

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

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1.25 Million Children Apply for CSF Scholarships

"Thunderous Demonstration" of Demand for Alternatives, Forstmann Says

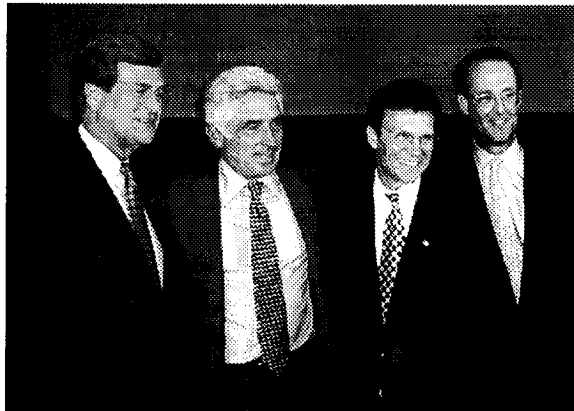
Ted Forstmann described April 21st as the proudest day of his life. That's the day when the cofounder and CEO of the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF) announced that 40,000 low-income children across America would receive more than \$160 million in four-year scholarships to attend the religious or independent schools of their parents' choice.

Following its launch last year, CSF, the largest private scholarship fund ever, generated an overwhelming public response. Encouraged by endorsements from Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, Sammy Sosa, Will Smith, and others, the parents of 1.25 million children from all 50 states applied for the scholarships. In some communities a huge portion of the eligible

population sought assistance from the fund, including 26 percent of eligible children in Chicago, 29 percent in New York, 33 percent in Washington, D.C.,

and 44 percent in Baltimore. The average annual family income of scholarship winners was just under \$22,000.

According to CSF, the average scholarship will be \$1,100 annually, and the typical family will have to contribute \$1,000. The vast majority of scholarship applicants currently attend public schools. Thus, despite their poverty, the parents of applicants are apparently willing to forego a free education in order to pay to have their children attend a school of choice. "Clearly the families who applied are profoundly dissatisfied with their current — and only — option in education," said Forstmann at the announcement ceremony in New York City.



Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Ted Forstmann, Senate Minority Leader Thomas Daschle, and Former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles at a CSF reception on Capitol Hill, April 27, 1999.

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Florida Approves State-Funded Scholarship Program

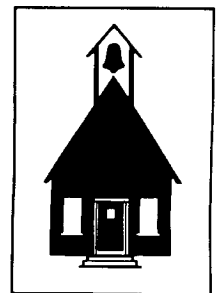
Converting undecided legislators one at a time, Florida Governor Jeb Bush pushed his tuition scholarship plan through the state legislature with some room to spare last month. By virtue of a 70-48 vote in the House on April 28 and a 26-14 vote in the Senate two days later, Florida, the nation's fourth-ranked state by population, became the first to enact a statewide voucher program for students in low-performing schools. Commenting on Bush's all-out campaign for

the bill, one Florida legislator described the program as not only the governor's "No. 1 priority, but his overriding priority."

Opportunity Scholarships

The new program will allow students enrolled in failing public schools to attend a higher-performing public school or to receive an "opportunity scholarship" to attend a religious or independent school. Starting this fall, four

public schools will have students eligible for the scholarships, with the number of designated schools likely to increase significantly within the next two years. A public school must receive an "F" grade for two



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“Families who are struggling financially do not call up and ask to spend on average \$1,000 per year over four years if they are even remotely satisfied.”

Forstmann noted that the four-year family contribution for 1.25 million children meant those families were collectively willing to commit \$5 billion. “Five billion in scrimpings and savings, in second jobs and second-hand clothes, in basic necessities not bought and countless other sacrifices made — simply to ...obtain a decent education for their children.”

“The old debate is over,” he added. “These families have ended it. In anybody’s book this is a thunderous demonstration of dissatisfaction with the present system - and of the demand for alternatives.”

A staunch proponent of equal opportunity in education, Forstmann said he believes competition and choice will return power to parents and spark educational improvement. Children are more sacred to Forstmann than systems. “Does the child exist to serve the system, or does the system exist to serve the child?” he asked. With great conviction, Forstmann asserted that monopolies, whether in education or business, are not good for customers. “[I]f we want education to serve the customers,” he said, “we have to be willing to open things up, to experiment a little, to allow some new providers to compete.”

