

PRIVATE SCHOOLS  
EXCLUDE DIFFICULT  
STUDENTS

**Vouchers don't just help the "average" student; they improve educational services for all students, including those who are hardest to teach. Private schools are not highly selective in their admissions, and are often better equipped to handle students with disabilities or other challenging students than public schools.**

**21,169**  
...students participate in the nation's five voucher programs for disabled students.

**90%**  
...of families no longer using the McKay voucher program for disabled students say the program should continue for others.

## The Facts: Private Schools Are Not Highly Selective

Private schools serve as many students as they can. That's their mission; helping students is what they were created to do. Also, private schools benefit when they maximize their enrollments. The evidence does not support the perception that private schools are highly selective in admissions; it points to the conclusion that private schools seek a broad student base.

Students with disabilities present a particular area of concern. There is a perception that private schools do not serve disabled students. Public schools maintain a large and costly bureaucracy whose purpose is to provide special education services, but this sort of administrative infrastructure is not as visible in private schools. As a result, many people believe that private schools do not offer special education services.

In particular, private schools serve disabled students better than public schools. While private schools do not usually have large and expensive special education bureaucracies, they do provide special education services. The evidence indicates that private schools have a better track record of providing necessary special education services than public school special education system does.

Many people are under the impression that private schools are highly selective in accepting students. Private schools are widely thought to weed out the less desirable students and select only the cream of the crop. Because of this perception, many are concerned that vouchers will "cream" the best students from public schools, leaving them with the burden of teaching the more difficult students.

## The Evidence: Studies Refute Exclusion in Private Schools

There is evidence that private schools are not highly selective. One empirical study on this issue found that students participating in voucher programs in New York, Washington D.C. and Dayton were representative of the general population. Evaluations of voucher programs in Charlotte and San Antonio showed similar results.

Some school choice programs, like the Milwaukee voucher program, require every participating private school to accept all voucher students. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available slots at a school then students are chosen by random lottery. These programs with "anti-creaming" provisions have a consistent track record of success.

Meanwhile, contrary to widespread perception, public schools do not serve all students. Public high schools expel approximately 1 percent of their students each year. Another 0.6 percent of public high school students are placed in specialized schools, so they are not served by their neighborhood public schools. Additionally, 1.5 percent of all disabled students in public schools are contracted out to private schools that can better handle their special needs.

The evidence also indicates that private schools do a better job of serving disabled students than public schools. Over 21,000 students participate in voucher programs exclusively serving disabled students in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Ohio and Utah. And that figure doesn't include disabled students participating in other school choice programs.

Even families that no longer participated in voucher programs noted that private schools served them better than public schools. Over 90 percent said that the program should continue to serve other families, even though they were no longer using it themselves.

## The Bottom Line

Private schools are not highly selective, and offer better educational opportunities for students who are difficult to teach, including students with disabilities.