

NAIS RESEARCH

Independent School Graduates as College Freshmen: 2015 Data from the Higher Education Research Institute



National Association
of Independent Schools

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The National Association of Independent Schools provides services to more than 1,800 schools and associations of schools in the United States and abroad, including 1,500 nonprofit, private K–12 schools in the U.S. that are self-determining in mission and program and are governed by independent boards. For more information, visit www.nais.org.

NAIS conducts research among schools nationally and then provides you with targeted, digested reports you can use to evaluate your own practices. Our research clearinghouse also identifies external research relevant to independent schools and helps you understand how to use the findings in your work.

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Executive Summary

A partnership between NAIS and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) has enabled researchers to study the attitudes and aspirations of independent school graduates as they compare with those of graduates from public schools, other private schools, and home schooling. In contrast to their counterparts, independent school graduates are more likely to

- have had experience in high school asking questions in class, integrating skills and knowledge from different sources, problem solving and sharing with others, supporting opinions with logical arguments, and taking risks;
- have experienced close relationships with teachers in high school, including asking a teacher for advice after class and being a guest in a teacher's home, and have been engaged in high school activities such as studying with other students, voting in a student election, discussing politics, and doing community service as part of a class;
- rate themselves highly on measures of leadership, public speaking, risk taking, knowledge of people from different races, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and foreign language skills;
- expect to be engaged with professors and students after class, succeed academically, and be involved with nonacademic activities such as study abroad programs;
- be interested in starting their own businesses, becoming a community leader, and improving their understanding of other places and people; and
- have parents with high levels of education and income.

Background

At the request of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) created a special report to identify the academic and personal development of independent school students during their freshman year at college. The HERI report also includes the performance of public school, other private school, and homeschooled students, allowing NAIS researchers to compare the results for other types of students.

Methodology

This report includes data from The Freshman Survey (TFS) conducted as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. CIRP is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students. CIRP surveys have been administered by the Higher Education Research Institute since 1973.

Each year, hundreds of two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities administer the CIRP Freshman Survey to hundreds of thousands of entering students during orientation or registration. The survey covers a wide range of student characteristics: parental income and education, ethnicity, and other demographic items; financial aid; secondary school achievement and activities; educational and career plans; and values, attitudes, beliefs, and self-concept. The table below shows the number of students surveyed for the 2015 CIRP survey:

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
First-time full-time freshmen	111,164	5,362	4,467	17,555	12,263	955	151,766

This report was written by Amada Torres, vice president of studies, insights, and research, and Cheryl Pruce, senior research analyst, at NAIS.

Key Findings

Well-Rounded Preparation for College

Activities Done in High School That Support College Success

In comparison with public and private school counterparts, independent school graduates enter postsecondary studies with more skills and experiences that will help them succeed in their new educational setting.

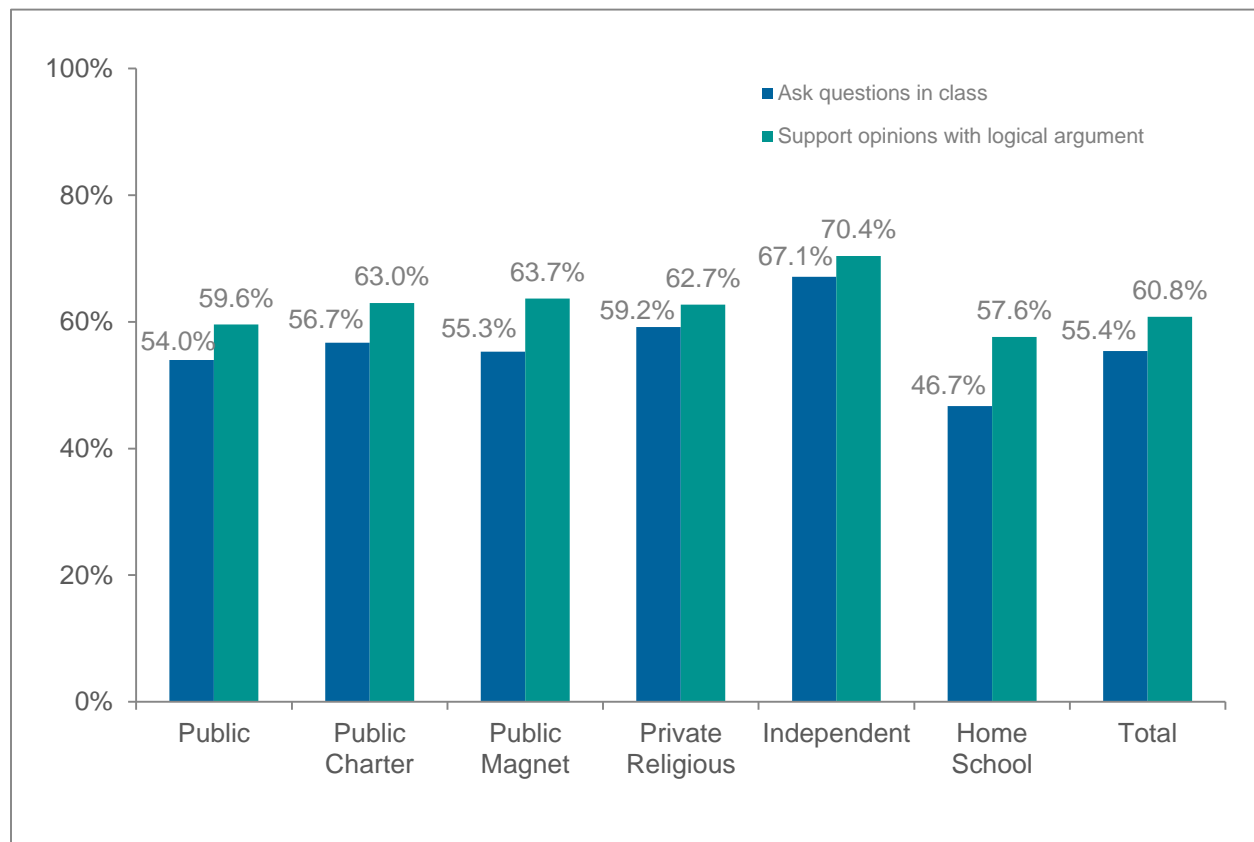
Independent school graduates report having spent more time during their last year in high school than other students integrating skills and knowledge from different sources and experiences (65.3 percent vs. 57.6 percent), seeking solutions to problems and explaining them to others (63.0 percent vs. 56.4 percent), and taking a risk because they feel they have more to gain (44.2 percent vs. 39.6 percent).

In particular, independent school graduates are more likely than their peers to have reported asking questions in class (67.1 percent vs. 55.4 percent) and supporting their opinions with logical arguments (70.4 percent vs. 60.8 percent).

How often in the past year did you ...? (Percent who chose “frequently” as opposed to “occasionally” or “not at all”)

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Accept mistakes as part of the learning process	57.4%	61.8%	61.7%	56.1%	59.9%	53.4%	57.7%
Evaluate the quality or reliability of information you received	43.0%	48.7%	48.6%	45.5%	50.1%	55.4%	44.1%
Explore topics on your own, even though it was not required for a class	36.6%	40.8%	45.2%	38.1%	41.7%	48.9%	37.5%
Integrate skills and knowledge from different sources and experiences	56.5%	60.3%	64.0%	58.5%	65.3%	57.0%	57.6%
Look up scientific research articles and resources	28.9%	34.8%	38.0%	29.9%	35.0%	33.3%	29.9%
Revise your papers to improve your writing	49.7%	53.1%	50.6%	54.3%	57.1%	67.4%	50.8%
Seek alternative solutions to a problem	47.4%	52.0%	52.3%	50.0%	52.5%	47.6%	48.3%
Seek feedback on your academic work	48.7%	54.8%	51.7%	49.9%	56.9%	56.1%	49.6%
Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others	55.4%	58.6%	59.7%	58.5%	63.0%	55.0%	56.4%
Take a risk because you feel you have more to gain	39.0%	40.3%	40.9%	40.4%	44.2%	31.0%	39.6%
Work with other students on group projects	52.0%	57.0%	57.6%	51.0%	55.7%	20.0%	52.3%

