

RELIGIOUS  
SCHOOLS  
IN AMERICA:



A Proud History  
**AND** Perilous Future





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# A Proud History **AND** Perilous Future

Prologue, Michael Guerra,  
Chair Emeritus, Commission on Faith-based Schools

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# Prologue

**The American Center for School Choice** was incorporated in 2008 by a group of founding directors committed to the principle that all parents should be able to choose the public, private, or religious schools they believed would best serve their children. While many advocates of school choice support this principle, they often build their case largely on the belief that school choice will strengthen schools. Opponents of school choice argue that school choice will hurt public schools that may lose students and funding. Their concern for parents is often limited to urging greater parental participation in supporting their children's public schools. The words of the Supreme Court's 1925 landmark decision **Pierce v. Society of Sisters** are somehow lost to those who believe that the role of the public school trumps the role of the parent. It is worth recalling the Court's words,

"The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations."

**The American Center for School Choice** set out not only to remind the nation of our fundamental respect for the educational decisions of parents, but also to challenge all fair-minded citizens to reject a vision that holds the children of families of modest means hostage to the presumed interests of the state-funded schools to which they are assigned. While the Center has always welcomed collaboration with other school choice advocacy groups whose commitment to school choice is rooted in the belief that choice is an essential element of school improvement, the Center has always placed parents' interests ahead of schools' interests. Why then has the American Center created a special **Commission on Faith-based Schools?**

Commissions are created for one of two reasons: to address a very special problem and propose solutions, or to appear to address a very special problem and to relieve pressure on the sponsoring group to take any difficult action. Arguably, the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education, closely identified with its report **A Nation at Risk**, was created for the second reason, but nevertheless it unleashed an extraordinary reform movement. While the results may be mixed, its report put an end to complacency about educational quality and outcomes and created a consensus that American education needed to change.

**The Commission on Faith-based Schools** was created to challenge another complacency and to create a national consensus that recognizes religious schools as an asset to the nation as well as their respective religious communities, and that understands and supports the decisions families make to entrust their children to these schools.

Many faith-based schools have closed, and more are at risk of closing, or of substantially reducing their availability to families of modest means. The Center's advocacy on behalf of parents who would choose a religious school will be meaningless if religious schools are not available. Opponents of school choice often single out religious schools for attack, since they represent by far the largest percentage of the private school sector and have a generally strong record of academic achievement and service to low income families. Many of the arguments raised by the opponents of full and fair school choice are based on misinformation or misrepresentation. The following report lays out the facts and challenges the myths.

But I believe there are also subtle and perhaps not so subtle assertions hidden in the debate about public support for parents who choose religious schools. First is the contention that, whatever the Supreme Court may have said in 1925, parents are not capable of making educational decisions that will prepare their children to "succeed" in a multicultural society and a global economy. After all, if "it takes a village to raise a child," doesn't government speak for the village?

And isn't religion simply a personal and private preference with no significant place in the public square? If faith-based groups want to sponsor houses of worship, they may do so. But if they sponsor institutions that serve the public, schools, hospitals, social service agencies, then they must shed their religious perspective and adopt a secular posture indistinguishable from comparable government-sponsored organizations. In effect, their initiatives may be faith-based, but their faith must remain hidden in the basement of their motivation and not appear above ground in their services to the community.

These false and Faustian claims must be challenged. They have probably had an impact on the attitudes of some religious leaders and their congregants, who see Faust's story as a warning that they put their souls and the integrity of their religious schools at risk if they join the effort to gain public support for school choice. Understandable, but wrong. Accommodation or surrender are not the only options. This report from the Commission on Faith-based Schools offers evidence that these critiques are unfounded and unworthy of a great nation. The Commission calls on legislators and policymakers especially, but also calls on all people of faith and of fair mind to join the campaign to advance respect for families, for faith, and for justice. It is time to transform a perilous future for religious schools into a renaissance that builds on their proud history.



**Michael Guerra**

(Michael Guerra is the past president of the National Catholic Educational Association, a founding board member of the American Center for School Choice, and the first chair of the Commission on Faith-based Schools. He retired from the latter two positions in June 2013.)



# Introduction

Faith-based schools are an extension of individual and family religious freedoms in America, tied to an expression of their rights of conscience and rooted deeply in America's history. These schools—and the rights that they help to protect—are currently under severe financial strains that threaten the existence of many of them. The United States is an aberration among democracies because it does not provide public support for its families to choose a faith-based school when they wish to do so.

U.S. faith-based schools, despite suffering a severe financial disadvantage when compared with public schools and with faith-based schools in other Western democracies, are serving hundreds of thousands of students of color, students from low-income families, students with special needs, and students whose first language is not English.

Finally, faith-based schools are producing above-average academic results with fewer resources, in both traditional academic subjects and also in the development of the virtues of character, respect for differences, and citizenship.

In short, faith-based schools are an essential element in the mosaic of American education, and deserve both support for their contributions and protection for their distinctiveness.



# Ten Myths About Faith-based Schools

## **1. Providing public support to families to choose a faith-based school violates the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution.**

**Fact:** The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that providing publicly supported scholarships directly to parents, either through tax credit scholarships or vouchers, is constitutional and 17 states now have such programs in operation. (P. 6)

## **2. Religion has never been a significant part of American education.**

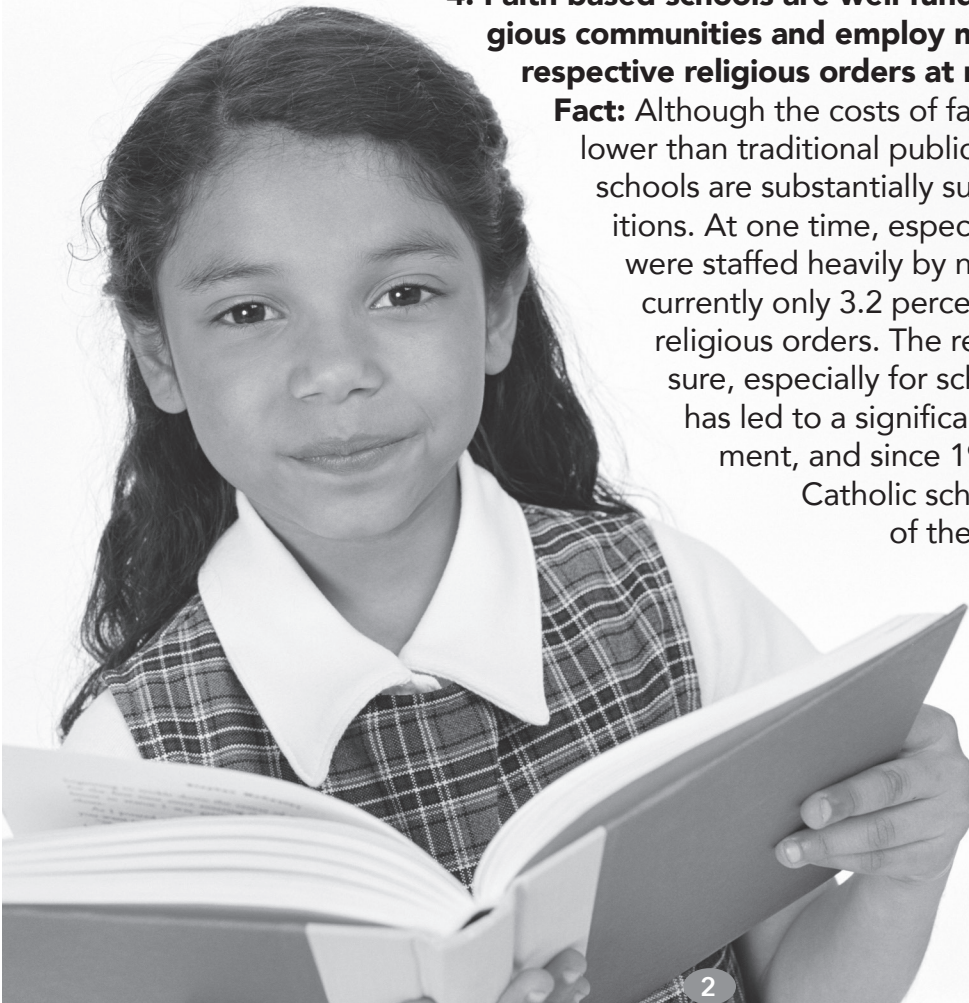
**Fact:** Religion was the foundation of education in America from Colonial days into the early twentieth century, with states passing laws requiring Bible reading in public schools as late as 1930. Public schools based on religion are not constitutional, but many American families still want to access a faith-based school for their children's education. (PP. 4-5)

