

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Spellings Visits Private School, Promotes School Choice

In a major policy speech at an African Methodist Episcopal cathedral in New York City, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings forcefully promoted school choice as a way to improve student performance across the nation.

Speaking at the Greater Allen Cathedral in Jamaica, NY, Spellings touted the Bush administration's agenda of expanding educational opportunities through public schools, private schools, and charter schools. Parents "want to send their children to schools that have high expectations and high standards," said Spellings. "And when schools fall short of these standards, we must give parents options."

The setting for Spellings's remarks was not without significance. The cathedral boasts a membership of approximately 15,000, which, according to church officials, makes it the largest religious congregation in the state. One of the cathedral's ministries is the Allen Christian School, which enrolls more than 600 African-American students in grades pre-k to 8. Spellings visited the school and said it "sets high standards for every student." Further, the cathedral's pastor, Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake, a former member of Congress (D-NY), is one of the country's foremost advocates of choice. The secretary described Rev. Flake as someone who looks for "new, innovative ways to solve problems and expand opportunity."

Spellings acknowledged two other religious leaders in the audience: Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, who heads the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, and Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. She thanked the bishop and rabbi for their "commitment to helping students."

Though a long way from home, Spellings

seasoned her speech with one of her favorite sayings from Texas. "If all you ever do is all you've ever done, then all you'll ever get is all you ever got," she said as a polite rebuke of those who reject innova-



Secretary Spellings at the Allen Christian School. (USDE photo)

tion despite decades of poor performance. She added, "Until every child can read and do math on grade level, all we ever get won't be enough. Not by a long shot."

Reviewing the administration's accomplishments in the arena of school choice, Spellings said, "No administration in history has done more to put choice on the books for parents than this one led by President Bush." To support that claim, she cited a provision in the *No Child Left Behind Act* that empowers parents in poor-performing schools to transfer their children to other public schools or to sign them up for free tutoring. She also mentioned the president's promotion of "the first-ever federally funded opportunity scholarships program" in Washington, DC, where almost 1,700 low-income students have been given "the chance to attend the private or parochial school of their choice." And she plugged the administration's sup-

port for the growth of charter schools, which between 2001 and now have increased in number from 2,000 to 3,600.

While encouraged by the progress made in getting more parents to take advantage of choice opportunities, Spellings acknowledged that there is still "a long way to go." She announced the results of a new report from the Department of Education showing that only 17 percent of students eligible for free tutoring (also called supplemental services) have signed up for the program. (Private schools and religious organizations are eligible providers of supplemental services.) She called on community groups and faith-based organizations "to help spread the word" about the options available to parents.

Turning to the topic of charter schools, Secretary Spellings said policymakers should "stop rationing opportunity" by "arbitrarily limiting" the number of such schools. Applying to charter schools attributes that are often applied to private schools, the secretary said they "improve education for everyone," they serve as "laboratories for new educational strategies that can eventually help raise achievement" across the board, and they are "even more accountable for results than traditional public schools." On the last point, Spellings noted that because parents choose charter schools, "when charters fall short of standards, they can be closed."

In connection with the Washington opportunity scholarships program, the secretary told the story of Eric Brooks, a former public school student in the District of Columbia who was "struggling with reading and wasn't getting the help he needed." Today, said Spellings, "Eric has a scholarship to attend a Catholic private school, and he's reading on grade level."

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Education Leaders Testify on Hurricane Recovery

Representatives from public and private education last month described to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce the progress and challenges connected with reestablishing schools and universities in the wake of last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Father William F. Maestri, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, testified that to date the archdiocese has reopened 83 out of 107 schools throughout eight civil parishes. Those schools now serve 40,000 students, whereas prior to Katrina enrollment was close to 50,000. Within the City of New Orleans, 29 Catholic schools are currently serving 12,297 children. "This re-entry and repopulation of our schools has been a key contributor to our recovery and the recovery of neighborhoods and even the rejoining of families," said Maestri.

