

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Report on Education Reform Calls for Expanding School Choice

A failing education system threatens the standing of the United States in the global economy and leaves too many students ill equipped for success, according to a new report from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

*U.S. Education Reform and National Policy*, developed by a task force chaired by former New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein and former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, offers several remedies, including school choice, for improving education.

“Educational failure puts the United States’ future economic prosperity, global position, and physical safety at risk,” the report warns. “Leaving large swaths of the population unprepared also threatens to divide Americans and undermine the country’s cohesion, confidence, and ability to serve as a global leader.”

Besides noting the national impact of poor education, the report also points out the personal effects: “Measured against global standards, far too many U.S. schools are failing to teach students the academic skills and knowledge they need to compete and succeed.”

### More Choice

One of three overarching policy proposals offered by the task force is to implement “structural changes to provide students with good choices.” The report says that states and school districts “should stop locking disadvantaged students into failing schools without any options; this is bad for the students and bad for the United States as a whole.” It contends that expanded “choice and competition, in an environment of equitable resource allocation, will fuel the innovation necessary to transform results.”

Specific strategies that public officials should consider include “offering vouchers, such as the DC Opportunity Scholarships, to students.”

The recommendation regarding private school choice was not unanimous. According to the report, “Most, but not all, members of the task force believe that choice should be extended to private K-12 alternatives.” Specifically, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and three other persons on the 30-member panel, offered dissenting views regarding that recommendation as well as several other aspects of the report.

At a news conference March 20 to unveil the report, Joel Klein and Condoleezza Rice defended the choice component. Klein said that as chancellor he found that “as we increasingly created options and choices in the city, more and more families from some of the more challenged neighborhoods got more involved because they saw the opportunity to really find what’s best and what’s right for their kids.” He said a “powerful part” of the report is “choice, competition and empowering parents to make the best decisions for their kids.”

### Playing to Strengths

Condoleezza Rice said the report played to the strengths of the nation, one strength being competitiveness. She said in American higher education, which is the “gold standard internationally,” there is significant choice and competition. “We

compete for students at Stanford. They compete for students at Ohio State,” and students have “a multiplicity of choices” to fit their circumstances. “Maybe you will do well in a big research university. Maybe you’ll do better in a small liberal arts college. Maybe a big state school is fine for

you. Maybe a historically black college is better for you.” She said “the competition, the variety, the options” in higher ed are instructive.

Klein bolstered that point, saying that one reason choice is “such a powerful lever” is that “schools will have to start to compete more.” He said America is “the most innovative country,” and “one of the reasons is clearly because we’re highly competitive.” Applying that point to education, he said if schools, “instead of having a guaranteed allotment of kids,

were forced to differentiate, to compete, to look for excellence, to reward excellence, to innovate—all the things that drive the successful aspects of our economy—I think that would change K to 12 in America.”

### System Not Delivering

Later that evening in an interview on *PBS NewsHour*, Ms. Rice lamented how failing schools are hurting children in troubled neighborhoods. “Today, the sad fact is that, for the children who have the fewest options, the educational system is

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Stanford University Professor Condoleezza Rice, co-chair of the task force that produced “U.S. Education Reform and National Policy.” (Photo: Steve Gladfelter, Stanford University)

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a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12  
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13017 Wisteria Drive #457  
Germantown, MD 20874  
(tel) 301-916-8460  
(fax) 301-916-8485  
(email) [cape@capenet.org](mailto:cape@capenet.org)

[www.capenet.org](http://www.capenet.org)



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not delivering. If I can look at your ZIP code and I can tell whether you're going to get a good education, we've got a real problem," she said. "And I think, increasingly, if you are a child in difficult circumstances, the neighborhood school may simply not be the answer any longer."

