



EXPLORING

WEST VIRGINIA'S PRIVATE EDUCATION SECTOR



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Overview

Exploring West Virginia's Private Education Sector synthesizes information about West Virginia's private schools from a [survey](#) conducted by EdChoice.

The Mountain State does not currently have any educational choice programs, but recent legislative pushes have brought options such as education savings accounts (ESAs) into the spotlight.¹

ESAs allow parents to withdraw their children from public district or charter schools and receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses. Those funds—often distributed to families via debit card—can cover private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, community college costs, higher education expenses and other approved customized learning services and materials. Some ESAs, but not all, even allow students to use their funds to pay for a combination of public school courses and private services. Six states have ESA programs, although one of those state programs is currently inactive.²

The characteristics of West Virginia's private school sector can inform policy debates surrounding the potential creation of educational choice programs, such as ESAs. From September 19 to December 10, 2018,

Key Findings

- Private schools in West Virginia have at least 1,786 open seats with a projected estimate closer to 6,300 open seats for K–12 students
- Nearly half of schools are already familiar with education savings accounts (ESAs)
 - 74 percent would or probably would participate in a general ESA program
- Slightly more than one-third of schools are familiar with tax-credit scholarships
 - 62 percent of schools would or probably would participate in a general tax-credit scholarship program
- Schools are mostly concerned with regulations regarding curriculum and instruction, school admissions and enrollment guidelines, teacher certification and licensure, and accommodations for students with special needs
- 70 percent of private schools serve students with special needs
- 73 percent of private schools provide some form of financial assistance to students
- 97 percent of private schools administer at least one nationally norm-referenced test to students

¹ S.B. 6, 2018 Regular Session (West Virginia, 2018), http://www.wvlegislature.gov/Bill_Text_HTML/2018_SESSIONS/RS/Bills/SB6%20INTR.htm; S.B. 128, 2018 Regular Session (West Virginia, 2018), http://www.wvlegislature.gov/Bill_Text_HTML/2018_SESSIONS/RS/Bills/SB128%20INTR.htm

² EdChoice (2018), What Is an Education Savings Account? [web page], accessed December 18, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/education-savings-account>

EdChoice administered a first-of-its-kind survey of West Virginia private school leaders. This brief provides a descriptive analysis of the results of that survey, including tuition and fees, the number of open seats, regulatory concerns, and interest in educational choice programs.

Do West Virginia’s private schools have available seats for new students?

Of the schools taking part in the EdChoice survey, cautious estimates show the state’s private schools have at least 1,786 open seats across K–12. This is an estimate provided directly by the 36 private schools in this survey that responded to enrollment and capacity questions. The projected estimate for West Virginia’s total private school sector is closer to 6,300 open seats for K–12 students.

Known Open Seats in Respondent West Virginia Private Schools (2018–19)

Private School Grade Level	Number of Open Seats
K–12 TOTAL	1,786
Prekindergarten	131
Kindergarten	205
Elementary School	688
Middle School	513
High School	324
Ungraded	56

Number of respondent schools = 36; item response rate = 29%

Are schools familiar with the concept of education savings accounts?

West Virginia private schools were asked how familiar they are with the concept of ESAs for K–12 education. Nearly half of the private schools (49%; 17 of 35 schools) indicated they were already familiar with ESAs. Nearly one-third of West Virginia private schools (31%; 11 of 35 schools) said they were “not at all familiar” with ESAs, meaning they may not have heard of such programs prior to taking the survey.

