

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

US Department of Education Unveils "Education Freedom Scholarships" Proposal

At an event at the US Department of Education (USDE) on February 28, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, joined by US Senator Ted Cruz (TX) and US Representative Bradley Byrne (AL), announced legislation that would establish a federal tax credit to encourage donations to scholarship granting organizations (SGO).

The "Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunity Act" would authorize up to \$5 billion per year for the tax credits, but would not, according to the bill's supporters, establish a federal program. Rather, the proposal would leave participation up to the states, and participating states would set the rules for how their programs would operate. The legislation would allow states to use scholarships for private education, but it would not require that approach.

According to Secretary DeVos, "Education Freedom Scholarships will give hundreds of thousands of students across the country the power to find the right fit for their education. Our bold proposal will offer a dollar-for-dollar federal income tax credit for contributions to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that provide scholarships to students. And the biggest winners will be America's forgotten children who will finally have choices previously available only for the rich, the powerful, and the well-connected."

In an impassioned plea, Senator Ted Cruz, who sponsored the Senate version of the legislation, declared, "I believe that school choice is the civil rights issue of the twentieth century. I believe that every child in America has a right to have access to excellent education."

The bill's House sponsor, Congressman Byrne, is a former member of the Alabama State Board of Education and former chancellor of the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education. In a statement, he said, "Every student in America should have the opportunity to receive a high quality education, and we can help accomplish that goal through a new federal tax credit. This model has succeeded at creating opportunity for students in Alabama, and I am hopeful through this legislation we can create similar opportunities for students around the country."

Information posted on the USDE website explains that under the bill, individual and business taxpayers nationwide would be able to contribute to state-identified SGOs,

students, who would finally have opportunities to pursue the best education for them in ways rich, powerful, and connected families always have. The scholarships are 100% privately funded by donations and do not take one cent from local public school students or public school teachers." USDE set up a special page to highlight the proposal: ed.gov/freedom.

In his remarks, Senator Cruz observed that "This legislation that we are introducing today, it is big and it is bold." He was adamant that "there are ironclad protections in this legislation that the federal government can't stick its fingers into curriculum and change what schools are teaching, that's a state and local question," and that "this legislation doesn't take one penny from any public school in America."

The House bill, H.R. 1434, was introduced with thirty-nine cosponsors while the Senate bill, S. 634, was introduced with five, including the chairman of the Senate's education committee, Lamar Alexander (TN). The bills were referred to their respective chambers' tax committees, however, because it is tax credit legislation.

"A great education shouldn't be determined by luck or by address or by family income," said DeVos. "And education shouldn't be an old-school, one-size-fits-all approach. Every student is unique and every one learns differently. The freedom to do that is why I took this job. And it's why we're here this morning. Because what's missing in education today is at the core of what makes America truly great: freedom...freedom is never a threat."



Education Secretary Betsy DeVos speaks as Senator Ted Cruz, others look on. (USDE photo)

and such contributions would be eligible to receive a non-refundable federal tax credit. No contributor would be allowed a total tax benefit greater than the amount of their contribution.

According to USDE, the proposal "would most benefit our vulnerable

CAPE

CAPE member organizations:

Agudath Israel of America
American Montessori Society
Association Montessori International—USA
Association of Christian Schools International
Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
Christian Schools International
Council of Islamic Schools in North America
Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Council on Education
Islamic Schools League of America
Jesuit Schools Network
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
National Association of Episcopal Schools
National Association of Independent Schools
National Catholic Educational Association
National Christian School Association
Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12

Executive Director:
Michael Schuttloffel

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE.
An annual subscription is \$35.
ISSN 0271-145

1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW

#190-433

Washington, DC 20004

Tel: 844-883-CAPE

(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org



Senate Committee Holds Field Hearing at DC Catholic School

The US Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee held a field hearing on February 26 at St. Thomas More Catholic Academy in Washington D.C. The subject of the hearing was the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP), which serves low-income families in the nation's capital and is the only federally funded voucher program in the country.

The hearing was chaired by Senator Ron Johnson (WI), who talked about his experience sending his children to Catholic schools. "I came to understand how crucial the private sector system is to education...I came to understand how important it was that families were involved in education. I came to understand the service and sacrifice of every administrator, every principal, every priest, every parent, and every teacher involved in that system." He went on to say that "I really want to thank all of you that are involved... for your act of service and sacrifice."

Senator Johnson was joined at the hearing by Senator Tim Scott (SC), co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Education Innovation and Opportunity, formerly known as the Congressional School Choice Caucus. "Being blessed with a healthy, positive, powerful, quality education is critical," Senator Scott observed. "The reality is, if you have a high-paying job, you already have school choice—it's called a good income. With a high income, you can choose your neighborhood, or choose to send your child to a private school. The problem is, many parents don't have that luxury. These parents want their kids to achieve as much as any other parent. But they lack the income to support the best options for their kids. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program ensures that your zip code doesn't determine your child's educational future. It provides families with options."

