

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

January 2001 • Number 261

Council Members: American Montessori Society • Association of Christian Schools International • Christian Schools International • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Friends Council on Education • International Christian Accrediting Association • Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod • National Association of Episcopal Schools • National Association of Independent Schools • National Catholic Educational Association • Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education, K-12 • Solomon Schechter Day School Association • Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools • Toussaint Institute for Historically Black Independent Schools • U.S. Catholic Conference • 30 Affiliated State Organizations

Education at the Top of Bush's Legislative Agenda

President-elect George W. Bush made it clear last month that education will be at the top of his legislative agenda for the next Congress. Trying to cobble a Congressional coalition of centrist legislators from outside his own party and a majority of members from within, Bush took steps to advance his agenda and ready it for early action.

His sweeping plan for education includes a range of initiatives involving both public and private schools: tax breaks for parents who save for education, loan forgiveness for teachers in high-need schools, vouchers for students in failing schools.

At a bipartisan meeting in mid-December with education leaders from the



Senate and House, Bush outlined his proposals for school improvement, including accountability, high standards, teacher quality, and local control. Despite discontent shown by some lawmakers about his promise to allow low-income parents of children in chronically poor-performing schools to transfer to private schools, Bush showed no sign of wavering on the issue.

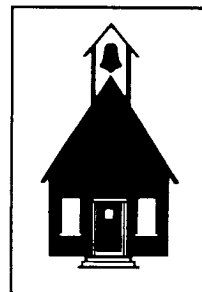
During his campaign for president, then Governor Bush proposed an ambitious agenda for school improvement. In addition to holding public schools accountable for results and empowering some parents with school choice, Bush said he would double the number of charter schools and consolidate some 60

federal programs into five flexible categories. His proposal to improve teacher quality included increased funding for training and recruitment, a teacher tax deduction for out-of-pocket classroom expenses, and a higher cap (from \$5,000 to \$17,500) on loan forgiveness for math and science majors who teach for five years in schools with high concentrations of needy students. To encourage parents to save for their children's education, he proposed an expansion of education savings accounts by increasing the allowable annual contribution from \$500 to \$5,000 and by enabling the accounts to be used for K-12 expenses.

In 1998, both houses of Congress approved proposals for K-12 education savings accounts and also for a pilot voucher program in the District of Columbia. But despite bipartisan support, President Clinton saw fit to veto both proposals. The Bush presidency could mean new life for these measures.

Another theme of the Bush campaign likely to affect private schools is support for faith-based action aimed at helping people in need. Bush believes the government should assist religious programs that have a proven track record in fighting social ills like poverty, drug abuse, and the school dropout problem. In a speech on compassionate conser-

**Continued
on page 2**



Paige to Head Education Dept.

When Rod Paige becomes the next U.S. Secretary of Education, he will establish a few important "firsts" for the position. In addition to being the first African-American and the first urban school superintendent to become secretary, Paige will be the first in the post to have proposed and implemented a district-level program of school choice.

It was for good reason that President-elect Bush, in nominating Houston's superintendent of schools, praised him as a "reformer" with a "record of results." Paige is widely regarded as one of the most successful urban district superintendents in the country. The numbers tell the story. When Paige became superintendent in 1994, 44 percent of the district's students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills; by 1999 the number was 64 percent. The district also saw dramatic decreases in the dropout rate and school crime. In the nomination announcement, Bush said, "I wanted an educator who had proven that urban schools can be excellent schools." In that regard, Paige's

Continued on page 2

“Bush” continued from page 1

vatism, which he delivered in 1999 in Indianapolis, Bush said, “In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people, we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities, and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives.” Such entities, Bush believes, are often more effective than government programs, which can sometimes be impersonal, distant, and bureaucratic. Recognizing the need for religious groups to retain the identity that makes them unique, Bush said in the same speech, “We will never ask an organization to compromise its core values and spiritual mission to get the help it needs.”

One faith-based component of Bush’s education plan is support for an increase in the participation of religious organizations and charities in providing after-school programs for children. Under the current major federal after-school initiative, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the only eligible applicants are public schools and school districts, although they are encouraged to collaborate with various public and private entities in the community. Students in private schools may participate in the community learning centers, which provide weekday, weekend, and summer enrichment activities, but private schools themselves cannot apply for grants. Presumably, under Bush’s plan, private and religious institutions would be eligible applicants and hosts for after-school programs.

By far the most controversial of Bush’s proposals, and the one facing the toughest opposition, is his plan for last-resort vouchers for Title I students in schools that for three years fail to show improvement. Although Bush is expected to include the proposal in the education package he sends to Congress, it is not certain how strongly he will insist on vouchers being part of a final legislative compromise. In any event, the president-elect’s degree of commitment to the issue should be known shortly, since education will surely be one of the first issues he presents to Congress.

