



COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL
STANDARDS & ACCOUNTABILITY

CESA ADMISSIONS
BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS
2025-2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis is based on data collected from CESA member schools for reporting years 2022-23 through 2025-26. Data includes opening day enrollment figures, admissions funnel metrics (inquiries, applications, acceptances, enrollments), staffing levels, tuition and fees by division, and financial aid commitments. Where noted, comparisons to NAIS schools and Day schools provide a broader market context. While this report is helpful for benchmarking, we do not recommend using these data as targets.

Schools within CESA are segmented by enrollment size: under 500 students, 501-1000 students, and over 1000 students. Means and medians (50th percentile) are provided to account for outliers and distribution variations. Weighted averages for tuition reflect the enrollment distribution across grade levels, providing a more accurate picture of average family expenditure than simple means.

All financial figures are reported in nominal dollars for the relevant academic year. When comparing multi-year data, users should consider the cumulative impact of inflation on both tuition levels and financial aid commitments. We had a strong response rate to DASL, with a 96% response rate (n=92). While there were intermittent gaps in the data from school to school, the overall size of the sample was large enough to provide reliable data. All data reported reflect calculations specified by DASL.

The distribution of CESA schools in the sample are below in Figure 1. Average class sizes and tuition data can be found in Appendix 1.

CESA Schools' Opening Day 2025-26 Enrollment

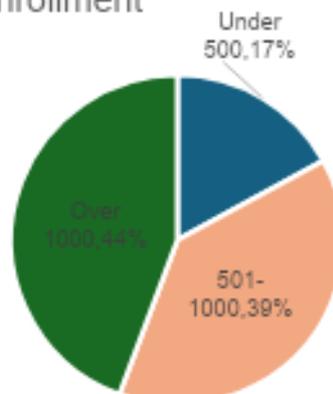


Figure 1. Distribution of CESA Schools enrollment into categories used throughout this benchmarking report.

KEY FINDINGS

Enrollment Growth

CESA schools demonstrate robust enrollment growth, increasing from 871 students in 2022-23 to 943 students in 2025-26, representing an 8.27% increase. This contrasts sharply with NAIS schools nationally, which experienced a decline of 1.91% (from 471 to 462 students) over the same period. Day schools showed minimal growth at 1.10%. (See Figure 2) These divergent trends suggest CESA schools are successfully capturing market share and adapting to evolving family preferences in the post-pandemic educational landscape.

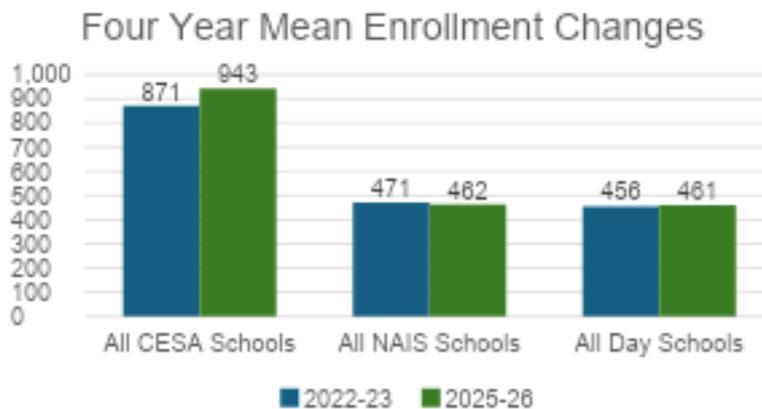


Figure 2: A comparison of mean enrollment changes over four years.