West Virginia Private Schools’ Familiarity with Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

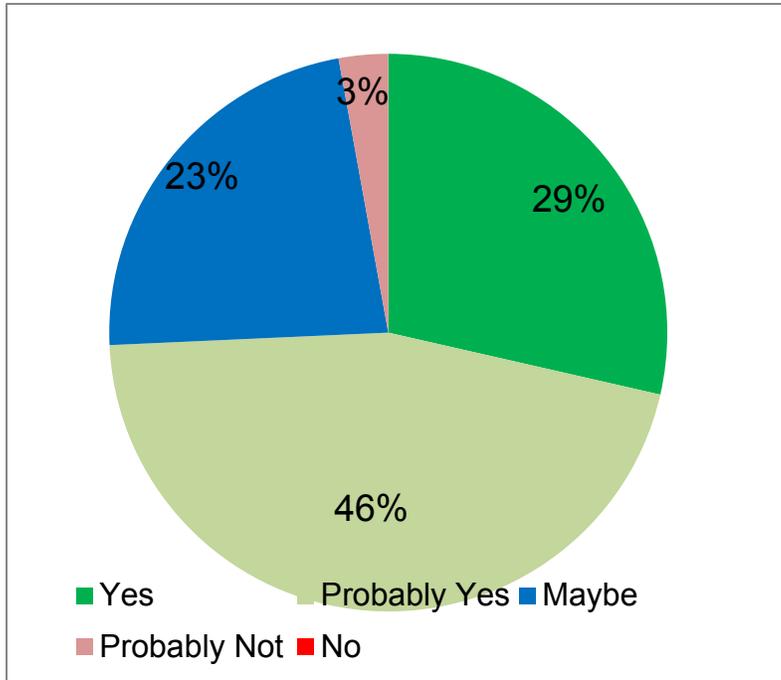
Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	3%
Somewhat Familiar	46%
Not Too Familiar	20%
Not At All Familiar	31%

Number of respondent schools = 35; item response rate = 28%

If enacted, would schools participate in an ESA program?

When provided with the previously footnoted ESA definition and asked if they would participate in an ESA program open to public school students, nearly three out of four respondent private schools (74%; 26 of 35 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 23 percent of schools (8 of 35 schools) said “maybe.” One school (3%) said they probably would not participate, and zero schools said they would not participate.

West Virginia Private School Responses to Potential ESA Program Participation



Number of respondent schools = 35; item response rate = 28%

Are schools familiar with the concept of tax-credit scholarships?

West Virginia private schools were asked how familiar they are with tax-credit scholarships.³ Slightly more than one-third of private schools (34%; 12 of 35 schools) indicated they were already “very” or “somewhat” familiar with tax-credit scholarships. Nearly one-third of West Virginia private schools (29%; 10 of 35 schools) said they were “not at all familiar” with tax-credit scholarships, meaning they may not have heard of the concept prior to the survey.

³ Tax-credit scholarships allow taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships. Eligible taxpayers can include both individuals and businesses. In some states, scholarship-giving nonprofits also provide innovation grants to public schools and/or transportation assistance to students choosing alternative public schools. EdChoice (2018), What Is a Tax-Credit Scholarship? [web page], accessed December 18, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/tax-credit-scholarship>

West Virginia Private Schools' Familiarity with Tax-Credit Scholarships

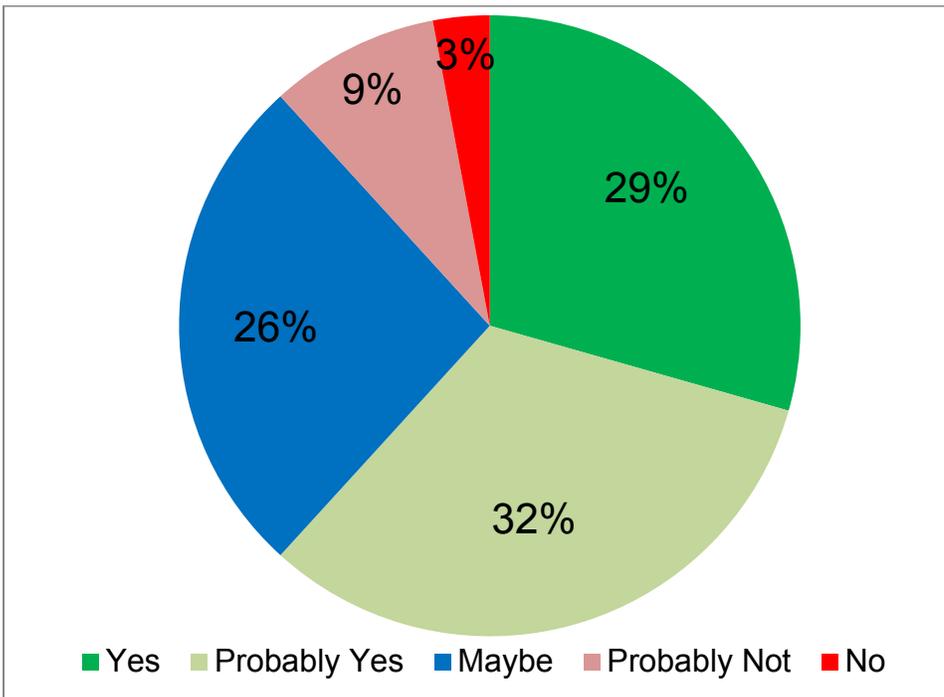
Response	Percent of Private Schools
Very Familiar	3%
Somewhat Familiar	31%
Not Too Familiar	37%
Not At All Familiar	29%

