

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

D.C. Mayor Williams Endorses School Choice Initiative

The prospects of passing a school choice bill in Congress got a big boost last month from an unexpected source. District of Columbia Mayor Anthony A. Williams told a U.S. House committee that he supports vouchers to help low-income children in the nation's capital attend private schools. "It is time that we explore other solutions to ensure that every child has access to a quality education in the District," the mayor said. "I support the president's desire to create a pilot scholarship program."

Three-Sector Approach

Testifying at a hearing to consider vouchers for children in D.C., the mayor told the House Committee on Government Reform that he endorsed a "tripartite" approach to education funding for the District, an approach that would bolster support for children in public schools, charter schools, and private schools. The three-pronged proposal appears to be gaining ground at the grassroots level. Soon after the mayor's testimony, an alliance of parent, religious, civic, and education leaders in the city, the DC K12 Education Coalition, issued a statement backing the plan. The coalition said the goals of the three-sector initiative are to create in the district "the best public education system in the nation," to provide all children "with a great education in public and nonpublic schools," and to "expand education options for economically disadvantaged families."

It appears that D.C. officials will be working with representatives from the Bush administration and Congress to design the details of a voucher initiative that Congress will likely consider later this year. U.S. Under Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok told the committee that the Department of Education is committed to developing a program "that reflects the needs of the District and reflects the

input of D.C.'s leadership."

Indeed, the willing involvement of the District's leaders in the program's design seemed to undermine the assertions of some critics that the program would violate the principle of "home rule." A re-



Anthony A. Williams, Mayor of Washington, D.C.

curing complaint among District residents is that Congress sometimes imposes its will on the capital city without the consent of the governed. But Under Secretary Hickok noted that, under the plan being considered, no one would be imposing anything on anyone. Voucher funds would be part of a competitive grant program, and the District could choose to apply for a grant, or not. If it were to receive a grant, eligible parents could then choose to apply for vouchers, or not. Reworking the meaning of "home rule," Hickok asked lawmakers to "let the *home* rule by allowing parents to choose the school for their child."

President Bush's budget request for fiscal year 2004 includes \$75 million for a national Choice Incentive Fund, a portion of which would be reserved for the District of Columbia, should District officials decide to take advantage of it.

New Vision of Urban Education

Under Secretary Hickok—one of the Education Department's hard-core champions of choice—said the D.C. voucher initiative has the potential not only to "forge a new partnership between the federal government and the good people of a great city," but also to create "a new vision of American urban education." Hickok denounced what he called the "false dichotomy between public education and nonpublic choice," and said school choice was about "transforming the nature of public education by putting the public first—the parents first as they exercise options and choices."

Parameters for Vouchers

Mayor Williams set down some parameters for vouchers in his testimony. He said an effective program would, "at a minimum:

- Focus on low-income parents and develop a means tested foundation
- Target students in the lowest performing schools...
- Emphasize opportunities for students who are not currently in nonpublic schools
- Seek to have students attend schools in the District and, where possible, in their neighborhoods
- Require schools to admit all eligible students and, in cases where grades or schools were oversubscribed, admit students based on lottery...
- Encompass a comprehensive accountability and evaluation component that would allow for solid longitudinal data

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CAPE member organizations:

- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- 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 Christian School Association
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- Solomon Schechter Day School Association
- Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools
- Toussaint Institute for Historically Black Independent Schools
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
Executive director: Joe McTighe

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collection and analysis...

•Acknowledge the need for additional supports to help families assess information, and transition and adapt to private schools.”

Joining Williams in what one member of Congress called “courageous and historic” testimony in support of vouchers were two other high-ranking D.C. officials: Peggy Cooper Cafritz, president of the D.C. Board of Education, and Kevin Chavous, chairman of the D.C. Council’s Committee on Education.

Chavous told the House committee that after years of overseeing education reform efforts, he is “absolutely convinced that no traditional school system can reform itself internally. Reform can only occur through pressure, and the best pressure comes by way of school choice.” He called Washington “the greatest city in the world,” but said its true greatness “remains hidden behind the closed doors of inequitable educational opportunities” for children. Yes, he said, vouchers “may at first glance appear to be an unorthodox solution,” but, he added, “these are unorthodox times.”

The committee’s chairman, Rep. Thomas M. Davis, III (R-VA), voiced the need for some sort of check on the schools that would enroll voucher students. Under Secretary Hickok responded by saying the most immediate check is the choice of parents. “The goal is not to impose...new restrictions on choice, but to open up more opportunities for choice,” he said.

