

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Bush Announces School Summit, Promotes Pell Grants for Kids

In his final State of the Union address, President Bush told Congress and the nation that faith-based schools “are disappearing at an alarming rate in many of America’s inner cities” and said he would “convene a White House summit aimed at strengthening these lifelines of learning.”

He then asked Congress to support a new “Pell Grants for Kids” initiative “to open the doors of these schools to more children.” The program would provide funds to allow low-income students in poor-performing public schools to attend religious or independent schools, or public schools in another district. “We have seen how Pell Grants help low-income college students realize their full potential,” said the president. “Now let’s apply that same spirit to help liberate poor children trapped in failing public schools.”

Summit

The summit on inner-city children and faith-based schools will be held in Washington sometime this spring. A White House briefing paper on the summit said urban religious schools, which “have helped to educate generations of low-income students,” are closing at high rates with unfortunate consequences for children. “From 1996 to 2004, nearly 1,400 urban inner-city faith-based schools closed, displacing 355,000 students into other institutions.” Calling these schools “critically important educational alternatives for underserved students,” the paper said the summit “will help increase awareness of the challenges faced by low-income students in the inner cities” and will address the role of faith-based schools “in meeting the needs of low-income inner-city students.”

The briefing document went on to explain that the summit will “bring together national, state, and local leaders in education, policymaking, research, philanthropy, business, and community development to:

draw greater attention to the lack of high-quality educational alternatives available to low-income urban students; highlight the impact non-public schools, including faith-based schools, have had in the education of youth in America’s inner cities;



President George W. Bush delivers the State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol. (White House photo by David Bohrer)

increase awareness of the challenges facing these schools; and identify innovative solutions to the challenges facing these schools so they can continue serving their communities.”

Pell Grants

The popular and successful college Pell Grant program provides financial assistance to help low-income students attend the school of their choice, whether public or private, secular or religious. Students can use the grants at Yale University, Yeshiva University, or Youngstown State. Modeled loosely after the college program, “Pell Grants for Kids” would provide families

of low-income students in certain public schools similar assistance and maneuverability in selecting schools at the elementary and secondary levels. As the White House briefing paper put it, “The same choice, flexibility, and support now available to students seeking a quality college education should be offered to low-income families with children in chronically low-performing schools.”

The program would be capped at \$300 million and would be limited to certain locations and schools. Funds would be distributed initially through competitive grants to willing states, cities, school districts, or nonprofit organizations. Awardees would then make the Pell Grants available to low-income students enrolled in either a public elementary school that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least five years under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) or a secondary school with a graduation rate under 60 percent. Student grants would be bolstered by whatever funds the student generated through Title I of NCLB and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). Administration officials estimate that funds could amount to between \$5,000 and \$6,000 for each elementary school student and between \$8,000 and \$9,000 for each secondary school student.

21st Century Learning

President Bush also proposed the conversion of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program into a scholarship program that, according to a White House background document, would provide parents with funds to “enroll their children in high-quality after-school and summer school programs aimed at increasing student achievement, including programs run by faith-based and community organizations.” The existing 21st Century program awards funds on a competi-

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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 Christian Teachers and Schools
 - 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
 - Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
 - 31 Affiliated State Organizations
- a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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tive basis to school districts, community-based organizations, or faith-based organizations so they can run after-school programs of academic advancement. The proposed program, called 21st Century Learning Opportunities, would drive funds to consumers instead of providers, enabling the former to select after-school enrichment opportunities that best suit their children's needs.

D.C. Opportunity Scholarships

Bush's address also highlighted the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, which Congress must reauthorize if the program is to continue past the 2008-09 school year. "We must also do more to help children when their schools do not

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Across the network, that contribution is substantial. For 2007-08, the projected average cost per student is \$14,308, and revenue from paid work-study contracts is expected to cover about 43 percent of operating expenses. In addition, the families of students are asked to pay tuition. The average bill for tuition and fees in Cristo Rey schools is currently \$2,386, but 80 percent of students receive tuition assistance, with the average aid being \$1,386 per pupil. In all, an estimated 57 percent of operating expenses in 2007-08 will be covered by projected revenue from tuition and work-study contracts. The balance will come from fundraising and other sources.

Work-Study Program

Preparing students for success at their jobs is a critical component of the program at Don Bosco. Last summer, students attended a three-week business "boot camp," where they learned teamwork, software skills, business ethics, and habits of success. The school is determined that students learn what Alicia Bondanella, executive director of the work-study program, calls the "soft skills" of the workplace, including interpersonal relations, punctuality, and even proper dress. And the assiduous training seems to be paying off. A just-completed mid-year performance review showed that 83.5 percent of students met or exceeded the expectations of employers.