Bipartisan Support

A noteworthy characteristic of the CSF project is the broad bipartisan support it has garnered. The national board of advisors includes such luminaries as Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Senate Minority Leader Thomas Daschle, Martin Luther King, III, General Colin Powell, Barbara Bush, and Andrew Young, the civil rights leader and former ambassador to the United Nations. Young had this to say about the program: “Every movement that I’ve been a part of has started out as controversial and unpopular.... But the parents of 1.25 million children have taken their stand, and I take mine with them.”

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school years in a four-year period for its students to be able to attend alternative schools.

Scholarships for students attending private schools are expected to average slightly more than \$4,000 per year. Students with special needs will remain eligible for services from the district.



Florida Governor Jeb Bush at an April 5 rally for the A+ Plan on the steps of the old Capitol in Tallahassee.

Private School Requirements

The legislation includes a requirement that participating private schools accept scholarship students randomly and without regard to religion or past academic history. Schools cannot compel any scholarship student to “profess a specific ideological belief, to pray, or to worship.” Further, private schools are subject to criteria adopted by their accrediting bodies, and must “furnish a school profile which includes student performance.” Although private schools are not required to administer state tests, scholarship students will have to take the tests at a location and time provided by the school district.

Bush’s opportunity scholarship program is part of a comprehensive *A+ Plan for Education*, intended to transform Florida’s public schools into “centers of excellence” and to ensure, as the governor said in his inaugural address last January, “that children learn a year’s worth of knowledge in a year’s worth of time.”

Court Watch

Maine Court Excludes Religious Schools from Tuition Program

In a 5-1 decision, Maine’s Supreme Judicial Court ruled last month that the state’s education tuition program, which explicitly excludes religious schools, does not violate the federal or state constitution.

In Maine, if a district does not operate its own school, it must provide tuition payments — up to a statewide cap — for resident children to attend approved public or private schools selected by their parents. About half the school districts in the state satisfy some or all of their K-12 education obligations through the tuition program. Some 14,000 students benefit from the program to the tune of about \$70 million annually. Before the Maine Legislature amended the program in 1981, parents had been able to use the tuition program to send their children to religious schools.

In 1997, the Institute for Justice, representing parents from the town of Raymond, filed a lawsuit alleging that the town’s failure to pay tuition for resident students at a Catholic high school, while doing so for students at other private schools, was a violation of the parents’ constitutional rights of free exercise and equal protection. The court, however, ruled otherwise, saying program violates neither the Maine nor United States Constitution.

Responding to the decision, Richard Komer, senior litigator for the Institute, said, “Considering that this law singles out the choice of religious schools alone for exclusion, it is hard to see how it is not discriminatory.” The Institute announced it would soon decide whether or not to appeal.

The decision, *Bagley v. Raymond School Department*, is available on the Web at:

http://www.courts.state.me.us/99me60ba.htm



Juan Williams Urges Educators: Embrace Diversity

When Juan Williams won a scholarship to Oakwood Friends School in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., some 30 years ago, he had no notion of the "deep personal imprint" the school was to ultimately have on his spirit. Today the bestselling author and national correspondent for *The Washington Post* credits Quaker education with rescuing him from the destructive values of popular culture and lighting his heart with a new and enduring sense of community. Speaking at the national gathering of the Friends Council on Education at Haverford College last month, Williams recalled he had felt "embraced and supported" in his personal journey at Oakwood — a journey toward becoming someone larger than he ever thought he could be, a journey toward "finding the extraordinary" within an ordinary soul.

Embracing Diversity

Addressing the theme of *Diversity in Friends Education*, Williams said the setting has changed for minority students in Friends schools since he attended Oakwood and then Haverford. Gone are the days when relatively few blacks and Hispanics shared the Quaker experience and largely assumed a grateful-for-the-opportunity demeanor. Today a "critical mass" of minority students is "mounting a challenge to Quaker orthodoxy under the rubric of diversity." The result is sometimes a heightened sense of tension as cultural differences demand recognition and as institutions struggle to retain tradition and identity in the face of pluralism. While Williams urged Friends schools to maintain a strong Quaker presence and pattern, lest they lose their meaning and purpose, he also challenged them to embrace diversity and to engage in the strife and strain of people coming to

terms with each other.