“Paige” continued from page 1

record speaks for itself. His success won him an award in 1999 from the Council of the Great City Schools as urban educator of the year, and in 2000 from the National Alliance of Black School Educators as superintendent of the year.

No Child Left Behind

In accepting his nomination as secretary, Paige said, “I will dedicate myself every day to the task of ensuring that no child in America will be left behind.” He makes that promise with considerable credibility. During his tenure, the performance gap between minority and non-minority students in Houston narrowed significantly.

Not shy when it comes to implementing bold reform, Paige has promoted charter schools, private-sector contracting, decentralized management, and standards-based assessment. Yet in a recent commentary in *Education Week*, he made clear his disdain for simple answers to the complex issue of education reform. He quoted H.L. Mencken, who once said that “for every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.”

Support for Parent Choice

Under Paige’s leadership, the Houston Independent School District’s board adopted a number of policies promoting parental choice in education. *Informed Source*, a district publication on board action, last month described the district’s school choice policy this way: “HISD believes that students perform best when they attend the school that best meets their needs and satisfies their parents wishes. That’s why HISD offers students and parents a wide variety of educational opportunities.” In addition to magnet schools and charter schools, the district’s school choice opportunities include the chance for students “capped out” of overcrowded public schools to attend nonreligious private schools at public expense. In grades 1-6, the dis-



Roderick R. Paige, President-elect Bush’s nominee for U.S. Secretary of Education

trict also allows low-performing students in low-performing schools to attend a private school. As *Informed Source* put it, “HISD believes in giving parents and students a choice when it comes to education.”

On the topic of vouchers, Paige told the *Houston Chronicle* two years ago, “[A limited voucher program] doesn’t weaken public school systems, it strengthens public school systems.” In his article in *Education Week* in November, he said, “We believe that public funds should go to students, not institutions, and there may be a time when vouchers will be part of the mix.”

Broad Experience

Paige would bring an array of school-related experiences to his job as education secretary. He has been a college football coach, a professor and dean at Texas Southern University’s School of Education, a member and president of the board of education of the Houston Independent School District, and most recently, superintendent of the district since 1994.

During the press announcement for the cabinet nomination, Paige told Bush that as superintendent he had seen the President-elect’s “compassion for our young people up close.” Praising Bush for making education a “cornerstone” of his campaign, Paige said he believed the president-elect would become the “education president.”

On January 29,
CAPE’s e-mail
address
gets simpler:
cape@capenet.org

Our Web address is still
www.capenet.org

School Choice Extolled at New York City Conference

Liverwurst. That's one term that former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich says could be used to describe his proposal for progressive vouchers. Call it anything at all, he argues, just not "vouchers," because the V word has become so polarizing, so infused with passion and ideology, as to preclude rationale discourse.

Reich was one of a dozen or so big-name speakers at a high-profile conference on school choice that took place last month in New York City under the sponsorship of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and The Manhattan Institute, a public policy research and advocacy group. Speakers, who covered virtually every corner of the school choice terrain, included



NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani

constitutional experts, researchers, policy analysts, and elected officials. In the later category were two governors (Gary Johnson of New Mexico and Frank Keating of Oklahoma) and three mayors (Giuliani, John Norquist of Milwaukee, and Bret Schundler of Jersey City).

Robert Reich, currently professor of social and economic policy at Brandeis University, reviewed a proposal he originally unveiled last September in a *Wall Street Journal* essay. His plan involves government giving children "liverwurst" in amounts inversely related to their family's income. Children from families with income in the lowest 20 percent would receive vouchers worth, say, between \$10,000 and \$12,000 annually. Children from families in the next highest income quintile might receive vouchers worth between \$8,000 and \$10,000, and children in the top quintile would get vouchers as little as \$2,000. Professor Reich says the added resources attached to poor children would provide both public and private schools a considerable incentive to recruit and keep such students by designing and offering the most attractive programs possible.

Governor Frank Keating made the case for wholesale reform in American

education. He said he realized radical change was necessary after meeting with a group of information technology executives on the West Coast. He asked them what he could do to make his state a more attractive location for their companies, and their answer was that he should work to ease restrictions on the number of well-educated foreigners they could hire. In essence, said Keating, these American entrepreneurs had given up on American education. Keating concluded that the way to revitalize schools is through more rigor in the curriculum, more choice for parents, and merit pay for teachers.