One of those employers, Diane Defibaugh, from Opus East LLC, a real estate development company in Rockville, MD, described the value that students bring to the workplace. She said the maturity and growth she has seen in students since they started in September is "amazing."

Other employers also report positive results. Alicia Bondanella reported that in one local banking establishment a Don Bosco student outpaced regular adult co-workers in entering loan

measure up," said the president. "Thanks to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships you approved, more than 2,600 of the poorest children in our nation's capital have found new hope at a faith-based or other non-public school."

According to a White House background document, the program "receives four applications for every available scholarship" and enjoys "strong community support." The initiative was signed into law January 2004 and was authorized for appropriations during fiscal years 2004 through 2008.

For more information about the president's State of the Union address and the proposals affecting students in religious and independent schools, visit CAPE's Web site at <www.capenet.org/new.html>.

transactions into the computer system.

The school principal, Christopher Maloney, reviewed four advantages of Don Bosco and the Cristo Rey model. The first is having at least one parent who "gets the child to our doors" and is willing to "lovingly follow" the child's progress to graduation. The second advantage is the school's religious identity and "clarity of mission." Third is the traditional college prep curriculum, though with some variations. (Ninth graders, for example, study Latin, which, because it is novel and "other worldly" to all students, has, according to Maloney, "created a level playing field" between those who have a strong academic background and those who don't. He thinks Latin also helps develop vocabulary and a sense of sentence structure.) Fourth, the work experience provides a huge benefit for students, offering them "another layer of care" (through mentors at the job site) and a different "yardstick of success." Maloney believes that a single day of success in the workplace can help students develop a stronger sense of self-worth.

Karina Ramirez, an alumna of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago and currently a student at Georgetown University, helped illustrate that point by explaining how her unique high school experience contributed to the development of self confidence. "Cristo Rey taught me to believe in myself," she said. With a gleam in her eye, she recalled how during one particular workday in sophomore year, two employees at her jobsite got into a spat because both wanted her help. Their supervisor soon resolved the conflict, but the impression on Karina was lasting. Knowing that two downtown company employees were arguing over who would get to work with her for the day "was a really good feeling," she said.

For more information about the Cristo Rey Network, visit <<http://www.cristoreynetwork.org/>>.

Ed. Dept. Spotlights Religious Schools

An innovative model of secondary education developed by a network of religious schools is not the typical topic for a policy forum sponsored by a government education agency. But the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement presented a briefing and discussion January 24 on the accomplishments of Cristo Rey schools, which prepare low-income students for success in college by combining a rigorous academic program with real-life job experiences. Cristo Rey's religious identity was not a barrier for a department determined to discover and promote examples of excellence in education wherever they are and whatever their sponsorship.

Held in the department's main auditorium, the forum looked at the Cristo Rey model as realized in one of its newest examples, the Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park, MD, just outside Washington, DC.

Dr. Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill, superintendent of schools for the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, reviewed the meticulous planning that preceded the school's opening in August 2007. Georgetown University conducted a demographic study to determine whether the region could sustain a new school. Then there were challenging and practical realities that had to be addressed, such as securing a building and getting corporate sponsors for the work-study program. A combination of perseverance and faith seemed to propel the process. "All things are possible as long as you believe in God," she said.

It also helps to have an effective and enthusiastic administrative team. As the school's president, Rev. Steve Shafran heads that team and serves as link to the Salesians of Don Bosco, a religious order committed to serving young people in need. The Salesians co-own the school with the archdiocese. Shafran described the school's purpose in grand, sweeping terms: changing the lives of students forever, giving them hope, making them "the best person they can possibly be," providing a "gateway to a promising future." His presentation at the

forum also provided an overview of students in Don Bosco. The school only serves students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch under the national school lunch program, an entrance criterion consistent with its mission of preparing young people "with limited options for college." The 125 students who enrolled as ninth graders



Rev. Steve Shafran, SDB, president Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School, speaks at Ed. Dept. forum. (Photo by Leslie Williams, U.S. Department of Education)

in August (the school plans to add a grade each year) represent a multicultural mix from 40 different ZIP codes in the surrounding area. About 70 percent of students are from single-parent households.

Cristo Rey schools in general lay claim to some eye-opening statistics. According to data from the network's Web site, 19 schools across the country enroll just over 4,200 students. Roughly 56 percent of students are Hispanic/Latino, and one-third are African American. Seventy-two percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and the average family income is \$33,700. Network-wide, the graduation rate is 96 percent, and the four-year drop-out rate is 4 percent. An astounding 99 percent of the network's graduates in 2007 enrolled in two- or four-year colleges.

Such impressive data help attract donors, including the B.J. and Bebe Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation, which has contributed \$12 million toward the establishment of Cristo Rey schools, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has invested over \$15 million.

