

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

National Policy Summit Spotlights School Choice

On a spring day in mid-May, enthusiastic advocates from across the country gathered at National Harbor, MD, to launch a two-day policy summit reviewing the past year's remarkable accomplishments in the school choice movement and setting the groundwork for future progress. As if on cue, 800 miles away, legislators in Montgomery, Alabama, voted the very same day to implement immediately two tax credit programs providing educational freedom for families. The summit's theme, "Go Big, Go Bold," seemed to be reaping instantaneous results.

Sponsored by the American Federation for Children, the event, which took place May 20 and 21 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, featured prominent speakers offering encouragement and advice, and parents and students offering moving testimony about how choice changed their lives.

Funds Should Follow Children

Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, headlined the first day's luncheon and called school choice "the root for equal opportunity for a quality education." He said money collected from everyone in taxes "has to find its way into the support of all of the kids and all of their parents" as they choose the school their children should attend.

Calling education tax credits and scholarship programs "proven ways to provide a fair and just distribution of educational monies," the cardinal said the United States is one of a few industrialized nations that do not allow tax funds to follow children to schools their parents choose.

Preceding the cardinal at the podium, Sheila Jackson, whose child participated in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, recounted how her daughter, Shawnee, once intimidated by math, became not only a strong math student, but valedictorian at her high school graduation.

"I will continue to advocate for this program even after Shawnee graduates out, because I believe every child deserves to be in an environment that works for them,"

said Jackson.

Before It Was Cool

Saying he was for school choice "before it was cool," Indiana Governor Mike Pence delivered the keynote address at dinner. Commenting on the history of educational opportunity in the United States, Pence recalled a time in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 when some people stood in the doorway of schools and told black children, "You may not come in." He said today some people in the educational establishment stand in schoolhouse doors and say, "You cannot come out." But because of the school choice movement's commitment to equality of educational opportunity for every child, "that door is opening every day for more children in America," he said.

Two weeks before the summit, Pence signed legislation that expanded eligibility for Indiana's scholarship program, boosted the maximum scholarship amount, and increased the overall cap on the state's tax credit program.

In late May, the state's top school finance official reported that Indiana's scholarship program would provide public schools nearly \$5 million this year as a result of savings in per-pupil allocations that the state has realized through the program.

Success Story

Mike McCurry, former press secretary to President Bill Clinton and current communications consultant and chair of the board of the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF), kicked off the conference's second day. He told the story of Jason, a middle-school student in New York City who, with assistance from CSF, was able to move out of a failing public school to attend Incarnation School in Washington Heights. His path of academic success

ultimately led to Columbia University, from which he graduated this year with a degree in economics. McCurry said stories like Jason's illustrate the difference that choice can make in the lives of individuals and serve as "fuel that gives energy" to the choice movement as it tries to change the "hearts and minds of legislators."

Quoting from Whitney Tilson, a member of the board of directors of Democrats for Education Reform, McCurry said the fact that skin color and ZIP code are "almost entirely determinative of the qual-



Cardinal Donald Wuerl speaks at the AFC Policy Summit (AFC photo)



Indiana Governor Mike Pence speaks at the AFC Policy Summit (AFC photo)

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- 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
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a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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ity of public education this nation provides” is “deeply and profoundly wrong and contrary to everything this nation stands for.”

Referencing the deep political divisions in the nation and “rhetoric that has become increasingly nasty and bitter,” McCurry suggested that school choice could provide an example of how to “get things right in a political system that is very broken.” It could help redirect American politics in pursuit of the common good. He said the movement includes liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans putting aside other differences and coming together to provide opportunities for children. He urged the audience to think of school choice as “part of the antidote to the poison that has now invaded our political system.”

Six Suggestions

McCurry offered six suggestions for the movement, the first being not to “let the issue of education reform become the prize of one political party over another.” He said he was proud of the American Federation for Children for being bipartisan in building a center that secures support for the movement from both Democrats and Republicans.

His second suggestion is that people in the movement should be careful about the language they use. They should show respect for those on the other side of the debate and praise opponents when they break out of their “political comfort zone” and make courageous decisions to do the right thing.

Hand in hand with that advice is McCurry’s next suggestion: to refrain from demonizing adversaries. Advocates for choice should have compassion for people with contrary opinions and should engage them in dialogue. “Not everything has to be mud wrestling on CNN,” he said.