A softening of enrollment, however, was noted. While the overall enrollment was slightly off the enrollment goals overall (-1.1% for CESA schools), that trend was mirrored with all day schools (-2.3%), and NAIS schools (-0.9%). (See Figure 3)

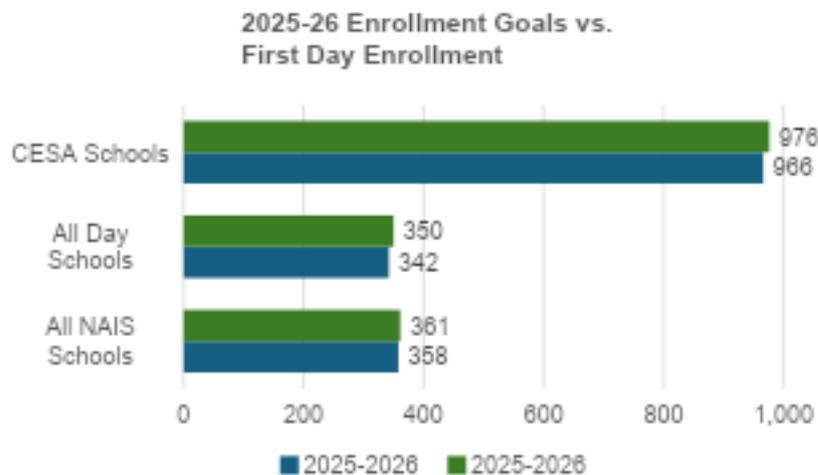


Figure 3: A comparison of enrollment goals to first day enrollment for the school year 2025-26.

The underperformance with respect to enrollment goals was not uniformly observed, however, with CESA schools under 500 experiencing the largest underperformance and schools over 1000 experiencing overperformance. (See Figure 4). Similarly, there was a divergence in this effect with respect to the grades offered at CESA schools; schools offering high school only overperformed their goals (+1.9%), while schools without high schools underperformed significantly (-10.6%). (See Figure 5)

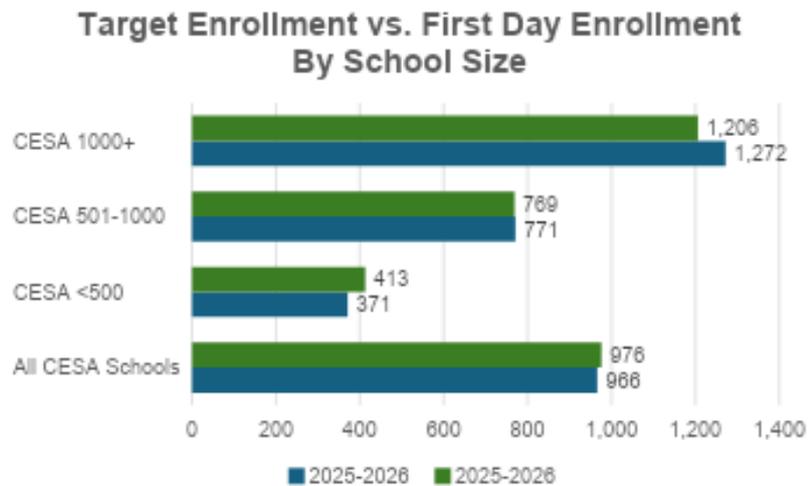


Figure 4: A comparison of target enrollment goals to first day enrollment by school size for the school year 2025-26.

