
TOPS: Teaching Opportunities in Private Schools



JOB SEARCH

Whether you are a new graduate or just looking for a change, it is important to consider all teaching opportunities, in both public and private schools. In the United States approximately 10% of all elementary and secondary school students attend a private school (Aud et al., 2012). Have you considered teaching in a private school?

Potential advantages to teaching in a private school:

- 1. Smaller class size.** Nationally in 2007–08, public school elementary teachers of self-contained classes averaged 20.3 students per class, while private school teachers had an average of 18.1 students (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009). Most practicing teachers will agree that class size is a factor in both academics (trying to meet varied academic ability levels) and discipline (fewer students to monitor).
- 2. Flexible curriculum and testing.** Many private schools do not have standardized testing requirements. This allows a less stressful classroom environment because neither the students nor the teachers are concerned about advancement decisions being made on the basis of a single testing situation. Teachers in private schools also may be able to alter the curriculum based on student needs rather than grade level mandates. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006) showed that students in grades 4 and 8 in private schools achieved higher scores in both reading and mathematics than students in public schools.

**By Madeline Kovarik
and Debbie Roman**

- 3. Increased parental support.** Forty-two percent of private school teachers feel that parents support their work as teachers versus 16% of public school teachers (Alt & Peter, 2002). Private school parents elect to send their child to a private school, so they have a vested interest in remaining involved in their child's education.
- 4. Sufficient supplies.** Private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to report that they have the supplies and curriculum materials they need for their classrooms (Forster & D'Andrea, 2009).
- 5. Teacher satisfaction.** Private school teachers have a tendency to be more satisfied with their school environment than public school teachers (Henke, Chen, Geis, & Knepper, 1999).
- 6. Religious teaching.** Public schools have to keep religion out of the classroom while private schools may be able to teach religious doctrine.
- 7. Increased teacher safety.** Teachers may find increased security in a private school simply because the school is smaller and visitors are more easily monitored.

Potential disadvantages for teaching in a private school:

- 1. Lower wages than public school.** In 2007–08 (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009), the average annual base salary of regular full-time public school teachers (\$49,600) was higher than the average annual base salary of regular, full-time private school teachers (\$36,300). Nationally, public school teachers' salaries are 9.8 percent more than private school teachers (Richwine & Biggs, 2011).
- 2. Greater demands placed on teachers by parents.** On average, private school teachers are required to be at the school about one hour longer each week and will spend about one hour more outside of school working on school work than their public school counterparts (Aud et al., 2012).
- 3. Less classroom diversity.** The average racial and ethnic composition of public school students is 58% non-Hispanic White, 20% Hispanic (regardless of race), 16% non-Hispanic Black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native. Among private schools, the racial and ethnic composition is 74% non-Hispanic White, 10% non-Hispanic Black, 9%

Hispanic (regardless of race), 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009).

- 4. Fewer teachers with advanced degrees.** Fifty-two percent of public school teachers have a master's degree or higher as compared to 38% of private school teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). This may indicate a less supportive school climate towards obtaining advanced degrees.

Both public and private schools have advantages and disadvantages. Weigh the pros and cons of both, so that you can find the teaching position that fits your background, professional viewpoints, and personality. There is a perfect teaching job for everyone—sometimes it is in the public school and sometimes in the private—you just have to be open to finding it! 

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Dr. Kovarik has experience as an elementary teacher, guidance counselor, primary specialist, and school administrator. She currently teaches TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) online courses for the University of San Francisco.

Ms. Roman has been a first and second grade teacher at Temple Beth Am Day school for 30 years. She holds a master's degree in special education and learning disabilities.