

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Education Secretary Duncan Talks to Private School Leaders

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in his first address to the nation's private school community, said last month that students and parents should have several quality educational options from which to select the setting that best suits their needs. "We need to give every single child an opportunity to fulfill their tremendous academic potential," he said.

In welcoming remarks at the Department of Education's fifth annual conference for private school leaders, held September 23 in Washington, DC, Duncan said the nation needs more quality schools, public and private. "We can all sort of rest easy when every child in the country has a chance to go to a great school," he said, adding that "we are no where near that point; we have a lot of hard work ahead of us."

Duncan said that expanding the supply of excellent schools should not be a source of competition between the public and private sectors, calling on both to work together and learn from each other while pursuing the same goal. "And if we can get to the point where children have not just one great option but two or three or four great options, and let parents and students figure out what the best learning environment for them is, we will be in a very, very good spot," he said.

Spotlight on Urban Schools

Commenting on the decline of urban faith-based schools, Duncan said he was aware of the challenges those schools are facing and called it "unfortunate that they are closing at an alarming rate." He reminded the group of a recent forum convened by the department to provide stakeholders an opportunity to examine the issue and "discuss innovative approaches for sustaining those schools." The secretary said he wanted "to continue to keep a spotlight on that issue."

Regarding the reauthorization of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Duncan predicted the Obama administration would move on that issue once the health care legislation is resolved. He said he wants to "address effectively the



U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan speaks at the Private School Leadership Conference. (USDE photo by Leslie B Williams)

ongoing challenge of meeting our obligation to ensure equitable services to private schools under Title I and other ESEA programs." In connection with that goal, he told the group his team will "begin facilitating meetings of national private school leaders to discuss your recommendations for enhancing the law with better outcomes for services to students and teachers who are in our nation's private schools."

Listening and Learning

The secretary also pledged to hold a "listening and learning" session for private school leaders in order to hear their "ideas and recommendations for education reform and how the federal government can help advance those reforms." Duncan launched his Listening and Learning tour last spring to engage parents, teachers,

and citizens across the country in dialogue about ways to improve education.

Following Duncan's remarks, Jim Shelton, assistant deputy secretary and head of the Office of Innovation and Improvement, delivered a keynote address, elaborating on several themes set by the secretary.

Mixed Feedback

Shelton said the forum on urban faith-based schools that his office cosponsored this summer was designed to start a dialogue about how to sustain the work that those schools are doing, "recognizing that in fact we're losing a large number of schools every year." He said he had received mixed feedback about the forum, with some critics balking that it amounted to little more than a message that participants themselves must figure out a way to solve the problem, while others were grateful for the chance to "share and build on the best practices that we already have." The assistant deputy secretary said he welcomed both sides of the feedback and would continue, within the limitations of his office, "to try to find ways to be supportive." At the same time, however, Shelton acknowledged that the Office of Innovation and Improvement would probably not have sponsored the summer forum had a non-government organization sponsored something similar, "because I think that in fact this community is best served outside the department."

How Can We Improve?

Shelton asked participants for advice on how his office and the department could serve the private school community better, given the context of a changing environment and difficult economic times. Picking up on the secretary's announcement about a private school listening and learning session and additional meetings

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centering on the reauthorization of ESEA, Shelton signaled that his office would play a key role in that effort.

Regarding some \$5 billion in discretionary funds that the secretary has available to distribute in grants through the Race to the Top program and the Investing in Innovation fund, Shelton said the money, in comparison to the overall landscape of spending, is fairly small. He insisted that dollars are only a part of the equation for education reform, with most of the impetus for change coming from a shift in focus and expectations—and a change in the national dialog—that the president and the secretary have helped bring about.

Invest in Innovation

On the specific issue of whether not-for-profit organizations would be able to serve faith-based schools under the \$650 million Investing in Innovation fund, Shelton said department officials were still wrestling with that question but would declare their intent in the notice about the program that would be published soon in the Federal Register.

Responding to a question on the timing of the ESEA reauthorization, Shelton said department officials are “preparing as though it is going to happen early next year.” In coming months, officials will offer “very specific proposals for how the legislation will work in the future.”

From Foundations to Government

Reflecting on how his new government job compares to his previous position as a program director for the education division of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Shelton said the foundation world was easier. A person oriented toward getting things done, he seemed to suggest some frustration with the layers of control in a government agency that can sometimes slow the rate of progress, but acknowledged that the checks and balances helped ensure that a given project gets done without mistakes. He described his job as “a greater honor and privilege” than he had ever anticipated it would be. “I love coming to work every day,” he said.

