolled in schools.

SOURCE: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*, table 60.

Catholic elementary schools to a high of about \$9,500 in non-sectarian secondary schools. Total public school expenditures were about \$6,500 per pupil (computed using average daily attendance) in 1993–94,⁵ but it is impossible to compare public and private school expenditures because tuition often covers only part of the total spent.

SCHOOL CHOICE

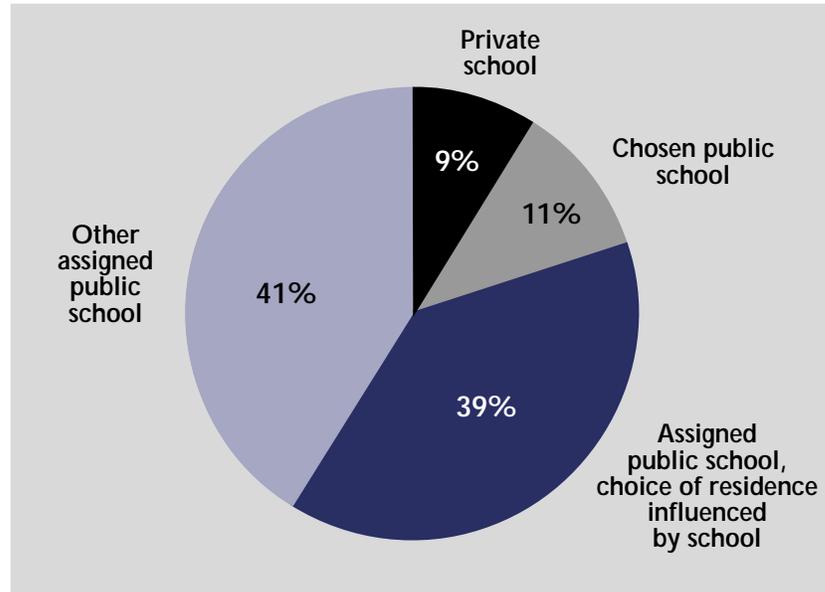
The idea of school choice has traditionally been associated with private schools, but many advocate offering at least some choice within the public sector. Having public schools compete for students, the thinking goes, will provide them with a strong incentive to improve and be more responsive to the needs and concerns of students and their parents.

- **Private schools are attended by choice, but choice is not limited to the private sector.**

Private schools provide an alternative for parents who are dissatisfied with public schools or have other reasons for wanting their children to attend a private school. Within the private sector, parents can choose among a range of religiously affiliated and nonsectarian schools (as long as they can afford the tuition charged or receive financial aid). Some private schools are very selective in their admissions, while others are not. In 1993, 9 percent of all students in grades 3–12 attended a private school.

Parents of students in public schools can sometimes choose or exert influence over which schools their children attend. In 1993, 11 percent of students in grades 3–12 attended a public school chosen by their parents. In addition, parents can indirectly choose among public schools for their children to the extent that they can choose where to live. While 80 percent of public school students in grades 3–12 attended an assigned public school in

Percentage distribution of students in grades 3–12, by parental choice of school attended: 1993



SOURCE: NCES, National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1993 (School Safety and Discipline File).

1993, the parents of 39 percent of the students in these grades indicated that their child attended an assigned school but that their choice of residence was influenced by where their children would go to school. Thus, less than half (41 percent) of the students in grades 3–12 attended assigned public schools over which their parents had exercised no direct or indirect choice.

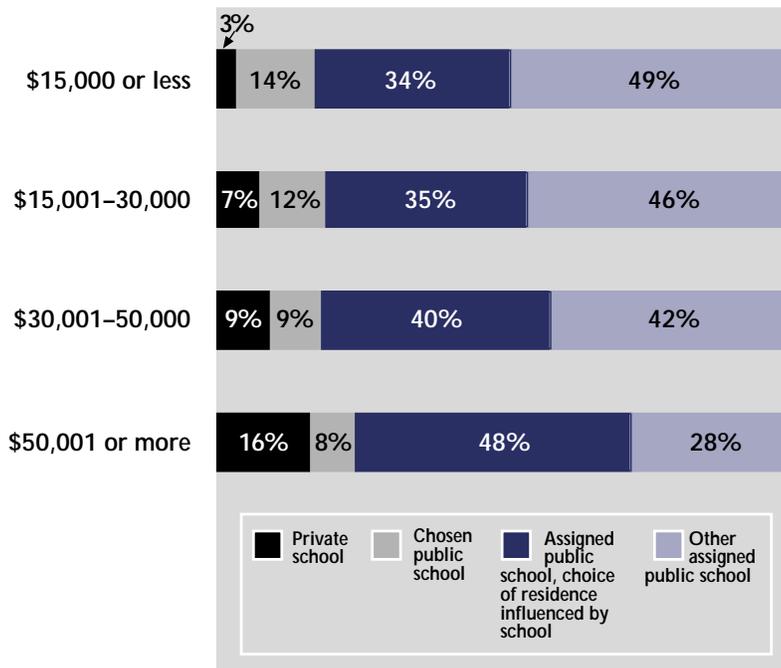
- **Families with annual incomes over \$50,000 have the most choice.**

Higher family income facilitates both public and private school choice. Because most private schools charge tuition, only parents with the personal financial resources or financial aid to afford the tuition truly have the option of selecting a private school. Thus, the rate of private school attendance in 1993

increased with family income. Similarly, because the housing options that realistically can be considered are related to a family's income, the percentage of parents who reported that their choice of residence was influenced by where their children would go to school also generally increased with family income.

