

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Policy Summit Centers on Breaking Down Barriers to Choice

Students, celebrities, and school choice leaders from across the country came to Kissimmee, Florida, last month for the fifth annual policy summit of the American Federation for Children. The event, whose theme was “Breaking Down Barriers to Choice,” featured an impressive roster of inspiring speakers—some well-known and some little-known.

Put Valencia Lynch in the latter category. She delivered emotional and powerful first-hand testimony about the transformative power of school choice. Through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, Valencia attended Notre Dame Middle School, which she described as “an avenue for the expansion” of opportunities in her life. Her mother saw the school as a place where Valencia could enrich her faith, be “academically challenged,” and receive “the very best tools and guidance to reach the stars.”

### Responsibility, Respect, Regalo

Now armed with bachelor's and master's degrees, Valencia is set on creating a cultural center in the city and helping her community “heal, understand, and empower itself.” She said her school and the values of responsibility, respect, and regalo (“gift” in Spanish) that it instills in students “have in many ways framed my life choices to be a socially responsible member of Milwaukee.”

Valencia's remarks, along with those of several other direct beneficiaries of school choice, provided the personal and energizing witness that marks the summit year after year. But the event also shines the spotlight on several famous people who

believe in the power of choice—a roster that this year included Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute; Bobby Jindal, governor of Louisiana; and Campbell Brown, an award-winning journalist and former White House correspondent for NBC News.

### Two Americas

Brooks described two Americas, where the wealthy are seeing 5 percent annual economic growth while the poor are experiencing zero growth, marking “the seventh year in a row that the average household in the bottom half

of the American economy will see declining real purchasing power.” He noted that five years ago, there were 32 million Americans on food stamps, while today there are 48 million, an astounding 50 percent increase. The unemployment rate for African American teenagers is 36 percent, the “highest it's been in many decades.” In light of these disturbing data, Brooks invited listeners to “fight for the bottom half” by engaging in what he called “the new American civil rights struggle.”

### Hope Agenda

Brooks reported that direct research is demonstrating that people in poverty desperately want hope, the “promise for a better future,” the “idea that if we do

something right, something good actually happens.” He said in a society where so many poor people are left behind, “it feels like the game is rigged.” The solution is a “hope agenda” and people willing to be “warriors for hope.”

For Brooks, an essential component of the hope agenda is education reform. He noted that every great company has two characteristics: choice and innovation. “Choice means that you give people what they want and need; innovation means you find better ways to do it.” Yet despite their importance for success, they are characteristics “of which our current education system is shockingly bereft.”

### More Money?

Brooks said many activists in Washington, DC, argue that schools in the district need more money, even though current spending per pupil averages \$18,475 and the percentage of eighth graders who read at grade level is only 15 percent. More money won't help, he said. The reason so many children in the country experience inadequate education is a lack of choice, a lack of innovation, and a lack of courage to “take on the entrenched interests.” “The threat to America is that we pull 25 percent of the country in the cart permanently. That's the national security struggle of our time,” he said.

Brooks urged the audience, whether Democrat or Republican, to seek social justice, which for him means “fighting for people who have less power than you do.” If people are willing “to fight like crazy” for school choice, “you're going to win,”



Valencia Lynch speaks at the AFC policy summit May 21, 2014. (Image captured from AFC video.)



Arthur Brooks speaks at the AFC policy summit May 21, 2014. (Image captured from AFC video.)

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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
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
- 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
- 35 Affiliated State Organizations

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said Brooks, because you're right and your cause is just."

## Dollars Should Follow Children

Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal talked about school reform that relies on a simple concept: "that the dollar should follow the child instead of making the child follow the dollar." He explained that one of the school choice measures enacted in Louisiana involves scholarships that allow parents, "the first and best educators of their children," to decide where best to educate their children. Since the initiative's enactment, "Every year, the enrollment in the program has grown by double digits." Over 60 percent of children in the state are eligible for the program, and "demand is far greater than the capacity." Even though the amount of the scholarships is capped at 95 percent of what the state would spend for public school students, the actual expenditure is 60 percent, "saving tens of millions of dollars for taxpayers."

## Parent Satisfaction

Jindal reported that 93 percent of parents participating in the program are happy with it. He has spoken with parents who were satisfied with everything from homework policies at the scholarship school to their children's newfound commitment to the pursuit of college and career. One mother, who as a teenager had become pregnant and gone on welfare, tearfully confided with him that she didn't want her daughter to repeat that path, but "to go to college, get a better job, and have a better quality of life."