## **3. Few countries provide support for parents to choose a faith-based school as part of their public education systems.**

**Fact:** Actually, in the Western Hemisphere, only Cuba and the United States do not routinely provide public support for parents to make that choice. Most democracies have incorporated faith-based schools among the choices that are open to parents when selecting a school for their children. (PP. 8, 14)

## **4. Faith-based schools are well funded through their religious communities and employ mostly members of the respective religious orders at relatively low wages.**

**Fact:** Although the costs of faith-based schools are lower than traditional public schools, faith-based schools are substantially supported through tuitions. At one time, especially Catholic schools were staffed heavily by nuns and priests, but currently only 3.2 percent of the staff are in religious orders. The resulting financial pressure, especially for schools serving the poor, has led to a significant decline in enrollment, and since 1990 more than 1300 Catholic schools have closed. Most of the staffs of nearly all faith-based schools today do not come from religious orders, and although they are paid less than public school staffs, compensation is a significant cost for these schools. (P. 9)





**5. Faith-based schools are elite, highly selective institutions that do not serve an ethnically diverse population.**

**Fact:** Faith-based schools in every region of the country have been found to be more racially integrated than the district public schools, primarily because the latter draw students almost exclusively from homogenous residential neighborhoods. Study after study, cited in this report, reflect that when parental choice programs are available, they move students from more segregated schools to less segregated schools. (PP. 12-13)

**6. Faith-based schools do not serve special needs children.**

**Fact:** The percentage of faith-based students with an individualized education plan (IEP) varies from 4 percent up to 11 percent with a median of 4.5 percent. That percentage is close to the 5.2 percent national average for school age children reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. (PP. 16-19)

**7. Faith-based schools do not serve English language learners.**

**Fact:** The percentage of limited proficient students ranges from 3 percent to 34 percent across the various faiths with a median of 5.3 percent. Again, this mirrors closely the national average of 5 percent of school age children who speak English “not well” and “not at all” reported by the U.S. Census. (PP. 19-20)

**8. Faith-based schools do not produce students as likely to be civically engaged, politically knowledgeable, or politically tolerant as public schools do.**

**Fact:** The evidence strongly indicates the opposite. Studies conducted in both Catholic and fundamentalist Christian schools found that the faith-based students were more confident and likely to exercise civic skills and displayed a higher level of tolerance than their public school counterparts. (PP. 27)

**9. Traditionally at-risk students, those with low incomes, African-Americans, and Hispanics, are not served well in faith-based schools.**

**Fact:** Utilizing data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the positive performance for these at-risk students is striking in faith-based schools. On average, the performance advantage in reading is 1.7 grade levels ahead for black students, 2.5 grade levels ahead for Hispanic students, and 1.6 grade levels ahead for low-income students. (P. 25)

**10. Parental choice programs that empower families to choose faith-based schools don't really make any difference in student outcomes.**

**Fact:** From 1998 to 2012 multiple researchers have conducted 12 “gold standard” random assignment studies of voucher programs focused on academic outcomes. This scientific method establishes a control group to compare with the group receiving vouchers, similar to how medical trials are conducted, and yields a high level of confidence that other influencing factors such as students’ background and parents’ education are not affecting the results. No gold standard study has ever found a negative impact from allowing students to attend a private school; 11 of 12 found positive results. Overall, those 11 gold standard studies show that attending private schools (including faith-based schools) increases the likelihood of high school graduation and college attendance, as well as improved reading and math scores. (PP. 20-23)

# Why Faith-based Schools?

## *The Religious Origins of American Public Education*

Religious concerns motivated the Colonial origins of formal education at all levels, whether in the village schools of New England, in the academies like Phillips Exeter and Phillips Andover, or in the early colleges. Less well known is that these motivations continued strong during the century (roughly 1830 to 1930) when publicly funded schooling spread across the United States. The “Common School” movement associated with Horace Mann was permeated by religious themes and motivations;<sup>1</sup> Mann himself insisted on the central role of religion and the Bible in schools. In his annual report to the Massachusetts Board of Education, in 1846, Mann stated that the “policy of the State promotes not only secular but religious instruction.”<sup>2</sup> The following year he claimed that “it is not known that there is, or ever has been, a member of the Board of Education, who would not be disposed to recommend the daily reading of the Bible, devotional exercises, and the constant inculcation of the precepts of Christian morality, in all the Public Schools,”<sup>3</sup> and the year after that, in his valedictory 1848 report, he made the religious character of the common school his central theme. After a panegyric to the importance of moral education as the central mission of the common school, Mann pointed out that

“It will be said that this grand result, in Practical Morals, is a consummation of blessedness that can never be attained without Religion; and that no community will ever be religious, without a Religious Education. Both these propositions, I regard as eternal and immutable truths. Devoid of religious principles and religious affections, the race can never fall so low but that it may sink still lower; animated and sanctified by them, it can never rise so high but that it may ascend still higher...The man...who believes that the human race, or any nation, or any individual in it, can attain to happiness, or avoid misery, without religious principle and religious affections, must be ignorant of the capacities of the human soul, and of the highest attributes in the nature of man.”<sup>4</sup>

As a result, he told the board and his widespread public, “I could not avoid regarding the man, who should oppose the religious education of the young, as an insane man,” and, in his role as secretary of the board of education, he had “believed then, as now, that religious instruction in our schools, to the extent

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn, Charles L. 1988. *The Myth of the Common School*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. Chapter 6: “The Common School as a Religious Institution.”

<sup>2</sup> Mann, Horace. 1847. *Tenth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*. Boston: Dutton and Wentworth. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Mann, Horace. 1848. *Eleventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*. Boston: Dutton and Wentworth. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Mann, Horace. 1849. *Twelfth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 98-99



which the constitution and laws of the state allowed and prescribed, was indispensable to their highest welfare, and essential to the vitality of moral education.”<sup>5</sup>

Such views were widely held among American educational leaders. National Education Association delegates voted unanimously in the 1860s that the Bible should be both read and taught in public schools, and this continued to be a regular theme at NEA conventions into the early twentieth century: “Its use was regarded as indispensable for the development of character, morals, citizenship, and patriotism.”<sup>6</sup>

For most non-Catholic parents, this generic Protestantism, though silent about the great drama of sin and salvation, seems to have been quite satisfactory, especially when accompanied with regular reading from the Bible and other devotional practices. “So successful were Protestant efforts to demonstrate the compatibility of the Bible with increasingly secular education that individual states continued into the twentieth century to pass laws requiring Bible-reading in public schools: Pennsylvania in 1913, Delaware and Tennessee in 1916, Alabama in 1919, Georgia in 1921, Maine in 1923, Kentucky in 1924, Florida and Ohio in 1925, and Arkansas in 1930.”<sup>7</sup>

## *The Origins of Faith-based Alternatives to Public Schools*

Against this background, the development of Catholic, Lutheran, and Dutch Calvinist schools over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—through heroic sacrifices by immigrants with very limited resources—was based in deep convictions about the importance of educating children within a religious perspective and behavioral norms differing from those of the majority, as expressed in the public schools. These efforts could not have succeeded without the strong support of parents who denied themselves in other ways to ensure that their children could receive an education corresponding to their deepest convictions.

