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A Brief Profile of America's Public Schools

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Introduction

A Brief Profile of America's Public Schools summarizes important findings from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). This document looks at differences between public and private schools and also examines public schools, and how they differ by community type (urban, suburban, and rural), and by school level (elementary, secondary, and combined).

The SASS is an integrated set of surveys that collects information on a wide range of topics about the characteristics of schools, staff and student populations, school climate, and staff perceptions. The School District Questionnaire focuses on teacher supply and demand in various subject areas and district hiring practices, and also includes questions about high school graduation requirements and programs offered. The Public School Questionnaire includes questions about their students, programs

offered, and policies. The Principal Questionnaire collects data on principals' prior professional experience, administrative decisions, and goals for their students. The Teacher Questionnaire seeks information such as teacher workload, education and experience, and perceptions of working conditions and school climate. The Library Media Center Questionnaire asks for information about the library collection, resources, services, and policies.

SASS data are published in a variety of reports. The data presented are from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and have been previously published as part of a larger report. For more information about the survey, go to the SASS web site (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass>) to find an overview, questionnaires from previous administrations of SASS, and reports that can be viewed or downloaded.



School definitions

The 1999–2000 SASS surveyed public and private schools. Among public schools, three different types of schools were surveyed—traditional public schools, public charter schools, and schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Traditional public schools are defined as institutions that provide educational services for at least one of grades 1–12 (or comparable ungraded levels), have one or more teachers to give instruction, are located in one or more buildings, receive public funds as primary support, and are operated by an education agency. They include regular, special education, vocational/technical, and alternative schools. They also include schools in juvenile detention centers, schools located on military bases and operated by the Department of Defense, and Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded schools operated by local public school districts. Traditional public schools do not include public charter schools.

Public charter schools are public schools that, in accordance with an enabling state statute, have been granted a charter exempting them from selected state or local rules and regulations. A public charter school may be a newly created school or it may previously have been a public or private school.

BIA-funded schools are listed in the *Office of Indian Education Programs: School Directory*. Schools listed in this directory receive federal funds but may be operated by a local school district, a local tribe, or as a public charter school. For the 1999–2000 SASS, if a BIA school was identified as a traditional public school, it received a Public School Questionnaire. Similarly, BIA-funded schools identified as public charter schools, received a Public Charter School Questionnaire.



Schools, staff, and students

In 1999–2000, there were approximately 83,700 traditional public schools (table 1). Those schools employed 3 million teachers and 82,800 principals. Some 45.1 million elementary and secondary students attended traditional public schools.

All of the 177 BIA schools listed in table 1 were funded by the BIA. They represented all of the BIA-funded schools at the elementary and secondary levels, regardless of how the schools were operated. There

were approximately 42,500 American Indian students who attended these BIA schools.¹ BIA schools employed 182 principals and some 3,600 teachers.

In 1999–2000, there were 1,000 public charter schools operating in the United States. They employed 17,500 teachers and 988 principals. Charter elementary and secondary schools enrolled some 267,000 pupils.

¹Alaska Native students were enrolled in traditional public schools in Alaska.

Table 1. Percentage and number of schools, principals, teachers, and students, by sector and by public school type: 1999–2000

Sector and type	Schools	Principals	Teachers	Students
Public				
Traditional public	83,725	82,802	2,984,781	45,099,506
BIA	177	182	3,564	42,532
Public charter	1,010	988	17,477	266,721
Private	27,223	26,231	449,057	5,262,848

NOTE: Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA schools or public charter schools. Some BIA-funded schools are reported twice in this table, once as BIA schools and once as either traditional public schools or as public charter schools.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.01, 2.01, 3.01, and 4.01 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public, Public Charter, and Indian School Questionnaires,” 1999–2000, “Private School Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

There were some 27,200 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States. They employed 26,200 principals and 449,000 teachers. In 1999–2000, 5.3 million students were enrolled in private schools.

Traditional public schools are, by far, the most common type of public school. The remainder of this summary will focus on traditional public schools and examine characteristics of traditional public schools by community type, and by school level.