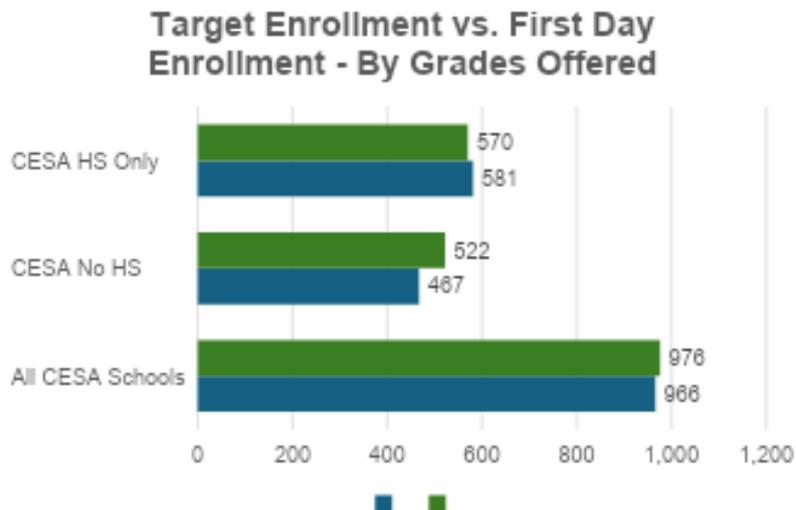


Figure 4: A comparison of target enrollment goals to first day enrollment by school type for the school year 2025-26.

Admissions Funnel Efficiency

The application conversion rate (completed applications as a percentage of inquiries) varies significantly by school size. Smaller schools (<500 students) demonstrate the strongest conversion at 74.9%, while larger schools (1000+) convert at 54.9%. However, when considering both direct inquiries and Did Not Inquire (DNI) applicants, the rates normalize across size categories (52.5%-56.2%), suggesting that larger schools benefit from stronger brand awareness that bypasses the formal inquiry stage.

Selectivity and Yield Patterns

Acceptance rates vary inversely with school size: smaller schools accept 66.2% of applicants while mid-size schools (501-1000) accept 72.4%, and larger schools accept 62.5%. This reflects both capacity constraints and different competitive dynamics. Yield rates remain strong across all categories (81-86%), with mid-size schools achieving the highest yield at 88.7% in 2025-26, indicating effective conversion of accepted students to enrolled students. (See Table 1, Figure 6)

Rates and Ratios for reporting year 2025-26 (Based on prior year's data)

Applications Rate (completed applications as a percent of inquiries)	All CESA Schools	CESA <500	CESA 501-1000	CESA 1000+
Mean	61.0%	74.9%	63.8%	54.9%
50th Percentile (Median)	54.3%	57.8%	55.1%	53.9%

Completed Applications as % of Inquiries + DNI	All CESA Schools	CESA <500	CESA 501-1000	CESA 1000+
Mean	53.8%	56.2%	52.5%	54.2%
50th Percentile (Median)	51.7%	57.8%	48.9%	52.7%

Acceptance Rate (acceptances as a percent of applications)	All CESA Schools	CESA <500	CESA 501-1000	CESA 1000+
Mean	67.0%	66.2%	72.4%	62.5%
50th Percentile (Median)	67.4%	64.7%	74.0%	62.2%

Yield (enrollments as a percent of acceptances)	All CESA Schools	CESA <500	CESA 501-1000	CESA 1000+
Mean	84.6%	81.20%	84.10%	86.0%
50th Percentile (Median)	86.5%	81.20%	88.70%	86.4%

Table 1. Admissions funnel data for reporting year 2025-26, based upon school year 2024-25 data.

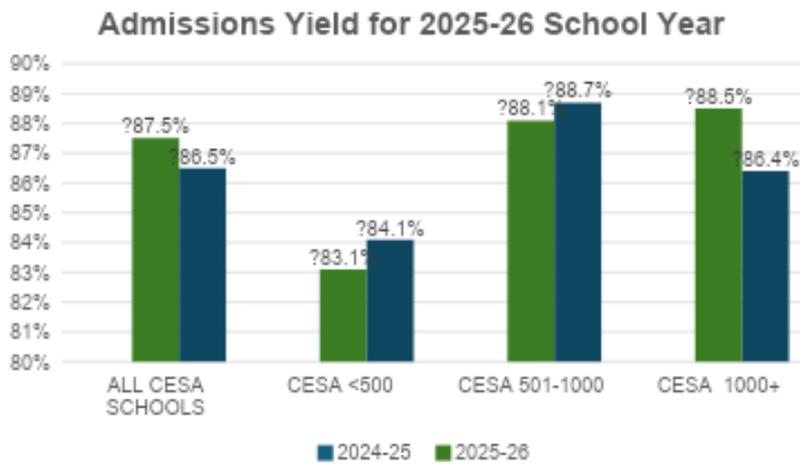


Figure 6. A comparison for admission yield for 2025-26 school year by school type.