Financial Model

The unique financial and educational model for Cristo Rey schools calls for students to help cover the cost of their education through paid work experiences in companies that partner with the schools. At Don Bosco, four students rotate through a single full-time employment position, each working a full-day shift a little over once a week. The arrangement allows employers to have the position covered each day and students to miss a minimum of class time. It also gives students on-the-job training, a sense of the connection between work and school, and the satisfaction of knowing they are contributing to their own education.

School Visits

Within days of President Bush's State of the Union address, First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings paid separate visits to inner-city faith-based schools to tout the schools' accomplishments and to promote the president's proposals to help them.

"I love to visit schools," said Mrs. Bush on January 30 at Holy Redeemer School in Washington, DC. "It's one of the most fun parts of my job."

Mrs. Bush spoke highly of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, which has helped over 2,500 children in the District of Columbia, choose religious and independent schools. "More than 80 of these children on Opportunity Scholarships are here at Holy Redeemer," she said.

The first lady also promoted her husband's proposal for Pell Grants for Kids and the upcoming White House summit on inner-city children and faith-based schools. She said participants at the summit will "work to find ways to keep schools open, so that parents in the inner cities can have educational options for their children."

Meanwhile in New Orleans, Secretary Spellings visited St. Peter Claver Catholic Central School, which has been educating African American students in the city since 1921. According to the school's Web site, the school is "dedicated to the proposition that black children can and must excel in mathematics, science and communication skills."

During her visit January 31, Spellings praised the school for its work in serving students after Hurricane Katrina. According to a Department of Education news release, the school "became a centralized school due to the fact that many schools could not re-open after the hurricane. The school took in all students who applied without regard for religion and without asking for tuition."

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Fast Fact About Private Schools: Juniors and seniors in private schools tend to take more rigorous mathematics courses and achieve higher math scores than students in other schools.

A study released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics analyzed course-taking patterns in the upper grades of high school. "Recent research shows that U.S. 15-year-olds are behind their international counterparts in problem solving and mathematics literacy," notes the study. "A key concern among policy makers and educators is improving the quantitative and analytical skills of American youth, who face job prospects in an economy that increasingly values a strong foundation in mathematics and science. One policy response has been to raise mathematics coursetaking requirements for graduation."

One measure of the rigor of the high school mathematics sequence is whether it includes a course in precalculus. It turns out that, among students who were 10th graders in 2002, 18 percent of public school students took a sequence that in grades 11 or 12 included precalculus, compared to 28 percent of Catholic school students and 30 percent of other private school students. Moreover, on a test of mathematics achievement in 12th grade, public school students scored an average of 51, compared to 58 for Catholic school students and 59 for other private school students.

The full report, titled *Mathematics*

Coursetaking and Achievement at the End of High School, is available online at <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008319.pdf>>.

★ A new study shows that graduation rates are higher for students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) than for students in Milwaukee's public schools (MPS).

In *Graduation Rates for Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee*, John Robert Warren, Ph.D., a sociologist at the University of Minnesota, analyzes four years of graduation and enrollment data between 2003 and 2006. He writes in the report: "I conclude that students in MPCP schools are more likely to graduate from high school than students in MPS schools. In three of four years where sufficient data are available, graduation rates for MPCP students are about ten percentage points higher than in MPS schools. In the fourth year the MPS graduation rate appears to be anomalously higher."

Warren adds that had the public school graduation rate equaled that of students in the voucher program, the number of public school graduates "would have been 14 percent higher in these four years."

Graduation rates for the four years studied are as follows, with public school rates first and choice program rates second:

- 2003: 48% - 62%
- 2004: 65% - 61%
- 2005: 52% - 61%
- 2006: 53% - 64%

On the significance of graduation rates,

Warren writes, "Decades of evidence from scholarship in sociology, economics, education, public health, political science, and other disciplines makes plain that completing high school is a prerequisite for success in modern America."

A news release from School Choice Wisconsin, the report's sponsor, says the report "represents the most comprehensive review yet of graduation levels among school choice and public school students in Milwaukee."

The report is available online at <http://www.schoolchoicewi.org/data/currdev_links/gradrates-8.5x11-FINAL.pdf>.

★ The U.S. Department of Education is accepting nominations for the 2008 American Stars of Teaching recognition program. The program honors "superior teachers with a track record of improving student achievement, using innovative instructional strategies, and making a difference in the lives of their students." Each year the department selects one public school teacher from each state and five private school teachers nationwide for the award. Nominations must be submitted by March 31, 2008, at <<http://www.t2tweb.us/AmStar/Nominate.asp>>.

The recognition program is part of the department's Teacher to Teacher initiative, which sponsors, among other activities, summer regional workshops on best practices in the profession. Learn more about the initiative by visiting <<http://www.t2tweb.us/About.asp>>.

