

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

National Summit Shines Spotlight on School Reform

It's tough to bring an audience of no-nonsense businesspeople, policy advocates, and legislators to tears, but that's exactly what Denisha Merriweather managed to do last month with her inspiring story of triumph over adversity.

Denisha beat the odds. During moving remarks at the 2014 National Summit on Education Reform, she recounted a life of challenge: born into poverty, disruptive in class, held back twice, and hating school. Her likely path was that of so many similar students: dropping out, having a baby, and spending the rest of her life "trying to make ends meet."

But a caring godmother, Florida's tax credit scholarship program, and Esprit de Corps Center for Learning in Jacksonville "changed everything," said Denisha. "The teachers there challenged me to make the honor roll, and I embraced that challenge. The school's small size and faith-based environment made me feel welcome. For the first time in my life, I woke up in the morning looking forward to school."

The experience paid off. Denisha graduated from the University of West Florida this year, the first person in her family to have a college degree. Next year she's starting a graduate program in social work and public health. The words of Benjamin Franklin, shown to the audience in an introductory video, perfectly capture Denisha's experience: "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." As Denisha herself put it, "You can see what is possible when you give a kid a chance at a quality education, helping them to unlock their true potential."

Esprit de Corps Center for Learning is a member of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The school's mission is "to provide a safe and nurturing atmosphere of Christian moral excellence where students are trained to lead godly lives in a multicultural and technologically sophisticated society."

Though she pretty much stole the show, Denisha's assignment at the summit was to introduce keynote speaker Jeb Bush, whose Foundation for Excellence in Education organized the event. Noting how school reform is often a struggle, Bush said Denisha's story shows that "the struggle is worth it." However, choice for one student is not enough, he said. "There are literally millions of Denishas waiting out there to be helped...waiting for us to push for policies to give them a choice." He went on to describe parent choice as "the promise of a quality education for every American child and with it, a chance to strengthen America."

Noting that black and Hispanic students are far behind their white counterparts in school performance, Bush called the problem "a civil rights crisis in every sense of the term," because "when schools fail our kids, we deny them more than an education, we deny them their right to their potential." Poor education stifles upward mobility and makes it harder to make a living, start a business, and raise a family, he said.

Calling education "the great equalizer," Bush pointed out that a math problem "doesn't care whether you were born into privilege or poverty." A piece of learning is "portable wealth, and nobody can take that away from you."

While placing parent choice at the center of reform efforts, Bush also identified other measures to improve schools: "high standards; rigorous, high-quality assessments; accountability for school leaders;

early childhood literacy and ending social promotion; digital and distance learning; transparency for parents to see whether their schools are getting better or getting worse."

Bush challenged summit participants to consider a basic question: "If we were

designing our school system from scratch, what would it look like?" First, said Bush, it would be a system where "parents would have the right to a full and competitive marketplace of school options: neighborhood schools, charter schools, private schools, blended and virtual schools, home schools."

Such a system would "make it crystal clear that the student is

why schools exist."

Second, "we would treat great teachers like modern professionals...capable of creativity, worthy of autonomy, and deserving of personal accountability."

Finally, the new system would turn "one of the key organizing principles of schools" on its head. "Right now, we think an education occurs because of the amount of time students spend in class...not the amount of knowledge they gain. It's time we reverse that. Time should be the variable and learning the constant." Technology can help accomplish that.

Summarizing his proposals as "abundant choices for parents, a 21st century teaching profession, and the full embrace of digital learning," Bush said reform requires bold leadership and long-term commitment. "Our movement has become strong, but our work is only beginning."



Denisha Merriweather speaks at the 2014 National Summit on Education Reform November 20 in Washington, DC. (Photo by Eric Draper)

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- 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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Parents Make Strides in Midterm Elections

The 2014 midterm elections provided significant gains for parents seeking more say in how their children are educated. More U.S. senators, more governors, and more state legislators can now be counted in the parent choice column of the school reform debate.