Declining Inquiry Volume

A concerning trend emerges in inquiry data for larger schools (1000+): inquiries declined from 972 in 2022-23 to 751 in 2025-26, a 22.7% decrease. This suggests potential challenges in market awareness, demographic shifts, or increased competition. Mid-size schools experienced an 11.5% decline (478 to 423 inquiries), while smaller schools showed a modest 11.1% increase (162 to 180 inquiries) in recent years. (See Table 2)

Admissions Funnel – Four Year Trends				
Inquiries about admission ▾				
	< 500	501-1000	1000 <	
2022-23		478		972
2023-24		463		895
2024-25	162	415		879
2025-26	180	423		751

Completed Applications				
	< 500	501-1000	1000 <	
2022-23		255		426
2023-24		263		365
2024-25	153	246		431
2025-26	128	250		391

Acceptance Rate (acceptances as a percent of applications)			
	< 500	501-1000	1000 <
2022-23		76.4%	63.4%
2023-24		75.2%	60.1%
2024-25	59.9%	74.8%	57.2%
2025-26	64.7%	74.0%	62.2%

Yield (enrollments as a percent of acceptances)			
	< 500	501-1000	1000 <
2022-23		83.1%	85.8%
2023-24		80.9%	81.3%
2024-25	83.1%	88.1%	88.5%
2025-26	84.1%	88.7%	86.4%

Table 2. Admissions funnel data over four year period beginning in 2022-23.

Attrition

The data reveal a moderate relationship between school size and student attrition rates, with mid-sized institutions experiencing notably higher turnover than their smaller and larger counterparts. Schools enrolling 501-1000 students exhibit a median attrition rate of 6.80%, significantly above the 6.30% benchmark for all CESA schools. This represents an approximately 8% higher attrition rate compared to the sector median. In contrast, both smaller schools (under 500 students) and larger schools (over 1000 students) demonstrate more favorable retention outcomes, with attrition rates of 5.80% and 6.30%, respectively. (See Figure 7)

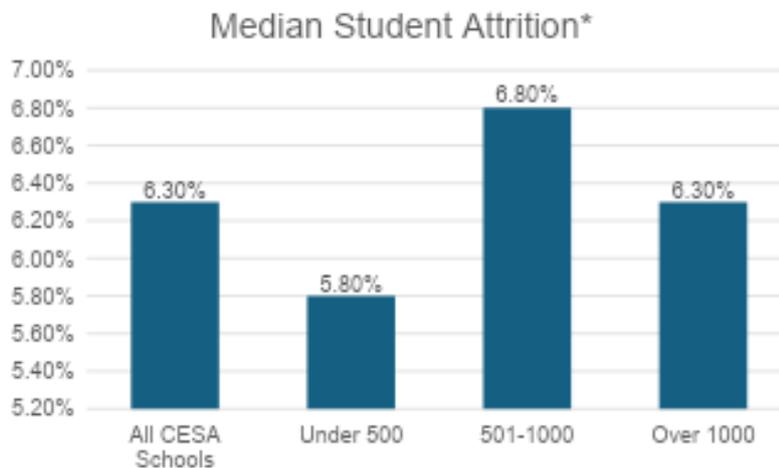


Figure 7: A comparison of student attrition in CESA Schools by school size.

*calculated as the number of students electing not to return to school divided by the total number of students likely to return, multiplied by 100, measuring the percentage of students lost between academic years.

