

Fall 2022

Understanding Education Variances in Our World: An Analysis of Private and Public Education on Graduates' Effects in Society

Ja'Quon L. Williams
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses

Recommended Citation

Williams, Ja'Quon L., "Understanding Education Variances in Our World: An Analysis of Private and Public Education on Graduates' Effects in Society" (2022). *Senior Theses*. 577.
https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/577

This Thesis is brought to you by the Honors College at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Understanding Education Variances in Our World: An Analysis of Private and Public
Education on Graduates' Effects in Society

By

Ja'Quon Williams

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

December 2022

Approved:



Suzanne Hardie
Director of Thesis

Steve Lynn, Dean
For South Carolina Honors College

Table of Contents

Thesis Summary	PG. 3
Methodology	PG. 4
Introduction	PG. 5
Aspects and Characteristics	PG. 7
Figure 1: Number of Private Schools	PG. 9
Figure 2: Percentage of Private Schools with 12 th Graders, Graduation Rate 4-year Institution Attendance	PG. 10
Testing	PG. 12
Figure 3: Private and Public Average ACT Composite Scores	PG. 12
Figure 4: SAT Performance Relative to National Mean	PG. 13
Figure 5: SAT Average Math and ERW Scored by School Type	PG. 14
Conclusion	PG. 15
References	PG. 16

Thesis Summary

As of late, the debate between public and private high school education has become a common topic of conversation. The question arises, which option of schooling is best for its students? While fairness may come into play, this thesis is not focused on discovering injustices in the systems. This thesis analyses data and features from public and private high schools to determine which system provides the best education and opportunities for its students to be successful in postgraduation. From the analyzed data, one can conclude that private high schools provide better opportunities and better education for students than public high schools. While the same factors exist in public high schools, private high schools score higher statistically and consistently.

Methodology

This thesis uses a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data to provide evidence for the thesis. Qualitative information will consist of interviews with members of the public high school system, and private high school system, and graduated students from both systems of education. While data is extremely important, an active voice from a participant in the system can provide more insight into the quantitative data. Qualitative data were gathered from as many sources as possible through online interviews to implement into the thesis.

My qualitative research will consist of inquiries concerning curriculum, educational goals for students, and student readiness in career and higher education. The goal of this method of research is to hear what the systems are looking to provide for each of its students and what methodology they are implementing to achieve those goals. For the graduates, I will be detailed questions about what they have learned directly or in terms of school from their educational system. I interviewed four individuals: employees from each educational system and one graduate from the public school system.

Quantitative data was gathered from the University of South Carolina's academic search database, JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, and other academic databases. Also, data was gathered from government databases that offer statistics on graduates from public and private institutions. This data will be reviewed in areas such as job placements, graduation rates, college prep scores, and college placement.

Introduction

In recent years, the advancements of society have caused the topic of education to increase in conversations amongst the people of America. When national rankings of state education and public-school systems are published each year, members of the lower-ranking states begin to question equality and change. This has also inflamed the existing conversation of private schooling being a better educational opportunity for students rather than public schooling. Not only in the fields that certain private schools specialize their curriculum and teaching in, but in every aspect of education private schools are socially viewed as better. Some findings even suggest that attending a private institution significantly increases the probability of graduating and/or attending college (Coughlin, 2014). These findings can lead one to believe that private education provides gains in the ability to obtain a higher salary through education (Coughlin, 2014). The statistics conclude that private schooling gives its students an advantage to become successful despite their ability to work and persevere based on the higher salary they are projected to obtain than public school students. This is unique to private schooling as the public-school curriculum can't be adjusted to fit the exact needs of students due to state law and policy.

In public schooling, teachers struggle to help the wide variety of students that they have. This is crucial for the continued education of most students because high entrance exam scores can increase financial aid and the likelihood of an institution permitting entry of a student. Public school teachers experience high levels of difficulty when preparing minority and culturally different students to achieve competent scores on standardized testing along with understanding the required material. They lack the

opportunities necessary to provide rigorous content necessary to achieve the goal outlined by the public education system (Ramsey-Jordan, 2020). Many public schools lack programs that educate teachers on methods to better understand the various cultures, potential issues students may be dealing with, and any strategic teaching methods outside of what they learned while obtaining their degree to teach.