Children from the lowest income families (less than \$15,000) were more likely than those from families with incomes over \$30,000 to attend a chosen public school. However, the net result of the various types of choice was that children from families with incomes over \$50,000 were much less likely than children from families in lower income categories to attend an assigned public school over which they had not exercised any choice.

Percentage distribution of students in grades 3–12, by parental choice of school attended and income: 1993



SOURCE: NCES, National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1993 (School Safety and Discipline File).

- **Parents who exercise some choice over where their children go to school tend to be more satisfied than those who do not.**

Parents of students in grades 3–12 who attended private schools were more likely than their public school counterparts to be very satisfied with their children’s school overall and with its specific aspects, such as the teachers, academic standards, and discipline. Within the public sector, parents whose children attended a chosen public school were generally more satisfied than those whose children were in an assigned school. Furthermore, among those whose children attended assigned public schools, parents whose choice of residence was school related were more satisfied than those who did not choose their residence for this reason. Parents whose children attended chosen public schools and those whose choice of residence was school related were about equally likely to be very satisfied with their children’s schools.

Percentage of parents of students in grades 3–12 who were very satisfied with aspects of their child’s school: 1993

School attended	School	Teachers	Academic standards	Discipline policy
Chosen school	70.7	67.6	72.1	72.6
Public	61.2	61.5	63.0	63.0
Private	82.5	75.2	83.4	84.4
Assigned public school	52.3	56.0	55.0	55.1
Influenced choice of residence	56.0	58.9	59.3	58.2
Other	48.7	53.1	51.0	52.2

SOURCE: NCES, National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1993 (School Safety and Discipline File).

STUDENTS

Many of the ways in which public and private schools differ reflect differences in their student populations. Students bring with them to school certain background characteristics such as their racial/ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and, sometimes, personal or family problems that affect their ability to learn. Teachers and administrators take these characteristics into account as they organize and manage their schools and plan and implement curriculum and support services. Thus, to the extent that public and private school students differ, one can expect public and private schools to differ as well. Other student characteristics, such as attitudes toward learning and behavior toward teachers, are also taken into account; however, because these are determined by the school environment as well as students' backgrounds, they are discussed below in the section on school climate.

- **Public schools tend to have more racially and ethnically diverse student populations.**

Racial and ethnic diversity can enrich the school experiences of students and teachers in many ways. However, a heterogeneous school population creates additional challenges for school teachers and administrators, who must be sensitive to different cultural backgrounds and the interactions among individuals (students and teachers) from different backgrounds. In 1993, 28 percent of public school students in grades 1–12 were black or Hispanic, compared to 17 percent of those in private schools. Private schools are changing, however, as evidenced by the increase in the percentage of black and Hispanic students between 1985 and 1993.

Percentage of students in grades 1–12 who were black or Hispanic: 1985, 1990, and 1993

Year	Public				Private
	Total	Central cities	Other metropolitan	Nonmetropolitan	
1985	26.8	56.7	18.1	16.8	11.5
1990	27.8	52.1	19.5	16.4	14.3
1993	28.4	53.8	20.2	16.0	16.7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, "School Enrollment: Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," October 1985, 1990, and 1993; October Current Population Surveys.

- **Public schools have more students with limited English proficiency.**

Students with limited English proficiency create demands on school resources and needs for teacher training that are absent in schools without such students. In 1993–94, 5 percent of all public school students (and 9 percent in central cities) had limited English proficiency, compared to 1 percent of private school students.⁶

- **Personal problems that interfere with learning are more of a problem in public schools.**

When students bring to school personal problems such as those associated with alcohol use, drug abuse, and poverty, both teaching and learning can be seriously compromised. In all types of communities, public school teachers were much more likely than private school teachers to believe that each of these problems was serious in their schools.

Percentage of secondary school teachers who reported that various problems were serious in their schools: 1993–94

Student problems	Public			Private		
	Central city	Urban fringe	Rural	Central city	Urban fringe	Rural
Use of alcohol	19.6	21.7	26.3	12.4	9.4	10.5
Drug abuse	17.1	14.8	12.1	5.1	2.8	3.7
Poverty	24.8	9.6	15.3	3.6	2.5	3.7

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 112–113.

TEACHERS

Because of the central role teachers play in the educational process, differences between public and private school teachers are an important dimension in which to compare public and private schools. In the aggregate, public and private school teachers come from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, have different qualifications to teach, and are compensated differently.

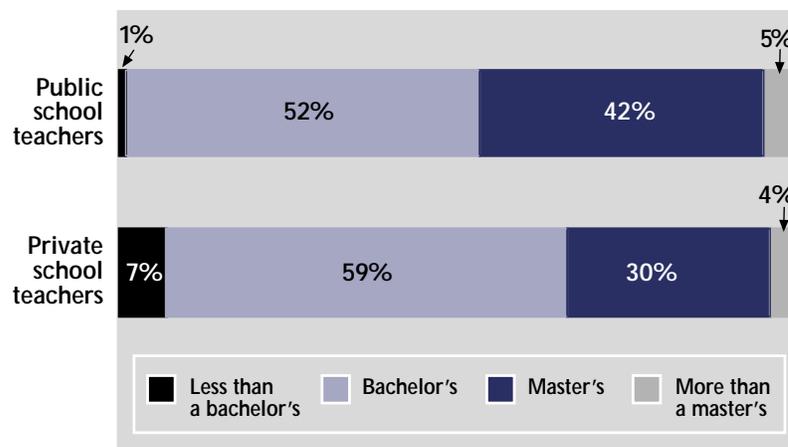
- **Private schools have fewer minority teachers and principals.**

In public schools, an average of 12 percent of the teachers and 16 percent of the principals were minorities. The percentages were lower in private schools (9 percent minority teachers and 8 percent minority principals). The benefits of having minority teachers as role models have been widely discussed.⁷ Nevertheless, 42 percent of public schools and 66 percent of private schools had no minority teachers in 1993–94.⁸

- On certain measures, public school teachers appear to be more qualified than their private school counterparts.