Suggestion four is to employ “compelling narratives” in conveying the value of school choice. McCurry talked about the power of the personal anecdote and the need to use language in the policy debate that is “vivid, personal, and memorable” while avoiding petty jargon. Telling the stories of children and parents whose lives have been affected by choice is important and effective.

Quoting the Girl Scout song, “Make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver and the other gold,” McCurry moved to his fifth suggestion, namely, that the movement should make new friends and find new allies. Efforts should be made to break through political bubbles and attempt to “widen the circle” of people involved with the issue.

Finally, McCurry urged the group to “keep hope alive.” He said the movement has made remarkable progress over the past decade in expanding the number of states and students involved in school choice. “That’s a glass that’s at least half-full if not better,” he said. “We’ve got the momentum on our side.”

“So my final plea is to stay optimistic and keep telling the story about how people can come together and get this work done, and encourage them to believe that, in fact, change is on the way.”

Accountability

The summit featured several panel sessions, including a lively discussion on the role of accountability

in publicly funded school choice programs that was moderated by John Kirtley, vice chair of the AFC. Robert Enlow, president and CEO of The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, offered an extensive overview of how private school accountability measures connected to school choice programs vary considerably from state to state. Adam Emerson, director of the program on parental choice at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, reported on a Fordham study on whether state accountability measures discourage private schools from participating in choice programs. Khawla Asmar, an administrator at a school in Milwaukee that participates in Wisconsin’s voucher program, talked about the practical effects of the program’s accountability measures on the school. And Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, said that private schools are already “the most accountable schools in the country” in that if they don’t deliver what parents want, they close. Such accountability is “immediate, effective, decisive, and unforgiving.” McTighe argued that government should tread lightly when it comes to regulating private schools, lest all schools wind up looking the same. “Without diversity in education, there is no freedom in education,” he said.



Mike McCurry speaks at the AFC Policy Summit (AFC photo)

Private Schools Urged to Partner with Police Departments

With school safety continuing as a significant concern across the nation, two federal agencies joined forces last month to advise private school leaders about programs available, or in the pipeline, to keep students safe.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) cosponsored a conference call

May 20 to explain how private schools can take advantage of several DOJ initiatives designed to improve the protection of students.

The call was the second outreach to the private school community this year by the executive branch to convey the message that certain

federal school safety measures are designed to extend to students in both public and private schools. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan assured private school officials in a call February 12 that the Obama administration is committed to safeguarding all students.

Establish Partnerships

During the call on May 20, Sandra Webb, deputy director of the COPS office, explained that COPS focuses on improving public safety by getting communities and law enforcement agencies to form partnerships. She said the best time for schools to partner with local police departments is before an emergency actually strikes. When officers and responders know the school, its culture, teachers, and students beforehand, they are in the best possible position to render effective help when the need arises.

Calvin Hodnett from the COPS office said he and his colleagues encourage police departments across the country to work with schools and reach out to all youth in an area. He said every police agency should have a memorandum of understanding with the schools in their jurisdiction that deals with emergency management and, where applicable, the duties of officers assigned to a particular school. He said specially trained school resource officers can assist with a myriad of issues, including the development of school safety measures, emergency operation plans, "shelter in place" procedures, teaching students about law-related issues, and even managing campus traffic.

Hodnett provided current examples of partnerships between private schools and local law enforcement agencies, including a police department in Georgia that assigns a school resource officer to a private school, and one in California that provides a summer camp for students in public and private schools.

COPS office staff talked about the COPS Hiring Program (CHP), which offers grants to law enforcement agencies so they can hire career officers to assist with community policing and crime prevention. This year's round of grants is giving special consideration to applicants who want to deploy school resource officers in public or private schools pursuant to a memorandum of understanding between the police agency and participating schools.

Comprehensive School Safety

Turning to President Obama's plan to reduce gun violence and improve school safety, COPS staff explained that the \$150 million Comprehensive School Safety proposal contained within the plan would, if approved by Congress, allow for the hiring of school resource officers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals to enhance student safety. Funds could also be used to develop school safety plans, to purchase safety equipment, and to train personnel to assist students in crisis.

Shannon Long from the COPS office said that the Comprehensive School Safety proposal shares similarities with several programs: the former COPS in Schools (CIS) program, the COPS Hiring Program, and the Secure Our Schools (SOS) program. However, the new proposal is different in that all benefits would be available for the protection of students in any type of school, public or private. (The current SOS program, which provides for the purchase of safety equipment and training, is restricted to public schools only.)

