

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

New Senate More Likely to Support School Choice

This month, amid politics and protocol, the 109th Congress convenes. Compared to its immediate predecessor, this Congress is more conservative, more Republican, and—at least on the Senate side—more likely to support school choice.

How much more likely? CAPE's examination of voting records and campaign positions shows a net gain of five school choice votes in the Senate. (A comparable analysis was not possible on the House side because the school choice positions of too many new members could not be determined.)

There are nine new senators in the 109th Congress. CAPE compared the school choice views of the new senators with those of the people they replaced, as expressed in a June 2001 Senate vote on a proposal to fund about a dozen voucher demonstration projects across the country. The positions of the new senators were ascertained by examining not only campaign documents and press reports, but also relevant votes on school choice initiatives in the House, where two-thirds of the freshmen senators once served.

Colorado

When Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO) was Colorado's attorney general, he was part of what The Wall Street Journal called "the coalition of the willing"—a new alliance of bipartisan supporters of a pilot voucher bill in the state that was ultimately signed into law. In a March 2003 editorial, the paper described Salazar's support of the measure this way:

"Included in the pro-voucher crowd is Colorado's highest-ranking Democrat, Attorney General Ken Salazar. In a recent statement that must have sent tremors through the teachers' unions, Mr. Salazar announced he favors 'a limited, experimental, constitutionally defensible voucher program targeted at poor inner-city children.'"

Salazar replaces Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO), another school choice supporter.

Florida

Throughout his senatorial campaign, Mel Martinez (R-FL) was never shy about identifying himself as pro school choice. Responding to a candidate questionnaire, he told The Ledger in Lakeland, Florida: "We must consider all options to improve the performance of our educational system. I support use of school vouchers." And on his campaign Web site, he stated, "I ... support giving parents choices when schools fail their children."

Martinez succeeds Democrat Bob Graham, who regularly voted against K-12 school choice measures, including education savings accounts. Back in 2000, Graham co-signed a letter from the New Democrat Coalition to then President-elect George W. Bush, declaring that the group was "firmly opposed to the voucher portion" of the president's school reform plan.

Georgia

Since his election as congressman in 1999, John Hardy (Johnny) Isakson (R-GA) has been a staunch advocate of parental rights in education. He has a record of faithfully voting in favor of school choice initiatives, including a floor vote in May 2001 on an amendment to authorize five pilot projects to test the effectiveness of school choice, and the historic vote in September 2003 to establish a voucher program in the District of Columbia.

Georgia's newest senator replaces the colorful Zell Miller (D-GA), a moderate Democrat who, despite a reputation for bucking the party line, voted against a



Tsunami Relief

The tsunami in Southern Asia last month caused unimaginable devastation. Victims included countless children—killed, injured, or separated from their families. Many schools were destroyed or damaged, as were textbooks and instructional supplies.

No doubt, America's schoolchildren—among the world's most fortunate—will want to assist their brothers and sisters in need. And teachers will want to instill in students the compassion and love for others that mark a moral person.

CAPE would like to help, too. On our special Web page (capenet.org/tsunami.html) educators can find links to agencies accepting donations for the tsunami relief effort. The site also provides schools and educational organizations the opportunity to post projects they are undertaking to help victims of the catastrophe. Your projects may be an inspiration to others, and our collective effect may be more than that of our individual efforts. Let's join forces to come to the aid of those in need.

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CAPE member organizations:

- 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
- Solomon Schechter Day School Association
- Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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school choice amendment in June 2001 by Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), which would have funded a number of pilot projects across the country.

Louisiana

A member of the House since 1999, Senator David Vitter (R-LA) also has an unassailable record in support of school choice legislation. In the 108th Congress he voted for the D. C. voucher bill, and in the 107th, for school choice demonstration projects. In his senate campaign materials, Vitter pledged to support “a voucher pilot program to give parents and children in low-performing schools real choices and options.” He added, “Saying no to kids trapped in failing schools is inexcusable.”

Democrat John Breaux, whom Vitter replaced, opposed the Gregg amendment in 2001.

Illinois

On the heels of a rousing speech at his party’s convention last summer and a lopsided win in the Illinois senate race this fall, Barack Obama (D-IL) is a rising star for Democrats. Senator Obama recognizes the failure of some public schools, and as a state senator he worked to expand charter schools. But throughout his campaign for U.S. Senate, he consistently opposed vouchers.

Back in 2002, however, Obama said he was willing to consider school vouchers. Here is an excerpt from the transcript of a June 2002 interview with Jeff Berkowitz, who hosts “Public Affairs,” a cable television show in Chicago:

Berkowitz: So, I take that to mean that under the right circumstances you, Barack Obama, possible U. S. senate candidate from the State of Illinois, could support school vouchers and could even do so in your role as a state senator in the Illinois Legislature.