Although many aspects of teacher qualifications are difficult to measure, public school teachers appear to be more qualified than private school teachers in terms of their education and years of teaching experience. In the 1993–94 school year, public school teachers were more likely than private school teachers to have earned a master’s degree (42 versus 30 percent).

Percentage distribution of public and private school teachers according to highest degree earned: 1993–94

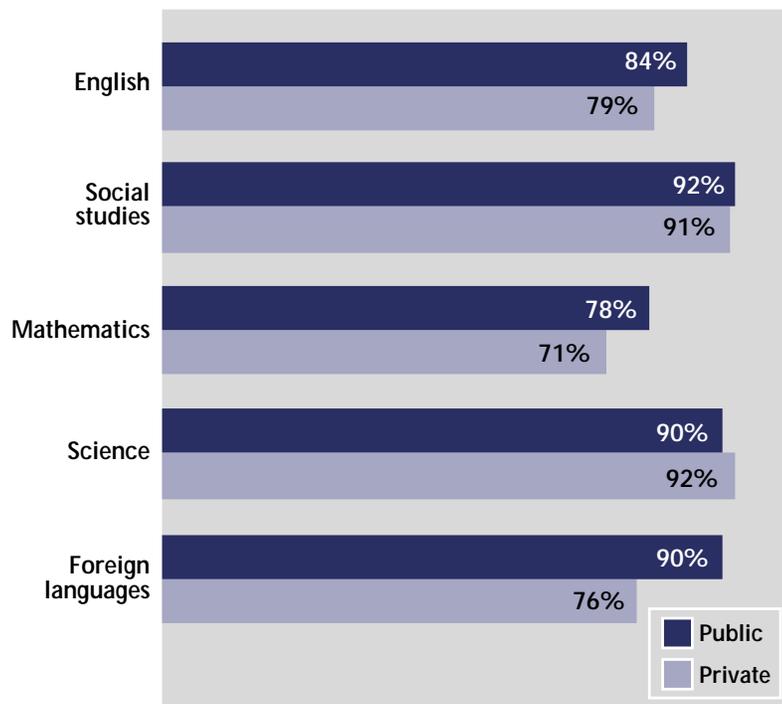


SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94*, 40.

In addition, at the secondary level, students in public schools were more likely than those in private schools to be taught English, mathematics, or a foreign language by teachers who majored or minored in the subject as undergraduates. Public school teachers in 1993–94 had more teaching experience, on average, than private school teachers (15 versus 12 years).⁹

Public school teachers were also more likely to participate in professional development activities, which many believe

Percentage of secondary students in selected subjects taught by teachers who majored or minored in the subject as undergraduates, by control of school: 1993–94



SOURCE: NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

teachers should do throughout their careers to update and improve their teaching skills. Beginning teachers in public schools (those in their first 3 years of teaching) were much more likely than their private school counterparts to participate in a formal teacher induction program (56 versus 29 percent).¹⁰ However, induction may be done informally in some schools. Full-time public school teachers were more likely than their private school counterparts to participate in in-service education or professional development on the uses of educational technology for instruction, methods of teaching in a specific subject field, in-depth study in a specific field, student assessment, and cooperative learning in the classroom.

Percentage of full-time public and private school teachers who participated in certain professional development activities during the 1993–94 school year

Professional development topic	Public	Private
Uses of educational technology for instruction	50.1	34.3
Methods of teaching in specific subject field	64.4	59.8
In-depth study in specific field	30.1	25.9
Student assessment	52.0	40.4
Cooperative learning in the classroom	51.5	43.6

SOURCE: NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

- **On average, public school teachers receive higher salaries and more benefits.**

In 1993–94, the average base salary was \$34,200 for public school teachers, and \$22,000 for private school teachers. Among public districts and private schools with salary schedules, the averages for the highest steps on the schedules were \$40,500 and \$27,300, respectively.¹¹ The difference between principals' salaries was also large, with public school principals earning an average of \$54,900 compared to an average of \$32,000 for private school principals. Public school teachers were more likely than private school teachers to be provided with medical insurance (87 versus 60 percent), dental insurance (66 versus 36 percent), group life insurance (61 versus 36 percent), and pension contributions (63 versus 47 percent). One substantial benefit that private school teachers sometimes received (15 percent) was tuition for their children.¹²

- **Teacher attrition is higher in private schools, but private school teachers are more satisfied with their working conditions.**

Teacher attrition tends to be higher in private than public schools: Between the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years, 10 percent of full-time private school teachers left teaching, compared to 6 percent of their public school counterparts.¹³ Nevertheless, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to be highly satisfied with their working conditions (36 versus 11 percent).¹⁴

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Many school reform efforts have focused on the organization and management of schools in the search for ways to increase school effectiveness. Public and private schools, in the aggregate, are organized differently in terms of school and class size and the locus of responsibility for decision making in a number of important policy areas.

