

A Survey of Idaho's Private Schools

By Andrew D. Catt
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Introduction

In recent years, Idaho's public officials have considered legislation to create a tax-credit scholarship program, which would give more parents the ability to choose private schools for their children. Because policymakers likely will review that legislation again, this memo provides essential information about the state's private schools and the opportunities and challenges within that K-12 education sector.

Because far fewer students attend private schools, compared to district schools, we know the least about private schools as a "sector" within Idaho's education system. Understandably, there is greater incentive for policymakers, analysts, and opinion leaders to focus on the public sector, because, by comparison, it is vastly larger. But as Idaho follows the lead of more states and considers giving families the ability to access private schools, more information on that sector is needed. Fortunately, the U.S. Department of Education and the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice have surveyed Idaho's private schools, allowing for better-informed policies and decision-making.

In this memo, we synthesize information collected recently in two private school surveys, one conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and another by the Friedman Foundation and the Idaho Federation of Independent Schools (IDFIS). After a brief description of the data sources, we present the key survey findings in two sections. Each survey offers key profile and demographic characteristics of Idaho's private K-12 school sector and should provide a healthy foundation and starting point for policy decisions and program design.

Survey Data Sources and Brief Background

U.S. Department of Education. The federal government has conducted annual surveys of private schools in each state for more than a decade, according to the USDOE website. The most recent survey was conducted in the 2011-12 school year.¹ Each year the USDOE has asked for information about certain school qualities, such as address and primary contact information, school district and county of residence, grade span, number of teachers, number of students, website, and any school association

membership. According to the USDOE's most recent survey report, there are 124 nonpublic private schools in Idaho serving 11,262 students overall.² Of those, the USDOE received survey responses from 115 schools serving 10,313 students.³

Friedman Foundation/IDFIS. From December 2 to April 30, 2014, the Friedman Foundation and IDFIS administered a first-of-its-kind survey of Idaho's private K-12 schools. The purpose of that assessment was six-fold: (1) establish currently available seats and capacities to enroll additional students; (2) measure the potential interest in a proposed tax-credit scholarship program; (3) determine the tax-credit scholarship program rules and regulations that would concern schools the most; (4) calculate the average and median private school tuition; (5) document how many schools provide tuition assistance; and (6) determine the current testing programs, if any, in effect for these schools.

The Friedman Foundation, in its role of overseeing the data collection and analysis, received responses from 52 private schools operating in Idaho serving at least 8,251 students.⁴ Based on the USDOE's total number of Idaho private school students, we estimate this represents nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the state's private school population. There were 102 private schools on the survey contact list that met at least two conditions: (1) the school had an email address or phone number; and (2) the school had at least one grade level other than pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. Therefore, the Friedman Foundation/IDFIS survey had a 51 percent school-level response rate. Assuming the survey's administration minimized any non-response bias, the survey's sample should provide a meaningful representation of the state's private school sector.

Key Findings

Part I: Friedman Foundation/IDFIS (2013-14)

Do Idaho's private schools have available seats for new students?

Of the schools taking part in the Friedman Foundation/IDFIS survey, we cautiously estimate close to 2,179 open seats—across all grades—are available in the state's

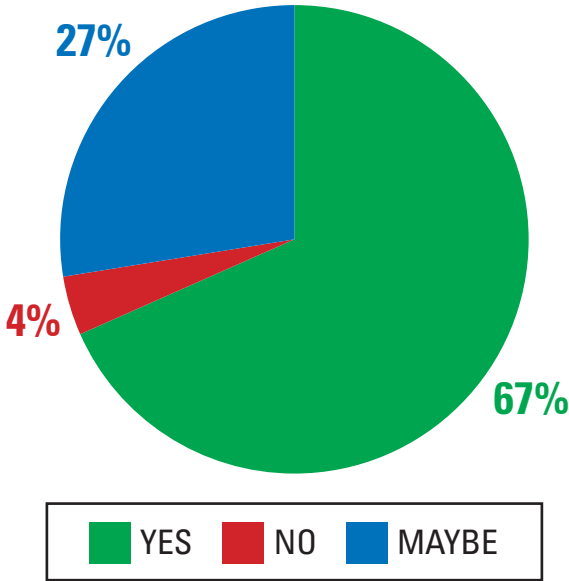
private school sector. Note that this is a low estimate provided directly by the private schools in this survey. The high-end estimate, based on responses, is closer to 2,250 seats for the 52 private schools in the survey.

