

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

CAPE'S Board Approves Early Childhood Issue Paper

With interest in public policy relating to early childhood education continuing to grow across the country, CAPE's board of directors, who represent the major national organizations serving religious and independent schools, last month approved an issue paper calling for freedom of choice in pre-k programs.

"Parents have the high calling and duty to decide how their children will be educated," states the paper. "Public policy should support the right of parents—the people who love the child most and know the child best—to direct the child's formative years."

As a sign of the growing interest in early education, both the Democratic and Republican parties have planks in their platforms that cover early childhood, and both candidates for president have issued statements on the topic. According to a new report from Pre-K Now, which advocates for pre-kindergarten programs for all three- and four-year-olds, 32 states and the District of Columbia have increased spending for pre-k programs for FY 2009 despite "declining revenues and rising deficits."

CAPE's issue paper recognizes the variety of early childhood settings that exist for parents who seek to supplement the education they offer at home. With individual children displaying different temperaments, talents, and traits and with parents seeking settings that reflect the family's values and meet the child's needs, the paper warns that government "should never insist that all children receive the same education in government-run institutions." Instead, parents should be free to choose an educational program "from an array of options. Without options, there is no choice; and without choice, there is no freedom."

The full text of the issue paper follows, and copies are available on the Web at <http://www.capenet.org/pubpol.html>.

Below is the text of CAPE's issue paper.

The experiences of early childhood serve as the foundation for a child's life. Whether at home or in early childhood centers, a child's formative experiences shape a



sense of self, establish a view of the world, and set the stage for a lifetime of learning. Ideally, those experiences help develop a whole person who is loving, capable, confident, inquisitive, happy, and responsible.

Neither the hard sciences nor the social sciences tell us what type or combination of activities, lessons, and methods are best suited for all children in all circumstances or even for particular children in particular circumstances. Research on such matters is inconclusive or nonexistent. It is the responsibility and right of parents, the child's primary educators, to rely on love, instinct, values, and observation to determine the setting and style of early instruction that meets their children's needs.

Parents Decide

Parents have the high calling and duty to decide how their children will be educated. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 60th anniversary we celebrate this year, makes explicit what is known by nature: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Govern-

ment should never insist that all children receive the same education in government-run institutions. Instead, public policy should support the right of parents—the people who love the child most and know the child best—to direct the child's formative years.

For those parents and guardians who seek to supplement the education they offer at home, a variety of quality early childhood settings exist, including programs that conform to a particular theory of child development, those that provide a particular pedagogy, and those rooted in a particular religious tradition. Some early childhood centers are operated by the government, and some are operated by faith-based and other independent providers. In a free society, it is essential that parents be able to choose from an array of options. Without options, there is no choice; and without choice, there is no freedom.

Principles for Freedom

To uphold freedom of choice in early childhood education, the Council for American Private Education offers the following principles:

- Formal early childhood education should be voluntary.
- Legislation promoting early childhood education should support the right of parents to choose from a range of programs and providers without financial penalty.
- Programs designed to assist children and teachers should provide benefits to comparably situated children and teachers, whether in independent or government-run settings.
- Early childhood education regulations should not seek program uniformity; they should promote pluralism that allows institutions to fulfill their unique missions and parents to choose from a variety of truly distinctive options.

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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Education Department Selects Star Teachers

Representing the thousands of talented teachers in religious and independent schools who day in and day out inspire students and shape the future, five private school teachers received the U.S. Department of Education's 2008 American Stars of Teaching award September 26 at the fourth annual Private School Leadership Conference in Washington, DC (see related story on p. 3). The awardees join 51 teachers from public schools (one from each state and the District of Columbia) who were selected from thousands of nominees for their "track record of improving student achievement, using innovative instructional strategies, and making a difference in the lives of their students."

Dr. Carol Chen-Lin teaches Chinese language to high school students at Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, CT, where she has been teaching for 11 years. Her program includes opportunities for students to study in Beijing. Dr. Chen-Lin works with the Chinese Language Association for Secondary-Elementary Schools, the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages, and promotes educational exchange opportunities between China and America. "If Chinese language and culture education in this country is gaining prominence," wrote Dr. Edward Shanahan, the school's headmaster, it is due "in no small part to Dr. Chen-Lin's efforts."

One would never guess that the teaching career of Sister Alice Hess, IHM, spans 45 years. The spry, imaginative, and knowledgeable Sr. Alice has experienced an extraordinary vocation, with awards such as the National Presidential Award for Excellence in Secondary Mathematics, the Tandy Prize for Excellence in Mathematics, and the Siemens Award for outstanding Advanced Placement teaching. For the past 17 years, Sr. Alice has taught mathematics at Archbishop Ryan High School in Philadelphia. "Sr. Alice's teaching methods transform even the toughest and most intimidating subject into a learning experience that is to be enjoyed and savored by all," wrote a former student.

