

Council for American Private Education

CAPE **outlook**

Voice of America's private schools

Achievement Gap Narrower in Religious Schools

What can be done to narrow the achievement gap? That question, in one form or another, has been challenging policy makers for decades. Grand national strategies, like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Head Start, and the No Child Left Behind Act, have been promoted by presidents and passed by Congress to help address the problem through expensive programmatic and instructional interventions. But what if the solution to the achievement gap is to be found in other domains, such as school culture, family support, or religious commitment?

On April 3 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Dr. William H. Jaynes, a professor at California State University at Long Beach and a scholar with the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, released a study showing that the achievement gap between majority students and minority students, as well as between students of high- and low-socioeconomic status, is significantly narrower in religious schools than in public schools. The study also found that “when African American and Latino children who are religious and come from intact families are compared with white students, the achievement gap disappears.”

Jaynes drew much of his data from the massive National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88), which tracked a nationally representative sample of eighth graders through high school and beyond. NELS:88 provides data on a host of school and student variables, allowing Jaynes to look at whether schools were religiously affiliated and to examine other factors like school culture, curriculum, race relations, discipline, violence, and homework practices. The student questionnaire enabled Jaynes to isolate students who considered

themselves “very religious,” those who were actively involved in religious youth groups, and those that regularly attended religious services. He also examined other variables, such as test results, socioeconomic status, race, gender, and family structure.

The NELS data showed that twelfth-grade religious school students in all SES

white students scored 6.0 percent higher than their counterparts. But even after controlling for gender and SES (see chart), black and Latino students outscored their public school peers in reading by 4.6 percent, while white students did so by 3.4 percent.

With the achievement advantage among religious school students greater for low-SES students than high-SES students and greater for minority students than majority students, Jaynes concluded that both the SES and racial achievement gaps are narrower in religious schools than public schools.

Turning to the more complicated question of why religious schools have a narrower achievement gap, Jaynes examined factors relating to school culture, family, social capital, and religious commitment.

Although the methodology did not allow a determination of the cause or causes of the higher student performance in religious schools, the study offered some interesting candidates and correlations.

Exploring the role played by school culture, Jaynes statistically examined five separate components, namely, school atmosphere, racial harmony, level of school discipline, school violence, and amount of homework done. According to the report, “The results demonstrate that religious schools outperform nonreligious schools in all of the five school trait categories and in nearly all of the individual questions that make up those categories.” The study also found that religious school students enjoyed an advantage over public school students in the three learning habits that were most strongly related to academic achievement: taking harder courses, diligence, and overall work habits.

Percentage Increase in Standardized Test Scores of 12th Grade Religious School Students Compared to Public School Students, After Controlling for SES and Gender

Subject	Black and Latino	White
Reading	4.6%	3.4%
Mathematics	4.2%	3.0%
Social Studies	5.2%	3.4%
Science	2.0%	1.2%
Test Composite	4.8%	3.8%

quartiles achieved at higher levels than their counterparts in public schools, with the religious school advantage being highest for students in the lowest SES quartile. Religious school students in the bottom SES quartile had a 7.6 percent advantage in reading scores over similar public school students, while students in the highest SES quartile had a somewhat lower 5.2 percent advantage.

Looking at achievement by race, Jaynes found similar results: higher overall achievement for both minority and majority students in religious schools when compared to their counterparts in public schools, but with minority students (i.e., African American and Latino students) enjoying an even greater religious school advantage than white students. For example, before controlling for gender and SES, black and Latino students scored 8.2 percent higher than their public school counterparts in reading achievement, while

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CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- 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
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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Commission Offers Plan for Public School Reform

On March 12, 2007, CAPE sponsored a discussion on the implications for private schools of the report *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (see article on facing page). The report, from the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, offers a series of recommendations for reforming public education. A brief description of the major proposals follows.

Assume that we will do the job right the first time. The “job” in this case is getting almost everyone ready for college by age 16. And a principal step the commission recommends for reaching that goal is having states establish a series of “board” examinations to measure mastery of core subjects. Students who score well on exams at the end of 10th grade would earn admission to a community college or could remain in high school to prepare, with other similarly motivated students, for entry into selective colleges.

Make much more efficient use of the available resources. The commission estimates that its total package will save \$67 billion nationally in education spending. The plan calls for using the savings to cover the costs of (1) educating all the high school students who would have dropped out were the plan not deployed; (2) recruiting well-educated teachers; (3) building a “high-quality full-service early childhood education system for every 3- and 4-year-old student in the United States,” and (4) helping disadvantaged students achieve at high levels.

Recruit from the top third of the high school graduates going on to college for the next generation of school teachers. Getting high-quality teach-

ers requires substantial hikes in teacher salaries (offset in part by cuts in pension benefits). The panel proposes statewide salary schedules and differential pay for highly effective teachers and for teachers in subject areas and schools where good teachers are hard to find.