Dr. Scott S. Cowen, president of Tulane University in New Orleans and chairman of the Committee on Public Education for the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, reported that so far 25 of the 117 public schools previously operated by the City of New Orleans have reopened. He said public schools now serve 12,000 students, which is about 20 percent of the enrollment before the hurricane.

Father Maestri told committee members that in the aftermath of Katrina, archdiocesan schools welcomed hundreds of displaced students from public and non-Catholic private schools. What he called the largest level of services to displaced students in the history of the country, took place at Archbishop Rummel High School in Metairie, LA, which took in over 2,000 displaced students, in effect operating three schools throughout the day in order to do so.

Outlining the significant contributions of private schools in Louisiana, Maestri said 16 percent of the state's students attend private schools, the highest share of any state in the nation. Ninety-eight percent of private school students graduate, and 97 percent attend college, the majority attending colleges and universities within

the state. He said Catholic schools have served New Orleans since 1725, "before there was an America and before there was a Louisiana."

Reflecting on what he called "post-Katrina realities," Maestri pointed to three lessons learned: (1) "De-centralization and not over-centralization is crucial to manage a disaster;" (2) "Faith-based communities can serve the common good." (3) "Government can help but cannot substitute for the power of personal witness, charity, and the will to do good."

As to how government might help the private sector, the priest said there is a "tremendous need for partnership" between the public and private communities. He called for a large-scale "investment in brick and mortar recovery" and the opportunity "for private and Catholic schools to participate in programs involving public money without sacrificing the unique mission and the healthy pluralism that is necessary for choice among parents."

On the issue of partnerships between public and private education, Maestri said, "The old divisions that have too long divided us must be laid aside so we can move forward together." He said such partnerships would be "grounded in the common desire to serve the good of the community and a willingness to think in new ways."

Illustrating the call to "think in new ways," Maestri asked Congress to allow his archdiocese to become the equivalent of a "local educational agency" (LEA), which could receive and administer federal funds on behalf of Catholic schools. He said the archdiocese was "not asking for special treatment but for an opportunity to compete for grants and funds so we can continue to serve the common good."

The hearing was chaired by Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), who said that the various witnesses showed not only the "many bumps in the road" toward recovery but also "shining examples of what has gone right." He called for remedies that "focus on speed, efficiency, and less, not more, layers of bureaucracy."

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Although the program is only in its second year, the secretary said that early results about student performance are encouraging.

"President Bush and I want to help spread this experiment to other cities as another alternative to help students trapped in schools that fall short of standards year after year," she said.

As a lifeline to students in over 1,700 schools across the nation that have failed to meet state standards for five or six years, the Bush administration has proposed a \$100 million Opportunity

Scholarship Fund, which would, as the secretary put it, "help thousands of low-income students in these schools attend the private school of their choice or receive intensive one-on-one tutoring after school or during the summer."

Regarding the daunting goal of Congress and the Bush administration to have every child perform proficiently in reading and math by 2014, Spellings said, "We've set out to do something that's never been done before. But I know it's possible with your help. Together, we'll rise to the challenge."

Department Releases Hurricane Aid and Guidance

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced in March that \$1.1 billion would be available to help with the education costs associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including \$645 million to cover the costs of educating displaced students and \$496 million to help restart schools that were destroyed or damaged by the storms. "We wanted to get the funds into states' hands as quickly as possible, so we accelerated the application process," Secretary Spellings said.

Concurrent with the announcement, the U.S. Department of Education immediately released \$120 million for the education of displaced students for the first quarter of the current school year. A total of 157,743 students, including 17,871 in private schools, are eligible for the first-quarter funding, which will amount to \$750 for each student without a disability and \$937.50 for each student with a disability. In subsequent quarters, the per-pupil payment amount could increase depending on student counts. "We're balancing the immediate need for aid with the need to be fair to all schools that have taken in students," Secretary Spellings said. "Our funding formula is based upon a conservative starting point, and it's important to note that increases may be made once complete data is available."

