

# cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

March 1992 Number 179

**Council Members:** American Montessori Society • Association of American Military Colleges and Schools of the U.S. • Christian Schools International • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Friends Council on Education • Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod • National Association of Episcopal Schools • National Association of Independent Schools • National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children • National Catholic Educational Association • National Society for Hebrew Day Schools • Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education, K-12 • Solomon Schechter Day School Association • U.S. Catholic Conference • **Affiliated state organizations in:** Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin

## Council on Standards and Testing Makes Report

A blue-ribbon commission charged with studying the issue of national standards, testing, and assessment for elementary and secondary students made its report to the Congress, the nation's Governors and the nation. The Council found that "national standards and a system of assessments are desirable and feasible mechanisms for raising expectations ... and rejuvenating educational reform efforts for all American schools and students.

In a joint effort by Congress, the Bush Administration and the National Association of Governors, the "National Council on Education Standards and Testing" was created with the enactment of public law on June 27, 1991. Of the 32 members composed of government officials, public education representatives and business interests, none represented the private education sector. The official report of the panel was presented to Congress January 24, only three weeks past the hurried six month deadline to complete its work.

### Desirable Goal?

The issue of whether a system of voluntary national testing should be a component of assessment toward the six national education goals has not been an issue for the Bush Administration. The President first pushed the notion of national voluntary testing with his high level "America 2000" education reform strategy announcement last Spring. However, skept-

tics in Congress, particularly the House, raised the broader question in its report language to the authorizing legislation by stating that the Council shall study "whether suitable specific education standards should and can be established" and that it should "address each of these issues in terms of its desirability and feasibility."

The House Committee on Education and

"... a national consensus around education standards could enhance the sense of national identity and community we need as our Nation becomes increasingly diverse." *Report of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing*

Labor, influenced by Representative Dale Kildee (D-Michigan), education subcommittee chairman, stated in that report that the "Committee in no way endorses the proposition that national education standards ... are either desirable or feasible." Kildee reiterated his concern at a hearing on the Council's report on February 19 when he stated his view of the unfairness of "testing students but not output systems."

Common concerns against the establishment of national standards and a testing system were that "minimum standards" can "act to drag down the entire system", accord-

ing to the Council report. Further, such standards that are put in place without the "strategies and resources for enabling students and schools to meet them are ... a disservice to the Nation's students."

Two other popular arguments were heard by the Council during its internal deliberations as well as in public testimony. First, a system of national standards could lead to a national curriculum that limits and inhibits local and state creativity and initiative. Second, such an assessment process would divert attention and resources from the various state and local reforms now underway throughout the nation.

However, proponents of a system of standards and assessment impressed upon the panel the importance of improving "the quality of schools and of teacher professional development by providing a clear, common set of challenging goals and criteria for the allocation of scarce resources." The Council also believes that commonly held standards will encourage states and localities to raise their educational expectations in educational performance.

### National Standards and Diverse Providers

The Council's report stated its belief "that a national consensus around education standards could enhance the



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sense of national identity and community we need as our Nation becomes increasingly diverse." Despite the counter-argument that standards may be too centralizing and constrain states and schools from responding effectively to the diverse goals and needs of their students, they "could form a core to which states, localities and schools could add standards tailored to the needs and interests of their students and communities."

The report also stated that "variation in resources should not be used to justify and excuse wide variation in the quality of content presented or the levels of student performance, as now occurs." Instead the Council asserted the "well defined and challenging national standards can serve both to point out problems and to establish clear targets for all states and localities to strive for."

When confronted with the reality that states are confined to their own financial base in trying to reach a new set of academic standards, the Council agreed that only through cooperation and regional consortia, states could "help ensure higher levels of student performance on the content and performance standards in all the participating localities."

## How and Who to Develop System of Standards

The Council recommended that a "coordinating structure be put in place to advance standards-setting and assessment development." Such a structure would be non-federal to maintain the tradition of state and local authority over education. The new body, the National Education Standards and Assessments Council, would be appointed by a reconfigured National Education Goals Panel, currently administered by the National Governors' Association.

The newly proposed panel would be comprised of 21 members "to include one-third public officials, one-third educators, and one-third members of the general public including consumers of education."

The Council stated that all levels of the education and policymaking communities must work together in establishing the context in which standards and assessments will operate. They referred to four major dimensions of educational renewal in that context: reforming schools, engaging fami-

lies and communities, creating incentives for high performance, and providing equitable opportunities to achieve the new standards.

In two public hearings before the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education, witnesses generally supported the preliminary work and report of the Council. Lauren Resnick, director of the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, endorsed the Council's work to help create "a high performance education system that will blend national aspirations with local energy and decision-making." She continued, "standards of performance should be the same throughout the nation, though states and districts may use different assessment to measure student performance."

However, dissent was heard within a week of disclosure of the Council's report. More than 50 educators and testing experts released a statement opposing any system of national testing citing a concern that they would penalize students who attend bad schools and deprive local districts of decision on what students should learn.

