

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Congress Bars New Students from Scholarship Program

In a year when Congress approved some \$100 billion in new education spending, it somehow could not manage to summon several million dollars to allow new students to participate in the popular and proven DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. An omnibus appropriations bill that President Obama signed December 16 provides funding for the voucher program in 2010-11, but limits those funds to students who currently receive vouchers.

The bill includes \$13.2 million for a one-year extension of the initiative, which serves over 1,300 students. Up to \$2 million would be available for assessments and testing, including a new requirement that scholarship students take the same annual tests as students in the DC public schools. The legislation directs the secretary of education to ensure that each participating school undergoes a site inspection twice each year and further requires him to file a report to Congress by June 15, 2010, detailing each school's "academic rigor and quality."

### Schools at Risk

The decision to deny scholarships to new students sets in motion a wave that could eventually engulf some of the schools the scholarships help support. Private schools in low-income neighborhoods with a high percentage of voucher families will lose an irreplaceable share of students each year, thus putting their financial viability and very survival at risk. If these schools are forced to close, the net effect would be that vulnerable children in the community would lose yet another chance at a promising future.

Already, the scholarship program is starting to unravel. Members of the board of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF), which administers the program, have advised Education Secretary Arne Duncan and members of Congress that ab-



sent Congressional action to authorize a sustainable program by January 31, 2010, WSF would not be able to operate the program beyond the current school year. The board said the uncertainty surrounding the program "makes it virtually impossible for children, families, schools, and WSF to prepare for the time-intensive application and renewal processes so critical to the OSP's sound administration for the 2010-2011 school year." The letter went on to say that Congressional inaction "also affects donors to the program who cannot confidently make the philanthropic commitments necessary to effectively administer the program."

### Clouded by Ideology

Oddly, the determination by Congress and the Obama administration to slowly kill the program doesn't square with a professed commitment to support reform and to try what works. "Let's not be clouded by ideology when it comes to figuring out what helps our kids," Obama said last December when he introduced Arne Duncan as his secretary of education. Opportunity scholarships work. After subjecting the program to years of painstaking scrutiny and rigorous study, the Education Department's hired researcher described it as "the most effective education policy evaluated by the federal government's official education research arm so far." A matter of will

and a relatively small investment would have allowed this effective program to continue with new students next year. That the program's death came in a year of massive new education spending—including a \$48.6 billion "block grant" (known as the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund), which gives states and districts broad discretion regarding its use, and whose effect, if any, on student performance is anyone's guess—only adds insult to injury. In a strange calculus, spreading tens of billions of dollars on programs of unknown efficacy proved an easier call for Congress than investing a relative pittance to preserve a proven and popular program.

### Scathing Letter

Directing a scathing letter of his own to certain members of Congress, Joseph E. Robert, Jr., chairman of the Washington Scholarship Fund, called the decision to end the program politically motivated. "Each of you...claims to have the best interests of low-income DC children at heart, but clearly you have only the interests of the teachers unions and others who benefit from putting politics before the needs of children and families who don't have the power (or campaign contributions) to fight you," wrote Mr. Robert. "Shame on you. Shame on all public officials who would rather relegate low-income children to continued cycles of poverty and illiteracy than take on the forces that benefit from the status quo of a broken education system."

Also making clear their displeasure with the decision, Kevin P. Chavous, cofounder and chair of Democrats for Education Reform, and Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of DC Parents for School Choice, issued a joint statement directing much of the blame at President Obama. "As someone who used scholarships to attend private schools himself, exercises

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

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

**Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE.**  
**An annual subscription is \$35.**  
**ISSN 0271-1451**

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school choice as a father, and who boasts of a background as a community organizer fighting for the disadvantaged, President Obama has destroyed the hopes and dreams of hundreds of low income DC families,” said Chavous and Ford. “By turning his back on these parents and their children—some of whom live mere blocks from the White House—the president has sided with special interests instead of the kids. His inability or unwillingness to speak out just one time and save this small but effective federal program brings into question his entire education reform agenda and his claim to ‘support what works’ for the betterment of our children.”