SCHOOL SIZE

The relative merits of various school sizes have been studied extensively as researchers have searched for the ideal school size.¹⁵ Smaller schools are generally thought to be easier to manage and to promote a greater sense of community among both students and teachers; however, larger schools (within limits) are often more equipped to offer a wider range of academic programs and support services. The advantages of larger schools are more relevant to secondary than elementary schools.

- **Public schools tend to have larger enrollments.**

In the 1993–94 school year, public schools were at least twice the size of private schools, on average. This relationship held across schools in different types of communities at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Average school size: 1993–94

Level and urbanicity	Public	Private
Total	516	191
Elementary		
Central city	547	210
Urban fringe/large town	524	201
Rural/small town	378	112
Secondary		
Central city	1,083	398
Urban fringe/large town	973	308
Rural/small town	468	183

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 23.

CLASS SIZE

Small classes allow teachers to give students more individual attention and lighten the teacher's workload and therefore are generally considered desirable,¹⁶ although research on the relationship between outcomes and class size has not been conclusive. Despite the advantages they may have, small class sizes are also expensive, and invoke trade-offs between small class size and other uses of school resources.

- Average class size is larger in public schools.

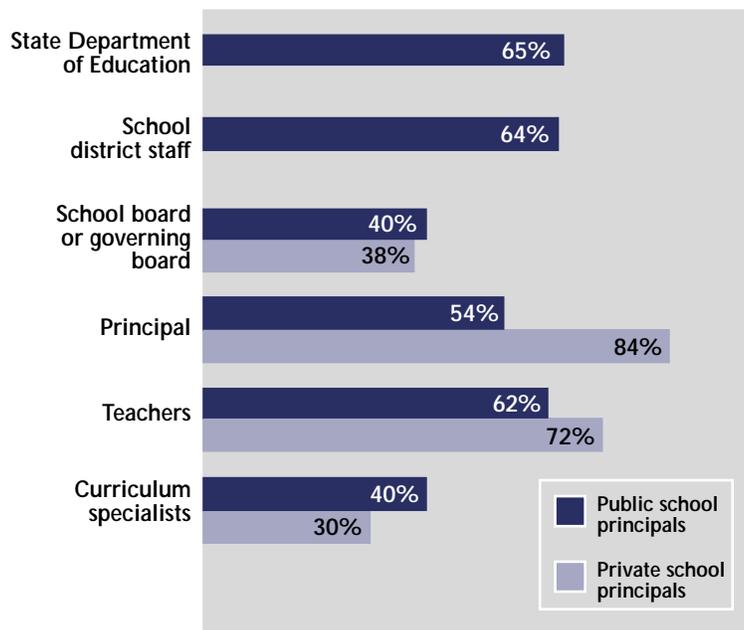
At both the elementary and secondary levels, private schools, on average, have smaller classes. In the 1993–94 school year, the average class size was 24 in both elementary and secondary public schools, compared to 22 in private elementary schools and 19 in private secondary schools.¹⁷

DECISION MAKING FOR THE SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM

A key aspect of school management is where important decisions are made concerning curriculum, school policies, and classroom practices. While public schools necessarily must take some direction from State Departments of Education, local school boards, and district staff, more site-based management and local decision making are frequently advocated as a means of improving school effectiveness.¹⁸

- Private school principals (or heads) report having more influence over curriculum than their public school counterparts.

Percentage of principals who thought that various groups had a great deal of influence* over curriculum decisions, by control of school: 1993–94



*Responded 4 or 5 on a scale of 0–5.

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 116–117.

When principals were asked to rate the influence of various groups on establishing curriculum in 1993–94, private school principals were more likely to report that they, rather than any other group, had a great deal of influence. Public school principals, on the other hand, attributed more influence to the State Department of Education, school district staff (which private schools do not have), and even to teachers than to themselves.

- **In a number of school policy areas, private school teachers and principals are more likely than their public school counterparts to believe that they have a great deal of influence.**

In the areas of setting discipline policy and establishing curriculum, in particular, private school teachers in the 1993–94 school year were considerably more likely than public school teachers to think that they had a great deal of influence. Only a relatively small percentage of teachers in either sector were likely to think that they had a great deal of influence over certain other important policy areas, such as making budget decisions, hiring, and evaluating teachers.

Percentage of teachers and principals who thought that they had a great deal of influence* over certain school policies: 1993–94

Policy area	Teachers		Principals	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Setting discipline policy	34.9	59.2	86.9	95.0
Establishing curriculum	34.3	55.7	53.9	84.1
In-service training content	30.6	35.3	72.4	88.4
School budget decisions	10.1	6.2	63.5	84.3
Hiring full-time teachers	8.1	8.4	84.6	90.9
Teacher evaluation	2.7	8.5	94.5	94.6

*Responded 4 or 5 on a scale of 0–5.

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 118–119, 120–121.

In the area of teacher evaluation, almost all principals, public or private, thought that they had a great deal of influence. However, in a number of other policy areas—discipline, curriculum, in-service training, budgeting, and hiring—private school principals were more likely than public school principals to think that they had a great deal of influence. Public school principals share authority for many policy decisions with school boards, district personnel, and State Departments of Education.