CESA's Competitive Position:

When benchmarked against broader independent school associations, CESA schools demonstrate a meaningful retention advantage. CESA's 6.3% median attrition rate compares favorably to NAIS Member Schools (8.1%) and Day Schools nationally (8.7%). CESA schools retain students at rates approximately 22% better than the NAIS average and 28% better than the national day school benchmark. (See Figure 8). This 240-270 basis point advantage represents a substantial competitive differentiator and suggests that CESA member institutions have developed particularly effective retention cultures and fidelity to their value proposition.

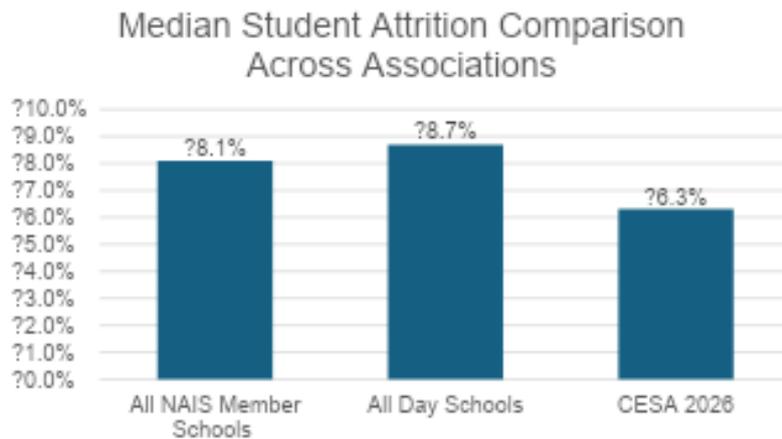


Figure 8. A comparison of student attrition between school associations.

Financial Aid

Financial aid commitments have oscillated over four years, largely reflecting inflationary pressures in 2022. Mean total aid awarded increased from \$1.64 million in 2022-23 to \$1.86 million in 2023-24, before leveling off to \$1.63 million in 2025-26. (See Figure 9). The number of applications for aid increased from a mean of 204 to 244 over the same period (See figure 10), while the number of students receiving aid grew from 166 to 208, indicating a smaller average financial aid award, an interesting trend. (See Table 3).

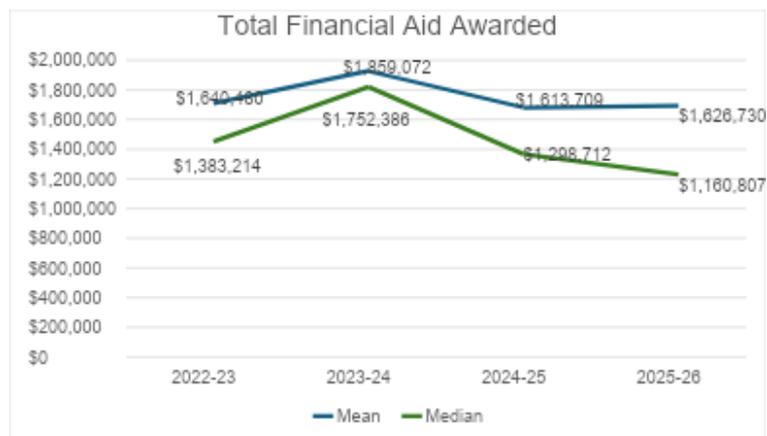


Figure 9. Four-year trends in total financial aid awarded in CESA Schools.