Obama: No, what you can take that to mean is that I am willing to listen to these arguments and see if there— if I can be persuaded that ultimately kids would be better off, then—

Berkowitz: Then you would support it.

Obama: I would support anything that is going to be better off for the children of Illinois.

Berkowitz: Including school vouchers, if you are persuaded?

Obama: Whatever is on the table I think has to be debated.

Berkowitz: Quite a concession. I am going to quit while I am ahead. (end)

Regarded as a potential bridge builder on several policy issues, Obama filled the senate seat of Republican Peter Fitzgerald (R-IL), an advocate of school choice.

North Carolina

Like a number of lawmakers, Richard Burr (R-NC) holds different views about different

types of school choice initiatives. During the campaign, he told a local newspaper that he believes “the federal government should not fund voucher programs administered by the state or federal government.” He added, however, “I do support tax credits for education-related expenses.” Burr’s five terms in the House of Representatives have pretty much reflected those dual sentiments. He voted for K-12 education savings accounts but against the D.C. scholarship initiative in 2003, even though in 1998 he supported legislation with a similar purpose: the D.C. Student Opportunity Scholarship Act.

Given Burr’s stated commitment to tax credits, we count him as a supporter of school choice. He replaced John Edwards (D-NC), a school choice opponent.

Oklahoma

A medical doctor who has personally delivered almost 4,000 babies, Tom A. Coburn (R-OK) has had a busy career. Part of that career included service in the U.S. House of Represent-

School Choice Changes in Senate

New Senator/ <i>Previous Senator</i>	Choice Supporter?	Net Change
Salazar (D-CO)	Yes	0
Campbell (R-CO)	Yes	
Martinez (R-FL)	Yes	+1
Graham (D-FL)	No	
Isakson (R-GA)	Yes	+1
Miller (D-GA)	No	
Obama (D-IL)	No	-1
Fitzgerald (R-IL)	Yes	
Vitter (R-LA)	Yes	+1
Breaux (D-LA)	No	
Burr (R-NC)	Yes	+1
Edwards (D-NC)	No	
Coburn (R-OK)	Yes	0
Nickles (R-OK)	Yes	
DeMint (R-SC)	Yes	+1
Hollings (D-SC)	No	
Thune (R-SD)	Yes	+1
Daschle (D-SD)	No	
Total		+5

Students in Grades 4 and 8 Score Above World Average

The country's fourth- and eighth-grade students scored well above the international average in both mathematics and science, according to a report released last month. The [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(TIMSS\)](#) showed American eighth-grade students scored 504 in mathematics, surpassing the international average of 466. For fourth-grade students, the U.S. math score was 518, compared to the world average of 495. In eighth-grade science, the U.S./international scores were 527/473, while for fourth-grade science they were 536/489.

Among the 45 countries that took the eighth-grade tests, the United States ranked 15th in math and 9th in science. Among the 25 countries in the fourth-grade survey, the U.S. ranked 12th in math and 6th in science.

U.S. private school students scored measur-

ably higher than students in public schools and thereby helped boost the U.S. average (see chart). Had the private school scores been the average for the nation, the country's international rankings would have risen to 8th place in eighth-grade math, 3rd place in eighth-grade sci-

ence, 6th place in fourth-grade math, and 1st place in fourth-grade science.

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige offered hope and caution in his comments on the report: "Eighth-grade results from TIMSS confirm what we have seen domestically—that a greater emphasis

	Private Schools	Public Schools
Grade 8		
Math	533	501
Science	559	524
Grade 4		
Math	544	516
Science	576	532

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

on higher standards in the classroom leads to improved performance and a smaller achievement gap. However, the results also show that we have further to go, particularly in earlier grades, toward establishing a culture of excellence and achievement at all grade levels."

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tatives from 1995-2001. During that time he voted in favor of D. C. opportunity scholarships in 1998 and education savings accounts in 1997. On his senate campaign Web site, Coburn wrote: "I believe parents and teachers, not federal bureaucrats, should direct children's education.... During my tenure in Congress, we passed a number of tax credits to assist families and students pay for education. These include the per-child tax credit, educational savings accounts that allow for tax-free educational savings, the Hope Scholarship that provides tax credits for education, the Lifetime Learning Credit that allows for tax credits for college tuition expenses, and the Education IRA that allows for tax free savings for children's higher education costs."

Coburn fills the vacant seat of Senator Don Nickles (R-OK), also a choice supporter.

South Carolina

During his three terms in the House of Representatives, Jim DeMint (R-SC) has consistently appeared on the "Yea" side of school choice votes. He has also sponsored creative legislation to enhance the right of parents to choose their children's schools. For example, in the most recent Congress, DeMint introduced

HR 4034, the National Education Advancement (NEA) and Teacher Relief Act, which would provide tax credits to corporations and individuals who contribute to school tuition organizations or to specified projects to benefit public or private elementary or secondary schools. The bill would also offer teachers a tax credit for classroom-related expenses. DeMint also sponsored an amendment to allow states to design and implement choice programs within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

DeMint succeeds Ernest Hollings (D-SC), who regularly rejected school choice legislation, including education savings accounts and voucher pilot programs.