- **Private school teachers reported having more autonomy in the classroom.**

In both public and private schools, the vast majority of teachers thought that they had a good deal of control over certain classroom practices: evaluating and grading students, determining the amount of homework, and selecting teaching techniques. Relatively fewer in each sector thought that they had a good deal of control over disciplining students; selecting the content, topics, and skills to be taught; or selecting textbooks and other instructional materials. Except in the area of determining the amount of homework, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to think that they had a good deal of control.

Percentage of teachers who thought that they had a good deal of control* over classroom practices: 1993–94

Classroom practice	Public	Private
Evaluating and grading students	86.9	91.6
Determining amount of homework	86.7	87.4
Selecting teaching techniques	86.4	91.6
Disciplining students	69.0	84.3
Selecting content, topics, skills to be taught	60.5	74.6
Selecting textbooks and other materials	55.5	67.9

*Responded 4 or 5 on a scale of 0–5.

SOURCE: NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher and Administrator Questionnaires).

SCHOOL CLIMATE

School climate can significantly affect the quality of the educational experience for students, teachers, and other staff as well as parents' satisfaction with their child's school. Neither teachers nor students can perform at their best if their school is unsafe or disrupted by misbehaving students or if there is a lack of cooperation among teachers or between the school and parents. The National Education Goals for the year 2000 call for schools that "will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning." The Goals also call for increased "parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children."¹⁹

- **Exposure to crime or threats is far more common in public schools.**

To learn effectively, students must feel safe at school. The learning environment in schools where students have to worry about being threatened or becoming victims of crime may be seriously compromised. Crime occurs in and around both public and private

Percentage of students in grades 6–12 who reported knowing about, witnessing, worrying about, or being victimized by robbery, bullying, or physical attack at school: 1993

Robbery, bullying, or physical attack	Public		Private
	Assigned	Chosen	
Knowledge of occurrence	73	71	45
Witnessed	58	54	32
Worried about	26	27	13
Victimized	12	10	7

SOURCE: NCES, *Student Victimization at School*, NCES 95-204, 1995.

schools, but public school students have a much greater exposure to crime. The percentages of students in grades 6–12 who knew about, witnessed, or worried about being a victim of bullying, physical attack, or robbery were much greater in both assigned and chosen public schools than in private schools. In addition, students in assigned public schools were more likely than private school students to report being victimized personally.

- **Public school teachers are far more likely to believe that certain negative student attitudes and behavior are serious problems in their schools.**

In the 1993–94 school year, teachers were asked to report their perceptions of the seriousness of various problems in their schools, and their responses suggest that there are different climates in public and private schools. Teachers in public schools were far more likely to report that poor attitudes toward learning

Percentage of teachers who perceived various problems as serious in their schools: 1993–94

Problems	Public		Private	
	All	Central city secondary schools	All	Central city secondary schools
Attitudes toward learning				
Come unprepared				
to learn	28.8	46.6	4.1	7.3
Apathy	23.6	46.4	4.5	10.7
Absenteeism	14.4	41.9	2.2	4.4
Tardiness	10.5	30.1	2.6	3.7
Interactions with teachers				
Verbal abuse of teachers	11.1	22.6	2.3	2.9
Disrespect for teachers	18.5	32.5	3.4	5.4

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 112–113.

and negative interactions with teachers were serious problems in their schools. The contrast between the perceptions of public and private school teachers was particularly striking in central city secondary schools.

- **Public school teachers are more likely to believe that a lack of parent involvement is a serious problem in their school.**

Communication between parents and school personnel promotes a spirit of home-school cooperation, which is important to student success. Public school teachers were much more likely than private school teachers to believe that a lack of parental involvement was a serious problem in their school (28 versus 4 percent).²⁰

The nature of the contact between schools and parents tends to differ in public and private schools. For example, high school seniors in private schools were more likely than their public school peers to have their parents contacted about volunteering

Percentage of seniors whose parents reported that school personnel had contacted them at least once during the current school year: 1992

Reason for contact	Public	Catholic	Other private
Discussion of student's:			
Academic performance	52.5	48.5	60.8
Academic program	42.9	46.1	59.0
Post-high school plans	34.9	50.0	69.1
Attendance	38.7	17.5	25.7
Behavior	20.5	14.6	18.5
Request parent to volunteer time at school	51.9	82.9	86.2
Inform parent how to help student with school work	21.5	29.3	31.8

SOURCE: NCES, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Second Follow-up, Parent Survey, 1992.

their time at school or about the student's post-high school plans, while seniors in public schools were more likely to have their parents contacted about their school attendance.

- **Private school teachers share a greater sense of community within their schools.**

When teachers in a school share a strong sense of community, they are likely to be more effective instructors and more satisfied

**Percentages of teachers who strongly agreed
with items related to their sense of
community at work: 1993–94**

	Public		Private	
	Less than 150 students	750 or more students	Less than 150 students	750 or more students
Sense of community				
Goals, beliefs, and expectations				
Colleagues share beliefs and values about central mission of school	40.8	26.2	71.4	49.4
Goals and priorities for school are clear	36.0	33.1	61.7	56.3
Governance procedures				
Staff members recognized for good work	23.5	22.1	48.1	34.7
Teachers participate in most of the important educational decisions	23.7	10.1	38.0	22.6
Collegiality and cooperation				
Great deal of cooperative effort among staff	41.5	25.9	65.3	46.4
Administration's behavior is supportive and encouraging	42.0	38.5	65.1	57.0