**Stand-Alone Vote**

In an editorial lambasting lawmakers, the *Washington Post* called on Congress to schedule a stand-alone vote on the program’s reauthorization. “If Congress, no doubt egged on by its allies in the teachers unions, is so intent on killing this program, it should be upfront in accepting the responsibility.” Chavous and Ford added their own voices to the call for a separate vote: “This program is too important to DC families to be suffocated in the stacks of a 1,000+ page omnibus bill. DC kids deserve a straight-up vote on this program....We want senators and Congressmen to look DC’s low-income children in the eye and tell them that their futures matter—or don’t. It’s that simple.”

According to news reports, a bipartisan group of senators sent a letter to Majority Leader Harry Reid “pleading for a reconsideration” of the bill by the end of January. Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Susan Collins (R-ME), Robert Byrd (D-WV), George Voinovich (R-OH), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and John Ensign (R-NV), called

the program “a lifeline to many low-income students in the District of Columbia.”

Meanwhile in the House, Rep. Michael C. Burgess, M.D. (R-TX) introduced H.R. 4312, the *DC Student Opportunity and Choice Act*, which would amend the appropriations language by striking the section limiting future scholarships to current recipients. The bill is cosponsored by House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH), Rep. John Kline (R-MN), ranking member of the House Education and Labor Committee, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), ranking member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

**One Child at a Time**

In an interview earlier this year with the Associated Press, Education Secretary Duncan explained why he opposes vouchers even though he supports continuing the DC program for current students. “We need to be more ambitious. The goal shouldn’t be to save a handful of children. The goal should be to dramatically change the opportunity structure for entire neighborhoods of kids.” But the program’s defenders have noted that large-scale reform efforts derive their strength from small-scale successes, or as Kevin Chavous put it, school reform “starts with educating one child.” Virginia Walden Ford recently pointed out that abolitionist Harriet Tubman never gave up on rescuing some slaves even though her efforts were never massive enough to rescue them all.

**Education Spending**

The scholarship program was part of a \$447 billion omnibus spending bill for fiscal year 2010 that President Obama signed into law December 16. The overall package encompassed six appropriations bills and included funding for a variety of education programs. The table at left compares fiscal years 2009 and 2010 funding levels for key federal programs affecting students in religious and independent schools. Two significant changes are the elimination of formula grants for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program and the reduction of education technology spending from \$270 million to \$100 million.

<b>Federal Education Spending Levels for Key Programs Affecting Private Schools</b>		
<b>(in millions of dollars)</b>		
<u>Program</u>	<u>FY 2009</u>	<u>FY 2010</u>
Career Education (Perkins Act)	\$1,161	\$1,161
Community Learning Centers (IV-B)	\$1,131	\$1,166
Education Technology (II-D)	\$270	\$100
English Language Acquisition (III-A)	\$730	\$750
Even Start (I-B-3)	\$66	\$66
Innovative Programs (V-A)	\$0	\$0
Math & Science Partnerships (II-B)	\$179	\$180
Reading First (I-B-1)	\$0	\$0
Safe and Drug Free Schools (IV-A-1)	\$295	\$0
Special Education (IDEA Part B-611)	\$11,505	\$11,505
Migrant Education (I-C)	\$395	\$395
Teacher Quality (II-A)	\$2,948	\$2,948
Title I (grants to LEAs)	\$14,492	\$14,492

## USDE Webinar Addresses Recovery Act and Private Schools

In a breakthrough webinar, U.S. Education Department officials provided a sweeping overview of programs within the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) that affect religious and independent schools. The online event, which took place December 15, featured a host of experts from the department to guide listeners through the often complicated provisions of education law that govern services to private school students and teachers.

President Obama signed ARRA into law last February. Its potential impact on private schools is mostly because it includes billions of dollars for three programs that already contain equitable participation provisions, namely, Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) and Titles I-A and II-D of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). IDEA provides services for students with special needs; Title I provides assistance in reading and math to qualifying students in low-income areas, and Title II-D helps schools enhance instruction through technology. The three programs were the focus of the webinar.

Maureen Dowling, acting director for the Office of Non-Public Education, served as anchor, explaining that her office's responsibilities include ensuring "the equitable participation of private school students and teachers in federal education programs."

### IDEA

Sheila Friedman from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) provided guidance for anyone grappling with the equity provisions in IDEA. She made clear that IDEA's benefits for children with special needs placed by their parents in private schools differ from those for children enrolled in public schools. Specifically, private school students do not have "an individual right or individual entitlement" to services. Instead, school districts "are required to spend a proportionate amount of the IDEA funds" they receive on services to students with disabilities in private schools. Decisions about which students receive services and what services they receive are made after "timely and meaningful consultation" with private school officials. Friedman went on to explain that a school district must "identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities" regardless of the kind of school they attend.