Another speaker at the conference, Mikel Holt, editor and associate publisher of the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, called school choice "the new civil rights movement" and likened it to a freedom train travelling across the country. The author of *Not Yet "Free At Last"* said there is no single problem for the black community more important than education. Not inclined to pull punches, Holt charged that educational apartheid exists in New York and other cities — one system for the haves and one for the have-nots. The old civil rights movement was to guarantee blacks access to the lunch counter; the new movement "is to make sure our children can read the menu," he said.

Holt recited a litany of ways in which Milwaukee and its schools have improved as a result of choice. Not only has education gotten better for voucher students, but also for those who stayed in public schools as well. Competition forced schools to improve and to be more responsive to parents. Now people are looking to move back to the city because that's where the quality options are. In addition, school choice has not robbed a nickel from public schools. Ten years ago, the city's school budget was about \$0.5 billion; today it's about \$1 billion. "We're not opposed to public

education," said Holt, "we're in the process of redefining public education."

Holt's recitation of the benefits of school choice was echoed and expanded by Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist. The public schools in the city have improved and have become more diverse, offering special-focus programs for particular populations. School choice has made city living a "superior experience," he said, and real estate agents are now using Milwaukee's choice-based education system to attract homeowners.

Monopolies, said Norquist, make no sense in cities, given the rich resources a city has, the centrality of its marketplace, and the diversity of its population. In a host of other services — from restaurants to higher education — cities are known for the quality they offer. But when it comes to K-12 schools, people of means often move to the suburbs in search of quality. Cities, according to Norquist, should be the best possible marketplace for school choice.

Revitalizing City Schools

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said he hopes that school choice will revitalize the city's public school system. He believes that if parents were given the chance to choose their children's schools, the schools chosen would be the good ones and those rejected would soon rebuild themselves into something that parents wanted. And the immensity of the challenge of school transformation doesn't seem to worry the mayor. He noted that 10 years ago no one would have believed that Times Square could be transformed from a dangerous crime-ridden section of the city into a thriving, flourishing, family-friendly entertainment center. Just as Times Square was changed, through vision, commitment, and determination, so too, said the mayor, can the city's children be "given the opportunity for a better education."





Return Service Requested

capenotes

• For some children in Cleveland, winter's cold was accentuated by a court decision that said the city's voucher program violates the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Three judges of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 that the vouchers have the "impermissible effect" of promoting religion. Established in 1995 as the country's first government-funded voucher initiative to include religious schools, the Ohio program provides low-income children with scholarships of up to \$2,250 to use at private schools.

Just as winter gives way to spring, the appeals court ruling may lead toward a long-awaited decision on vouchers by the U.S. Supreme Court. Calling it the "test case we've been waiting for," Clint Bolick, litigation director for the Institute for Justice, which represents five families of students participating in the program, said the case could "remove the constitutional cloud from school choice once and for all." In late December, Bolick petitioned the entire Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals to review the three-judge panel's decision. But his eye was on the end game, which will

likely play out in the U.S. Supreme Court in the term that begins October 2001. In the meantime, the scholarship program continues, at least while the case is pending before the Sixth Circuit.

• Trinnietta McGrady attends St. Thomas Aquinas School in Cleveland, using a government-provided voucher. She started first grade below average, but with the help of a teacher who trained parents to tutor their children and who provided extra instruction throughout the summer, she moved up to second grade with on-level skills. Trinnietta's mother, a Baptist, says she has no problems sending her children to Catholic school. "I want a place with values," she says.

In *Trinnietta Gets a Chance*, Daniel McGroarty presents the personal side of school choice. He examines the struggles and triumphs of six families who participate in a publicly or privately funded voucher program and end up discovering the school equivalent of an oasis for their children. We learn about Juan Alvarez, who moved his children to Faith Outreach School in San Antonio to es-

cape bad behavior, drugs, and gangs. And we hear of Carol Butts, who chose Clara Mohammed School in Milwaukee

to reinforce the family's Muslim faith. McGroarty tells his touching stories with reverence, grace, and style. Each one is a testimony to the value of letting parents choose schools that are right for their children.

Trinnietta Gets a Chance may be ordered from the bookstore of The Heritage Foundation at www.heritage.org.

• "The Gothic Cathedral as a Mirror of Medieval Culture." "American Women as Writers." "Cultural Responses to the Holocaust." These are just a few of the thirty stimulating seminars or institutes available this summer to teachers in American K-12 public or private schools from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Teachers selected to participate will receive a stipend ranging from \$2,800 to \$3,700 to cover travel costs, books, and living expenses. The application deadline is March 1, 2001. More information is available on the NEH Web site at www.neh.gov.