Obstacles such as these give reason and potential cause to the performance gap seen between public and private school students. Through analysis of school, student, and family characteristics, 78% of the performance gap can be explained: 45% of the gap is family characteristics, 26% is school characteristics and 7% is from student characteristics (Duncan, 2007). In all areas analyzed, private school students produced better numbers than public school students. Private schools each have a specific offering for the market of students they hope to attract, thus resulting in a more uniform demographic. Public schools received students from all different backgrounds and experiences, resulting in many needs for each different type of student. This can lead one to believe that private school students perform better but there may be much room for public school students to grow. The notion that private schools produce higher scores is due to their flexibility. Private school methods can benefit some individuals better than others or not others at all. The ability to produce a different and unique education is the cause of the gap (O'Brien, 2010). By modifying the method of education, public school students have a chance to perform as well as private school students (Duncan, 2007).

Aspects and Characteristics

Choosing between public and private schooling for students can begin at any point in time in their education. Parents consider many factors such as instructors, support, graduation, and class size. Private schools are statistically smaller in class and school size than public schools, generating a smaller teacher-to-student ratio and creating a more tight-knit environment (Martin, 2022). In this environment, students are more likely to be passionate and express themselves. It also allows teachers ample time to learn about students better and identify each person's strengths and weaknesses. Instruction can be altered to better suit them and their needs. Private schools can look passed mandatory state testing to provide more benefits to students.

Public and private high school graduation rates have both increased over the years and are projected to climb even higher (Bransberger, 2020). However, private high school graduates are expected to "prop up" the U.S. While public school graduates make up the majority, private school graduates are projected to make up the top 10% of all graduating students, helping adjust for the downward trend public school graduates are projected to generate (Bransberger, 2020).

Public schools are required to meet the requirements set by the state and strive to achieve excellence on all state-mandated testing (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 17, 2022). While there may be offerings outside of what the state requires, the options are limited as students must complete a certain curriculum to perform well on those examinations (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 17, 2022). This type of limitation can inhibit students from pursuing other paths outside of attending a two-year or four-year institution. Some graduated students felt they were unaware of what they

would like to pursue in life and are forced into the world to learn something they wish they could have learned in high school (Student 1, personal communication, October 16, 2022). However, some feel it is possible to use the broad range of knowledge and skills taught by the public school system to succeed (Student 1, personal communication, October 16, 2022). Depending on the institution, private school students can receive support through the private school with mentors, counselors, learning specialists, and specialized groups (Martin, 2022). Private institutions may offer a larger variety of cultural and social clubs, service-learning opportunities, and advanced courses that are outside of what the state allows public institutions to participate in or are aware of (Martin, 2022).

A collection of data presented by the Institute of Education Services 2019-2020 Private School Universe survey details the number of private schools in the United States. The number of students attending private schools in the United States during that time frame is 30,492. This number includes all grade levels and ages of students attending

private schools at grade levels K through 12.

Table C-4. Number and percentage distribution of private schools, by urbanicity type and selected characteristics: United States, 2019–20

Selected characteristic	Total		City		Suburban		Town		Rural	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	30,492	100.0	10,445	100.0	11,670	100.0	2,476	100.0	5,901	100.0
Private school typology										
Catholic	6,449	21.2	2,630	25.2	2,418	20.7	898	36.3	503	8.5
Parochial	2,196	7.2	829	7.9	842	7.2	367	14.8	157	2.7
Diocesan	3,081	10.1	1,226	11.7	1,179	10.1	450	18.2	226	3.8
Private	1,172	3.8	575	5.5	397	3.4	81	3.3	120	2.0
Other religious	13,794	45.2	4,086	39.1	4,359	37.4	1,179	47.6	4,170	70.7
Conservative Christian	3,698	12.1	1,045	10.0	1,273	10.9	456	18.4	924	15.7
Other affiliated	3,134	10.3	1,244	11.9	1,127	9.7	266	10.7	497	8.4
Unaffiliated	6,962	22.8	1,796	17.2	1,958	16.8	458	18.5	2,749	46.6
Nonsectarian	10,249	33.6	3,730	35.7	4,893	41.9	398	16.1	1,228	20.8
Regular	4,985	16.3	1,773	17.0	2,432	20.8	171	6.9	608	10.3
Special emphasis	3,470	11.4	1,322	12.7	1,608	13.8	166	6.7	374	6.3
Special education	1,794	5.9	634	6.1	853	7.3	61	2.5	246	4.2
School level ¹										
Elementary/middle	18,890	61.9	6,445	61.7	7,560	64.8	1,555	62.8	3,329	56.4
Secondary/high	3,479	11.4	1,437	13.8	1,226	10.5	189	7.7	626	10.6
Combined/other	8,124	26.6	2,563	24.5	2,884	24.7	731	29.5	1,946	33.0
Program emphasis										
Regular elementary/secondary	21,083	69.1	7,086	67.8	6,998	60.0	2,074	83.8	4,925	83.5
Montessori	2,566	8.4	974	9.3	1,273	10.9	126	5.1	193	3.3
Special program emphasis	929	3.0	397	3.8	352	3.0	55	2.2	125	2.1
Special education	2,025	6.6	723	6.9	966	8.3	67	2.7	269	4.6
Vocational/technical	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Alternative	843	2.8	305	2.9	321	2.8	47	1.9	169	2.9
Early childhood	3,033	9.9	954	9.1	1,755	15.0	106	4.3	217	3.7
Size (number of students)										
Less than 50	12,636	41.4	3,476	33.3	4,820	41.3	844	34.1	3,497	59.3
50–149	8,223	27.0	2,690	25.8	2,988	25.6	1,071	43.3	1,473	25.0
150–299	5,271	17.3	2,161	20.7	2,086	17.9	420	17.0	603	10.2
300–499	2,460	8.1	1,098	10.5	1,033	8.8	108	4.4	221	3.7
500–749	1,064	3.5	534	5.1	441	3.8	23	0.9	66	1.1
750 or more	838	2.7	486	4.7	303	2.6	‡	‡	41	0.7

