

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Newark Mayor Booker Defends Choice at National Summit

Newark Mayor Cory Booker offered a stirring and dramatic defense of school choice during a national policy summit last month saying, "We cannot have a leading democracy if we have a lagging school system."

Speaking May 4 at a conference sponsored by the American Federation for Children, the Democratic mayor of New Jersey's largest city repeatedly cited statistics suggesting an education system on the decline. "There is a cancer in our country eating at the soul of our being, and we must find a way to wake up everyone to the profound urgency of this moment," he said.

Noting that minorities will soon make up the majority of the U.S. workforce, Booker predicted an economic downfall unless the country is able to close the achievement gap. Striking the theme that fates are interconnected, Booker recalled the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a common garment of destiny."

Reflection of the Divine

Booker said every child is "born and created in the reflection of the Divine" and endowed with the ability to achieve, yet society "chokes out the potential of millions of children who are trapped in systems that deny this nation the benefit of their genius." He compared the crisis to that of slavery, where students, though not literally confined by "shackles and chains," are cast into a "prison of ignorance" that limits their possibilities and the realization of their potential. "It tears at my heart to have to look at children in this nation and know that their schools are failing them at levels that most of us fail to acknowledge," he said.

The mayor said he could never stand against school choice because he himself had benefited from his own parents having

options. He suggested that elected officials who oppose choice would have more credibility if they sent their own children to failing public schools rather than selecting successful alternatives. "What have we created, a system that if you're connected, elected, have wealth and privilege, you get freedom in this country? And now you want to deny that to my community? No. I'm going to fight for the freedom and the liberty and the choice and the options of my people in the same way you will defend that right for yourself."

Born on Third Base

A disarming storyteller, Booker relayed a time as a teenager when, despite his considerable academic and athletic success in high school, his parents admonished, "Don't you dare walk around here like you hit a triple; you were born on third base." His parents went on to remind him that he was drinking "deeply from wells of freedom and liberty and opportunity" that he did not dig and was eating "lavishly from banquet tables" prepared by ancestors. His choice, they said, was to get "dumb, fat, and happy" consuming everything that was put before him or to use his blessings to continue the fight for freedom because "this nation is not finished yet." As an example of that unfinished business, he said, "We still have a country where your destiny is determined by the ZIP code you're born into," and where "some children by

law are locked into schools that fail their genius."

Drawing from his own biography and mapping his own vision, Booker spoke movingly about the "conspiracy of love"

that once helped his father achieve success. He said a new generation of privileged Americans must continue that conspiracy for those in need.

He called school choice a strategy, not an end. The goal, he said, is a nation where a child's destiny is not determined by the place

of her birth, but by the boldness of her dreams and the strength of her work ethic.

Cavalcade of Speakers

Booker was part of a cavalcade of inspiring speakers at the AFC event. Author and news analyst Juan Williams defended the right of parents to choose their child's school, saying, "Nobody knows better than a parent what's best for their child."

On Thursday, May, 3, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie kicked off the conference promoting the *Opportunity Scholarship Act*, a scholarship tax credit program that is pending in the state legislature. "If you are ready to fight with me, I'm ready to fight with you," Christie told the audience.

Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, who recently signed two sweeping school choice bills, spoke during dinner and told the audience, "The truth and the people are winning when it comes to education reform."



Newark Mayor Cory Booker speaking at the AFC policy summit May 4 in Jersey City, NJ. (Photo courtesy of the American Federation for Children)

CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- 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
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- 33 Affiliated State Organizations

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

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$35. ISSN 0271-1451

13017 Wisteria Drive #457
Germantown, MD 20874
(tel) 301-916-8460
(fax) 301-916-8485
(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org

May Is Active Month for School Choice

May proved to be an active month for school choice with several states moving legislation, a Congressional committee holding a hearing, and the Speaker of the House urging the Secretary of Education to implement a program in the District of Columbia fully and expeditiously.

Arizona Expands Unique Program

Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed an expansion of the state's Empowerment Scholarships Accounts (ESA) program, a unique plan through which deposits are made by the state and withdrawn by parents to educate a child in the setting of their choice. Allowable expenditures include tuition and fees at a private school, textbooks, therapies, tutoring, online learning programs, and even eventual college costs. Last year the state established the program for students with disabilities, but this year's expansion extends to students attending low-performing schools, the children of members of the military, and children in foster care. For many students the state will save money in that the amount deposited in the accounts each year will be 10 percent less than what the state would have spent to educate the child in a public school.

The school choice advocacy community offered quick praise. "We applaud the work of Governor Brewer and Arizona legislators for their work towards creating new pathways for children to succeed," said Betsy DeVos, chairman of the American Federation for Children.