In the same interview, Mr. Klein noted "two things I think that are significant about this report." First, "a wide range of people from a wide range of backgrounds who have come together and, with very few exceptions, have put a lot of emphasis on this choice notion." Second, "I actually think the public schools get better when they face competition." He said what makes America so successful is "the innovation, the competition, the focus on merit," all of which "have been absent from the K-12 system." Driving home the point, he said, "So, every viewer you have watching this show wants choice for his or her kid. I don't know anyone who didn't want a choice for his or her kid."

## National Security

As might be expected in a report from the Council on Foreign Relations, the report includes a heavy emphasis on the impact of poor education on national security. The country "will not be able to keep pace—much less lead—globally unless it moves to fix the problems it has allowed to fester for too long," claims the report.

Specifically, members of the task force said failing education poses five threats to national security: "threats to economic growth and competitiveness, threats to U.S. physical safety, threats to intellectual property, threats to U.S. global awareness, and threats to U.S. unity and cohesion."

In a startling finding related to physical safety, the task force reports, "Most young people do not qualify for military service." It cites a recent study that found that "75 percent of U.S. citizens between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four are not qualified to join the military because they are physically unfit, have criminal records, or have inadequate levels of education." The lack of qualified soldier applicants puts the country's ability "to maintain a robust military" at risk.

Also on the security front, "The U.S. State Department and intelligence agencies are facing critical language shortfalls in areas of strategic interest."

Task force members expressed hope that by focusing national attention on the link between K-12 education and national security they would be able "to recast old debates, spark new conversations, enlist new advocates, and catalyze national change."

## Three Overarching Proposals

The proposal to provide students with more school choice was one of three central policy recommendations that the task force advanced.

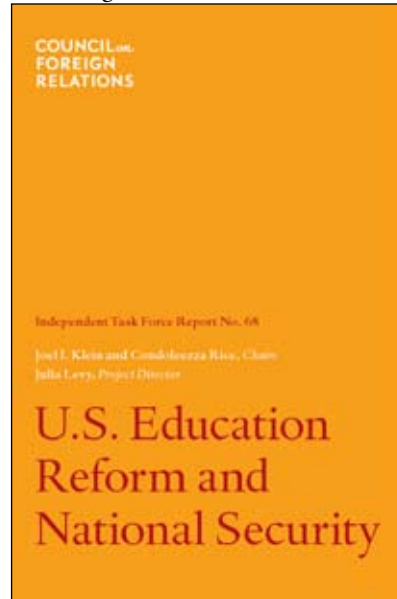
The first was, "Implement educational expectations and assessments in subjects vital to protecting national security." The report called on states to expand the Common Core State Standards in order to ensure "that students are mastering the skills and knowledge necessary to safeguard the country's national security." In this regard, the panel highlighted the importance of science, technology, foreign languages, problem-solving skills, and civic awareness. It also called for necessary resources to ensure that the higher standards are successfully implemented in

communities of need.

The final overarching proposal was, "Launch a 'national security readiness audit' to hold schools and policymakers accountable for results and to raise public awareness." The report called for "a coordinated, national effort to assess whether students are learning the skills and knowledge necessary to safeguard America's future security and prosperity." Results of the audit "should be publicized to engage the American people in addressing problems and building on successes."

The blue ribbon task force included 30 prominent people from the fields of education and national security and also from the corporate world. Members included Gaston Caperton, president of The College Board; Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., former CEO of IBM; Frederick M. Hess, resident scholar and director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute; Ann M. Fudge, retired chairman and CEO of Young & Rubicam Brands; Wendy Kopp, founder and CEO of Teach For America; Benno C. Schmidt, chairperson of the board of trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY); Margaret Spellings, former U.S. Secretary of Education.

The report, titled *U.S. Education Reform and National Policy*, is available for download as a PDF document from the CFR Web site at [www.cfr.org/education\\_task\\_force](http://www.cfr.org/education_task_force).



## National School Choice Leaders Meet with CAPE

Representatives from two prominent school choice advocacy organizations met with CAPE's board of directors and state CAPE representatives in Washington, D.C., last month to offer assessments of the choice movement on two fronts: public policy and litigation.



