



2014-15 Statewide Census of Private Education (SCOPE)

Summary of a Study of Private K-12 Schools in Minnesota

To better understand the reach and impact of private education in Minnesota, the Minnesota Independent School Forum (MISF) contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a study of private schools throughout the state. This is the second time Wilder Research has conducted the study. The results of the study provide a comprehensive portrait of private K-12 schools including private school characteristics and programs, school enrollment and capacity, student characteristics, high school graduation requirements and graduation rates, school staffing, and school finances. It also provides information about changes since the prior study of the 2010-11 academic year as well as comparisons with Minnesota public schools. This summary was developed for use by funders, educators, advocacy organizations, and others interested in the education of children in Minnesota.

About the study

Wilder Research, in consultation with the Minnesota Independent School Forum (MISF), revised the survey and the study protocol used in the prior iteration of the study (2010-11). The study included a statewide survey of private schools. The survey was conducted during April and May of 2016 and gathered data on the 2014-15 school year. Survey data were supplemented with data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

For purposes of the study, private schools were defined as religiously-affiliated and/or independent schools in Minnesota that serve one or more grades from kindergarten through 12. Only schools with at least 15 students enrolled in fall 2014 were included. Based on lists of schools from MDE and MISF, a total of 431 schools were eligible and invited to participate in the study. Of these, 149 schools completed the survey (35% response rate). Selected information on 388 of the eligible private schools (e.g., enrollment, staffing, and some student services) was available from the Minnesota Department of Education and is included in the study. Analysis of schools that completed the survey compared with what is known about the broader population of private schools from MDE data suggests that the survey is representative of private schools in Minnesota.

Private schools in Minnesota

In many ways, the current landscape of private schools in Minnesota looks very similar to that from 2010-11. Seventy-eight percent of private schools are accredited. Most private schools have a religious orientation or purpose (95%) and are affiliated with a religious organization or institution (90%). The most frequent affiliation is with the Roman Catholic Church (49%), followed by Lutheran church denominations (29%) (Figure 1).

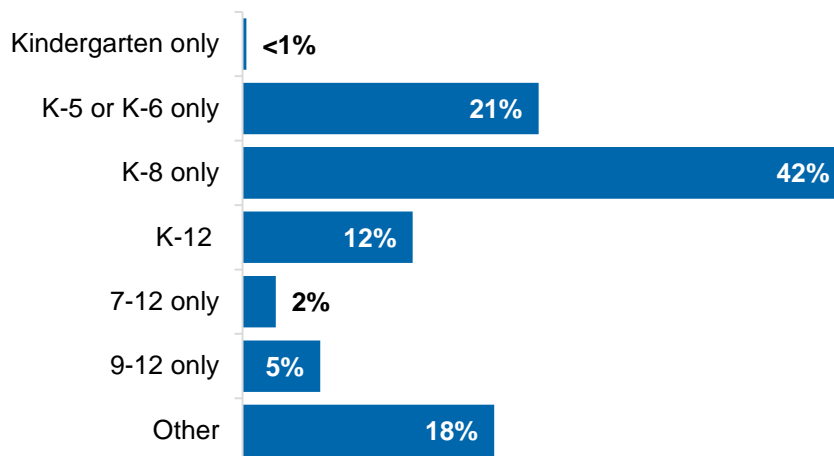
1. Characteristics of private schools that participated in the 2014-15 SCOPE survey

Accredited	78%
Religious orientation	95%
Affiliated with religious organization	90%
Roman Catholic	49%
Lutheran	29%
Christian (no specific denomination)	5%

Note. N=149 (Specific affiliation with religious organization based on 142 responding schools)

The most common grade range for private schools is kindergarten through eighth grade (42%). Twenty-one percent of schools serve kindergarten through grades 5 or 6. Twelve percent serve kindergarten through 12th grade. Just five percent of private schools serve high school only (grades 9-12) (Figure 2).

2. Grades served in private schools



Source. Updated 2014-15 MDE Fall Report, N=388

Two-thirds of private schools have no special admission requirements beyond proof of immunization, age, and residence. Of those that do, the most frequent requirements are the applicant's commitment to the school's mission, a personal interview, record of prior behavior, and academic record.

