

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools



A Nation at Risk: New Report Looks Back and Looks Ahead

It's hard to believe it was twenty years ago when the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared us *A Nation at Risk* and detailed the country's crisis in elementary and secondary education.

Now comes *Our Schools and Our Future*, a long, hard look at why we've improved so little in the past twenty years and what we must do to achieve "a bottom-to-top reconstruction" of American education.

Members of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education discussed their report last month at a symposium in Washington, D.C., that featured three prominent reactors: Secretary of Education Rod Paige, U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, and Milton Goldberg of the Education Commission of the States.

The Koret report claims that the 1983 diagnosis of the Excellence Commission was wanting. It failed to recognize that many K-8 children were failing to master fundamental skills, and it "failed to confront core issues of power and control" within the public education system. "The Excellence Commission never penetrated to that core. It accepted the system as it was, with all the anachronisms inherent in a political mechanism crated in the mid-nineteenth century."

A Nation at Risk also misjudged the resistance to change from the K-12 education system, the colleges of education, and "the large number of Americans, particularly in middle-class suburbs, who believe that their schools are basically sound and academically successful."

Members of the Koret task force offer

ten important findings about American K-12 education:

1. U.S. education outcomes, measured in many ways, show little improvement since 1970.

2. The U.S. economy has fared well during the past two decades not because

6. Bold reform attempts have been implemented in limited and piecemeal fashion, despite their potential to improve student learning.

7. Standards-based reform has not achieved its full potential. Though promising, it is hard to get right.

8. Choice-based reforms have not had a fair test.

9. Americans need better, more timely information about student performance, not only at the national and international levels, but also for individual schools, pupils, and teachers.

10. We need a thoroughgoing reform of elementary and middle schooling.

Our Schools and Our Future proposes a series of fundamental changes necessary to reform K-12 education—changes "anchored to three core principles: accountability, choice, and transparency.

By *accountability*, the task force means that "every school or education provider—at least every one that accepts public dollars—subscribes to a coherent set of rigorous statewide academic standards, statewide assessments of student and school performance, and statewide systems of incentives and interventions tied to academic results in relation to those standards." Accountability involves clear standards, accurate measures of performance against those standards, and consequences for failing to meet those standards. One consequence is that students in failing schools should have the right to transfer to better schools, including private schools. "Taxpayers should no longer be forced to pay for ineffective schools."



(l-r.) Koret Task Force members Diane Ravitch, John E. Chubb, Williamson M. Evers, Herbert J. Walberg, Caroline M. Hoxby. Photo provided by the Hoover Institution, Office of Public Affairs.

of the strong performance of its K-12 system, but because of a host of coping and compensating mechanisms.

3. We've made progress in narrowing resource gaps between schools, communities, states, and groups, but the achievement gaps that vex us remain nearly as wide as ever.

4. The preponderance of school reform efforts since *A Nation at Risk* has concentrated on augmenting the system's resources, widening its services, and tightening its regulation of school practices.

5. Higher-quality teachers are key to improving our schools, but the proper gauge to measure that quality has nothing to do with paper credentials or more resources and everything to do with classroom effectiveness.

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CAPE member organizations:

- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- 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 Christian School Association
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- Solomon Schechter Day School Association
- Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools
- Toussaint Institute for Historically Black Independent Schools
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
Executive director: Joe McTighe

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13017 Wisteria Drive #457
Germantown, MD 20874
(tel) 301-916-8460
(fax) 301-916-8485
(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org

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By *choice*, the task force means “that parental decisions rather than bureaucratic regulation should drive the education enterprise.” Calling for “open competition among ideas and methods,” the report argues that the foundational concept of charter schools—“freedom of operation in return for evidence of satisfactory results”—should apply to all schools. Schools should be granted a great deal of freedom and autonomy regarding the how of education as long as they account for the bottom line: “student learning and parental satisfaction.”

Within the section on choice, the report says states should undertake more voucher experiments that are “rigorously and objectively evaluated.” It also calls on the federal government to sponsor and evaluate such experiments. Within choice initiatives, “[d]isadvantaged, disabled, and limited-English-proficiency pupils should carry with them substantially larger amounts of funding” than other students.

The report extends the choice idea to teachers as well in order to expand the opportunities to teach for competent and willing individuals. “A person who is knowledgeable in a subject should be given the right to teach it, with actual classroom effectiveness then used as the primary gauge of competence. Performance in the classroom should be the chief determinant of

whether teachers are retained and promoted.”