A similar effort was made after World War II by Orthodox Jews, refugees from Europe and their children, to create and sustain Jewish day schools, and, more recently, by Muslim immigrants and their children to create and sustain Islamic schools. The intention in none of these cases was to reject participation in American society, but rather to ensure that this participation would have strong roots in a particular religious tradition and could resist those aspects of American culture seen by parents as toxic.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 103, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Wesley, Edgar B. 1957. *NEA: The First Hundred Years*. New York: Harper & Brothers. 43, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Fessenden, Tracy. 2005. “The Nineteenth-Century Bible Wars and the Separation of Church and State.” *Church History*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (December), pp. 784-811, 807.

The very rapid growth of Evangelical Protestant schools since World War II, (the largest group of which are commonly self-identified as “Christian” schools,) had a rather different motivation: the alienation of many parents by public schools that through litigation and political pressure had purged the religious elements once central to their mission. One could say that the trajectory in this instance was just the opposite of that followed by the immigrant groups: While the latter chose to stay out of the public schools in order to nurture their distinctive convictions, many Protestant families felt pushed out as their beliefs, long a staple of public schooling, were expelled.



Whatever the motivations for seeking an alternative to the common public school, such parents were claiming a basic human right. Article 26 (3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, declares that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” and this right has been recognized in the laws of most countries as well as in a series of international covenants. It had already been acknowledged in 1925 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (268 U.S. 510), with the famous words:

“The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.”

The U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* in 2002 that providing public support to parents to attend religious schools did not violate the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. In 2011, the Court decided in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* that a group of Arizona taxpayers asserting that the state’s tax credit scholarship program violated the Establishment Clause did not have standing to bring suit. Tax credit scholarship programs allow businesses and/or individuals to claim credits against taxes owed for donations to nonprofit organizations that subsequently provide scholarships that may be used at private schools, including faith-based schools. The Supreme Court found that any damages or harm claimed by the taxpayers by virtue of simply being a taxpayer would be pure speculation because the issue at hand was a tax credit and not a government expenditure.



Although, as we will see, strong evidence clearly supports the positive social and educational benefits of faith-based schools, the fundamental case for them rests upon the right of families to make decisions in what they consider the best interest of their children. As Professor John Coons has pointed out, “the right to form families and to determine the scope of their children’s practical liberty is for most men and women the primary occasion for choice and responsibility. One does not have to be rich or well placed to experience the family. The opportunity over a span of fifteen or twenty years to attempt the transmission of one’s deepest values to a beloved child provides a unique arena for the creative impulse. Here is the communication of ideas in its most elemental mode. Parental expression, for all its invisibility to the media, is an activity with profound First Amendment implications.”<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> Coons, John E. 1985. “Intellectual Liberty and the Schools.” *Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 1, 511.

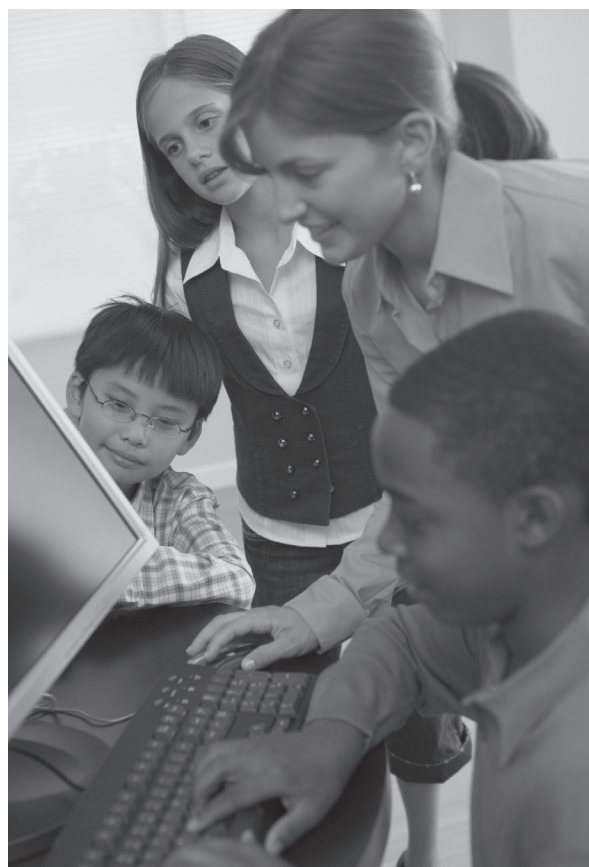
# The Present Situation of Faith-based Schools in the United States

There are 21,023 faith-based schools, representing 17 percent of all schools in the United States, though they represent a smaller proportion of students since they tend to be smaller than district public schools.<sup>9</sup> More than 7,400 Roman Catholic schools make up the largest share of faith-based schools. Nondenominational “Christian” (Evangelical Protestant) schools represent the second largest share with more than 4,300 schools, followed by Lutheran (Missouri Synod) schools, with nearly 2,100.

Urban faith-based schools, 36 percent of the total, have experienced large demographic shifts in recent decades as the populations of cities have changed and often middle class families have moved to the suburbs, subjecting the schools to enrollment and financial pressures and causing many of them to close.

Altogether there are 4,360,456 students enrolled in faith-based schools, representing 8 percent of all student enrollments. Roman Catholic schools make up the largest share of faith-based enrollments, with more than 2.3 million students. Nondenominational Christian schools represent the second largest share with more than 697,000 students, followed by Baptist schools with nearly 290,000 students, and Jewish schools, with more than 221,000 students.

Faith-based schools in the United States are subject to financial pressures that are not experienced by similar schools in other Western democracies (including in most Canadian provinces), where government funds them directly based upon parental demand. The United States and Cuba are the only Western Hemisphere countries that do not offer families public support to access faith-based schools routinely.



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<sup>9</sup> Data here and below were generated by Vicki E. Alger from the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data (CCD) for the 2009-10 school year. The CCD data come from Stephen P. Broughman, Nancy L. Swaim, Cassie A. Hryczaniuk, Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2009-10 Private School Universe Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, May 2011, Table 2, p. 7, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011339.pdf>. Direct table link: [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/tables/table\\_2009\\_02.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/tables/table_2009_02.asp). In some cases the latest CCD figures presented on the website will differ from their original report sources because the Department updates the CCD as new information becomes available.

As public expenditure (in constant dollars) in district public schools more than doubled in recent decades, this increased the tax pressure on families wishing to send their children to faith-based schools, at the same time that the schools were forced to increase expenditures on salaries and facilities to keep pace (though always some lengths behind) with their public school competitors.

These pressures have become even greater with the establishment of thousands of charter schools, providing many of the advantages of distinctive focus and autonomous management that faith-based schools have long enjoyed, though without their religious focus.

Catholic schools have been especially hard-hit, both because many charters locate in urban neighborhoods where the Catholic schools have been serving the community and also because of the sharp decline in the number of religious vocations in the orders of teaching nuns and brothers has raised the costs of operating Catholic schools compared with earlier times. At present, only 3.2 percent of the staff of Catholic schools are in religious orders. Based on federal government data, the chart below shows Catholic school enrollment declined by more than 200,000 students (8.7 percent) between the 2001-02 and 2009 -10 school years. The National Catholic Educational Association reports an even more dire decline, from more than 5.2 million students in the early 1960s to just over 2 million in 2012-13.<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>10</sup><http://www.ncea.org/news/annualdatareport.asp>, accessed May 9, 2013.