The study also highlights 31.8 percent of schools had 12th graders and a number of 340,609 private high school graduates. With a graduation rate of 96.4 percent, the total pool of potential private high school graduates was 353,329. Going further, 64.5 percent of the high school graduates went to 4-year institutions, equaling 219,693 incoming college freshmen.

Table C-13. Percentage of private schools with 12th-graders, number of graduates, graduation rate, and percentage of graduates who attended 4-year colleges, by selected characteristics: United States, 2018–19

Selected characteristic	Percent of schools with 12th-graders in 2018–19	Number of 2018–19 graduates	2018–19 graduation rate ¹	Percent of 2018–19 graduates who attended 4-year colleges by fall 2019
Total	31.8	340,609	96.4	64.5
Private school typology				
Catholic	22.6	146,744	98.9	85.2
Parochial	8.9	12,051	99.3	82.7
Diocesan	19.1	65,656	98.6	85.0
Private	57.1	69,038	99.3	86.1
Other religious	35.9	107,875	98.2	63.7
Conservative Christian	61.2	38,272	98.7	63.3
Other affiliated	32.3	34,016	98.5	72.4
Unaffiliated	24.2	35,588	97.4	58.9
Nonsectarian	32.1	85,990	90.3	55.6
Regular	31.0	67,869	98.5	77.5
Special emphasis	17.2	11,749	79.0	53.7
Special education	63.9	6,373	55.3	19.1
School level ²				
Elementary/middle	0.7	1,208	82.6	43.7
Secondary/high	92.8	177,964	97.9	70.4
Combined/other	78.1	161,437	94.7	61.9
Program emphasis				
Regular elementary/secondary	35.7	314,356	98.8	71.5
Montessori	2.5	682	97.4	62.7
Special program emphasis	37.8	10,709	97.2	72.8
Special education	62.3	6,768	55.5	18.9
Vocational/technical	†	†	†	†
Alternative	58.9	7,744	70.2	39.6
Early childhood	†	†	†	†
Size (number of students)				
Less than 50	18.8	8,416	76.1	43.0
50–149	32.7	26,457	89.8	52.3
150–299	35.4	46,369	96.0	71.2
300–499	48.9	64,564	98.4	83.7
500–749	74.9	75,271	98.6	89.5
750 or more	91.6	119,531	97.5	91.4
Region				
Northeast	31.0	84,403	96.1	61.9
Midwest	24.7	68,098	97.3	65.5
South	39.2	124,109	96.3	66.3
West	28.0	63,999	95.9	62.2

(Husser & Bailey, 2013)

Public high school graduates fell below the private school high school graduates with a graduation rate of 86% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Their numbers make up the majority of the total 2018- 2019 graduating class, but they performed around 10 percentage points lower than private high school graduates.

