

Characteristics of North Carolina Private Schools

Preliminary Findings v.2

February 2014

**A report issued by:
Children's Law Clinic
Duke University School of Law
Durham, North Carolina**

Introduction

In 2013, the North Carolina General Assembly created a school voucher program. Through this program, known as the Opportunity Scholarship program, low-income school children can apply for a voucher of up to \$4,200 per year to apply toward tuition at a private school. The application period opened February 1, 2014; the first vouchers are scheduled to be available for the 2014-15 academic year. The program is administered by the State Education Assistance Authority.

The law allows a voucher to be used at “any nonpublic school.” In North Carolina, nonpublic schools are subject to just a few regulations by the state, most related to health and safety. Nonpublic schools may be religious or independent. They are free to determine the type of curriculum that will be offered and the credentials of the teachers that will be hired. They are required to administer nationally-standardized tests annually at certain grade levels and report the performance data to the State Education Assistance Authority.

Because nonpublic schools will be supported with public money through the voucher program, the public will benefit from knowing more about them. Thus, this study was undertaken to make available to the public information about the nonpublic schools that will be eligible for voucher payments.

Methodology

The study began by accessing the Directory of Non-Public Schools maintained by the N.C. Division of Non-Public Education (NCDNPE) and available on its website at (<http://www.ncdnpe.org/hhh118.aspx>). The most recent Directory was published in June 2013, containing information from the 2012-13 school term. For each school, this directory provides the name, address, county, name of chief administrator, grade levels offered, status as either religious or independent, accreditation status, enrollment (by sex), and the number of staff. The study proceeded by using volunteer law students¹ to conduct an internet search and phone survey of all the schools listed in the Directory, during December 2013 and January 2014. The students were instructed to gather whatever data was available on the school website, and then follow up with a phone call and/or an e-mail to an administrator at the school. Website information was confirmed by phone or e-mail.

¹ The law students were enrolled at either Duke Law School or the University of North Carolina Law School. They were instructed and supervised in the data collection by either Jane Wettach, director, Duke Children’s Law Clinic or Christine Bischoff and Matt Ellinwood, staff attorneys at the North Carolina Justice Center. All data was analyzed by the Children’s Law Clinic.

In the phone survey, the callers sought information about the school's tuition, its plan to accept voucher payments, enrollment criteria, teacher certification, curriculum, and racial composition.

More than 70 percent of the private schools in the NCDNPE Directory responded to the survey, providing answers to at least some of the questions posed. Eleven of the schools had closed. The surveyors recorded the answers and correlated it with the data in the Directory of Non-Public Schools.

An initial analysis of a portion of the collected data is contained in this report of Preliminary Findings. Further analysis will be presented in a later report.

Key Findings

- A total of 696 private schools are registered with the State Division of Non-Public Education. Of those, 70 percent are religious and 30 percent are independent.
- Of the 696 schools, 38 are boarding schools and 35 are "special schools" such as treatment facilities, wilderness programs, and schools focused on students with particular special needs. The remainder are day schools. Some serve just a few grade levels and others serve up to 13 grade levels (kindergarten through grade 12).
- North Carolina's private schools operate throughout the state, though there are 13 counties with no private schools and another 18 counties with just one private school. In those 18 counties, the single private school is religious. A large majority of the private schools, particularly independent schools, are concentrated in the urban areas of the state.
- Approximately half of the schools have enrollments of 50 or fewer students; a quarter of schools have enrollments of 20 or fewer students. Eighty nine schools – 13 percent of the total – enroll ten or fewer students.
- The average tuition of private schools in North Carolina, excluding boarding schools and special schools, is \$6,690. Approximately 38 percent of schools charge tuition at some grade level that could be fully paid by a voucher (i.e., \$4,200 per year or less). Of those schools whose tuition could be met with a voucher payment, 92 percent are religious

schools. At the middle school and high school levels, nearly 95 percent are religious schools.

- About 70 percent of private schools indicated a willingness to accept voucher payments.
- About 30 percent of the private schools in North Carolina have some type of accreditation from an independent agency. Of the schools with tuition at or below the \$4,200 voucher level, less than five percent of high schools have any type of accreditation and less than 10 percent of grade schools and middle schools have accreditation.
- About 30 percent of the private schools in North Carolina employ only certified teachers. Twenty percent of schools have no certified teachers; another 25 percent have fewer than half certified teachers.
- About 25 percent of the private schools follow the North Carolina curriculum standards.
- More than 30 percent of the private schools reported that more than 90 percent of the students are of one race. Twenty-nine percent reported that more than 90 percent of the students are white, and 4 percent reported that more than 90 percent of the students are black.
- About 40 percent of private schools have academic criteria for admission; about 20 percent have religious criteria for admission.

As noted, the information presented here is preliminary. We hope, however, that it will be useful as the state embarks on its school voucher program.