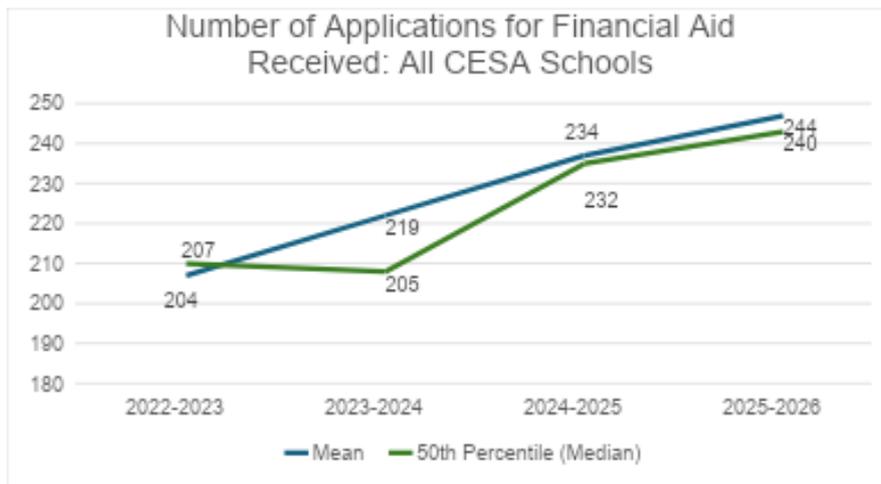


Figure 9. Four-year trends in total financial aid applications in CESA Schools.

Financial Aid Overview – Four Year Trends								
	2022-2023				2023-2024			
	Number of Applications	Number of Students Eligible	Number of Students	Total Financial Aid Awarded	Number of Applications	Number of Students Eligible	Number of Students	Total Financial Aid Awarded
Mean	234	246	213	\$1,613,709	244	254	208	\$1,626,730
Max Value	546	1,230	694	\$5,193,326	813	1,198	815	\$7,655,072
Min Value	21	12	19	\$143,052	2	1	1	\$2,500
50th Percentile (Median)	232	192	179	\$1,298,712	240	195	169	\$1,160,807
	Receiving				Receiving			
Mean	204	173	166	\$1,640,480	219	170	176	\$1,859,072
Max Value	356	329	294	\$3,894,685	390	329	309	\$4,488,422
Min Value	61	57	75	\$437,908	71	24	79	\$543,299
50th Percentile (Median)	207	163	162	\$1,383,214	205	159	158	\$1,752,386
	2024-2025				2025-2026			
	Number of Applications	Number of Students Eligible	Number of Students Receiving	Total Financial Aid Awarded	Number of Applications	Number of Students Eligible	Number of Students Receiving	Total Financial Aid Awarded

Table 3. Financial aid overview from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

Non-employee financial aid averages \$1.29 million across CESA schools, with larger institutions (1000+) averaging \$1.51 million. Employee children assistance programs average \$404,618, with mid-size schools investing the most (\$484,129 mean). (See Table 4). These investments represent substantial commitments to both accessibility and employee retention.

Non-Employee Children Financial Aid 2025-26

	All CESA Schools		CESA <500		CESA 501-1000		CESA 1000+	
	Number of Children	Total Amount Awarded						
Mean	170	\$1,293,736	75	\$940,297	144	\$1,147,092	218	\$1,505,003
Max Value	638	\$6,348,219	191	\$5,234,500	345	\$2,752,314	638	\$6,348,219
Min Value	1	\$2,500	1	\$2,500	11	\$38,345	12	\$60,000
50th Percentile (Median)	142	\$902,097	83	\$385,022	147	\$902,096	183	\$1,299,047

Employee Children Financial Aid 2025-26

	All CESA Schools		CESA <500		CESA 501-1000		CESA 1000+	
	Number of Children	Total Amount Awarded						
Mean	48	\$404,618	13	\$64,756	50	\$484,129	55	\$438,014
Max Value	272	\$2,114,430	18	\$578,120	272	\$1,875,200	166	\$2,114,430
Min Value	3	\$3,081	3	\$3,081	4	\$34,499	5	\$10,163
50th Percentile (Median)	33	\$185,479	5	\$20,903	33	\$163,938	38	\$284,346

Table 4. Financial Aid Awards

Admissions Staffing Benchmarks

Admissions office staffing scales predictably with enrollment. Schools under 500 students maintain a mean of 1.47 FTEs (median 1.0), mid-size schools employ 2.53 FTEs (median 2.25), and larger schools staff 3.02 FTEs (median 3.0). (See Table 5). The overall CESA mean stands at 2.61 FTEs. These benchmarks provide important planning metrics for schools experiencing enrollment growth or contraction.

