

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## House Panel Hears Testimony on School Choice

Signaling a significant shift in focus, the House Education and the Workforce Committee last month heard testimony highlighting school choice as a pathway to student improvement.

The hearing included an eye-opening statement from Andrew J. Coulson, director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute. After tracing a 40-year record of federal education policy, Coulson singled out the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) in the District of Columbia as the “one federal education program that has been proven to both improve educational outcomes and dramatically lower costs.”

Coulson cited research by the Department of Education finding that students attending private schools under the program had “equal or better academic performance” than their public school counterparts as well as “significantly higher graduation rates.” These outcomes, along with “very high levels of parental satisfaction, come at an average per pupil cost of around \$7,000,” a figure that compares very favorably with public school per-pupil spending in the District of “roughly \$28,000 during the 2008-09 school year.”

Coulson said Congress “could contribute greatly to the spread of educational excellence around the nation by preserving and growing the Opportunity Scholarship Program as an example of what is possible.” Such a move would “bolster interest in the many state-level private school choice programs that have also been improving outcomes while lowering costs.”

As prelude to his statement about the D.C. program, Coulson reviewed the effect of massive increases in federal education spending on two important goals of federal education policy: improving

overall achievement and narrowing the performance gaps between different groups of students. He testified that despite a “meteoric rise in federal spending per pupil” over the past 40 years, math and

Program,” Coulson answered. Does the study account for selection bias? “Actually, there is very little selection bias in this kind of study, because it is a randomized control trial,” he said.



Witnesses testify before the House Education and the Workforce Committee February 10, 2011. From left, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Tony Bennett; Lisa Graham Keegan, founder and president of the Education Breakthrough Network; Andrew Coulson, director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute; Dr. Ted Mitchell, CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund. (Committee Photo)

reading scores for high school students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have remained stagnant. And although there has been some narrowing of the achievement gap between minority and white high school students, Coulson concluded there is “little support for the hypothesis that federal efforts” are responsible. “To sum up,” he said, “we have little to show for the \$2 trillion in federal education spending of the past half century.” He then identified the D.C. OSP as the single exception to that rule.

Coulson fielded a volley of questions from committee members. What programs besides the D.C. OSP should Congress continue to fund? “I am not aware of any other federal program that has proven to be both effective and efficient with anywhere near the quality of research that supports the Opportunity Scholarship

In his first question at an education hearing as chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) asked how the OSP or competitive grant programs might be effective in helping students in the 2,000 or so public schools that are responsible for a majority of the nation’s dropouts. Coulson responded that by encouraging the OSP program at the federal level, Congress would be encouraging states to set up similar programs to help children in various types of districts, whether urban, suburban, or rural. The program could provide a model to states and thereby help raise graduation rates and lower dropout rates.

Hunter asked if Congress should leave it to states to determine whether to use the OSP approach or an alternative in a particular situation. Coulson and his fellow panelists answered and nodded in the affirmative, causing John Kline (R-MN), the committee chair, to say “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a simultaneous nod by all panelists quite like that one.”

Another committee member asked Coulson to identify the most effective role the federal government could play to improve educational outcomes—a soft toss that triggered a swing for the fences. “We have seen \$2 trillion worth of federal programs produce essentially no results in either gap narrowing or overall achievement,” he said, “and so another federal program is not likely to do any better than this 45-year history, with the strik-

continued on page 2

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- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
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## Senate Panel Holds Hearing on Opportunity Scholarships

The drive in Congress to reauthorize the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) picked up steam last month when Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman

Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME) held hearings on the measure.

“In America it should not be a privilege for our children to get a first rate education. It should be a right,” Lieberman said. “Without a quality education, there is no equal opportunity. Rigorous evaluations have shown that

the OSP program is working and helping disadvantaged students.” He went on to say that the legislation would “fulfill the fundamental civil

rights of children in D.C. to get the best educations they can. There is no down side.”

Collins said: “The value of educational choice provided by D.C. Opportunity Scholarships is



Witnesses testify at the Senate hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program February 16. From left, Kevin Chavous, chairman, Black Alliance for Educational Options; Virginia Walden Ford, executive director, D.C. Parents for School Choice; Patrick Wolf, professor and 21st Century Chair in School Choice at the University of Arkansas’ Department of Education Reform. (Photo: Leslie E. Kossoff/LK Photos)

clear. For many students, this voucher program is their first and only opportunity to receive a high-quality education.” The senator went on to note that since the program started in 2004, more than 8,400 students have sought scholarships. “Clearly, this program fills a need,” she said. “It would be a great disservice to these students if Con-

gress did not reauthorize this program and allow more students the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.”

**continued from page 1**

ing exception of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.” He went on to state that if Congress were to demonstrate its support for the program despite partisan differences, it would encourage state legislators to establish similar programs and would thereby serve as “a beacon to the nation that would have a lasting and dramatic effect on improving education in this country.”

