



Ten Myths about North Carolina's Private Schools: A Parent's Guide

TERRY STOOPS
JULY 2009

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin said, “For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise.” Without a doubt, “better information” about our state’s private schools can help families make more informed choices about the kind of schooling that best meets the needs of their children.

This guide is a first step in a larger effort to correct decades-old misconceptions about North Carolina’s private schools. In the spring of 2009, the John Locke Foundation conducted a survey of all private schools in North Carolina (see Resources, page 7). Much of the information below comes from responses to the questionnaire.

Terry Stoops
Education Policy Analyst
The John Locke Foundation
919/828-3876 • tstoops@johnlocke.org

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff or board of the John Locke Foundation. For more information, call 919-828-3876 or visit www.JohnLocke.org.
©2009 by the John Locke Foundation.

Ten Myths about North Carolina's Private Schools: A Parent's Guide

Myth #1: *Private schools are not affordable.* According to tuition data provided by respondents to the John Locke Foundation private school questionnaire, the average private elementary day school tuition was \$4,889. The average private middle day school tuition was \$5,410. The average private high school tuition in North Carolina was \$5,916. Recognizing that some families have difficulty paying for fees and tuition, over two-thirds of all private schools reported that they offered financial aid.

Myth #2: *North Carolina has few private schools and private school students.* During the 2007-08 school year, North Carolina had 683 private schools that enrolled 97,656 students. Today, private schools students make up approximately six percent of all K-12 students in North Carolina.

Myth #3. *Private school enrollment is declining.* Despite fluctuations in the economy, the growth of private schools has been steady. Over the last ten years, enrollment in private schools has increased 16 percent, while the number of private schools has increased nine percent. Even during the current recession, the state's private schools added nearly 1,000 students last year.

Myth #4: *Private schools are only located in urban and suburban areas.* While urban areas dominate, most counties in North Carolina have at least one private school. In fact, during the 2007-08 school year, only 13 of North Carolina's 100 counties did not have a private school.

Myth #5: *Most private schools are large, college preparatory schools.* Most private schools in North Carolina are small, religious schools. Approximately 7 in 10 private schools maintain a religious affiliation or focus. The average private school in North Carolina enrolls 148 students, employs 20 faculty and staff, and, according to the John Locke Foundation questionnaire, has an average class size of 14 students.

Myth #6: *Private schools do not serve special needs students.* According to the John Locke Foundation questionnaire, approximately two-thirds of private schools reported that they served students with learning differences and disabilities, and nearly 50 percent of respondents said that they had the ability to enroll more students with learning differences and/or disabilities.

Myth #7: *Private schools are not held accountable.* The State of North Carolina imposes regulation and oversight on private schools. According to Article 39, Chapter 115C of the North Carolina General Statutes, private schools must:

1. comply with mandatory attendance laws
2. meet all state health and safety regulations
3. administer standardized tests in the areas of English grammar, reading, spelling and mathematics
4. administer high school competency tests (if applicable)
5. maintain applicable testing, health, and safety records and allow state, county and municipal authorities to examine those records upon request.

Local/county zoning, health, and safety regulations also apply.

Myth #8: *Private and public schools draw from the same teacher applicant pool.* One important difference between public and private schools is that, unlike public schools, state certification does not act as a barrier to individuals who want to teach in a private school. In this way, private school administrators found the following five factors to be most important in evaluating the credentials of prospective teachers:

1. college degree in any field
2. college degree in or related to the subject area(s) taught
3. professional experience related to subject area
4. previous teaching experience in subject area(s) taught
5. recommendations from previous employers.

Private school administrators may choose the best applicant for the job, while, in general, state certification and licensure requirements force public schools to find the best applicant among only those who have earned certification.

Myth #9: *Students have a difficult time meeting private schools admissions standards.* Although most private schools have admissions guidelines, few schools surveyed had prohibitive admissions standards. There were three main criteria reported by questionnaire respondents. A number of schools required that incoming students exceed cut scores on standardized tests. Other schools required an interview, recommendations, and/or parental input. Finally, a handful of the religious schools required that students and parents were members of a church or denominational body or were families that adhered to a statement of faith or religious creed.

Myth #10: *Private schools do not support school choice.* In general, private schools support school-choice options for families. Over 86 percent of respondents to the John Locke Foundation questionnaire supported a voucher program that would pay the full tuition amount. None of the private schools surveyed opposed a tax credit program that would cover part or the entire tuition amount. Nearly 85 percent of private schools supported a program that would provide a voucher to the families of targeted categories of students.

CONCLUSION

North Carolina families are beginning to recognize that finding alternatives to public schools may be the only way to guarantee that children receive a quality education. The growing disenchantment with the state's public schools has forced financially able parents to pay twice for their child's education – taxes to pay for public schools and tuition to pay for the private schools that their children attend. On the other hand, families that cannot afford to send their children to private schools are demanding that the state of North Carolina provide them a scholarship or tax credit that covers part or all of the cost of a private school education. Better information about North Carolina's private schools is the first step toward persuading legislators and policymakers to increase educational options for North Carolina families.

RESOURCES

- Terry Stoops, “Building a Case for School Choice: Initial Results from a Survey of North Carolina’s Private Schools,” John Locke Foundation *Policy Report*, June 2009, johnlocke.org/policy_reports/display_story.html?id=200
- Children’s Scholarship Fund, www.scholarshipfund.org/index.asp
- North Carolina Association of Independent Schools, www.ncais.org
- North Carolina Christian School Association, www.nccsa.org
- North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education, www.ncdnpe.org/index.asp
- North Carolina General Statutes: Elementary and Secondary Education, www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/Statutes/StatutesTOC.pl?Chapter=0115C
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte Schools, www.charlottedioocese.org/ourschools.html
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh Schools, www.dioceseofraleigh.org/where/schools/index.aspx
- Southern Association of Independent Schools, www.sais.org
- U.S. Department of Education: Office of Non-Public Education, www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/index.html

ABOUT THE JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION

The John Locke Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute based in Raleigh. Its mission is to develop and promote solutions to the state's most critical challenges. The Locke Foundation seeks to transform state and local government through the principles of competition, innovation, personal freedom, and personal responsibility in order to strike a better balance between the public sector and private institutions of family, faith, community, and enterprise.

To pursue these goals, the Locke Foundation operates a number of programs and services to provide information and observations to legislators, policymakers, business executives, citizen activists, civic and community leaders, and the news media. These services and programs include the foundation's monthly newspaper, *Carolina Journal*; its daily news service, *CarolinaJournal.com*; its weekly e-newsletter, *Carolina Journal Weekly Report*; its quarterly newsletter, *The Locke Letter*; and regular events, conferences, and research reports on important topics facing state and local governments.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity, tax-exempt education foundation and is funded solely from voluntary contributions from individuals, corporations, and charitable foundations. It was founded in 1990. For more information, visit www.JohnLocke.org.

“To prejudge other men’s notions
before we have looked into them
is not to show their darkness
but to put out our own eyes.”

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704)

Author, *Two Treatises of Government* and
Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina



200 West Morgan St., #200
Raleigh, NC 27601
V: 919-828-3876; F: 919-821-5117
www.johnlocke.org
info@johnlocke.org