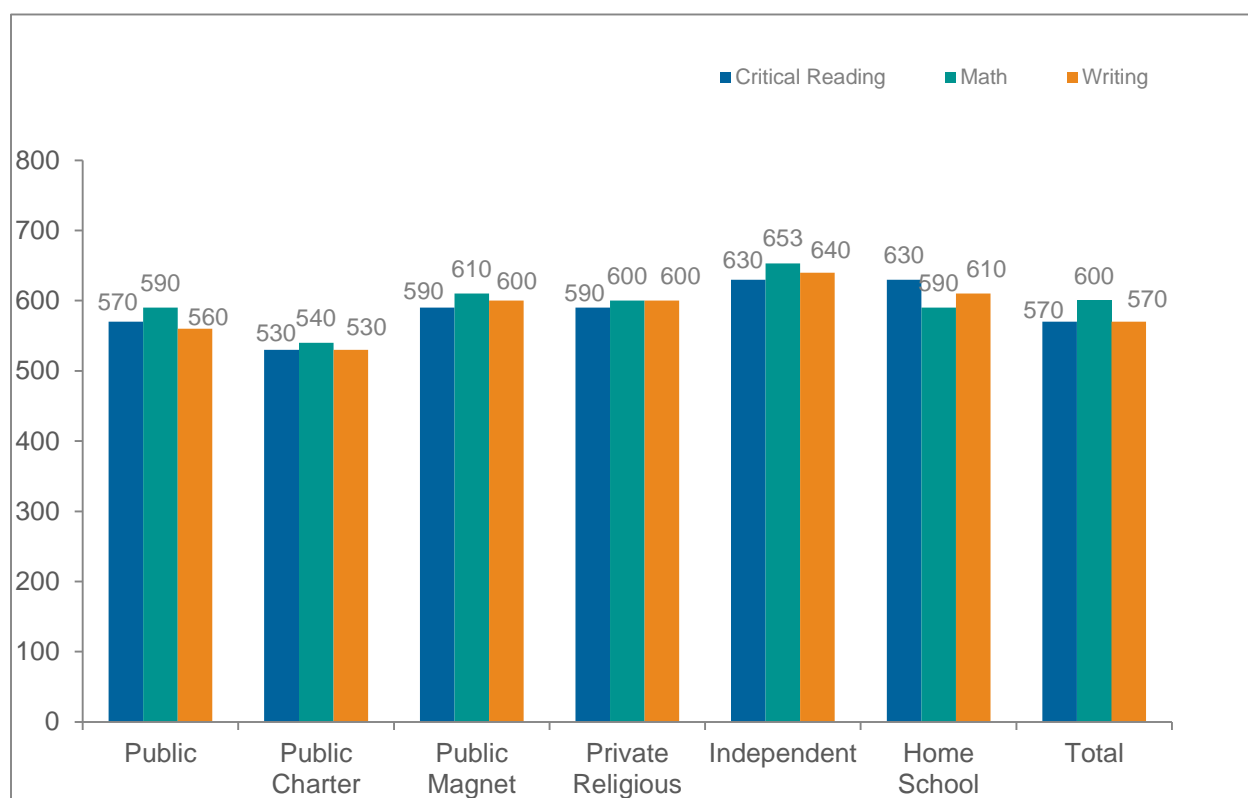
How often in the past year did you ask questions? How often in the past year did you support your opinions with a logical argument? (Percent who chose “frequently” as opposed to “occasionally” or “not at all”)



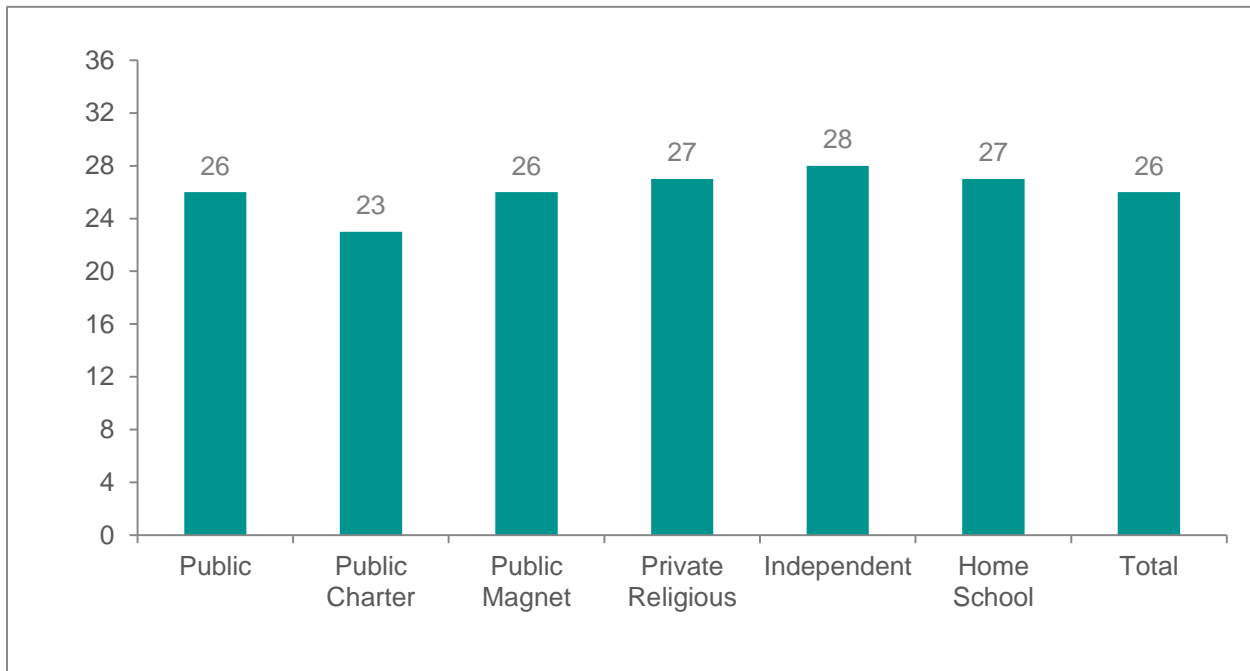
Scholastic Achievement

Independent school graduates enter college with higher-than-average SAT scores in critical reading (630 vs. 570), mathematics (653 vs. 600), and writing (640 vs. 570) and median ACT composite scores (28 vs. 26). Similarly, independent school graduates are more likely to have had a B+ or higher average in high school (78 percent vs. 74 percent).

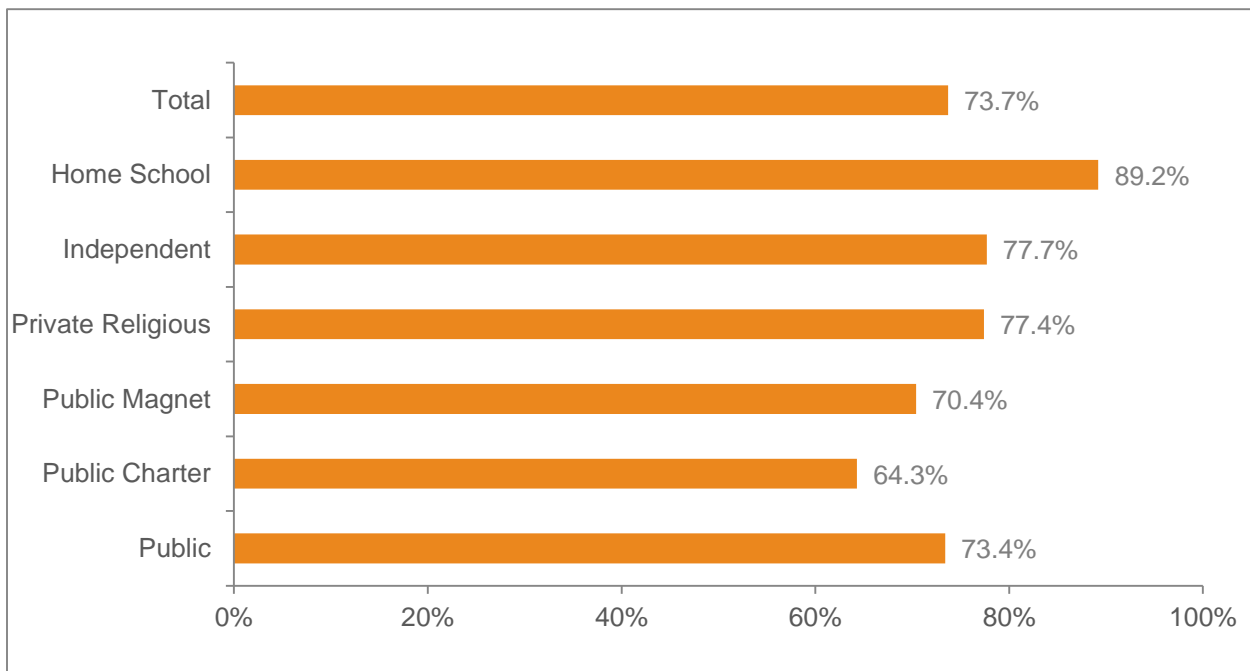
Median SAT Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing



