

cape Council for American Private Education outlook

"Voice of the Nation's Private Schools"

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Council Members: American Montessori Society • Association of Christian Schools International • Christian Schools International • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Friends Council on Education • International Christian Accrediting Association • Jewish Community Day School Network • Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod • National Association of Episcopal Schools • National Association of Independent Schools • National Catholic Educational Association • National Christian School Association • Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education, K-12 • Solomon Schechter Day School Association • Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools • Toussaint Institute for Historically Black Independent Schools • U.S. Catholic Conference • 30 State Affiliates

CAPE Promotes Policy Agenda on Capitol Hill

For those who relish political discourse, there's no place like Washington at the start of a new administration. The town is all but bursting with new players, proposals, and policies. Each day brings a hot-off-the-press announcement of an appointment or program that speaks of change and hope and promise.

Against this backdrop of new beginnings, CAPE's board of directors and state representatives met last month with lawmakers and officials from the Bush administration to discuss a host of public policy issues of importance to the private school community. The discussions, straightforward and substantive, covered topics such as school choice, the teacher shortage, technology, and special education. The tone throughout was positive and encouraging.

Dick Armey

At a meeting in the Capitol, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) let the CAPE delegation know of his unwavering support for opportunity scholarships to allow disadvantaged children in failing schools attend schools that work. Not one to mince words,

Armey called the arguments against the scholarships "bogus," noting that the

government routinely gives grants to older students who attend religious and independent colleges.



Rep. Dick Armey

In a city where words and deeds are sometimes at odds, the majority leader backs his commitment to helping needy children with action: he personally sponsors the private education of 15 low-income students. He described his sponsorship as "one of the most heartwarming things I've

done in this town."

Armey is mindful of the importance of protecting private school autonomy. "You don't want the government saying, 'Here's the money, now take our mandates,'" he stated directly. He added that if money comes to a school through the choice of the parent, the government shouldn't attach rules and regulations.

The majority leader responded positively to a series of presentations on issues important to CAPE. He agreed that government incentives, such as tax breaks and loan forgiveness, that encourage people to become teachers should not discriminate against

those who choose to teach in private schools. And he promised to work with

CAPE to pursue an amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that would secure equitable services for private school children with special needs.

Offering a lesson in Political Action 101, Armey, a former college professor, held up a list that CAPE had prepared of private schools in his home district. He called the roster of 63 schools "impressive," and reminded the group that every Congressional district has a similar list of schools with teachers,

parents, and patrons who can contact their representatives in Congress and stir up support for issues. He called on the private school community to intensify grassroots advocacy for children.

John Boehner

House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH) brought his straight-talking

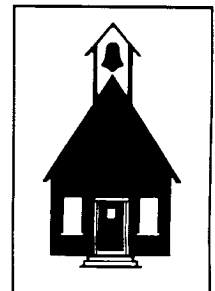
style to the session with CAPE. A strong supporter of school choice since coming to Congress in 1991, Boehner urged the CAPE delegation to come up with a realistic, achievable initiative to promote the right of parents to choose their children's schools.



Rep. John Boehner



Rep. Peter Hoekstra



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At the same time he made it clear that he understood the importance of preserving the independence of private education. His assertion about being reluctant to "put strings on private schools" received a warm response from the group.

Peter Hoekstra

Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Select Education, addressed the CAPE assembly and lifted spirits with his enthusiastic determination to find a way to advance school choice in the current Congress. Claiming the convergence of support in Congress for tax reduction and education reform presents a unique opportunity to use the tax code to provide relief for parents who choose private schools, Hoekstra said he was taking a hard look at Arizona's program of tax credits for contributions to scholarship funds for needy children.



Nina Shokroii Rees

"I'm just looking for the little win that hopefully gets us moving in the right direction," he said.

