

# CAPE Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

February 1992 Number 178

**Council Members:** American Montessori Society • Association of American Military Colleges and Schools of the U.S. • Christian Schools International • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Friends Council on Education • Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod • National Association of Episcopal Schools • National Association of Independent Schools • National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children • National Catholic Educational Association • National Society for Hebrew Day Schools • Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education, K-12 • Solomon Schechter Day School Association • U.S. Catholic Conference • **Affiliated state organizations in:** Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin

## CAPE Coordinates "Choice" Coalition

CAPE organized a coalition of 20 national, nonprofit groups to support educational choice legislation considered in the Senate in January. The "National Coalition for Improvement and Reform of American Education" endorsed the "Low-Income School Choice Demonstration" amendment offered by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) to S. 2, the Neighborhood School Improvement Act.

### Choice Test Focus

The coalition, representing a majority of CAPE members as well as other concerned organizations, focused its efforts on the demonstration project amendment as an appropriate federal test of the educational choice concept.

The coalition pronounced its commitment "to promoting legislation which holds promise for widespread reform and improvement of American schools" -- public and private. Upon its public announcement of formation on January 16, the coalition further stated its belief that, "while not a panacea, choice offers parents and schools an important tool for forge lasting, meaningful, systemic reform."

"Low-income families should have choices regarding their children's education just as wealthier people do," said Joyce McCray, CAPE executive director and coalition spokesperson. "We can't ignore the fact that there are children out there who are failed by the system. This is

a perfect chance -- without jeopardizing any existing programs -- to see how choice can work for those children."

The choice amendment would have authorized \$30 million to fund six demonstration sites for choice proposals. Offered by Senator Hatch with the co-sponsorship of New Jersey Democrat Bill Bradley, the legislation would fund proposals directed at low-income families over a three-year period of time.

### Coalition Lobbies Hill

In a letter to Senators signed by the 20 organizations comprising the new coalition, the group stated that "12% of the nation's children are enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools because their parents value the excellence those schools represent and have the means to pay tuition, choose to make certain sacrifices to do so, or receive financial aid from churches or schools." It went on to state that other families "have the ability to choose excellent public schools by moving to more affluent school districts."

The letter concluded that "innovation prompted by healthy competition can spur basic reform of our beleaguered educational system" and that the federal government should "invest in this education reform venture."

In a four-page position paper, developed with the help of representatives of the various organization members, the coalition outlined several reasons why the Senate should approve the amendment. In addition

## Choice Amendment Vote Fails

In the first floor vote to be held in nine years in the Senate on legislation identified as a private school issue, the Senate defeated the "Low-Income School Choice Demonstration" amendment by a vote of 57 to 36.

The vote, held on January 23, was primarily along party-lines with Democrats opposing the \$30 million program and Republicans supporting it. Three Democrats were among the 36 "yea" votes while six Republicans joined the amendment's opponents. Seven Senators were absent.

The vote was viewed by many as a political blow to the President's "America 2000" education strategy as well as his claim to be the "Education President", especially coming four weeks before the New Hampshire primary.

Arguing against the Senate's action, Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander stated, "I would not want to be the Democrat going around the country this fall saying, 'I proudly



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**Vote...**

cast all my votes to dribble a little bit more money into a system that's not working and against radical change." He also said that he "can't understand why the Democrats think it's a smart political issue to begin the year by coming down squarely on the side of business as usual in the American school system."

The education bill, S. 2, was later passed by a 92 to 6 margin on January 28.

to empowering parents and the success of private schools in inner-cities, the paper cited growing public support for choice and existing accountability of private schools that might participate in the demonstration program.

The paper stated that "an essential component of child development and student success must clearly fall on the parent(s)" and that empowerment of those families to exercise educational choice can be successful. It further explained that since inner-city school districts are those in greatest need of reform, the Hatch amendment's focus would provide the best opportunity to help low-income families.

A National Association of Independent Schools public opinion poll was also cited in the position paper noting that 57% of American adults support the idea of a federally funded voucher system including public and private schools and that 87% believe private schools are "good for the country because they give parents a choice" in education.

It was a Gallup poll which showed that African-Americans and inner-city residents were most dissatisfied with public schools; only 25% gave high ratings to their schools as compared with the national average of 42%.

Several public school organizations lobbying against the amendment questioned the Constitutionality of choice programs involving religiously-affiliated schools. The coalition responded by quoting a recent Congressional Research Service brief which argued that "indirect assistance in the form of tax benefits or education grants ... [has] not been held to be absolutely forbidden" by the Supreme Court, as the federal aid was to

families, not institutions.

**White House Priority**

The Bush Administration had been involved in early and intense negotiations with Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), Chairman of the Labor and Human Resources Committee since the "America 2000" strategy was introduced last May. However, after the Committee reported S. 2, the Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act, on a partisan vote in November, the Department of Education sounded a veto warning if certain key amendments were not added to the legislation.