Asked what President Obama and Secretary

Duncan could do to help preserve the national treasure of urban faith-based schools, Shelton offered several specific suggestions and predictions. He said one of the first steps the department could take was the step it in fact already took over the summer when it convened persons involved with the issue to generate different



Private school leaders gather for a group photo with Secretary Duncan at the USDE conference in Washington, DC, September 23, 2009. (USDE photo by Leslie B Williams)

perspectives on the topic and highlight successes. Once the working groups from the summer forum develop their reports and suggestions, their work will be highlighted. Moreover, the secretary, who is fond of offering examples of what he likes to see and doesn't like

to see in education, will likely shine the spotlight on successful strategies. Shelton also predicted that the secretary would continue to emphasize, as he did earlier in the day, the need for an increase in the number of great schools of every kind, and the fact that, despite that need, the nation is losing great schools. Shelton went on to hint that both the secretary and the president would talk more about their own educational experiences, which include private schools. Summing up his response, Shelton said, “I think that in those ways you will start to hear the rhetoric and tone change around private schools. I think it will be subtle at first and then will increase in intensity over time.”

Best Practices

Irene McHenry, executive director of the Friends Council on Education and president of CAPE, asked Shelton if any detailed thinking had been given to recognizing, and lifting up as best practice models, independent and faith-based schools that have been in operation for centuries and doing an excellent job serving inner-city children. He answered yes and requested feedback on the best ways to highlight not only schools, but also particular innovative practices within schools.

Impressive Array

The full-day conference provided an impressive array of topics and presenters, including an animated luncheon address by Ron Clark, former teacher of the year, author of the best-selling book *The Essential 55*, and founder of The Ron Clark Academy, a private school in Atlanta, GA.

Students and Parents Rally to Support Scholarships

Students and parents came to the U.S. Capitol September 30 to raise their voices and placards in support of the continuation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, which provides some 1,700 students scholarships of up to \$7,500 per year to attend religious and independent schools in the District of Columbia.

Sponsored by the DC Black Alliance for Educational Options (DCBAEO), the rally featured an impressive lineup of speakers.

Dr. Howard Fuller, founder and chair of the national BAEO, fired up the crowd by calling on President Obama, “whom we love,” to “do the right thing by our children.” Fuller said health care is important, as is fixing the banking system and getting the Olympics to come to Chicago in 2016, but “there is nothing more important than our children—nothing” He spurred participants through a rousing chant of the event’s theme, “Put Kids First.”

Former U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, saying politicians should “walk the walk,” delivered this message to them: “If you say ‘put kids first,’ you need to support the D.C. scholarship fund.”

Calling himself “a big believer in giving parents options,” House Minority Leader John Boehner urged participants to “put pressure on Congress” to make sure the scholarship program continues. Boehner has introduced legislation in the House (H.R. 2556) to preserve opportunity scholarships in the District.

Bruce Stewart, former head of Sidwell Friends School, which participates in the scholarship program, said that choice is “as American as apple pie.” Speaking as a Quaker and a Quaker educator, Stewart said, “No young child

should be denied excellence in education because of the place of their residence or the economic status of their family.” Recounting the joy involved in watching scholarship students at Sidwell soar as they “enriched their minds and characters and opened new doors of opportunity for themselves and for their families,” he said he was stunned to discover that their younger siblings could not take advantage of the same program “not for any valid educational reason, but simply because of political philosophy and provincial public policy.”



Dr. Howard Fuller, chair of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, energizes the crowd at the “Save School Choice” rally September 30.

Congress has closed the program to new applicants, although Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) has introduced bipartisan legislation (S. 1552) to extend the scholarship initiative for another five years. Called the *Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act of 2009* or “SOAR Act,” the bill is cosponsored by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Sen. Robert C. Byrd, (D-WV), Sen. Susan M. Collins (R-ME), Sen. John Ensign (R-NV), Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH).

Senate Testimony

The day before the rally, Dr. Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, superintendent of schools for the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, testified about the scholarship program before a Senate subcommittee. “No government should allow the right to choose a quality education to be cut short by the limits of personal income,” she said. Reminding com-

mittee members that President Obama told a recent joint session of Congress that citizens “do better when there is choice and competition,” she said the scholarship program is “about providing the opportunities for all families in the District of Columbia to exercise their right to choose the best education for their children.”