Develop standards, assessments, and curriculum that reflect today’s needs and tomorrow’s requirements. The commission calls for a rigorous and sophisticated assessment system that measures the full panoply of competencies needed by students to compete in the workplace, including “creativity and innovation, facility with the use of ideas and abstractions, the self-discipline and organization needed to manage one’s work and drive it through to a successful conclusion, the ability to function well as a member of a team, and so on.”

Create high-performance schools and districts everywhere. Under the commission’s plan, schools would be operated by independent contractors instead of school districts. District offices and school boards would develop performance objectives, monitor operations, and cancel contracts with schools if necessary.

Provide high-quality universal early childhood education. The panel calls high-quality early childhood education “one of the best investments a nation can make in its young people.”

Give strong support to the students who need it the most. Schools enrolling disadvantaged students should be able to employ high-quality teachers and offer extended hours, support services, health screening, counseling, and tutoring.

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Jeynes reviewed the research literature for clues about other possible explanations for private school achievement. Parental involvement, religiously committed parents, intact families, and caring teachers were all potential contributing factors. Jeynes also explained that religious schools encourage a religious commitment among students, which could affect achievement because of an associated religious work ethic, a stronger internal “locus of control,” and “the tendency for religious people to avoid behaviors that are typically regarded as undisciplined and harmful to educational achievement.”

In connection with what he described as one of the study’s most notable findings, Jeynes looked at what happens to the achievement gap for religiously committed students from intact families. He found what he called an “amazing” result: “The achievement gap disappears.” Put another way, “[W]hen the data are adjusted for SES and gender, black and Hispanic adolescents who are religious and from intact families do just

as well academically as white students.”

Turning to the policy implications of the study, Jeynes suggested that “showing that factors as simple as religious commitment, religious schools, and family structure can reduce or eliminate the gap may inspire educators and social scientists to encourage policies that are supportive of faith and the family so that the gap can be narrowed significantly.” He argued that including private schools in school choice initiatives “conceivably could improve the overall quality of the U.S. education system,” and he suggested that public schools “can benefit by imitating some of the strengths of the religious school model.”

Jeynes concluded that “religious education is a vibrant part of the education system in the United States” and called for further study on “why students from religious schools outperform students in public schools.”

The study, *Religion, Intact Families, and the Achievement Gap*, is available online at <<http://www.religjournal.com/>>.

Panel Examines Implications of Tough Choices Report

Tough Choices or Tough Times (TCTT), a report on the need and the way to revamp American education in order to maintain a competitive edge in a global economy, stirred considerable public attention when the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce released it last December. Although the document's focus is public education, CAPE's board and state representatives recently examined its implications for private education in a forum led by three expert presenters, each with a different perspective.

Michael J. Petrilli, vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, tends to like TCTT. He set the stage for the discussion by explaining the fundamental

rationale on which TCTT stakes its claim that radical reform is needed. He said it's essentially the same case made by Thomas Friedman in *The World Is Flat*: globalization is forcing American workers to compete with workers around the world like never before. To stay competitive, Americans will have to bring something new to the table: the ability to produce innovative products and services that derive from creative thinking and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Petrilli presented the major proposals for changing preK-12 education contained in TCTT (see overview on facing page). In doing so, he noted that the report has proposed for public schools some of the same elements of flexibility that exist in private schools. He said private school leaders "should take it as a sign that people understand the benefit of that flexibility and the contributions that your schools are making."

A Whole New Mind

Patrick Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools, examined the TCTT report through the lens of Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind* (WNM), a book which Bassett said "all educators should be thinking about and reading." Noting that both TCTT and WNM focus on the need for creativity and innovation, Bassett said private schools in America tend to emphasize these areas much more than

public schools, where the focus on high-stakes testing has narrowed the curriculum.

Bassett challenged private school leaders to help develop the kinds of students that TCTT says are likely to meet success in the new economy, namely, those "who are comfortable in working in artistic, investigative, highly social or entrepreneurial environments." While analytical, logical, and linear thinking will continue to be important skills for students, they will not be sufficient. New skills will be needed along the lines of the aptitudes proposed by Pink: the abilities to design useful things in significant ways, weave compelling narratives, see relationships, empathize with others, and derive deep meaning.

Private schools, according to Bassett, are in a unique position to develop these skills in students.

A Fundamental Flaw

Patrice Maynard, leader for outreach and development at the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, argued that a fundamental flaw in TCTT is its willingness to entrust school improvement to the very agencies that messed things up in the first place: government and industry. Quoting the 19th-century economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill, Maynard maintained that while government has an interest in requiring children to be educated, it need not provide that education itself. In fact, society is much better served through a rich diversity of providers.

