

# cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

October 1994 Number 204

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## Reform Recipes Reveal Private School Ingredients

*An Essay*

by *Greg D. Kubiak*

After many years of debate, the publication of numerous studies, and hundreds of hours of testimony before Congress and state legislatures, the education reform movement has yielded one, clear trend. In all the efforts to "re-invent" education and improve the quality of learning in the classroom, the crusade has promoted qualities and principles common to private schools.

Beyond the adversarial arguments surrounding the issue of school choice, vouchers or tax credits for private school tuition, many reform endeavors skirt the controversy by trying to make public schools more like private schools. Within the reform menu of initiatives and issues is charter schools, privatization, school-based management, homeschooling, as well as school finance inequity lawsuits and a different look at the teaching profession.

### State, Federal Fixes Have Common Thread

In nearly a dozen years since the hallmark study *A Nation At Risk*, public concern and government attention to stagnant student performance has only increased. While lagging test scores were a chief predicament to educators at the end of the last decade, the roots of the problem seem to have grown more complex. Today, a deeper look into the morass reveals a public education system fraught with deep inequities in finance, as well as increasing problems with violence

and discipline.

After the reams of research, attention to test scores, and calls for more money, many of the remedies for education's ills have a common thread to private education. Federal and state legislators are creating opportunities and inducements to create "charter schools" — schools organized by teachers and citizens, free from oppressive oversight of a central office. Instead of relying on career education bureaucrats to filter down how to staff, run, and teach in a school, "charters" allow the founders to utilize the energy and talents of teachers to run schools.

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The teaching profession is also targeted for reform attention. One effort has been to allow for alternative teacher certification, like that shepherded in New Jersey in recent years. This recognizes a private school principle of having a well trained professional teaching in the classroom, rather than an education schooled teacher professing in a classroom.

Further, the establishment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has begun a movement to

truly "professionalize" the profession. Rigorous "master teacher" standards are being developed by the NBPTS. Also, there is renewed state house debate on merit pay, signaling potential change in certification and professional standards of teachers. Perhaps peer review and the same individual performance criteria for most private school teachers will one day be the norm in public schools.

The crisis in urban schools has brought remedies once decried as radical among some public education officials and protectors of church-state separation. Not only have districts from Minnesota to Maryland contracted out certain instructional duties to for-profit entities, but the debate on "character" and values education has quieted public education purists. Once seen as a backdoor attempt to bring religion into public schools, building character and teaching values are finally seen as mainstream necessities for learning and growing. Even though most private schools do model the values inherent in a particular religious tradition, the principle of respect for one's self and others is as much a product of school environment as it is any religious tenet.

A mission of private schools is to create an appropriate learning environment for the student. Inherent in that effort is a central doctrine of personal character, respect and honesty. However,



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public school parents and leaders have begun to agree that such training is not a market to be cornered by religiously affiliated schools.

A final "reform" deserving of mention is the renewed focus on parents as partners in education. Parental involvement in their children's education was added as the eighth and last of the national education goals codified with passage of the "Goals 2000" education reform bill earlier this year. Secretary Riley also has initiated an intense public campaign this fall to stress this necessity. In so doing, he has reached out to religious institutions and private schools groups as integral participants in stressing parental involvement. Even Congress has recognized parents inherent interest in their children's education by voting to give them the right of choice in the Chapter 1 program for students from low-income, disadvantaged families.

### Challenge for the Future

Clearly, private schools have known for their 350 years of existence in this country that parents are the first and most important teachers in their children's lives. And respecting their need to have schools pick up where parents leave off, choice in education will continue to be a principle that is discussed in any serious debate on school reform and improvement.

The prescriptions for improving the learning experiences of our nation's children will require increased responsibilities for the various stakeholders. The public school community should not denounce privatization trends or parental choice as backward attempts to de-fund public education. Private school leaders, teachers, and parents cannot smugly sit back as spectators in this race of transformation. While we very well serve the public good, our responsibility goes beyond passive, philanthropic gestures of leadership by example.

The 21st century will bring treacherous unknowns for private and public schools alike, with continued financial stress, complex advances in technology, and more intellectual competition in a global classroom. We must be activists for change and improvement for ourselves, and all schools, respecting the principles of independence and the cause of educational excellence.

**EDITORS NOTE:** This marks my 42nd and final issue as editor of Outlook. I am

leaving CAPE on October 31 to explore new professional and writing opportunities, as well as promote my new book, *The Gilded Dome*. To the CAPE board of directors, the many colleagues and friends with whom I have associated, and Joyce McCray and the CAPE staff, I offer sincere thanks for a growing and educational experience these past four years.

### From the Executive Director...

Greg Kubiak will leave CAPE at the end of October after four years of dedicated and creative work. We are grateful for his many contributions in support of CAPE's mission. He has represented well the interests of the private school community on the Hill, brought innovations to our monthly newsletter and was instrumental in developing CAPE's now annual legislative conference and Leadership Award dinner. He is our friend and esteemed colleague and we wish him continued success. We shall miss him indeed!