The hearing, which took place February 10, was billed as an opportunity for the House Education and the Workforce Committee to highlight state and local reforms and to look at the effectiveness of the federal role in education. “Congress must understand the challenges facing our education system, hear the concerns of state and local leaders intimately involved with what goes on in the classroom, and begin to chart a different course that ensures the innovation and accountability being driven at the local level can succeed,” said Chairman Kline.

Lisa Graham Keegan, founder and president of the Education Breakthrough Network, told the committee that when it comes to education reform, “genuine shifts in attitude, policy and practice began twenty years ago, and are dramatically reshaping American education. “She said the transformation is marked by the belief that “our students can and should be leaders in academic attainment. No equivocation, no apology, no excuses.” Keegan pointed out that with

almost one-third of students no longer attending their assigned public school, school choice “has gone mainstream.”

Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Tony Bennett described steps his state is taking to improve student performance. One pillar of his three-part “Putting Students First” agenda calls for giving “all families a voice and high-quality educational options for their children.” Bennett said legislation currently being considered by the state’s legislature includes creating “a needs-based opportunity scholarship for families to take a percentage of state funding to educate their children in participating non-government schools.”

Bennett endorsed a comprehensive approach to education reform: “No single solution will give all students the high-quality education they deserve. Our approach is to attack all of the problems simultaneously from multiple angles. We know that’s what it will take to transform our current system into one that expects and supports excellence for all students.”

Chairman Kline suggested that the pathway to education improvement is not necessarily tied to more spending. “Since 1980, federal spending on education has increased by 425 percent, yet student achievement has failed to improve,” he said. “Clearly, the current system isn’t working. It is time we stopped measuring our commitment to education by the dollars we spend.”

## New Publications Document Growth of School Choice

Two brand new publications spotlight school choice as a growing reality in the United States, embraced by more and more states and families as a way to provide children a quality education to meet their particular needs.

The 2011 edition of *The ABCs of School Choice*, published by the Foundation for Educational Choice (formerly the Friedman Foundation), is a first-rate primer on the topic, presenting a clear case for choice, detailing the various types of choice programs, and offering straightforward answers to common questions on the topic.

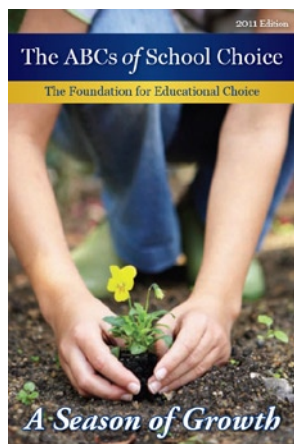
Does school choice have a positive academic impact on participating students? Does it drain funding and resources away from public schools? What is its impact on encouraging civic values? Is it constitutional? The booklet responds to these and other questions in clear language drawing on the latest studies and data.

### 26 Programs in 16 States

The document's core centers on a thorough examination of the 26 school choice programs currently operating in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Whether it's Arizona's tax-credit scholarship program or Oklahoma's special-needs voucher program, the booklet provides the most recent statistics, details on how the program operates, and what statutes and regulations govern the program.

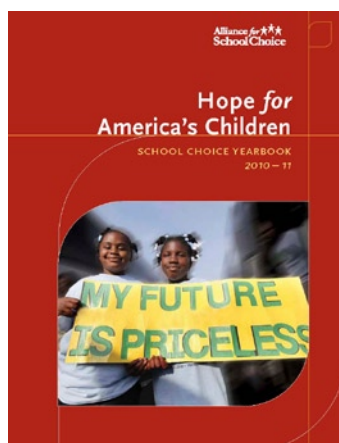
As an added bonus, the booklet is spiced with insights from the late Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman and economist Rose D. Friedman, the couple who established the foundation and whose vision drives it to this day. An example is this 2002 quote from Milton: "Education spending will be most effective if it relies on parental choice and private initiative—the building blocks of success."

The theme for the 2011 edition is "Season of Growth," reflecting the foundation's sense that school choice is on the rise. "The foundation expects a tremendous leap forward for school choice in 2011," says Robert C. Enlow, president and CEO. "Policy makers across the country are finally responding to millions of families who are calling for the freedom to choose the best education for their children."



The richly illustrated *School Choice Yearbook 2010-11*, published by the Alliance for School Choice, focuses on the two most popular types of private school choice programs, vouchers and scholarship tax credits. A total of 20 such programs in 12 states and the District of Columbia currently serve nearly 200,000 children, according to the yearbook. The number of children served has almost doubled since 2004-05.

In a review of key developments in 2010, the yearbook notes that the past year demonstrated how resilient the movement is. "Despite staggering state budget deficits, double-digit unemployment, and a national economic climate that has yet to fully rebound, school choice ceded no ground in 2010." Two new programs, focusing on children with special needs, were enacted during the year, and the number of students served by all choice programs grew by more than 4 percent. What's more, the election in November "of hundreds, if not thousands, of school choice supporters to statehouses and governorships across the country foretold an even brighter 2011."