Prior to the Senate's adjournment before Thanksgiving, the legislation was nearly brought to the floor for consideration, but put off due to Republican objections. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Maine) arranged for the education bill to be the first issue debated in 1992.

The White House immediately made the education bill a priority and increased the pressure on the Senate to approve three key amendments to S. 2: one on regulatory flexibility, one with New American Schools funding, and the Hatch, low-income school choice amendment.

In a January 14 speech before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, President Bush laid out the Administration's position. The President stated that "while Americans across the nation are working to spark a revolution for the future, the Senate regrettably remains riveted on the past." He claimed that "when the American people want transformation, we are being offered business as usual" in the Kennedy bill, S. 2.

A week later, after the Senate began debate on the legislation, the Chamber issued a strong letter to Senators urging adoption of the three Administration amendments. This was a first for the powerful, pro-business Washington lobby which typically remains silent on such social agenda issues.

On January 21, representatives of the coalition met with Administration officials -- including newly appointed chief of staff Samuel Skinner, Education Secretary Lamar Alexander, White House domestic advisor Roger Porter -- to discuss and design strategies for the Hatch amendment. The meeting, held in the West Wing of the White House, was upon the invitation of the Ad-

ministration. According to McCray, the meeting "was a good opportunity to offer suggestions and share information on the Hatch amendment with key Administration policymakers."

**Senate Consideration**

By the time the Senate began debate on the Hatch amendment, Administration officials and Senate leaders had worked out agreements on the regulatory flexibility amendment offered by Senator Mark Hatfield (R-Oregon) and the New American Schools amendment offered by Senator Thad Cochran (R-Mississippi). Both primary amendments were accepted by 95-0 and 96-0 votes. (See "Legislative Update" on page 3 for more on the Cochran amendment.)

Coalition support for the amendment intensified with representatives making strategic Hill visits with Senators and staff members. "Grassroots" efforts to Senators undecided about the amendment complemented the visits. In addition, CAPE and many of its members sent letters to the Senate in support of the amendment.

Sr. Lourdes Sheehan, secretary for education of the United States Catholic Conference and CAPE board member, urged Senators in a letter to support the amendment which "recognizes and encourages the right of all parents, especially the economically disadvantaged, to choose schools most appropriate for their children." A similar letter from the President of Agudath Israel of America, another coalition member, argued that the "most obvious benefit would be the development of factual data that will enable America to make intelligent decisions in this important area of educational policy in the years to come."

Prior to the Senate vote on the issue, Senator Bradley said on the floor of the Senate that although "choice may not be the panacea for all our nation's education ills ... we cannot afford not to take an honest look at whether more options would help kids who today are trapped in the worst schools in our poorest areas." In opposing the measure however, Senator Kennedy argued that scarce public resources should not be used as "a Preparatory School Relief Act."

Despite the setback of the Senate vote, the coalition will stay in place to study and promote other choice proposals.

continued from page 2

## Legislative Update:

### CAPE Conference Next Month

It is not too late to register for the CAPE Legislative Conference scheduled for March 17-18. The conference will include legislative updates, a White House briefing, and time to visit Members of Congress about issues of concern to private schools.

Most conference events will be held at the Sheraton City Centre Hotel and Towers in Washington. A special CAPE room rate for early reservations will be honored by calling (202) 775-0800. A registration fee of \$120 is required of participants. For more information on the conference, please call CAPE at (202) 659-0016.

### Bush for Head Start Increase

Prior to his State of the Union address and delivery of the 1993 budget, President Bush announced his intention to support an increase in funding for the Head Start program. The program, currently funded at \$2.2 billion, assists pre-school children of low-income families.

The President announced the proposed increase in a speech at a Head Start center in Cantonsville, Maryland. He stated that although "no government program alone can guarantee that children start school ready to learn", Head Start is "a government program that works, that works to strengthen communities and families for the future." The first of the six national education goals adopted by the nation's Governors in 1990 is that "by the year 2000, all children start school ready to learn."

Administration officials estimate that the \$600 million increase would expand services to nearly 780,000 children nationwide. However, estimates are that 2 million children are eligible for the program.

### New Generation of American Public Schools

During consideration of the Senate education bill, S. 2, Senator Thad Cochran (R-Mississippi) attempted to amend the legislation to add a provision from the President's "America 2000" strategy creating a New Generation of American Schools.

The original Administration bill and

Cochran amendment would have authorized seed money to fund grants of up to \$1 million for the development of innovative elementary and secondary "break the mold" schools. The New American Schools Development Corporation, funded by private donations, continues to work on a separate track to help create designs for these and other schools. The "America 2000" bill would also have given the Secretary and Governors authority to nominate and approve recipient grants.

Cochran stated that "these schools would reflect the best of what is known about teaching, learning, and educational technologies and enable all students to meet world class standards of achievement."