Number of respondent schools = 35; item response rate = 28%

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

When asked if they would participate in a tax-credit scholarship program open to all students, more than three out of five respondent private schools (62%; 21 of 35 schools) said “yes” or “probably yes.” Another 26 percent of schools (9 of 35 schools) said “maybe.” Three schools (9%) said they probably would not participate, and one school (3%) said they would not participate.

West Virginia Private School Responses to Potential Tax-Credit Scholarship Program Participation



Number of respondent schools = 35; item response rate = 28%

Which private school choice program rules and regulations concern schools most?

More than four out of five schools that responded to the survey (84%; 32 of 38 schools) shared their concerns about potential rules and regulations from state government for at least one of the categories listed. On average, respondent schools were most concerned with rules pertaining to:

- Curriculum and instruction,
- School admissions and enrollment guidelines,
- Teacher/staff certification and licensure,
- Accommodations for students with special needs,
- Paperwork and reporting,
- School eligibility for program,
- Tuition and fees, and
- Testing and accountability.

More than half of the schools that responded to that question said they would have “very high” or “somewhat high” concerns with regulations regarding curriculum and instruction (63%; 20 of 32 schools), school admissions and enrollment guidelines (59%; 19 of 32 schools), and teacher/staff certification and licensure (53%; 17 of 32 schools). Nearly half of the schools (44%; 14 of 32 schools) expressed “very high” or “somewhat high” concerns about regulations concerning testing and accountability and concerning accommodations for students with special needs.

West Virginia Private Schools’ Average Concern Level for Specific Rules and Regulations (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)

Rule/Regulation	Average Concern Level
Curriculum and Instruction	3.8
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	3.6
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	3.5
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	3.3
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	3.1
Tuition and Fees	3.1
Testing and Accountability	3.1
Paperwork and Reporting	2.9
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	2.8
Building Safety and Security	2.8
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	2.7

Number of respondent schools = 32; item response rate = 25%

Number of West Virginia Private Schools with Somewhat High or Very High Concern for Specific Rules and Regulations

Rule/Regulation	Number of Private Schools
Curriculum and Instruction	20
School Admissions and Enrollment Guidelines	19
Teacher/Staff Certification and Licensure	17
Accommodations for Students with Special Needs	14
Testing and Accountability	14
Tuition and Fees	13
School Eligibility for Program (e.g. register with state)	10
Building Safety and Security	9
Paperwork and Reporting	8
Student Eligibility for Program (e.g. income limit)	8
Financial Reporting and Disclosure	7

Number of respondent schools = 32; item response rate = 25%

Which geographic areas have the most open seats in West Virginia's private schools?

