

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 • Association of Waldorf Schools of North America • Christian Schools International • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Friends Council on Education • 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

Private School Bond Measure Approved in Hawaii

Voters on Election Day had their say on more than 200 ballot initiatives nationwide. And while the national media tended to focus on hot-button topics like animal rights, class size, and medical marijuana, a less headline-grabbing measure in Hawaii carried significant consequences—at least for private schools. Ballot Question 2 would allow those schools to use tax-exempt bonds to finance renovation and construction projects. Hawaiians approved it handily, 60 percent to 33 percent.

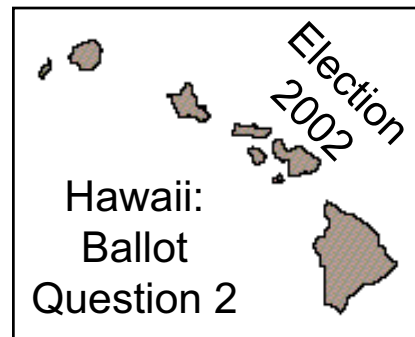
The constitutional amendment adds private elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities to the list of institutions that already qualify for special-purpose revenue bonds. The tax-exempt bonds allow qualifying entities to borrow money for building projects from private investors at interest rates lower than commercial rates. Before the state authorizes the bonds, the legislature must first find that the construction project is in the public interest. Once the bonds are approved, a financial institution can sell them to investors.

No Cost to Taxpayers

Throughout their campaign, proponents emphasized that the bonds would not cost taxpayers a penny. Unlike the state and local bond issues that typically appear on Election Day ballots (this year there were an estimated \$44 billion in such issues nationally), Hawaii's special-purpose bonds are not financed by taxpayers. The borrowing institution,

not the public, is responsible for paying back the debt.

Predictably, however, the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) opposed the measure. Claiming the mission of private schools "does not



serve the public good," HSTA president Karen Ginoza said voters and taxpayers should not be asked to support private schools while public schools need funds for repairs and other improvements. "If state resources such as special purpose revenue bonds are going to be utilized, they should benefit the public good in Hawaii," said Ms. Ginoza, apparently overlooking the fact that the bonds in question are purchased by private investors and paid back by private institutions.

Investment in Children

From the start of their efforts to secure passage of the constitutional amendment, supporters stressed the initiative would not affect funding for public schools. They presented the bonds as an investment in the education of the

52,000 students at the state's 130 private schools and colleges that would not divert any money at all from public education. They also argued that the repair and construction projects that flowed from the bonds would be good for the state's economy.

Wide Support

The successful pro-bond campaign was spearheaded by the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) and supported by the state's private school community. But its support didn't stop there. Both gubernatorial candidates backed the measure, as did the state school superintendent, the state education department, and 74 out of 76 state legislators.

Following approval of the ballot initiative, Robert M. Witt, executive director of HAIS and the Hawaii Council of Private Schools, the state's CAPE affiliate, said, "The real winners are Hawaii's children and Hawaii's economy." Witt went on to say that the ballot campaign helped educate the state's citizens about private schools. "They now know that Hawaii's private schools are diverse, affordable, and accessible, and that, like public schools, they contribute to the public good and to the health and well-being of our island community."



General Accounting Office Issues Voucher Study

In a sweeping study of privately funded voucher programs, the General Accounting Office reached this less-than-startling conclusion: More study is needed on the effects of expanding choice in education.

Reviewing recent research on programs in New York City, Dayton, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., the GAO found positive academic effects among African American students awarded vouchers in New York City and consistently higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schooling among voucher parents—regardless of race or ethnicity—in all three cities. But while calling the research “an important first step,” the GAO concluded, “Further analyses of these data by other researchers and additional high quality studies in other settings and involving different types of students and schools are important next steps in informing this ongoing public debate.”

\$60 Million and 46,000 Students

The GAO report—released in the midst of considerable discussion in Congress on the value of helping low-income families select the schools their children attend—said privately funded voucher programs nationwide currently provide nearly \$60 million to help about 46,000 students attend private schools. Requested by Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), ranking member (though soon to be chairman) of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, the report sought to find out the characteristics of voucher programs financed by private donors, the academic performance of the students awarded vouchers, and the level of school satisfaction among the parents of those students.

In carrying out their work, GAO staff looked at 78 voucher programs.

The largest program served over 3,000 students; the smallest served only four. All used family income as their sole criterion for eligibility, and many used a sliding scale to determine award amounts, which in 2001-02 ranged from about \$600 to about \$2000 per student.