Jindal said the fundamental question surrounding the school choice debate is, "Do we trust parents to make the best decisions for their children?" Whether the choice is a public school, a public charter school, an independent school, or a religious school, "every parent should have the choice."

Denouncing "the coalition of the status quo," Jindal said he's "tired of folks saying, well, just be

patient; we're making incremental progress; just give us more money and more time." He called that approach immoral in that children "only have one chance to get a great education."

## Everyone Should Have Choice

Campbell Brown described her advantaged life in New York City, the many choices she had for her children to receive a quality education, and the many opportunities their education would provide. But she also confessed her realization that many other parents in the city are not in the same boat. "Those choices and those options are not available to mothers who care about their kids just as much as I do, and have the same hopes and dreams for their children that I have for mine, and who want their child to have every opportunity in life just like I did," she said. "If we believe that education is a fundamental right, then everyone should have that choice."

## Why Is This Controversial?

Brown said she is astonished by the resistance she sees to the simple proposition that parents should have the option to find "a better school to try to give their child a better life." She said, "The idea that this is somehow controversial is amazing to me!"

Campbell spoke about her years at NBC News, where she was mentored by Tim Russert, the late host of *Meet the Press*. She believed at the time that when covering a story, "both sides had some merit" and "both sides deserved a fair hearing." The reporter's job "was essentially to referee the match." But she said she now realizes that with some issues, "it's very clear that both sides do not have merit." She said, "Referee is not a role you can play when the lives of children are hanging in the balance."

In closing, Brown wished the group success in "winning more battles on behalf of parents and children."

Videos of presentations at the summit are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SchoolChoiceWorks>.



Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal speaks at the AFC policy summit May 21, 2014. (Image captured from AFC video.)



Campbell Brown speaks at the AFC policy summit May 20, 2014. (Image captured from AFC video.)

## Public Rules on Private Schools

Do school choice programs compromise the autonomy and independence of private schools? A new study from the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice offers important context for addressing this question.

In *Public Rules on Private Schools: Measuring the Regulatory Impact of State Statutes and School Choice Programs*, Andrew D. Catt, research analyst for the foundation, examines and compares regulations imposed on private schools “before and after the enactments of 23 school choice programs in 12 states.”

### Already in Effect

It turns out that most regulations affecting private schools that participate in school choice programs were already on the books before the program was up and running. As the report put it, “On average, 62 percent of regulations on private schools were created prior to the existence of a given program.” Of the 575 regulations examined in the study, 355 were classified as “pre-choice” (that is, in effect prior to the program), while 130 additional regulations kicked in during the first year the program was underway and another 90 regulations took effect in subsequent years.

Of course, regulations vary in their impact. Not all affect private schools equally, and not all affect them negatively. The report assigned an “impact score” (on a scale of -3 to +3) to each regulation to assess its positive or negative effect on private schools. By way of example, a regulation that requires all private schools to administer a particular standardized test might receive a score of -3, while a regulation that protects the autonomy of all private schools might receive a +3.

The report found that “private school voucher programs have regulatory impact scores slightly more than three times as negative the scores of tax credit scholarship programs.” But the report cautions that “the actual level of burden facing private schools may or may not be onerous.”

### Recommendations

Catt includes several policy recommendations for lawmakers in the process of designing school choice programs:

- “Avoid reinventing the wheel.” See if private schools are already meeting certain standards before placing additional regulations on them.

- “Avoid statutory redundancies and overlap.” If a regulation is already in place that essentially achieves the same objective, there is no need to impose a new burden upon schools.

- “Consider the oversight roles of accreditation.” Lawmakers should ask the questions: “Are there non-governmental organizations that already provide some measure of oversight and accountability for the state’s private schools? Do those organizations already have the capacity and/or industry knowledge to function in one or more ways and relieve state government of costs in terms of time and resources?”

- “Consider costs to private schools in fiscal impact calculations.” The administrative cost to private schools of implementing a regulation is a burden that should be taken into consideration.

- “Ensure all schools, regardless of type or sector, can be reimbursed for substantial costs associated with regulations.” As the report explains, “If lawmakers plan to enact legislation that requires private schools to follow regulations that public schools receiving public dollars follow, then parity should be considered. Private schools should be reimbursed for costs incurred for regulatory compliance.”