South Dakota

The Senate race with the most far-reaching aftereffect was the one between Jim Thune (R-SD) and Tom Daschle (D-SD). By unseating the Senate minority leader, Thune caused a significant redistribution of power among Senate Democrats. He also helped tip the scale on school choice. While serving in the House from 1997 to 2002, Thune voted for the D. C. scholarship bill in April 1998 and for education savings accounts in June of the same year. Daschle, on the other hand, routinely opposed school choice legislation.

15-Year-Olds Below Average

Although American elementary school students scored above the international average in the TIMSS survey (see story left), American high school students performed below par in a separate study released last month. Results from the [Program for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#), which was conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, ranked American 15-year-olds below the OECD average in mathematics literacy, problem solving, and science literacy, and at the OECD average in reading literacy.

In the two focus areas of the report—mathematics literacy and problem solving—the United States ranked 24 out of 29 OECD countries. For each test, the OECD average score was 500 and the standard deviation was 100.

U.S. public school students scored 484 in mathematics literacy and 478 in problem solving.

As they did in the TIMSS assessment, American private school students scored significantly above their public school counterparts in all four areas tested (see chart). Had the private school scores been the national average scores, the country's international ranking would have jumped from 24 to 14 in mathematics and from 24 to 16 in problem solving.

	Private	Public
Mathematics Literacy	509	484
Problem Solving	505	478
Reading Literacy	533	496
Science Literacy	525	492

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ Fourth-graders in charter schools score about the same as students in regular public schools in reading but score a little lower in math, according to an [Education Department analysis of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress](#). But the report, released last month, also shows that when looked at by racial/ethnic subgroups, the performance of black, white, and Hispanic charter school students is not significantly different from that of public school students in the same groups.

“While charter schools are similar to other public schools in many respects, they differ in several important ways, including the makeup of the student population and their location,” the report stated. Charter schools are more likely than regular public schools to be located in central cities. Their share of black students is higher than other public schools, and their share of white students is lower.

Darvin Winick, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which authorized the pilot study, urged caution in interpreting the results. “Developing a sample of students that fairly represent the charter school population presents a real challenge,” he said.

★ Schools are safer than they once were. According to a report issued recently by the Justice Department and the Department of Education, “between 1992 and 2002, the violent crime victimization

rate at schools declined from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 such victimizations in 2002.”

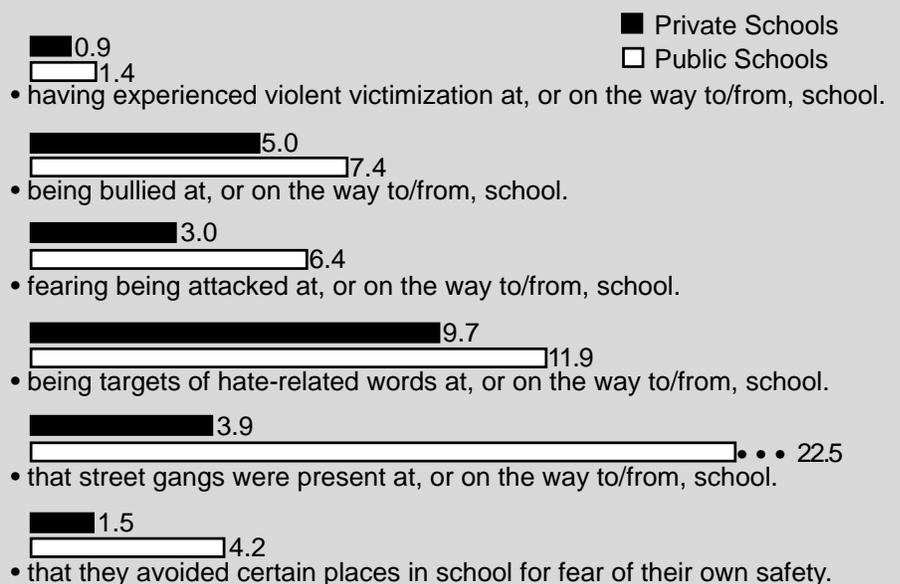
But despite the improvement, the report warns that “violence, theft, bullying, drugs, and firearms are still prevalent: students ages 12-18 were victims of about 659,000 violent crimes and 1.1 million crimes of theft at school in 2002.”

The 2004 edition of *Indicators of School*

Crime and Safety, which is put together by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics, breaks out some of the data by school type—public or private. As might be expected, private schools tend to be safer environments for students. The accompanying chart offers some illustrative statistics.

The report is available at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/crime_safe04/.

How Safe Are America's Schools? Percentage of Students, 12-18, who in 2003 reported...



Source: *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2004*
U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. November 2004.