Given the overwhelming evidence (presented later) that Catholic schools do an unusually effective job educating Hispanic and African-American students, this decline is a severe blow to our national agenda of reducing the achievement gap. Since 1990, more than 1,300 Catholic schools have closed, affecting some 300,000 students; it has been estimated that this represents an additional cost to taxpayers of more than \$20 billion a year.<sup>11</sup>

Several recent articles and studies attribute this decline to the rise of public charter schools, particularly in urban areas.<sup>12</sup> Many analyses focus on particular cities or states. A recent study estimates that about one-third of New York State's charter school enrollment, 20,000 students, comes from Catholic schools at an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$320 million.<sup>13</sup> Based on charter enrollments in Michigan it has been estimated that for every three students gained by charter schools, private schools will lose one.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Scott Hamilton, ed., *Who Will Save America's Urban Catholic Schools?* Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008, [http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/catholic\\_schools\\_08.pdf](http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/catholic_schools_08.pdf).

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Richard Buddin, *The Impact of Charter Schools on Public and Private School Enrollments*, Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 707, August 28, 2012, <http://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/PA707.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup>Abraham M. Lackman, "The Collapse of Catholic School Enrollment: The Unintended Consequence of the Charter School Movement," draft September 10, 2012, *Albany Government Law Review* forthcoming, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/106930920/Abe-Lackman-Draft>.

<sup>14</sup>Eugenia F. Toma, Ron Zimmer, and John T. Jones, "Beyond Achievement: Enrollment Consequences of Charter Schools in Michigan," *Advances in Applied Microeconomics*, 2006, [http://ncspe.org/publications\\_files/OP128.pdf](http://ncspe.org/publications_files/OP128.pdf).

Although some debate occurs over the exact effect charters have had on religious schools, whatever the causes of the decline in Catholic school enrollments, particularly in urban areas, this unquestionably is a loss for the at-risk children these schools have served so effectively, as well as for many thousands of families seeking an education based upon religious perspectives.<sup>15</sup> Signs of renewed vitality among Catholic schools, as evidenced by the Cristo Rey high schools and the Nativity-Miguel middle schools, dedicated to serving low-income students, have appeared in recent years, but Catholic schools have also seen their growth hampered by financial constraints where no access to public support programs exists.

Enrollment trends between the 2001-02 and 2009-10 school years in other religious schools are presented below, though they should be treated with caution since in some cases there may simply be a change in the way groups of schools identify themselves. Out of the 22 faith-based school types reported, nearly two-thirds experienced enrollment increases, while about one-third experienced enrollment declines. Growth is not occurring in the inner city areas where faith-based schools have long been critical community resources.

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<sup>15</sup>See Bruce S. Cooper, Steven D’Agustino, and Mary Rivera, “Catholic School Survival and the Common Good: Trends, Developments & Futures,” in *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest: Past, Present, Future Trends*, Patricia A. Bauch, ed., (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008).

## K-12 FAITH-BASED STUDENT ENROLLMENT: 2001-02 AND 2009-10

School Orientation /Affiliation	Number of Students 2009-10	2001-02 to 2009-10	
		Change	% Change
Assembly of God	57,520	-8,518	-14.81%
Baptist	289,582	-25,102	-8.67%
Brethren	9,091	949	10.44%
Calvinist	26,691	-12,388	-46.41%
Christian (unspecified)	697,358	93,734	13.44%
Church of God	13,744	-42	-0.31%
Episcopal	119,746	19,343	16.15%
Evangelical Lutheran Church	23,383	7,246	30.99%

Friends	22,205	1,324	5.96%
Greek Orthodox	4,768	206	4.32%
Islamic	32,646	9,695	29.70%
Jewish	221,178	22,700	10.26%
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	179,525	17,224	9.59%
Mennonite	20,384	-3,286	-16.12%
Methodist	35,933	18,366	51.11%
Other	26,729	-30,310	-113.40%
Other Lutheran	6,596	1,221	18.51%
Pentecostal	16,924	-22,376	-132.22%
Presbyterian	55,449	15,552	28.05%
Roman Catholic	2,314,397	-201,127	-8.69%
Seventh-Day Adventist	64,720	4,039	6.24%
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran	36,988	1,404	3.80%

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, Private School Survey, 2001-02 school year, Table 2; and Common Core of Data, 2009-10 school year.

*Notes:* 1. The following faith-based schools were excluded because reporting standards were not met or were flagged as potentially unreliable: African Methodist Episcopal, Amish, Church of God in Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Disciples of Christ, and Latter Day Saints. 2. Because of those exclusions, details will not sum to the total. 3. Includes K-12 and ungraded enrollments.

Especially notable is the nearly 30 percent increase in the (still small) enrollment in Islamic schools, and the 10.3 percent increase in enrollment in Jewish day schools. The latter reflects a continuing trend away from the historically strong support of American Jews for public schools, led first by Orthodox Jews but now involving other branches of Judaism as well.

## Who Are Served by Faith-based Schools?

One of the most widespread misconceptions about faith-based schools is that they are elite, selective institutions, a refuge for bigoted white parents from racially integrated public schools. In fact, as Jay Greene and other researchers have shown, faith-based schools in every region of the country are more racially integrated than



are district public schools, since the latter are highly segregated by race and by income as a result of drawing students from homogeneous residential districts.<sup>16</sup> Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice has recently summarized the eight empirical studies specifically examining racial segregation in private schools participating in school choice programs. Seven of those studies find that school choice moves students from more segregated schools into less segregated schools. One study finds no net effect on segregation from school choice. No empirical study has found that choice increases racial segregation.<sup>17</sup>

Even though the current Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP) has come under fire from the U.S. Department of Justice, which alleges that the use of private school vouchers by low-income students fails to conform to federal school-desegregation plans initiated in the 1970s, a study shows that in the 34 districts under federal desegregation orders, including the 24 districts specifically named in the DOJ lawsuit, LSP transfers actually improve integration in both the public schools students leave and the private schools in which they enroll. Statewide, 83 percent of LSP transfers positively affect racial integration in the sending schools, and LSP transfers have no significant effect on integration in receiving schools.<sup>18</sup>

In urban communities like Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., where programs have been implemented to provide low-income parents with educational vouchers, the effect has been to move those children from heavily segregated district schools to racially balanced faith-based private schools.<sup>19</sup> In some cases—Cleveland and Kansas City are good examples—faith-based schools expressed willingness to accept poor children from the inner-city even as suburban public school systems refused to do so.

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<sup>16</sup> Jay P. Greene and Nicole Mellow, "Integration Where It Counts: A Study of Racial Integration in Public and Private School Lunchrooms," *Texas Education Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1/Spring 2000, pp. 15-26; and Jay P. Greene, "Civic Values in Public and Private Schools," in *Learning from School Choice*, eds. Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998), pp. 83-106, <http://www.uark.edu/ua/der/People/Greene/Civic-values.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Forster, *A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice*, Third Edition, Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, April 17, 2013, pp. 18-22, <http://www.edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/994/A-Win-Win-Solution--The-Empirical-Evidence-on-School-Choice.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Anna J. Egalite and Jonathan N. Mills, "The Louisiana Scholarship Program," *Education Next*, Winter, 2014/Vol. 14, No. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Howard L. Fuller and George A. Mitchell, "The Impact of School Choice on Integration in Milwaukee Private Schools," *Current Education Issues*, No. 2000-02, May 2000 (Marquette University, Office of Research). See also Coleman, *Trends in School Segregation, 1968-73, 1975* (Coleman II/"white flight" study). Also Jay P. Greene, Jonathan N. Mills, and Stuart Buck, "The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program's Effect on School Integration," *SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #20, School Choice Demonstration Project*, March 2010. Also Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, "An Evaluation of the Effect of D.C.'s Voucher Program on Public School Achievement and Racial Integration after One Year," *Education Working Paper No. 10*, Manhattan Institute Center for Civic Innovation, December 2006.

Many poor families cannot send their children to faith-based schools because these schools must in most cases charge tuition to meet their expenses. As noted, this contrasts starkly with the policies in other Western democracies, which allow parents to choose schools without financial penalty on the basis of their religious convictions.<sup>20</sup> The American situation is improving, moving toward greater equity and respect for freedom of conscience, as 17 states now operate education voucher programs and tuition tax credits that offer at least some tuition assistance and serve approximately 250,000 students, many of whom choose faith-based schools. Demand for choice, however, far exceeds the ability of American parents to access the school of their choosing.

