

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Louisiana Approves Two Sweeping Choice Initiatives

Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal selected a religious school as the site for the signing of sweeping school choice legislation April 18 that alone reshapes the state's education landscape by providing state-funded scholarships for students to attend private schools. But as if that measure were not enough, a week later state legislators approved yet another Jindal-backed reform, this one delivering tax rebates for donations to organizations that provide private school scholarships. Both measures are emblematic of the school choice surge that is rapidly advancing across the country.

At Redemptorist Elementary School in Baton Rouge, Jindal signed legislation allowing the state to pay tuition for certain public school students who transfer to religious and independent schools. The law, which passed with considerable bipartisan support, greatly expands the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program (SSEEP), which currently applies only to residents of New Orleans in grades K-6. The expanded program covers students statewide in grades K through 12.

Students who are about to enter kindergarten or are enrolled in a public school that received a letter grade of C, D, or F under the state's accountability system are eligible for the scholarships if they come from families with an annual income that does not exceed 250 percent of the federal poverty level (equivalent to \$57,625 for a family of four in 2012). State officials say that just over 70 percent of the state's public schools, enrolling about 450,000 students, earned Cs, Ds, or Fs in 2011. If there are more eligible applicants than

available seats, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) will conduct a lottery to distribute scholarships, with preference given to students from D and F schools as well as to students who have siblings in participating schools.

School Requirements

Soon after the law was signed, LDOE hosted a webinar and released applications for schools that want to participate. The department also announced tight timelines and procedures for approving schools and enrolling students for the coming school year.

Scholarship applications will be accepted beginning May 22, and a lottery will be conducted in July to identify recipients.

"We have an obligation to give all our students their best chance to thrive in school and in life," State Superintendent of Education John White said. "Through this program and process, we intend to give more of our children the option to attend high-quality schools, beginning with students who have been trapped in some of our lowest-performing schools."

Participating schools must be approved by the state, must submit a financial audit to the state, and must enroll scholarship students using an open admissions process. Schools have to ensure that scholarship students are administered the examinations required under the state accountability system. The state itself is required to publish annually average proficiency rates on state tests for scholarship students at each school. Other data to be made public by the state include school graduation and retention rates for scholarship students and the percentage of scholarship parents who are satisfied with each participating school.

In addition, the state education department is required to develop, by August 1, 2012, an accountability system for participating students at participating schools.

The law makes clear that participation by private schools in the program is voluntary and that the statute "shall not be construed to authorize any additional regulation of participating schools beyond that specifically authorized."

Twice in Twelve

The Louisiana measure marks the second time in 12 months that a state has enacted a comprehensive voucher program. Last year, Indiana passed what turned out to be the most far-reaching school choice legislation in the nation, serving more than 4,000 students in its first year. Depending on how the numbers play out, Louisiana could very well eclipse that mark.

At the ceremony where he signed several school reform measures, Governor Jindal said: "We live in an aspirational society, and the opportunity to receive a quality education is part of the American Dream. Every child isn't receiving an equal opportunity to a quality education today. For our country to continue to lead the world, we have to right this wrong. That's exactly what these new laws will do."

Also present at the event was New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, who said of the legislation, "Ultimately it will break the cycle of poverty."

Reaction from school choice advocates was swift and effusive. "This is a great day for low-income children in Louisiana," said Kevin P. Chavous, senior adviser to the American Federation for Children. "Thousands of students who were stuck in schools that were not working for them will now have an opportunity to attend a school that fits their needs and, ultimately, allows them to succeed."

"States are realizing that school choice

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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
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Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
33 Affiliated State Organizations

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

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

www.capenet.org



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works,” said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. “The more that states can move from limited school choice to universal availability, the greater its benefits will be to those in need. Indiana is witnessing this now. So, too, will Louisiana.”

Louisiana’s Black Alliance for Educational Options Director Eric Lewis said the law “sets the stage for generational changes.”

And Dr. Tony Bennett, chairman of Chiefs for Change and state education superintendent in Indiana, said, “These student-centered reforms will completely transform Louisiana and its students.” He added, “Students will no longer have to settle for failing schools. Countless families will be able to select the best education option for their unique student’s needs.”

Choice Times Two

Days after Jindal signed the voucher measure, state lawmakers approved a bill to provide tax rebates to individuals and corporations that donate to school tuition organizations (STOs) offering scholarships to students attending private schools. Rebates are equal to the amount of donations actually used for scholarships but exclude administrative costs. Since the statute limits an STO’s administrative costs to no more than 5 percent, a rebate is essentially worth no less than 95 percent of the donation.

In many ways the rebate program mirrors conditions set in the new voucher law. Students must come from families with annual incomes not in excess of 250 percent of the federal poverty level. Participating private schools must be approved by the state and must administer state-required tests in math and language arts to all participating students. If more first-time scholarship students apply than there are available seats, the school must admit those students by a random selection process.

