

# cape Council for American Private Education outlook

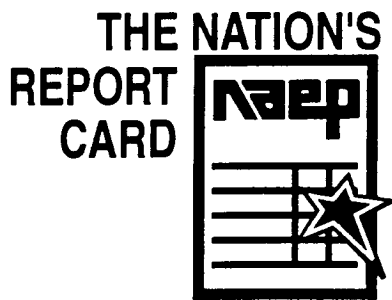
"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

November 1997 • Number 229

**Council Members:** American Montessori Society • Association of 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 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 30 States

## Science Scores Need to Improve

The country received its report card in science last month, and it is safe to say we are not quite a nation of Einsteins. Only 27 percent of 8th graders in public schools and 42 percent of their counterparts in private schools scored at or above the proficient level of science achievement, a level described by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) as representing "solid grade-level performance" and "competency over challenging subject matter." What's worse, a full 40 percent of public school students in grade 8, as well as 25 percent of private school students, wound up scoring below the basic level,



a level bleakly defined as "partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills."

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1996 science assessment gathered information about the knowledge of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students in earth, physical, and

**Continued on page 2**

## School Choice Triple-Header Congress Tackles Reform Agenda

The House and Senate have surely set a record for considering the most school choice initiatives in a single session. Three pieces of legislation aimed at helping parents choose their child's school saw swift Congressional action this fall in what amounted to a dramatic and historic — though ultimately unsuccessful — school choice blitz.

### Coverdell Accounts

A concentrated but thwarted effort to enact education savings accounts started with the House voting 230-198 on October 23 to approve the proposal. But a week later on Halloween, the Senate dealt account advocates a trick instead of a treat by failing to muster enough votes to stop a Democratic filibuster of the proposal. The cloture motion to limit debate fell four votes short of the 60 votes it needed to pass. A second attempt to invoke cloture failed by the same margin on November 4.

The proposal by Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-GA) would allow parents and others to contribute up to \$2,500 each year in an *A+ Account* to be used for a child's K-college education. The buildup of interest in the account would be tax-free.

At a news conference after the No-

vember 4 vote, Sen. Coverdell sounded an optimistic note about the proposal's future. "I am very confident that by early next year we will be able to conclude an agreement with the key Democrats needed to secure passage," he said.



H.R. 2746, the Helping Empower Low-Income Parents (HELP) Scholarships Amendments of 1997, from introduction, to committee action, to floor vote in record time. Introduced on October 28 and immediately referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, the fast-moving bill eventually met its downfall on November 4 with a largely partisan vote in the House of 228-191.

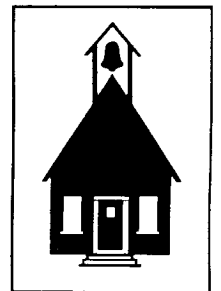
The bill would allow states and local school districts to use Title VI funds to provide K-12 scholarships for low-income stu-

**Continued on**

**page 3**

### HELP Scholarship Act

Acting within what might be the most compressed timeline ever for processing a school choice bill, House leaders muscled



**Continued from page 1**

life sciences. About 130,000 students were tested nationwide. Last month, NAGB, which sets policy for NAEP, released performance standards for the science test. The standards in effect describe "what students should know and be able to do at different grade levels." For each grade, NAGB established basic, proficient, and advanced performance levels and reported on the percentage of students attaining each.

existed at the proficient and basic levels in grades 4 and 8. But at the advanced levels in those grades, and at all levels in grade 12, the public/nonpublic performance differences were negligible (see chart).

The study provided an extensive state-level analysis of student performance in grade 8, presenting states in rank order by achievement at the proficient and advanced levels. Of the 40 states for which results were available,

the top-ranked state was Maine, with 41 percent of students at or above proficient level and 4 percent of students at or above advanced level. The lowest-ranked state was Mississippi, with a proficient percentage of 12 and an advanced percentage of 1. The good news for private schools was that the performance of their students nationwide — 42 percent at or above proficient level and 5 percent at or above advanced level — was higher than that of any state.

**Good News**

The fact is there was also some good news for the nation as a whole. As dismal as science performance is now, it is better than it has been. Commenting on the upswing in performance (NAEP science scores have been going up since 1982), Education Secretary Richard Riley said, "We aren't where we want to be by a

longshot, but we need to recognize where we have come from. We have raised the level of science education by one grade level...."

