

**Council Members:** American Montessori Society • 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 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 31 States

## Nation Receives Reading Report Card

### Private School Students Score Well Above National Average

If "reading maketh a full man," as Francis Bacon said some 400 years ago, then American children still have far to go in their quest to achieve full human potential. The country received its report card in reading last month, and sad to say, only 33 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders scored at or above the proficient level, a level described in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as representing "solid academic performance."

There was some good news, however, in the latest results, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., who heads the Center, reported that the 1998 reading survey showed "some improvement in reading achievement nationally, particularly at grade 8 and since 1994." The share of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students scoring at or above the proficient mark rose a full three percentage points since 1994.

The NAEP reading test measured the performance of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students in public and private schools. National results were reported for the three grades in two ways: average scale scores on a scale that ranges from 0 to 500, and percent of students

performing at or above three achievement levels: basic (partial mastery of fundamental skills and knowledge), proficient (solid academic performance), and advanced (superior performance). Similar national assessments were conducted in 1992 and 1994, allowing NCES to chart and compare student performance over time.

As noted in the 200-page *Reading Report Card to the Nation*, "For all three grades in 1998,

students in nonpublic schools outperformed their peers in public schools." As detailed in the chart, there were significant across-the-board differences between the two sectors in the percentage

of students performing at the basic, proficient, and advanced levels. Similarly, private school students had much higher scale scores than public school students in grades 4 (233 private/215 public), 8 (281/261), and 12 (303/289). At a news conference on the release of the NAEP scores, Under Secretary of Education Marshall Smith said ten points on the NAEP scale equals about one grade level.

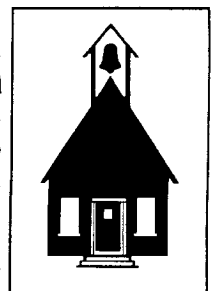


% of Students At or Above Key Levels in NAEP Reading Test		
	Public	Private
<b>Grade 4</b>		
Basic	61	78
Proficient	29	46
Advanced	6	14
<b>Grade 8</b>		
Basic	72	91
Proficient	31	54
Advanced	2	5
<b>Grade 12</b>		
Basic	76	87
Proficient	39	54
Advanced	5	9

#### Riley Response

Reacting to the reading results, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley offered a prescription for improvement: "When we don't teach our children to read well by the end of the third grade, they are often condemned to fall behind. We must encourage more parents to get involved, schools to strengthen their instruction on reading, and many more members of the community to volunteer as reading tutors."

The full report, entitled *NAEP 1998 Reading Report Card to the Nation*, is available on the NCES Website: <http://nces.ed.gov/>



## Public and Private School Groups Issue Title I Statement

In the world of education news, February 4 was one of those "man bites dog" days. You see, it is not all that unusual for national organizations representing public schools and private schools to issue carefully-crafted statements on federal education programs. But when they issue the *same* carefully-crafted statement, that's a story.

What prompted the joint communication was the pending reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the eight-billion-dollar gorilla of federal education programs. The statement calls for full funding of Title I and may very well represent the first time some of the nation's major public school groups have gone on record in support of federal assistance to children in nonpublic schools. Rev. William Davis, representative for Catholic schools and federal assistance for the U.S. Catholic Conference, one of 14 endorsing organizations, called the statement "an historic achievement in the support for education in our country."

### Help for Disadvantaged

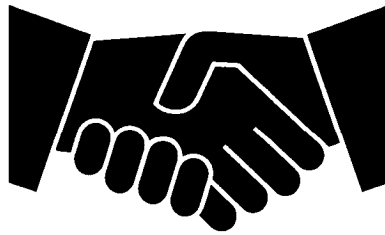
The signers pledged to seek a reauthorized Title I program that provides "substantial additional dollars" for services to "poor and educationally disadvantaged children enrolled in public, private, and religious schools."

"We are all committed to seeing that America's most disadvantaged, most vulnerable children get the help they need to meet high academic standards, no matter what kind of school they attend," said Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Echoing the focus on children, Dr. John Scibilia, director for schools for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said, "Children are our common language," and added that collaborative efforts would "send a consistent message of the urgency for action on behalf of children."

In addition to supporting more money for Title I, the associations that signed the statement said they would oppose Title I-funded vouchers as well

as efforts to "block grant" the program, calling such proposals "neither politically viable nor necessary." Private school representatives made it clear that the statement's opposition to vouchers and block grants is restricted to the pending reauthorization of Title I and does not extend to any other federal program.