Scholarships are limited to children entering kindergarten, students who received scholarships the previous year, or students who attended a public school the previous year. Unlike the voucher law, previous public school attendance is not limited to C, D, or F schools, although participating private schools must give priority in admission to students who attended public schools that received a letter grade of D or F and may give preference to students with siblings already attending the school.

Donations to STOs may not be earmarked for specific schools or students other than students with disabilities, and scholarships are limited to 80 percent of the state’s average per-pupil funding amount in grades K-8 (90 percent in grades 9-12) or the actual amount of tuition and fees at the school, whichever is less.

STOs are required to award scholarships on a first-come, first-served basis, giving priority to previous recipients. They must also ensure that awards are portable during the school year for use in any qualified school. As with the voucher program, private schools are free to participate in the rebate program or not.

The bill was approved with considerable bipartisan support by votes of 65-36 in the House and 32-7 in the Senate.

A \$300 million cap on rebates that the Senate originally approved was removed from the final version. Thus, individuals and corporations are free to contribute as much as they want to the scholarship program but will receive re-

bates only to the extent their donations are actually used for scholarships.

An analysis prepared by the state’s Legislative Fiscal Office indicates that if students are diverted from public schools to private schools because of the bill, the cost of the rebates would be offset by lower outlays in education spending. The savings would be lessened, however, by rebate costs attached to scholarships for students in kindergarten and beyond who would have attended private schools anyway. Thus, says the report, while net savings to the state “are possible, they cannot be assured.” The analysis focused only on the legislation’s fiscal impact and did not address the benefits to children, families, and society that stem from expanding the freedom of parents to choose their child’s school.

Louisiana’s education reform measures have quickly propelled Governor Bobby Jindal to the top of the “most appreciated” list within the school choice community. Jindal is scheduled to present the keynote address at the American Federation for Children’s annual policy summit scheduled for May 3-4 in Jersey City, NJ.

“We are truly thrilled that one of the nation’s most committed education reformers will join us,” said AFC Chair Betsy DeVos. “Governor Jindal serves as an example of how strong leadership and a bipartisan approach can improve the lives of children, and we can’t wait to hear how he will inspire other governors across the country to stand up for children.”



Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal

Public and Private Schools in Philadelphia Sign Compact

Public schools and private schools in Philadelphia have pledged to work together to expand high-quality school choices for parents and children in the city. At a ceremony April 23 at St. Peter the Apostle School in Philadelphia, Catholic Archbishop Charles J. Chaput became the latest official to sign the Philadelphia Great Schools Compact, an alliance aimed at replacing 50,000 slots in poor-performing schools with high-performing alternatives by 2016-17.

The compact, which had already been signed last December by city Mayor Michael A. Nutter, state Secretary of Education Ronald Tomalis, and various public school and public charter school leaders in the city, could increase the city's chances of securing a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Mayor Nutter called the agreement with the archdiocese a "historic moment" and said the compact would help ensure "that the more than 200,000 school-age young people in Philadelphia, regardless of where they go to school, get a great education." The mayor called on leaders to "work together to expand high quality options for our students and their parents" no matter what type of school they attend. "No child should have to sit in a low performing seat anywhere in the city," he said, adding that the day presented "a great opportunity for our city to think even bigger and more boldly about how to collaborate and support our young people."

More Options

The mayor reminded the audience that he himself is "the beneficiary of a great Catholic school education" and that his teenage daughter attends a public school. "These systems are not in conflict with each other...not in competition with each other," he said. The goal is "to drive excellence at the highest possible levels for all schools across the city" and one way to do that is through choice. "The more options our children have, the more options our parents have, the more we can deliver high quality education for all young people, and that makes this city a better place to live, work, and raise our families." Noting there are "too many challenges to not have cooperation," the mayor called for col-

laboration "so that the excellence that is available in some places is available in all places."

Dr. Lori Shorr, chief education officer for the public schools of Philadelphia, said that the signing by the archdiocese means that "95 percent of all the kids in the city will be in a school that's represented at the compact table."



Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Archbishop Charles J. Chaput celebrate the signing of the Great Schools Compact April 23 at St. Peter the Apostle School in Philadelphia. (Video Image, Office of the Mayor)

St. Peter the Apostle Church is the burial site of St. John Neumann, the fourth bishop of Philadelphia, who established an extensive diocesan system of schools and is considered one of the founders of Catholic schools in the United States. Archbishop Chaput noted the connection and said Neumann strove "to provide children with an education that would enable them to contribute to society and to the betterment of the world."