Referencing his latest book, *Thurgood Marshall, American Revolutionary*, Williams said Marshall had made ending segregation "the gold ring of the civil rights effort" in this century. Knowing that the wealthy white majority had the political wherewithal to en-



Kay Edstene, Executive Director of the Friends Council on Education, and author/journalist Juan William at FCE's national gathering at Haverford College, PA.

sure quality education for their children. Marshall was convinced that integrated schools were the only way to guarantee minorities access to the best teachers, textbooks, and facilities. In other words, integration was the road to equal opportunity. But Marshall's arguments, according to Williams, are not necessarily carrying the day with the current generation of blacks and Hispanics. Equal opportunity and quality education are still the goals, as demonstrated by the large share of black and Hispanic parents who support vouchers and school choice, but integration is no longer seen as the only or even the best way to reach those goals. More and more black parents and leaders, said Williams, seem to want quality neighborhood schools more than busing.

Light to the World

Williams urged Quaker educators to be a light to the world, an example of what "a diverse educational institution

can be and can mean for American society." He said he sees administrators and teachers in Quaker schools not just as educators but as "history makers" who can exemplify integrated education and can demonstrate that diversity works. Friends schools, for Williams, are on the frontline of education and race relations

in America and have no idea of the effect they could have if they are willing to put up with the tensions involved in embracing diversity. The students of Quaker schools — black, white, Hispanic, and Asian — could in turn carry a light to others that attests to the fact that people of varied backgrounds can come together. The "prize" for implementing what he called this truly revolutionary and challenging concept, "is nothing less than the heart and soul and the educated mind of future Americans."

School Integration

Which schools are better integrated, public or private? After examining data from the 1992 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Jay Greene, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin, found that private school students are twice as likely as public school students to be in well-integrated classrooms and much less likely to be in highly segregated classrooms. In sum, says Greene, "An analysis of the data... suggests that private schools are doing a better job than public schools of integrating students of different races...." His essay "Civic Values in Public and Private Schools" appears in *Learning from School Choice*, a book edited by Paul Peterson and published last year by the Brookings Institution.



capenotes

• A bill that provides states more flexibility in administering federal education programs was signed into law April 29, after winning overwhelming approval last month in the House (368-57) and the Senate (98-1). Essentially, the legislation gives the Secretary of Education the power to grant any state that requests it, the authority to waive certain federal statutory or regulatory requirements relating to seven major federal programs, including various sections of Titles I, II, III, IV, and VI of ESEA. The bill explicitly prohibits states from waiving requirements relating to "the equitable participation of students and professional staff in private schools."

"This bill cuts the strings that keep our children from a better education," said **Rep. Bill Goodling** (R-PA), Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "At the same time, schools that receive these waivers will be held accountable for achieving results." For a copy of the law, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and search for H.R. 800.

• A group of prominent educators, researchers, and elected officials issued a "manifesto" last month on how to increase the nation's supply of excellent teachers. The document reflects many of the teacher hiring practices currently in effect in private schools across the country.

Calling for a "commonsensical strategy" that focuses on results rather than input and regulation, the document concludes that school systems should "allow principals to hire the teachers they need" and should "focus relentlessly on results, on whether students are learning." That approach, the signers say, will produce more teachers who are qualified by virtue of their performance in the classroom. "Perhaps the gravest failing of our present arrangement," according to the manifesto, "is the many teachers who lack preparation in the subjects that they teach." Recruiting "smarter and abler" teachers, with high subject matter knowledge and verbal ability, "will do more to improve teaching than requiring more or different pre-service training."

The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them is available at <http://www.edexcellence.net/>.

• In the aftermath of the tragedy at Columbine High School, we realize all too well the limits of ordinary words and actions in responding to something that at its core concerns our society's soul. Nonetheless, our "can do" culture welcomes a pragmatic reply, something to say or do at once, a plan we can carry out now to help make sure the calamity is not repeated. In that vein, the U.S. Department of Education last year issued *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* to help school personnel, parents, and others "identify early indicators of troubling and potentially dangerous student behavior." The guide offers "research-based practices designed to assist school communities to identify these warning signs early and to develop prevention, intervention and crisis response plans." It is available on the Web at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html>.

In a moving statement reacting to the shootings, Secretary of Education Richard Riley said, "We should not look for one easy answer to this type of tragedy." We agree. We must continue to search for the deeper answers, the unsettling soul-full responses that perhaps only prayer can provide.