

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Bush Convenes Conference After Amish School Shootings

There it was, an unsettling and stark contrast: the high-tech, stainless-steel truck—its front cab full of arms and ammunition—breaking into the bucolic landscape of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The shootings of students at a serene Amish schoolhouse last month sent waves of shock and sorrow across the country. And emotions deepened as details unfolded. The final toll was five girls dead and five others wounded by a lone gunman. The oldest victim, 13-year-old Marian Fisher, reportedly said to her killer, “Shoot me first,” presumably to protect her younger classmates through a heroic act of love. Thus, lives of virtue and hope were eclipsed by evil and despair.

About a week after the Amish shootings, President Bush convened the Conference on School Safety at the National 4-H Youth Conference Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. The conference brought together educators, law enforcement officials, families, and policymakers to sort through the lessons learned from the Lancaster tragedy and related incidents, and to identify steps that stakeholders can take to help make schools safer and to help stricken communities recover. The serious purpose was underscored by the presence of the president himself, Mrs. Bush, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and Education Secretary Margaret Spellings.

The president called school violence “incredibly sad” and “upsetting to a lot of people.” Describing himself as a “results-oriented person,” Mr. Bush said he expected the conference to produce concrete action to help people learn about responses that are working. He said the purpose of the conference was to identify best practices and to “share information so that we can save lives, encourage parents, and help people respond.”

“All of us in this country want our

classrooms to be gentle places of learning, places where people not only learn the... basic skills necessary to become productive citizens, but learn to relate to one an-



Mrs. Laura Bush speaks during the conference on school safety. (White House photo by Shealah Craighead)

other,” Mr. Bush said. “And our parents, I know, want to be able to send their child or children to schools that are safe places.”

Private Schools

In one of the Q-and-A sessions at the conference, Dr. Keith Wiebe, president of the American Association of Christian Schools, reminded panel members that the scene of the shootings in Pennsylvania was a private school and asked how such schools could be included in plans and processes to improve school security and safety.

Frederick Ellis, director of the Office of Safety and Security for the Fairfax County (VA) public schools, responded by saying his county shares plans and processes with officials on a private school contact list that the county maintains. He noted that a private school official sits on a school safety officers committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which shares a great deal of emergency planning information. But Ellis's bottom-line advice was this: “I would encourage

private and parochial schools to make contact with their local emergency managers and their local public school districts, and inquire about what's available, what can they share, how can they be a partner.” He added, “As a private school, you can't wait for the public to come to you. You need to knock on that door.”

Also responding to Dr. Wiebe's question, Secretary Spellings said she would ask her newly appointed Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Advisory Committee to “take a look at that issue on how we can be more coordinated.”

The point raised by Wiebe had a ripple effect later in the day when Secretary Spellings, answering a question posed to a separate panel, made reference to her earlier decision to direct the advisory committee to “make sure that private schools and other providers are aware of all the [school safety] strategies, plans and techniques.” And in her report to the president at the close of the conference, Spellings made clear that no community is immune to school violence. “We know also that these sorts of incidents can occur in inner-city America and Amish communities, private schools, public schools—really every single community has to be alert,” she said.

Panel Presentations

The conference included three panel presentations, remarks by First Lady Laura Bush, and a closing session with the president.

Moderated by Attorney General Gonzales, the first panel focused on the scope of school violence and specific steps to prevent it from the perspective of law enforcement. Summarizing the session for the president, the attorney general reported that America's schools are generally safe

continued on page 2



CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- 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
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 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 using an Apple Power Mac G4. An annual subscription is \$20. 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



CAPE Welcomes Three New State Affiliates

CAPE’s board of directors acted in October to approve three new state affiliates, representing the private school communities in Arizona, the Carolinas, and Oklahoma.

With the new additions, the State CAPE Network now comprises coalitions of private school associations in 31 states and territories.

Each state affiliate of CAPE addresses the unique needs of the private school community in its respective state. Because many issues and activities pertaining to private schools begin in the states, the network of state affiliates plays a unique and critical role in helping CAPE identify and respond to issues affecting private education.

The three new state CAPE organizations are in states with significant numbers of private

schools and students. According to data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, there are 292 private schools in Arizona, enrolling over 46,000 students. North and South Carolina have a combined total of more than 1,000 schools, serving over 160,000 students, and Oklahoma adds another 168 schools and 27,603 students.

Members of the new state CAPEs include major state-level associations of independent and religious schools in each of the states and generally mirror the diverse membership of the national CAPE.

CAPE’s member organizations and state affiliates represent about 80 percent of private school enrollment nationwide.

continued from page 1

places. “Your kids are much more likely to be safer in school than they are at the mall,” he said. Gonzales also reported that the U.S. Secret Service developed a threat assessment guide to help schools manage threatening situations and create safe settings. But he stressed that a school’s plans to deal with violence “are worthless if people don’t know about them...if people don’t practice them.”