Nina Shokroii Rees

Down Pennsylvania Avenue apace, the CAPE group met with Nina Shokroii Rees, Vice President Cheney's deputy assistant for domestic policy and a pivotal player in crafting the administration's education reform package. Calling Bush and Cheney "reformers with results," Rees reviewed the administration's education proposals, providing special emphasis on the school choice components, including:

- the opportunity for Title I students in persistently failing schools to use their share of federal funds to transfer to better performing public or private schools;
- the establishment of a fund for school choice demonstration projects to see if they improve the

performance of low-income students:

- the expansion of education savings accounts to include the costs of K-12 education for children in public or private schools;
- more money to establish charter schools;
- a program to allow students in unsafe schools to transfer to safe alternatives, including private schools if space is not available in a safe public school.

Regarding the administration's proposal to incorporate the E-Rate into a consolidated technology grant program, Rees said logistical problems would likely prevent that from happening in the current Congress. On the equitable provision of special education services to private school students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), she expressed interest in the issue and encouraged CAPE to submit a position paper on the topic. (Congress is slated to tackle the reauthorization of IDEA in 2002.)

White House Official Promotes Faith-Based Initiative

Donald Eberly is a true believer in the power of faith to transform destitute communities. The deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives met with representatives of CAPE last month to outline and promote the Bush administration's plan to assist religious and charitable organizations to, in Eberly's words, "renew communities from the inside out." Amid the controversy whirling around the initiative, Eberly personifies the storm's serene center.

In his first month of office, President Bush issued executive orders establishing the White House office and comparable posts in five government agencies, including the Department of Education. Eberly told CAPE that the department centers will conduct a comprehensive review to determine if government programs are "friendly or not" toward faith-based and other community service programs. Although the centers will strive to eliminate discrimi-

nation against religious institutions and to establish a "level playing field," the institutions themselves will ultimately have to decide whether they want to "suit up and play," he said.

Controversy

Acknowledging the controversy surrounding the initiative (some on the left say the program violates the First Amendment, while some on the right say religious institutions would lose their autonomy by accepting government aid), Eberly argued that the program is designed to address the concerns of critics on both sides. On the one hand, direct government aid cannot support religious activity per se. But on the other hand, religious institutions ought to be able to compete for funds for secular services without having to sacrifice religious autonomy. A distinction can be made, said Eberly, between an institution's



Donald Eberly

social services and its religious activities. In order to deliver the former, it should not have to scrub itself completely of the latter.

Turning to the issue of school choice, Eberly, the founding chairman of a statewide coalition promoting parent choice in Pennsylvania, said that in some communities private schools are the only institutions doing an effective job of serving poor children. He said the Bush administration is determined

to make incremental gains in the arena of school choice that could have long-term implications. The president believes that the adoption of even a relatively modest measure would signal a moral and psychological breakthrough.



CAPE Board Member Testifies at House Hearing

Gail Foster positioned her petite frame at the long wooden witness table in the cavernous hearing room and proceeded to offer heartfelt counsel to members of Congress about the compelling necessity of school choice for inner-city children. The former New York City public high school teacher and founder of the Toussaint Institute Fund, a scholarship program for inner-city students, testified last month before the House Education and the Workforce Committee.



"I understand that the concept of school choice has passionate political and philosophical meaning for many people," said Dr. Foster. But she quickly added that she wasn't at the hearing to make the political or philosophical case for choice. No, she wanted to tell representatives what actually drives millions of African-American parents to support choice: love for their children. "They are ordinary, good,

loving parents," she said, "driven by maternal and paternal instinct and love to insure their children's survival and well-being." Low-income parents, just like elected officials and everyone else, "feel compelled to make their children's education a priority that comes before politics and philosophy," she said.

"You have no idea what it is like to be trapped in a poor-performing school like the ones in our neighborhoods," she told committee members. And in response to those who ask poor parents to stay with failing schools, give reform a chance, and work from the inside out, she asked bluntly: "Then why didn't you stay?...Why is it that your children can't wait four more or eight more years, and ours can? You've been tinkering with the public school system for decades, and nothing has changed."

Foster stressed that education in the

inner-city is in crisis, and children need to escape the crisis now. It doesn't take much time for a kindergarten student to get irreparably behind in reading and math, or for an active second grader to be inappropriately placed in a special ed program, or for a freshman in high school to become absorbed in his school's dropout culture, she said.