Robert C. Enlow

Robert C. Enlow, president and CEO of The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, examined the current status of school choice across the country. It turns out that 2011 was a robust year for the movement, with 13 states enacting 19 school choice bills.

Enlow reported that nearly 40 percent of states (19, to be exact) have measures at the state or district level to assist parents who choose private schools. Of the 35 programs on the books, 17 involve vouchers and 18 provide some form of tax benefit, such as a deduction for tuition or a credit for a contribution to a scholarship organization. Over 200,000 private school students are currently reaping the benefits of these programs, and even more are expected to do so in 2012, with recent victories in Arizona, Florida, and Virginia and a promising outlook in Louisiana, New Hampshire, and elsewhere.

Voucher programs serving students with special needs are growing especially fast, Enlow said. Nine programs are serving over 26,000 children, a class of beneficiaries that has grown over 300 percent since 2002.

### How Private Schools Can Help

Enlow said the private school community could assist the school choice movement in several ways. First, the community should cooperate with groups seeking private school data, such as the number of available seats, the kinds of standardized tests in place, graduation rates, and other measures of success. Private schools should also highlight their positive effects on students. In states where school choice measures have passed, private school leaders should work with state education department officials to ensure that programs are implemented reasonably and efficiently. Enlow also called on the community to develop capacity models for school growth. Finally, he asked private school leaders to support the work of The Friedman Foundation, established to advance the school choice vision of Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman and economist Rose D. Friedman.

Richard "Dick" Komer, senior attorney at the Institute for Justice, who knows as much as anyone about school choice jurisprudence, told the CAPE group that because 2011 was a banner year for choice legislation, it was also a banner year for choice litigation. Current cases in play across the country include challenges to the constitutionality of Indiana's expansive new scholarship program, Arizona's innovative education savings accounts program, and the nation's first district-level voucher initiative in Douglas County, Colorado. Komer provided background and status updates for each case and also outlined the broad contours of the arguments for the Indiana litigation.

In addition to its involvement in choice cases in state courts and in federal district and appellate courts, the Institute for Justice has successfully litigated two landmark cases before the U.S. Supreme Court: *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, which upheld the constitutionality of the voucher program in Cleveland, Ohio, and *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, which protected Arizona's school choice tax credit program from a challenge by state taxpayers.



Richard Komer

Komer reviewed some of the history of school choice jurisprudence, noting that the Oregon law that was overturned in 1925 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* was the culmination of efforts by certain public school advocates not only to monopolize funding for public education, but to eliminate the competition entirely by making it unlawful for parents to send their children to private schools. In a modern-day parallel, Komer said today's charter school movement has the same potential to bring about the elimination of private schools in favor of government-sponsored schools. He urged the private school community to help ensure that the public policy deck is not stacked against the right of parents to choose alternatives to government schools.

On the issue of accountability, Komer said the debate should be turned on its head. Private schools are more accountable than other schools because they are directly answerable to parents. If a school does a bad job, parents leave it for someplace else. The government lards all kinds of supervisory regulations upon public schools in a vain effort to make them as accountable as private schools.

## Budget Snubs DC OSP

President Obama's proposed budget for FY 2013 contained some unwelcomed news for school choice advocates in the District of Columbia. Much to everyone's surprise, the budget zeroed out funding for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP).

Last year the OSP was re-authorized as part of an omnibus spending agreement. The *Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act*, which was incorporated into the spending bill, authorized \$60 million to be shared equally among D.C. public schools, D.C. charter schools, and the OSP. But the FY 2013 budget directs \$36.6 million toward traditional public education and \$23.4 million to expand public charter schools, with nothing left for the scholarship program.

To no one's surprise, House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT), the program's strongest advocates, were not happy. They sent a letter to the president March 22, expressing disappointment in the failure to fund the OSP and urging him to work with Congress to restore the funds.