Median ACT Composite Score



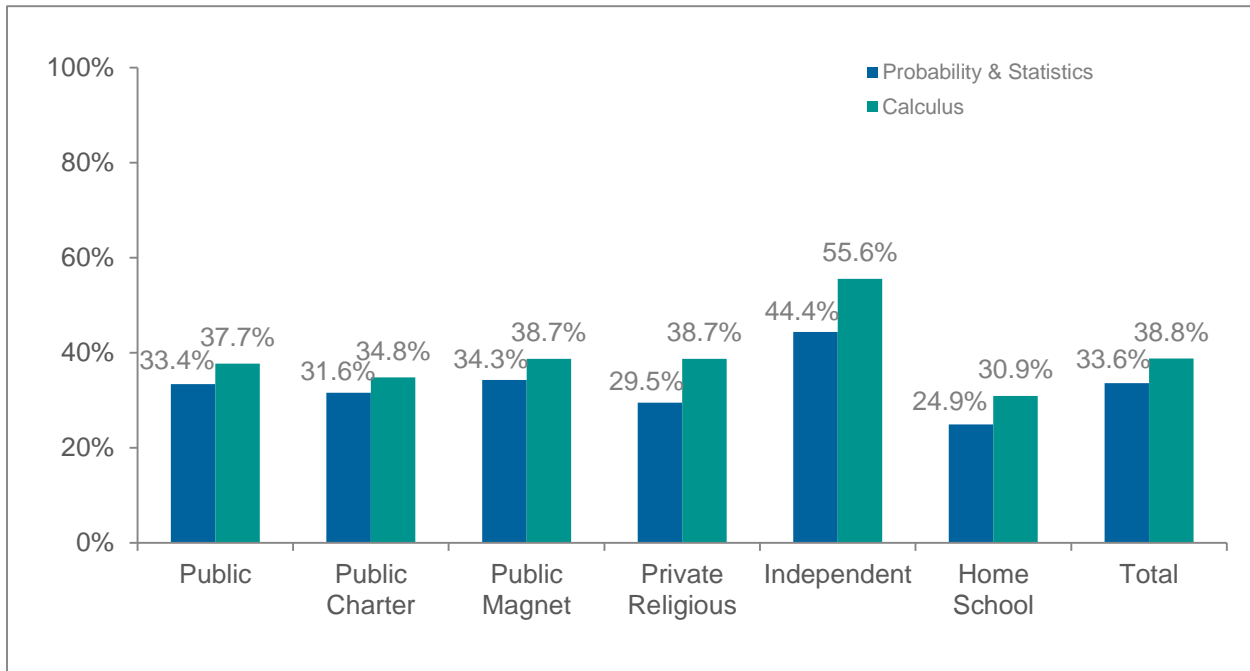
What was your average grade in high school? (Percent with an average of B+ or higher)



Course Completion

Independent school graduates are more likely to have completed a probability and statistics course (44.4 percent vs. 33.6 percent) and a calculus course (55.6 percent vs. 38.8 percent).

Please mark which of the following courses you have completed.



Academic Experience

Independent school graduates are more likely to have completed four years of major subjects. In particular, they are much more likely to report having completed four years of a foreign language (50.5 percent vs. 28.5 percent) and physical science (22.2 percent vs. 13.3 percent).

During high school (grades 9-12) how many years did you study each of the following subjects?
(Percent who chose 4 or more as opposed to none, ½, 1, 2, or 3)

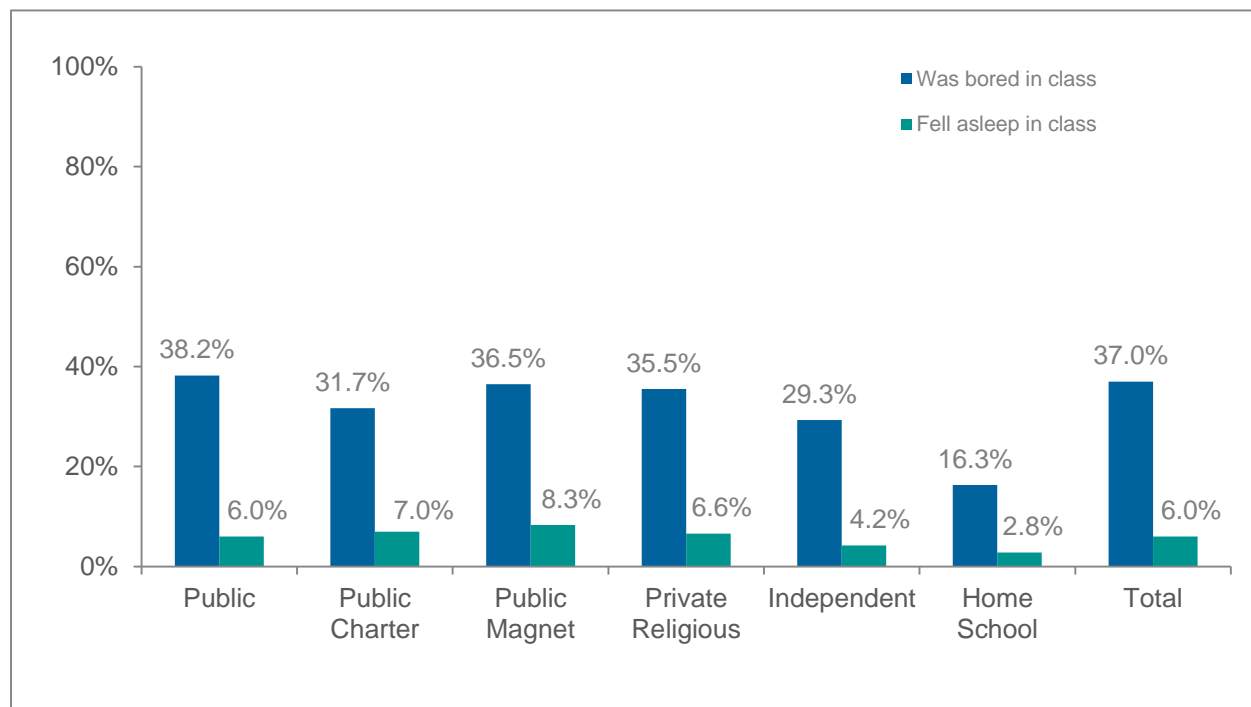
	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Arts and/or Music	25.2%	20.5%	25.8%	19.4%	31.6%	44.0%	24.9%
Biological Science	7.5%	8.1%	8.0%	7.9%	13.1%	7.3%	7.9%
Computer Science	1.6%	2.1%	2.6%	1.6%	2.9%	4.8%	1.8%
English	97.9%	96.9%	97.7%	98.7%	96.9%	86.3%	97.8%
Foreign Language	26.4%	19.4%	25.0%	35.7%	50.5%	20.2%	28.5%
History/American Government	45.1%	45.5%	45.3%	51.6%	55.1%	47.7%	46.5%
Mathematics	88.0%	84.0%	86.9%	91.9%	93.8%	74.5%	88.5%
Physical Science	12.7%	10.9%	13.3%	13.0%	22.2%	12.5%	13.3%

Engagement as High School Students

Being Present in Class

Aside from homeschooled students, independent school graduates report being generally more engaged in school during their senior year of high school. They are less likely than their counterparts to report being bored in class (29.3 percent vs. 37.0 percent) or falling asleep in class (4.2 percent vs. 6.0 percent).