Copies of the report, titled *NAEP 1996 Science Performance Standards*, and an eight-page tabloid summary, called *Science: What Do Students Know?*, are available free of charge from the NAGB office by calling 202-357-6942. Both documents are also posted on the web at [www.nagb.org](http://www.nagb.org).

## New IDEA Rules Comments Due 1/20

Last month the U.S. Department of Education issued proposed rules for carrying out the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA). The rules include important provisions for students in private schools.

The proposed regulations clarify that each school district must "locate, identify and evaluate all private school children" who reside in the district and must spend on "providing special education and related services" to those children a proportional amount of the district's federal grant under IDEA. The rules go on to state that an SEA or LEA may also use state and local funds to provide additional services to private school students in accordance with state laws and local policies.

As one of the pleasant aftereffects of the decisions of the Supreme Court in *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District* (1993) and *Agostini v. Felton* (1997), the regulations make clear that LEAs may provide services on site at religiously-affiliated schools.

On the matter of consultation, the proposed rules state, "Each LEA shall consult, in a timely and meaningful way, with appropriate representatives of private school children..." to decide on which children will receive services, what services will be provided, how the services will be provided, and how the services will be evaluated.

Unfortunately, the proposed regs would codify the Department's position that "no private school child with a disability has an individual right to receive some or all of the special education and related services that the child would receive if enrolled in a public school."

The full text of the proposed rules may be found on the Education Department's web site ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)).

Comments must be received by USDE on or before January 20, 1998.



### % of Students At or Above Key Levels in NAEP Science Test

|                 | Public | Private |
|-----------------|--------|---------|
| <b>Grade 4</b>  |        |         |
| Basic           | 65     | 82      |
| Proficient      | 27     | 42      |
| Advanced        | 3      | 5       |
| <b>Grade 8</b>  |        |         |
| Basic           | 60     | 75      |
| Proficient      | 27     | 42      |
| Advanced        | 3      | 5       |
| <b>Grade 12</b> |        |         |
| Basic           | 56     | 63      |
| Proficient      | 21     | 22      |
| Advanced        | 3      | 2       |

The NAGB report provided separate results for various subgroups, including breakouts by state, race/ethnicity, gender, and type of school.

Consistent with results from previous NAEP assessments in other subject areas, the report found that "at all grade levels in 1996, students attending nonpublic schools attained higher achievement levels than those attending public schools." Significant differences in public and nonpublic performance

**Continued from page 1**

dents to attend public or private schools. Other current allowable uses of Title VI funds would remain unchanged.

HELP scholarships would only go to families whose income did not exceed 185 percent of the poverty line and would be considered assistance to the student and not assistance to the participating school. The Department of Education would not be permitted "to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over curricula, program of instruction, administration, or personnel" of any school that chose to participate.

Some national organizations that ordinarily support school choice objected to the legislation, their concerns centering on whether the bill provided sufficient civil rights protections and on whether Title VI should be the funding source.

**DC Scholarship Initiative**

Early in October, the House voted 203-202 to approve an appropriations bill for the District of Columbia that included a scholarship initiative to help about 2,000 low-income youngsters in the District attend the public or private school of their choice. A week earlier, the Senate had been unable to stop a Democratic filibuster of the scholarship amendment. As of November 4, the House and Senate had not yet acted on a compromise version of the spending bill, and it was uncertain whether the \$7 million scholarship initiative would remain intact. In any event, the President was expected to veto any appropriations bill that included scholarships.

**National Tests**

On another matter before Congress, the issue of national tests became increasingly contentious in early November, with all sides playing hardball and negotiations at a standstill. The hang-up seemed to be over the degree of explicit Congressional and state-level approval that would be required for developing and piloting the tests.

At the time *Outlook* went to press (November 5), the outcome of this divisive issue was still very much up in the air.

**Telecom Discount To-Do List**

*With the FCC soon to fire the gun to start the application process for telecommunications discounts, private schools need to make sure they are ready for the race. Here's a checklist of things a school or consortia of schools needs to do to get ready.*

✓**Develop a Technology Plan.** A technology plan is an integral and necessary component of the discount process. The Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) advises that a school's technology plan should cover such areas as training, hardware, and software. Sample plans are available from various national private school organizations. Some consortia of private schools (e.g., Catholic dioceses) have prepared, or are preparing, a single technology plan for schools within the group.