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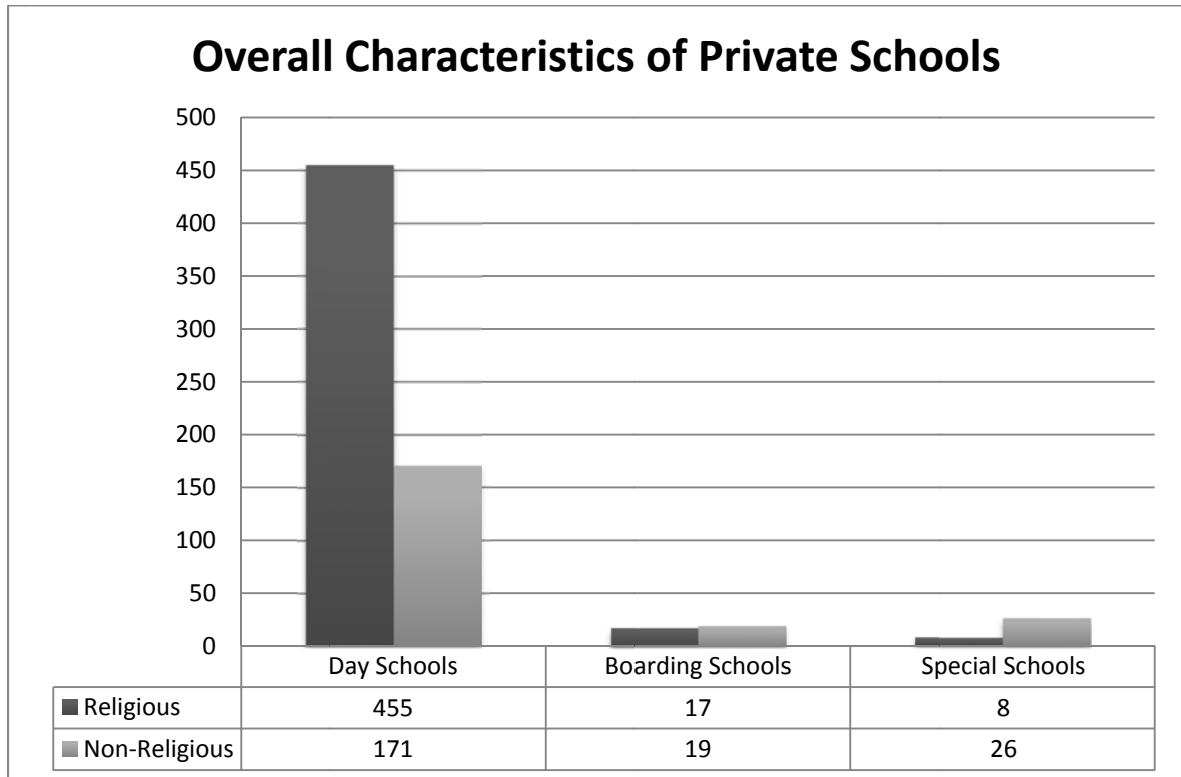
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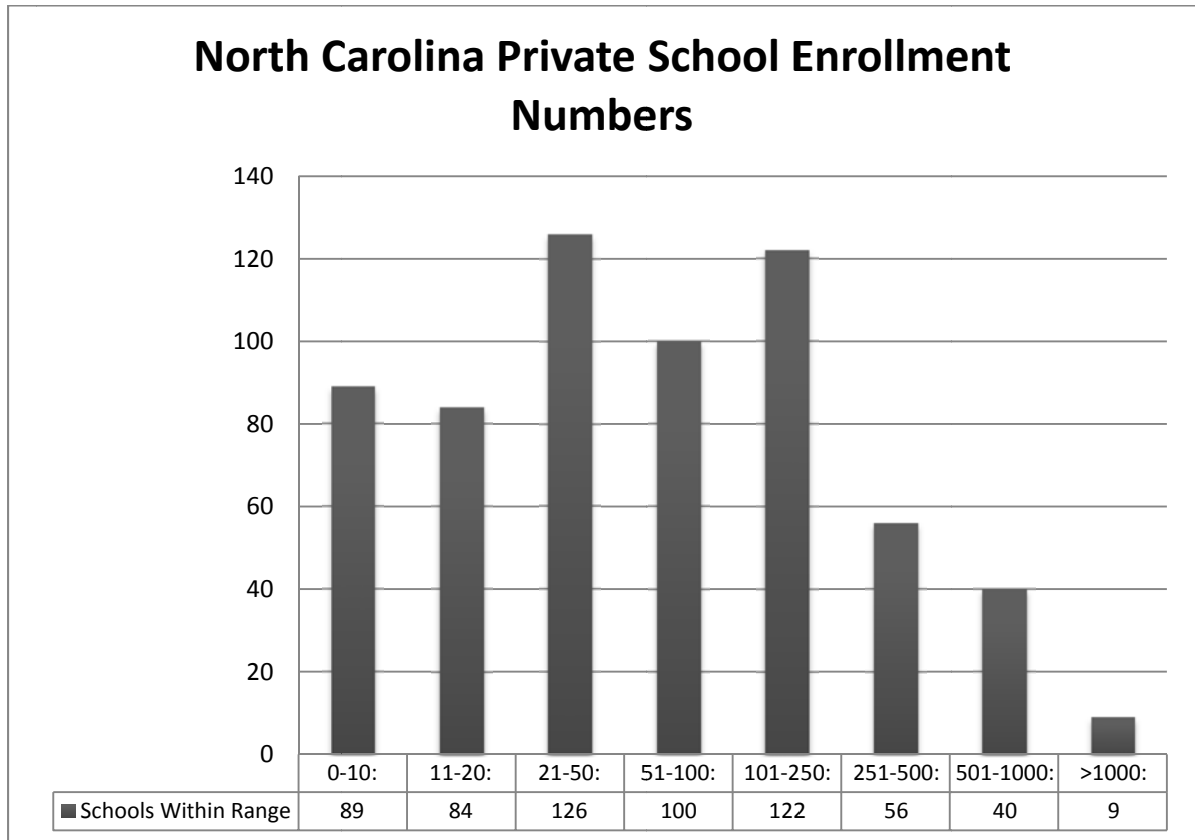
1. Overall Characteristics of Private Schools

The North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE), within the Department of Administration, publishes an annual directory of non-public schools. It can be found at the division’s website: <http://www.ncdnpe.org/hhh118.aspx>. The most recent directory, from 2012-13, includes 696 non-public schools. The table below reflects the breakdown of schools included in the directory.



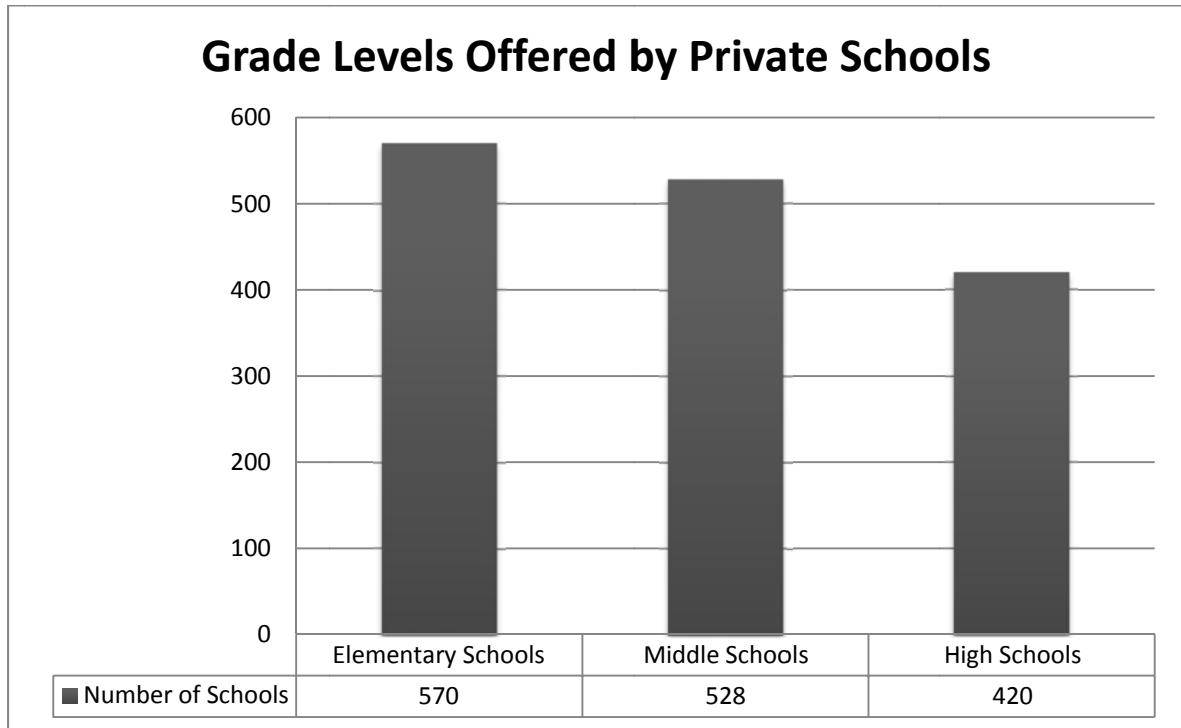
2. Enrollment at North Carolina Private Schools