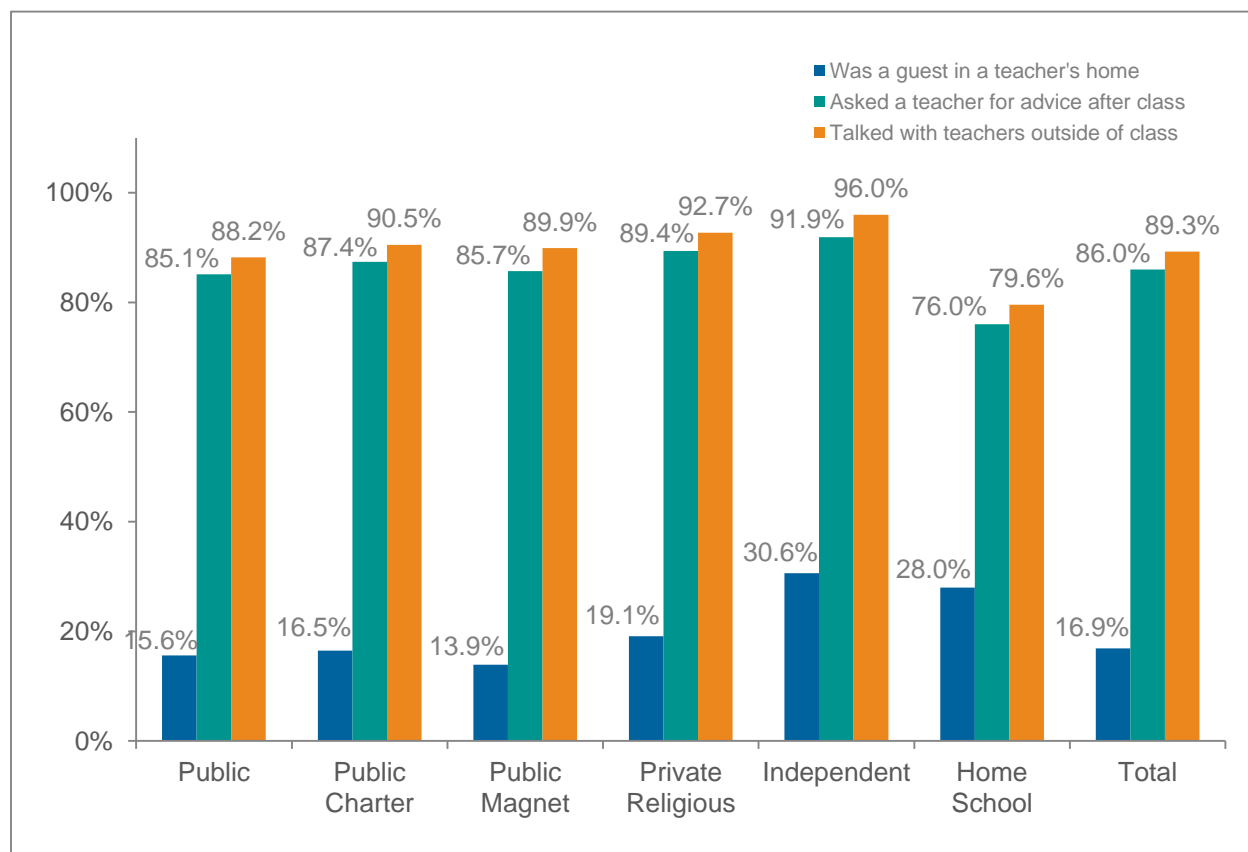
For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during the past year. (*Percent who chose “frequently” as opposed to “occasionally” or “not at all”*)



Relationships with Teachers

Independent school graduates report a higher level of engagement with their teachers. More independent school graduates reported being a guest in a teacher’s home (30.6 percent vs. 16.9 percent), asking teachers for advice after class (91.9 percent vs. 86.0 percent), and talking with teachers outside of class (96.0 percent vs. 89.3 percent).

For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during the past year. (*Percent who chose “frequently” or “occasionally” as opposed to “not at all”*) During your last year in high school, how much time did you spend during a typical week talking with teachers outside of class? (*Percent who chose a number other than none*)



Engaged as Active Citizens

In measures of engagement as active citizens, independent school graduates are more likely than their peers to have reported voting in a student election (27.6 percent vs. 19.1 percent), discussing politics (36.9 percent vs. 29.3 percent), and performing community service as part of a class (25.3 percent vs. 18.7%).

For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during the past year. (*Percent who chose “frequently” as opposed to “occasionally” or “not at all”*)

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Demonstrated for a cause (e.g., boycott, rally, protest)	3.0%	4.9%	4.3%	3.2%	3.5%	3.0%	3.1%
Discussed politics	26.7%	30.2%	32.7%	43.0%	36.9%	33.6%	29.3%
Helped raise money for a cause or campaign	13.9%	16.0%	14.7%	15.3%	16.8%	9.3%	14.3%
Performed community service as a part of a class	16.2%	24.4%	19.6%	32.0%	25.3%	9.2%	18.7%
Performed volunteer work	35.2%	41.5%	42.1%	43.7%	37.2%	41.1%	36.7%
Publicly communicated my opinion about a cause (e.g., blog, email, petition)	13.1%	16.1%	16.2%	14.0%	14.2%	14.1%	13.4%
Voted in a student election	17.7%	20.0%	20.2%	25.5%	27.6%	3.9%	19.1%
Worked on a local, state, or national political campaign	1.6%	2.2%	2.6%	2.1%	2.4%	2.3%	1.8%

Working with Other Students

Independent school graduates are more likely than their counterparts to have reported socializing with someone of another racial/ethnic group (77.8 percent vs. 73.5 percent) or studying with other students (49.6 percent vs. 35.3 percent). In addition, independent school graduates are more likely than peers to identify the following as a major area of strength: being tolerant of others with different beliefs (50.2 percent vs. 45.3 percent), seeing the world from someone else's perspective (36.0 percent vs. 31.7 percent), and working cooperatively with diverse people (56.9 percent vs. 53.7%).

For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during the past year. (*Percent who chose "frequently" as opposed to "occasionally" or "not at all"*) How would you rate yourself in the following areas? (*Percent who chose "a major strength" as opposed to "somewhat strong," "average," "somewhat weak," or a "major weakness"*)

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Frequently socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group	72.7%	77.5%	84.2%	72.8%	77.8%	64.8%	73.5%
Frequently studied with other students	33.5%	40.4%	38.4%	38.8%	49.6%	20.2%	35.3%
Frequently tutored another student	14.5%	19.4%	18.4%	14.8%	14.2%	11.1%	14.8%
Tolerance of others with different beliefs is a major strength.	45.0%	48.8%	50.7%	42.2%	50.2%	34.3%	45.3%
Ability to see the world from someone else's perspective is a major strength	31.2%	35.2%	34.2%	31.1%	36.0%	30.1%	31.7%
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people is a major strength.	53.3%	59.0%	60.5%	50.8%	56.9%	52.2%	53.7%

Confidence in Skills and Understanding of the World

High Self-Ratings of Abilities

The largest gaps between independent school graduates and respondents as a whole is self-ratings for popularity (42.0 percent vs. 33.1 percent), physical health (61.5 percent vs. 54.6 percent), self-understanding (63.5 percent vs. 56.6 percent), writing ability (52.7 percent vs. 46.2 percent), and risk taking (48.6 percent vs. 42.6 percent).

Independent school graduates also self-rate other abilities highly, such as leadership (66.2 percent vs. 62.7 percent), public speaking (43.2 percent vs. 38.2 percent), intellectual self-confidence (62.0 percent vs. 59.0 percent), social self-confidence (50.2 percent vs. 45.9 percent), and understanding of others (72.7 percent vs. 69.9 percent).

Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.

(Percent who chose “highest 10 percent” and “above average”)

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Academic ability	71.0%	66.2%	73.8%	71.4%	73.3%	70.3%	71.1%
Competitiveness	58.4%	53.6%	56.3%	61.1%	60.5%	54.4%	58.6%
Computer skills	31.7%	35.1%	38.8%	33.0%	32.6%	30.1%	32.2%
Cooperativeness	70.5%	70.0%	70.2%	70.0%	71.5%	68.1%	70.5%
Creativity	53.0%	55.7%	57.8%	54.0%	59.3%	59.3%	53.7%
Drive to achieve	77.6%	77.4%	77.0%	77.3%	77.7%	77.0%	77.6%
Emotional health	50.2%	46.0%	49.7%	53.8%	54.5%	53.4%	50.7%
Leadership ability	62.3%	59.7%	62.0%	64.1%	66.2%	61.4%	62.7%
Mathematical ability	48.0%	43.1%	48.5%	46.2%	47.8%	33.8%	47.6%
Physical health	54.1%	45.8%	48.4%	59.0%	61.5%	53.3%	54.6%
Popularity	32.1%	29.8%	30.8%	38.0%	42.0%	20.4%	33.1%
Public speaking ability	37.3%	39.7%	42.8%	40.8%	43.2%	40.8%	38.2%
Risk taking	42.0%	44.0%	43.3%	43.4%	48.6%	37.9%	42.6%
Self-confidence (intellectual)	58.5%	58.2%	61.9%	60.2%	62.0%	59.9%	59.0%
Self-confidence (social)	45.4%	46.2%	45.1%	47.9%	50.2%	39.1%	45.9%
Self-understanding	55.7%	56.7%	60.0%	57.9%	63.5%	57.7%	56.6%
Understanding of others	69.5%	70.3%	72.2%	70.2%	72.7%	67.6%	69.9%
Writing ability	44.9%	44.6%	49.6%	50.1%	52.7%	59.4%	46.2%

Self-Identified Areas of Strength

Academic areas of strength identified by independent school graduates include critical thinking skills (27.8 percent vs. 21.7 percent), problem-solving skills (28.4 percent vs. 24.3 percent), time management skills (19.9 percent vs. 17.4 percent), foreign language skills (16.6 percent vs. 12.0 percent), interpersonal skills (21.2 percent vs. 16.4 percent), and knowledge of people from different races/cultures (18.1 percent vs. 11.8 percent).

Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.

(Percent who chose “highest 10 percent” and “above average”)

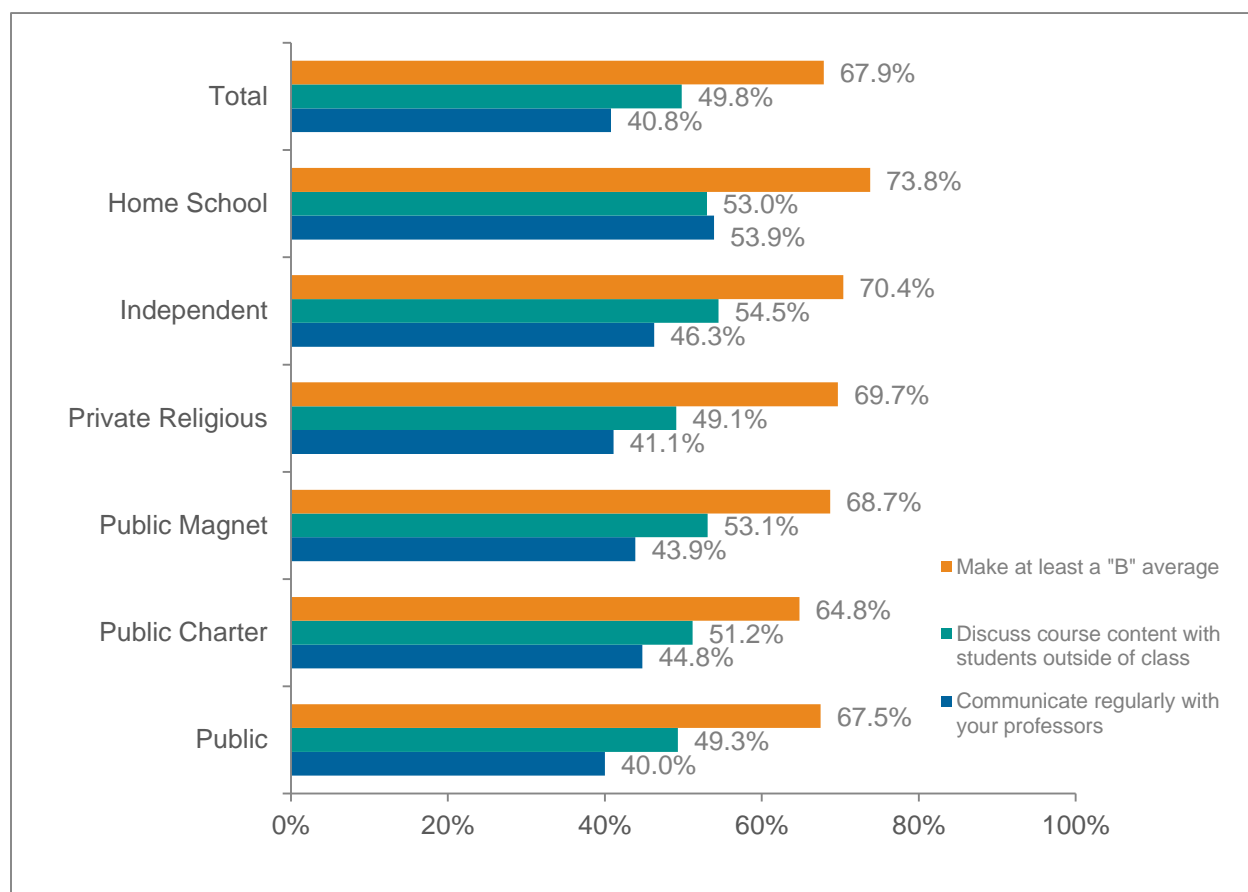
	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Ability to manage your time effectively	17.1%	15.9%	17.3%	18.8%	19.9%	15.5%	17.4%
Critical thinking skills	20.8%	23.9%	26.5%	22.7%	27.8%	26.0%	21.7%
Foreign language ability	11.5%	15.4%	15.3%	11.1%	16.6%	6.9%	12.0%
General knowledge	24.3%	25.1%	26.6%	25.3%	24.2%	19.8%	24.4%
Interpersonal skills	15.7%	16.0%	19.5%	17.4%	21.2%	15.4%	16.4%
Knowledge of a particular field or discipline	22.5%	23.4%	28.0%	22.4%	25.7%	29.3%	22.9%
Knowledge of people from different races/cultures	11.0%	14.2%	16.7%	12.0%	18.1%	11.2%	11.8%
Problem-solving skills	23.8%	24.9%	28.2%	24.5%	28.4%	23.4%	24.3%
Understanding of problems facing your community	11.0%	17.2%	15.1%	11.4%	14.6%	8.8%	11.6%

Making the Most of Campus Life

Expectations for Academic Success in College

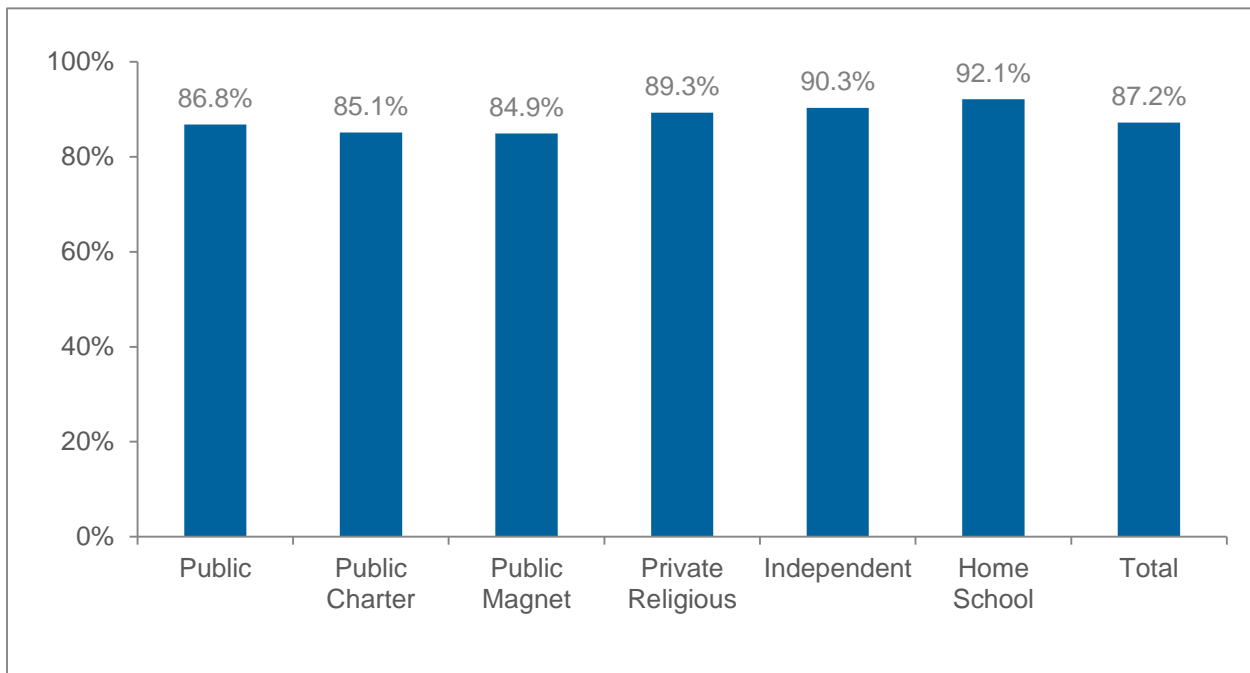
Compared with their public and private school colleagues, freshmen with independent school backgrounds expect to succeed and be engaged academically. Independent school graduates expect to communicate regularly with professors (46.3 percent vs. 40.8 percent), discuss course content with students outside of class (54.5 percent vs. 49.8 percent), and make at least a “B” average (70.4 percent vs. 67.9 percent). This connects back to the data showing that independent school graduates report close relationships with their high school teachers.