Of the private schools that responded to the survey, Kanawha County had the most open K–12 private school seats during the 2018–19 school year. The county seat county and the most populous city in and capital of the state, Charleston, also had more open K–12 private school seats than any other city in the state, based on respondents. In addition:

- Monongalia County had 95 percent as many open seats as Kanawha County
- Nearly two out of five open seats in the state (38%) were located in the previous two counties or Harrison County (196 open seats)
- More than one-fourth of the open seats (27%; 483 open seats) were located in the Mountaineer Country region
- Nearly half of the open seats were located in the New-River-Greenbrier Valley region (23%; 408 open seats) and the Metro Valley region (22%; 398 open seats)
- Nearly one-sixth of the open seats (16%; 285 open seats) were located in the Northern Panhandle region

Top 10 West Virginia Cities with the Largest Number of Open K–12 Seats in Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Open K–12 Seats
Charleston	251
Morgantown	238
Weirton	164
Pipestem	130
Ronceverte	123
Clarksburg	112
Bridgeport	84
Scott Depot	80
Williamstown	76
Prosperity	71

Number of respondent schools = 36; item response rate = 29%

Top 10 West Virginia Counties with the Largest Number of Open K–12 Seats in Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Open Seats
Kanawha	251
Monongalia	238
Harrison	196
Hancock	164
Raleigh	155
Putnam	138
Summers	130
Greenbrier	123
Wood	76
Berkeley	56

Number of respondent schools = 36; item response rate = 29%

Which geographic areas have the most respondent private schools?

Almost a third (31%) of respondent private schools are located in Monongalia County, Ohio County, Raleigh County, or Randolph County, each of which are home to three respondent schools.

Nearly two out five respondent schools are located in Elkins, Morgantown, Wheeling, Charleston, Huntington, or Martinsburg.

Top Six West Virginia Cities with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

City	Number of Private Schools
Elkins	3
Morgantown	3
Wheeling	3
Charleston	2
Huntington	2
Martinsburg	2

Number of respondent schools = 38; item response rate = 31%

Top 10 West Virginia Counties with the Largest Number of Respondent Private Schools

County	Number of Private Schools
Monongalia	3
Ohio	3
Raleigh	3
Randolph	3
Berkeley	2
Boone	2
Cabell	2
Harrison	2
Kanawha	2
Putnam	2

Number of respondent schools = 38; item response rate = 31%

What is the cost of combined tuition and fees among private schools?

Half of private schools for which combined tuition and fee data are available charge \$4,100 or less for elementary and \$4,000 or less for middle school grades and high school grades.

At all levels there are some relatively expensive schools that create gaps between “average” and “median” private school tuition and fee rates. The minimum combined tuition and fees charged at any level is \$1,200 and the maximum combined tuition and fees charged at any level is \$10,600. Focusing on the median amounts may offer a more representative picture of West Virginia private schools while minimizing outlier effects.

Approximately nine out of 10 West Virginia private schools charge less than \$6,000 for prekindergarten (88%), kindergarten (87%), elementary school grades (86%), middle school grades (90%) and high school grades (88%). For comparison purposes, West Virginia spent an average of \$11,424 per student in public school in 2015–16, with an average of \$836 paid