### Strong as Ever

"School choice programs are as strong as they've ever been," said the yearbook's editor and coauthor Andrew Campanella, a senior communications advisor to the Alliance for School Choice. "With the growth in 2010 and a continued focus on expanding and enacting high quality and sustainable programs around the country, the prospects for even more expansion in 2011 are very, very good."

"We have a societal obligation to make sure that each child has the opportunity to reach his or her potential, and well-designed school choice programs are the key to making that a reality in all corners of this country," said Betsy DeVos, chairman of the Alliance for School Choice. "Tens of thousands of children every day are getting a shot at the better future they deserve because of school choice."

Both publications may be downloaded as PDF documents. *The ABCs of School Choice* is available at <<http://www.edchoice.org/>>. *Hope for America's Children: School Choice Yearbook 2010-11* is available at <<http://www.alliance-forschoolchoice.org/>>.

## ESEA Issue Paper

Preparing for a possible reauthorization by Congress this year of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), CAPE's board of directors last month approved an issue paper proposing 20 changes to the law that would improve services to students and teachers in religious and independent schools.

When Congress first enacted ESEA back in 1965, it directed that aid be provided to children in need regardless of the kind of school they attended. But over the past decade, certain inequities in the law have put private school students and their teachers at a disadvantage. CAPE's proposals would help address the problems.

One proposal would "require that all funds generated by private school students be clearly set aside for the benefit of such students." The change would direct school districts to determine allocations for Title I services to private school students prior to reserving funds for purposes that do not include such students.

Another proposal would re-establish the equitable participation of private school teachers in teacher improvement grants by calculating their benefits as a proportion of a district's full allocation under the program, rather than only on the portion spent on professional development.

Anticipating that ESEA may very well undergo some major changes, the CAPE paper calls for the reauthorized statute to "provide for the participation of private school students and teachers in any combined or newly proposed formula or competitive grant programs."

The paper also seeks a provision that would have states calculate and set aside funds to be used for services to students and teachers in private schools.

CAPE's issue paper on ESEA is available for download at <<http://www.capenet.org/pdf/IP-ESEA2011.pdf>>.

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## CAPE notes

★ The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform's subcommittee that deals with the District of Columbia held hearings March 1 on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). Among the distinguished witnesses was Ronald Holassie, a senior at Archbishop Carroll High School.

Holassie told the committee the program gave his mother "a chance to send me to a school she knew would fit me best." He added: "My mother saw it as a blessing and an answer of prayer from God for her child. She always wanted me to have a quality education."

An OSP participant since sixth grade, Holassie said the transition from public school to private school was tough because his new school had academic standards and behavioral expectations that were higher and stricter than what he had been used to. Catching up academically required "years and hard work and dedication."

Now preparing to graduate high school, Holassie said, "I am ready to take on the world and new opportunities. I credit the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program for my success." He told committee members he was testifying not only for himself or the students currently in the program, but also for "the thousands of children who have not been given the same opportunity."

★ President Obama has released a proposed 2012 budget that includes significant new funds for education, despite

growing congressional sentiment to reduce federal spending. "These are challenging times, but we can't delay investments that will secure our future," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who accompanied the president at a Baltimore public school to announce the budget on February 14. "We must educate our way to a better economy by investing responsibly, advancing reform and demanding results." The budget includes \$500 million in additional funds for Title I and IDEA, two programs in which students in religious and independent schools participate. Additional new funds would promote the administration's "competitiveness agenda," such as the Race to the Top program, which does not provide equitable services for private school students. Before taking effect, the budget must be approved by Congress, which is sure to imprint it with its own priorities.

★ An indication of budget priorities in the House of Representatives came February 19 with passage of a continuing resolution (CR) for the remainder of fiscal year 2011, representing what a House Appropriations Committee press release described as "the largest single discretionary spending cut in the history of the nation."

Committee Chairman Hal Rogers praised the measure, calling it "a monumental accomplishment for each and every American who believes that their government is spending too much." Among the spending cuts is a \$192 million reduction

in basic Title I grants. A compromise on the CR will have to be reached with the Senate and the White House before it is signed into law by the president.

★ Rabbi Bernard Goldenberg, president of CAPE's board of directors from 1977 to 1979 and a founder of Torah Umesorah, an organization committed to starting and supporting Hebrew day schools, died in Jerusalem on Friday, January 28. Rabbi Goldenberg enjoyed a renowned career rooted in his work to help establish day schools in major orthodox Jewish communities. Torah Umesorah, of which Rabbi Goldenberg was leader and then national director emeritus, today serves over 675 schools that enroll more than 190,000 students, a tribute to his vision and inspiration. Its services include "personnel placement, curriculum development, publications, principal and teacher training, school supervision," and more.

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