Because the demand for vouchers generally exceeds supply, the programs usually select recipients from eligible applicants

using a lottery, though some do so on a first-come-first-serve basis. Most require parents to cover part of a child's private school tuition.

According to the GAO, two national organizations—Children First America (CFA) and Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF)—assist local voucher programs with funding and technical assistance. Three states—Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania—provide tax credits to individuals (Arizona) or corporations (Florida and Pennsylvania) that make contributions to organizations providing vouchers.

Random Assignment Experiment

Although it identified 11 studies on the effects of privately funded vouchers, the GAO focused on three studies that met its rigorous standards, which included comparisons between a control group and a voucher group, and the collection of baseline data on student achievement or parent satisfaction. The three studies of programs in New York City, Dayton, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., all used the method of randomly assigning voucher-eligible students to one of two groups: recipients of vouchers and non-recipients. Because the two groups had similar socioeconomic characteristics and were distinguished only by whether or not they received vouchers, the difference in measures of academic achievement or parent satisfac-

tion could be attributed to the isolated effects of vouchers, rather than the confounding effects of other factors.

Regarding the effects of vouchers on academic achievement, the GAO had this to say: “The findings of the studies show positive achievement gains for low-income African American voucher users in New York City who applied for vouchers while in grades 1-4; however, the findings do not provide evidence that African American students elsewhere, or any other students, would realize achievement gains if they were offered vouchers to attend private schools.”

However, in examining the academic effectiveness of vouchers, the GAO did not consider the cost of achieving the effect in question. If School A and School B could produce essentially the same academic results, but School A could do so at, say, half the cost of School B, the public policy implications would be significant.

Parent Satisfaction

Regarding parent satisfaction with private schools, the GAO said the three studies found this: “[P]arents who used a voucher to send their children to private schools were more likely to be satisfied with their children's education overall and perceived their children's schools to be better on a number of indicators, compared to parents in the control groups.”

Voucher users in all three cities were more likely than non-recipients to rate their schools an “A.” They were also more satisfied with their schools' discipline, safety, academic quality, teaching, and curricula. On parents' perception of disruption in the school, the report states that parents of voucher users “were less likely than parents of control group students to report that fighting, truancy, cheating, or destruction of property were serious problems in their children's schools.”

The GAO report (GAO-02-752) is available on the Web at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02752.pdf>.

School Safety

Despite important progress in recent years, "crime and safety issues remain substantial problems in our nation's schools," according to the fifth annual report on school crime and safety that the Departments of Education and Justice issued earlier this month.

The report indicates that between 1995 and 2001, the percentage of students who said they were victims of crime at school dropped from 10 percent to 6 percent. But the report also says the rates of some other problem behaviors, such as bullying, have been on the rise in recent years. All in all the authors offer this assessment: "Violence, theft, bullying, drugs, and firearms remain problems in many schools throughout the country, indicating that more remains to be done to make our schools safer."

The rate of crime at school varied by type of school. "[P]ublic school students were more likely to report having been victims of violent crime than were private school students." Violent crime includes rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

New Poll on School Vouchers

African Americans are more likely than Americans in general to support school vouchers, according to a poll released last month by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

When asked, "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?" 57 percent of blacks answered yes, compared with 52 percent of the general population.

The Joint Center released its poll findings a week before Election Day. Its survey on politics, the midterm elec-

In 2001, 1.9 percent of public school students and 1.0 percent of private school students ages 12 through 18 reported being the victim of violent crime during the previous six months. The chart below shows other indicators of school safety.

The report is available on the Web at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003009>.

tions, and a host of domestic and foreign policy issues was conducted between September 17 and October 21. The survey included two population samples: 850 adults representing the general population and 850 adults representing the African American population.

The Center found what it called a "noteworthy change in black partisan identification" since 2000. In 2002, 63 percent of African Americans identified themselves as Democrats, 24 percent as Independents, and 10 percent as Republicans. In the Center's 2000 survey, the percentages were 74 percent Democrat, 20 percent Independent, and 4 percent Republican. Significantly, this year's survey revealed that 34 percent of African Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 consider themselves Independents.