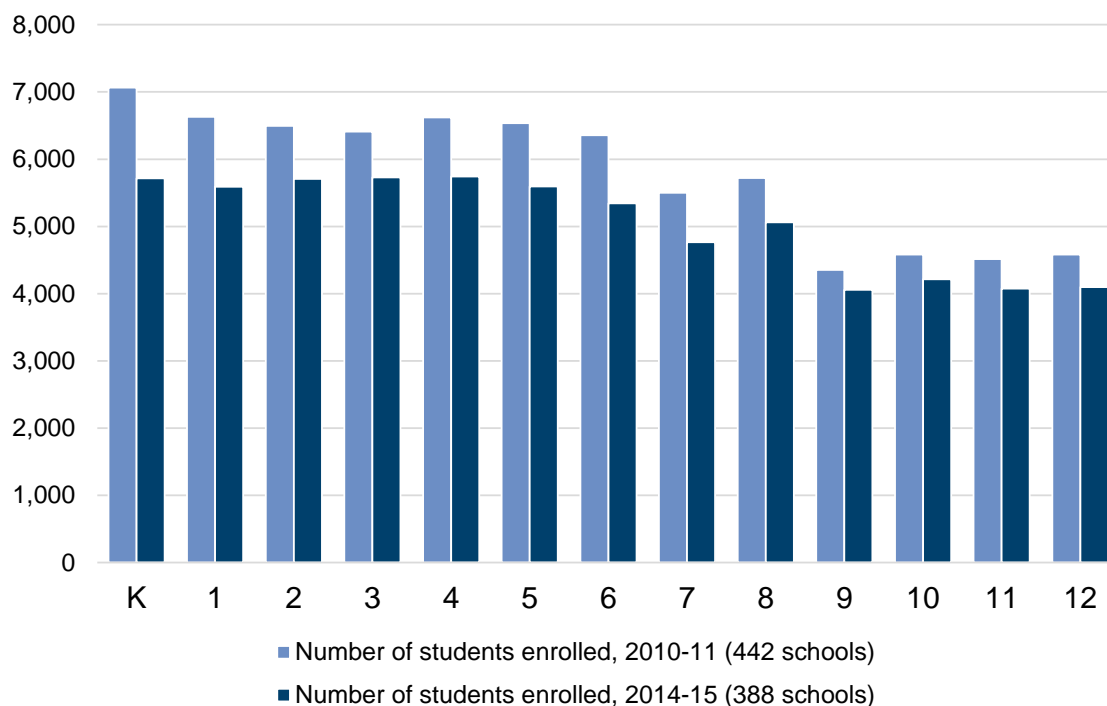
Enrollment and capacity

In Minnesota, 65,692 students attended private schools during the 2014-15 school year, accounting for 7 percent of all students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade in the state. Enrollment is highest in elementary and middle school grades and lower in high school grades.

Private schools tend to be small. Half of private schools have fewer than 100 students enrolled, while only 6 percent have 500 or more students enrolled. The average (mean) enrollment in private schools is 169 students, which is less than half of the average enrollment in public schools (417 students).

Based on enrollment data available from MDE about the schools in our eligible sample, enrollment in private schools has fallen. Total enrollment fell from 75,406 students enrolled in 2010-11 to 65,692 students enrolled in 2014-15, with the largest declines occurring in kindergarten through eighth grade (11 - 19% decline) (Figure 3).

3. Enrollment in private schools, 2010-11 and 2014-15



Source. Updated 2010-11 and 2014-15 MDE Fall Report

Similar to 2010-11, private schools have substantial capacity to serve more students than they currently do. It is estimated that private schools have the capacity to serve about 27,000 more students statewide (based on their self-reported capacity versus current student population). There is more additional capacity in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area than in Greater Minnesota.

The students

Similar to 2010-11, the overall student population of private schools is less diverse, higher income, and receives fewer special education services than the population of public school students (Figure 4).

- Relative to public schools, private schools enroll a larger share of white students (84% percent of private school students are white, compared to 71% of public school students). The racial makeup of private school students has not changed substantially since 2010-11.
- 3% of private school students are English Learner students, compared to 8% of public school students.
- 6% of private school students receive special education services (have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Individualized Service Plan (ISP), or 504 Plan) compared to 13% of public school students.
- 11% of private school students are considered low-income (i.e., eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch) compared to 38% of public school students.