"For decades, members of the armed forces have benefited from the GI Bill in higher education, and to give similar freedom to their children in K-12 education is the right move," said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

The Goldwater Institute, which developed the program, estimates that over 100,000 new students will be eligible for the accounts as a result of the expansion, essentially doubling the program's size. "Thanks to this program's expansion, more students in Arizona will be able to customize their education—something we could have only dreamed of just five years ago. We're not talking about just choosing a different school, but a complete school experience specifically de-

signed for each student," said Jonathan Butcher, education director for the institute. "This is the future of education in the U.S."

Mississippi & New Hampshire

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant signed legislation May 23 that expands educational options for dyslexic students. According to the governor's office, "House Bill 1031 sets guidelines for dyslexia screenings and provides school choice to students diagnosed with dyslexia, allowing them to transfer to a public or private school

that offers dyslexia therapy."

Meanwhile, the New Hampshire House and Senate approved, by wide margins, school choice measures designed to provide corporations with an 85 percent tax credit for contributions to organizations that award scholarships to eligible students currently attending public schools. Be-

cause the two chambers passed different versions of the legislation, it will have to go to a conference committee for resolution.

Capitol Hill

On Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held a hearing May 16 on school choice and parental engagement. One of the witnesses, Kevin Chavous, senior advisor for the American Federation for Children, said that "parental engagement via school choice improves educational outcomes for participating students, puts students in safer schools, and gives parents more satisfaction with their child's learning environments."

In another school choice development, House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) met with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan May 17 to urge him to fully and expeditiously implement the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) in the District of Columbia. Officials at the U.S. Department of Education have capped enrollment in the OSP in accordance with President Obama's budget proposal to zero out funding for program. But the act that authorized the program contains no enrollment cap, and Boehner expects the program to be fully funded in the coming fiscal year.



Speaker Boehner meets with Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, and Senator Joe Lieberman in his office in the U.S. Capitol. May 17, 2012. (Photo by Bryant Avondoglio)

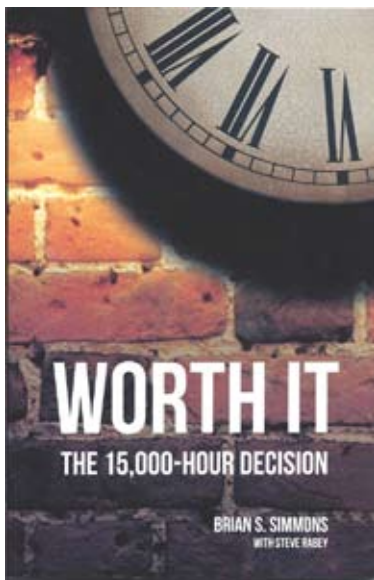
Worth It: The 15,000-Hour Decision

Is a Christian education worth the tens of thousands of dollars that parents are likely to spend on it over the course of a child's K-12 schooling? Dr. Brian Simmons, president of the Association of Christian Schools International and a member of CAPE's board of directors, says the answer is an emphatic yes. His engaging book *Worth It: The 15,000-Hour Decision* (available at Amazon.com) explains why.

Simmons sees the home, church, and school (where students spend 15,000 hours or so between kindergarten and twelfth-grade graduation) as a three-part, interlinked structure to help children reach and fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

He describes the 22,000+ ACSI-member schools, which serve more than 2.5 million students worldwide, as sharing a core commitment to Jesus Christ. "[T]he foundation of Christian schools is Jesus' life and message and the teaching of the Bible," he writes.

And while it's important that students learn math and science and language arts, "it's even more important that they learn to address the deeper life questions." Christian schools offer students a particular perspective when dealing with questions like "Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? Is there a God?"



Simmons delivers a clear message to parents: "The education students receive at Christian schools is truly world class." He offers several attractive examples of excellence. At the Bear

Creek School in Redmond, WA, students experience a Shakespeare Immersion Program. In the primary grades they explore plot lines and character traits and examine meter and syntax. In middle school they learn about Elizabethan culture, perform several vignettes, and progress to a full performance of *Julius Caesar*. By the time they graduate high school, "the students have experienced a substantial repertoire."

In a chapter devoted to teachers, Simmons presents a compelling example of exceptional practice. Dan Stroup from Heritage Christian School

in Indianapolis every year writes an individual birthday letter to each of his current and former students, a practice he started in 1985. "It's a privilege for me to come in and teach these young people that the Bible is God's practical guide for their lives," says Dan.

Simmons considers Christian schools an "essential ingredient" in helping children "meet the challenges they will face." He invites parents to visit and consider a Christian school as a way to help prepare their children "for both this life and the life to come."

Condition of Ed

Under Congressional mandate, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) each year produces *The Condition of Education*, a report on how education is trending in the United States.

As with years past, the latest report, released May 24, presents a significant amount of data about private schools. Ten percent of students in elementary and secondary schools attended private schools in 2009-10, although the count of students has changed over the past 15 years. According to the report, "Private school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12 increased from 5.9 million in 1995-96 to 6.3 million in 2001-02 then decreased to 5.5 million in 2009-10."