Secretary Spellings chaired a discussion on what schools and communities can do to help prevent future tragedies. In her report to the president at the end of the day, Spellings said the panel “talked about how to create a school culture that was supportive and nurturing.” She said it is important for young people to have connections with caring adults, and that the adults have to be alert to changes in behavior that signal trouble. Another point covered by the panel was the need for “constant communication and coordination between school personnel and law enforcement.”

Spellings also told the president about discussions by the third panel, which centered on helping schools and communities recover from traumatic events. One member of that panel, former Columbine High School student Craig Scott, provided the event’s emotional and inspirational high point in his report to Mr. Bush on how he and his family responded to the death of his sister, Rachel Joy Scott, the first person killed in the Columbine massacre back in 1999.

Kindness and Compassion

Mr. Scott told the president that youngsters are growing up in a culture that doesn’t teach “anything of substance, of value,” but instead bombards them with “messages of emptiness and shallowness.” Claiming that students are “crying for something to stand for, something to believe

in,” he called for an education “that touches and teaches the heart and helps form the character.”

Scott visits high schools across the country and has met students beset by “depression, anger, and loneliness, students without direction or purpose.” He said the main thing he’s learned since Columbine is that “kindness and compassion can be the biggest antidotes to anger and hatred, and I believe the biggest antidotes to violence.”

Scott described his sister as someone “willing to stand up for the one who gets put down in school, to sit by the student that sits all alone at lunch, and to talk to or reach out to the one who is consistently ignored or made fun of.” He challenged students to show compassion for one another and continue the “chain reaction” of kindness that his sister once wrote about.

The Columbine survivor also issued a challenge to educators “to take a look at teaching that doesn’t just teach the head, but teaches the heart.” He said the students he meets “are looking for truth,” and teachers “can help point them to what’s right and what’s wrong.”

He challenged parents to “please love your kids like my parents love me, like my parents loved Rachel.” And he challenged the media and entertainment industry to “own up to the product that you create and the effect that it has on its audience.”

In concluding his remarks to the president, Craig Scott said, “I’m not out to change the world, just to change one person, one teen at a time.” He urged conference participants to “please take my words to heart today. They were bought at a high price.”

A Web video and transcript of the conference, along with school safety resources for schools, families, and communities, are available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/schoolsafety/index.html>.

Bush's Domestic Policy Advisor Meets with CAPE's Board

Sounding a reassuring note on several touchstone issues for the private school community, Karl Zinsmeister, President Bush's chief domestic policy advisor, met with CAPE's board of directors October 3 and told them he is "professionally and personally predisposed" to their work.

"I am a walking advertisement for CAPE," said Zinsmeister, describing a commitment to educational pluralism exemplified by the schools his own children have experienced: public, private, religious, a cooperative nursery school, and even home schooling. "We've almost touched every single base," he said.

His experience has led him to realize that there is no one good school for everyone. "A school is good if it matches the child," he said. "Every child has different needs, and a school that may be perfect and appropriate for one child might not be perfect and appropriate for another child." And the realization that different needs require different responses leaves one wanting "a multi-pointed school system" and leaves one resistant to having "government-run schools as the only option."

Noting the diversity of beliefs and backgrounds among CAPE's member organizations, Zinsmeister said, "It's a wonderful coalition that you've assembled, and it's real life; it's you and me; it's the way people are, and it's the requirements that our children have."

School Choice

Zinsmeister devoted much of his time with the board to the issue of school choice. He said Americans are past the point where alternative schooling is considered odd, weird, or a "fringe phenomenon." Citing a Harris poll finding from earlier this year, he said a substantial portion of American adults have children who at one point or another attend a school other than a conventional public school. The concept of a monopoly school system, he said, is "not the verdict of parents these days and ought not be the verdict of policymakers."

Before coming to the White House, Zinsmeister was founder and editor-in-chief of *The American Enterprise*, a magazine of politics and current affairs. Quoting from an article ("The

Last Holdout Against Educational Freedom") that Boston University professor Charles Glenn had written for the magazine in 2003, the president's domestic policy assistant said public funding for school choice is the "international standard," with the U.S. being "one of the few advanced countries that still mostly blocks public funding for non-government schools."

Noting that Americans who most support school choice are low-income parents with children in the worst schools of all, Zinsmeister said it borders on the immoral to "take that interest, hunger, and appetite away." But in a note of optimism, he observed that arguments against school choice are "slowly beginning to wither," in part because of experience with actual programs. "The globe has not stopped spinning when we've tried some of these experiments," he said.

Zinsmeister expressed hope that Congress would consider a national opportunity scholarships program, which would allow low-income students who are stuck in persistently poor-performing schools to transfer to a private school. He said there is a moral case to be made for saying "Let freedom ring!" and for giving families of students in the worst schools the resources to move to a better setting.