A revised amendment negotiated by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, Senator Cochran and others added a provision to the language that "any new public school established under this title ... shall not be affiliated with a nonpublic sectarian school or religious institution." Additionally, authority for selections of grant recipients was removed from the Secretary of Education and given to the state education agencies.

### State of the Union

In the annual State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress on January 28, President Bush reiterated his commitment to "give parents more choice, give teachers more flexibility, and help communities create New American Schools." Citing his "America 2000" education strategy as a way to make the U.S. "the world's leader in education", the President called on Congress to "join this great movement [and] pass my proposals for New American Schools."

### Bush Budget Boosts Baby BEOGs

In a briefing to education leaders, Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander discussed the President's fiscal year 1993 budget priorities in the Department. A new initiative sought in the budget is funding to provide one million scholarships of \$1,000 to children of low- and middle-income families for use at the elementary or secondary school of their choice.

Cited as a "GI Bill for Children", the

program would cost \$500 million with which federal dollars would be matched with state monies to provide the \$1,000 scholarships. Alexander stated that, although the authorizing legislation is not yet drafted, the grant could be spent "for a child at any lawfully operating elementary or secondary school, public or private."

The Secretary also pointed out that of \$3.4 billion in new discretionary spending allowed in the '93 budget, the Department of Education is proposed to receive the largest agency increase with \$1.6 billion. In addition, the Department of Health and Human Services increase of \$600 million for Head Start gives a \$2.2 billion boost to total education spending.

## Capenotes:

Private school enrollment figures for the 1991-92 school year published by the National Center for Education Statistics last month show a slight decline to

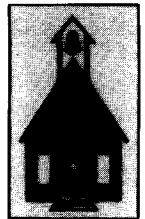
5,193,213. The public school enrollment was calculated at 41.8 million -- up from 41.2 million the year before. Private school students constitute just over 11% of the total elementary and secondary student enrollment.

The student-teacher ratio has remained stable at 14.7 to one in private schools and 17.2 to one in public schools.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has also recently announced a new method of compiling private school data. The report states that "with private schools increasingly drawn into educational policy debates and into school effectiveness comparisons with the public sphere, it is increasingly apparent that the current private school [categories] are incomplete."

The Center has started to categorize private schools in nine subgroups rather than "Catholic", "Other religious", and "Nonsectarian", as has been the practice. The NCES report, "Diversity in Private Schools" argues that expanding the reporting categories "will better capture the diversity" of private schools and "further our understanding of private school education".

Joyce G. McCray, CAPE executive



continued from page 3

director, applauded the new system of research and data collection by the center by stating, "I think it will give private schools an opportunity to understand their own schools more" as opposed to when they were "lumped together" under the previous system of data collection.

► The Department of Education's **Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST)** will accept applications for its 1992 awards until March 18. The Fund will give grants for projects to improve student achievement by forging ties between a local education agency or school and a higher education institution.

A total of seven awards will be made in amounts from \$50,000 to \$150,000. Individuals public and private schools and consortia, as well as higher education institutions or non-profit organizations are eligible to apply.

Interested prospective applicants may contact Carl Jensen at FIRST by writing to 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Room 522, Washington, DC 20208, or calling (202) 219-1496.

► Nominations for the **1992 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching** are open until Feb-

ruary 14. Any elementary or secondary teacher who is assigned to teach the subjects of science or math and has five years experience in public or private school teaching are eligible.

A total of 216 teachers will be recognized by the National Science Foundation with a grant of \$7,500 to be spent under the awardee's direction, to improve school mathematics and science programs.

For further information about elementary school nominations, contact Elementary PAESMT c/o NSTA, 3140 N. Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201 or call (703) 243-7100. Secondary school nomination information can be obtained by writing Secondary PAESMT, NSTA, 5112 Berwyn Rd., 3rd Floor, College Park, MD 20740, or calling (301) 220-0875.

► In a survey of **Who's Who Among American High School Students**, only two thirds (64%) say that, given a choice, they would attend their current high school while 34% would choose a different school. The same sample was asked if they would prefer to go to a different area public or private school. On that question, 57% said they would choose a public school while 40% would choose a private school.

Of public school students polled, 38%

say they would choose a "different school" than the one they attend, while only 22% of private school students would do so.

Of the students polled, 75% of earn an "A" average and 24% earn a "B" average. Further, 73% feel that the "United States public education is weak in comparison to Japan."

► A 19-minute videotape entitled "**A Parents' Guide to Asbestos In Our Schools**" has been produced and is being distributed.

The videotape is intended to inform parents about asbestos, the purpose and function of the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, and parents' responsibilities under AHERA. It was produced under grants provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State of Illinois Department of Energy and Natural Resources

The tape and a discussion guide is especially designed to assist parents and school administrators or designated school asbestos managers in their efforts to deal with asbestos in their schools.

The tape, discussion guide, and a user's manual are available for \$34.95, which includes shipping and handling. Contact Arlene Swartzman at Lark Communications, (312) 275-6115 for more information.

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