What is your best guess as to the chances that you will ...? (Percent who chose “very good chance” as opposed to “some chance,” “very little chance,” or “no chance”)



Independent school graduates are more likely to expect to graduate in four years or fewer (90.3 percent vs. 87.2 percent).

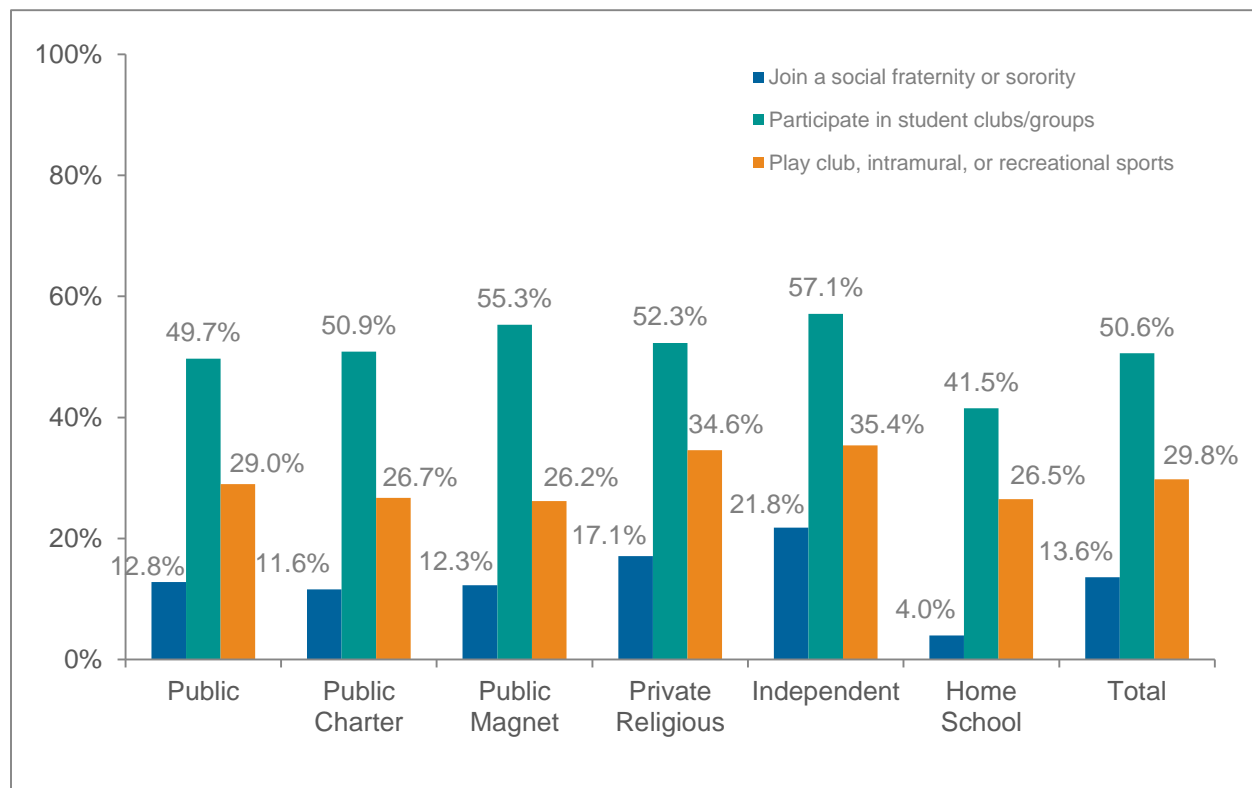
How many years do you expect it will take you to graduate from this college? *(Percent who chose 4 or less as opposed to 5, 6, or do not plan to graduate from this college)*



Expectations for Involvement in Nonacademic Activities in College

Independent school graduates also report expecting to be more engaged in some nonacademic activities than their counterparts, including participating in students clubs or groups (57.1 percent vs. 50.6 percent), recreational sports (35.4 percent vs. 29.8 percent), and fraternities or sororities (21.8 percent vs. 13.6 percent).

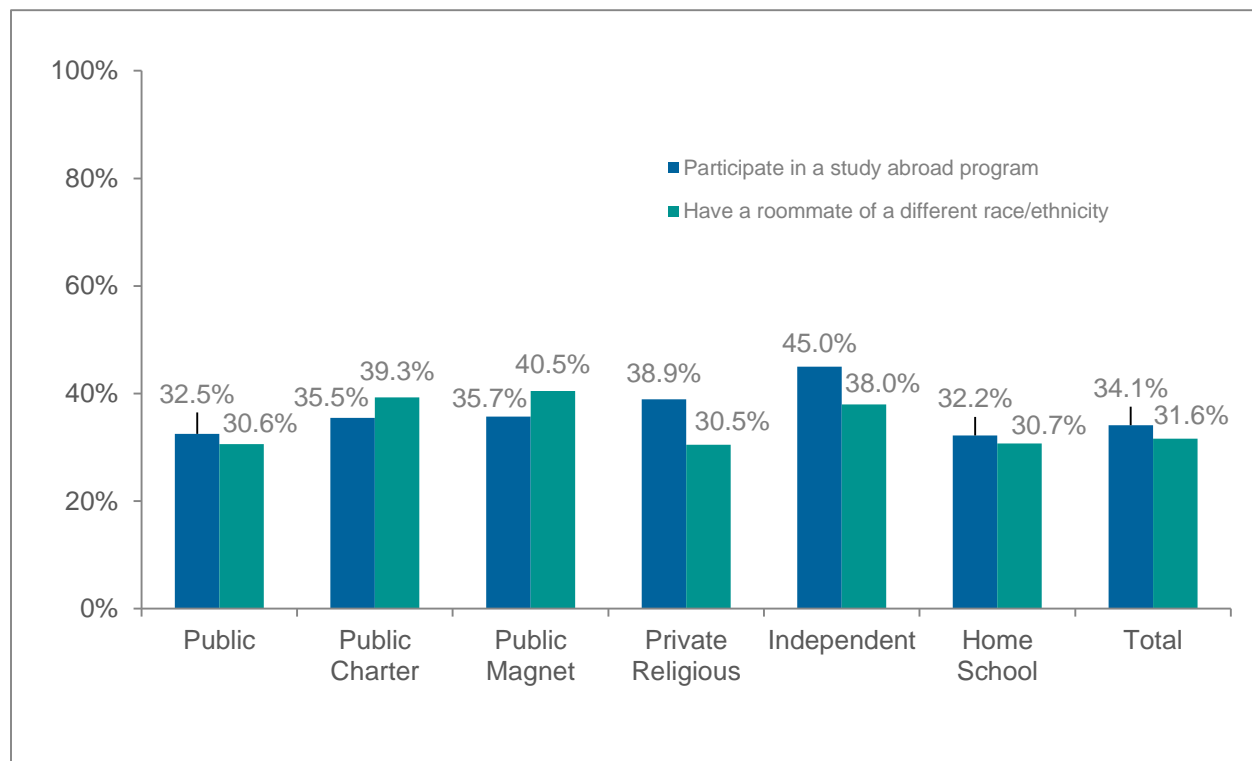
What is your best guess as to the chances that you will ...? (Percent who chose “very good chance” as opposed to “some chance,” “very little chance,” or “no chance”)



Expectations for Learning about Others Who Are Different in College

Linking to student engagement in global issues and awareness of others in high school, independent school graduates are more likely to expect that they will participate in a study abroad program (45.0 percent vs. 34.1 percent) and have a roommate of a different race/ethnicity (38.0 percent vs. 31.6 percent).