The statement said that "any policy to establish benchmarks for achievement without creating equity in the educational resources available to children would be a cruel hoax." Signers of the statement included Theodore Sizer of Brown University and the Coalition for Essential Schools, as well as Keith Geiger, president of the National Education Association and a Council member.

The House of Representatives will soon consider legislation that would implement the recommendations of the Council.

## Private Ed Office Adds Staff

Since the late summer announcement of the appointment of Michelle Easton as the executive assistant to the Secretary for private education, the office has added two permanent professional staff members.

Kathleen G. (Kiki) Johnson joined the Department of Education late last year. As special assistant, she serves as the senior policy advisor and programs liaison officer. Johnson spent 21 years as a teacher, administrator and head in four independent schools

in Virginia, Maryland and New York.

Johnson's experience includes teaching at the secondary level as well as a Head Start tutor. She has served as head of Pre-K through 8, high school, boarding, coed, single sex schools. Those schools were urban, suburban, rural, religious and non-sectarian.

Johnson also sits on a team with Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement Diane Ravitch to examine ways by which the Department can help develop students' competency in the core subjects - Goal three of the six national education goals.

Michelle L. Doyle was appointed as a program specialist in January. A current project on which she is working is the development of a "Handbook of Federal Support for Private Schools". The manual would serve as a resource to both private school and public school administrators who coordinate private school participation in federal programs. The latest version of this handbook was published in 1978.

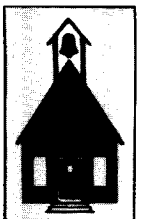
Doyle left her position as Assistant Superintendent for Staff and Student Services for the schools of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Virginia. She coordinated the involvement in federal programs for 35 schools and was active in legislative matters in Virginia on behalf of Catholic schools throughout the state.

Doyle now serves as the principal reviewer of all Department of Education regulations for the office of private education and is a member of the Regulatory Review Task Force.

Appointed to the office on temporary assignment from the Department's Office of Civil Rights, Patricia Williams is a special assistant. In this position, Williams will work on legal and policy issues including laws and regulations from the Department's civil rights office.

As an attorney with the civil rights office, Williams has served in trials for the government in discrimination cases. A five-year veteran of the Department, Williams and her husband presently homeschool two of their four children.

These new professional staffers were introduced to private school leaders in a



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meeting at the Department on February 13. Easton also introduced the two staff assistants in the office, Delenia Jackson and Cheryl Gilliam.

## Blue Ribbon School Recognition Program Reinstated

After a firestorm of protest, the Secretary of Education and Congressional leaders have revived the Blue-Ribbon Schools program. After losing funding in the 1992 budget late last year, an agreement was reached to allow the Secretary to reinstate the program with money taken from the \$100 million education excellence fund already approved by Congress.

As the administrator for the program for private schools, CAPE sent a letter to nominees on February 14. The letter from Joyce McCray, CAPE executive director, told school heads that "letters and calls from schools all over the country were instrumental in encouraging Secretary (of Education Lamar) Alexander to ask Congress to reinstate the funding."

The program was initiated by then-Secretary of Education Terrel Bell in 1983 using discretionary funds. Congress authorized it separately beginning in 1988. Its current operating cost of \$885,000 represents less than one one-hundredth of one percent of the total Department of Education budget.

A principal from a Catholic elementary school in Los Angeles, California that was nominated said in an *Education Week* interview that "we have waged a little war here at St. Thomas, because we feel passionate not only about the program but about what the program could have done for our school." That principal claimed that his school's nine teachers and many parents put in nearly 1,000 hours of work on the application and activities to support it.

The 476 schools nominated nationwide will be judged by site visits this summer with the awards to be made in January 1993, four months later than usual, due to the delay in funding.

Funding for the 1993 fiscal year has again been requested in the President's budget given to Congress in January.

## Legislative Update:

### House Choice Provision Gets Dropped

The House of Representatives will soon consider a revised omnibus elementary and secondary education bill, **H.R. 4323**, minus a controversial private school choice provision previously adopted by the Education and Labor Committee.

The original bill, **H.R. 3320**, would have authorized \$700 million annually for school reform efforts by states and local districts over the next five years. One allowable option in the restructuring plans would have been funding for choice programs that could include private schools. After the Senate vote on a choice demonstration project to include private schools, choice opponents pressed House members to eject the choice option for their legislation before it reached the floor for full House consideration.

Late last year, committee leaders forged an agreement with then-White House Chief of Staff John Sununu that the bill wouldn't be vetoed so long as choice including private schools remained in the measure. House education subcommittee chairman Dale Kildee (D-Michigan) joined with committee chairman Willaim Ford (D-Michigan) and ranking committee Republican William Goodling (R-Pennsylvania) to fight back attempts to strip the bill of the choice provision.