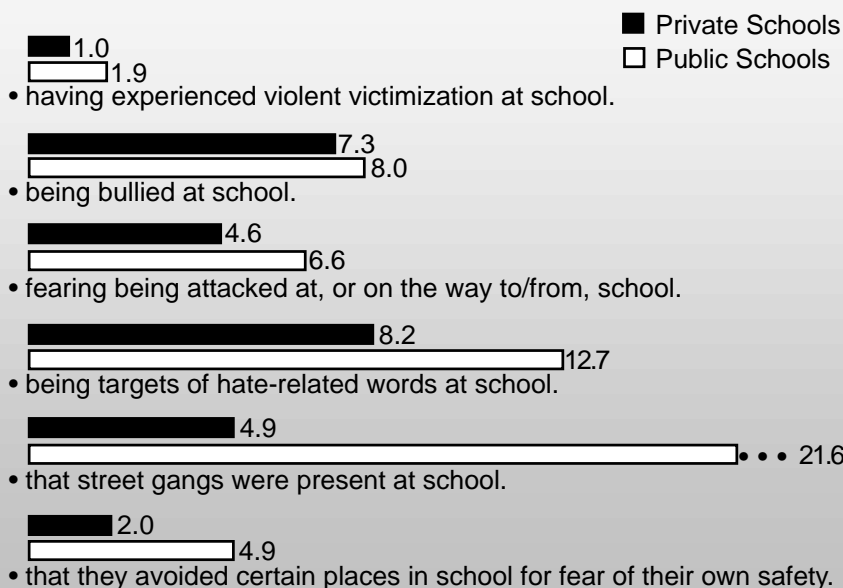
Shifts have also taken place since 2000 in what blacks and whites consider to be the most pressing national problems. The top issues in 2000 for both groups were education and healthcare. In the most recent survey only 14 percent of African Americans identified education as the top national issue, compared to 26 percent in 2000. Among whites, education dropped from 24 percent in 2000 to 10 percent in 2002. Voters this year are more concerned about other issues. The most important national problems identified by blacks are the economy and employment (23 percent), terrorism and the possible war with Iraq (23 percent), and crime (17 percent). Among whites, the top problems are terrorism, the war, and foreign affairs (all adding up to 35 percent), the economy (18 percent), and moral decline (11 percent).

Results from the politics portion of the 2002 National Opinion Poll by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies are available on the Joint Center's Web site at <http://www.jointcenter.org/index.html>.



How Safe Are America's Schools?

Percentage of Students, 12-18, who in 2001 reported...



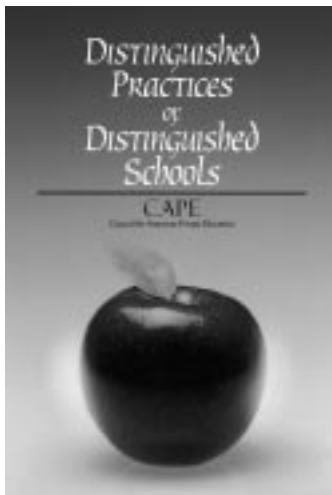
Source: Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2002
U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. November 2002.



Return Service Requested

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• CAPE's newest publication, *Distinguished Practices of Distinguished Schools*, provides a selection of responses from applications of recent private school winners of the Blue Ribbon Schools Award. Readers can find out how some exemplary private schools approach curriculum, professional development, school culture, leadership, family involvement, character education, and assessment. To order a free hardcopy of the 130-page book or to download a PDF version, visit CAPE's Web site at www.capenet.org.



• The U.S. Department of Education will soon release the final rules and application for the 2003 No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools program. The program will honor elementary and secondary schools that perform at very high levels or that demonstrate dramatic

success in educating traditionally underachieving students. As soon as the new rules and application are available, CAPE will post them on its Web site at www.capenet.org/brs.html.

• CAPE welcomes its newest member, the Association Montessori International—USA. AMI/USA was established in 1970 to promote the growth of Montessori education, the development of teacher training, and the public understanding of Montessori pedagogical principles and practice. The K-12 enrollment in AMI/USA-affiliated schools is about 16,600 students.

With the addition of AMI-USA, CAPE now has 18 national association members and 28 state affiliates, which collectively represent about 80 percent of the nation's K-12 private school enrollment.

• The *Chicago Sun-Times* reported last month that parents of private school students in Illinois have received \$65.9

million in benefits so far this year under the state's tax credit program for elementary and secondary school expenses. The program, which went into effect in tax year 2000, allows parents of K-12 students to take a tax credit for a portion of expenses incurred in connection with tuition, book fees, and lab fees. The credit is equal to 25 percent of qualifying expenses that exceed \$250, but the total credit per family cannot exceed \$500. Expenses must be incurred at a public or private elementary or secondary school, attendance at which satisfies the requirements of the state's compulsory education statute.

• The Department of Education last month released draft guidance on the transferability provisions under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). Transferability permits states and school districts to transfer a portion of funds from certain NCLBA programs to other specified programs in order to meet state or local needs. The guidance specifies that before any funds are transferred, officials must engage in timely and meaningful consultation with private school officials regarding the equitable participation of students or teachers in private schools.

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