Justice Department officials concluded the conference call by urging that private school officials engage in conversations now with local law enforcement officials about their security needs in order to pave the way for cooperative activities and for full participation under current and future federal programs.



Professional Development

Most private school administrators would jump for joy over an increase in the professional development line of their school's budget and would waste no time deciding how it should be spent. But many of these same administrators are not aware that federal funds are already available through local school districts to help with teacher training.

To address that problem, the Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) at the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs (AITQ) hosted a webinar May 29 on Title II, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), a program that has the potential to assist teachers in almost all the nation's religious and independent schools.

The 2013 federal budget allots just over \$2.3 billion to Title II-A. To the extent school districts use those funds for professional development, they must spend an equal amount per student for services to private school teachers and other education personnel. According to USDE data, about 44 percent of II-A funds in 2011-12 were used by districts for professional development.

A question that department officials often get about the program is whether professional development opportunities for private school teachers must be the same as what the public school district offers to its own teachers. The short response is, no. If private school teachers have different needs, professional development opportunities for them should meet their needs.

A recording of the webinar and a list of dates for upcoming webinars on other ESEA programs that provide equitable services will soon be posted on the ONPE Web page at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oi/nonpublic/index.htm>.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) last month released, *The Condition of Education*, a congressionally mandated annual report “to help inform policymakers and the public about the progress of education in the United States.” The 2013 report includes 42 measures of education focusing on “population characteristics, participation in education, elementary and secondary education, and postsecondary education,” according to NCES Commissioner Jack Buckley.

Here’s an interesting tidbit from Indicator 27, which relates to high school course taking: “A higher percentage of 2009 graduates from private schools (85 percent) had taken courses in algebra II/trigonometry than had graduates from traditional public schools (75 percent), and a higher percentage of graduates from private schools (23 percent) had taken courses in calculus than had graduates from public schools (15 percent). Also, a higher percentage of private high school graduates (44 percent) had taken at least one credit in biology, chemistry, and physics than had graduates from traditional public schools (29 percent).”

★ Alton T. Lemon died on May 4. If the name doesn’t ring a bell, recall the Lemon test, the three-pronged measure of whether programs of state support for religious schools are constitutional.

The U.S. Supreme Court established the test in the 1971 landmark case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, which found statutes in

Pennsylvania and Rhode Island that reimbursed religious schools for certain expenses related to secular instruction to be unconstitutional. Lemon, a civil rights advocate, was the lead plaintiff, and David H. Kurtzman, superintendent of public instruction in Pennsylvania, the lead defendant.

According to a recent article about Lemon’s passing in *The New York Times*, the decision’s namesake was surprised to have the premier position in the citation. “I still don’t know why my name came out first on this case,” he said in 2003.

Lemon passed away in Jenkintown, PA, at the age of 84.

★ The Alabama House and Senate last month voted to override an amendment by state Governor Robert Bentley and thereby immediately implement tax credit programs to help children in failing public schools attend private schools and to encourage corporations to donate to programs that offer private school scholarships to low-income children. The governor’s amendment would have delayed the programs for two years.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard said, “The governor and the legislature have the same goal: eliminating failing schools and helping children get the best education possible in the state of Alabama,” but added that the override vote in the House “proved that we overwhelmingly believe that students deserve school choice now, and not two years from now.”

Alabama is now the latest in a growing list of states turning to school choice as a path to educational improvement.

★ In a related development in Iowa, both chambers of the legislature unanimously lifted the total amount of tax credits allowed under the state’s tuition scholarship program from \$8.75 million to \$12 million. The credits are allowed for contributions to organizations that award scholarships to eligible students to help them attend private schools.

“The Iowa tax credit program helps thousands of students receive the quality education of their parents’ choice and we’re pleased to see the program expand to serve even more students,” said Kevin P. Chavous, executive counsel for the American Federation for Children. “The unanimous votes in the House and Senate demonstrate the strong commitment of policymakers to ensure Iowa families have greater access to educational choice.”

★ Schools that are considering replacing physical education with more core academic instruction in an effort to boost student performance should first read a new report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM). *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School* states, “Children who are more active show greater attention, have faster cognitive processing speed, and perform better on standardized academic tests than children who are less active.”