A second-grade teacher at Valley Christian Elementary School in Bellflower, CA, Pamela Leestma loves science, especially space science.

That passion has led to partnership with a public school using NASA's Digital Learning Network and the opportunity for Valley Christian students to take part in a live videoconference with astronauts on the International Space Station. No wonder principal Ann Samuelson writes that Ms. Leestma helps students "experience life beyond their everyday perimeters." Ms. Leestma shares the knowledge she has gained during her 33 years as a teacher (28 at Valley Christian) with other educators by conducting professional development workshops across the country.

And closer to home, she sponsors an annual star gazing night for students and families

Linda Messina teaches high school biology and environmental science at St. Joseph's Academy in Baton Rouge, LA.

Among the many accomplishments during her 13-year tenure is a partnership with the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program to create the LSU Coastal Roots Program through which students set up nurseries to grow seedlings that are used to restore and preserve coastal wetlands in the state. Other accomplishments include participation in the Biotechnology Education for Students and Teachers program and serving as an assistant instructor for the Howard Hughes Microbiology Workshop and the Molecular Biology Workshop at LSU. The school principal wrote, "Linda is a tough teacher but always ranks as a 'top teacher' when we do student surveys at the end of the year."

An eighth-grade English teacher at Rowland Hall—St. Mark's School in Salt Lake City for the past eight years, Mike Roberts uses a host of innovative approaches to engage students in the appreciation of literature. One project noted in the Education Department's award citation involves Mr. Roberts inviting students to "interview senior citizens to supplement their reading of *Tuesdays with Morie* by Mitch Albom." In another featured project, Mr. Roberts asks students "to create a letter summarizing their eighth-grade year and predicting their high school years." Roberts sends the letters to students just before their high school graduation, and students often "return to visit him and discuss the content of their letters."



Private school recipients of the 2008 American Stars of Teaching award pose with U.S. Department of Education officials. From left, Pamela Allen (USDE), Carol Chen-Lin, Pamela Leestma, Sr. Alice Hess, Linda Messina, Maureen Dowling (USDE), Mike Roberts. (USDE photo)

Education Department Hosts Private School Conference

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) held its fourth annual Private School Leadership Conference in Washington, DC, September 26, offering a host of expert speakers and panelists to cover topics relating to religious schools, independent schools, and home schools. The event also served as a celebration of the 30th anniversary of ONPE, which was established by federal law in 1978 with a mission "to insure the maximum potential participation of nonpublic school students in all federal education programs for which such children are eligible."

One panel at the conference discussed examples of how state education departments, school districts, and private schools have collaborated to ensure that private school students are served equitably under various titles of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Another panel, headed by Andy Smarick, who coordinated the White House Summit on Inner-City Children and Faith-Based Schools last April, examined how inner-city private schools can remain viable. Smarick previewed a new report on the summit (see story at right).

A highlight of the conference was the keynote address by Jack Klenk, director of ONPE. Klenk noted the deep roots of private schools in American history and said their contribution to the education of the public has helped to "make America great." Besides demonstrating academic achievement, private schools "teach morals and meaning to students." Klenk reminded listeners of a quote from President Teddy Roosevelt that "to educate a man in mind but not in morals is to create a menace to society."

Turning to another distinctive element of private education, Klenk said private schools are "characterized by choice." Parents choose these schools for their children; teachers and administrators elect to work in them. "Choice is the warp and woof of private schools," he said, adding that the "voluntary" nature of communities is what makes "real community possible." He

called on public authorities to "respect parents and their role as choosers of the schools their children will be part of."

Acknowledging that some private schools are facing significant challenges relating to enrollment, finances, regulation, and identity, Klenk observed that private schools have faced and survived challenges in the past. He said "enlightened public policy on the one hand, and courage and conviction and entrepreneurship in nonpublic education on the other hand" are necessary for private schools to "flourish and be free" and for private education to be for future generations "the blessing it has been to Americans in the past and present."

To his great surprise, Jack Klenk was honored by his colleagues at the Department and by participants at the conference for his outstanding service to American education in general and to private education in particular. Maureen Dowling, an education program specialist at ONPE, identified the remarkable and many accomplishments in which Jack has played a significant role: the federal scholarship program for students in the District of Columbia, the White House summit on faith-based schools, regional meetings on federal programs serving private school students, and the distribution of NOAA public alert radios to private schools, to name but a few. Dowling correctly noted that Jack has served the private school community "exceedingly well and with genuine passion," not only meeting people's expectations, but consistently seeking to exceed them.