Private School Type	Number of Seats (Low)	Number of Seats (High)
TOTAL	2,179	2,233
Elementary School	1,148	1,181
Middle School	525	528
High School	506	524

If we assume our survey’s school sample is representative of the state’s private school sector, we can extrapolate this total range. When doing this computation, we project a range of 5,200 to 5,325 available private schools seats in the state.

If enacted, would schools participate in a tax-credit scholarship program?

Approximately two-thirds of responding private schools (67 percent; 35 of 52 schools) said they would participate in a tax-credit scholarship program.⁵ Another 27 percent of schools said “maybe”; in other words, they would consider participation. Only two schools (4 percent) said outright they would not participate. In the comments section, some of the schools that said “maybe” indicated their participation would depend on what “strings” are attached and what regulations are required.



If we assume the survey’s school sample is representative of the state’s private school sector, we can extrapolate numbers that would project the following school participation counts:

Response	Number of Private Schools (Projection)
Yes	83
No	5
Maybe	33

What tax-credit scholarship program rules and regulations would concern schools the most?

Nearly nine out of 10 schools (88 percent; 46 of 52 schools) responding to our survey shared their concerns about potential rules and regulations from state government for all categories listed. On average, responding schools were most concerned with rules pertaining to accommodations for students with special needs; setting curriculum and instruction; and school admissions and enrollment guidelines.

Average Concern Level with Issues Affected by Rules and Regulations (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)	
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	3.8
Curriculum and Instruction	3.7
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	3.6
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	3.2
Paperwork and Reporting	3.2
Tuition and Fees	3.2
School Eligibility for Program (e.g., register with state)	2.9
Testing and Accountability	2.9
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	2.7
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g., income limit)	2.6
Building Safety and Security	2.3

Half of the schools responding to all parts of this question would have “very high” concerns with regulations concerning curriculum and instruction. In the comments section, most schools expressed apprehension with accreditation rules and how a school choice program might affect their teaching of religion.

Number of Private Schools with Very High Concern Over Issues Affected by Rules and Regulations	
Curriculum and Instruction	23
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	20
Tuition and Fees	14
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	13
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	13
School Eligibility for Program (e.g., register with state)	11
Paperwork and Reporting	9
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	8
Testing and Accountability	7
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g., income limit)	5
Building Safety and Security	3

How much tuition do they charge students?

It appears there are some especially expensive schools at all three levels that create gaps between “average” and “median” private school tuition rates. Half of surveyed private schools charge \$3,600 or less for elementary and middle school grades. More than half of schools charge less than \$5,100 for high school.

Private School Type	Average Tuition	Median Tuition
Elementary School	\$4,219	\$3,550
Middle School	\$4,885	\$3,600
High School	\$6,023	\$5,081

What proportion of the school’s student population receives some form of financial assistance?

Of those private schools that responded to this question, 94 percent of the schools (47 schools) offer their students tuition assistance.⁶

Nearly one-third of the responding schools (32 percent; 16 schools) said they have more than 25 percent of their students receiving some form of financial assistance.

Percentage of Students with Tuition Help	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
76% to 100%	1	2%
51% to 75%	2	4%
26% to 50%	13	26%
1% to 25 %	31	62%
None	3	6%

In the comments section, multiple schools expressed they have various tuition discounts, such as staff discount, teacher discount, multi-child discount, and giving non-parish students the parish rate. Many schools also said they require volunteer hours from all families receiving aid.

Do responding schools give an annual standardized test to their students?