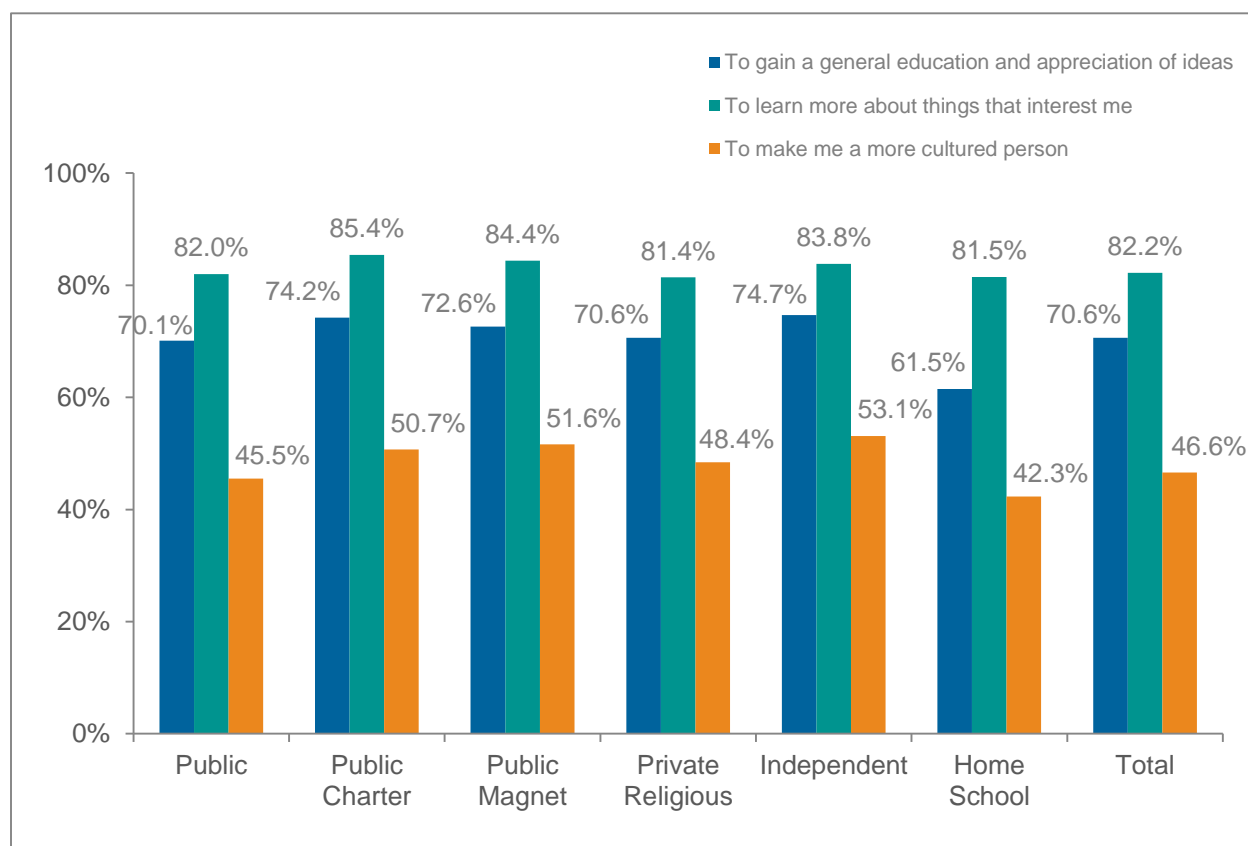
What is your best guess as to the chances that you will ...? (Percent who chose “very good chance” as opposed to “some chance,” “very little chance,” or “no chance”)



Compelling Factors for Attending College

When weighing how important various factors are in attending college, independent school graduates are more likely than their peers to place high importance on general education and a better appreciation of ideas (74.7 percent vs. 70.6 percent), learning things that interest them (83.8 percent vs. 82.2 percent), and becoming a more cultured person (53.1 percent vs. 46.6 percent).

In deciding to go to college, how important to you was each of the following reasons? (Percent who chose “very important” as opposed to “somewhat important” or “not important”)

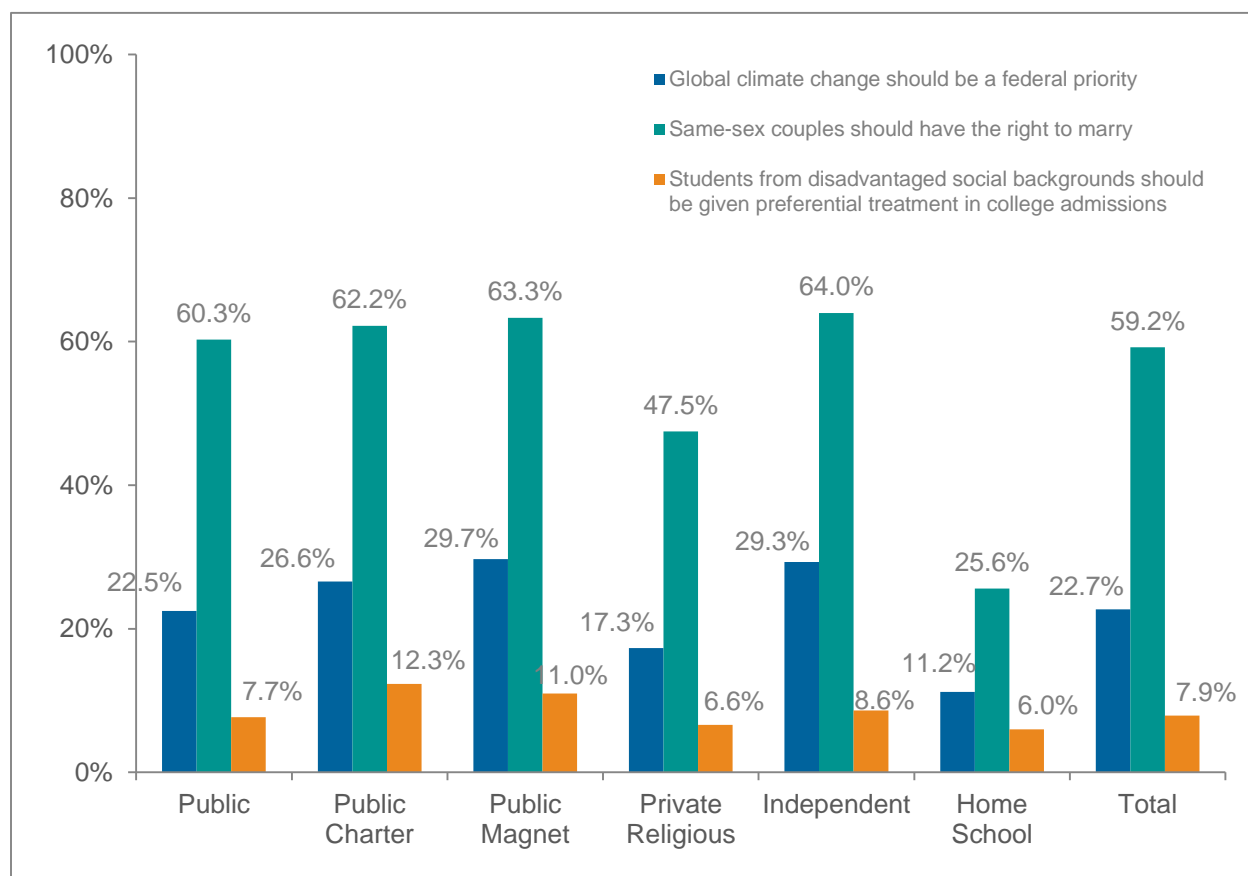


Views on Social Issues

Federal Priorities and Social Mobility

More independent school freshmen agree strongly that addressing global climate change should be a federal priority (29.3 percent vs. 22.7 percent) and that same-sex couples should have the legal right marry (64.0 percent vs. 59.2 percent). Independent school students are more likely than some, but not all, of their peers to strongly agree that students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions (8.6 percent vs. 7.9 percent).