The American Federation for Children said 2014 “will go down in history as the election cycle in which parents rose up in support of educational choice.” AFC Chair Betsy DeVos proclaimed that “an education revolution” is underway in this country.

Governors

According to The Heritage Foundation and other sources, governors’ mansions across the country will be more likely to house pro-parent-choice occupants starting January.

Many were re-elected to office: Robert Bentley (AL), Rick Scott (FL), Nathan Deal (GA), Terry Branstad (IA), Sam Brownback (KS), Paul LePage (ME), Brian Sandoval (NV), Susana Martinez (NM), John Kasich (OH), Mary Fallin (OK), Nikki Haley (SC), and Scott Walker (WI). Others—such as Doug Ducey (AZ), Bruce Rauner (IL), Larry Hogan (MD), and Pete Ricketts (NE) —will be serving for the first time.

In Wisconsin, Scott Walker promised to expand the state’s private school scholarship program, while his opponent said she’d work to abolish it. Brian Fraley, spokesperson for the Wisconsin Federation for Children, said the group is looking forward “to working with the governor in the months and years ahead to empower parents through the expansion of school choice.”

For John Kirtley, chairman of the Florida Federation for Children, one thing was clear about Rick Scott’s victory over challenger Charlie Crist, an opponent of parent choice: “There’s no doubt educational choice played a deciding factor in the outcome of [the] election.” Kirtley said voters “rewarded Gov. Scott for supporting educational choice, and that message has resonated throughout the state as many pro-educational choice candidates won their races across Florida.”

Senators

The newest class of U.S. senators is another indication of how the country is trending on the issue of parent choice. At least eight of the 12 first-time senators elected last month are on record as supporters.

When he was House speaker in North Carolina, Senator-elect Thom Tillis helped move an opportunity scholarship program for low-income students through the state legislature. This past August he urged the state’s Court of Appeals to ensure the program’s continuation.

Tom Cotton, soon to be the newest senator from Arkansas, once pledged to “work to empower parents with better information and more options to make the right choices for their children’s education.” After affirming his support for public education, he said he also strongly supports “parental choice and alternatives to the traditional public school system, including home

schooling, charter schools, and private and religious schools. Only parents can and should decide which path is best for their children.”

Colorado’s next senator, Cory Gardner,

already has a voting record in Congress in support of school choice. When he was a member of the House of Representatives in 2011, Gardner supported two parent choice measures: one to create a five-year pilot program to provide opportunity scholarships to the children of members of the military, and the other to reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Senator-elect Shelley Moore Capito from West Virginia also voted on the same two parent choice amendments when she was in the House, as did James Lankford, who will soon represent Oklahoma in the Senate.

Joni Ernst, the senator-elect from Iowa, also has a voting record on school choice, though at the state level. In 2013 as a member of the Iowa Senate, she voted to lift the total amount of tax credits allowed under the state’s tuition scholarship program from \$8.75 million to \$12 million. The credits are allowed for contributions to organizations that award scholarships to help eligible students attend private schools.

Steve Daines, the only member of the House of Representatives from Montana and a senator starting January, writes on his Congressional Web site, “I will push for expanding school choice so that more parents can send their children to a high-performing school where public schools are poor.”

Finally, Senator-elect Ben Sasse of Nebraska recently wrote a piece for the National Review Online outlining “bold ideas” that Republicans need to get behind, one being “education reform that champions more choices for parents.” [Graphic ©ottawawebdesign/Dollar Photo Club]



Forty Years and 400 Issues of CAPE Outlook

Forty years ago—and 400 issues ago—CAPE published its first Outlook, though under a title at the time that was a tad longer: “The Private Elementary and Secondary Education Outlook.”

In its inaugural issue, the publication’s purpose was described this way: “By regularly presenting information on significant issues and activities in private education, Outlook will help readers make informed independent judgments on the role and value of private education in America.”