In view of this lack of equitable funding, it is remarkable that more than a million racial/ethnic minority students attend faith-based schools:

## K-12 FAITH-BASED ENROLLMENTS: ETHNICITY/RACE

American Indian/Alaska Native	17,105
Asian/Pacific Islander	221,088
Black	327,022
Hispanic	435,338
White	2,680,634
Multiple races	101,759
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,782,946</b>

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data, 2009-10.

*Notes:* 1. Details may not sum to total because of rounding or missing values in cells with too few sample cases. 2. Includes K-12 and ungraded enrollments.

While white non-Hispanic students represent 70 percent of the enrollment in faith-based schools, Hispanic enrollments represent 12 percent, while 9 percent of the students in faith-based schools are African-American.

Another common misconception is that wealthy American families enroll their children in private schools. In reality most of those families live in affluent suburbs where they send their children to public schools that draw from a large property tax base.

<sup>20</sup>See discussion of such policies in 65 countries in Charles L. Glenn and Jan De Groof. *Balancing Freedom, Autonomy, and Accountability in Education*, volumes 1-4 (Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishing, 2012).

The Census Bureau regularly publishes statistical tables on the family incomes of Americans sending their children to public, private, or both types of schools.<sup>21</sup> For context, the median annual American household income is just under \$53,000, and less than 40 percent of American homes with children under the age of 18 have annual incomes of \$75,000 or more. Yet 85 percent of all families in this highest Census income bracket send their children to public schools. In contrast, just 12 percent of these families send their children to private schools; while 3 percent send their children to both types of schools.

It is also commonly asserted that private schools enroll few low-income, special needs, and English-language learners (ELLs). The way these students are reported gives artificially low counts in private schools, particularly faith-based private schools. The reason is that each of those student groups is defined by participation in federally funded education programs: the National School Lunch Program (free and reduced-price lunches), Title I of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 20 percent of Catholic private schools do not participate in federal education programs, nor do 72 percent of other religious private schools and 75 percent of nonsectarian private schools.

### Where do students from families with incomes \$75,000 and over go to school?

Families by Ethnicity/Race/Origin	Public only	Private only	Public & Private
All	85%	11%	3%
Asian	88%	11%	1%
Hispanic origin	88%	9%	3%
Black	86%	10%	4%
White	85%	12%	4%

Source: Percentages based on figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, School Enrollment in the United States, 2011, Table 8.

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, School Enrollment in the United States: 2011, Detailed Tables, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/>. See "Table 8. Table 8. Enrollment Status for Families with Children 5 to 24 Years Old, by Control of School, Race, Type of Family, and Family Income: October 2011, All Races, [http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2011/tab08\\_11.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2011/tab08_11.xls).



Thus significant numbers of private school students who are from low-income families, have special needs, or are ELLs are not counted simply because the educational services they receive are not funded by the federal government.<sup>22</sup>

Comparing available faith-based school and district public school data with comparable U.S. Census Bureau data reveals that special student populations in faith-based schools better reflect the American population at large than do district public school enrollments.<sup>23</sup> In fact, across all three at-risk student populations, the public school proportions are at least twice as high as both the Census and faith-based schools proportions.

Faith-based private schools do, in fact, enroll students designated as low-income defined according to their participation in federal education programs. Students are counted as “low-income” if their families’ incomes qualify them for free or reduced-priced lunches under the federal National School Lunch Program. The percentages of eligible students vary across faith-based and nonsectarian private schools, from 4 percent up to 56 percent, with a median of 23.75 percent. That median closely reflects the 21.4 percent of related children under 18 living in poverty reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

This proxy, however, understates the actual number of low-income students enrolled in private schools since more than half of all private schools do not participate in federal education programs. Additionally, in the 17 states with a variety of parental choice programs providing a private school option primarily for low-income students, the number of participating private schools is expanding.

## *Special Needs Students*

Faith-based schools also enroll many students with special needs. Students are considered “special needs” if they have a diagnosed disability. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children whose parents place them in private schools are not individually entitled to special education services. Through a consultation process, some students are selected to receive some services and are given an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that describes the services the student will receive.

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<sup>22</sup>U.S. Department of Education, *Private School Participants in Programs under the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Private School and Public School District Perspectives*, 2007.

<sup>23</sup>Sources for low-income students are the U.S. Department of Education, *Schools and Staffing Survey*, Table 1. Total number of private schools and students and percentage of private schools and students that participated in Title I and the National School Lunch Program, by affiliation: 2007-08, [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s2a\\_01.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009321_s2a_01.asp); and U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States: 2011 - Tables & Figures*, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2011/tables.html>. See Table 3. *People in Poverty by Selected Characteristics: 2010 and 2011*.

The U.S. Department of Education reports that 8.3 percent of private school students in 2007-08 had an IEP, approximately 429,000 students.<sup>24</sup> The percentages of eligible students varied across faith-based private schools, from 4 percent up to 11 percent, with a median of 4.5 percent. Those students with a diagnosed disability who were not selected to receive an IEP were not included in the data. Those percentages and median mirror the 5.2 percent national average for school-age children with disabilities reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>25</sup>

## K-12 Faith-Based Students with an IEP

Catholic	14.40%
Baptist	3.70%
Jewish	10.90%
Lutheran	4.40%
Seventh-Day Adventist	3.70%
Other religious	6.60%

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 2. Number and percentage of all private schools that had any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or who were limited-English proficient (LEP) and percentage of students with an IEP or who were LEP, by affiliation: 2007-08, [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s2a\\_02.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009321_s2a_02.asp).

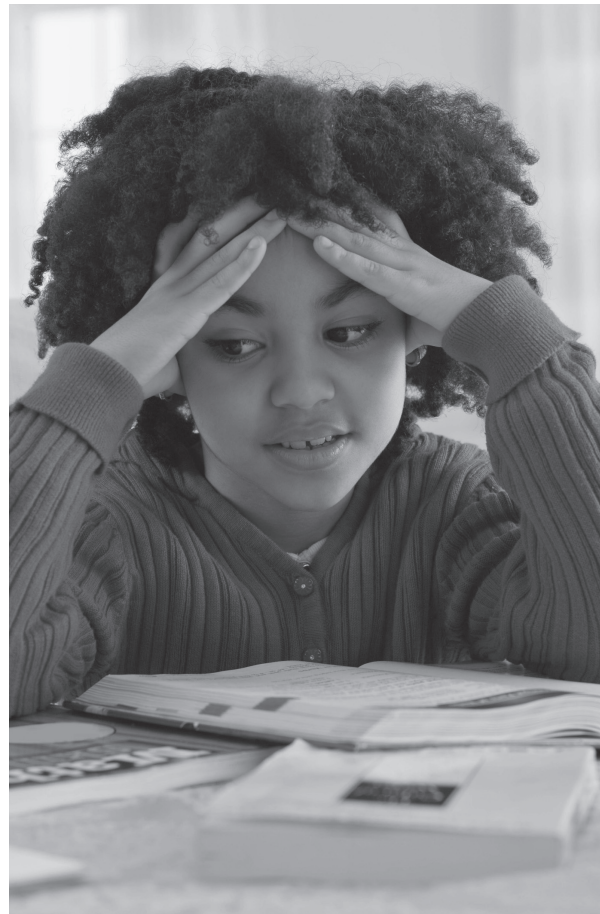
*Notes:* 1. "IEP" stands for individualized education plan or program. Students with an IEP are eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2. The Catholic percentage represents combined percentages for Catholic private, parochial, and diocesan school students.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 2. Number and percentage of all private schools that had any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or who were limited-English proficient (LEP) and percentage of students with an IEP or who were LEP, by affiliation: 2007-08. Student figures are based on total enrollment figures provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 1.