Indeed, some of the groups that signed the statement are strongly committed to vouchers and tax credits that advance the right of parents to choose the schools their children attend.

Jack Jennings, director of the Center on Education Policy, who helped broker the statement, said: "I hope we're setting an example for people at the state and local level that public and private school people should start talking to one another. We should try to find ways to agree on things, rather than having all of us divided all of the time."

### Signers

The following organizations signed the statement:

American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, American Montessori Society, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council of the Great City Schools, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - Division for Higher Education and Schools, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Episcopal Schools, National Association of Independent Schools, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Catholic Educational Association, National Education Association, National School Boards Association, United States Catholic Conference.

### Six Principles for Title I

In their joint statement on Title I, the coalition of public, private, and religious organizations identified six principles that should mark the reauthorization of ESEA. They said they would work for a bill that:

1. Is consistent with the child benefit principle of providing special types of assistance to meet the needs of disadvantaged school children and only incidentally serving the school or school district.

2. Is consistent with the public trustee principle - Title I funds would flow to public authorities, who in turn would arrange for services to all eligible children.

3. Requires that public, private and religious school officials continue to work together to provide benefits to poor and educationally disadvantaged children.

4. Supplies substantial additional dollars to local school districts with the greatest number of poor and educationally disadvantaged children enrolled in public, private, and religious schools.

5. Is a categorical program that targets resources to the most disadvantaged children and also permits flexibility in the use of these funds at the local level in order to meet the needs of children.

6. Requires that Title I funds supplement other education programs students are entitled to and prohibits the supplanting of these funds.



## Conference Participants See Choice as an Issue of Justice

Parents, professors, and policymakers told participants at a symposium on school choice last month that helping poor parents secure a quality education for their children is a moral imperative and a matter of social justice.

The conference, called *Partners for Justice*, was sponsored in Washington, D.C., by the National Catholic Educational Association, the world's largest private professional education association. According to Dr. Leonard DeFiore, NCEA president, the symposium was intended to educate the Catholic school community about the "myriad issues involved in school choice" and to help people "engage in the public policy debate."

### Lieberman: Keep on Marching

Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, who addressed the conference during a break from the impeachment trial, said school choice would provide some children "a way out of bad schools" and would boost public school performance. Pledging to "keep on marching" for parent choice, Lieberman emphasized the importance of saving children from failing schools. Quoting from the Talmud, the senator said, "If you save one life, it is as if you've saved the world."

### Flake: Civil Rights Issue

Former Democratic Congressman Floyd Flake, another conference speaker, called school choice "the next move in the civil rights movement." He said the children for whom *Brown v. Board of Education* was fought suffer the most when public schools provide a substandard education. Further, their parents are put in double jeopardy when they pay taxes for a quality education and then have to pay tuition in cases where the public school system doesn't deliver a quality product. The challenge, he said, is to "bring about equality."

Flake, pastor of the Allen AME Church in New York City, called on black pastors to establish church schools

so that children can get a quality education. "I hope that together we can join hands and move toward that day when justice will become a reality for every child in America," he said.

### Coons: Treat Rich and Poor Alike

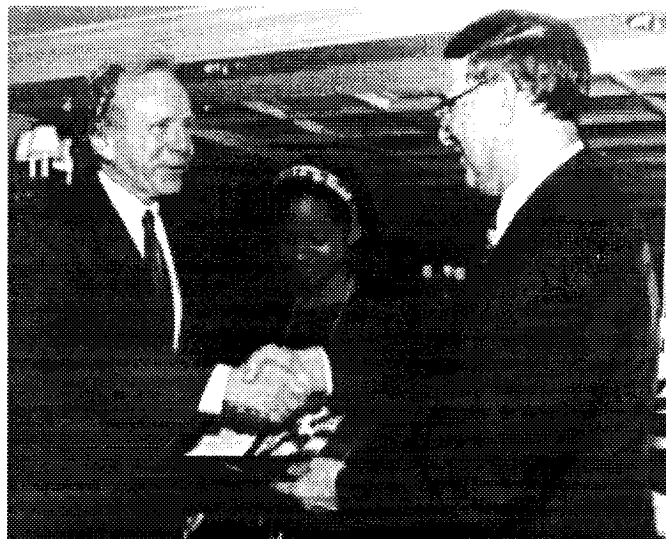
Another presenter, John E. Coons, professor emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley, said low-income families should be given the same opportunity to choose their child's school as families of privilege. What is good for the rich is good for the poor, he said, and then went on to chastise those who "flaunt their stewardship for the poor while tolerating a system that keeps the poor in their place."

