

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

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D.C. Scholarship Bill Introduced Bipartisan Sponsors in Senate and House

House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) described the bipartisan lineup of sponsors as "politically incorrect." If not quite that, it was at least an eclectic mix of Republicans, Democrats, liberals, and conservatives that assembled at a news conference on June 4 to announce the introduction of legislation to provide "opportunity scholarships" to low-income children residing in Washington, D.C.

The *District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act* (S. 847, H.R. 1797), also known as DC-SOS, would provide scholarships to about 2,000 students to enable them to attend the public or private school of their choice in D.C. and surrounding counties. Students from families with incomes below the poverty line would receive scholarships up to \$3,200, while those from families with incomes between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty line would receive scholarships up to \$2,400.

If demand were to exceed supply, as was the case recently in New York

City, where 23,000 students applied for 1,300 privately-funded vouchers, the scholarships would be awarded randomly. Participating private schools would be required under a specific provision of the bill to "comply with Title IV of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin."



Senators Sam Brownback (R-KS) (right) and Joe Lieberman (D-CT) field questions.

According to a bill summary issued by the sponsors, "providing low-income parents with the means to send their children to the best possible school will improve the education of the children who receive scholarships, and will likely improve public schools as well." Supporters made it clear the funds for the scholarship program would not come from the District's school budget. In fact, even if all 2,000 scholarship students were to leave the D.C. public school system, District funding would remain the same, thus increasing per-pupil spending levels.

The lively news conference pro-

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IDEA Signed by President

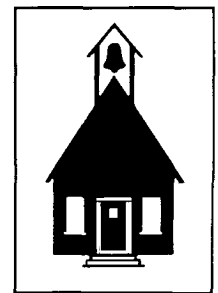
Here's a Washington rarity: an idea enthusiastically supported by the President and by virtually all members of Congress. The idea at issue is actually the reauthorization of IDEA, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, which the President signed into law at an emotional ceremony at the White House on June 4.

Since its inception in 1975, the IDEA has been the primary federal law governing the education of children with special needs. As the President put it, "For 22 years now, the IDEA has been the driving force behind the simple idea ... that every American citizen is a person of dignity and worth, having a spirit and a soul, and having the right to develop his or her full capacities." The reauthorized IDEA, rushed through Congress in May, clarifies and in some instances strengthens requirements that children with disabilities receive the same education as other children.

Private School Provisions

The new law includes a mix of provisions affecting students placed by their parents in private schools. According to the Senate report on the bill, "These changes

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vided a potpourri of personalities, political philosophies, and speaking styles. Presentations included stately pronouncements, homespun humor, heartfelt stories, and a liberal dose of old-fashioned preaching. Commenting on a visit he had made the previous day to Holy Redeemer School in Washington, Rep. Armev said, "Holy Redeemer educates the same population of youngsters as the public schools do, but with fewer resources and dramatically different results. You can see the success on the faces of the children." Noting that President Clinton sends his child to a private school, Rep. J. C. Watts (R-OK) said other parents who live in "public housing" should have the same opportunity. And rousing the crowd with his Sunday-sermon style, Rep. Floyd Flake (D-NY) spoke with great passion about the crying needs of inner-city children.

Bipartisan Survey

Prominently displayed at the conference were the results of a bipartisan survey of D.C. residents on their support of school choice scholarships. The survey had been conducted by Global Strategy Group and The Polling Company, respectively Democratic and Republican polling agencies. The poll showed that "fully 64 percent of Washingtonians...would send their kids to a private school if they had the option and if money were not an issue." It further showed that more than 60 percent of the District's low-income families believe that "the quality of education in the District of Columbia would improve if parents had a greater ability to choose where their children go to school."

Commenting on the results, pollster Jeffrey Pollock of the Global Strategy Group said, "In looking past the overall data at the demographic subgroups who do respond to this issue, it's clear that single parents, young women, African Americans and those with low incomes respond with a strong voice in favor of school choice."

The months ahead will tell whether Congress hears that voice and responds to it.

Get Set for Telecom Discounts

New Years Eve this year will provide schools across America an extra reason to celebrate. For when midnight strikes, they will no longer have to pay full fare on the information superhighway. Thanks to the *Telecommunications Act of 1996*, schools will be eligible, starting January 1, 1998, for discounts ranging from 20 percent to 90 percent on such things as monthly telephone bills, Internet access, classroom wiring costs, and other advanced telecommunications services.

But here's the rub: the discounts don't happen automatically. To take advantage of the lower rates, school officials have to do some homework. And even though all the application details — including the application form itself — are not yet available, there are things officials can be doing now to get ready for January 1.