SOURCE: NCES, *Teachers' Sense of Community: How Do Public and Private Schools Compare?*, IB-10-96, 1996.

with their working conditions.²¹ In the 1993–94 school year, private school teachers in both large and small schools were more likely than public school teachers to report that they and their colleagues shared goals, beliefs, and expectations (and that the goals and priorities for the school were clear); that they were recognized for good work; that teachers participated in most of the important decisions in their schools; that the staff cooperated; and that the administration was supportive and encouraging.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

A major thrust of school reform efforts begun in the 1980s has been setting higher academic standards for elementary and secondary school students. One of the National Education Goals for the year 2000 is to have all students be able to demonstrate in grades 4, 8, and 12 “competency over challenging subject matter” in a range of subjects, including reading, mathematics, science, and social studies.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Key aspects of the instructional program at the elementary level are the amount of time spent on core subjects, the teaching methods used in the classroom, and how homework is handled. Public and private schools exhibit both similarities and differences in these areas.

- **Elementary public school teachers spend more time than private school teachers on core subjects.**

In the 1993–94 school year, public elementary teachers in self-contained classrooms spent more time than their private school

**Average hours per week elementary school teachers spent
teaching core subjects: 1993–94**

Subject	Public	Private
Total	21.5	18.1
English	10.3	8.5
Mathematics	5.2	4.5
Social studies	3.1	2.7
Science	3.0	2.4

SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 76–77.

counterparts teaching each of the four core subjects—English, mathematics, social studies, and science—and more time on all four together. Public elementary teachers spent an average of about 22 hours per week teaching the four core subjects, and private school teachers spent about 3 hours less. Teachers in both sectors divided their time among these subjects in approximately the same way. That is, they spent about half of the time teaching English, the next most time on mathematics, then social studies, and science.

Elementary school students in public and private schools spent virtually identical amounts of time in school (6.4 hours per day and 179 hours per year), which implies that private school elementary teachers allocate more time than public school teachers to non-core subjects such as music, art, physical education, and, sometimes, religion.²²

- **Elementary teachers in public and private schools use similar teaching methods.**

When asked if they used certain instructional strategies at least once a week during the 1993–94 school year, 90 percent or more of the elementary teachers in both sectors said that they provided instruction to the class as a whole, demonstrated concepts using the board or an overhead projector, worked with individual stu-

dents, and worked with small groups of students.²³ Among less commonly used practices, public school teachers were more likely than private school teachers to demonstrate a concept using a computer, videotape, or other electronic medium (75 versus 57 percent), while private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to lecture (78 versus 69 percent).

- **Private elementary teachers handle homework differently than public elementary teachers.**

Almost all elementary school teachers (94 percent of public school teachers and 98 percent of private school teachers) reported that their students did some homework during an average week in 1993–94.²⁴ Forty-six percent of public school teachers and 40 percent of private school teachers assigned 1 hour or less per week. Although the focus is often on how much homework is assigned, how teachers use homework assignments may be more important than quantity. For example, some argue that homework is most useful to students if teachers collect, correct, and return their assignments. At the elementary level, private school teachers were more likely than their public school counterparts to do this (82 versus 72 percent).

— HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS —

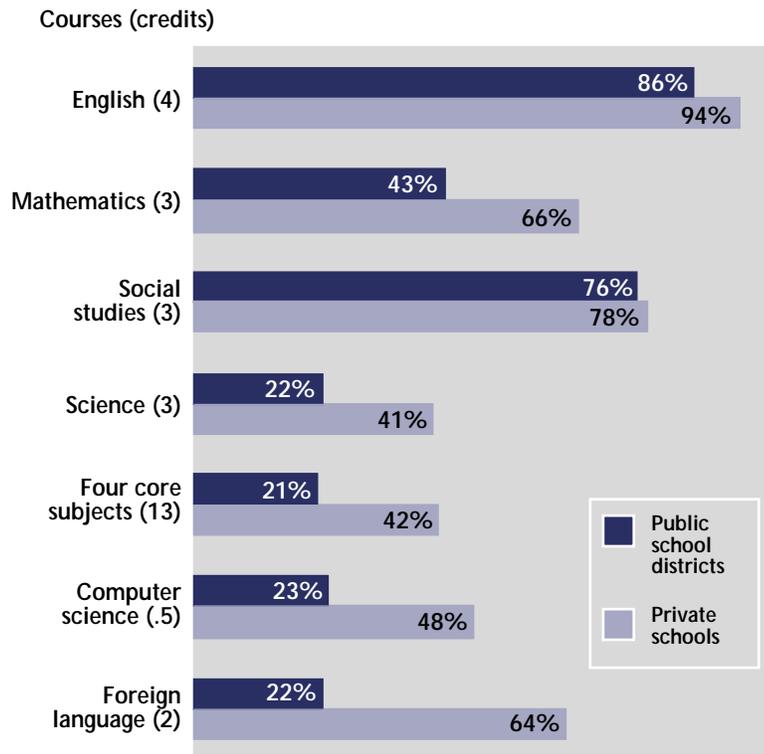
In 1983, the National Commission on Education and the Economy (NCEE) proposed in *A Nation at Risk* that all high school graduates be required to complete at least 4 years of English; 3 years each of social studies, science, and mathematics; and .5 years of computer science. This has become a standard against which high school programs are evaluated.

- Private high schools appear to have more rigorous academic programs.