Supplemental Educational Services

Zinsmeister encouraged private schools to serve as providers of supplemental educational services to students in public schools. "I would very much like to see a meeting of the two worlds through that tutoring program," he said.

Federally funded supplemental services, such as summer-school programs and after-school tutoring, are available to students from low-income families who attend public schools in need of improvement. Parents select the provider of services from a list of providers approved by the state. Zinsmeister promoted the program as an opportunity to help children, extend the use of the private school's physical plant, provide part-time positions for teachers, and generate some income for the school. He also called it a chance to "break down this artificial wall that exists in the minds of some policymakers between the private world and the public world."



Karl Zinsmeister, President Bush's chief domestic policy advisor. (White House photo)

USDE Conference

It was a whirlwind three days for Morgan Brown. On Tuesday, October 3, the new assistant deputy secretary for the Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) met with CAPE's board of directors; the next day he delivered the keynote address at the department's annual private school leadership conference, and on Thursday he welcomed to the OII the ultimate VIP visitor to a federal office, the president himself. If Brown ever thought his new position would be uneventful, the three days in October put a quick end to that notion.

At the leadership conference, Brown reviewed the Bush administration's achievements relating to private education. He highlighted the assistance to schools and students in the aftermath of the Gulf Coast hurricanes, the private school provisions in the new regulations under IDEA, and the department's guidance on the participation of private schools in the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) program. Brown also reminded the group that on the school choice front, the president supported and signed the *DC School Choice Incentive Act* and promoted a program to expand the concept to other willing cities.

Brown challenged private school leaders to tell the public about private schools, the money they save taxpayers, and the range of students they serve. He said schools should cultivate relations with the media, community leaders, and elected officials.

To exemplify the contributions of private schools, Brown showcased the First Baptist School in Rosemount, MN, which reached out to Hmong refugees from Laos, providing low-income children with scholarships and transportation to the school. Brown said he has heard many other stories of private school outreach to students in need. "Please don't keep this good news about what's going on in your schools to yourselves," he said.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ *Fast Fact About Private Schools:* How safe are schools? One way to find out is to ask students. The federal government's Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 did just that by having high school sophomores react to the statement "I don't feel safe at this school." In public schools, 12.6 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while in private schools the same was true for less than 3.8 percent of students.

The finding is part of a report released recently by the National Center for Education Statistics that analyzes the academic performance, extracurricular activities, life values, aspirations, and school settings of sophomores. The report, which summarizes data from three major NCES studies over a 22-year span from 1980 to 2002, is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006327>.

★ Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt issued a letter to educators last month reporting on federal plans to help schools prepare for a possible pandemic flu. The secretaries also unveiled a new pandemic flu planning guide for educators and announced that funds from Title IV, Part A may now be used for pandemic flu planning activities. The letter and planning resources are available at www.capanet.org/new.html.

★ A study reported in the September 29, 2006 issue of the journal *Science* con-

cludes that on several measures of academic and social skills, students in Montessori schools show "superior outcomes" relative to students in other schools. Students were randomly assigned to the experimental (Montessori) and control groups through the use of a lottery, thereby controlling for parental influence and addressing the concern that "parents who seek to enroll their child in a Montessori school are different from parents who do not."

The evaluation of the impact of Montessori education was done for a 5-year-old group and a 12-year-old group. The article, written by Angeline Lillard, a University of Virginia psychology professor, and Nicole Else-Quest, a former graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, summarizes the findings as follows:

"By the end of kindergarten, the Montessori children performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, engaged in more positive interaction on the playground, and showed more advanced social cognition and executive control. They also showed more concern for fairness and justice. At the end of elementary school, Montessori children wrote more creative essays with more complex sentence structures, selected more positive responses to social dilemmas, and reported feeling more of a sense of community at their school."

The authors concluded that "Montessori education fosters social and academic skills that are equal or superior to those fostered by a pool of other types of

schools."

★ The Supreme Court of Ohio ruled October 25 that a state law authorizing charter schools (known in Ohio law as "community schools") is constitutional. Not surprisingly, the decision in support of charter schools included arguments that many advocates have applied to private schools. Some examples:

- "In enacting community school legislation, the General Assembly added to the traditional school system by providing for statewide schools that have more flexibility in their operation. Community schools were designed to give parents a choice and give educators 'the opportunity to establish limited experimental educational programs in a deregulated setting.'"

- "The expressed legislative intent is to provide a chance of educational success for students who may be better served in their educational needs in alternative settings."

- "Requiring community schools to be operated just like traditional public schools would extinguish the experimental spirit behind [the statute establishing them]."

- "The Ohio Community-Schools Act was drafted with the intent that parental choice and sponsor control would hold community schools accountable...In exchange for enhanced flexibility, community schools face heightened accountability to parents and sponsors. Either can threaten shutdown, sponsors by suspending operations...and parents by withdrawing their children."