✓**Determine the Discount.** Telecommunications discounts ranging from 20 percent to 90 percent are based on the percentage of students in a school who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch under the national school lunch program. The higher the percentage, the higher the discount. Schools seeking more than the baseline 20 percent discount will have to determine the percentage of lunch-eligible students. National, state, and regional private school associations can provide advice on how best to do that.

✓**Get the Application Forms.** Sometime soon the FCC is expected to make available the official application forms for telecommunications discounts and to announce the precise process to follow to file the forms. School officials should check the FCC's LearnNet website ([www.fcc.gov/learnnet](http://www.fcc.gov/learnnet)) for updates on the forms and process. In the meantime, draft versions of Forms 470 and 471 (see below) are available now at the LearnNet site. They provide a preview of the information a school or consortia will need to provide.

✓**File Form 470.** This is the form that an applicant files to describe the services being requested and to certify that certain eligibility criteria have been met. In effect, Form 470 is a solicitation of bids from service providers. The request for services gets posted on the Universal Service website for 28 days, during which providers have an opportunity to submit bids. The school or consortia then selects the service providers that offer the best value for the lowest competitive price.

✓**File Form 471.** After an applicant signs a contract for telecommunications services, it files form 471 to let the Universal Service Fund (USF) administrator know the provisions of the contract and to request appropriate discounts. It is the filing of Form 471 that determines an applicant's "place in line" for discounts, which are awarded on a "first come, first served" basis. (Note: The Schools and Libraries Corporation (SLC), which administers the application process, recently announced there will be an initial 75 day "window period" for filing Form 471. All applications filed during the window will be treated as if simultaneously received.)

✓**Get Technology Plan Approved.** A state education agency can approve technology plans for private schools or can designate other entities (e.g. state or regional associations of private schools) to do so. (Some state agencies have decided not to approve technology plans for private schools.) Also, the SLC is expected to authorize additional approval mechanisms, but as of November 4, 1997, it had not done so. Although an applicant may file Forms 470 and 471 without having a technology plan approved, it cannot file Form 486, which triggers payment to the service provider (see below), until the technology plan is approved. In short, no technology plan, no discount.

✓**File Form 486.** This is the form an applicant files to authorize the USF administrator to pay the service provider the portion of the bill covered by the discount. Once this form is in, it's time to sit back and relax, knowing students have received a reduced-rate ticket to the Information Age.





---

---

## capenotes

• At a ceremony in late October near the Washington Monument, Vice President Al Gore launched the *Computers for Learning* program, designed to donate surplus federal computer equipment to schools and educational nonprofits. Over 70,000 computers are expected to be delivered to eligible institutions within the next year, with preference given to schools with the greatest need (determined by factors such as the school's location in an enterprise zone and its computer-to-student ratio). A number of national moving and transportation companies have formed a partnership to provide free shipping of the computers. Public and private K-12

schools can sign up at the *Computers for Learning* website ([www.computers.fed.gov](http://www.computers.fed.gov)) or through a toll-free hotline at 888-362-7870.

• Education policy analyst **Nina H. Shikraii** has been working full-throttle with her associates at The Heritage Foundation to produce a number of well-researched and readable reports on issues surrounding the school choice debate. Three recent efforts include *A Comparison of Public and Private Education in the District of Columbia*, *Why Catholic Schools Spell Success for America's Inner-City Children*, and *How Members of Congress Practice School Choice*. The latter document reports that of those responding to a Heritage survey, 34.4 percent of Representatives

and 50 percent of Senators "send or have sent at least one of their children to private school." The study concludes that many members of Congress vote to deny school choice for others while pursuing it for themselves. Heritage Foundation reports are available on the web at [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org).

• *Attaining Excellence: A TIMSS Resource Kit* is designed to help educators use the findings of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to improve education. The USDE multimedia kit includes videotapes of classroom teaching in the U.S., Japan, and Germany, showing striking differences in content and style. To order the \$94 kit, call the Superintendent of Documents at 202-512-2250.

---

COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN PRIVATE EDUCATION • 18016 Mateny Road, #140 • Germantown, MD 20874  
Tel: 301-916-8460 • Fax: 301-916-8485 • Email: [cape@connectinc.com](mailto:cape@connectinc.com)  
a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
Executive Director: Joe McTighe  
(ISSN 0271-1451)

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by the Council for American Private Education. Annual Subscription is \$15.

---