Total number of private schools and students and percentage of private schools and students that participated in Title I and the National School Lunch Program, by affiliation: 2007-08, [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s2a\\_01.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009321_s2a_01.asp).

<sup>25</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, "School-Aged Children with Disabilities in U.S. Metropolitan Statistical Areas: 2010," November 2011, pp. 1, and 7-8, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-12.pdf>.

Many private schools choose not to label students as special needs unless they have “hard,” medically diagnosed disabilities (autism, severe brain injury, visual impairments, etc.). A growing body of research documents an apparent over-identification of public school students with “soft,” more subjective specific learning disabilities (SLD) or learning disabilities (LD), which alone account for 41 percent of all disabilities across 13 categories defined by the U.S. Department of Education.



Typically, students identified as having a learning disability have average and above average intelligence. Because their brains simply process information differently, these students typically do poorly on assessments.<sup>26</sup> Researchers have identified various factors contributing to the disproportionate rate of students with SLD IEPs. First, students are frequently labeled with an SLD based on assessments by education committees, not medical diagnoses.<sup>27</sup> Researchers from the National Institutes of Health have also found evidence that poor reading instruction in the early grades results in deficiencies that are later misidentified as learning disabilities. They estimate up to 70 percent of those learning disability labels are preventable with proper reading instruction.<sup>28</sup>

In a five-year study of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the nation’s oldest, which now serves 23,000 students in 107 private schools, researchers found that while the percentage of students in the voucher schools with disabilities is lower than the disability rate in the public schools, it is at least four times higher than public officials have claimed.

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<sup>26</sup>National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, Categories of Disabilities Under IDEA, March 2012, “<http://nichcy.org/disability/categories>”<http://nichcy.org/disability/categories>. See Specific Learning Disability, <http://nichcy.org/disability/categories#ld>; and Learning Disability, January 2011, <http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/ld>.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Johnson, Ann Lessem, Carol Bergquist, Dottie Carmichael, and Guy Whitten, Disproportionate Representation of Minority Children in Special Education, Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M University, n.d., pp. 1, and 14, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/pubs/pdf/disprop.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup>G. Reid Lyon et al., “Rethinking Learning Disabilities,” in Chester E. Finn, Jr., A. Rotherham, and C. Hokanson, Jr., eds., “Rethinking Special Education for a New Century” (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Progressive policy Institute, 2001), p. 260.



They also noted that comparing special education in the public and private schools is difficult because “they operate under different legal obligations, financial incentives, and cultural norms.” Nevertheless, within this long-standing voucher program, parental satisfaction with services for students with disabilities is quite similar across the two sectors, regardless of whether the student was in MPCP or Milwaukee Public Schools. Presumably, the choice of sectors and schools allowed parents to obtain an educational setting they view as appropriate for their child.<sup>29</sup>

Other researchers also point to perverse incentives to over-identify students with learning disabilities in public schools, such as to ensure that poor test-takers are exempted from mandatory assessments. Another perverse incentive is financial, since many states distribute federal IDEA funding based on the number of students placed on IEPs by school districts, often referred to as “bounty funding.”<sup>30</sup> Researchers have found that up to 62 percent of the total increase in special-education enrollments in bounty funding states is attributable to financial incentives. They further note that such over-identification has resulted in nearly 400,000 more students in special education nationwide at a cost of \$2.3 billion annually.

## *English-language Learners*

Private schools also enroll ELLs, also referred to as limited English proficient (LEP) students. The U.S. Department of Education reports that 7.9 percent of private school students overall are LEP, approximately 408,000 students.<sup>31</sup> The percentages of LEP students vary across faith-based schools, from 3 percent up to 34 percent, with a median of 5.3 percent, closely mirroring the combined 5 percent national average of school-age children who speak English “not well” and “not at all” reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Patrick J. Wolf, David J. Fleming, and John F. Witte, “Special Choices,” *Education Next*, Summer, 2012/Volume 12, No. 3, pp. 16-22.

<sup>30</sup>Richard Apling and Nancy Lee Jones, “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Overview of Major Provisions,” CRS Report RS20366, Jan. 11, 2002, <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/educ/files/ideaover.pdf#search=%22%22history%20of%20IDEA%22%20education%22>. Jay Greene and Greg Forster, “Effects of Funding Incentives on Special Education Enrollment,” Manhattan Institute, Civic Report No. 32, December 2002, [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_32.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_32.htm).

<sup>31</sup>U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 2. Number and percentage of all private schools that had any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or who were limited-English proficient (LEP) and percentage of students with an IEP or who were LEP, by affiliation: 2007-08, Student figures are based on total enrollment figures provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 1.

Table 1. Total number of private schools and students and percentage of private schools and students that participated in Title I and the National School Lunch Program, by affiliation: 2007-08, [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s2a\\_01.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009321_s2a_01.asp).

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Robert A. Kominski, Hyon B. Shin, and Karen Marotz, “Language Needs of School-Age Children.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans, LA, April 16-19, 2008. See “Tables,” Table 2. School-Age Children Ages 5-17 Years, Enrolled in Nursery School Through 12th Grade, Who Spoke a Language Other (Tab 2).

## Percentage of K-12 Faith-Based Students Who are LEP

Catholic	8.70%
Baptist	3.10%
Jewish	33.70%
Lutheran	2.40%
Seventh-Day Adventist	8.70%
Other religious	5.30%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 2. Number and percentage of all private schools that had any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or who were limited-English proficient (LEP) and percentage of students with an IEP or who were LEP, by affiliation: 2007-08, [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s2a\\_02.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009321_s2a_02.asp).

Notes: 1. "LEP" stands for limited English proficient. 2. Reporting standards were not met for LEP Catholic-Diocesan schools, therefore data were not presented. 3. Catholic percentage represents the combined percentages for Catholic private and parochial school students.

## Outcomes of Faith-based Schools

Increased data availability and more sophisticated analytical strategies developed in recent years have contributed to a growing body of scientific research on the academic outcomes of private and faith-based schools. At the same time, the growth of parental school choice programs has made it possible to conduct more exacting research on the performance of private and faith-based schools compared to public schools. From 1998 to 2012 multiple researchers conducted 12 "gold standard" random assignment studies of voucher programs focused on academic outcomes.<sup>33</sup> This scientific method establishes a control group to compare with the group receiving vouchers, similar to how medical trials are conducted, and yields a high level of confidence that other influencing factors such as students' background and parents' education are not affecting the results.

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<sup>33</sup>For an excellent summary, see Greg Forster, *A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice*, Third Edition, Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, April 17, 2013.

No gold standard study has ever found a negative impact on students attending private schools through a parental choice program. On the contrary, 11 of the 12 gold standard studies find that attending a private school improves academic performance for all students (six studies) or some students (five studies). The sole exception was a 2004 replication of the 2002 study by Peterson and Howell in New York by Princeton researchers, who used an arbitrary and novel definition of black students, along with other now discredited practices, to conclude that attending private schools in New York City had at best only a “trivial” impact on black student achievement.<sup>34</sup> Peterson and Howell conducted more than 120 scientific re-analyses. Positive effects were found in all cases, 90 percent of which (108) were statistically significant, confirming that the academic performance of black students attending private schools improved.<sup>35</sup> They in fact disputed that the Princeton researchers actually found significantly different results.<sup>36</sup>

Overall the 11 gold standard studies finding positive impacts show that attending private schools (including faith-based private schools) increases the likelihood of high school graduation and college attendance, as well as improved reading and math scores, as summarized in the table below. These are compelling findings, especially since students attending private and faith-based private schools through various voucher and tax credit scholarship programs are overwhelmingly from inner city low-income families and had previously attended underperforming public schools.



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<sup>34</sup>Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu, “Another Look at the New York City School Voucher Experiment,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, January 2004/Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 658-698.