For one, they can be working on a technology plan. An approved plan must be in place before a school can apply for a discount. The Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) advises that a school's technology plan should cover such areas as training, hardware, and software. Staff from three national associations that represent private schools — NCEA, USCC, and NAIS — have been working on a guidance document to help schools develop a technology plan. The document is available on the web at www.ncea.org/pubpol/tech_planning.htm.

Another step administrators can take is to determine the discount their school will receive. Discounts are based on the percentage of students in the school who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The higher the percentage, the higher the discount. Schools where less than 1 percent of students are eligible receive at least a 20 percent discount, whereas schools where 75 percent or more students are eligible receive a 90 percent discount. (For the steps in between, see the May issue of *Outlook*.)

Schools seeking more than the baseline 20 percent discount will have to

determine the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. For the 1997-98 school year, children from households of four with gross annual incomes under \$29,693 are eligible. Here are the income eligibility levels for other household sizes:

Household Size	Gross Income
1	\$14,597
2	\$19,629
3	\$24,661
4	\$29,693
5	\$34,725
6	\$39,757
7	\$44,789
8	\$49,821

Principals from schools that participate in the lunch program or in Title I may already know how many students are eligible; others will have to ferret that figure using what the regulations call "federally-approved alternative mechanisms" — a highfalutin term that's actually not as intimidating as it sounds. An acceptable mechanism can be as easy as a confidential survey of families with a yes/no response. What's more, a 100 percent return rate for the survey isn't necessary. Federal guidelines allow schools to extrapolate "from a representative sample of actual data." Administrators would do well to seek guidance on this matter from appropriate regional, state, or national associations of private schools. No doubt such groups are working on developing guidance to help schools obtain the maximum discount with minimal administrative burden.

The long and short of it is that with the right readiness and some periodic checking, school officials should be able to make certain that starting next New Year's, their school's telecommunications costs will be dropping like the ball atop Times Square.



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should resolve a number of issues that have been the subject of an increasing amount of litigation in the last few years." The statute states, for example, that amounts expended for the provision of special education services for private school students "shall be equal to a proportionate amount of federal funds" made available under IDEA, an amount estimated at about \$500 per student per year. The law goes on to state that such services "may be provided to children with disabilities on the premises of private, including parochial, schools, to the extent consistent with law." Another section requires states to ensure that all children with disabilities, "including children with disabilities attending private schools," are identified, located, and evaluated. The explicit mention of private school children in the so-called "child find" section should provide states with new encouragement to do what they should have been doing all along under the old IDEA.

There are also provisions in the law for a bypass for states that, since 1983 have been "prohibited by law from providing for the participation in special programs of children with disabilities enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools." Other requirements include representation of private schools on state advisory panels and consultation by the Secretary of Education with representatives of private schools in developing plans to carry out certain provisions of the law.

Presidential Summary

In summarizing the significance of IDEA before an enthusiastic bipartisan audience at the signing, President Clinton said, "[T]o the world, we are sending a message, the same message that the FDR Memorial I was honored to dedicate last month will send: In America, you are measured by what you are and what you can achieve. In America, the American Dream is alive for all our people. In America, we recognize that what really counts is the spirit and the soul and the heart, and we honor it with this legislation."

Blue Ribbon Schools Named

For 36 private schools and 226 public schools across the country, the long wait is over and the celebrations have begun. They are the newest recruits in the ranks of the nation's Blue Ribbon Schools. Education Secretary Richard Riley announced the 1996-97 elementary school winners in late May, ending months of anxiety for the schools awaiting word.

In announcing the awards, Secretary Riley said, "Though each school is unique, they are all places where students are challenged to learn to high standards and with the active support of teachers and parents."

Established in 1982, the Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors elementary and secondary schools in alternate years. Since its inception, nearly 3,400 schools have been recognized, including 726 private schools. All nominated schools — public and private — are judged by the same standards and reviewed by the same national review panel. Delegates from winning schools attend an awards ceremony in Washington.