The following information is drawn from the Directory of Non-Public Schools published by the Division of Non-Public Education. Not every school reported its enrollment. Eighty nine schools enroll between one and ten students.



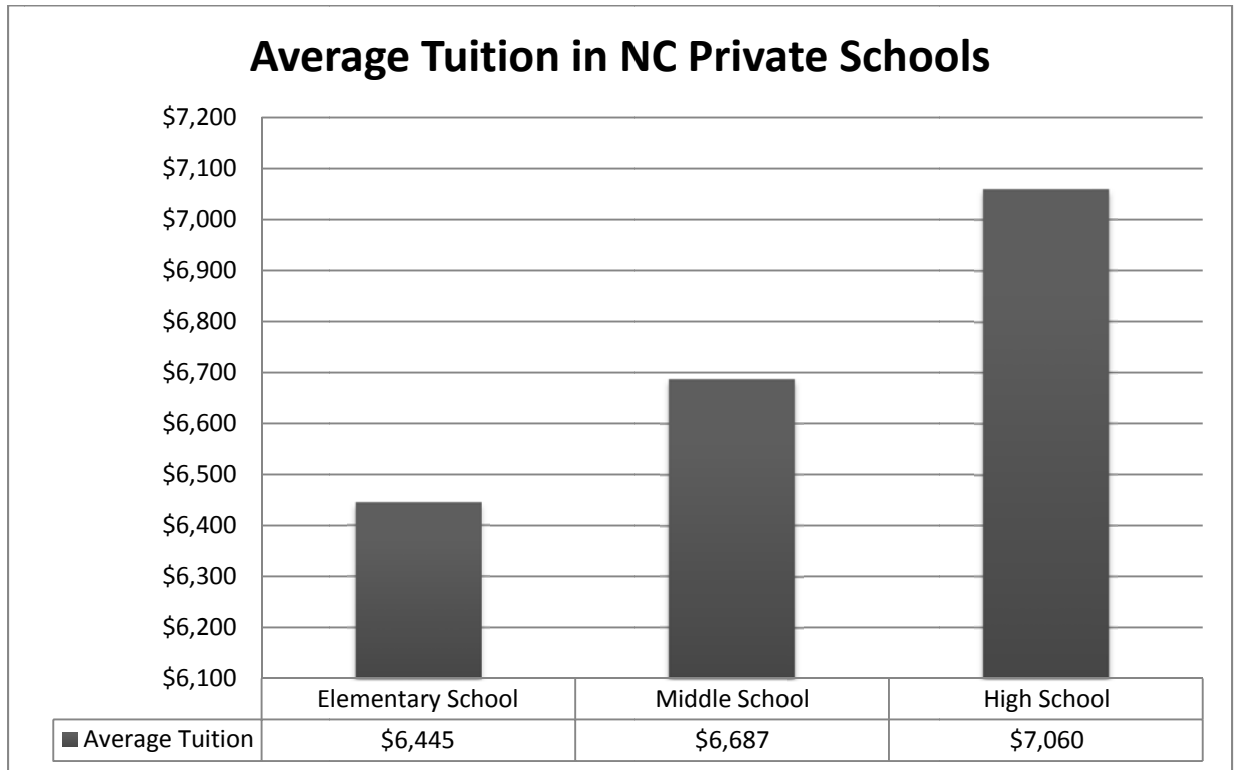
3. Grade Levels Offered by Private Schools

The following information regarding the grade levels offered is drawn from the Directory of Non-Public Schools published by the Division of Non-Public Education. The total is greater than the total number of schools (696) because some schools offer grade levels in more than one category.



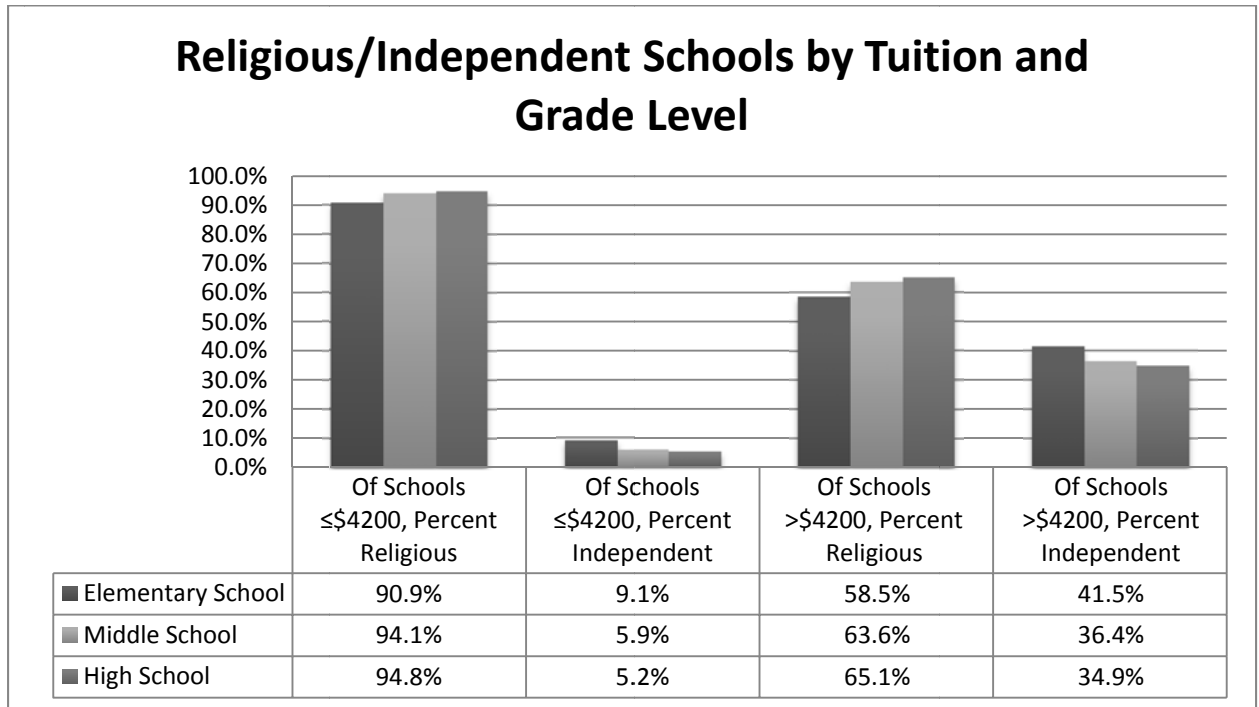
4. Average Tuition of North Carolina Private Schools