<sup>35</sup>Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell, “The Latest Results from the New York City Voucher Experiment,” *Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality & Social Policy*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, November 3, 2003, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/inequality/Seminar/Papers/PetersonHowell03.pdf>; William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson, “Voucher Research Controversy,” *Education Next*, Spring 2004 /Vol. 4, No. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell, “Voucher Research Controversy,” *Education Next*, Spring, 2004/ Vol. 4, No.2, pp. 73-78.



## Gold Standard Research: Attending Private Schools Improves Academic Outcomes

No.	Author(s)	Year	Program Location	Low-income Student group	Time period	Outcomes
12	Chingos & Peterson <sup>37</sup>	2012	New York	Black	Within 3 years	<p>Increased likely college enrollment rate 24 percent.</p> <hr/> <p>Increased likely full-time college enrollment rate 31 percent.</p> <hr/> <p>Increased likely selective, four-year college enrollment rate 130 percent.</p>
11	Jin et al. <sup>38</sup>	2010	New York	From low-performing public schools	After 1 year	Raised math scores 4 points (confirms Bernard et al., 2003, using different assumptions)
10	Wolf et al. <sup>39</sup>	2010	D.C.	All	After 4 years	Increased high school graduation rate 21 percentage points to 91 percent.
				From low-performing public schools	After 4 years	Increased high school graduation rate 20 percentage points to 86 percent.
9	Cowen <sup>40</sup>	2008	Charlotte	All	After 1 year	Raised reading scores 8 points.
					After 1 year	Raised math scores 7 points.

<sup>37</sup>Matthew Chingos and Paul Peterson, "The Effects of School Vouchers on College Enrollment: Experimental Evidence from New York City," Brookings Institution and Harvard University, August 2012, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/8/23%20school%20vouchers%20harvard%20chingos/Impacts\\_of\\_School\\_Vouchers\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/8/23%20school%20vouchers%20harvard%20chingos/Impacts_of_School_Vouchers_FINAL.pdf). Overview, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/08/23-school-vouchers-harvard-chingos>

<sup>38</sup>Hui Jin, John Barnard, and Donald Rubin, "A Modified General Location Model for Noncompliance with Missing Data: Revisiting the New York City School Choice Scholarship Program using Principal Stratification," *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, April 2010/Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 154-173.

<sup>39</sup>Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Brian Kisida, Lou Rizzo, Nada Eissa, and Matthew Carr, Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, U.S. Department of Education, June 22, 2010, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>. Overview: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/>.

<sup>40</sup>Joshua Cowen, "School Choice as a Latent Variable: Estimating the 'Complier Average Causal Effect' of Vouchers in Charlotte," *Policy Studies Journal*, May 2008/Vol. 36, Issue 2, pp. 301-315.

8	Krueger & Zhu <sup>41</sup>	2004	New York	Black	After 3 years	None, but methodology discredited.
7	Barnard et al. <sup>42</sup>	2003	New York	Black, from low-performing public schools	After 1 year	Raised math scores 5 percentile points.
6	Howell & Peterson <sup>43</sup>	2002	Dayton, OH	Black	After 2 years	Raised combined math & reading scores 7 percentile points.
5	Howell & Peterson <sup>44</sup>	2002	D.C.	Black	After 2 years	Raised combined math & reading scores 9 percentile points.
4	Howell & Peterson <sup>45</sup>	2002	New York	Black	After 3 years	Raised combined math & reading scores 9 percentile points.
3	Greene <sup>46</sup>	2001	Charlotte	All	After 1 year	Raised combined math & reading scores 6 percentile points.
2	Rouse <sup>47</sup>	1998	Milwaukee	All	After 4 years	Raised math scores 8 percentile points.
1	Greene, Peterson, Du <sup>48</sup>	1998	Milwaukee	All	After 4 years	Raised math scores 11 percentile points. Raised reading scores 6 percentile points.

<sup>41</sup>Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu, "Another Look at the New York City School Voucher Experiment," *American Behavioral Scientist*, January 2004/Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 658-698.

<sup>42</sup>John Barnard, Constantine Frangakis, Jennifer Hill, and Donald Rubin, "Principal Stratification Approach to Broken Randomized Experiments: A Case Study of School Choice Vouchers in New York City," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, June 2003/Vol. 98, No. 462, pp. 318-320.

<sup>43</sup>Howell and Peterson, *The Education Gap*.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>Jay Greene, "Vouchers in Charlotte," *Education Next*, Summer 2001/Vol. 1, No. 2, <http://educationnext.org/vouchersincharlotte/>.

<sup>47</sup>Cecilia Rouse, "Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, May 1998/Vol. 113, No. 2, pp. 553-602, <http://faculty.smu.edu/millimet/classes/eco7321/papers/rouse.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup>Jay Greene, Paul Peterson, and Jiangtao Du, "School Choice in Milwaukee: A Randomized Experiment," in *Learning from School Choice*, pp. 335-56.

Analyses by the U.S. Department of Education have shown “that students who had attended private school in eighth grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor’s or higher degree by their mid-twenties (52 versus 26 percent).” Importantly, students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (socioeconomic status or SES) who had attended private school in eighth grade were more than three times as likely as their public school peers to have earned a bachelor’s degree by their mid-twenties (24 versus 7 percent).<sup>49</sup> Based on its ongoing reviews of student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the U.S. Department of Education summarized, “For the past 30 years, NAEP has reported that students in private schools outperform students in public schools.”<sup>50</sup>

A notable exception was in 2006 when the U.S. Department of Education reported no statistically significant differences between private and public school performance once various student background characteristics were taken into account.<sup>51</sup> Independent experts from Harvard University, however, determined the study’s student characteristics measures were “flawed.” Once better measures were used a private school advantage resulted “in nearly all comparisons.” Specifically, the Harvard researchers noted, “Similar results are found for Catholic and Lutheran schools taken separately, while Evangelical Protestant schools achieve parity with public schools in math and have an advantage in reading.” The flaws with the U.S. Department of Education report were “so deep-seated that their purported findings lack credibility,” the Harvard researchers concluded. They did caution, however, “Without information on prior student achievement, one cannot make judgments about schools’ efficacy in raising student test scores. Thus, NAEP data cannot be used to compare the performance of private and public schools.”<sup>52</sup>

With this caveat in mind, a comparison of NAEP public and private school student results for grades 4, 8, and 12 for a variety of years is possible. NAEP subject-specific reports confirm the U.S. Department of Education’s previous findings that private school students typically outperform their peers in public schools.

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<sup>49</sup>Martha Naomi Alt and Katharin Peter, *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait*. Findings from The Condition of Education, 2002, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, August 2002, p. 24, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002013.pdf>. Overview, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002013>.

<sup>50</sup>Marianne Perie, Alan Vanneman, and Arnold Goldstein, *Student Achievement in Private Schools: Results from NAEP 2000–2005*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, December 2005, p. 2, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006459.pdf>. Overview, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006459>.

<sup>51</sup>Henry Braun, Frank Jenkins, and Wendy Grigg, *Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, July 2006, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006461.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup>Elena Llaudet and Paul E. Peterson, “The NCES Private-Public School Study: findings are other than they seem,” *Education Next*, Winter 2007/Vol. 7, No. 1, <http://educationnext.org/the-nces-privatepublic-school-study/>.



Using the generally accepted rule of thumb that 10 NAEP scale-score points are roughly equivalent to one grade level (or academic year) of learning, faith-based school students perform consistently ahead of their public school peers. On average, faith-based school students outperform their public school peers by:

**1.6** grade levels ahead in **reading**

**2.0** grade levels in **vocabulary**

**1.1** grade levels in **math**

**2.0** grade levels in **geography**

**1.4** grade levels in **science**

**1.5** grade levels in **U.S. history**

**1.3** grade levels in **writing**

**1.8** grade levels in **civics**

This academic advantage of faith-based schools is especially striking for at-risk students. On average, the performance advantage in reading is 1.7 grade levels ahead for black students, 2.5 grade levels ahead for Hispanic students, and 1.6 grade levels ahead for low-income students.