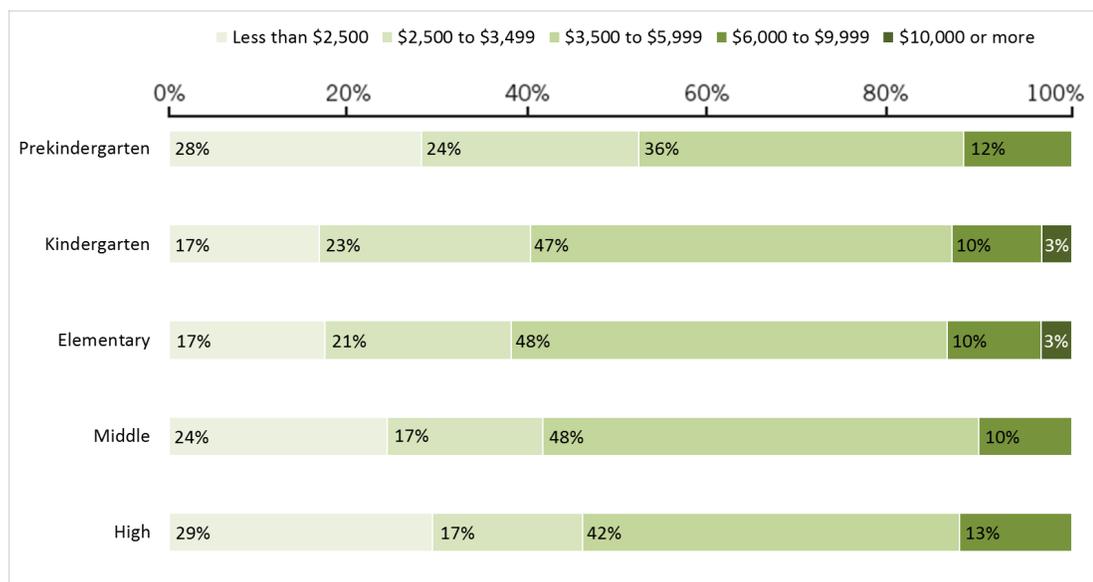
for transportation per student.⁴ After subtracting out the average amount paid for transportation per student by public schools, the remaining \$10,588 is approximately the same as the tuition amount at the most expensive private school that responded to the survey.

Combined Tuition and Fees Amounts for West Virginia Private Schools (2018–19)

Grade(s)	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
OVERALL	\$3,955	\$4,000	\$1,200	\$10,600
Prekindergarten	\$3,596	\$3,400	\$1,200	\$8,105
Kindergarten	\$4,120	\$4,050	\$1,200	\$10,600
Elementary School	\$4,167	\$4,100	\$1,200	\$10,600
Middle School	\$3,781	\$4,000	\$1,200	\$8,705
High School	\$3,703	\$4,000	\$1,200	\$8,300

Number of respondent schools = 33; item response rate = 26%

West Virginia Private Schools' Combined Tuition and Fees Ranges by Grade Level (2018–19)



Number of respondent schools = 33; item response rate = 26%

What do private schools charge in fees?

Half of schools for which fee data were collected charge \$325 or less, and the West Virginia private schools for which fee data are available charge a range of \$25 to \$1,600 in total fees. Those fees are in addition to the tuition that schools charge students. The fee category in which West Virginia schools charge the most, on average, is fees for uniforms. Fees related to registration and application were, on average, the least-expensive fee category of West Virginia private schools.

⁴ Stephen Q. Cornman, Lei Zhou, Malia R. Howell, and Jumaane Young (2018), *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2015–16* (NCES 2019-301), table 4, p. 11, retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics' website: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019301.pdf>

Fee Amounts for West Virginia Private Schools

Fee Category	Average Fee	Median Fee	Minimum Fee	Maximum Fee
TOTAL	\$424	\$325	\$25	\$1,600
Registration/Application	\$158	\$125	\$25	\$1,000
Textbooks	\$229	\$200	\$75	\$400
Technology	\$171	\$110	\$50	\$480
Transportation	\$171	\$110	\$50	\$480
Uniforms	\$450	\$450	\$300	\$600
Other	\$63	\$35	\$25	\$130

Number of respondent schools = 25; item response rate = 20%

What proportion of West Virginia private schools offers some form of financial assistance, and how much do they offer?

Nearly three-fourths of the state's private schools for which tuition data are available (73%; 24 of 33 schools) provide some form of tuition assistance. Half of the schools provide financial assistance to at least one-fifth of their students (20%), and half of the schools provide \$2,680 or more in financial assistance per student.

Tuition Assistance Provided by West Virginia Private Schools

	Average	Median
Percentage of Students Receiving Financial Assistance (Including Discounts)	22%	20%
Tuition Assistance Per Student	\$6,873	\$2,680

Number of respondent schools = 24; item response rate = 19%

What proportion of West Virginia's private schools' students have special needs?