This table reflects the average tuition of private schools at each grade level. In calculating these averages, the boarding schools and special schools were excluded. These amounts are the average for day schools. Responses came from 403 elementary schools, 372 middle schools, and 282 high schools.



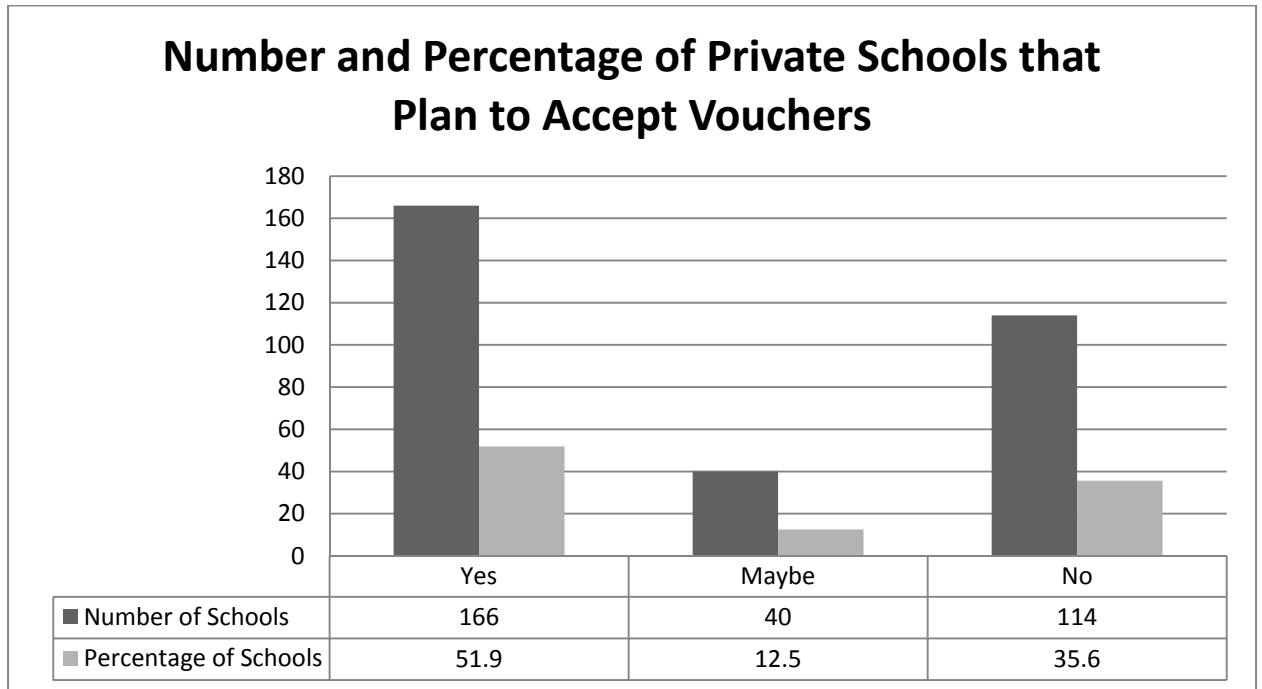
5. Religious/Independent Schools by Tuition and Grade Level

This table shows the average tuition at private schools broken down by whether they are religious or independent, by grade level, and by whether the tuition could be met by using a \$4,200 voucher. Responses came from 398 elementary schools, 361 middle schools, and 267 high schools.