However, after the Senate's defeat of a \$30 million choice demonstration project in an amendment by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) in January, educators have watched the House closely to see if they too would yield to opponents of choice programs. The committee's counsel told an *Education Daily* reporter that "Bill Ford only agreed to that compromise because he was told the Senate would adopt a private school choice amendment. Some members have been emboldened and encouraged by the Senate vote."

The new bill is authored by Representatives Kildee and Ford. **H.R. 4023** will be considered by the House Education and Labor Committee before a debate by the full House occurs.

### Bush Budget Freezes Chapter 1 for Private Schools

The Chapter 1 budget given to Congress by the Administration holds the "Capital Expenses for Private School Children" line item at a \$40.1 million funding level. That was the amount appropriated for 1992.

Chapter 1 provides financial assistance to local school districts for compensatory education for disadvantaged children and to state educational agencies for services directed at children of migrant workers or those under state care. The program also provides assistance to local districts to pay the capital costs of providing equitable compensatory educational services to private school children.

The program received a \$4 million increase from 1991 to 1992.

### Tax Provision Advances

The House of Representatives approved legislation to remove gifts of appreciated property from the alternative minimum tax (AMT), a move widely supported by the education and philanthropic community. The measure was part of a large economic stimulus tax package.

Before the Tax Reform Act of 1986, taxpayers who made "noncash" contributions to charities could take a tax deduction for the fair market value of that property. However, the '86 act legislated that those taxpayers who file under the AMT could **not** deduct the full value of their gifts of appreciated property. In effect, this removed a major incentive for many higher income taxpayers to make large donations to non-profit, tax-exempt organizations, including private elementary and secondary schools.

At a Ways and Means Committee hearing on February 10, Bruce C. Dodd, Jr., President of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in Georgia testified in support of the tax change. Speaking on behalf of the National Association of Independent Schools and CAPE, Dodd said, that "we have seen a succession of changes in the tax laws that has undermined charitable giving." He concluded that "if volunteerism and non-profit enterprise are to continue to succeed in complementing government efforts, it is essential that government policies foster an environment hospitable to these organiza-

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tions' pursuit of their respective missions."

The Senate Finance Committee will soon take up its version of a tax measure which should also include a provision on appreciated property. CAPE wrote to all House Members and to the Senate Finance Committee in support of the "permanent removal of all charitable gifts of appreciated property from the alternative minimum tax."

## Senate Votes Down Pell Grant Entitlement

During consideration of the higher education reauthorization bill, S. 1150, the Senate rejected an effort to make Pell Grants an entitlement with mandated full funding by fiscal year 1997. The entitlement effort was supported by the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), a coalition of which CAPE is a member.

Although the bill reauthorizing higher education programs was eventually approved by a vote of 93 to 1, the Senate was reluctant to expand the cornerstone program of higher education funding due to budget constraints.

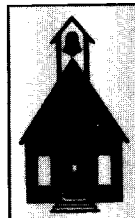
In a February 19 letter to the Senate signed by coalition members, CEF argued that "entitling children of low-income and middle-class families to a Pell Grant will send a clear message to elementary and secondary students to plan and prepare for college with confidence that federal support

will be available to help them secure their dreams." It went on to cite a recent Gallup poll reflecting that "87 percent of Americans worry that college is becoming out of the reach of most people."

## Capenotes:

From the February 12 edition of *Education Week*, an article entitled "Does 'Public' Mean 'Good'", **Chester E. Finn, Jr.**, former Assistant Secretary of Education, writes: "Educating the public is part of the social contract; institutions called public schools are not. Occasionally we do well to recall that it's the consumers, not the suppliers, for whose benefit we have an education system. Most Americans agree that we need a quality revolution in that system. We're a lot more likely to get one, however, if we banish from this domain - as we've done from so many others - the shibboleth that goodness and legitimacy attach only to institutions that bear the 'public' label."

Democratic Presidential candidate **Paul E. Tsongas** has stated support for experimentation of many education reform and improvement ideas, including the controversial notion of choice that involves pri-



vate schools. Despite his opposition to the 1983 tuition tax credit proposal while a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, Tsongas now supports examining merit pay, teacher competency standards, national testing, and choice as means to student improvement.

Tsongas has stated "Let's criticize bold ideas after they have been found to be flawed, not before they have been tested."

Another Presidential candidate had kind words for a former private school teacher during an extensive interview for *The Washington Post*. **U.S. Senator Tom Harkin** recalled his experiences as a seventh grade student at Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Rock Springs, Iowa.

He noted an instance in which one teacher, Sister James Marie, was especially influential and compassionate soon after the death of his mother. "She was tough but she was tender," Harkin said. After an encounter that left him crying, he remembered her words, "she gave me her handkerchief ... and I can still remember her telling me, I know its tough, your mother died, but ... you can't let these people get to you." He went on to say, "She was basically telling me I had to have backbone, and I had to, by God, stand up for my rights ... don't let anybody get in my way. It was a tough message, but I'll never forget it."

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