Chaput said the archdiocese supports the vision of the compact and is happy to be partners with the city. "We want to be good citizens; we want to be friends; we don't see our school systems as competitors but equally committed to the good of the children who are the future of our community."

Agreements

In signing the compact, all parties agree that schools "will be held accountable for student outcomes." Participants pledge to develop and adopt "a transparent, outcome-driven, research-based, student-centered accountability and performance framework" that is available to the public and that includes measures of "student achievement, student academic growth, school safety and climate, and postsecondary success."

Signers agree to "coordinate planning for the growth of high-quality schools" and to "ensure that vacant or under utilized building facilities are made available" to facilitate that growth. In addition, they promise to collaborate on training and professional development, share best practices, and "move to adopt curriculum aligned to the national 'Common Core' standards."

The agreement also calls for coordinated advocacy efforts at all levels of government "to promote policies and legislation that are aligned to the tenets of this compact."

The compact is available at <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/greatschoolscompact/>.

Green Schools

What does it take to be honored as a Green Ribbon School? You might start with having one of the world's largest geothermal energy systems, which is the case with the American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, NC. Or you might be the first K-12 school in the world to have a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum rating, as is Sidwell Friends Middle School in Washington, DC. Then again, you might involve students in sustainability projects such as transforming a gas-powered Honda into an electric car, one of many integrated environmental activities at The Athenian School in Danville, CA.

The day after Earth Day, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the names of 78 Green Ribbon Schools, including 12 private schools. "Science, environmental, and outdoor education play a central role in providing children with a well-rounded education," said Duncan, adding that awardees "help children build real-world skill sets, cut school costs, and provide healthy learning environments."

The department says the program honors schools that "exercise a comprehensive approach to creating 'green' environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education."

The following private schools received the award: American Hebrew Academy, Greensboro, NC; The Athenian School, Danville, CA; Catlin Gable School, Portland, OR; The College School, St. Louis, MO; Crossroads College Preparatory School, St. Louis, MO; Hawaii Preparatory Academy, Kamuela, HI; Lucy School, Middletown, MD; The Overlake School, Redmond, WA; Savannah Country Day School, Savannah, GA; Sidwell Friends Middle School, Washington, DC; Springside Chestnut Hill Academy, Philadelphia, PA; The Willow School, Gladstone, NJ.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) reported last month that it received 18,982 applications for two private school scholarship programs in the state, including 17,438 for the EdChoice Program and 1,544 for the new Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program.

Both programs “provide families with an alternative option to ensure their children have the opportunity to pursue learning in their ideal setting,” said Susan Cosmo, who serves as associate director at the ODE Office for Quality School Choice and Funding.

According to an ODE statement, EdChoice “provides a limited number of state-funded scholarships to students who attend low-performing public school buildings. The scholarships may be used to attend private schools that meet requirements for program participation.” The Peterson program “gives the parents of children with disabilities the choice to send their child to special education programs other than the one operated by their school district of residence to receive the education and the services outlined in their individualized education program (IEP).”

Parents will be notified of scholarship awards over the summer.

Agudath Israel of America, which has been following the programs closely, reports that in Cleveland alone “dozens of students are hoping to attend Jewish schools next year” using the Peterson scholarships, which would translate “into hundreds of thousands of dollars in special

education and related services for these families.”

★ The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) and the NAEP State Service Center at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) will co-host a one-hour webinar May 16 at 2 PM EDT on private school participation in NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

For over 40 years, NAEP has been the only ongoing, nationally representative measure of what America’s students know and can do in key subject areas and has provided valuable information on student achievement to policymakers, educators, and the general public. Private school data make an important contribution to the picture of American education. With private schools accounting for nearly 25 percent of all schools in the nation, it is important that the performance of their students be included in NAEP results.

According to an announcement from ONPE, webinar topics will include “background information on the assessment; curriculum content areas assessed; the inclusion of private school students; an

analysis of the 2011 grade four and grade eight private school students’ mathematics and reading scores; and the NAEP Data Explorer, a web-based system that provides the user with tables of detailed results from NAEP national and state assessments.”

Participants must register in advance at <<http://bit.ly/Ifhr7Y>>.

★ CAPE board member Charles L. Glenn, professor of Educational Administration and Policy at Boston University, is the author of a recent thought-provoking essay in *First Things* titled “Disestablishing Our Secular Schools,” in which he cogently argues for a public education system that allows families to choose schools with a religious character without financial penalty.



CAPE Board Member Charles Glenn
(Boston University Photo Services)

“The point is not to favor or promote schooling on a religious basis,” Glenn writes, “but to ensure that those who act out of religious motivations are not thereby disadvantaged in comparison with others engaging in the same lawful activities from secular motivations.” Requiring parents who choose alternative schools to do so at their own expense is “fundamentally unjust as well as a denial of the rights of conscience,” says Glenn.