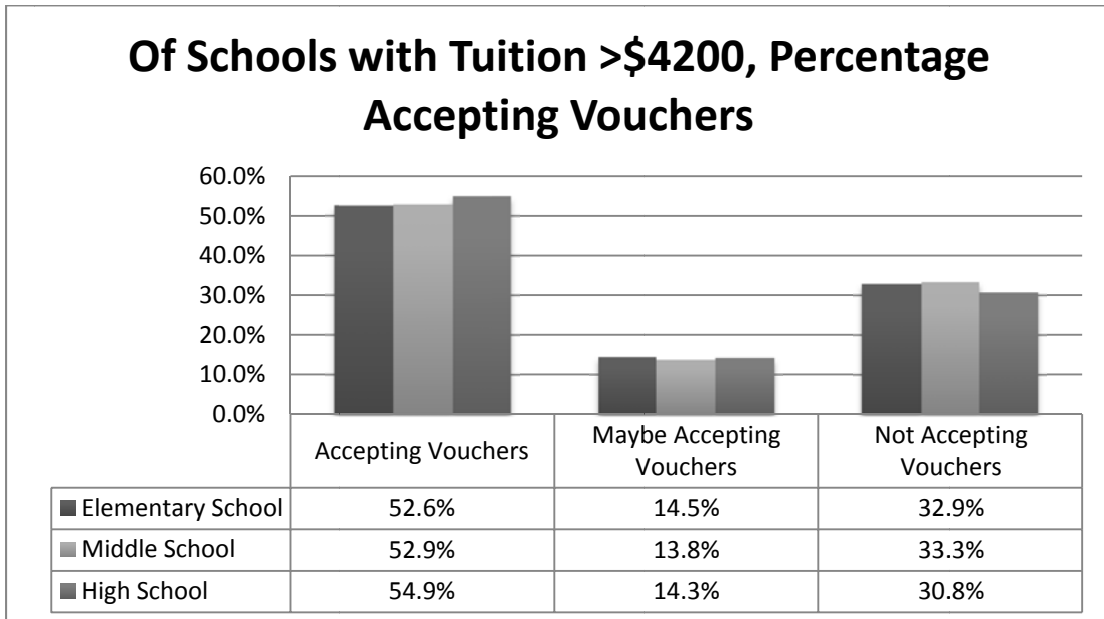
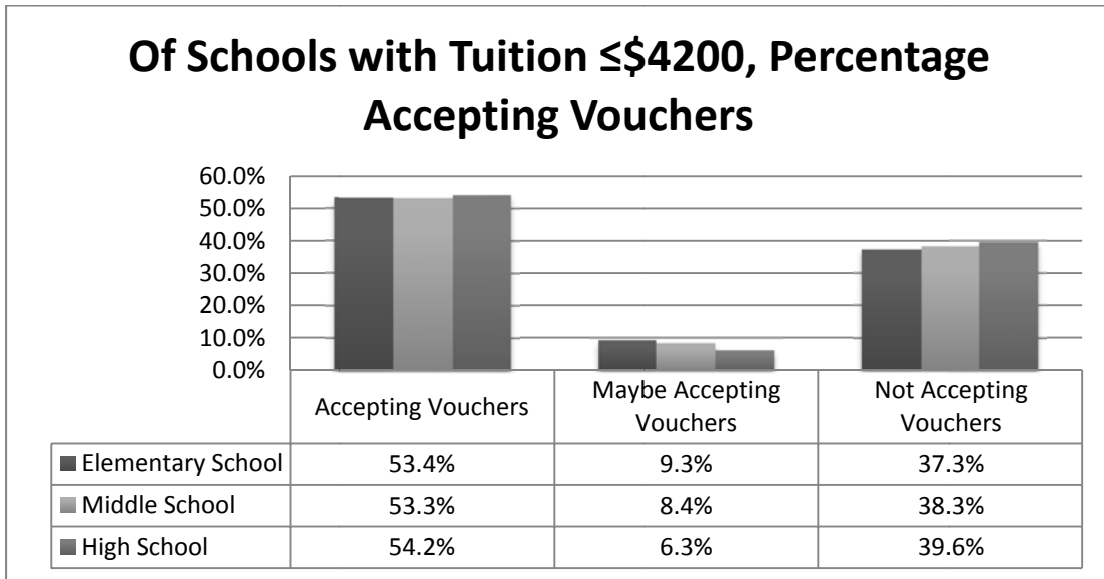
6. Number and Percentage of Private Schools that Plan to Accept Vouchers

Private schools will have the choice of whether to accept a voucher for payment of tuition. This table reflects the number and percentage of schools that reported an initial determination of whether they would accept vouchers. Responses were obtained from 320 schools. Schools are not restricted from either 1) discounting their tuition so that it could be fully met with a voucher; or 2) charging the family for the tuition that exceeds the voucher amount.



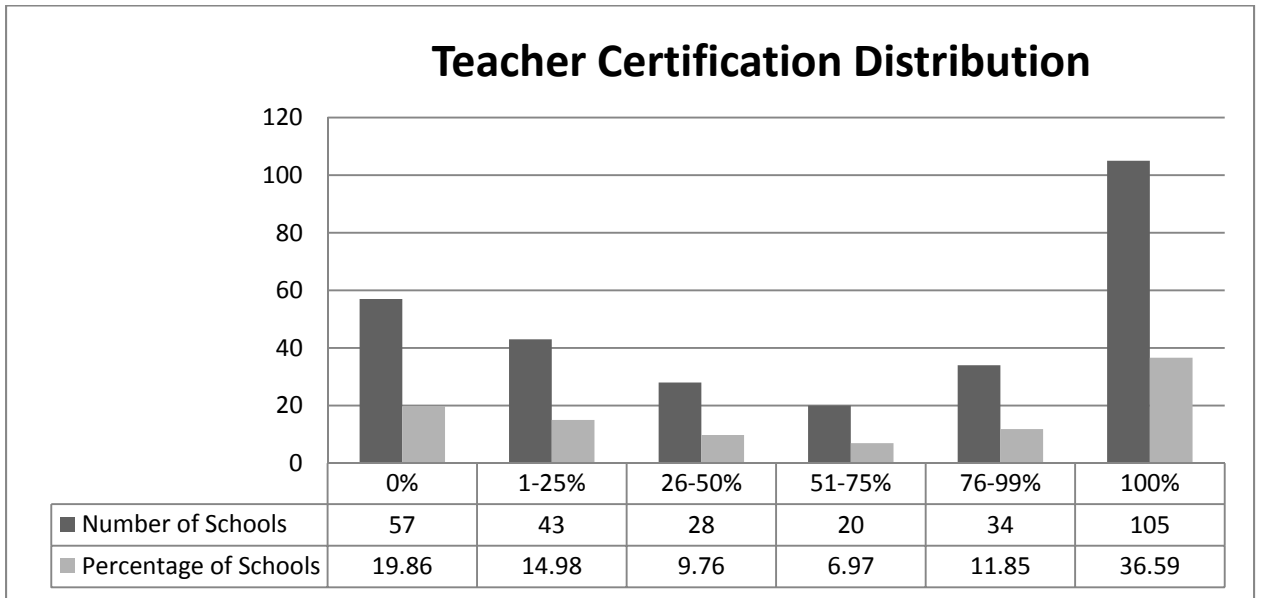
- 7. **Percentage of Schools with Tuition ≤\$4200 that Plan to Accept Vouchers;**
- 8. **Percentage of Schools with Tuition >\$4200 that Plan to Accept Vouchers**

The following two tables show the percentage of private schools that plan to accept vouchers, separated by grade level and tuition level. The demarcation line of \$4,200 is used because that is the maximum annual voucher that will be available. Responses came from 270 elementary schools, 245 middle schools, and 187 high schools.