School programs

The federal government provides a variety of programs for elementary and secondary schools. Title I, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a program that provides educational services, such as remedial reading or remedial math, to children who live in areas with high concentrations of low-income families. Of the almost 84,000 traditional public schools in the United States, 44,300 participate in the Title I program; 5,900 private schools participate in the Title I program (table 2).



The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program that provides cash subsidies and donated commodities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal the school serves. In return, schools must serve lunches that meet federal requirements and they must offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible children. About 81,400 public schools reported that they had students who were eligible

for free or reduced-price lunches. Of those public schools with eligible students, 78,100 public schools participated in the National School Lunch Program. Approximately 10,200 private schools had students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and 5,700 private schools participated in the National School Lunch Program.

Table 2. Number of schools with Title I students, schools with students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches or participating in National School Lunch Program, by sector and by community type: 1999–2000

Sector and community type	Schools	Schools with Title I students	Schools with students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches	Schools that participate in National School Lunch Program
Public	83,725	44,311	81,365	78,148
Central city	19,858	11,137	19,506	18,868
Urban fringe/large town	37,462	16,824	36,368	34,318
Rural/small town	26,405	16,350	25,491	24,962
Private	27,223	5,938	10,179	5,685

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.07 and 2.06 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Questionnaire,” 1999–2000 and “Private School Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

School security

Elementary and secondary schools took a variety of steps to ensure the safety of the students and staff while they are in school. The security measures inquired about ranged from a requirement that visitors sign in upon entering a school to video surveillance of the school and its grounds and maintaining a daily presence of police or security personnel.

Visitors were required to sign in or check in at the school office in 97 percent of public schools (table 3). Ninety percent of public schools required that all or most students stay on school grounds during lunch. In private schools, 92 percent required that all or most students stay on school grounds during lunch, and 81 percent required visitors to sign in or check in at the school office.

Table 3. Percentage of elementary and secondary schools with various security measures, by sector and by school level: 1999–2000

Sector and school level	A requirement that visitors sign in or check in	A requirement that all or most students stay on school grounds during lunch	Metal detectors through which all students must pass each day	Random metal detector checks on students	Drug sweeps	Daily presence of police or security personnel	Video surveillance
Public	96.6	89.7	1.7	7.8	21.0	23.5	14.9
Elementary	96.8	94.4	0.8	5.0	10.1	14.7	10.9
Secondary	96.4	77.5	3.1	13.9	49.6	48.2	25.6
Combined	93.6	82.0	8.9	19.7	40.9	29.3	20.1
Private	80.7	91.6	0.6	0.8	4.8	4.8	8.1

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.08 and 2.07 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Questionnaire,” 1999–2000 and “Private School Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

Security measures used by public elementary schools included requiring visitors to sign in (97 percent) and requiring students to stay on school grounds during lunch (94 percent). Some public elementary schools reported the use of daily presence of police or security personnel (15 percent), video surveillance (11 percent), and drug sweeps (10 percent).

Among security measures used by public secondary schools, 50 percent reported using drug sweeps and 48 percent reported the daily presence of police or security personnel. Some public high schools also reported using video surveillance (26 percent). Some public combined schools reported the use of daily presence of police or security personnel (29 percent), drug sweeps (41 percent), and video surveillance (20 percent).



Principal characteristics

Among public school principals, 99 percent had been a classroom teacher prior to becoming principal (table 4). Some public school principals had previous experience as an assistant principal or program director (67 percent), department head (37 percent), athletic coach or director (34 percent), or curriculum specialist or coordinator (25 percent).

Private school principals also tend to have experience within a school setting, prior to becoming a principal. Eighty-seven percent of private school principals reported that they had previous experience as a teacher. The other common school positions reported by private school principals were: assistant principal or program director (44 percent), department head (35 percent), curriculum specialist or coordinator (27 percent), and athletic coach or director (23 percent).