CAPE, the proud coordinator of the program for private schools, joins the nation's education community in congratulating all winning schools. Quite naturally, we especially want to recognize this year's class of private school winners:

- Boca Raton Christian School (ACSI), Boca Raton, FL**
- Charlotte Latin School (NAIS), Charlotte, NC**
- Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy (ACSI), Cincinnati, OH**
- Colegio Catolico Notre Dame Elementary (NCEA), Caguas, PR**
- Forsyth School, Inc. (NAIS), St. Louis, MO**
- Gesu Catholic School (NCEA), University Heights, OH**
- Grace School (NAIS), Houston, TX**
- Heathwood Hall Episcopal School (NAIS), Columbia, SC**
- Holy Rosary School (NCEA), Seattle, WA**
- John Paul II Catholic School (NCEA), Houston, TX**
- Kennedy Krieger Lower School (NAPSEC), Baltimore, MD**
- Mercymount Country Day School (NCEA), Cumberland, RI**
- Our Lady of Promp Succor School (NCEA), Chalmette, LA**
- Our Lady of the Wayside School (NCEA), Arlington Heights, IL**
- Rohan Woods School (NAIS), St. Louis, MO**
- Saint Ignatius School (NCEA), Mobile, AL**
- Saint Michael Lutheran School (LC-MS), Ft. Myers, FL**
- St. Benilde School (NCEA), Metairie, LA**
- St. Camillus Catholic School (NCEA), Silver Spring, MD**
- St. Clement's Episcopal Parish School (NAES), El Paso, TX**
- St. Genevieve du Bois School (NCEA), St. Louis, MO**
- St. Joan of Arc School (NCEA), Jackson Heights, NY**
- St. Joseph School (NCEA), Fremont, CA**
- St. Jude School (NCEA), Indianapolis, IN**
- St. Martin of Tours School (NCEA), Maple Heights, OH**
- St. Patrick School (NCEA), Corpus Christi, TX**
- St. Paul's Episcopal School (NAIS), New Orleans, LA**
- St. Peters Elementary School (NCEA), Mansfield, OH**
- St. Pius X School (NCEA), Tulsa, OK**
- St. Raphael the Archangel (NCEA), Louisville, KY**
- St. Thomas Aquinas School (NCEA), Dallas, TX**
- St. Thomas the Apostle School (NCEA), Phoenix, AZ**
- The Hebrew Academy (NSHDS), Westminster, CA**
- The Lab School (NAIS), Washington, DC**
- The Midland School (NAPSEC), North Branch, NJ**
- The Nueva School (NAIS), Hillsborough, CA**





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• “Dad, I want you to be wise, briefly.” That was the advice the most famous senior at **Sidwell Friends School** gave the speaker for the June 6 graduation ceremony. The President obliged. In delivering the address, Mr. Clinton thanked the school for “its superlative commitments to academic excellence, to diversity, and to service; to the welfare of all students here; to the maintenance of good character, good citizenship, and good spirits.” The President reported that he appreciated “the school’s observance of the Quaker practice of meaningful worship — an hour spent in reflective silence, broken only when someone has something truly meaningful to say in a respectful way.” He said he wished the Quakers were in control of Congress.

• The **U.S. Supreme Court** decided 5-4 to declare unconstitutional a Maine statute that denies property tax exemption to institutions which operate principally for the benefit of out-of-state residents. Boarding schools and colleges across the country that serve out-

of-state students were watching this case closely because an unfavorable ruling might have prompted other states to rethink the tax laws governing such institutions. In the matter of **Camps Newfound/Owatonna, Inc. v. Town of Harrison**, the Court ruled that the Maine statute violated the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution.

• Syndicated columnist **William Raspberry**, a longtime opponent of school choice, recently declared himself a “reluctant convert to choice.” In a piece published in **The Washington Post** on May 30, Raspberry wrote, “Poor children desperately need better education.” He went on to observe, “[I]t seems as obvious for poor children as for rich ones that one-size-fits-all education doesn’t make sense.”

• Those who say that vouchers will not cause public schools to improve should talk to New York City Schools Chancellor **Rudy Crew**. Responding to the news that 23,000 families had applied for 1,300 privately funded scholarships to the city’s private and parochial schools, Chancellor Crew said he thought parents had sent a message to the public school system — a message he stressed he had heard. “I think it says that parents want schools that work,” said the Chan-

cellor. “They want schools that are high quality.” With Dr. Crew now more intent than ever on providing such quality, New York City’s students are bound to benefit.

• Anyone concerned that the Administration’s proposal for national tests in reading and math may be the first step toward more tests in other subjects now have good cause for their concern. At a presidential town meeting last month in Clarksburg, WV, **President Clinton** said, “In my dream world, before too long we would have this 4th grade reading test and this 8th grade test replicated in elementary, junior high, and high school in several areas.”

• If you read the June 2 edition of **Forbes**, you can meet **Virginia Gilder**, a New York City investor who will provide 153 students in Giffen Elementary School in Albany, NY, up to \$2,000 a year in scholarships so they can attend the private school of their parents’ choice. You can also meet **Caroline Minter Hoxby**, a Harvard economist who has studied school choice programs and has concluded they can improve school performance. The magazine’s cover story examines in great detail the effectiveness of both publicly funded and privately funded voucher programs.

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