

## *“Christian Conservatives and Public Schooling”*

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Christian conservatives' view of public life is closely tied to their assessment of public schools. When asked about the biggest problems with American society, an overwhelming number of conservative Christians volunteered problems in the public schools and family. How conservative Protestants view their relationship to public life seems to turn on the perceived problems with and prospects for public schools. At the grass roots level, their strategies of involvement in public life are closely tied to their assessment of whether to work with public schools or develop parallel institutional structures through home education and Christian academies. More than one million children are home schooled and tens of thousands of others are educated in Christian schools, yet some conservative Christian traditions, such as evangelicalism, call for engagement with public schools as a religious obligation. This paper addresses the question of how conservative religious traditions shape attitudes toward the public schools, and give meaning to alternative schooling strategies for their children. This understanding of conservative Christian educational views and strategies will be used to explain the structure, curriculum, and “moral climate” of conservative Christian alternatives to public schooling. The primary empirical contribution of the paper will show how the organizational culture of various types of Christian schools shapes children's academic and social development. The analysis will draw on survey data, such as the National Survey of Youth and Religion and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, ethnographic case studies, and interviews with Christian conservatives from around the country to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Christian alternative schooling for academic achievement and democratic education. The paper will discuss how the findings on Christian alternative schooling can enlighten the debate among democratic theorists, such as Amy Gutmann and Stephen Macedo, about the relation between religious education, democratic citizenship, and the public good.