Nearly nine of 10 private schools (88 percent) require their students to take a nationally norm-referenced standardized test.⁷ More than 20 percent of these schools require the state’s criterion-referenced assessment, called the ISAT.

Standardized Test	Number of Testing Schools	Percentage of State’s Testing Schools
ISAT	9	21%
Other Test	9	21%
ITBS	8	19%
MAP	7	16%
Stanford	6	14%
Terra Nova	3	7%

Part II: U.S. Department of Education (2011-12)

What geographic areas have the most private schools?

Ada County and Kootenai County collectively have approximately 38 percent of the state's private schools (45 of 120 schools).⁸ Bonner County and Canyon County collectively have 18 private schools. Generally speaking, these four areas represent the cradles of private schools spread out across the state.

Top 10 Counties	Number of Private Schools
Ada	26
Kootenai	19
Bonner	9
Canyon	9
Bonneville	6
Twin Falls	6
Blaine	4
Boundary	4
Elmore	4
Nez Perce	4

Although the state's private schools seem to be concentrated in two counties, their locations are more varied when it comes to school districts. Nearly one-third (33 percent) of the state's private schools are located in either Boise City Independent School District, Coeur d'Alene School District, or Meridian Joint School District (39 of 120 schools). The districts of Lake Pend Oreille, Mountain Home, and Twin Falls collectively have 19 private schools.

Top 11 School Districts	Number of Private Schools
Boise City	15
Coeur d'Alene	13
Meridian	11
Lake Pend Oreille	9
Mountain Home	5
Twin Falls	5
Blaine County	4
Boundary County	4
Lewiston	4
Nampa	4
Post Falls	4

What types of communities have the most private schools?

Approximately one-third (33 percent) of the state's private schools are located in a city (41 of 124 schools).

Community Type	Number of Private Schools
City	41
Rural	36
Town	23
Suburb	15

What cities have the most private schools?

More than one-quarter (28 percent) of the state’s private schools are located in Boise, Coeur d’Alene, and Sandpoint (35 of 124 schools).

Top 10 Cities	Number of Private Schools
Boise	19
Coeur d’Alene	10
Sandpoint	6
Idaho Falls	5
Nampa	5
Twin Falls	5
Eagle	4
Lewiston	4
Mountain Home	4
Post Falls	4

What is the state’s *average* private school size (enrollment)?

The average private school size in Idaho is 109 students.

What is the state’s *median* private school size (enrollment)?

The median private school size in Idaho is 64 students (half of all private schools are above/below this enrollment number).

What are the most common grade spans for Idaho’s private schools?

By far the most common school-wide grade span is pre-kindergarten through kindergarten (PK-K). In Idaho, 15 percent of private schools span PK-K. This is slightly higher than the number of private schools in the state that span PK-12 (14 percent). The 124 private schools in Idaho have at least 35 different grade spans.

Most Common Grade Spans	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
PK-K	18	15%
PK-12	17	14%
PK-8	12	10%
PK-5	8	7%
PK-6	7	6%
K-12	5	4%
6-12	4	3%
K-8	4	3%

What proportion of the state’s private schools also offer pre-kindergarten? How many schools?

We estimate 74 private schools in Idaho already offer pre-kindergarten, representing about three-fifths (60 percent) of the state’s total private school sector.

What is the racial makeup of the state’s private schools?

Nearly nine of 10 private school students (87 percent) are white.

Students’ Race	Number of Students	Percentage of State’s Private School Students
White	8,893	87.4%
Hispanic or Latino	550	5.4%
Asian	324	3.2%
Black	161	1.6%
Two or More	136	1.3%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	94	0.9%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	21	0.2%

How long is each year and day for students attending the state’s private schools?

Students attend Idaho’s private schools for approximately 6.4 hours per day for 175 days of the year, on average.

School Days, Hours	Average	Median
Number of School Days/Year	175 days	173 days
Number of School Hours/Day	6.4 hours	6.8 hours

What is the average class size?