First-issue stories included a piece about CAPE being “a unifying agency and voice for most of private elementary and secondary education in the United States,” and a report that Terrel H. Bell, President Nixon’s nominee for commissioner of education, had taken a “firm stand in support of private education.” The premier issue also reported on a speech that Robert Lamborn, CAPE’s executive director at the time, had given to a group of educators, telling them that private schools “serve the needs of a society committed to the strength which derives from diversity.”

For four decades, Outlook has served as the premier chronicle of policy issues relating to private education in the United States. Our archives (available at <www.capenet.org/outlook.html>) are well worth a tour by policy buffs, historians, or any citizen curious about the interplay between public policy and private schools. Each issue is packed with information relating to legislation and regulations, research, court rulings, national trends, federal and state initiatives, and much more.

A Lot Has Happened

A lot has happened in 40 years. The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), which provides equitable educational services for students in religious and independent schools, was reauthorized numerous times. Its private school provisions served as the focus of a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1985 in *Aguilar v. Felton*, which required students in religious schools to receive ESEA services at neutral sites—at least until 1997, when the court reversed itself in *Agostini v. Felton*. Outlook captured it all.

In 2001 CAPE reported on enactment of education savings accounts, the nation’s first measure of tax relief to help parents with the costs of K-12 education in private schools. A year later, headlines captured the Supreme Court’s historic decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, upholding the Ohio school voucher initiative. And two years after that, Outlook focused on the enactment of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, the first K-12 voucher measure at the national level.

Individual Stories

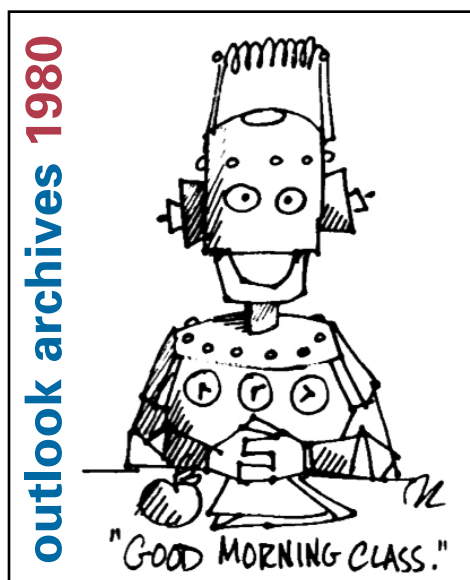
Outlook’s archives also reveal chapters in the stories of individuals. In 1989, the CAPEnotes section reported that President George H. W. Bush had appointed John Chubb, then senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, as a full-time advisor on education. In 1991, Outlook described Chubb as “co-author of *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* and “a leading scholar and advocate for choice and education

reform” whose “extensive writing and speeches have shown private schools as a model of why choice works.” Most recently, Chubb—now president of NAIS and a member of CAPE’s board—was mentioned in Outlook in connection with his presentation to the CAPE community on what the country can do to get the best teachers in the world.

Lamar Alexander is another example of someone who has been in Outlook’s spotlight through a series of career changes: Tennessee governor, university president, secretary of education, and now chair-elect of the Senate HELP Committee.

A Lighter Touch

Outlook’s generally serious tone has sometimes been tempered with a touch of levity. An editorial cartoon by former art editor Jay Roudebush illustrates the point. In December 1980, Jay offered his take on instructional technology in connection with a story on how the Educational Testing Service was developing an innovative computer-based assessment project that would go beyond multiple-choice bubble formats to meet “growing concerns about traditional paper-and-pencil testing.” Oddly, in 2014 that project still sounds fresh.



Outlook Art Editor Jay Roudebush’s take on educational technology, December 1980

Bell Award

When he honored 340 schools November 11 with the 2014 National Blue Ribbon Schools award (see the October 2014 Outlook for a list of the 50 private schools that received the award), U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan also honored eight principals who received the coveted Terrel H. Bell award.