Note: Many private schools (34%) do not participate in the free- and reduced-price lunch program which may have resulted in the percentages of low-income students being under reported in private schools.

4. Characteristics of private and public school students

	Private schools		Public schools
	2010-11	2014-15	2014-15
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	1%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	5%	7%
Hispanic	4%	4%	8%
Black, not Hispanic	5%	7%	12%
White, not Hispanic	87%	84%	71%
English Learner (EL)	1%	3%	8%
Special education	3%	6%	13%
Free- and reduced-price lunch	11%	11%	38%

Sources. Public school data from Minnesota Department of Education Data Center, October 1, 2014 count. Private school data from 2010-11 and 2014-15 SCOPE.

Teachers and administrators

Private schools have a lower student to teacher ratio than public schools, similar to what was found in 2010-11. In private schools, there are, on average, 12 students per teacher. In public schools, the average is 15 students per teacher. Within private schools, the student to teacher ratio is higher in grades 1 through 6 (13 students per teacher) than it is in kindergarten or high school grades (11 students per teacher). This analysis includes regular classroom teachers as well as those who teach subjects such as art, music, physical education, or special education.

Overall, 76 percent of private school teachers hold valid teaching licenses for the grades that they taught. This is very similar to the percentage with teaching licenses in 2010-11.

Professional staff characteristics

The racial/ethnic characteristics of private and public school professional staff (teachers and administrators) are similar – the vast majority (96%) are white. In private schools, 60 percent of professional staff have bachelor's degrees and 34 percent have master's degrees. Public school professional staff are more likely to have master's degrees (55%). These findings are very similar to those from 2010-11.

Staff salaries and benefits

The average salary of private school teachers is estimated to be around \$40,500. This is roughly \$16,000 less than the average salary for public school teachers in Minnesota (\$56,670).

Statewide, the average annual salary for private school principals is about \$61,000. Average salaries for public school principals are considerably higher, falling in the \$100,000 to \$110,000 range. A small number of private schools that participated in this survey report having presidents or headmasters. The average salary for these positions is about \$90,000.

In addition to salary, most private schools contribute to benefits programs for their staff. Nine out of 10 schools contribute to health insurance plans for staff, and just over half contribute to dental insurance plans. Two-thirds or more of the schools contribute to employee retirement programs or pensions, tuition discounts for staff's children, and continuing education. Six out of 10 schools contribute to staff's life insurance plans.

High school graduation rates, ACT and SAT results, and college enrollment

In terms of on-time graduation rates, college entrance test scores, and college enrollment, private school students perform better, on average, when compared with public school students.

- 99% of students in private schools graduate on time (within four years after entering ninth grade), compared with 82% of public school students.

- There appears to be very little difference in graduation rates between white students and students of color attending private schools – both are around 99%. In public schools, 67% of students of color graduate on time (with considerable variation in percentages across racial/ethnic groups) and 87% of white students graduate on time.
- 92% of private school seniors take the ACT college readiness test compared with 78% of seniors statewide, and they tend to score higher (average composite ACT scores of 24.5 vs. 22.7) (Figure 5).
- 91% of private school graduates in the class of 2015 enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges. Among public school graduates in the class of 2014 (the most recent available data), 75% enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

Note: Private school graduation rates, ACT and SAT scores, and college enrollment rates are based on a relatively small number of schools reporting useable information for this survey, and small sample sizes of some racial groups, so these results should be interpreted with caution, as they may not represent all private schools granting diplomas.

5. ACT and SAT test-taking rates and scores: private schools compared with Minnesota overall

	Minnesota overall	Private schools
Students taking ACT	86%	92%
Average ACT score	22.7	24.5
Students taking SAT	5%	9%
Average SAT English score	572	584
Average SAT math score	599	647

Sources. Overall Minnesota data from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education. Private school data from 2014-15 SCOPE.

Use of technology and online learning

Almost all private schools (99%) provide computers (desktops or laptops) for classroom use. Many also provide tablet computers (69%), such as iPads. Fifteen percent of schools state that they provided each student with a laptop or tablet for their own use (i.e., a 1:1 school). Most schools have wireless network access available in their whole school (78%), though some only have wireless network access in part of the school (20%).

