

## Civic Values in Public and Private Schools

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS evoke certain images in most people's minds. We tend to imagine private schools as elite, predominantly white, institutions for the affluent. Whatever their academic merits, private schools are not thought to provide experience or instruction that promote integration, tolerance, or public spiritedness, values we desire in citizens of a democratic country. Private schools are said to be separate institutions, serving families with separate values. Public schools, on the other hand, are imagined to be "the common school" envisioned by Horace Mann more than a century ago, mixing people of all races, classes, and origins. According to this vision, public schools take people from all backgrounds and make Americans of them, teaching tolerance and a commitment to the public good.

Although these perceptions of public and private schools are difficult to shake, the evidence is becoming clear that public and private schools are not what we imagine them to be. An analysis of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) suggests that private schools are

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