Bottom Line Is Children

During his testimony, Mayor Williams said he believes research shows “that school vouchers increase parental satisfaction, boost academic achievement of inner-city African-American students, and increase the likelihood that students will attend and complete college.” He said that when one sets aside “all the arguments, and all the ideology, and all the steam and hot air,” the bottom line is children: children “who aren’t getting the education they should be getting”

and children whose parents want vouchers. “I believe I have an obligation to represent all of the children of our city,” the mayor said, “and I humbly assert that this is leadership, and I humbly assert that this is democracy.”

Bleeding Funds From Public Schools

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), who vigorously opposes vouchers, argued that the proposed program would bleed funds from public schools. But voucher supporters disputed her claim, saying the choice incentive would be funded with new money over and above the District’s regular allocation. If the District chose to apply for a grant from the Choice Incentive Fund, the additional money would enable thousands of children to attend private schools while allowing the District’s full education allocation to be distributed among fewer students, thereby upping the per-pupil expenditure and probably reducing class size. If the District decided not to seek a grant—in effect turning down additional funds to educate the city’s children—the money would presumably be made available to other willing jurisdictions.

Amount of Voucher

Somewhat paradoxically, Delegate Norton, who spoke the most against the program at the hearing, said the vouchers would have to be large enough to help low-income parents attend private schools. She recalled a conversation during a call-in show in which a mother claimed she was too poor to afford the family’s share of tuition under an existing privately funded voucher program. “If in fact you’re for these vouchers for low-income parents,” Norton asked Kevin Chavous, “don’t you also have to be for paying the full freight in order for them to go to these schools?” Chavous agreed that the vouchers had to be large enough for poor families to cover the complete cost of attending what he called a “great neighborhood private school.” If there’s going to be a voucher program, he said, “it has to be meaningful; it can’t be partial.”

Quick Stats

Average U.S. Private School Tuition: 1999-00

	All Levels	Elementary Schools	Secondary Schools	K-12 Schools
All Schools	\$4,689	\$3,267	\$6,053	\$6,779
Catholic	\$3,236	\$2,451	\$4,845	\$6,780
Other Religious	\$4,063	\$3,503	\$6,536	\$4,260
Non-Sectarian	\$10,992	\$7,884	\$14,638	\$12,363

Source: Table 61 of the new *Digest of Education Statistics 2002*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

Private School Parents Pleased With Schools

Parents of children in private schools are more satisfied with their schools than parents of children in public schools.

A report released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 75 percent or more of private school parents in 1999 were “very satisfied” with the schools their children attended, as well as with the

they attended a general meeting at the school, went to a parent conference, attended a school event, or volunteered or served on a school committee.

Private school parents are also more likely than their public school counterparts to expect their children to attend and graduate from a four-year college after high school.

As suggested by its title, the study tracks the percentage of children in choice-related schools from 1993 to 1999. During that period, the number of children in public assigned schools decreased from 80 percent of the school-age

population to 76 percent, while the enrollment in public choice schools went from 11 percent to 14 percent. The percentage of the nation’s children enrolled in private schools remained nearly constant.

In addition to tracking trends in school choice and measuring parent satisfaction, the study looks at student demographics in private schools and public schools by race, gender, household income, disability status, and other characteristics.

To download the report, visit the NCES Web site at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003031>.

Percentage of Students in Grades 3-12 With Very Satisfied Parents by Type of School (1999)

Parents very satisfied with...	Public Assigned	Public Chosen	Private Religious	Private Other
School	48	62	80	76
Teachers	54	62	76	75
Academic Standards	53	63	81	79
Order and Discipline	54	63	87	80

Source: Table 3, *Trends in the Use of School Choice: 1993 to 1999*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, May 2003

teachers, academic standards, and discipline in those schools. The average percentage of very satisfied private school parents was about 30 points higher than that of parents whose children had been assigned a public school, and about 16 points higher than that of parents who had chosen their children’s public school (see chart).

Trends in the Use of School Choice: 1993 to 1999 also shows that students in private schools are more likely than other students to have parents who are “involved with their schools.” More parents of students in private schools than those of students in public schools said

Supreme Court to Hear Blaine Case

Last year the U.S. Supreme Court decided that state tuition assistance to students attending religious schools is constitutionally permitted. Last month the court agreed to take a case that would determine whether such assistance—at least under certain circumstances—is constitutionally required.

At issue in *Davey v. Locke* is a Washington State policy that denies state-funded “Promise Scholarships” to otherwise qualified college students who choose to major in theology. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled last year that the state’s policy “discriminates on the basis of religion.” The court required the state to provide a scholarship to Joshua Davey, a major in pastoral ministries at Northwest College, an evangelical Christian institution. Washington Governor Gary Locke appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

The case takes on huge significance in the school choice arena because Washington State defended its discriminatory action on the basis of a state constitutional provision banning the appropriation of public money for “any religious worship, exercise or instruction, or the support of any religious establishment.” Numerous states have similar provisions, called Blaine Amendments, in their constitutions, and those provisions have been interpreted by some state executives, lawmakers, and judges as disallowing aid that would otherwise be considered valid under the federal Constitution.