For the schools that responded to this question, estimates show, on average, one out of 10 students who attended West Virginia private schools (10%) had special needs in 2017–18.⁵ This is slightly less than the proportion of West Virginia's public school students (16% in 2015–16).⁶

However, it is important to note that the median proportion of students (6%) may be more useful. A median of that data point could not be found for West Virginia public school students.

⁵ Students with special needs were defined on the survey as those having autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or other health impairments.

⁶ Authors' calculations; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey Special ED Data", 2015-16 v.1a; "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Membership Data", 2015-16 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Directory Data", 2015-16 v.1a., accessed December 18, 2018 via ELSi tableGenerator, <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>

West Virginia Private Schools' Percentage of Students with Special Needs

Student Profile	Average Percent of Private Schools' Students	Median Percent of Private School's Students
With Special Needs	10%	6%
Without Special Needs	90%	94%

Number of respondent schools= 22; item response rate = 17%

What proportion of the state's private schools enrolls students with special needs?

Of those schools that responded to the question, seven of 10 (70%; 23 of 33 schools) enrolled at least one student with special needs in 2018–19.

West Virginia Private Schools Enrolling Students with Special Needs

Enrolled Student(s) with Special Needs	Number of Private Schools	Percent of State's Private Schools
Yes	23	70%
No	10	30%

number of respondent schools = 33; item response rate = 26%

Do West Virginia private schools test their students annually?

Nearly every West Virginia private school (97%) requires their students to take a nationally norm-referenced test to measure student academic performance. Of those schools, nearly half (45%; 14 of 31 schools) reported they administered the TerraNova. Only two private schools said they administer the West Virginia General Summative Assessment (WVGSA), while four schools said they administer the SAT.

West Virginia Private Schools Administering Nationally Norm-Referenced Test(s)

Tests Administered	Number of Testing Schools	Percentage of State's Private Schools
TerraNova	14	45%
Iowa Assessments	9	29%
Stanford 10	3	10%
PSAT	2	6%
SAT	2	6%
West Virginia General Summative Assessment (WVGSA)	2	6%
ACT	1	3%
CogAT	1	3%
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)	1	3%
West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)	0	0%

Number of respondent schools = 31; item response rate = 25%

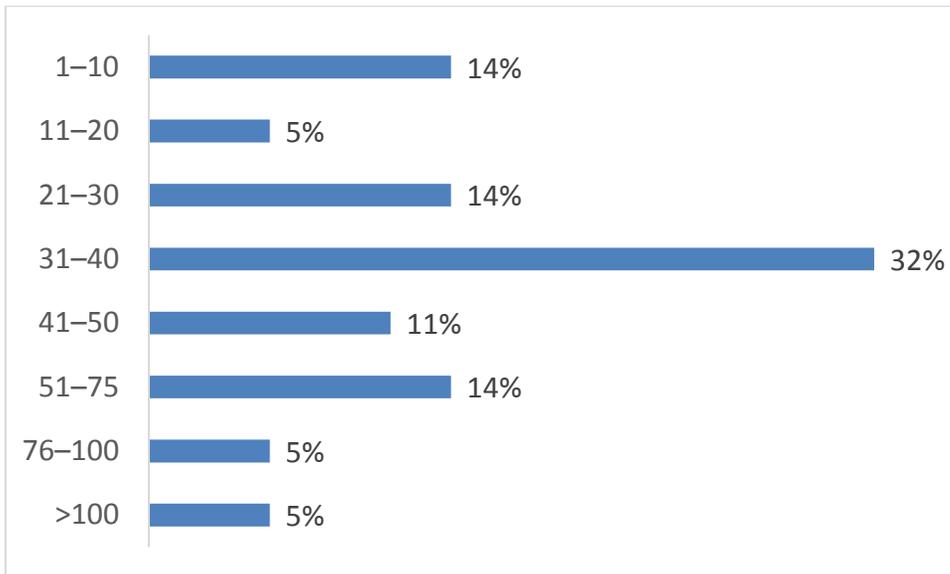
Note: Percentages total more than 100 because some schools administer multiple tests.