*Joyce G. McCray*

## New ADA Guidelines for Blue Ribbon Schools

*by Fay O'Brien*

There has been a significant change in the eligibility criteria for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The U.S. Department of Education, acting in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, has added specifications dealing with the accessibility of nominated schools to students, parents, staff and others with disabilities.

The result of these changes has evoked an outcry from the private and public school communities regarding the new criteria in the Blue Ribbons Schools 1994-95 Secondary School Program. The number of letters and telephone calls clearly demonstrates the concern of the private schools in regard to meeting the new regulations, which in some cases go beyond ADA's original intent. In order to help clarify the regulations and keep all private school abreast of the changes within the Blue Ribbon Schools' nomination package, CAPE has been providing important information.

A few examples of the requirements are: There must be a visual alarm system in every classroom, hallway, office, gymnasium, and bathroom; every public room in the school, including classrooms, offices, and auditoriums, must be accessible to a person in a wheelchair; every bathroom must have a handicapped accessible stall and handicapped accessible covered sink; ramps must have a length to height ratio of 12 to 1; and there must be one handicapped accessible drinking fountain for every regular drinking fountain.

Schools that do not meet the ADA guidelines, but have implemented a plan to have all construction completed by May of 1996, within one year of being recognized, may be nominated. Schools that have been previously recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools must be readily accessible and usable for people with disabilities in order for the school to be nominated again.

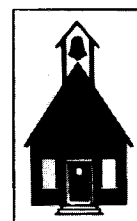
CAPE strongly supports the ADA law. The new Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, however, go above and beyond the law, to which there are no exceptions. Please contact the CAPE office should have any questions.

## NDN Advisory Committee Meets: Looks Toward the Millennium

*by Frank X. Delany*

A lively annual meeting of the Private School Community Advisory Committee to CAPE's Private School Facilitator Project focused on the proposal due next spring. This will be the third, four-year grant proposal submitted by CAPE, which would take the Project through September, 1999. While proud of the record of the Project in bringing NDN staff development resources to thousands of private school teachers (and their students) across the nation since 1987, the Committee felt that the Project had to meet new challenges and move in new directions as we approached the year 2000.

Building on the success of the past, the Committee felt



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that the Project should place greater emphasis on sustaining the impact and maximizing the results of NDN programs in terms of the specific staff development goals of the schools using them. This would mean greater involvement with local educators throughout the process from program selection to follow-up.

Technology and networking were two areas that the Committee wants to see addressed in the new proposal. The appropriate use of emerging technology could make staff development more cost efficient in general and deliver NDN staff development to the many small private schools in rural areas.

Networking and greater coordination with the many other entities which have an impact on the dissemination of staff development programs could help private schools become contributors to as well as consumers of the NDN. Among the partners in this coordination should be the Regional Labs, the Star Schools Program, the National Science Foundation, and many colleges which have denominational or other ties with private schools.

The ideal is a dialogue in practice among creative educators working within every school environment and educational philosophy. A potential new level of validation for the NDN, Promising Practices, could help make this ideal a reality. A place to start would be the inclusion of some private schools in the validation process of NDN programs from any source.

There was general agreement with a draft paper by Elizabeth Farquhar, NDN Staff Director, anticipating a redesign of the NDN. Farquhar advocated greater interaction with practitioners, adaptation to local situations as well as fidelity to the essential principals of a program. She further urges the development of local capacity (e.g. Certified Trainers), follow-up and evaluation of programs in context, and increased connections between the NDN and other providers of staff development and technical assistance.

Farquhar's paper also spoke of school reform and a priority concern for at-risk students. The Committee pointed out that private schools served many at-risk students and that essential elements of school reform such as site-based decision making and teacher empowerment were consistent values in the continuing pursuit of excellence in private education. They felt that now, more than ever, private and public educators had

much of value to share with each other.

The Committee also had concerns. They noted that there were many instances in which Eisenhower and Chapter 2 funds that could be used for NDN staff development were so administratively cumbersome to access at the local level that they were, practically speaking, inaccessible to private schools. They also noted increased costs involved in some of the newer NDN programs. The kind of in-depth, coordinated NDN dissemination called for would cost more. But they concluded this was a particularly exciting time to work with the NDN for those who believed in pluralism in American education.

## Private School Teachers Empowered

Private school teachers are generally more pleased with issues concerning school policy and classroom activity, according to a study released by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

"Who's in Charge", released by OERI in August, studied responses of teachers who indicate "considerable control" over various policy issues like discipline, ability grouping and establishing curriculum. The rankings show 54 percent of private school teachers indicating they had power to determine policies in discipline, compared to 37 percent of public school teachers. The comparable numbers for "ability grouping" and curriculum establishment by private school teachers over their public school counterparts was 45 to 27 and 54 to 35, respectively.