Except in social studies, greater percentages of private than public high school students attended schools with graduation requirements at or above the NCEE recommendations in 1990–91. In addition, private school students were much more likely than their public school peers to be required to take 2 years of a foreign language.

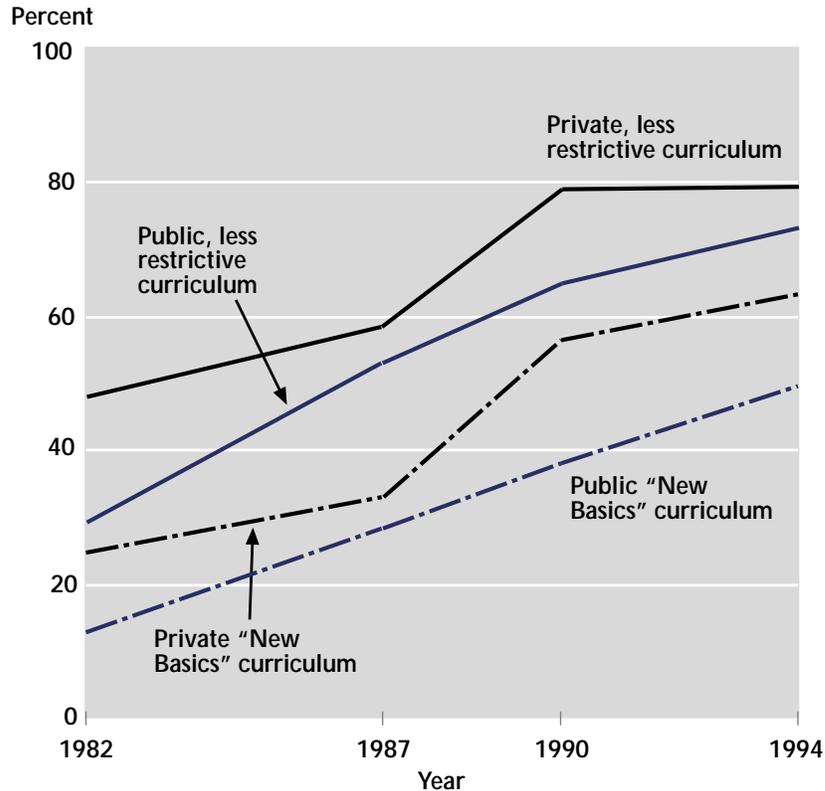
In both sectors, a greater percentage of high school graduates earned the minimum number of units specified in the “New

Percentage of high school students in public districts or private schools with course graduation requirements at/above the NCEE recommendations, by subject and control of school: 1990–91



SOURCE: NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91 (Teacher Demand and Shortage Questionnaire); and NCEE, *A Nation at Risk* (1983).

Percentage of high school graduates earning a minimum number of units in core courses, by curriculum type and sector: 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1994



SOURCE: NCES, *The 1994 High School Transcript Study Tabulations: Comparative Data on Credits Earned and Demographics for 1994, 1990, 1987, and 1982 High School Graduates*, 1996.

Basics" curriculum (4 years of English, and 3 years each of social studies, science, and mathematics) in 1994 than in 1982. Although the percentage meeting this standard is still higher for private school graduates, the two sectors are now similar when a less restrictive curriculum (one less year each of science and mathematics) is used as the standard.

- Graduates of private high schools are much more likely to have taken advanced mathematics and science courses.

In both 1982 and 1994, virtually all graduates of either public or private high schools earned some credits in mathematics and science. However, in both years, graduates of private high schools were more likely than their public school counterparts to take advanced mathematics courses such as algebra II, trigonometry, analysis/pre-calculus, and calculus; courses in biology, chemistry, and physics; and courses in all three of the major sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics). The percentages of students taking these courses increased between 1982 and 1994 for public high school graduates in all of these subjects and for private high school graduates in most of them.

**Percentage of high school graduates taking selected
mathematics and science courses in high school:
1982 and 1994**

Courses (credits)	1982		1994	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Any Mathematics	98.4	99.8	99.5	99.9
Algebra II (0.5)	29.7	52.8	56.4	81.8
Trigonometry (0.5)	11.0	21.4	16.2	29.5
Analysis/pre-calculus (0.5)	5.0	12.8	16.2	29.6
Calculus (1.0)	3.7	12.0	8.8	14.4
Any Science	96.2	99.0	99.5	100.0
Biology (1.0)	74.5	91.9	93.5	97.4
Chemistry (1.0)	28.7	49.2	54.4	74.8
Physics (1.0)	13.3	22.0	23.7	32.1
Biology, chemistry, physics (3.0)	9.7	17.5	20.5	30.1

SOURCE: NCES, *The 1994 High School Transcript Study Tabulations: Comparative Data on Credits Earned and Demographics for 1994, 1990, 1987, and 1982 High School Graduates*, 1996.

SUPPORT SERVICES

In addition to their curricular offerings, schools provide various other services to support the academic and health-related needs of their students. The particular services a school provides reflect the needs of the students and the availability of resources as well as the importance that the school places on such services. Federal and state laws require public schools to provide some services that are not required of private schools.