According to the Institute for Justice, the case “raises squarely” the issue of whether a state’s Blaine Amendment violates the First Amendment. IJ says a clear victory in the Supreme Court “could wipe away the largest remaining legal obstacle to school choice.”

Blacks, Hispanics Support Vouchers More Than Whites

Fifty-seven percent of African Americans, 61 percent of Hispanics, 51 percent of whites, and 52 percent of the general population support school vouchers, according to a poll released last month by the [Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies](#).

Support for vouchers is even stronger among respondents with children and among respondents in certain age brackets. When asked the survey’s voucher question (“Would you support a voucher system where parents would get money from the government to send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice?”), 67 percent of black and Hispanic respondents who have children said yes, as did 56 percent of the general population with children. Within the 26-35 age subgroup,

70 percent of blacks, 58 percent of Hispanics, and 63 percent of the general population voiced support for vouchers.

In another finding, the survey shows that people are pretty much all over the lot in estimating private school tuition costs. One question asked, “How much do you think the average private school charges for tuition?” Respondents were forced to choose from four answers: \$2,500, \$3,500, \$5,000, and \$10,000 or more. Within the general population, 11 percent chose \$2,500, 19 percent chose \$3,500, 30 percent chose \$5,000, and 20 percent chose \$10,000 or more. Another 20 percent said they didn’t know. (See the table on page 2 to find out how well the responses match up with actual private school tuition rates.)

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation last month announced a grant of \$18.9 million to create 12 new high schools modeled after the Cristo Rey Jesuit High School of Chicago. A unique feature of the school, which serves poor and minority youths, is a work-study program in which students spend one day a week working at local businesses. The money they earn covers 75 percent of their tuition. A rigorous academic curriculum and student support system help trigger extraordinarily high college-going rates. One hundred percent of the school's graduates in 2002 were accepted into college.

"The Cristo Rey model is an amazingly effective way to make high-quality education available to economically disadvantaged young people," said B.J. Cassin, chairman and president of the Cassin Educational Initiative, which has helped establish four Cristo Rey type schools since 2000.

A spokesperson for the Gates Foundation had this to say: "All students should be able to choose from an array of small, focused high schools designed to give them a solid, personalized education and the promise of a bright future. Successful models like Cristo Rey Jesuit High School should be a part of the national discussion and local solution."

The press release issued by the sponsoring foundations noted that "parochial schools have long played a critical role in

creating high-quality educational options for inner-city youths, offering students a narrow rigorous curriculum that prepares them for college."

★ U.S. Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ) has introduced the Children's Hope Act of 2003 (HR 2234), which encourages states to establish scholarship tax credits similar to programs that already exist in Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Florida.

"Most of my public life has been devoted to children's issues," Franks said. "I have seen first-hand that the strongest and surest inducement to educational excellence is to give parents the ability to choose what kind of educational substance and environment is best for their child. They have the intrinsic right to make the fundamental decisions regarding their children's education."

Franks' bill provides a federal tax credit of \$100 (\$200 for joint returns) for certain contributions to school tuition organizations that offer scholarships or tuition grants to low-income students to attend a qualified school. A "qualified school" means, among other things, a school that "does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, handicap, familial status, or national origin."

Twenty-one other members of Congress have joined Franks in sponsoring the bill, including Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

"Families have waited far too long for

these reforms," Franks said. "America's children deserve the best education possible and Congress has an ideal opportunity to employ a proven method to help make this happen."

★ The newest form of vouchers is the one contained in the budget that Florida legislators approved last month: vouchers for virtual schools. Up to 1,000 children in the state will be eligible for vouchers of up to \$4,800 to enroll in an online school. Only current public school students qualify.

In an article last month on schooling in cyberspace, *The New York Times* reported that "because of increasing dissatisfaction with conventional schools and increasing acceptance of so-called distance learning at the high school and college levels, the number of virtual elementary and middle schools is expected to grow substantially in the next five years." James McVety, senior analyst at Eduventures, an education consulting firm, told the *Times*, "Every state in the union is exploring or has begun to develop a virtual school program, whether on their own or through a third-party provider."

★ The application for the 2003-04 No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools program will likely be released sometime over the summer. As soon as it is released, CAPE will post it and the private school application timeline on the CAPE Web site at www.capanet.org/brs.html.