For this analysis, resources are considered as extra-curricular programs, obtainable vocations, and certifications students can receive while pursuing their high school diploma. Because every public and private institution is different, there can be a

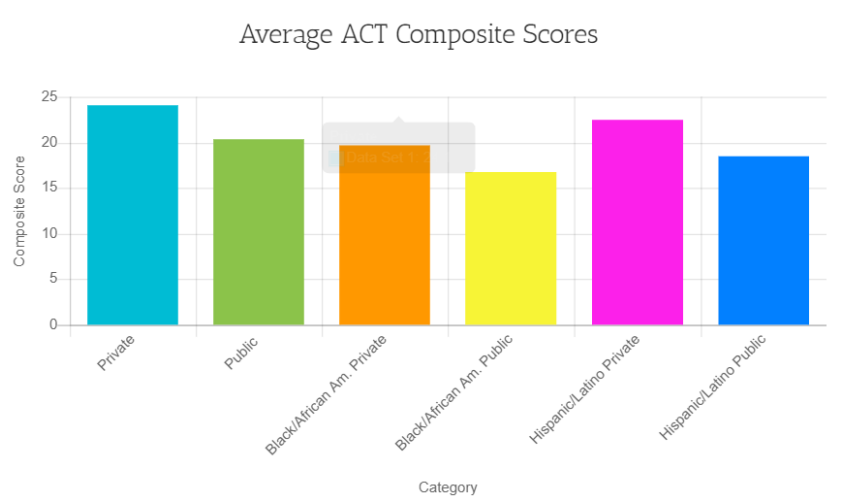
plethora of opportunities available at each. For example, a public high school in South Carolina offers internships and mentorships through the University of South Carolina; monthly speakers from different industries; and CNA certification. Many other opportunities were offered many years ago at the school such as becoming a plumber, and dental hygienist, and plumber but were removed (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

At a private school in South Carolina, they offer resources to teachers to improve and enhance student education. Teachers receive reduced tuition to a certain college to obtain their master's or Ph.D. They also take courses to maintain their certifications to ensure they are up to date in their area of expertise (Teacher 2, November 25, 2022). CNA certification is also offered and local business internships for juniors and seniors are available (Teacher 3, personal communication, November 17, 2022). In general, private schools can implement resources quicker than public schools due to the chain of decision-making. Implementing mental health courses, personal finance classes, personal fitness courses, critical and strategic thinking programs, and technological activities are not easy to bring to fruition, but it is an advantage over public schools ((Teacher 3, personal communication, November 17, 2022).

Testing

When discussing college readiness or projecting a student's readiness postgraduation, the ACT and SAT are used as benchmarks. The ACT scored 36 in four multiple-choice categories: English, mathematics, reading, and science with an optional writing test. The composite score is obtained by averaging all four scores from each category, providing the student with a singular score. Due to not being required or included in the composite score, the writing portion will not be analyzed. The SAT scored 1600 in two sections: Math and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW). The two sections can only be scored to 800 which means: $\text{Math} + \text{ERW} = \text{SAT score}$.

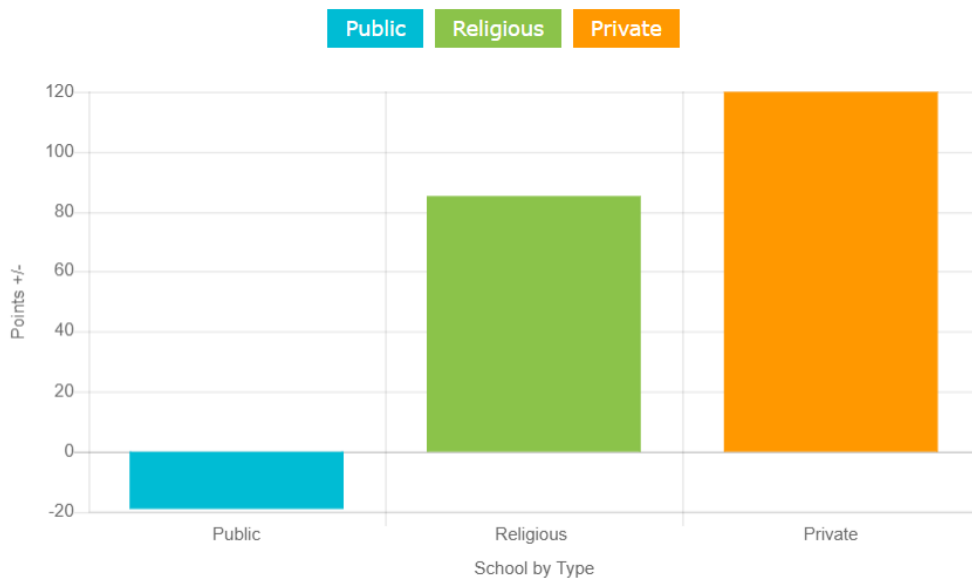
In 2018, ACT has confirmed private school students scored higher in each category than public school students: science 23.4 vs. 20.4; reading 24.8 vs. 20.9; math 23.1 vs. 20.2; and English 24.7 vs. 19.7 (Burroughs, 2019). In the chart below, not only do private students test higher on the ACT than public school students but they do also so no matter their race/ethnicity.