By *transparency*, the task force means that “those who seek complete information about a school or school system (excluding personal information about individuals) should readily be able to get it.” Schools should provide parents, teachers, and policymakers: “(1) a clear statement of standards and objectives, (2) a detailed curriculum, (3) the indicators it uses to track progress toward its goals, (4) evidence of its progress to date, and (5) a budget presented in ways that link expenditures to programs and goals.” Readily accessible reports should describe achievement “in absolute terms (how students are performing vis-a-vis the school’s standards), in value-added terms (how much more they know at the end of the school year), and in comparative terms (in relation to district, state, or national standards or to the performance of other schools and students).”

The report calls accountability, choice, and transparency “the essential trinity of principles by which to reconstruct America’s schools.” And that reconstruction, says the task force, must begin today. “The stakes are huge, the challenge historic.” The nation has promised its children “equal educational opportunity,” the report reminds us. “For their sake, and for the sake of our country’s future, it is a promise that we must keep.”

Paige Unveils IDEA Principles

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced last month a [set of principles](#) to guide the Education Department in working with Congress to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

“Every child in America deserves the highest-quality education, including our children with disabilities,” Secretary Paige said. “Our goal is to align IDEA with the principles of No Child Left Behind by ensuring accountability, more flexibility, more options for parents and an emphasis on doing what works to improve student achievement. I look forward to working with Congress in the weeks and months ahead to achieve these goals.”

The four principles are:

1. Stronger Accountability for Results
 2. Simplify Paperwork for States and Communities and Increase Flexibility for All
 3. Doing What Works
 4. Increase Choices and Meaningful Involvement for Parents.
- Under the accountability heading, the Department’s document talks about moving “from a culture of compliance with process to a culture of accountability for results.” It calls for ensuring that students with disabilities “have access to and make progress in the general curriculum, and are appropriately included in state accountability systems.”



U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige

Prizewinning Professors and Private Schools

Private education is one of the threads connecting the three recipients of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's prizes for excellence in education. One prizewinner researched private schools; one attended them; and one did both.

Professors Anthony Bryk of the University of Chicago and Paul E. Peterson of Harvard University shared Fordham's Prize for Distinguished Scholarship, given to "a scholar who has made major contributions to education reform via research, analysis, and successful engagement in the war of ideas." Professor E.D. Hirsch, Jr., of the University of Virginia won the Prize for Valor, "awarded to a leader who has made major contributions to education reform through noteworthy accomplishments." The three professors are the first recipients of the foundation's annual awards, which were presented at a symposium last month in Washington, D.C.

Bryk, author of the landmark study *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* and founder of a university research center on urban schools and communities, attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools in New Jersey. According to Fordham's profile, his research on Catholic schools attributed their success with disadvantaged students to a strong sense of community and an insistence on academic coursework. Bryk told Fordham the teacher who had the greatest impact on his life was his seventh and eighth grade teacher, Sister Claire. "She took a personal interest in me and nurtured my interests in mathematics."

Paul Peterson, dubbed by Fordham "the Yoda of the school choice movement," is prob-



ably best known for his randomized field trials on the effects of privately funded vouchers. According to Fordham, his "groundbreaking research has provided the evidentiary force that has helped enable thousands of disadvantaged students to use vouchers to attend private schools." A Minnesotan and a graduate of Concordia College, Peterson identified Harding Noblitt, a professor at the college, as the teacher who influenced him the most.

E.D. Hirsch, Jr., who received his high school diploma from the Todd School for Boys in Woodstock, IL, wrote *Cultural Literacy*, an enormously popular book that argues that mastery of certain core background information is essential for higher levels of national literacy. Much of the education establishment balked at Hirsch's prescription for school reform. "I was called an elitist, a racist, a male supremacist, an Ozzie-and-Harriett fifties nostalgia buff—every contemptuous phrase that was in the armory at the time," Hirsch told Fordham.

Commenting on the commitment of the prizewinning professors to improve the education of disadvantaged children, Fordham Foundation president Chester E. Finn, Jr., said, "In the field of K-12 education, it's striking how often ideas and people—and organizations—that get called 'conservative' turn out to be driven by the belief that poor kids can learn a great deal more than most of our schools are teaching them today and by the conviction that rectifying that situation must be education reformers' top priority, even if it means breaking some china to accomplish this."

private schools of their choice. States should then measure and report academic achievement results for all students benefiting from IDEA funds, regardless of what schools they choose to attend."

IDEA, the path-breaking statute that provides federal assistance for the education of children with disabilities, is up for reauthorization this year. Although IDEA offers significant assistance to public school children in need of special education, it has never provided the same level of services to parentally placed children in private schools. CAPE's board of directors has called for changes in IDEA to provide such children with equitable services. CAPE's IDEA issue paper is available as a PDF document on the Web at <http://www.capenet.org>.