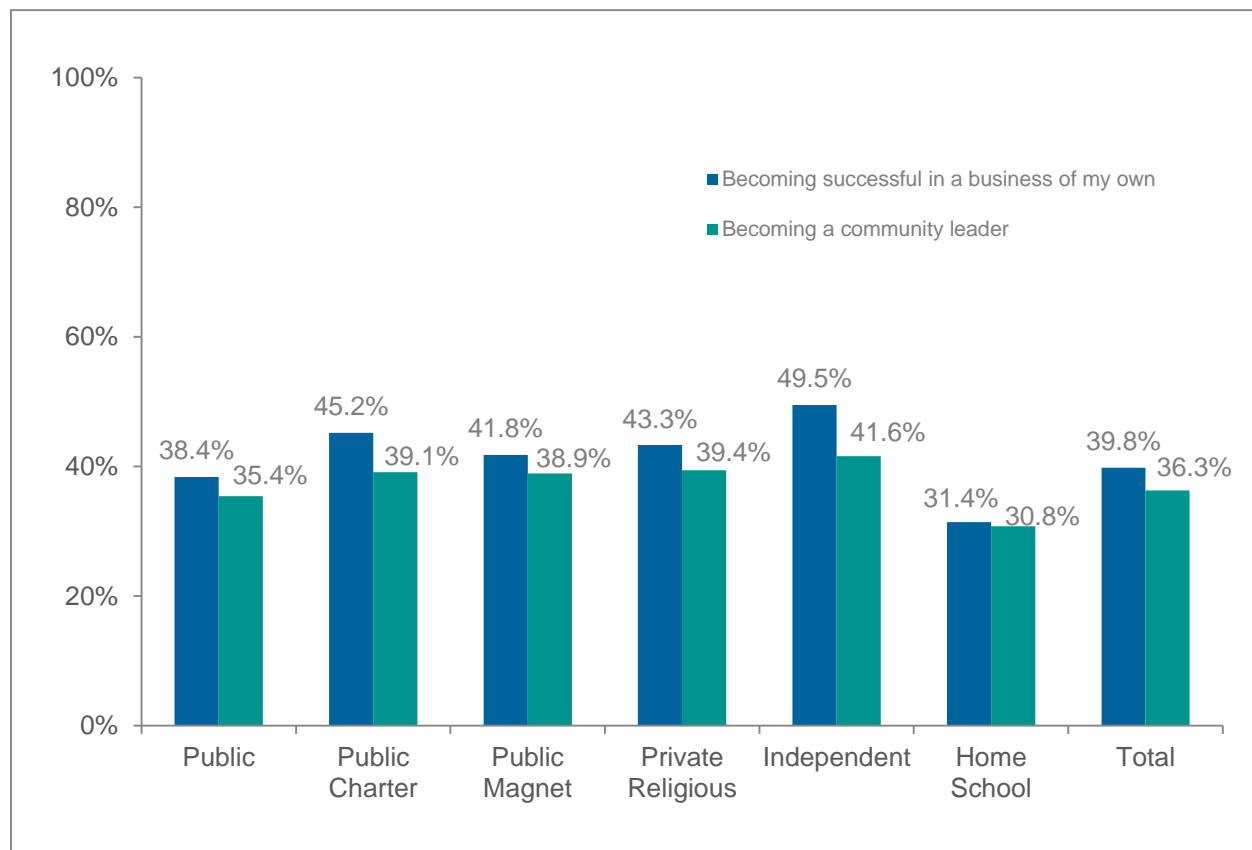
Mark one in each row. (Percent who chose “agree strongly” as opposed to “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” or “disagree strongly”)



Future Goals

Independent school students are more likely than their peers to feel strongly about becoming successful in their own businesses (49.5 percent vs. 39.8 percent) and becoming a community leader (41.6 percent vs. 36.3 percent).

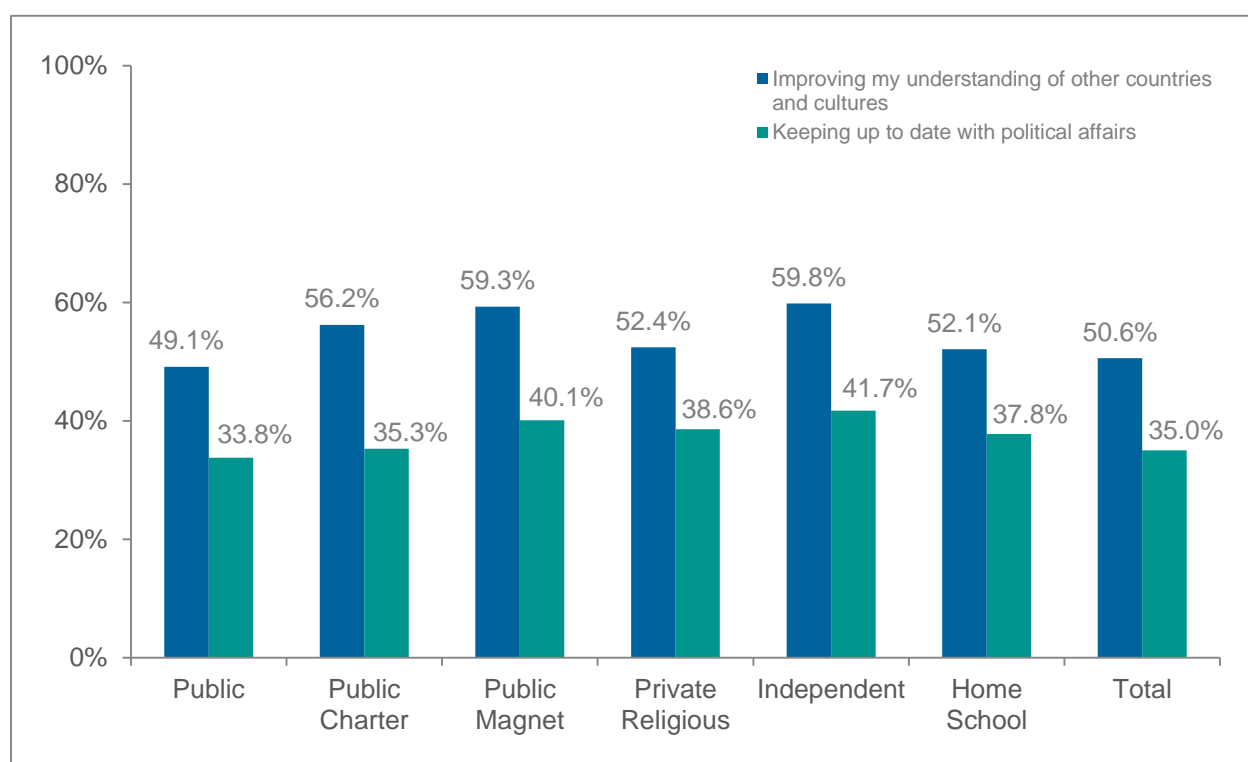
Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following. *(Percent who chose “essential” or “very important” as opposed to “somewhat important” or “not important”)*



National and Global Awareness

Independent school graduates are more likely than their peers to feel strongly about improving their understanding of other countries and cultures (59.8 percent vs. 50.6 percent) and keeping up-to-date with political affairs (41.7 percent vs. 35.0 percent).

Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following. (*Percent who chose “essential” or “very important” as opposed to “somewhat important” or “not important”*)



Independent school graduates are more likely to report a variety of skills and knowledge as a major strength. The global awareness strengths include understanding global issues (14.4 percent vs. 10.3 percent) and understanding national issues (13.4 percent vs. 10.6 percent).

Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.

(Percent who chose “highest 10 percent” and “above average”)

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Understanding of global issues	9.8%	12.0%	12.3%	11.1%	14.4%	8.9%	10.3%
Understanding of national issues	10.1%	12.0%	12.3%	11.7%	13.4%	11.7%	10.6%

Demographic Context for Findings

Family Background

Independent school graduates are more likely to have both parents alive and living with each other (77.4 percent vs. 70.5 percent), have a father with a graduate degree (43.9 percent vs. 24.4 percent), and have a mother with a graduate degree (34.3 percent vs. 21.1 percent). Independent school graduates are much less likely than their peers to be first-generation college students (7.6 percent vs. 19.6 percent).

Background questions on parents

	Public	Public Charter	Public Magnet	Private Religious	Independent	Home School	Total
Both parents are alive and live with each other	69.4%	61.4%	64.6%	78.4%	77.4%	86.7%	70.5%
Father completed a graduate degree	22.2%	15.7%	21.8%	32.0%	43.9%	35.7%	24.4%
Father employed	87.6%	82.1%	83.4%	90.6%	89.5%	90.7%	87.8%
First generation in college	20.8%	35.9%	27.5%	10.6%	7.6%	8.8%	19.6%
Mother completed a graduate degree	19.8%	13.7%	21.0%	26.0%	34.3%	20.7%	21.1%
Mother employed	76.4%	70.9%	75.2%	75.1%	67.5%	48.0%	75.4%

Family Income

Independent school students are more likely to come from families with a total incomes of \$150,000 or more.

What is your best estimate of your parents' total income last year? (Respondents chose income buckets from less than \$10,000 to more than \$250,000)

