



Private Education and the Public Interest

A message from the California Association of Private School Organizations (CAPSO)

Private schools are partners in the education of the public.

California's private schools currently educate some 500,000 students or roughly one of every thirteen students enrolled in grades K-12. More than one in every four K-12 schools in California is a private school. Private schools provide students with knowledge, skills and values that are essential for productive and responsible participation in a democratic society. Graduates of California's private schools make significant contributions to every aspect of life in the state, often distinguishing themselves for their social, cultural, economic, scientific, academic, legal, religious and political achievements and leadership. Whatever their particular orientation, California's private schools uphold and promote the values of public participation and service to community.

Private schools are diverse and pluralistic.

American private education reflects the diversity that is a hallmark of our country's strength, freedom and creativity. Private schools span the ideological gamut, from Society of Friends (Quaker) schools to military academies, include parochial schools associated with multiple faiths and denominations, and feature an array of non-sectarian schools with differing philosophies of education, visions and missions. Private schools are urban, suburban and rural, large and small, progressive and traditional, religious and secular, independent and networked in various associations. In short, private schools offer parents and students a broad and meaningful range of educational options.

Private schools set high standards and assure direct accountability.

For all their diversity, private schools share a number of essential characteristics in common. Chief among these is the fact that private school enrollment is always a function of *choice*. This means that the relationship between families and the schools they choose is strictly *voluntary*. If a private school fails to meet or exceed the expectations of the families it serves, the option of withdrawal and enrollment in other private or public schools can always be exercised. Competition for scarce resources in an open market environment dictates that private schools establish and maintain *high standards* and commit themselves to the constant pursuit of excellence. The very nature of private education promotes *direct accountability* of schools, teachers and administrators to the parents and students they serve.

Private schools contribute significantly to California's economy.

What would the cost to California's taxpayers be if private schools were to disappear? According to figures reported in *Education Week*, the state spends at least \$8,482 per-pupil enrolled in grades K-12. Multiplying this figure by the 500,000 students enrolled in California's private schools would result in an additional cost to the public of some \$4.25 billion dollars. Even if this sum could be modestly reduced by economies of scale, the question of *where* these students would be educated remains. It is conceivable that as many as 500 new schools would need to be constructed or purchased, resulting in a staggering level of additional long-term, public indebtedness.

Not only do California's private schools save taxpayers billions of dollars every year; private school families help foot the bill for public education through their own tax dollars. Moreover, these schools provide tens of thousands of private sector jobs, generate revenue for local businesses and, most importantly, develop the human capital necessary to assure California, and our nation, of a bright economic future.

Private schools achieve the kind of results California needs.

High standards and direct accountability to students and parents produce positive results. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, private schools both outperformed public schools in the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, and achieved a substantially narrower gap between minority and majority students, as well. In fact, NCES data have shown that minority students who graduate from private schools are more than twice as likely to attend four-year colleges as their public school counterparts. And once they get there, they'll be well prepared.

Civic minded, fiscally responsible, socially and philosophically diverse, accountable and high achieving. These are California's private schools – truly partners in the education of the public.

About CAPSO

CAPSO is a statewide association of twenty-one private school organizations whose affiliates serve schools enrolling approximately 80% of California's total private school population in grades K-12. Through more than thirty years of information and resource sharing, CAPSO has built collegial relationships among a diverse array of independent, religious, non-sectarian and special education private schools. CAPSO is recognized by both the California and U.S. Departments of Education, and is the California affiliate of the Council for American Private Education.