In the area of classroom practices, private school teachers also outranked public school teachers in control over textbook selection, teaching techniques and evaluating students. Sixty-eight percent of private school teachers have control over picking texts for courses, compared to 55 percent in public schools. In the area of teaching technique, private school teachers had slightly more autonomy than their colleagues in public schools, by a ratio of 93 to 87 percent. The same was true for the issue of evaluating students, on which the percentage of control was 91 to 86 percent. In the area of "amount of homework" assigned, both sets of teachers indicated an 87 percent level of control.

The full study is available at no charge by

writing Judith Anderson, Director of Special Studies, Office of Research, OERI, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Room 611B, Washington, D.C. 20208.

## Legislative Update:

### Nutrition Programs to be Reauthorized

School breakfast and lunch programs administered through the Department of Agriculture are due to be reauthorized before the end of the Congressional session. H.R. 8, a bill to re-write the Child Nutrition and National School Lunch acts, was passed by the House in July. The Senate version, S. 1614, was passed in August.

Both bills maintain the current eligibility requirement for subsidized meals as well as various provisions to reduce administrative burdens in providing the program.

It is expected that a conference committee will be appointed and complete a compromise version in time for passage by Congress in October.

### ESEA Reauthorization

House and Senate conferees completed work on H.R. 6, the bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act through 1999. The conference report must still be passed by both houses and signed by the President before adjournment this month.

CAPE wrote the conferees about a number of issues of concern, particularly the reformation of the Chapter 1 program which was the most controversial aspect of the re-writing of the law. In a letter dated September 16, CAPE executive director Joyce G. McCray said, "We are very concerned with the fundamental shift in the Title I program proposed in the Senate version." She noted that "the ESEA has insured assistance and services to educationally disadvantaged students in low-income areas," but that the Senate version of the bill could potentially deny such services to others with real need." She urged the conferees to the House provisions for Title I.

Also presenting a problem for private schools was language passed in the Senate version, S. 1513, which would create "a new bureaucratic burden for nonpublic schools," according to the McCray letter. She said, "Requiring our schools to provide verifiable

documentation on the level of poverty of their students, assumes direct financial assistance being given to these schools," and would create an unfair administrative burden.

The programs under ESEA must be renewed or extended before Congressional adjournment.

## Chapter 2 Funded

The school improvement fund, commonly referred to as Chapter 2, cleared a major hurdle after being recommended for elimination in the early phase of the ESEA reauthorization consideration and the 1995 budget. The program was provided \$347 million for fiscal year 1995 in **H. R. 4606**. The conference on the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Education and Health and Human Services was completed on September 20.

In efforts to support the Chapter 2 program, CAPE worked with a coalition of public and private school organizations. CAPE argued in letters to Congress that the program is "flexible, simple, and highly responsive to local and state priorities for school improvement." CAPE also pointed out to the appropriations committees that "private schools have made beneficial use of these flexible funds to cover costs of library materials, computer instruction, and other resources which provide academic enrich-

ment for our students and teachers. Educators consistently rate Chapter 2 as the most effective and helpful federal education program — simple, inexpensive to administer, and responsive to local needs."

## Technology Bill Dead for Year

Several bills of interest to private school will have to wait for 1995 to be considered by a new Congress. Among the issues will be health care reform and an omnibus technology and communications bill.

CAPE was especially concerned with the technology legislation, **S. 1822**, and made efforts to insure private school access to the "information superhighway." In a letter to Members of the Senate Commerce Committee this summer, CAPE urged that private schools be explicitly identified as eligible for "preferential rates" to be made available to educational institutions desiring access to various on-line technological and information services.

Committee chairman, Senator Ernest Hollings (D-South Carolina) said he and his committee will try again next year.

## Adjournment Nears as Elections Approach

With the November 8 elections just a month away, the 103rd Congress is expected to complete its business within days, shelving a number of issues for the next Congress

to tackle. While the target adjournment date of October 7 is an unlikely end point of the session, Congressional observers expect the legislative year to end by mid-month.

## CAPENOTES:



▶ A new, joint educational television partnership has just been announced by **The History Channel** and **The National Trust for Historic Preservation**. The network will delve into the past with a full slate of exclusive historical documentaries, movies, and mini-series.

One program under development is a documentary featuring the "11-Most Endangered Historic Sites" identified by the National Trust each year. Another will feature "Kykuit", the Rockefeller family estate which opened to the public this summer and is the latest addition to the Trust's diverse collection of historic properties.

The History Channel, a 24-hour televised channel devoted to history programming, will debut this new effort on January 1, 1995 at 7:00 p.m. (EST). The channel is a part of the A & E Television Network, a joint venture of Hearst/ABC/NBC.

Watch for this educational programming starting next year or call LaDebra L. Moore at (212) 210-1328 at The History Channel.

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