Addressing committee members directly, Foster closed with a plea on behalf of African-American parents: "Please look into our eyes and know that we are just like you. We are parents who love our children and who deserve the right, the chance to escape dead-end schools as you have."

Gail Foster serves on the boards of CAPE and the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), a national organization that promotes school choice for black parents. The complete text of her testimony, which she presented on behalf of BAEO and the Toussaint Institute Fund, is available on CAPE's Web site at <http://www.capenet.org/foster.html>.

Board Approves Policy Principles

As the investment ad puts it: Circumstances change, but principles endure. To help CAPE navigate through the changing landscape of public policy, our board of directors last month provided a compass, in the form of the following set of principles:

Principles to Govern CAPE's Public Policy Positions

1. Private schools fill a vital role in educating a significant segment of our nation's youth. It is both legal and appropriate that government programs, resources, and benefits should be made available to all students, parents, teachers, administrators, and schools on an equitable basis
2. Leaders of government education agencies and their departments

should serve all students, parents, and schools, public and private, on an equitable basis.

3. Government programs, resources, benefits, and activities must respect the autonomy and independence essential to the unique missions of private schools. Private schools are committed to high standards, and are directly accountable to the parents who choose them and the communities they serve.
4. Children have different educational needs. Government programs should expand educational options for children to include private schools, and be designed and implemented to empower parents, especially low-income parents, to choose educational programs that best meet those needs.

Hickok to USDE

President Bush has nominated Eugene Hickok, Secretary of Education in Pennsylvania, to be U.S. Undersecretary of Education.

Dr. Hickok is a strong advocate of school choice. At a conference sponsored last December by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Hickok said school choice is about "creating a new concept of public education." He labeled the notion that one is either for public schools or for school choice a "false dichotomy," and said choice will help bring about reform in public education. "More choice means better results."





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• Education savings accounts are popular, and we have the National Education Association to thank for that information. A poll commissioned by the NEA and conducted in February 2001 by a bipartisan team of research firms found that an astounding 82 percent of likely voters, including 81 percent of Democrats and 84 percent of Republicans, favor education savings accounts.

Asked about providing parents of children in low-performing schools that fail to maintain certain standards a "tuition voucher worth \$1500 a year that they could use to send their child to any public, private, or charter school," 63 percent of respondents said they supported the idea.

• Sometimes national organizations attempt to address the sensibilities of multiple constituents. And sometimes they don't.

In a recent newspaper ad (*Education Week*, 2/21), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals

(NASSP), which, according to the copy, "represent public and private school principals across the nation," didn't appear overly concerned about representing the private school contingent of their membership. "We are strongly opposed to vouchers, whether they are called K-12 education savings accounts, charitable choice, portability, or tuition tax credits," the ad proclaimed. "Nor do we support Title I funds being redirected to private schools. Such a diversion only serves to weaken the very schools which Title I is committed to serving."

Despite the ad's boilerplate recognition of the important role that private schools play in education and "the right of parents to send their children to these schools," it seems clear what schools NAESP and NASSP are "committed to serving."

• What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today? When asked that question in a recent Gallup survey, more Americans identified the decline in ethics and morality above any other issue. "This is the second time that this has happened in 65 years of polling," said George Gallup, Jr., adding that the poll provides an

indication of "how much people are worried about these issues." Gallup spoke last month at a conference on released-time religious education programs for students in public schools.

The question about the "most important problem" has no predefined answers. Respondents are free to say whatever they want. Thirteen percent mentioned some combination of "ethics/morality/religious/family decline and dishonesty."

The public perception about the decline in ethics may be justified. Gallup reported that other surveys have indicated that about one-third of high school students admitted stealing from a store within the last year; one-third said they had cheated on an exam within the last year, and one-third said they would lie on resumes or applications in order to get a job.

By the way, a close runner-up in the "most important problem" poll was education. Twelve percent of respondents identified it at the top of the list.

More information about Gallup's poll on the top problems facing the country today may be found at the following Web site: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/Releases/pr010205.asp>.