In another tack, Coons noted the ongoing disagreements and lack of professional consensus about the best way to transmit even the 3R's to children. He said that fact combined with the fact that different children have different traits, gifts, and experiences makes it "grotesque" to match a child to a particular methodology merely on the basis of the parents' street address. "This nonetheless has been the 'rationale' of our historic conscription of the non-rich," he said. Coons claimed the lack of consensus regarding fundamental pedagogy argues for "an open system in which diverse producers and consumers can seek each other out in the hope of making the individual match that is best for both." Parents, added Coons, are the best agents to match a particular child to a particular school because parents possess three salient

traits: they know the child, they love the child, and they share the child's fate.

Coons also argued that because "school policy is family policy," the act of denying the non-rich an opportunity to choose a child's school diminishes the authority of the parent in the eyes of the child. Poor parents are robbed of the chance to deliver to their children the same message that wealthier parents do when they choose their child's school: "Here in this school you will encounter the content and values we want to share as a family. Heed the voice of your teachers; they speak for us."

Other speakers at the conference



Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) receives an award for his significant contributions to school choice from Dr. Leonard DeFiore, president of the National Catholic Educational Association.

included Senator George Voinovich (R-OH), J. Patrick Rooney, founder of the Educational Choice Charitable Trust, Nina Shokraii Rees of the Heritage Foundation, and Virginia Gilder, who finances a private scholarship program in Albany, NY, called A Better Choice.

NCEA intends to publish the proceedings this spring.





Return Service Requested

---

---

## capenotes

• **Cary Potter**, a founding board member and the first president of CAPE, died of congestive heart failure at his home in Westwood, MA, on February 13, 1999. He was president of the National Association of Independent Schools from 1964 to 1978.

In commenting on Potter's role in helping to establish CAPE, Robert Lamborn, former executive director of CAPE, said: "Cary recognized the need for greater understanding and collaboration among private schools. He was a moving force in convening the meeting of national leaders out of which came the consensus that there should be a national organization which could serve as agent for all of the nation's private schools....As its first president, he played a central role in CAPE's early achievements, in establishing a solid base of accomplishment upon which to build for the future....Scholars of American education have labeled the creation of CAPE 'historic.' There is no reason to believe it would have occurred except for Cary Potter."

The CAPE community is deeply grateful for the vision, scholarship, dedication, and leadership of Cary Potter.

Memorial contributions may be made to Trinity Church at Copley Square, Boston, MA 02116, or to St. Andrew's Dune Church, Dune Road, Southampton, NY 11968.

• Should the American Jewish community support or oppose school vouchers? That question, which lately has assumed renewed prominence within the Jewish community, is the subject of a lively new volume entitled *Vouchers for School Choice: Challenge or Opportunity?* An impressive group of eminent legal scholars, educators, and policymakers offer a range of perspectives in "a civil and mutually respectful discussion" of the issue.

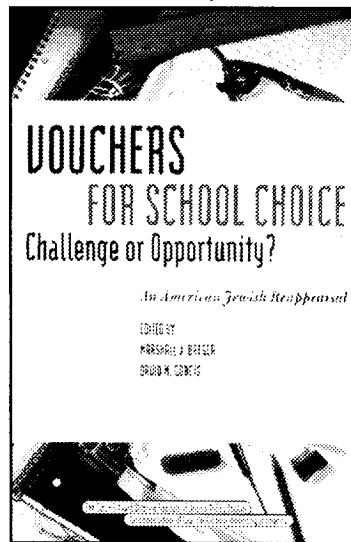
But for all its civility, the discussion does not shy away from some tough

questions: Do vouchers compromise the separation of church and state? Would vouchers expand access to Jewish day schools and thereby serve to strengthen Jewish identity in an increasingly secular society? Are vouchers necessary to improve educational opportunities for children in failing schools? Would they strengthen or harm public schools? The thoughtful essays

in this engaging book attempt to provide some answers and, more importantly, to illuminate the discussion and spark further inquiry.

The book is available for \$12.95 + \$1.50 s&h from:

The Wilstein Institute  
Hebrew College  
43 Hawes Street  
Brookline, MA 02446  
Tel. (617) 278-4974  
Fax. (617) 264-9264  
wilstein@hebrewcollege.edu



**VOUCHERS  
FOR SCHOOL CHOICE**  
*Challenge or Opportunity?*  
*An American Jewish Response*  
EDITED BY  
MARGARET J. BECKER  
DANIEL COHEN

Multiple copy discounts are available.