IDEA Survey

Anyone who knows anything about private schools and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is acutely aware of the statute's deficiencies when it comes to children with special needs placed by their parents in private schools. But a recent survey by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) exposes much more than statutory shortcomings. It documents critical breakdowns in the delivery of IDEA services to children in private schools.

One of the survey's most unsettling findings is this: "Less than one percent of Catholic school children diagnosed with disabilities receive services funded through IDEA."

Yet despite the absence of IDEA-supported services, "Catholic schools serve special needs children in all disability areas as defined by IDEA." Seven percent of children enrolled in Catholic schools have disabilities, and they are served by staff who use "innovative strategies" to meet their needs.

Although IDEA requires school districts to locate, identify, and evaluate resident children with special needs regardless of the type of school they attend, the survey finds that the so-called "Child Find" process is "fragmented," "inhospitable," "poorly administered," and seemingly designed "to exclude parents whose children are not in public schools." The bottom line on Child Find is that it is "not working for private school children."

What's the remedy? IDEA needs some "fundamental changes" to ensure equitable services for children with disabilities placed by their parents in private schools.

USCCB's study on Catholic school students with disabilities is available at <http://www.usccb.org/education/fedasst/reauth.htm#study>.

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In line with the focus on results is the call for simplifying paperwork. The Department's objective is to "increase the time spent by teachers on teaching and minimize time currently spent on procedural and non-instructional tasks while still preserving the fundamental rights of students with disabilities."

The "doing what works" principle calls for IDEA funds to focus on implementing "researched-based practices that have been proven to help students with disabilities learn."

And on the choice front, the document says this: "IDEA should expand opportunities to help parents, schools, and teachers choose appropriate services and programs for children with disabilities, including the charter and pri-

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CAPE notes

★ In the “better late than never” department, Congress last month approved an omnibus spending bill for FY 2003, a fiscal year that actually began last October. Fortunately, most education programs are forward-funded, which means the appropriations just approved kick in July 1 and affect the 2003-04 school year. The chart below compares funding levels for FY 2002 (current school year levels) and FY 2003 (next school year) for some key programs affecting the private school community.

★ Colorado seems destined to be the

first state to enact a voucher system since the Supreme Court sanctioned such programs last June. The state’s House and Senate passed two different bills last month, with each version headed toward the counterpart chamber for reconciliation. Gov. Bill Owens is poised to sign whatever bill lands on his desk.

Senate Bill 03-099 allows school districts with 11,000 or more students, and two or more low-performing schools, to implement a voucher program if the school boards and a majority of voters decide to do so. Vouchers of up to \$4,200 would be provided to children who are from low-income families and who score “unsatisfactory” on the state’s reading or math test. Private schools that participate must not discriminate on the basis of “disability, race, color, religion, ethnic background, or need for special services” and must meet “all requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.” They must also agree to permit the school district of residence to administer statewide assessments to voucher recipients at the district’s cost and in the district’s facilities.

House Bill 03-1160 envisions a pilot program in

which school districts with eight or more poor-performing schools must participate and any other district may participate. Eligible children are low-performing students from low-income families who attend substandard schools. The bill calls for a financial and performance evaluation of the program by 2008.

★ If you’re among the thousands of educators who have heard the term “assistive technology” but have never quite grasped its meaning, CAPE has just what you need: the Assistive Technology Consideration Quick Wheel (AT Quick Wheel). According to the IDEA Local Implementation for Local Administrators (ILIAD) Partnership, a sponsor of the device, “Assistive technology is any tool that helps a student with a disability perform a functional task more easily or more successfully.” ILIAD describes the AT Quick Wheel as a “fun, hands-on resource” that “looks like a little wheel and offers quick and easy access to a generic list of AT tools for a variety of tasks. On one side of the AT Quick Wheel are federal definitions of AT devices and services. The other side provides information about a variety of resources, including books, journals, newsletters and Internet sites.”

CAPE, which is affiliated with ILIAD, has a generous supply of AT Quick Wheels available to private schools and private school associations free of charge (except shipping). Send bulk and individual order requests to cape@capenet.org.

Federal Education Aid

(in millions of dollars)

Key Programs Affecting Private Schools

	FY '02	FY '03
Advanced Placement	\$22	\$23
Early Reading First	\$75	\$75
Educational Technology	\$700	\$696
English Language Acquisition	\$664	\$686
Even Start	\$250	\$248
Improving Teacher Quality	\$2,850	\$2,931
Innovative Programs	\$385	\$382
Math and Science Partnerships	\$13	\$100
Migrant Education	\$396	\$395
Reading First	\$900	\$994
Safe and Drug-Free Schools	\$472	\$469
Special Education (Total)	\$8,673	\$10,034
Title I Grants to LEAs	\$10,350	\$11,684
21st Century CLC	\$1,000	\$994