Maynard urged private schools to step forward with a "different imagination" about education than the performance-based, test-driven, government-controlled model offered in TCTT. She said the private school community should use TCTT as an opportunity for discourse about an approach to education grounded in diversity and focused on nurturing children and helping them become not only successful producers, but also happy, confident, and creative people who derive deep satisfaction from their lives.

The executive summary of Tough Choices or Tough Times is available at <<http://skillscommission.org/executive.htm>>.



Michael Petrilli, left, Patrice Maynard, and Patrick Bassett pose after their panel presentation at CAPE's meeting.

In Memory of Hank Strong

Henry "Hank" Strong, a member of CAPE's board of directors from 1982 to 2006 and the longest-serving board member in CAPE's 36-year history, died March 22 at the age of 83 from pneumonia.

Mr. Strong, a resident of Washington, D.C., was chairman and president of the Hattie M. Strong Foundation, which provides interest-free loans to college students in their final year of study and awards grants in support of educational opportunities and services to children and adults in the Washington area. The foundation was established by, and bears the name of, Mr. Strong's grandmother, the wife of Henry Alvah Strong, co-founder and first president of the Eastman Kodak Company.

According to *The Washington Post*, Mr. Strong attended Sidwell Friends School and St. Albans in Washington, and graduated from Pomfret School in Connecticut. During World War II, he served in the Navy, eventually becoming a flight instructor. Upon graduating from Williams College in 1949, he joined the Foreign Service.

In addition to his service on CAPE's board, Mr. Strong served as trustee or board member to a host of organizations, including the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the National Zoological Park, and the National Symphony.

His awards included the Mayor's Art Award, the National Brotherhood Citation from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Founders Award from the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington.

During his 24 years of smart and steadfast service to CAPE, Mr. Strong proved to be a valuable member of the board, bringing a unique perspective from the world of business and philanthropy.

The CAPE community is saddened by Hank's passing and extends condolences to his wife, Malan, their three children, and 10 grandchildren.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** “Religious schools have more racial harmony, fewer drug problems, and a more demanding curriculum than do public schools.” This is just one of the important findings from a study by Dr. William H. Jaynes, a non-resident scholar with the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) and professor of education at California State University in Long Beach. The study, published in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, was released April 3 in a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. (See page 1 of *Outlook* for more information.) It is available at: <http://www.religjournal.com/>.

★ Is your school’s science lab a chemical accident waiting to happen? The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency may be able to help. On March 23, the EPA announced its Schools Chemical Cleanout Campaign.

According to an EPA news release, “Under this program, EPA, working with the U.S. Department of Education and industry, will help schools safely manage chemicals. Across the country, EPA estimates that about 33,000 middle and high schools have laboratory and other chemicals that could cause accidents and injure students.”

“We’re ready to help schools take practical steps to prevent accidents, spills, and fires. This program is not only good for our schools but also can keep our environment safe and clean for generations to

come,” said Susan Bodine, assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response.

The project connects schools with local chemical management experts and offers a Web-based toolkit. To find out more about the campaign that can help schools avoid “costly and possibly dangerous accidents,” visit <http://www.epa.gov/sc3/>.

★ How does a fully funded professional development trip to the Galapagos Islands or Japan or Costa Rica sound? The Institute of International Education has announced its 2007-08 schedule of training programs for full-time classroom teachers of all disciplines in grades 7-12. According to the IIE, “Each program will offer country-specific themes to help educators expand their professional skills, increase cultural awareness, and enhance their understanding of environmental issues around the world.” Trips are planned for October 2007, March 2008, and June 2008. The application deadline for the October trip is April 23, 2007. For more information, including an application packet, visit the IIE’s Web site at <http://www.iie.org/Toyota>.

★ Ohio Governor Ted Strickland announced last month his intention to eliminate the state’s voucher program for low-income students outside Cleveland. Lori Drummer, director of state projects at the Alliance for School Choice, said the governor “slammed the door of opportunity” in

the faces of Ohio’s poorest schoolchildren. “He is forcing these children to leave the schools they love and sentencing them to return to the staggeringly low-performing schools they fled.”

Susan Zanner, executive director of School Choice Ohio, said, “Parents across Ohio know what’s best for their children and are best equipped to choose the right school for them. To deny children the ability to leave failing schools is unfair.”

★ Yet another state has joined the CAPE family! CAPE’s board of directors last month approved affiliation of the Massachusetts CAPE (MA CAPE), which supports CAPE’s mission to preserve and promote educational pluralism so that parents have a choice in the schooling of their children. The State CAPE Network now represents 32 states and regions across the country.

★ What’s on the horizon for CAPE? In part that depends on what your generous support allows us to do. Our energized board and state leaders are not at a loss for ideas, including expanding and invigorating the State CAPE Network. But to accomplish ambitious goals, we need your help. April is annual giving month at CAPE. We invite you to become a partner in our work by visiting <http://www.capenet.org/support.html>. Your gift will help CAPE be an even more effective voice for private education. Thank you for your support.