- **Public schools provide a wide array of academic support and health-related services.**

Most support services are found more often in public than private schools. This may occur because private schools do not believe

**Percentage of schools in which various services
were available to students: 1993–94**

Service	Public	Private
Academic support		
Remedial	83.2	54.5
Gifted and talented	70.7	24.9
Bilingual	17.8	4.2
ESL	42.7	11.3
Chapter I	61.6	22.7
Disability	89.2	24.8
Diagnostic services	82.6	43.5
Library	95.6	80.3
Health-related		
Medical services	58.7	31.0
Drug and alcohol prevention	93.6	70.6
Substance abuse counseling	36.2	14.4
Free or reduced-price lunches	94.3	22.4

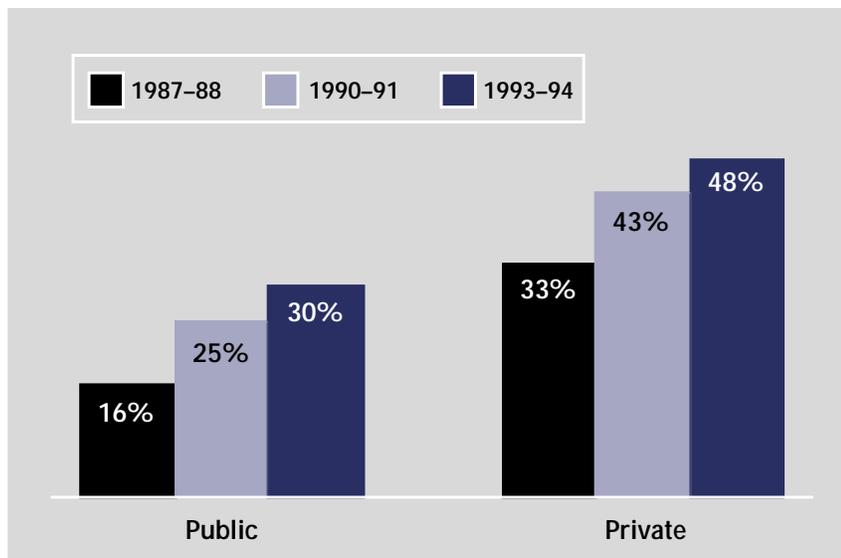
SOURCE: NCES, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 26–29.

their students need these services or because they do not believe they can afford to provide them. In addition, private schools may meet the special needs of students without formal programs.

- **Increasing numbers of schools in both sectors are providing extended-day programs, but public schools still lag behind private schools in this area.**

Because of the importance of high-quality child care to working parents, extended-day programs have become increasingly common in elementary and combined schools. However, considerably more private than public elementary and combined schools provided this service in the 1993–94 school year (48 versus 30 percent).

Percentage of elementary and combined schools that offered extended-day programs, by control of school: 1987–88, 1990–91, and 1993–94



SOURCE: NCES, *Extended-Day Programs in Elementary and Combined Schools*, Issue Brief, 1996 and *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94*, 30–31.

- **Private schools tend to have larger library collections (on a per pupil basis), but public school library/media centers tend to be more technologically advanced.**

Library/media center resources provide students with access to materials and equipment that facilitate and promote learning. Public schools were more likely than private schools to have libraries in 1993–94, but among schools with libraries, private schools had larger collections, on average, on a per student basis (37 versus 26 volumes).²⁵ Expenditures (excluding federal gifts and grants) were similar in both sectors in 1993–94, however (about \$8 per student annually among schools with libraries).

The library/media centers in public schools were more technologically advanced than those in private schools in 1993–94. For example, they were more likely to have an automated catalog and circulation system; computers with modems and connection to the Internet; and broadcast, cable, and closed circuit television facilities.

Percentage of library media centers with various types of equipment: 1993–94

Equipment	Public	Private
Automated circulation system	37.9	9.5
Automated catalog	24.0	9.7
Computer with modem	34.3	19.5
Connection to Internet	12.0	5.3
Cable television	76.2	39.9
Broadcast television	48.6	39.9
Closed circuit television	25.5	8.8

SOURCE: NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Library Media Center Questionnaire).

SUMMARY

Although there is much variation within each sector, in the aggregate, public school students present their schools with greater challenges than do their private school counterparts. Not only do they come from more diverse racial/ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, but also public school teachers are more likely than private school teachers to perceive their students and their families as having problems that can interfere with learning.

Overall, teachers in public schools are more likely than their private school counterparts to have certain attributes that are thought to contribute to effective teaching. These include more schooling, more teaching experience, and greater participation in professional development activities. However, public and private school teachers use similar teaching strategies. On average, public school teachers earn more and receive more benefits, which provides public schools with one advantage when trying to attract and retain the best teachers.

Despite poorer pay, private school teachers as a group are more satisfied than public school teachers with their jobs. In the aggregate, private schools seem to offer a greater sense of community, greater teacher autonomy in the classroom, and more local influence over curriculum and important school policies. In addition, on average, private schools have a climate that would appear to be more conducive to learning, including greater safety and fewer problems caused by students having poor attitudes toward learning or negative interactions with teachers.

Finally, private school students take more advanced courses than do public high school students. They also appear to follow a more rigorous academic program overall, but the differences may be narrowing.

While some systematic differences between public and private education have been outlined here, enormous variation exists

within each sector. How successful students are in school does not depend on whether they attend public or private schools, but is related in complex ways to the abilities, attitudes, and problems they bring to school; the skills and expertise of their teachers; and the quality of the learning environment, which is the joint responsibility of students, teachers, school administrators, parents, the larger communities in which the schools are located, and policymaking at the local, state, and federal levels.

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