The overall performance advantage for historically disadvantaged students is smaller in math than reading. In general, black, Hispanic, and low-income fourth-graders perform on par with or slightly below their public school peers (except Hispanic students attending conservative Christian schools); eighth-graders, however, outperform their public school peers. Based on the available NAEP results, the average math performance advantage is 0.3 grade levels for black students, 1.0 grade levels for Hispanic students, and 0.3 grade levels for low-income students.



This pattern of superior academic outcomes for at-risk students is not a new story. Research documenting the academic advantages of private and faith-based schools received a notable impulse in 1981, with James Coleman's study showing that sophomores in Catholic high schools performed up to a year ahead of their public school peers, in large part because of more disciplined environments and high expectations for all students. Coleman and his colleagues were able to take into account family background characteristics to show that learning gains were the result of private school quality, not student/family characteristics. Additionally, Coleman found:

"Catholic schools more nearly approximate the 'common school' ideal of American education than do public schools, in that the achievement levels of students from different parental educational backgrounds, of black and white students, and of Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students are more nearly alike in Catholic schools than in public schools. In addition, the educational aspirations of students from different parental educational backgrounds are more alike in Catholic than in public schools."<sup>53</sup>

With better data and enhanced methodological controls for family background differences, in 1987 Coleman concluded that Catholic and private schools' success is rooted in parental and shared community values.

So supported, Catholic high school students' academic growth in verbal and mathematic skills outpaces their public school peers by about one grade level. Importantly for disadvantaged students in particular, the religious community support surrounding Catholic high schools inhibits dropping out even though these schools place more rigorous academic demands on all students. As Coleman summed up:

"The proximate reason for the Catholic schools' success with less-advantaged students and students from deficient families appears to be the greater academic demands that Catholic schools place on these students. But the ability to make these demands appears to follow in large part from the greater control that the school based on a functional community is able to exercise."<sup>54</sup>

Bryk, Lee, and Holland pointed out that one result of this "Catholic school advantage" for at-risk students was that "the achievement advantage of white over minority students...increases in public high schools during the last two years of schooling, whereas the minority gap actually decreases in Catholic schools."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Coleman, James S., Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore. 1982. *School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared*. New York: Basic Books. p. 185.

<sup>54</sup>Coleman, James S. and Thomas Hoffer, *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Community* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). pp. 142, 146, 148.

<sup>55</sup>Bryk, Anthony S., Lee, Valerie E., and Holland, Peter B. 1993. *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 247.

While some critics have charged (without citing evidence) that faith-based schools do not “make citizens” as effectively as do district public schools, the evidence is strongly on the other side. David Campbell, drawing upon the NAEP results cited above as well as extensive research, has shown that, “even with statistical [background] controls, students in all three types of private schools are more likely than students in assigned public schools to have confidence in their ability to exercise civic skills if called upon to do so. Of these three, the religious, non-Catholic school students display the greatest degree of civic confidence.” He also notes that “students in Catholic schools perform better than students in assigned public schools on all three objectives of a civic education—capacity for civic engagement, political knowledge, and political tolerance.”<sup>56</sup>

Similar results have been found in “thick” studies of individual schools, including sociologist Alan Peshkin’s study of a “fundamentalist” Protestant school in Illinois. Peshkin reports his own expectation that the students would be narrow and intolerant, and his surprise at finding the opposite was true. Compared with students in the local public high school, 93 percent of the Bethany Baptist Academy students versus 80 percent of the public high school students responded that they would approve of a black family moving next door.

Ninety-three percent of the Bethany and 95 percent of the public school students agreed that “people who don’t believe in God should have the same right to freedom of speech as anyone else.” Eighty-three and 84 percent respectively disagreed with the statement that “only people who believe in God can be good Americans.” Seventy-two percent of the public school students but only 33 percent of the Bethany students agreed that “it’s hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.”<sup>57</sup>



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<sup>56</sup>Campbell, David E., 2001. “Making Democratic Education Work,” In *Charters, Vouchers, & Public Education*. Edited by Paul E. Peterson, Paul E. and David E. Campbell. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. 241-265. pp. 252, 258.

<sup>57</sup>Peshkin, Alan. 1986. *God’s Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 332-5.

# A Call to Action

The Commission on Faith-based Schools presents in its first report both documentation of the value of faith-based schools to American education and a call to action for legislators, policymakers, members of faith communities, and parents. No one can credibly assert that the U.S. has a surplus of high quality schools, especially high quality schools that serve urban communities with poor families who most need an education to end the cycle of poverty. Yet month after month, year after year, decade after decade, we have watched as thousands of faith-based schools have closed, especially in these low-income areas and usually where they have operated for many years. The loss is significant in education resources; but for many of these communities the school is often also a center for other resources—a safe gathering point for networking and information, food distribution, and some basic health care. It is a place of hope where hope is a scarce commodity.

America is losing a valuable national asset—not because it has become obsolescent, not because the demand for it has disappeared, not because the need for it has been satisfied by other entities, but because we have a misguided public policy that continues to restrict severely parental choice in education and discriminates especially against faith-based schools in favor of all other kinds of schools.

With the charter and magnet school movements, the variety of public schools available has increased. Parents in select states and areas can choose, for example, language immersion, science and math based, and arts schools to educate their children with the full support of society. But parents utilizing their constitutional right of free expression of religion and seeking a faith-based education for their children routinely are told that the state will offer them no support. Only 17 states have scholarship programs in place that empower parents to choose a faith-based school, and many of those are extremely small and narrowly targeted. They represent important progress, but come nowhere close to meeting the demand from American parents for the ability to access these schools. To demonstrate how rapidly demand can grow, in Indiana, where the educational choice program has broad eligibility, applications have quadrupled in the two years of its operation and doubled in the last year to over 20,000.

The American Center for School Choice is founded on the belief that parental choice is a moral imperative that must be adopted to return proper authority to the family for educating their children. Parents know what their children need far better than a faceless, albeit possibly well-meaning, school district official assigning a child a school via a ZIP code. Robbing parents of the authority and responsibility for selecting the education their children receive has consequences beyond education as it contributes to alienation from their community and makes them appear less effective and powerful to their children and to themselves.



Confronted with the clear history and present value of faith-based schools, the injustice of denying parents equal access to be able to exercise their constitutional right of free exercise of religion, and the continuing loss of valuable educational institutions just as the country needs every single good school it has, the question for America is “What will you do?”

We believe the time is right to recognize that parents seeking a faith-based school are not second class parents to those seeking a language immersion or science and technology education or any other school in American education. They deserve to be treated as other parents who pay taxes and support American education. Supporting parents to choose whatever school will serve their children and family best, including a faith-based school, is just and does not constitute in any way the government establishing a state religion. The U.S. Supreme Court has stated this, but left providing educational choice as optional. It should not be optional. Public education must move to a system that educates the public, reflecting the demands and needs the public requires, and away from its narrow, state-operated monopoly that offers few choices. Slowly, that is happening, but addressing this inequity should be urgent. American education must support good schools and the creation of more good schools, no matter what structure they take, if it is to meet the requirements of the twenty-first century.

Therefore, we call on states and the federal government to empower parents with choices not limited to ZIP codes and traditional public schools and include faith-based schools. We are not against traditional public schools; many families will continue to choose them. We are for an equal ability to access all schools. In states with small educational choice programs, we call for expanded eligibility so more families can benefit.

We also invite, encourage, and need the active engagement of all faiths and others who support parental choice in this effort to inform the media, public, and legislators about faith-based schools and rid the society of the myths that exist. The American Center for School Choice and its Commission on Faith-based Schools are eager to lead this noble and important effort.



**Peter H. Hanley**

Executive Director  
American Center for  
School Choice

Peter H. Hanley

# American Center for School Choice

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