Restart Funds

Since January, the Department has made available a total of \$750 million to Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Alabama to help hurricane-damaged schools in those states reopen and

resume normal operations. About \$159 million was initially reserved by those states to provide services or assistance to private schools.

In connection with the Restart program, the department recently released guidance on the use of funds for private schools. The guidance document describes the purposes for which the funds may be used and explains that assistance must be provided equitably and in a timely manner. The guidance also clarifies that funds may be used to cover certain secular expenses intended to help damaged schools reopen after the hurricane, even if those expenses were incurred prior to the enactment of the *Hurricane Education Recovery Act*. And in what may prove to be an enormous help to schools, the department's guidance states that Restart funds may be used to pay utility bills "through the end of the school year in which the private school reopens" or to "reimburse a private school for utility bills previously paid."

Private schools, says the guidance, may not be reimbursed for costs related to the work that teachers do in connection with their regular day-to-day responsibilities under contract with the school. However, the document explains that if private school teachers are employed by a public agency or by a third-party contractor under the control of a public agency, they can be paid with Restart funds to provide "secular, neutral, and non-ideological services to students in a private school." By the same rule, private school teachers could be employed by third parties to provide catch-up instruction in secular subjects after school, on weekends, or during the summer to private school students.

Boy's Wish Saves School

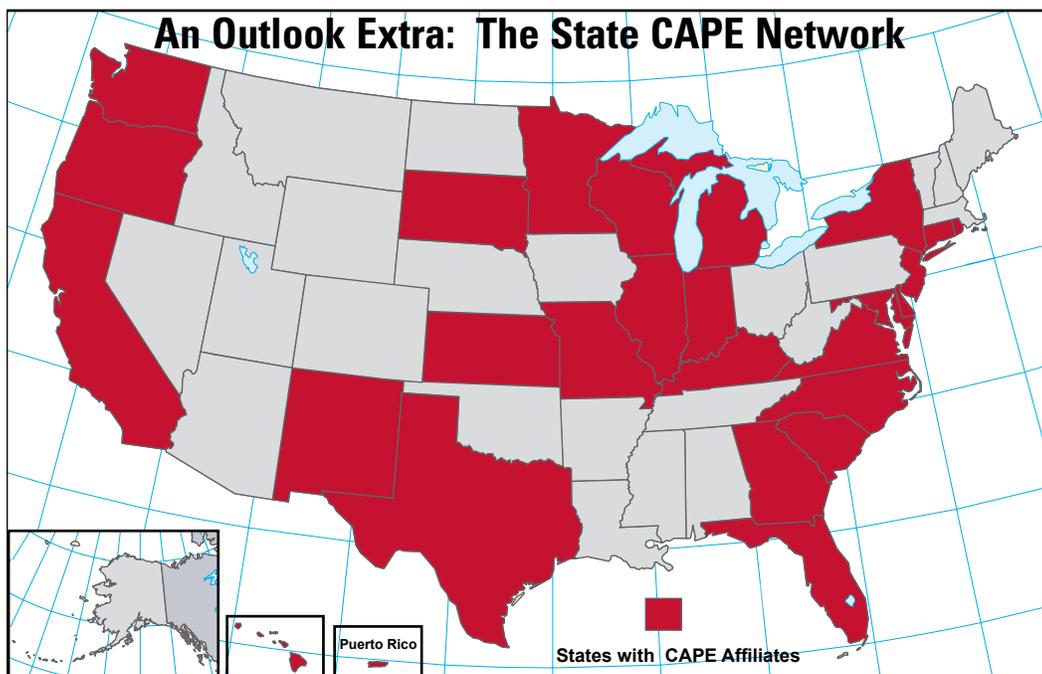
CBS Evening News reporter Steve Hartman suggests that if St. Cyril's School in Philadelphia is ever renamed, an appropriate candidate might be "St. Tommy Gerimickal Elementary."