2025-26 Admissions Office Full Time Equivalencies

All CESA Schools	
Mean	2.61
50th Percentile (Median)	2.50
< 500	
Mean	1.47
50th Percentile (Median)	1.00
501-1000	
Mean	2.53
50th Percentile (Median)	2.25
> 1000	
Mean	3.02
50th Percentile (Median)	3.00

Table 5: Admissions Office Staffing

Appendix I.

Class Sizes 2025-26

	All CESA Schools	CESA <500	CESA 501-1000	CESA 1000+
Preschool				
Mean	14	13	14	15
Max Value	22	16	20	22
Min Value	6	11	10	6
50th Percentile (Median)	14	12	14	14
Grades K-5				
Mean	18	17	18	19
Max Value	26	20	26	25
Min Value	12	14	14	12
50th Percentile (Median)	18	17	18	19
Grades 6-8				
Mean	19	17	19	20
Max Value	28	24	28	26
Min Value	12	12	13	15
50th Percentile (Median)	19	17	18	20
Grades 9-12				
Mean	18	16	18	19
Max Value	29	22	24	29
Min Value	10	14	14	10
50th Percentile (Median)	18	15	18	19

Appendix I

Tuition 2025-26

Preschool Tuition plus Fees (Half Day)	All CESA Schools	Under 500	501-1000	Over 1000
Mean	\$7,709	\$7,392	\$8,302	\$7,360
Max Value	\$12,990	\$9,650	\$12,990	\$12,131
Min Value	\$125	\$5,360	\$6,071	\$125
50th Percentile (Median)	\$7,604	\$7,165	\$7,385	\$8,263
Preschool Tuition plus Fees (Full Day)				
Mean	\$13,273	\$12,805	\$13,107	\$13,467
Max Value	\$23,500	\$16,710	\$23,500	\$20,350
Min Value	\$8,000	\$9,325	\$9,695	\$8,000
50th Percentile (Median)	\$12,983	\$12,593	\$12,055	\$13,230
Kindergarten Tuition and Fees				
Mean	\$15,451	\$7,360	\$15,699	\$15,718
Max Value	\$30,500	\$12,131	\$30,500	\$24,930
Min Value	\$7,946	\$125	\$10,090	\$8,935
50th Percentile (Median)	\$14,175	\$8,263	\$14,409	\$15,354
Grade 1 to Grade 12 Tuition Only				
Mean	\$19,053	\$18,217	\$19,940	\$18,569
Max Value	\$35,900	\$35,900	\$32,577	\$29,971
Min Value	\$8,852	\$8,852	\$10,090	\$10,483
50th Percentile (Median)	\$17,311	\$15,778	\$18,558	\$17,156
Grade 1 to Grade 12: Tuition Only, Weighted Average				
Mean	\$19,242	\$18,262	\$20,127	\$18,808
Max Value	\$36,429	\$36,429	\$32,577	\$30,685
Min Value	\$8,846	\$8,846	\$10,090	\$10,385
50th Percentile (Median)	\$17,469	\$15,792	\$18,761	\$17,355
Grade 1 to Grade 12: Tuition and Fees				
Mean	\$19,450	\$18,433	\$20,318	\$19,041
Max Value	\$35,900	\$35,900	\$33,215	\$30,413
Min Value	\$8,852	\$8,852	\$10,090	\$10,483
50th Percentile (Median)	\$18,203	\$15,815	\$18,558	\$17,657
Grade 1 to Grade 12: Tuition and Fees, Weighted Average				
Mean	\$19,647	\$18,479	\$20,515	\$19,288
Max Value	\$36,429	\$36,429	\$33,265	\$31,213
Min Value	\$8,846	\$8,846	\$10,090	\$10,385
50th Percentile (Median)	\$18,279	\$15,830	\$18,761	\$17,737