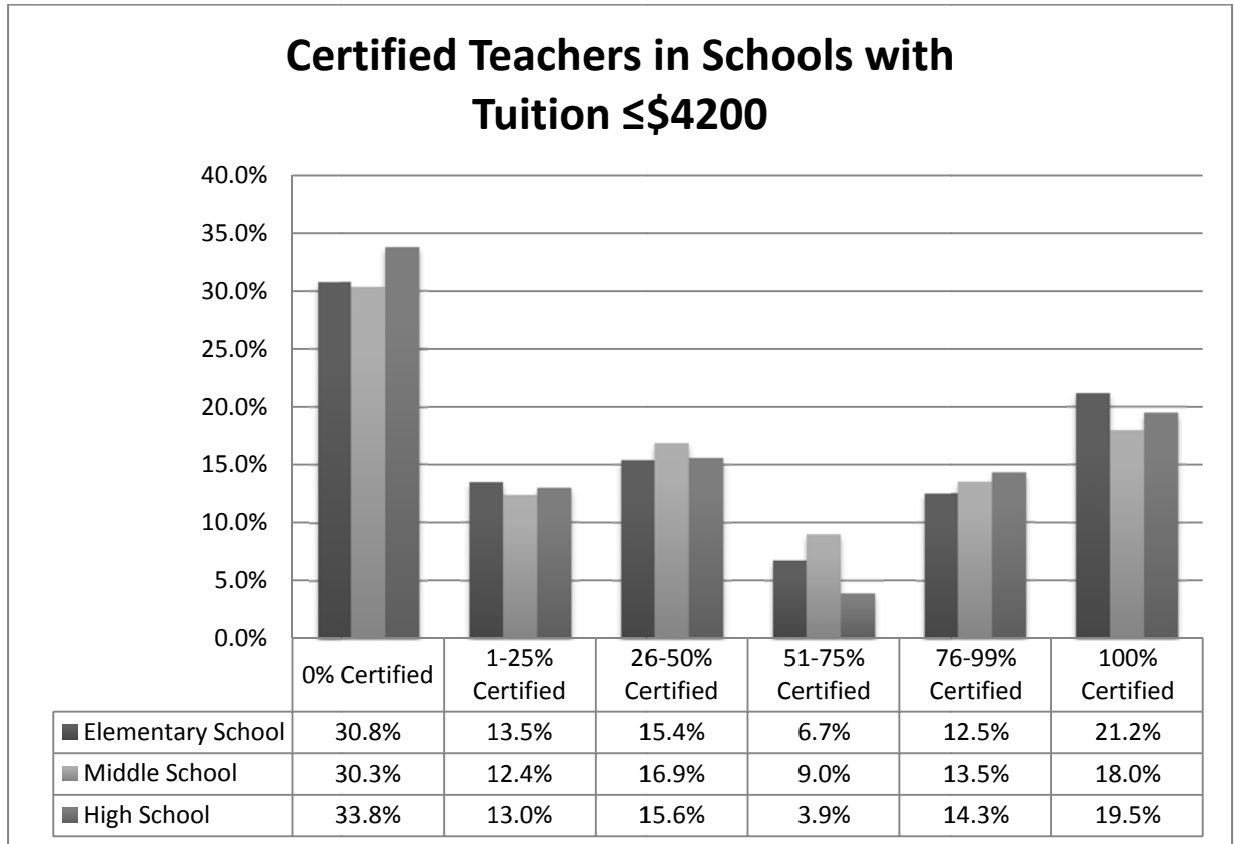
9. Teacher Certification Distribution

This table reflects the number and percentage of certified teachers employed by the school. A total of 287 schools responded. Note: North Carolina does not regulate the qualifications of teachers in private schools.



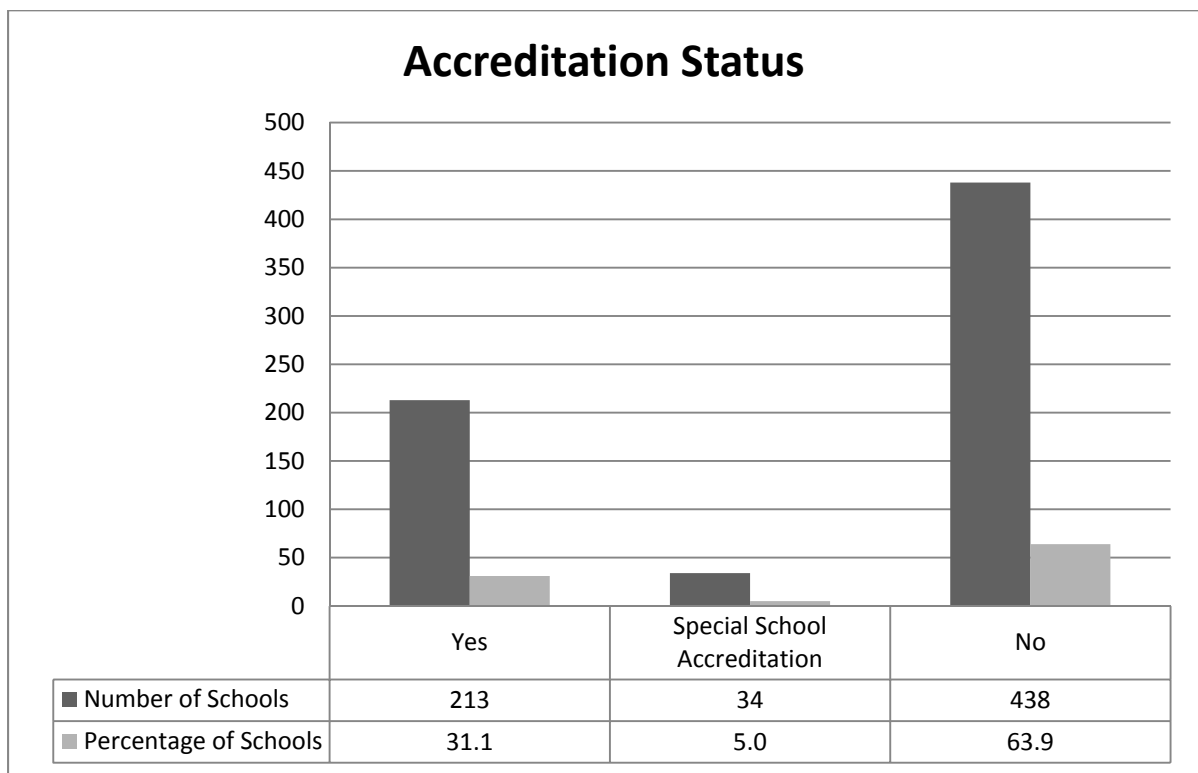
10. Percentage of Certified Teachers in Schools with Tuition ≤\$4200

This table reflects the distribution of certified teachers in schools with tuition that could be fully met with a voucher payment. Responses came from 104 elementary schools, 89 middle schools, and 77 high schools.



