

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Senator Lieberman Vows to Push for DC Vouchers

Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) told a gathering of leaders from religious and independent schools that he plans to push legislation allowing federally funded scholarships in the District of Columbia to continue despite recent action by Congress that would effectively eliminate the program after the 2009-10 school year. "I am going to hold hearings in the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee—hopefully in May—to reauthorize the Opportunity Scholarship program and try to get it approved by the Congress before the deadline to keep the program alive," he said March 16 in remarks prepared for a gathering sponsored by CAPE and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program currently allows over 1,700 children from low-income families to attend a religious or independent school of their choice in the nation's capital. But earlier this year, the House and Senate approved an omnibus appropriations bill that includes stringent language specifically requiring Congress to reauthorize the program, and the D.C. Council to approve it, in order for funding to continue beyond 2009-10. The hurdles were put in place precisely to make the program's survival highly unlikely.

Reminding the group that in recent years "the federal government has spent between \$160 and \$170 billion—that's BILLION—on programs that have not been reauthorized," Lieberman asked, "Why single out this tiny \$14 million dollar appropriation?"

It looks like Senator Lieberman may get some help from the Obama administration in his push to have the scholarship program continue. At a briefing March 11,

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said President Obama would work with Congress to ensure that students in the



Sen. Joe Lieberman

District who are currently benefiting from the program would not have their education disrupted. And in an interview with the Associated Press, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "I don't think it makes sense to take kids out of a school where they're happy and safe and satisfied and learning. I think those kids need to stay in their school."

Value of Diversity

A consistently strong supporter of school choice, Lieberman told the group, "The American system of education has always gained from its diversity. We have always understood that the aim is to educate every child in America as best we can. How we do that remains a question of choice that both the society and individual families make."

Lieberman said the public schools will continue to educate most children. "And yet, we have a lot of children—deeply poor children—who are suffering in public schools that are really not giving them an equal educational opportunity. To the extent that we can work with you to help close that gap and create the diversity of choices that the parents have, the better off we will all be."

Representative Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), the top Republican member of the House Education and Labor Committee, also addressed the meeting of private school leaders. In his prepared remarks, McKeon said, "One of the most successful components of the American education

system is the existence of choice." Describing the array of choices that many families have, including public, charter, independent, and religious schools, McKeon said far too many families do not benefit from educational options. "In some communities, the private schools are the only ones that have had success in bringing up student achievement. Yet low-income families—often, those who could benefit from private education most—are usually denied a choice of where to send their children to school."

Early Childhood

McKeon also spoke of choice in the context of early childhood education, an issue he said Congress would soon tackle. "As with K-12 education, I believe the hallmark of effective early childhood services is parental choice," he said. "Parents should be able to choose whether to enroll their children in formal early childhood education programs, and what type of programs would best suit their needs. And as with K-12 education, it is important that any federal support be equitable in its treatment of children and teachers in public and private settings."



Rep. Dale Kildee

ESEA Reauthorization

Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, told the assembly of private school leaders how much he appreciated the work of religious and independent schools.

For decades, Kildee has championed the equitable participation of private school students and teachers in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. He said he would continue to work for this principle when the House takes up the act's reauthorization, perhaps later this year.



Rep. Buck McKeon

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
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- 31 Affiliated State Organizations

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

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$25. ISSN 0271-1451

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National Service Bill Includes Students in Private Schools

Congress has passed bipartisan legislation that encourages Americans of all ages to volunteer their time and talent to address national challenges like education, energy, and health care. Known as the *Senator Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act*, the bill greatly expands federal resources devoted to national and community service and includes various education-related initiatives designed not only to assist students in elementary and secondary schools, but also to engage them in service projects to improve their communities. The education programs generally offer opportunities to public, religious, and independent schools.

The Senate approved the measure March 26 by a vote of 79 to 19; the House followed suit March 31 by a vote of 275 to 149. President Obama is expected to sign the bill soon.

The national service legislation, which expands current service programs and creates new ones, would reach out to students, adults, and senior citizens as persons to both serve and be served. A Senate summary describes the act as “tackling the dropout crisis and strengthening our schools; improving health care for low-income communities; assisting veterans and military families; boosting energy efficiency; and cleaning up parks.”

A central component of the bill increases the number of annual volunteer slots in the AmeriCorps program from 75,000 to 250,000. AmeriCorps volunteers work with nonprofit groups to perform all sorts of services, ranging from tutoring disadvantaged children to beautifying neighborhoods. Volunteers receive training as well as an education grant, currently worth up to \$4,725 for full-time service, to help pay for college or to pay off student loans. The *Serve America Act* sets the full-time education grant to equal the maximum Pell Grant award in any given year, thereby taking account of increases in college costs. For the 2009-10 school year, the grant tops out at \$5,350.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

The legislation also updates programs for elementary and secondary students under Learn and Serve America, which links academic instruction with having students meet a community’s pressing challenges. The goals are to improve academics and the community, while instilling

in students a sense of civic responsibility. The new Learn and Serve program retains provisions in its predecessor that require participating states and school districts to provide (after consultation with appropriate private school representatives) for the equitable involvement of students in private schools and for the training of their teachers in connection with service-learning projects supported by the program.

