

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Parent Satisfaction Highest in Private Schools

Private school parents are significantly more satisfied with the schools their children attend than are parents from other sectors, including public charter schools and public district schools. That finding comes from two new studies released by *Education Next*, a scholarly journal on school reform published by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance at the Harvard Kennedy School.

The first study (reported here) looked at results from a survey, commissioned by *Education Next* in May and June of 2016, of a nationally representative sample of 1,571 parents with children in school. The second study (reported on page 2) analyzed results from a survey of over 17,000 families conducted in 2012 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The second study's larger sample size allowed for a deeper dive into population subgroups.

Five Key Characteristics

The report on the *Education Next* poll (*What Do Parents Think of Their Children's Schools?* by Samuel Barrows, Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West) examined parent satisfaction levels across five key school characteristics: teacher quality, discipline, expectations for achievement, safety, and instruction in character and values. The researchers found that "parents in the private sector are far more satisfied with most aspects of their children's schools than are parents with children in district

schools." Satisfaction levels for charter school parents "typically fall between those of parents using schools in the district and private sectors."

Comparing charter school parents and district school parents, the report notes, "The difference in the share of parents who are very satisfied for the five key characteristics is, on average, 13 percentage points." Then matching charter school par-

ents with private school parents, the report continues: "We observe lower levels of satisfaction with charter schools than with private schools. For the five key characteristics, the private school advantage is 12 percentage points, on average."

Teacher Quality

An online interactive graphic of the findings provides the precise percentages of parents from each sector who indicated various degrees of satisfaction with a particular aspect of their child's school. For example, 46 percent of private school parents were very satisfied with teacher quality in their school, compared to 32 percent of charter school parents and 23 percent of public school parents. Another 40 percent of

private school parents said they were satisfied (rather than very satisfied), bringing the total satisfaction percentage to 86. Total teacher quality satisfaction levels for public charter schools and public district schools were, respectively, 72 percent and 74 percent.

Character and Values

Parents were also asked how satisfied they were with the school's instruction in character and values. Again, the percentage of private school parents very satisfied with character/values education (59 percent) was significantly higher than the percentages of parents in charter schools (38 percent) and district schools (21 percent).

In other key characteristics, the share of very satisfied private school parents similarly outstripped percentages in the other sectors. Regarding school discipline, the percentages of very satisfied private, charter, and district parents were, respectively, 46, 34, and 17 percent; regarding the school's expectations for student achievement, they were 53, 38, and 25 percent; and for school safety, they were 60, 38, and 28 percent.

The study also looked at the degree of variation within each sector in how parents perceive schools and found that private school parents were the most uniform in their support. Commenting

on this finding in an EdNext podcast, Paul Peterson said, "There are so many differences within the private sector, but the one thing they seem to have in common is they've found a way to satisfy parents."

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