On average, there are nearly 10 students per teacher (9.5:1) in Idaho’s private schools. However, when considering only full-time equivalent teachers, this increases to more than 15 students per teacher (15.4:1).

Student-Teacher Ratios	Average	Median
Number of Students/Teacher	9.5	9.1
Number of Students/FTE Teacher	15.4	12.0

How many schools are religious and what denominations are represented?

More than two-thirds of Idaho’s private schools are religious in origin (69 percent; 79 of 115 schools).

Private School Type	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
Religious	79	69%
Nonsectarian	36	31%

Of those schools that are religious, most are Christian with no specific denomination (41 percent; 32 of 79 schools).

Top Five Denominations	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
Christian (no specific denomination)	32	28%
Roman Catholic	17	15%
Seventh-Day Adventist	12	10%
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	7	6%
Assembly of God	3	3%

How many schools belong to an association and to what associations do they belong?

More than two-thirds of Idaho’s private schools belong to at least one association (68 percent; 78 of 115 schools).

Association Relationship	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
Belong to ≥ 1 Association	78	68%
Belong to 0 Associations	37	32%

Of those schools that belong to at least one association, most belong to the Association of Christian Schools International (19 percent; 15 of 78 schools).

Top Six Associations	Number of Private Schools	Percentage of State’s Private Schools
Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)	15	13%
National Catholic Education Association (NCEA)	14	12%
General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (GCSDAC)	10	9%
American Montessori Society (AMS)	6	5%
Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) or (School of Tomorrow)	4	3%
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	4	3%

Conclusion

Assuming our survey’s school sample is representative of the state’s private school sector, Idaho has enough empty seats to grow its number of private school students by 46 percent to 47 percent, totaling approximately 16,500 students. Making the same assumption, our survey’s findings show more than two-thirds of schools (67 percent; 83 of 124 schools) would participate in a tax-credit scholarship program and more than one-quarter

of schools (27 percent; 33 of 124 schools) would maybe participate, resulting in more than nine out of 10 private schools potentially participating in such a program.

If Idaho policymakers are curious as to potential eligibility of a tax-credit scholarship program, they can base low estimates on programs that already exist and recent enrollment numbers.⁹

Income Limit	Annual Income for Family of Four in 2014-15	States with Tax-Credit Scholarship Programs	Number of Eligible Idaho Students
100% x FRL	\$44,123	FL	100,078
250% x Poverty	\$59,625	LA, RI	129,975
300% x Poverty	\$71,550	NH, VA	156,931
185% x FRL	\$81,628	AZ	194,146
300% x FRL	\$132,369	IA, OK	256,489
None	-	AZ, GA	285,450

Notes

1. Stephen P. Broughman and Nancy L. Swaim, *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011-12 Private School Universe Survey*, NCES 2013-316 (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013316.pdf>.

2. Ibid., table 15, p. 20.

3. US Dept. of Education, PSS Private School Universe Survey data for the 2011-12 school year, <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch>.

4. Five of the schools that responded to our survey did not respond to the USDOE survey so we do not have enrollment numbers for them.

5. One school did not respond to this question.

6. Two schools did not respond to this question.

7. Nine schools did not respond as to whether or not they administer a nationally norm-referenced standardized test.

8. The USDOE survey had location information for 115 schools and our survey had location information for an additional five schools.

9. Author's calculations based on data from 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), tables B19101 and DP02 via American FactFinder; Federal Register 78, no 61 (Spring 2013), p. 19179; Broughman and Swaim, *Results From the 2011-12 Private School Universe Survey*; Patrick Keaton, *Selected Statistics From the Common Core of Data: School Year 2011-12*, NCES 2013-441 (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013441.pdf>; The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *The ABCs of School Choice: The Comprehensive Guide to Every Private School Choice Program in America*, 2014 ed. (Indianapolis: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2014), p. 107, <http://www.edchoice.org/ABCs>. Assumes one school-aged child per family and no prior year public school requirement.