How many years have the schools been operating?

Based on survey responses, West Virginia private schools have been operating for an average of 41 years, with a median operating length of 37 years. The newest school has been operating for less than one year, while the oldest school responding has been open and operating for more than 150 years, according to survey responses.

Seven out of 10 schools (70%; 26 of 37 schools) have been operating between 21 and 75 years, meaning they opened during the middle or late 20th century. Only 14 percent of schools (5 of 37 schools) have been operating for 10 years or fewer.

Number of Years West Virginia Private Schools Have Been Operating



Number of respondent schools = 37; item response rate = 29%

APPENDIX 1: Survey Project and Profile

Title:	<i>Exploring West Virginia’s Private Education Sector</i>
Survey Sponsor and Developer:	EdChoice
Survey Data Collection and Quality Control:	EdChoice
Interview Dates:	September 19, 2018 to December 10, 2018
Interview Method:	Web; SurveyMonkey
Interview Length:	14.5 minutes (median)
Language(s):	English only
Sample Frame:	Non-Probability Sampling of Establishments
Sample Providers:	West Virginia Department of Education
Population Sample:	Attempted census of all K–12 private schools in West Virginia (N = 126)
Sample Size:	Private School Leaders, N = 38 (partial and complete)
Margins of Error:	N/A
Response Rates (RR) using AAPOR RR2:	≤30.2%
Weighting?	None
Oversampling?	None
Questionnaire:	Available upon request

The authors are responsible for overall survey design; question wording and ordering (see separate West Virginia Private School Survey Questionnaire [here](#); this paper’s analysis, charts, and writing; and any unintentional errors or misrepresentations.

APPENDIX 2: Survey Methodology and Data Sources

From September 19 to December 10, 2018, EdChoice administered a first-of-its-kind survey of West Virginia’s private K–12 schools. The purpose of that assessment was seven-fold: (1) forecast a count of currently available seats and capacities to enroll additional students, (2) measure the familiarity with and potential interest in various private school choice programs, (3) determine the rules and regulations that concern schools the most, (4) estimate the average and median private school tuition, (5) document how many schools provide tuition assistance, (6) determine the current testing programs, if any, in effect for those schools, and (7) document how many schools serve students with special needs.

According to the USDOE, there were 128 private schools serving 12,951 students overall in West Virginia during 2015–16.ⁱ The EdChoice survey received responses from 38 private schools operating in West Virginia serving approximately 3,644 K–12 and ungraded students. Based on the USDOE’s total number of West Virginia private school students, this represents more than one-fourth (28%) of the state’s private school population; based on the USDOE’s total number of West Virginia K–12 private schools, this represents nearly one-third (30%) of the state’s private schools.

There were 126 private schools on the survey contact list that met at least the following three conditions:

- (1) the school had a working email address or phone number;
- (2) the school was not part of a residential treatment facility, such as an in-patient mental health hospital; and
- (3) the school taught at least one grade within the K–12 grade level range.

The EdChoice survey had a 30 percent school-level response rate for contact information and equal or lower response rates for the other data points. Complete responses were received from 33 private schools, which equates to a 26 percent complete response rate.ⁱⁱ Six schools refused to take the survey.

To minimize coverage bias, the authors took the following steps:

- (1) compiled private school lists from West Virginia Department of Education;
- (2) called schools to collect missing email addresses;
- (3) contacted all 126 schools at least three times directing them to the SurveyMonkey link containing the survey;
- (4) verified school email addresses through school websites, where possible; and
- (5) called remaining non-respondents to ensure email was received and to further encourage participation.

EdChoice’s survey sample should provide a meaningful representation of the state’s private school sector.

ⁱ Stephen P. Broughman, Adam Rettig, and Jennifer Peterson (2017), *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 Private School Universe Survey* (NCES 2017-073), table 15, p. 21, retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017073.pdf>

ⁱⁱ EdChoice incentivized schools to complete the survey by entering them into a randomized drawing to win a \$1,000 gift card or one of five \$200 gift cards.