Under Learn and Serve, the bill provides grants to establish innovative initiatives that would engage public and private school students in activities such as improving neighborhood spaces, mentoring other students, or even preparing communities to respond to emergencies. A special “Summer of Service” program would invite middle- and high-school students to spend 100 hours meeting environmental, educational, and other needs in the community in exchange for \$500 in awards toward college costs.



Rep. George Miller at the national service press conference March 18.

The hope is that the program would help set the stage for a lifelong commitment to service.

Another section of the act sets in place a new Education Corps to help meet the education needs of public and private school students in a community through tutoring, improving school climate, expanding the school day, preparing students for college-level work, and other activities.

The act also establishes a “Volunteer Generation Fund” to help nonprofit organizations (including faith-based organizations) and other eligible entities to increase the number of volunteers to address targeted areas of national need, one of which is to “improve education in schools for economically disadvantaged students.”

Continuum of Service

The House passed its initial version of the bipartisan bill, the *Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act*, March 18 by a vote of 321 to 105. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, said that the GIVE bill provided “a continuum of service for Americans of all ages and walks of life—from middle school through retirement—who can help transform our nation by making a difference in their communities.”

Rep. Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), the committee’s top Republican, said the bill would help “nurture that spirit of selflessness, leveraging both individuals and organizations to achieve

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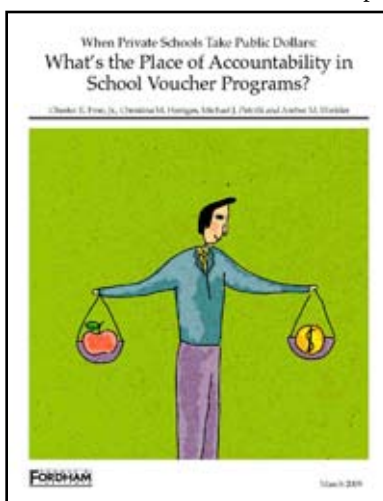
Report Looks at Accountability in Voucher Programs

Accountability, a watchword in education policy circles these days, is nothing new to religious and independent schools. Such schools are directly accountable to parents, the child's primary educators. Free-market forces ensure a level of quality control that is immediate, effective, decisive, and unforgiving. If a school fails to deliver what parents want, they take their business someplace else, and the school closes. That's accountability.

But what should happen when children enroll in private schools bearing government vouchers? Are additional layers of accountability necessary to ensure that tax dollars are being spent wisely? A new report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute tries to tackle this issue.

Last fall, folks at Fordham invited 20 school choice experts (including several associated with CAPE and its member organizations) to respond to 10 questions on accountability within the context of tax-funded voucher programs. Should the government mandate testing for voucher students? What information about private schools' success with voucher students should be released to the public? The experts had a host of strong views on these and other questions. Fordham analyzed and summarized their responses in a report named *When Private Schools Take Public Dollars: What's the Place of Accountability in School Voucher Programs?* (available at www.edexcellence.net).

According to the report, "The majority of



experts agree that participating private schools should not face new regulations regarding their day-to-day operations." Respondents said private schools should be left alone "when it comes to issues such as teacher qualifications, admissions, student discipline, and religion in the curriculum." They also agreed that schools participating in voucher programs should provide parents with information on how their children are doing and that "voucher programs as a whole should be rigorously evaluated."

But respondents disagreed on several other issues, including the use of standardized tests within voucher programs. Some thought that if researchers required results for voucher students from an assessment instrument other than what the participating school normally uses for its students, a government agency or a third party should administer the test. Others said schools should be required to give a national test of their choice to voucher students, while still

others said all students in participating schools should have to take state standardized tests.

Agreement also broke down on what other academic indicators should be made available to the government or the public, and on the degree of financial information that should be released.

The report's authors promote a "sliding scale" of accountability: "Schools that draw the majority of their revenues from private sources should be treated more like other private schools, while those that depend primarily on public dollars should be treated more like public schools."

According to a House summary, the bill is designed to "support and energize community service and volunteerism to help our country get through this economic crisis, restore confidence, and prepare our nation for the future."

The legislation reflects a theme struck by President Obama during the election campaign, when he issued "a new call to service to meet the challenges of our new century." When the bill passed the Senate, Obama said, "This legislation will help tap the genius of our faith-based and community organizations, and it will find the most innovative ideas for addressing our common challenges and helping those ideas grow... I call on all Americans to stand up and do what they can to serve their communities, shape our history and enrich both their own lives and the lives of others across this country."