### Regulatory Focus

In comments posted about the report, the author said he found that various types of school choice programs seem to focus their regulations in different ways. “It appears that statutes for voucher programs regulate the participating schools the most; statutes for tax-credit scholarship programs regulate the nonprofit scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs) the most; and statutes for ESAs regulate parents/guardians the most,” he wrote.

Catt had important advice for proponents of school choice: “Educate policymakers, the media, and the general public on the longstanding regulatory relationship between state governments and private schools.”

A PDF version of the report is available on the Web site of the Friedman Foundation at: [www.edchoice.org](http://www.edchoice.org).

## Condition of Ed

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released *The Condition of Education 2014* on May 29. Mandated by Congress, the report covers enrollment, expenditures, resources, and outcomes related to American education, pre-K through college.

One chapter focuses on private school enrollment. According to the report, “Private school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12 increased from 5.9 million in 1995–96 to 6.3 million in 2001–02, then decreased to 5.3 million in 2011–12. The percentage of all students in private schools decreased from 12 percent in 1995–96 to 10 percent in 2011–12.” But bucking the trend, private school enrollment in grades 9–12 “increased from 1.2 million in 1995–96 to 1.3 million in 2011–12.”

Enrollment shifts within the private school community varied by type of school. “Catholic schools decreased from 2.7 million in 1995–96 to 2.1 million in 2011–12, and the share of private school students in Catholic schools declined from 45 percent in 1995–96 to 40 percent in 2011–12.” The number of students enrolled in conservative Christian schools was also lower in 2011–12 (731,000) than in 1995–96 (787,000). By contrast, unaffiliated religious schools, which NCES defines as having a general religious orientation or purpose, though not classified as conservative Christian or affiliated with a specific religion, saw a higher enrollment in 2011–12 (696,000) than in 1995–96 (611,000).

When looked at by school level, in 2011–12, 50 percent of all private elementary school students were enrolled in Catholic schools, as were 74 percent of all secondary school students. However, only 8 percent of students in combined K–12 schools attended Catholic schools. The largest percentages of students in combined schools were in conservative Christian schools (30 percent) and nonsectarian schools (also 30 percent).

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## CAPE notes

★ Hall of Fame football star Deion Sanders appeared on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on May 9, 2014, to discuss parental choice in education. "I truly believe you should have your choice" when it comes to selecting a child's school, said Sanders. Not having choice "would be just like someone telling you you could only go to the beauty salons that are in your area, in a three block radius, or you could only buy suits from someone that's in your area.... But that's what we have when we're talking about schools. And often times in the inner city, schools are failing." Parents "should have the opportunity to choose" the schools they want for their children, he said.



★ Agudath Israel of America, a member of CAPE that represents Orthodox Jewish schools across the country, celebrated its 92nd anniversary on May 27, 2014, with a gala dinner in the grand ballroom of the New York Hilton in Midtown Manhattan.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, a featured speaker at the event, noted the "incredible growth" of yeshivas in New York City and what it means for the present and future strength and stability of the city. The mayor also referenced the inclusion of

Jewish schools in his plans to expand pre-K and after school programs. "Our pre-K program is going to have a strong yeshivot element, and I am proud of that fact," he said.

Mayor de Blasio ended his remarks with a quote from Rebbe Nachman, an Hasidic rabbi who lived and taught in Breslov, Ukraine from 1802 to 1810. "If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?" The mayor said Agudath Israel is "getting better all the time" and earning its tomorrows. He wished the organization "mazel tov."

★ U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan last month recognized 141 high school seniors as Presidential Scholars. Forty-four of the scholars this year (31 percent) attend private schools. The 2014 class of scholars also includes 20 students recognized on the basis of their "academic and artistic scholarship in the visual arts, the performing arts, or creative writing." Five of the 20 Presidential Scholars in the Arts were from private schools.

"The extraordinary young men and women being honored for the 50th anniversary of the Presidential Scholars have excelled in their educational, artistic and civic pursuits," said the secretary. "They

show all of us that when students challenge themselves and commit themselves to excellence, the results can be astounding."

Honorees from the class of 2014 will receive a Presidential Scholar Medallion at a ceremony to be held June 22 in Washington, DC.

★ U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, introduced the *Creating Hope and Opportunities for Individuals and Communities through Education (CHOICE) Act* on May 29, 2014, to expand school choice for military families and children with disabilities. The bill matches S. 1909, which Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) introduced back in January.

"I am proud to partner with Senator Scott in introducing the CHOICE Act to empower families as they determine the best educational path for their children," said Rokita.

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