Jack Klenk, director of the Office of Non-Public Education at the U.S. Department of Education, speaks at the Private School Leadership Conference September 26. (USDE photo)

New Report on Inner-City Schools

The White House released a report October 3 describing the challenges faced by inner-city faith-based schools and offering ways to stem their decline. *Preserving a Critical National Asset: America's Disadvantaged Students and the Crisis in Faith-Based Urban Schools* examines the rich tradition of religious schools in America and the causes and consequences of their recent downturn in inner-cities.

Noting that between 1999-2000 and 2005-06 nearly 1,200 religious schools have closed in inner-cities, affecting nearly 425,000 students, the report takes its cue (and part of its title) from a quote by President George W. Bush: "We have an interest in the health of these centers of excellence; it's in the country's interest to get beyond the debate of public/private, to recognize this is a critical national asset."

The report calls the loss of inner-city faith-based schools "a cause for national concern." Such schools "are part of our nation's proud story of religious freedom and tolerance, community development, immigration and assimilation, academic achievement, upward mobility, and more." Their decline has community-wide effects: "In addition to hurting students, the loss of a strong school in an underserved community can destabilize fragile social networks, depress job creation and economic development, and exacerbate the collective sense of despair resulting from scarce community resources and opportunities."

But the report says the problem "is solvable" and offers specific suggestions for "protecting these valuable education options," calling for "a sustained collaborative effort by educators, elected officials, philanthropists, neighborhood leaders," and others.

The report is available on CAPE's Web site at <<http://www.capenet.org/new.html>>.

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CAPE notes

★ U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced September 9 the names of 320 schools identified by the U.S. Department of Education as the No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools for 2008. Schools were selected either because they dramatically improved student performance on standardized tests in reading and math or because their test scores placed them in the top ten percent of schools in the nation or state.



Fifty private schools were among the awardees this year, the maximum number allowed. Each state's commissioner of education nominates public schools for the award, and CAPE nominates private schools. All schools nominated by CAPE received the award.

More information about the program, including the application for 2009, is available at <www.capenet.org/brs.html>.

Private School Awardees

(By State)

California - St. John's Lutheran School, Bakersfield, CA • Serra Catholic School, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA • Heschel West Day School, Agoura, CA • St. Nicholas School, Los Altos Hills • Pinecrest Schools, Van Nuys, CA • **Connecticut** - St. Mary School, Bethel, CT • **Florida**

- Hillel School of Tampa, Tampa, FL • Sacred Heart Catholic School, New Smyrna Beach, FL • Incarnation Catholic School, Sarasota, FL • **Georgia** - Torah Day School of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA • **Illinois** - Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Catholic School, Orland Hills, IL • St. Viator High School, Arlington Heights, IL • St. James School, Arlington Heights, IL • St. Mary School, Buffalo Grove, IL • Queen of All Saints, Chicago, IL • Pope John XXIII

School, Evanston, IL • **Indiana** - Christ the King School, South Bend, IN • St. Casimir, Hammond, IN • **Iowa** - Holy Trinity Catholic School, Des Moines, IA • **Kentucky** - Our Lady of Lourdes, Louisville, KY • **Maryland** - St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park, MD • **Michigan** - Holy Name School, Birmingham, MI • **Minnesota** - Holy Name of Jesus School, Wayzata, MN • Trinity School at River Ridge, Eagan, MN • **Missouri** - St. John Lutheran School, Ellisville, MO • St. Peter Catholic School, St. Charles, MO • **Nebraska** - St. Margaret Mary School, Omaha, NE • St. Stephen the Martyr School, Omaha, NE • **New York** - St. Bernadette School, Brooklyn, NY • **Ohio** - St. Dominic School, Cincinnati, OH • St. Hilary School, Fairlawn, OH • St. Ignatius

Loyola, Cincinnati, OH • Bishop Leibold Catholic School, Dayton, OH • Cardinal Pacelli School, Cincinnati, OH • Sts. Joseph and John Interparochial School, Strongsville, OH • St. Brigid of Kildare School, Dublin, OH • **Pennsylvania** - St. John the Evangelist School, Morrisville, PA • St. Aloysius Academy, Bryn Mawr, PA • **South Carolina** - St. John Neumann Catholic School, Columbia, SC • **Texas** - Our Lady of Victory School, Victoria, TX • Mary Immaculate Catholic School, Farmers Branch, TX • John Paul II Catholic School, Houston, TX • St. John the Apostle Catholic School, North Richland Hills, TX • **Virginia** - School of the Nativity, Burke, VA • Blessed Sacrament School, Alexandria, VA • St. John Academy, McLean, VA • Holy Spirit School, Annandale, VA • **Wisconsin** - Aquinas High School, La Crosse, WI • St. Stanislaus / St. Stephen Schools, Stevens Point, WI

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