Over one-third of schools report that students participated in supplemental online learning (e.g., used online resources to supplement their face-to-face courses). Approximately one in ten schools report that students participated in hybrid or blended courses that were offered partially online and partially face-to-face. A smaller share of schools report that students participated in fully online K-12 courses (8%).

Programs and school choice

Programs

Similar to 2010-11, many schools participate in public (state or federal) programs.

- 92% of private schools participate in the Nonpublic Pupil Aid program, a state program which provides counseling services, health services, and textbooks and instructional materials.
- 85% of private schools participate in school district-provided transportation.
- 66% of private schools participate in the free- or reduced-price lunch program.

Over half of schools (57%) are aware that their students could participate in the state's Shared Time Program through which they could take public school classes. However, only 20 percent of private schools report that some of their students participated in this program through their resident district.

Potential school choice options

Most private schools say they would participate in each of three potential school choice options that were described to them in the survey. These include a tax credit for scholarship program donors (95%), a tuition tax credit for parents (94%), and a tuition voucher program (83%).

School finances

Per student costs

In Minnesota, the average per-student cost in 2014-15 was \$8,268 for private schools, compared with \$10,878 for public schools. Average per-student costs are lower for schools that serve elementary grades relative to those that serve secondary grades.

Tuition

Almost all private schools report charging tuition to students. Average tuition paid per student is approximately \$4,400. Average tuition paid is lower among schools that serve elementary grades relative to those that serve secondary grades. However, there is great variability in average tuition paid per student within schools serving the same grades.

Most schools report that they offer discounted tuition rates based on financial need (91%) and for additional students from the same family (80%). Over half of participating schools give tuition discounts to church members. Overall, 23 percent of private school students in kindergarten through eighth grade and 39 percent in 9th through 12th grade receive need-based financial aid to help with tuition costs. A smaller share of students receive merit-based aid (Figure 6).

6. Students receiving financial aid

		Number of schools reporting	Students receiving financial aid	
			Number	Percent
Need-based aid	Grades K-8	118	3,604	23%
	Grades 9-12	28	2,045	39%
Merit-based aid	Grades K-8	115	76	<1%
	Grades 9-12	29	536	10%

Source. 2014-15 SCOPE

Income, expenses, and endowments

Approximately 60 percent of private schools have both incomes and expenses of under \$1 million in 2014-15. Less than 10 percent of the schools have incomes or expenses of \$5 million or more. Across all the schools, tuition accounts for 65 percent of income, followed by church or congregation subsidies and gifts at 12 percent, and then fundraising and donations at 11 percent.

Nearly half of private schools report having an endowment. The value of schools' endowments ranges widely. Twenty-four percent of the schools have endowments valued at \$100,000 or less, while 28 percent have endowments valued at \$1 million or more. Endowment income accounts for three percent of schools' total income.

Overall, private schools' personnel costs account for over half of their expenses (58%), followed by program operational expenses (15%), instructional expenses (8%), and administrative expenses (8%).

Conclusions and issues to consider

Overall, the landscape of private schools and the characteristics of students enrolled in private schools have not changed substantially since 2010-11. However, overall private school enrollment appears to have declined over this time, with the greatest declines occurring in kindergarten through eighth grade. Similar to 2010-11, there still appears to be substantial excess capacity to serve more students in private schools. MISF, private schools, and other stakeholders may want to consider how to promote their schools to encourage enrollment to fill these empty seats.

Overall, the cost of educating each student is lower in private schools than public schools. Furthermore, private schools have fewer students per teacher than public schools. They also tend to see better outcomes for high school students. Graduation rates, college entrance exam scores, and college enrollment rates are higher for private school students. It is important to consider these strengths of private schools in conjunction with the profile of students they serve. Private school students tend to be less diverse, higher income, and less likely to be receiving special

education or English Learner services. More research is needed to assess the extent of differences in academic outcomes between private and public school students in Minnesota, taking into account differences in the characteristics of the students served.

Additionally, findings related to graduation rates, college entrance exam scores, and college enrollment among private schools are based on a small number of schools reporting data. As such, it is important to use caution when interpreting these findings as they may not reflect all private schools that serve high school students.

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