The letter noted that families participating in the OSP "have an average income of less than \$24,000 per year" and that "more than 92 percent of participating students would otherwise be in a school in need of improvement." Boehner and Lieberman called the program "a shining example" of a way to help address the dropout crisis, noting: "According to the most recent Institute of Education Sciences (IES) report, 91 percent of students who used their opportunity scholarships graduated high school, which was 21 percent higher than those who applied but were not awarded a scholarship. In fact, the OSP has the second highest achievement impact of any of the programs studied so far by the IES."



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## CAPE notes

★ Calling himself a “policy skeptic,” Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) told *PBS NewsHour*’s Judy Woodruff that he “rejects the idea that there is anybody in Washington wise enough” to make decisions about what should take place in classrooms.

At a forum on education hosted by *The Atlantic* on March 27, the senator proposed an approach at the K-12 level that is similar to how federal aid is distributed for higher education. Instead of giving funds to institutions, the money should follow students. “I think there would be more good schools and more good choices for low-income students as well as high-income students.” Specifically, he suggested distributing the current federal outlay for education to the 50 percent of children who are in the bottom 50 percent of income (approximately 25 million children), which would provide each student about \$3,400 per year. The money could follow them to their public school, or to an after-school program, or to a religious or independent school. “Some of the strongest advocates for choices are single moms with low incomes whose kids are assigned to a bad school, and they want out. They want their child to have more of a chance. So you don’t take away those choices from people just because they have low incomes.”

★ Florida Governor Rick Scott on March 23 signed HB 859 into law, providing a significant expansion of the state’s

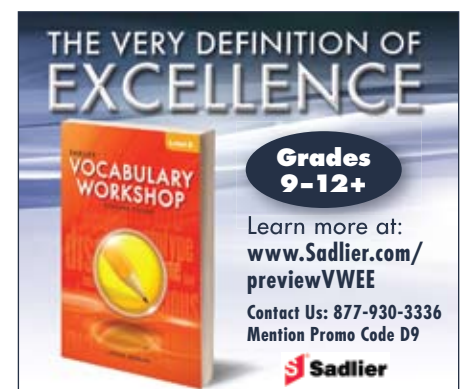
tax credit scholarship program. The bill increases the cap on the amount available for tax credits next year from \$219 million to \$229 million. It also extends eligibility for scholarships to all low-income private school students in grades 2 to 5, building upon the current eligibility for students entering grades K and 1. (Low-income students who attended a public school the previous year continue to qualify for the program at any grade level.) The bill also allows participating private schools to administer the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (the state’s standardized test for public schools) to all students enrolled in grades 3 through 10.

Florida provides corporations a tax credit equal to 100 percent of a donation to a qualified scholarship funding organization. Over 38,000 students receive scholarships under the program.

Florida’s Revenue Estimating Conference reports that the program is expected to save state taxpayers \$57.9 million next year. According to Jon East at redefinED, “The Revenue Estimating Conference is the official prognosticator for the state, and its staff employs a sophisticated and conservative approach in gauging the cost of the scholarship.” East explains that the equation for calculating the revenue savings is straightforward: “The state, by and large, will be paying for every economically disadvantaged student to attend school. If the student attends a traditional public school, the state spends \$6,225 in operational expenses alone this year. If the stu-

dent tries a scholarship, the state spends no more than \$4,011 on everything.”

★ A five-year evaluation of the Milwaukee voucher program was just released, and two of the researchers (Patrick Wolf from the University of Arkansas and John Witte from the University of Wisconsin, Madison), writing March 22 in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, described “three clear findings” from the study. First, secondary school students using vouchers were more likely than public school students to “graduate from high school, enroll in a four-year college, and stay in college.” Second, “the program saved Wisconsin taxpayers \$52 million in fiscal 2011.” Third, because the “overwhelming majority of participants are African American or Latino students who leave mostly minority public schools for mostly minority private schools,” the voucher program has “no discernible effect on racial integration.”



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