

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Jill Biden Helps Celebrate 325 Years of Quaker Education

In 1689, William Penn established a school in Philadelphia “at the request, cost, and charges of the people called Quakers.” Three hundred twenty-five years later, on April 24, 2014, the “people called Quakers” celebrated the birth and growth of Friends education in the United States at the historic Arch Street Meeting House in Philadelphia.

Dr. Darryl J. Ford, clerk of the Friends Council on Education, which sponsored the event, and current head of William Penn Charter School, the same school that Penn established and the oldest Quaker school in the world, chaired the festivities and served as a symbolic and unmistakable link between past and present.

Second Lady Jill Biden offered moving testimony on the influence of Friends education on her own family. She said teachers at Wilmington Friends School in Delaware, which her two sons and daughter attended, saw “that of God in every child,” and “worked hard and consciously” to make students feel valued. “The school’s kindness and support was the glue that really helped cement us together,” she said. “The environment was safe and nurturing. The dedicated staff interacted wonderfully with students and parents.” The school “made a big difference for our family.”

Biden went on to attribute to the school the commitment her children have to serving others. “For the Biden family, the Quaker philosophy of ‘let their lives speak’ has become a reality,” she said. Her three children “have lived, because of the Friends School experience, to let their lives speak.” The school’s philosophy “is embedded in their character.”

Leadership Award

Dr. Biden presented the “Friends Council Leadership Award for Service to Society” to Kwesi and Melissa Koomson for their work in establishing Heritage Academy, a PK-12 independent school

in Ghana, as well as a foundation that provides scholarships for students at Heritage. The school, which serves over 1,200 students, is committed to producing graduates who can pass the national exam, think critically, succeed in college and life, and give back to the community. Its motto is “Knowledge and Integrity.”

The Koomsons are faculty members at Westtown School in West Chester, PA. Kwesi teaches upper school math, and Melissa coordinates the work program and service network. Students and staff at Westtown periodically visit Heritage Academy, putting into action the community’s commitment to service and global education.

Dr. Biden said the Koomsons “embody the very best in Quaker education, but also the very best in basic humanity.” Their work, she said, has resulted in “thousands of children given new hope and confidence, regardless of age, background, or disability.”

Quaker Education Day

Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter added to the festivities by issuing a proclamation declaring April 24 to be “Quaker Education Day” and urging “all citizens to be aware of the essential contributions of the Quaker community in Philadelphia, the nation, and the world.”

Irene McHenry, executive director of the Friends Council since 2001 and immediate past president of CAPE, spoke about

how Quaker education weaves key values into daily life and engenders in students a sense of awe and wonder about the world. She said Friends schools help students understand “justice, basic human and civil rights, and values that include the love of freedom, religious tolerance, respect for human dignity and diversity.”

Reflecting on the practice of Meeting for Worship in Friends schools, she said she sees in those settings “communities joining together to share their stories of happiness, pain, friendship, insight, and hope.” She reported that one kindergarten student described the experience this way: “We sit in circles. God is everywhere. There are no right answers.”

Throughout the celebration and during a dinner that followed, McHenry was honored for a lifetime of exemplary service to Friends education: founding schools, establishing a leadership institute, producing publications, and leading the Friends Council.

Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, thanked McHenry for her recent exemplary four-year service as CAPE’s president. “Irene has a remarkable ability to hear and honor all voices,” he said. “She treats everyone with the utmost kindness and respect, recognizes the various gifts at the table, and exerts courageous but calm effort in finding common ground.” He called her “a model of Quaker leadership.”



Dr. Darryl J. Ford, Second Lady Jill Biden, and Dr. Irene McHenry celebrate 325 years of Quaker education at the Arch Street Meeting House in Philadelphia, April 24, 2014. (Photo: Laurie Beck-Peterson)

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Switching Sectors Has Consequences

Take a tour of any inner-city neighborhood and you won't have to walk far before seeing a building that for decades served as a religious school but is now the home of a charter school. The general dynamics of the interplay between the private school and charter school sectors have been fairly easy to grasp: the growth of charters has forced the closing of some religious schools, which in turn has provided additional space for the expansion of charters. But the details driving the phenomenon and the consequences of the shift have not always been fully understood. A new report from the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice helps shed some light on what exactly is taking place.

Sector Switchers: Why Catholic Schools Convert to Charters and What Happens Next takes a detailed look at Catholic schools in Washington, D.C., Miami, and Indianapolis that have not exactly "converted"

to charters so much as closed down completely and then allowed their facilities to be taken over by charters. The report's authors, Michael Q. McShane and Andrew P. Kelly, examine the forces leading to the change, some immediate consequences of the change, and the long-range policy implications.

Short-Term Demographics

The short-term demographic effects are straightforward and somewhat predictable. Tuition-free charter schools see a significant increase in enrollment over the tuition-dependent Catholic schools they replace. "Free" turns out to be an attraction.

In 18 schools that were tracked, average enrollment went from 153 students the last year they were Catholic to 242 students the second year they were charters. The average percentage of minority students in the studied schools also increased, from 79 percent in the year of closing to 93 percent two years after becoming charters.