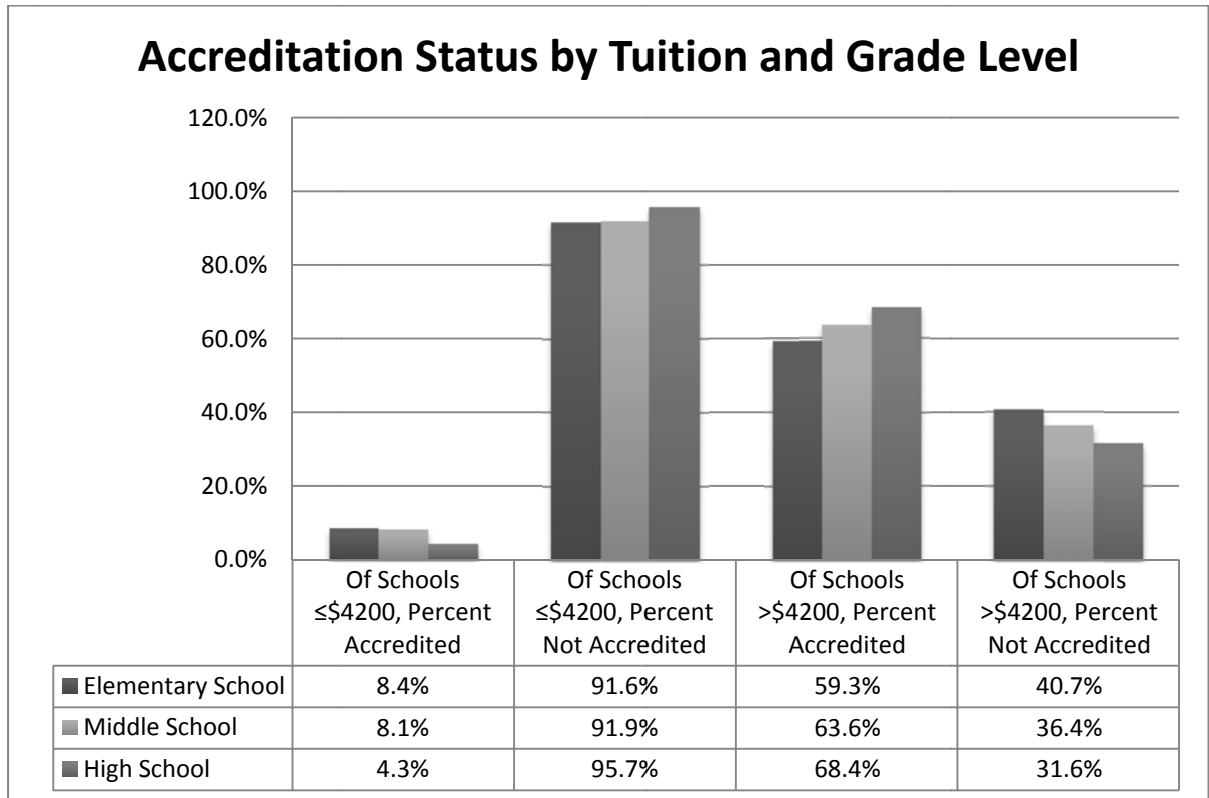
11. Accreditation Status

The following information is drawn from the Directory of Non-Public Schools published by the Division of Non-Public Education. It reflects the accreditation status at 685 non-public schools. Accreditation can come from any one of the following accrediting agencies: Association of Christian Schools International; North Carolina Christian School Association; Southern Association of Independent Schools; Middle States Commission of Elem/Secondary Schools; National Council for Private School Accreditation; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Note: No independent accreditation or state approval is required for a private school to operate in North Carolina.



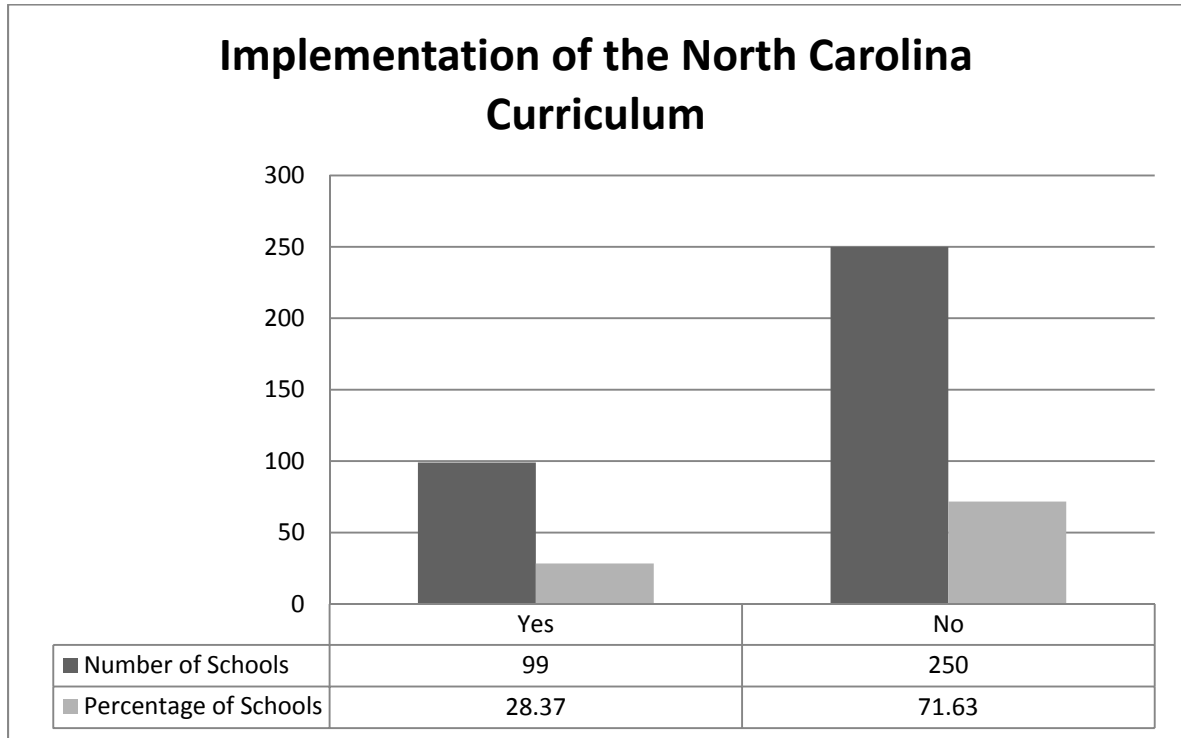
12. Accreditation Status by Tuition and Grade Level

The table correlates the information on accreditation with tuition level and grade levels offered. Responses were from 398 Elementary Schools, 361 Middle Schools, and 267 High Schools. Note: No independent accreditation or state approval is required for a private school to operate in North Carolina.