Also testifying at the hearing, scholarship recipient Yishek Abraham described how "OSP has had a tremendous, positive impact on my life...The transition to Rock Creek [International School] felt magical, to say the least...I continued with the OSP and attended Archbishop Carroll High School, a college-preparatory Catholic school...I graduated from

Carroll in 2012 and from Columbia University in 2016 with a B.A. in Economics. Currently I am a Research Associate at the American Enterprise Institute where I focus primarily on financial markets. In the future, I hope to continue to utilize economics to analyze policies to benefit the public."

Senator Johnson took the opportunity to shine a light on the financial upside of the program, pointing out that "In the 2018-19 school year, 1,615 students used OSP to attend a school outside the public system. The scholarships cost \$8,887 for K-8 students, and \$13,287 for high school students, and the federal government will provide \$20 million to cover the full cost of scholarships. With a \$19,117 average cost per student, the district should save over \$30 million. Even if the

District had to fund OSP, it should still save \$10 million per year, while providing students and their parents the freedom to choose a school that meets their individual needs."

According to a Homeland Security Committee release, 91 percent of OSP students graduate from high school, whereas the D.C. public school graduation rate was 68.5 percent for SY2017-18.

Marguerite Conley, formerly Executive Director of the Consortium of Catholic Academies, pointed to the "94% parent satisfaction rate with their child's academic progress and current school and the 86% high school senior acceptance rate to 2 or 4 year colleges or universities" as evidence of the program's success. Gerald D. Smith Jr., principal of St. Thomas More, testified that "School Choice is an important component in allowing parents and their scholars to find places that fit the needs of their unique academic profile. More importantly, the chance to choose a school rooted in mission and its religious core provides the opportunity for developing young men and women who are dedicated to growing in virtue."

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program's authorization expires this year. Senator Johnson and Representative Mark Walker (NC) have filed bills extending the program for another five years.



Senators Ron Johnson and Tim Scott at a field hearing held at a Washington, DC Catholic school. (HSGAC photo)

School Choice in Florida Demonstrates Success

A new study released by the Urban Institute found that “students who enroll in private school through the FTC program are more likely to go to and graduate from college than their public school peers.” The FTC (Florida Tax Credit scholarship program) is the nation’s largest private school choice program, providing more than 100,000 scholarships each year that can be used to enroll in participating private schools. Sixty-eight percent of the students in the FTC program are black or Hispanic.

According to an Urban Institute [release](#), “Fifty-seven percent of FTC students enrolled in college, compared with 51 percent of non-FTC students. This is a 12 percent increase. FTC students had higher college-going rates in all sectors: two-year, four-year public, and four-year private colleges. Additionally, FTC participants were more likely to attend college full time.”

A redefinedED [article](#) on the study highlighted the fact that “the outcomes are even stronger for students who use the scholarship four or more years. Those students are up to 99 percent more likely to attend a four-year college than their public school peers, and up to 45 percent more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees.”

Approximately 14,000 students are on the waiting list for the FTC. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has proposed a new “Equal Opportunity Scholarship” program to supplement the FTC in order to meet the needs of those 14,000. “The Equal Opportunity Scholarship will ensure that students of all backgrounds have access to a world-class education as well as give parents peace of mind knowing their children are being set up for success in the classroom,” DeSantis was quoted as saying. Members of the Florida Senate have put forward a similar proposal.

State Update

Vermont

Two students, their parents, and the Burlington Catholic Diocese have filed a federal lawsuit against education officials in Vermont. The case is being litigated by Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), which describes the situation the following way: “Vermont maintains a Dual Enrollment Program, under which high school students take college courses at public expense. The program’s main purpose is to promote opportunities for students to achieve postsecondary readiness through high-quality educational experiences. Students at public, secular private, and home-schools are eligible, but the state categorically excludes students at private religious high schools.” According to the suit, the students wanted to take college classes under the Dual Enrollment program but were not permitted to do so because they attend a Catholic high school.



Department of Education, two-thirds of the students participating in the state’s tax credit scholarship program maintained their performance or grew academically. Per the Department, the program allows a student whose family has a household income not more than 300 percent of the federal poverty level to apply for a scholarship from an approved scholarship organization. The scholarship provides support for the student to attend a registered private school, as well as other purposes. Over 6,000 scholarships have been awarded since the launch of the program in 2015.