Table 4. Percentage of school principals with experience in teaching, administration, or other selected positions before becoming principals, by sector and by school level: 1999–2000

Sector and school level	Teacher	Assistant principal or program director	Department head	Athletic coach/athletic director	Curriculum specialist or coordinator	Guidance counselor	Library media specialist
Public	99.3	66.8	36.6	34.1	24.6	7.9	1.5
Elementary	99.3	65.0	32.2	26.4	26.4	6.6	1.7
Secondary	99.2	73.5	48.0	56.1	19.7	11.9	0.8
Combined	97.9	58.3	46.9	39.2	21.9	8.3	1.4
Private	87.4	44.2	35.2	22.5	27.0	10.9	3.6

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.11 and 2.10 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Principal Questionnaire,” 1999–2000 and “Private School Principal Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

Teacher working conditions

The number of hours per week that teachers were required to spend at school was quite consistent across sectors and across grade levels. In 1999–2000, the average number of hours per week that public and private school teachers were required to be at school was 38 hours (table 5). Across the public school grade levels teachers were required to be at school approximately 38 hours per week.

Public and private school teachers spent an average of 3 hours per week outside of regular school hours participating in school-related activities involving students, such as coaching, field trips, tutoring, or transporting students. Public and private school teachers spent an average of 9 hours per week outside of regular school hours participating in school-related activities not involving students.

Table 5. Average hours per week that full-time teachers were required to be at school and average hours worked outside regular school hours, by sector and by school level: 1999–2000

Sector and school level	Average hours per week required to be at school	Average hours per week spent outside of regular school hours in school-related activities involving students ¹	Average hours per week spent outside of regular school hours in school-related activities not involving students ²
Public	37.8	3.2	8.7
Elementary	37.6	2.1	8.9
Secondary	38.1	5.2	8.4
Combined	38.0	3.6	7.0
Private	38.2	3.1	8.6

¹School-related activities involving student interaction include coaching, field trips, tutoring, or transporting students.

²School-related activities not involving students include preparation, grading papers, parent conferences, or attending meetings.

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.15 and 2.13 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Questionnaire,” 1999–2000 and “Private School Teacher Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

Public elementary school teachers spent an average of 2 hours per week outside of regular school hours participating in school-related activities involving students. Public high school teachers spent an average of 5 hours per week outside of regular school hours in activities that were school-related and involved students.

Teachers' perceptions of school safety tended to differ by sector. Private school teachers were less likely than public school teachers to report being threatened with injury in the past 12 months. Among private school teachers, 4 percent reported injury threats, compared with 10 percent of traditional public school teachers (table 6).

Table 6. Percentage of teachers who stated that crime was a serious problem or who reported being threatened or physically attacked, by sector and by community type: 1999–2000

Sector and community type	Stated that robbery or theft was a serious problem	Stated that physical conflicts among students were a serious problem	Stated that student possession of weapons was a serious problem	Reported being threatened with injury in the past 12 months	Reported being physically attacked in the past 12 months
Public	2.4	4.8	0.8	9.6	4.2
Central city	3.9	9.4	1.6	13.5	6.2
Urban fringe/large town	1.9	3.3	0.5	7.9	3.5
Rural/small town	1.6	2.7	0.5	8.6	3.1
Private	0.9	1.0	0.3	3.9	2.2

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.17 and 2.15 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Questionnaire,” 1999–2000 and “Private School Teacher Questionnaire,” 1999–2000.

Private school teachers were also less likely than public school teachers to report physical conflicts among students as a serious problem in their school. Just 1 percent of private school teachers reported that physical conflicts among students were a serious problem in their school, compared with 5 percent of public school teachers.

Among public school teachers, reports of being threatened with injury varied by community type. Teachers in central city schools were more likely to report threats of injury in the past 12 months than teachers in urban fringe/large town schools and teachers in rural/small town schools. In central city public schools, 14 percent of teachers reported injury

threats. In urban fringe/large town schools, 8 percent of teachers reported injury threats. In rural/small town schools, 9 percent of teachers reported injury threats.

Central city public school teachers were also more likely than other public school teachers to report physical conflicts among students as a serious problem. In central city public schools, 9 percent of teachers reported conflicts as a serious problem, compared with 3 percent of teachers in urban fringe/large town public schools and 3 percent of teachers in rural/small town public schools.