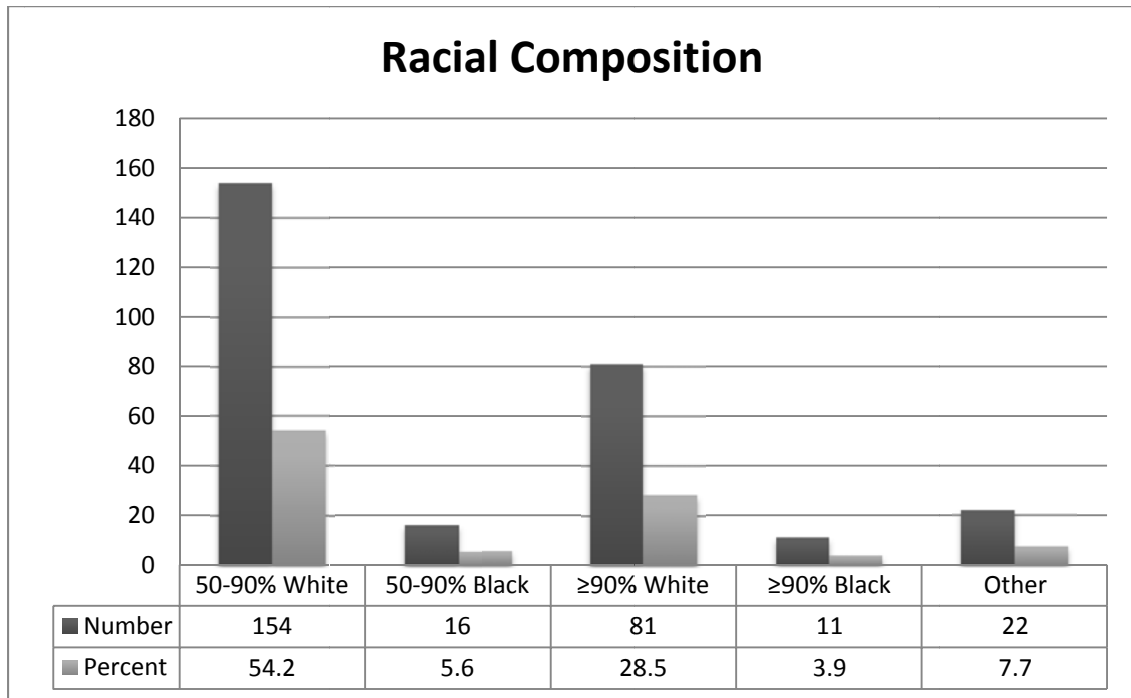
13. Implementation of the North Carolina Curriculum

This table reflects the number and percentage of schools that implement the North Carolina curricular standards. A total of 349 schools responded. Note: North Carolina law allows private schools to choose their own curriculum.



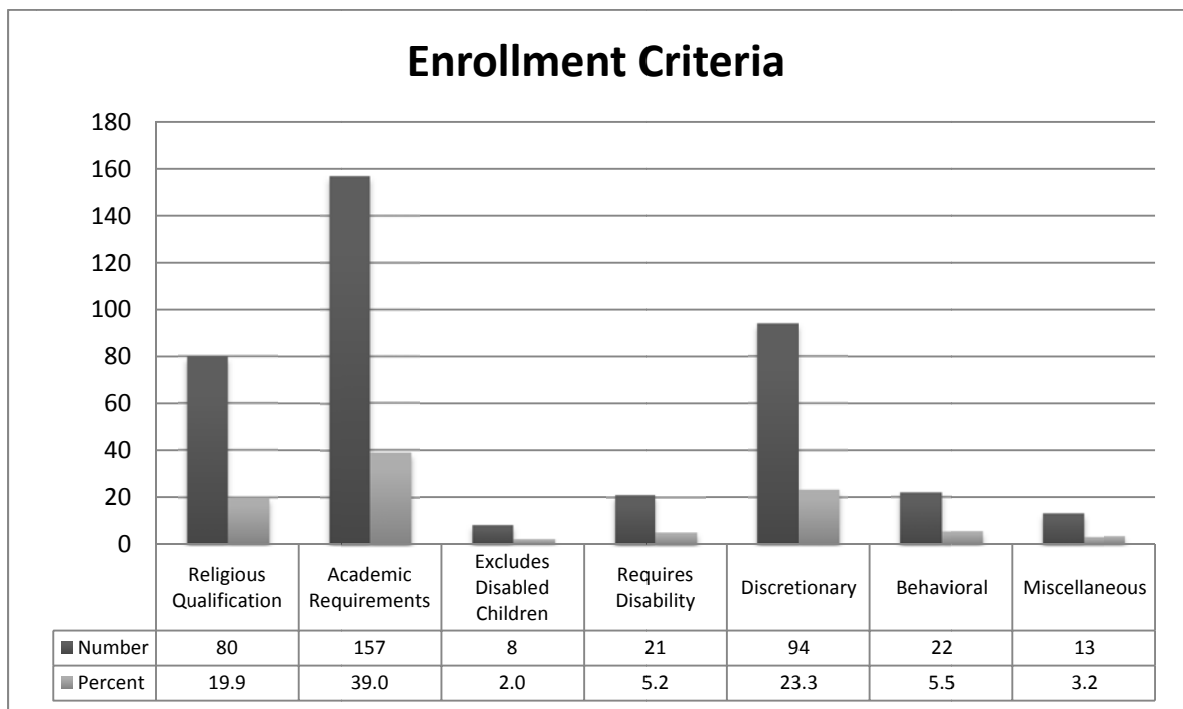
14. Racial Composition

Schools were asked to report the racial composition of the school. The table shows the number that reported more than 90 percent of students were of a particular race, and those that reported a majority of students were of one race. This latter category included any school that did not report a particular percentage, but used a term such as “mostly,” “predominantly” or “majority.” A total of 284 schools responded to this question.



15. Enrollment Criteria

Schools were asked if they had particular admission standards or other criteria for enrollment. This chart reflects the following the various criteria that were reported. “Religious qualification” means that students (or their parents) must ascribe to certain religious beliefs to be admitted. “Academic requirements” means that admitted students must have certain test scores or meet other academic standards to be admitted. “Excludes Disabled Children” refers to schools that reported they do not accept students with disabilities. “Requires disability” refers to schools that exclusively provide education to children with certain disabilities and do not accept typical learners. “Discretionary” means that the head of school uses personal discretion in selecting students. “Behavioral” refers to schools that reported they do not accept children with behavioral problems. “Miscellaneous” includes various other criteria for acceptance. Some schools have two or more of the various enrollment criteria.



The Children's Law Clinic gratefully acknowledges the contributions of all the law students who assisted in gathering and analyzing the data contained in this report. Special thanks go to Duke Law students Kristi Lundstrom, Nichole Davis, Shamus Hyland, and Susan Walker.