Named after the second secretary of education, the award, according to a U.S. Department of Education news release, “honors school leaders who are committed to fostering successful teaching and learning at their schools, and who are committed to education as a powerful and liberating force in people’s lives.”

Robert Lyall, principal at St. Patrick Catholic School in Kingman, Kansas, was one of the Bell award recipients.

A department profile says St. Patrick School was “built by farmers and workers during the Great Depression” and “does not charge tuition,” being part of the Diocese of Wichita, which has a robust stewardship program. Over half of the school’s students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Lyall “led teachers in creating professional learning communities and adopting data analysis and differentiated instruction.” He now trains other principals in the diocese “in data-driven instruction...with striking results.”

St. Patrick School “fosters life skills to prepare students for college, careers, and life in more culturally diverse communities.” In addition, the school’s “cultural diversity plan prepares students to welcome the ever growing number of ethnic minorities.”

Commenting on the Bell awardees, Secretary Duncan said “It is principals who can nurture, retain, and empower great teachers and serve as the catalyst for significant school improvement... The Bell Award is a small recognition for the essential work they do every day.”

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ President Obama signed the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant program into law on November 19, 2014, two days after the Senate approved a version that the House had passed back in September.

The law includes language proposed by the CAPE community and originally introduced by Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) that affirms the use of child care certificates, which are provided directly to parents for use in whatever program best suits their child: faith-based, Montessori, Waldorf, or any other public or private program.

U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD), who attended the signing ceremony, said she applauded the president “for moving swiftly to sign this bipartisan legislation into law so that we can help ensure all children get the care they need and deserve so they and their families can have a better, brighter future.”

★ The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) recently honored outstanding K-8 school leaders as 2014 National Distinguished Principals (NDPs). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan delivered opening remarks at the awards banquet, held October 17 in Washington, DC.

The 61 principal honorees included five from private schools: Deborah D. Ollis, St. Mary Catholic School, Mobile, AL; Sister Marisa DeRose, St. Anthony Catholic School, Hawthorne, NJ; Patricia M. Freund, St. Gregory the Great Catholic

School, Williamsville, NY; Mary-Elaine Leake, Astoria Lutheran School, Astoria, NY; Michael P. Oldenburg, Divine Redeemer Lutheran School, Hartland, WI.

★ Schools have until December 12 to sign up to participate in National School Choice Week, which will be held January 25–31, 2015. More than 8,000 schools across the country already plan to mark the event with unique celebrations, including open houses, pep rallies, and showcases of student talent.

“National School Choice Week is celebrated in thousands of different ways around the country, but one common theme is present in each event—a positive spotlight on the success stories made possible by education options,” said Andrew Campanella, president of National School Choice Week.

For more information, and to register your school, visit schoolchoiceweek.com.

★ The U.S. Department of Education last month put the spotlight on Washington Jesuit Academy (WJA), a middle school for boys founded in 2002. According to a [Department blog](#) published November 20, “WJA is preparing its students for college, careers, and long-term success in life.” The school offers “tuition assistance as well as social, nutritional, and health services to nearly 100 students, an enrollment intentionally kept low to ensure students receive focused, individualized attention.” In addition, WJA uses “extended

school days and a longer academic year to provide additional instruction time, scholastic reinforcement, and social supports that enable students to overcome many of the challenges associated with poverty.”

★ Agudath Israel of America held its 92nd national convention at the Hilton Woodcliff Lake hotel in New Jersey last month. Thousands of attendees gathered to hear rabbis and other presenters discuss accomplishments, challenges, and a host of other issues.

One highlight of the event was a video reviewing the organization’s activities over the past year, including a mission to Washington, DC, efforts to expand parent choice in various states, help for special-needs students in New York City, and the restoration of government services to nearly 30,000 children in Lakewood, NJ.

Rabbi David Zwiebel, Agudath’s CEO, hailed what he called “a year of tangible accomplishment.”

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