Supporters thrust high their placard at the “Save School Choice” rally September 30.

Video Contest

“We are what we learn. In grade school I learned to read, and on the basketball court I learned about teamwork. In college I learned how to think.” That’s how Education Secretary Arne Duncan begins a new public service announcement promoting a national video contest titled “I Am What I Learn.”

Sponsored by the Department of Education, the contest invites students ages 13 and older to create and submit videos of up to two minutes long that convey how their education is important to them and their future.

In religious and independent schools, education is about math, reading, and the other standard subjects, but it’s also about art, music, athletics, character, spiritual and ethical values, and the development of the whole person. It’s about students being called to fulfill their destiny through a life of service and love. No doubt such students could produce creative, inspiring, and compelling videos on how education helps them become the person they are called to be.

Secretary Duncan called the video contest “an opportunity for young people to share their stories about where their education and career training can take them.”

Students must submit their entries by November 2. Videos of any style are encouraged as long as they are original and creative. Ten finalists will be selected by a panel of judges, and those videos will be posted on the department’s YouTube channel from November 9 to November 24, allowing the public to vote on their favorites. The three most popular videos will each earn their creator a \$1,000 prize. Winners will be announced the week of December 1.

Specific contest rules, judging standards, and procedures for submitting videos are available on the department’s Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/iamwhati-learn/>.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced September 15 the names of 314 schools identified by the U.S. Department of Education as Blue Ribbon Schools for 2009. 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 of private school awards allowed. Each state's education department nominates public schools for the award, and CAPE nominates private schools.

More information about the program, including the application for 2010, is available at <www.capenet.org/brs.html>.

Private School Awardees

(By State)

California - Mission Parish School, San Juan Capistrano, CA • St Paul's Lutheran School, Orange, CA • **Connecticut** - Greenwich Catholic School, Greenwich, CT • Our Lady of Fatima School, Wilton, CT • St Cecilia School, Stamford, CT • St Mark School, Stratford, CT • St Rose of Lima School, Newtown, CT • **Florida** - Brauser Maimonides Academy, Fort Lau-

derdale, FL • St Andrew Catholic School, Orlando, FL • The First Academy Lower School, Orlando, FL • **Georgia** - Holy Redeemer Catholic School, Alpharetta, GA • Holy Spirit Preparatory School, Atlanta, GA • Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School, Atlanta, GA • Our Lady of Victory Catholic School, Tyrone, GA • St Francis Xavier Catholic School, Brunswick, GA • **Illinois** - Peoria Christian Elementary School, Peoria, IL • St Joseph School, Libertyville, IL • St Raymond School, Mount Prospect, IL • **Iowa** - Resurrection School, Dubuque, IA • **Kentucky** - St Agnes School, Ft. Wright, KY • **Louisiana** - St James Episcopal Day School, Baton Rouge, LA • **Maryland** - Holy Redeemer School, Kensington, MD • Our Lady of Mercy School, Potomac, MD • Resurrection-St Paul School, Ellicott City, MD • St John Regional Catholic School, Frederick, MD • **Michigan** - St Hugo of the Hills, Bloomfield Hills, MI • **Minnesota** - Our Lady of Grace Catholic School, Edina, MN • **Missouri** - Christ Community Lutheran School, Kirkwood, MO • Most Sacred Heart, Eureka, MO • **New Jersey** - Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley, East Brunswick, NJ • **New Mexico** - Holy Ghost Catholic School,

Albuquerque, NM • **Ohio** - Seton Catholic School, Hudson, OH • St Ignatius High School, Cleveland, OH • St Joseph School, Cuyahoga Falls, OH • St Michael School, Cincinnati, OH • St Paschal Baylon School, Highland Heights, OH • St Veronica School, Cincinnati, OH • **Oklahoma** - Rosary School, Oklahoma City, OK • **Pennsylvania** - Epiphany of Our Lord School, Plymouth Meeting, PA • Grey Nun Academy, Yardley, PA • Waldron Mercy Academy, Merion Station, PA • **Rhode Island** - St Philomena School, Portsmouth, RI • **South Carolina** - Christ Our King-Stella Maris School, Mount Pleasant, SC • St Mary's Catholic School, Greenville, SC • **Virginia** - All Saints Catholic School, Manassas, VA • Corpus Christi School, Falls Church, VA • Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, Newport News, VA • St Agnes School, Arlington, VA • St Mary's School, Alexandria, VA • Trinity School at Meadow View, Falls Church, VA



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