"Tuition no doubt prevents many parents from enrolling their children in private schools, a barrier taxpayer-supported 'free' public and charter schools don't have," McShane said. "Minority households, many of whom have lower incomes, are affected by that price tag more than others."

McShane and Kelly write that none of the three cities in which the studied schools were

located had "what could be described as a level playing field between school sectors." As a result, the Catholic schools were forced to compete against schools that did not charge tuition and were squeezed out of the market. The authors conclude, "Choice programs that concentrate students in one particular sector over another can lead to the dissolution of one set of providers, actually narrowing the set of choices students have."

Evolution or Destruction?

Although some might argue that the schools were simply evolving to more affordable and sustainable models, the Catholic school leaders interviewed made it clear that the replacement schools were not an evolution so much as an entirely different type of school, which is to say they were no longer Catholic. The leaders regarded the religious mission as

central to the nature of a Catholic school, and charter schools do not reflect that mission. As one administrator put it, Catholic identity is not "an element" of the school, it is "the reason we do what we do."

Broad School Choice

McShane and Kelly offer evidence that "many charter school students come from private schools" and note that "the movement of students from one sector to another could, over the long term, narrow the choices families have in a given area." If the goal is a "vibrant choice marketplace...in which families can choose from a diverse set of options," then "limiting that choice to charter and traditional public schools is suboptimal."

By way of solution, they note that the evidence makes "a strong case that private school choice programs can stem the tide of private school closures," though they caution that the way choice programs are structured "affects the schools that will be able to participate—and ultimately the set of choices available to families."

Commenting on the report, Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation, said, "School choice for all families would enable more parents to overcome tuition barriers, allowing those same private schools to remain open, independent, and able to serve students in need."

SECTOR SWITCHERS

Why Catholic Schools Convert to Charters and What Happens Next

Michael Q. McShane and Andrew P. Kelly

APRIL 2014

Taking the Life of the Soul Seriously

Awash in chatter about the Common Core, standardized assessments, and college readiness, educators would do well to step back, draw a deep breath, and drink freely from what The Rev. Daniel R. Heischman has to say about a profounder purpose of schooling: nurturing the spirit.

In his latest book, *What Schools Teach Us About Religious Life*, Heischman, executive director of the National Association of Episcopal Schools and president of CAPE's board of directors, examines the role of religion in eight private schools, both faith-based and nonsectarian. Page after page provides fresh insight and rich narrative on how schools foster a life of faith, develop a sense of service, and enrich the spirit.

At the same time, the book illustrates an underlying premise: the landscape of religion is changing in the country, and schools can serve both as indicators and mediators of that change. Indeed, schools must artfully navigate the change as they attempt to advance unity amidst diversity and to secure an anchor of tradition within the tugs of secular society.

"These institutions have powerful stories to tell, not only about their own internal life but, also, I believe, about the rapidly changing character of religious life in the United States," writes Heischman. "Our culture is hungry for models...that can help instruct us in how to be people and places of integrity and commitment while also being eager to be diverse, welcoming communities."

The book describes "America's increasingly pluralistic and fluctuating religious character," with more people claiming to be atheists or agnostics or to have no formal affiliation with traditional religion. Private schools, writes Heischman, "have become places where issues of religious diversity and fluctuation are being addressed, lived out, and more fully understood." In fact, he believes that schools "have as much to tell us about religious life in the United States as do churches, synagogues, temples, or mosques."

One school featured in the book is The First Academy, an evangelical Christian school in Orlando, Florida, committed to offering a setting that fosters faith along with academic excellence. Two upper school religion courses, Christian

Worldview and Apologetics, "help students to understand their faith in tandem with competing worldviews."

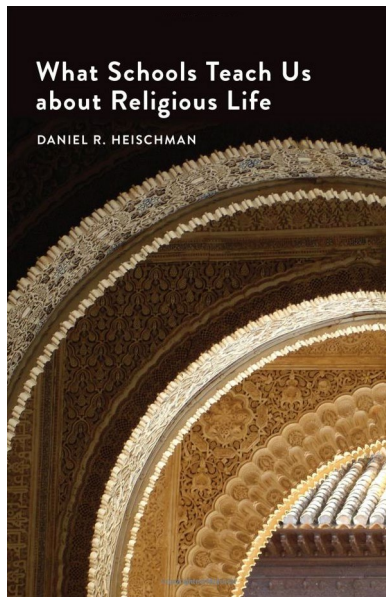
New Horizon School in Pasadena, California, named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education, serves Muslim students. The school brings together Islamic heritage and American citizenship, cultivating an understanding that "religious life for Muslims in the United States will be a life lived among a variety of religious groups and identities." The school partners with Weizmann Jewish Day School in Pasadena and St. Mark's Episcopal School in Altadena for music concerts and has a cultural exchange program with another Jewish school, Sinai Akiba Academy in West Los Angeles. As Heischman puts it, New Horizon students "are seeking, and fully expect to secure, a place in the crosscurrents of American culture."