Mississippi

A bill extending and expanding Mississippi’s Education Scholarship Account program died in the Legislature. A proposal to extend the program to 2024 had been passed by the Mississippi Senate, but did not make it to the governor’s desk. As described by the Mississippi Department of Education, the program “is designed to give those parents with special needs children the option of withdrawing their child from the public school system and receiving a designated amount of funds to help defray the cost of private school tuition or other specific allowable activities to educate their child.” Without reauthorization, the program will sunset in 2020.

As described by the Mississippi Department of Education, the program “is designed to give those parents with special needs children the option of withdrawing their child from the public school system and receiving a designated amount of funds to help defray the cost of private school tuition or other specific allowable activities to educate their child.” Without reauthorization, the program will sunset in 2020.

Wisconsin

A new [study](#) shows a reduced rate of criminal activity and paternity suits for students who participate in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). The study was conducted by Corey A. DeAngelis and Patrick J. Wolf and is titled “Private School Choice and Character: More Evidence from Milwaukee.” In it, the authors “examine the effects of Milwaukee’s school voucher program on adult criminal activity and paternity suits. Using matched student-level data, we find that exposure to the program in 8th or 9th grade predicts lower rates of conviction for criminal activity and lower rates of paternity suits by ages 25 to 28. Specifically, exposure to the MPCP is associated with a reduction of around 53 percent in drug convictions, 86 percent in property damage convictions, and 38 percent in paternity suits.”

West Virginia

The West Virginia Senate passed legislation establishing Education Saving Accounts (ESA), but the proposal, which was part of a larger package of education-related provisions, ultimately died. After a standoff with the state’s teachers union that led to a teacher strike, legislative leaders shelved the legislation. The Senate bill would have allowed 2,500 students to receive \$3,200 in education savings accounts for purposes that would include private education. A later version was downsized to 1,000 ESAs for those with special needs, but that too failed to survive the legislative gauntlet.

Illinois

Last month’s *Outlook* covered the number of people applying to Illinois’ new tax credit scholarship program for students from low-income families. In February, Governor J.B. Pritzker released his proposed budget for fiscal year 2020, in which he recommends that the program be substantially scaled back and phased out over the next three years. It seems school choice advocates in the Land of Lincoln will have a fight on their hands.

Nevada

According to a [report](#) from the Nevada

CAPE notes

★ In the State of the Union address, President Trump made a brief mention of school choice, saying, “To help support working parents, the time has come to pass School Choice for Americans’ children.” Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos followed up with a statement of her own: “Too many American students are far too limited by the current education ‘system’ that assigns them to a school building based solely on where they live. That means their family income largely dictates their education options. But the freedom to choose the right education should not only be for the rich, powerful and connected. All students should have the freedom to pursue an education that develops their talents, unleashes their unique potential and prepares them for a successful life. The President was exactly right tonight to remind the nation of his call to expand education freedom. I look forward to continuing to work with Congress on ways to give students opportunities to pursue the education that engages their curiosity, unlocks their creativity and empowers them to reach their fullest potential. It’s time to do what’s best for kids and get to work.”

★ The budget shutdown officially ended when President Trump signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 on February 15. Funding for the US Department of Education had already been approved in September and so was not part of the shutdown. However, the


Consolidated Appropriations Act does contain funding for the Department of Justice’s STOP School Violence Act.

★ In February, EdChoice released a report titled “The Private School Teacher Skills Gap.” In it, author Michael Q. McShane investigates the following question: “Do private school educators need a different set of skills than public school educators need to be successful?” According to McShane, “it turns out, the vast majority of skills that make an educator successful in the private sector are also important in the public sector. Managing classrooms, planning instruction, administering assessments, and much of the day-to-day work of educators looks the same in both sectors. There is, however, a discrete set of skills that private school educators need that their public school colleagues don’t. Because private schools often act as independent and autonomous organizations, leaders need more preparation in legal compliance and accounting and finance than their public school peers. Because they almost always exist in a competitive space, private school educators were also more likely to indicate that they needed more public relations and marketing skills. Because private schools are more likely to be faith-based, both teachers and leaders indicated the need to act as faith leaders and models of faith.”



★ The American Federation for Children (AFC) describes its “Voices for

Choice” story portal as “a place where advocates, legislators, and families can come to read about the personal success stories behind school choice programs in states across the country.” Visitors to the site will encounter some outstanding young people with amazing stories to tell. You can view the profiles at www.federationforchildren.org/voices-for-choice/.

★ CAPE’s national board and leaders of the State CAPE Network will be meeting in Washington, DC in March to discuss issues of importance to private schools. On the agenda: substantial equivalency regulations in New York (see the January 2019 edition of *Outlook*), the Trump Administration’s newly proposed Education Freedom Scholarships, ESSA implementation, and a range of other issues.



EDOPS
Operational Excellence in Support
of Student Achievement

-  Finance & Accounting
-  Facilities Support
-  Student Data

www.ed-ops.com