Although more students are enrolled in Catholic schools than any other type of private school, the numbers are shifting somewhat. Between 1995-96 and 2009-10, the percentage of all private school students who attended Catholic schools dropped from 45 percent to 39 percent.

By contrast, "From 1999-2000 to 2009-10, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools more than quadrupled from 0.3 million to 1.6 million students" Charter schools in 2009 operated in 40 states, numbered 5,000, and accounted for roughly 5 percent of all public schools.

Among traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools, the number of students per school differs significantly. "Some 30 percent of traditional public schools were small (enrollment of fewer than 300 students), as compared to 61 percent of charter schools and 85 percent of private schools. In that same year, 9 percent of traditional public schools were large (1,000 or more students), as compared to 4 percent of charter schools and 1 percent of private schools."

The Condition of Education is available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>.

Students Surpass National Average in Science

Eighth-graders in private schools have significantly surpassed national average performance levels in science, according to the latest results from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card.

Seventy-seven percent of private school students scored at or above the basic level, compared to 65 percent of students in general. Similarly, 43 percent of private school students scored at or above the proficient level, while only 32 percent of all students did so.

Results are also reported as scores on a 300-point scale. The average score of private school students was 163, 11 points higher than

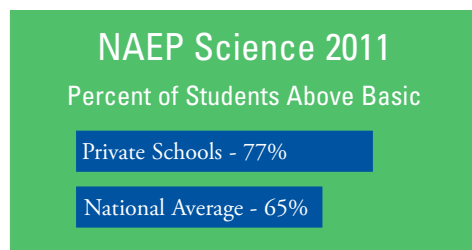
the national average of 152. By way of reference, the 50th percentile score for the nation was 155, and the 75th percentile score was 176.

The report notes that the "private-public gap persists" in that "[p]rivate school students scored 12 points higher on average than public school students in 2011."

Roughly 122,000 students, selected to represent eighth-graders across the country, took

part in the assessment.

Average scores increased from 150 to 152 between 2009 and 2011, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan said the results "offer encouraging signs" of improvement.



Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, offered some insights on the differences between private and public schools in a recent blog on *The Huffington Post* titled “Fixing the Fixation on Testing”:

“Look at the difference between private and public schools in our country. Most private schools do not administer high-stakes tests, and that is reflected in their curriculum and culture. Freedom from test fixation allows them to provide enriching experiences and in-depth instruction in an array of subjects.”

“Public schools, in contrast, are required by federal and state laws to administer what numerous experts consider to be too many low-quality standardized assessments, which have significant consequences. This, in turn, drives an excessive focus on the tests, test preparation and tested subjects.”

★ New Jersey voters support by over a three-to-one margin Gov. Chris Christie’s proposal to establish scholarships funded by tax-incentivized donations that would enable students in poor-performing public schools to attend religious and independent schools, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released May 17.

Support for the proposal outweighed opposition 73 to 20 and remained high within all subgroups. Eighty percent of Republicans favored the measure, as did 76 percent of Independents and 66 percent of Democrats. Urban residents were on

board 78 to 15; suburban, 73-21. Seventy-five percent of blacks, 73 percent of whites, and 72 percent of people in union households backed the legislation. Even seventy-one percent of voters with children in public schools said they liked the idea.

★ Speaking of New Jersey, Republican Governor Chris Christie and Democrat Mayor of Newark Cory Booker, two strong supporters of school choice, got the Internet hopping in recent weeks with a Seinfeldesque viral video spoofing Booker’s new superhero status. (In a genuine act of heroism, the mayor actually saved a woman from a burning building April 12.)

In a video prepared for the New Jersey Press Association’s Legislative Correspondents Club, Christie desperately seeks an opportunity to perform a heroic deed, only to be out-done at every turn by “Booker!” (Picture Seinfeld’s grimace while muttering a disdainful “Newman!”) View this refreshing bipartisan takeoff at <<http://bit.ly/LqW1Aw>>.

★ Fordham University recently honored a leader of the CAPE affiliate in New York State for his contributions to Catholic education. James Cultrara, co-chair of the NYS Coalition for Independent and Religious Schools and director for education for the NYS Catholic Conference, received an award May 15 at the annual leadership dinner sponsored by Fordham’s Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Merryl H. Tisch, chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, spoke at the event, which took place at the university’s Lincoln Center campus.

Chancellor Tisch recalled her own attendance at a Jewish day school in New York City, made possible because of a scholarship. “For our family, the ability to access outstanding parochial school education—values-based education—would open the door to our family to live the American dream,” she said.

“Everyone should be able to live the American dream, and I believe that parochial schools open doors for families.”



Fordham President Joseph M. McShane, S.J., (left) with James Cultrara and Chancellor Tisch. (Photo by Bruce Gilbert, Fordham University)