Hardly a page goes by in this tightly written book without an original look at the deeper dimensions of the featured schools or a wise connection with religion and society in general. Even the nonsectarian schools have "something to teach the religious world," writes Heischman in reference to one school's "continual emphasis upon kindness."

To offer a foothold in exploring each school and to sustain an engaging story line, Heischman intersperses his own observations with excerpts from numerous interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The effect is much like an anthropologist uncovering a hidden culture. The reader leaves each chapter with a rich tapestry of narrative, character, and data that captures the school's inner life.

Whether describing the unashamedly Christian environment at an evangelical school, the interreligious sensitivities of an Episcopal school, the rooted sense of family at a Catholic school, or the compelling Meetings for Worship at a Quaker school, Heischman manages to uncover how private schools are engaging students in a dimension of life typically ignored in other types of schools.

These are schools, he writes, that "take the life of the soul seriously," and such focus carries profound consequences. "Souls become gentle when attention is paid to them, and in turn gentle souls come to recognize and appreciate the souls of their peers."



Choice-apalooza

OK, the headline is a bit hokey, but it captures a whirlwind of April activity advancing school choice in a couple of states.

On April 21, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback signed HB 2506 into law, a comprehensive school funding and reform bill that includes up to \$10 million in tax credits for corporations that contribute to scholarship funds to help low-income children in failing schools attend private schools.

According to the American Federation for Children, Kansas is now the 19th state "to offer low-income and special needs children educational choice." It is the 14th state to provide choice through scholarship tax credits.

"Kansas's new scholarship tax credit program will empower parents and provide children with the necessary educational options they deserve," said AFC Chair Betsy DeVos. "I want to applaud Gov. Brownback for his leadership and commitment to helping low-income and special needs children."

Meanwhile in Arizona, Governor Jan Brewer was also busy signing school choice legislation. On April 23, just weeks after the Arizona Supreme Court let stand a lower court's decision upholding the state's education savings accounts program, the governor signed two pieces of legislation to expand that program: one allowing siblings of already eligible children to participate, and the other providing immediate access to the program for children of military members stationed in Arizona or killed in the line of duty.

"Arizona's military members serve our state and our country. We feel strongly that we should reciprocate by serving their children with this legislation," said Marine Corps veteran Rep. Sonny Borrelli. "Although we can never make up for the immense sacrifices military families make, we can provide the educational options to help those families."

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Sometimes focusing on a particular city can offer insights about trends in other jurisdictions both by contrast and comparison. The New York City Independent Budget Office released a **fact sheet** last month on the number of students attending the city's public and private schools. In 2012-13, 241,900 children attended private schools in the Big Apple, 19 percent of the city's K-12 total. The enrollment figure represents a 9 percent decline (23,100 students) since 2002-03. But the decline was not evenly distributed among school sectors. Roman Catholic schools lost over 47,000 students (35 percent) during the 10-year span, while independent schools increased by 6,600 students (19 percent) and Jewish schools grew by 21,300 students (23 percent). Jewish schools now serve more students than any other private sector in New York City. As the report puts it, "Enrollment at Jewish schools has eclipsed that of Roman Catholic schools, historically the most popular alternative to public schools."

★ The Alliance for School Choice released its 2013-14 School Choice Yearbook last month, which reports that across the nation, 308,560 students are enrolled in government funded school choice programs.

"With eight new statewide programs and the single largest increase in private school choice enrollment—it is clear that parents nationwide demand and deserve educational choice," said Betsy DeVos,

chairman of the Alliance for School Choice. "We remain focused, not on yesterday's victories, but on tomorrow's triumphs as we continue to work together to break down barriers to educational choice and opportunity."

The attractive interactive yearbook is available at <http://allianceforschoolchoice.org/yearbook>.

★ The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Non-Public Education sponsored a webinar April 29 on how to develop a state-level working group to ensure equitable services under federal education programs for children in private schools. The event highlighted how the Commonwealth of Virginia went about establishing such a group, and it featured presenters from the Virginia Department of Education as well as Josie Webster from the Virginia Council for Private Education. Josie also chairs CAPE's State CAPE Network (SCN).

An archive of the webinar, along with PowerPoint slides, will soon be available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/technical.html#webinars>.

★ The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), a member of CAPE, is sponsoring National Christian Educators Day (NCED) on May 5, which it describes as "an annual event to celebrate, honor, and pray for Christian educators in both public and private schools worldwide."

"ACSI is inviting parents, students,

pastors, educators, businesses, and non-profits to participate in National Christian Educators Day," said ACSI Vice President Taylor Smith. "We want to bless Christian educators—wherever they serve—on this day."

Learn more about the event at www.NationalChristianEducatorsDay.com.

★ On Earth Day, April 22, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced a total of 48 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools for 2014, including the following nine private schools: Bertschi School, Seattle, WA • Conserve School, Land O Lakes, WI • Greenwich Academy, Greenwich, CT • High Meadows School, Roswell, GA • Jesuit High School, Portland, OR • Kellman Brown Academy, Voorhees, NJ • Metro High School, Cleveland, OH • San Domenico School, San Anselmo, CA • St. Thomas Aquinas School, Indianapolis, IN.

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