(Burroughs,2019)

College Board released its performance results for 2018, showing the mean SAT score for all students was 1068: Math = 531 and ERW = 536 (Burroughs, 2020). This was a slight 8-point increase compared to the previous year’s class average. However, public schools still averaged 19 points below the national mean with a score of 1049 while private schools average 120 points above the national mean with a score of 1188.

SAT Performance Relative to National Mean



(Burroughs, 2020)

Public school students averaged 520 in Math, 11 points below the national mean, and 529 in ERW, 7 points below the national mean. In the same respective categories, private school students scored 76 points and 44 points above the national mean. These numbers allowed College Board to hypothesize that 44 percent of public school students and 70 percent of private school students that took the SAT in 2018 have, “a 75% chance of earning at least a C in first-semester, credit-bearing, college-level courses in history, literature, social science, or writing,” and “a 75% chance of earning at least a C in first-

semester, credit-bearing, college-level courses in algebra, statistics, precalculus, or calculus (Burroughs, 2020).”

SAT Scores – Class of 2018

Schools	ERW	Math	Totals
Independent	580	608	1188
Religious	581	572	1153
Public	529	520	1049
National Mean	536	531	1068

(Burroughs, 2020)

Conclusion

As this thesis has demonstrated, a private school system is better than its public-school counterpart in preparing students for success. Small school and class sizes allow for teachers to have more one-on-one interactions with the class overall and each student. This allows forms of a stronger student and learner relationship and enriches the possibilities of what the teacher will be able to successfully teach the students. Personal experiences and individual characteristics are less of an obstacle to learning when their presence in the classroom is less numerous. This can also be reflected in graduation percentage rates for each system.

Private schools are also able to create and implement courses outside the required curriculum faster than public schools. This creates programs of more up-to-date information that stem from current real-world conditions. While public schools offer a better broad understanding of the world, private schools have proven more efficient at teaching more specific skills and subjects allowing students to begin working into what they desire sooner with more experience. Establishing incentive and learning programs for teachers is another method of enriching student experiences and potential success postgraduation. Resources can be scarce or plentiful in either system, showing the variety of opportunities is dependent upon leadership and availability.

Using benchmark indicators such as the ACT and SAT, private school students are more prepared for college and postgrad ventures compared to public school students. Scoring several points above the national mean on both exams is an indication of their projected success and capabilities.

References

- Broughman, S. P., Kincel, B., Willinger, J., & Peterson, J. (2021, August 31). *Characteristics of private schools in the United States: Results from the 2019-20 private school universe survey. First Look. NCES 2021-061*. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED614904>
- Bransberger, P., Falkenstern, C., & Lane, P. (2020, November 30). *Knocking at the college door. projections of high school graduates. [10th edition]*. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED610996>
- Burroughs, M. (2019, December 5). *Private School students perform better on Act*. League of Christian Schools Education. Retrieved from <https://www.lcs.education/private-school-students-perform-better-on-act/>
- Burroughs, M. (2020, July 7). *2018 SAT results released*. League of Christian Schools Education. Retrieved from <https://www.lcs.education/4198-2/>
- Coughlin, C., & Castilla, C. (2014). The Effect of Private High School Education on the College Trajectory. *Economics Letters*, 125(2), 200–203.
- Duncan, K., & Sandy, J. (2007). Explaining the Performance Gap between Public and Private School Students. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 33(2), 177-191. Retrieved February 7, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20642346>
- Hussar, W.J., and Bailey, T.M. (2013). Projections of Education Statistics to 2022 (NCES

2014-051). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Martin, L. (2022, October 3). *Public vs. private school: Interesting statistics*. The Friends' Central School Blog. Retrieved from <https://blog.friendscentral.org/publicvs-private-schoolstatistics#:~:text=Private%20Schools%20Lead%20to%20Higher,of%20many%20colleges%20and%20universities>

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Public High School Graduation Rates. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi>.

O'Brien, R., & Pianta, R. (2010). Public and Private Schools: Do Classroom Processes Vary by School Type? *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(3), 409-419.
doi:10.1086/648984

Ramsay-Jordan, N. (2020). Preparation and the Real World of Education: How Prospective Teachers Grapple with Using Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in the Age of Standardized Testing. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 29(1), 3-24.
<http://dx.doi.org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.1177/1056787919877142>