Library media centers

Library media centers in public schools were most likely to report having at least one paid state-certified library media specialist. Of public schools with library media centers, 75 percent reported having a paid, state-certified library media specialist on staff compared to 20 percent of

private schools with library media centers (table 7). On average, public schools with library media centers had a student to certified library media specialist ratio of 551 to 1. On average, private schools with library media centers had a student to library media specialist ratio of 404 to 1.

Table 7. Number of public and private schools with a library media center and selected characteristics of schools with library media centers, by sector and by school level: 1999–2000

Sector and school level	Total number of schools with a library media center	Percentage of schools with paid state-certified library media specialists	Average number of paid full- or part-time state-certified library media specialists ¹	Average number of paid other library media staff ^{1,2}	Average number of students per certified library media specialist
Public	76,807	75.2	0.8	0.3	551.4
Elementary	56,715	71.3	0.7	0.3	490.4
Secondary	17,963	89.4	1.1	0.3	711.1
Combined	2,129	61.3	0.7	0.3	477.7
Private	17,054	20.2	0.2	0.5	404.0

¹Based on total headcounts.

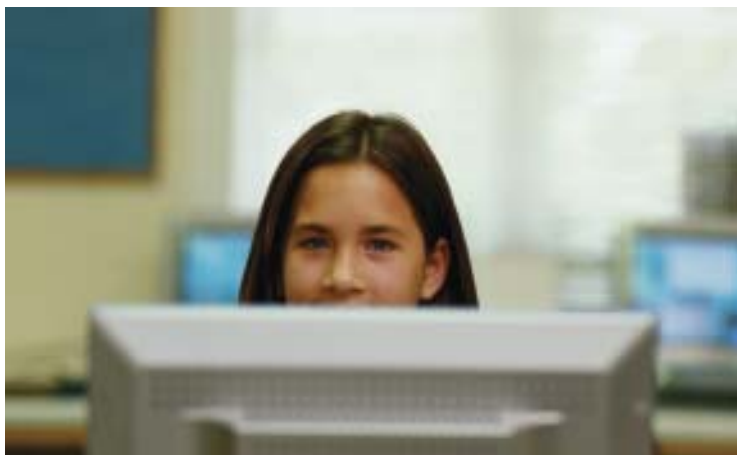
²Other paid library staff includes headcounts of library aides or clerical staff and paid professional staff who are not certified as library media specialists.

NOTE: These estimates are for traditional public schools. Traditional public schools include all public schools in the United States except public charter schools and BIA-funded schools that operate as BIA or public charter schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313), tables 1.09 and 2.08 from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Library Media Center Questionnaire," 1999–2000 and "Private School Library Media Center Questionnaire," 1999–2000.

Among public secondary schools with a library media center, 89 percent reported having a paid state-certified library media specialist. Seventy-one percent of public elementary schools employed a state-certified library media specialist. Of public combined schools, 61 percent employed a paid, state-certified library media specialist

Elementary and combined schools reported that the average number of state-certified library media specialists, whether full-time or part-time, was .7 compared to 1.1 in secondary schools. The average number of paid other library media staff (i.e., library aides, clerical staff, or professional staff who are not state-certified) was .3 for public elementary, secondary, and combined schools.



Reference

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools*, NCES 2002–313, by Kerry J. Gruber, Susan D. Wiley, Stephen P. Broughman, Gregory A. Strizek, and Marisa Burian-Fitzgerald. Washington, DC: 2002.

Notes

If you have specific questions about the SASS questionnaire, e-mail sassdata@ed.gov or call 1–800–221–1204 toll free.

The SASS web site (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass>) provides a complete list of publications that report findings from the SASS. Reports can be downloaded or a paper copy can be ordered, while supplies last, through ED Pubs at 1–877–4ED–Pubs, or online at <http://www.edpubs.org>

Recent titles that may be of interest include the following:

- *Qualifications of the Public School Teacher Workforce: Prevalence of Out-of-Field Teaching 1987–88 to 1999–2000* (NCES 2002–603)
- *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313)





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