CAPE Issues NCLB Paper

With the U.S. House of Representatives now poised to take up the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) perhaps before the end of this year, CAPE's board of directors recently approved an update to CAPE's NCLB issue paper. The document calls for improvements in services to religious and independent school students and teachers in programs authorized by NCLB, the current version of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA)

Since ESEA was first enacted in 1965, Congress has safeguarded equitable services to students and teachers in private schools. Under Title I, for example, eligible students in public and private schools serving low-income neighborhoods are supposed to receive remedial services in math and reading. But in recent years, certain provisions have put the private school community at a serious disadvantage when it comes to receiving services.

For example, even though the count of private school students in a school district helps determine the amount of federal funds the district receives under various ESEA programs, a proportionate share of such funds is not always directed to serve those students. The issue paper proposes that "all funds generated by private school students be clearly set aside for the benefit of such students."

In addition, the paper calls for having public and private school officials look into having an agent other than the school district take charge of administering services to private school students and teachers under ESEA. A third party would relieve the district of routine administrative responsibilities for the program and could result in a big improvement in services.

CAPE's issue paper, which includes 16 ways to improve NCLB is available at <http://www.cape-net.org/pdf/IP-NCLB2009.pdf>.

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national goals." He added, "Bipartisanship has been the guiding principle in this bill's development, and the legislation is stronger for it."

On the Senate side, a bipartisan press release called the *Serve America Act* "the most sweeping overhaul and expansion of national service programs in 16 years." Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), the measure's namesake and chief sponsor, said the bill's goal is "to tap much more deeply into Americans' enthusiasm to serve, and direct it to areas and issues where it can make the biggest difference." Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), the lead Republican cosponsor, said, "Volunteer service is a keystone to our country's traditions, and it is becoming increasingly important in these troubled economic times that we help our neighbors."

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Facts About Private Schools:** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) just released its biennial report on private elementary and secondary schools, noting that in the fall of 2007 there were 33,740 such schools with 456,266 teachers serving 5,072,451 students in grades K-12.

For the first time ever, the **report from the Private School Universe Survey (PSS)** includes counts from what NCES calls “k-terminal” schools, which are schools in which the highest grade is kindergarten. The report notes that because of this change, “the estimates in this report are not directly comparable to the estimates in the main tables sections of previous PSS release reports.” The 2005 report, for example, identified 28,996 private schools in the United States, but the dramatic increase in the number of schools between 2005 and 2007 may be explained by the addition of k-terminal schools.

★ CAPE keeps growing. In March, the board approved the application for membership in the State CAPE Network (SCN) from the Arkansas Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (ANSAA), bringing to 34 the number of states and territories that make up the network. ANSAA, founded in 1988, provides “guidance and assistance” to the religious and independent schools of Arkansas. Its primary purpose is to “promote quality education by adhering to responsible professional standards through its evaluation/accredita-

tion process.”

Dr. Gary Arnold, head of Little Rock Christian Academy, played a pivotal role in bringing ANSAA to CAPE. Arnold has a long and distinguished history with CAPE, having served as the state CAPE coordinator in Illinois and Wisconsin before taking on the same role in Arkansas. In recognition of his talent, hard work, and leadership, state CAPE representatives elected him as the SCN coordinator, a position he has held since 2006.

★ **Wondering how the new economic stimulus package affects religious and independent schools?** The U.S. Department of Education issued guidance April 1 that includes several questions addressing services to private school students and teachers under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. In short, school districts *must* provide equitable services under the special recovery funds for IDEA and Title I, and *may* provide services under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Full information about the new guidance is available at <http://www.capenet.org/new.html>.

★ **Looking for the latest information on state programs that help cover the costs of having students attend private schools?** The U.S. Department of Education just released a report that describes in detail the various types of financial assistance available, how many students participate in each program, the average or maximum amount of aid awarded, and lots of other

information to help parents, researchers, and policymakers.

According to the report, “In recent years, there has been an expansion of education options for parents to choose schools for their children.” And that expansion includes providing parents “an increasing number of state programs that provide financial support for their children to attend private schools.” The report goes on to note: “As of the end of calendar year 2008, 24 programs were in place in 14 states and the District of Columbia. This compares with 22 programs in 13 states and the District of Columbia in August 2007, and seven programs in seven states in 1997.”

The report *Education Options in the States: State Programs That Provide Financial Assistance for Attendance at Private Elementary or Secondary Schools* is available from the Office of Non-Public Education at: www.ed.gov/parents/schools/choice/educationoptions/index.html.

★ **What’s on the horizon for CAPE?** In part that depends on what your generous support allows us to do. Our energized board and state leaders are not at a loss for ideas, but to accomplish ambitious goals, we need your help.

April is annual-giving month at CAPE. We invite you to become a partner in our work by visiting www.capenet.org/support.html. Your gift will help CAPE become an even more effective voice for religious and independent education.