In the April 28 broadcast, Hartman told the heartwarming story of Tommy, a sixth-grader in a school that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia said would have to close. Tommy has cystic fibrosis, and he submitted a wish to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a wish-granting organization for children facing a life-threatening disease. But Hartman said Tommy's wish was not the typical trip to Disney World or a visit with a top celebrity. Instead, he told the foundation he wanted "to keep my school open until I graduate eighth grade." In his letter to Make-A-Wish, he described how his school "is like a second home" and the people "like family."

Although the foundation simply could not honor a request that would cost an estimated \$400,000, Tommy stayed determined. He sent his letter to local newspapers, and that got some fund-raising efforts started. The bottom line is that so far Tommy and the school have raised \$260,000, enough to keep the school operating another year. "It feels great to know that our school is going to stay open," said Tommy.

Hartman ended the story by suggesting to Tommy that if he gets in trouble during his seventh grade, he should play the "Hey, I saved the school" card. But Tommy said he has already tried that. "My teacher said, 'That's no excuse.'"

The video and story, "A Wish that Saved a School," is available on the Assignment America section of the CBS News Web site at: http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/04/28/assignment_america/main1560919.shtml.



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CAPE notes

★ Private School Facts: The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study has been tracking the academic progress of a nationally representative sample of students since kindergarten in 1998-99. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) just released the latest report from the study, which presents the reading, math, and science performance of the student cohort in the spring of 2004, when most of them were fifth-graders. In reading, 51.8 percent of private school students scored in the highest third of the score distribution for all students, compared to 31.3 percent of public school students. (In other words, more than half of private school students scored at or above the 67th percentile.) In math, 45.2 percent of private school students and 32.1 percent of public school students scored in the top third. And in science, the percentage of top-third scores was 50.7 percent for private school students and 31.5 percent for public school students. The new NCES report is available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006038>.

★ The U.S. Department of Education will sponsor 14 free regional workshops for teachers and principals this summer. According to the department, "Some of the nation's best teachers and practitioners will share their strategies for raising student achievement and will inform teachers of the latest successful research-based practices." Information about the Teacher-to-Teacher Summer Workshops is available

at <https://www.t2tweb.us/Workshops/About.asp>.

★ *The New York Times* reported last month that "school-choice programs are winning over minority parents." The April 6 article by Diana Jean Schemo entitled "Program on Vouchers Draws Minority Support" looks at choice through the eyes of participants in the federal voucher program in Washington, DC.

When Amie Fuwa, 14, attended a public school in Washington, she "felt like it didn't really matter to different people," including her teachers, whether or not she failed. But now she attends Archbishop Carroll High School, and according to the article, "When algebra confounds Amie, her teacher stays with her after school to help, and a mentor keeps her on course." As Amie puts it, "It's a lot of people behind my back now."

The *Times* reporter writes that for minority families in Washington, "vouchers offer a way out of one of the nation's most dysfunctional public school systems, and open a window into worlds that few would otherwise know."

Rock Creek International School has 29 voucher students and raised enough money through donations so that all those students who wanted to could "join class trips to Greece, Costa Rica and Qatar." April Cole Walton, the mother of a voucher student, said her neighborhood public school "has broken down." She wanted something more for her daughter. "Every child here

should be able to say I'm going to set my sights high," she said. "I refuse to let my child be cheated."

Patricia William, the single mother of Fransoir, a student at Sacred Heart School, talked about how her son today has nothing in common with the boy he once was. "All the effort he's making every night makes me want to sit with him and study," said Ms. William. "I'm learning academically, but also about making an effort."

★ Did you hear the one about the priest, the rabbi, and the minister who wrote an op-ed piece in the *New York Daily News* in support of legislation to provide state tax credits for education expenses? No joke. The authors are The Rev. A.R. Bernard, spiritual leader of the Christian Cultural Center; Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, who leads the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn; and Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

The exceptional article in the April 6 edition is available at: http://www.nydailynews.com/news/ideas_opinions/story/406250p-344012c.html.

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