Deborah Morrow, also from OSERS, worked to unravel the process for determining a proportionate share of funds for services to students in private schools, a process based on the count of students with disabilities and the district's allocation of IDEA funds through both the regular allocation and the ARRA supplement. An accompanying slide detailed the formula.

### Ed Tech

Enid Marshall, from the Office of School Support and Technology Programs, provided a road map for navigating the provisions of the

\$650 million in ARRA funding for education technology under Title II-D of ESEA.

Marshall explained that the primary goal of the ed tech program "is to improve student achievement through the integration of technology with teacher training, skill and development, and instruction in the classroom." Funds may be used "to enhance existing technology, to acquire new technologies, both hardware and software, to support instruction, and to deliver education content."

Maureen Dowling ran through several points relating to private school participation in federal education programs, including consultation, equitable expenditures, and the need for services to be "secular, neutral, and non-ideological."

### Title I

Virginia Berg, the Title I private school specialist in the Office of Student Achievement and School Accountability, explained that ARRA provided local school districts across the country with an additional \$10 billion. "All the Title I requirements, statutory and regulatory, apply to the use of Title I funds under ARRA," she said, "including those Title I provisions related to the equitable participation of private school students, their teachers and their families."

In her trademark clear and direct style, Berg reviewed the equitable service requirements under Title I: the opportunity to participate, equal expenditures, assessing the program's effectiveness, and starting the program roughly when the public school program starts. "All four of these must be met in order to meet the requirements for equitable services," she said.

For anyone who missed this valuable event, an archived webcast, transcript, and related resources are available at [www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/web-conferences.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/web-conferences.html).

## Chicago School in USDE Spotlight

"We believe in the creation of inspired lives produced by the miracle of hard work." So begins the mission statement of Providence St. Mel School in Chicago. By any measure, the hard work that infuses the school seems to have paid off.

Serving over 500 African-American students in a troubled section of the city, this highly acclaimed school, the subject of an award-winning documentary titled "The Providence Effect," took center stage at a policy briefing at the U.S. Department of Education December 10.

Paul Adams, III, the school's president, and Jeanette DiBella, its principal, were among panelists who explained the model of success that drives the school. They presented an impressive set of statistics: 50 percent of students come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000; the average Terra Nova test score is at the 75th percentile; the mean ACT score is 23; 100 percent of seniors are accepted into college—a rate that has held true for the past 30 years.

What accounts for the success? According to school officials, the formula includes unwaveringly high expectations, quality teaches, early academic interventions and tutoring for low-performing students, data-driven planning, awards of corporate stocks to high-performing students, lots of professional development, a high level of structure, and an emphasis on classroom management. As DiBella puts it in the documentary, "It's not rocket science. It's actually kind of embarrassing that everybody thinks it's so phenomenal when everyone should be doing it."

More information about this "phenomenal" school is available at <http://psm.k12.il.us/>, and information about the documentary may be found at [www.providenceeffect.com](http://www.providenceeffect.com).

Return service requested

## CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** Five percent of private school students ages 12–18 reported that gangs were present at their school, compared to 25 percent of public school students, according to a government report released last month on school crime and safety. “Schools should be safe havens where young people can learn and prosper, and anything less than that is unacceptable,” said Attorney General Eric Holder and Education Secretary Arne Duncan in a joint statement about the report. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2009* is available at <<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2009/>>.

★ A new report from the National Governors Association highlights a program designed to increase the number of students taking and scoring well on Advanced Placement exams. According to the report, AP courses compare to introductory college courses and are “the nation’s oldest example of a rigorous, common curriculum. Students who score well on AP exams are more likely to persist in college and earn a degree.”

The most recent data available to CAPE about AP courses in private schools was compiled by the College Board at CAPE’s request in 2005. It turns out that of the 1,861,154 AP tests taken by students in public and private schools in 2004, private school students took 293,895, or 16 percent. To provide some perspective, U.S. Census Bureau data for 2003–04 show

that private schools enrolled 7.5 percent of the country’s secondary school students. Thus, private schools accounted for a disproportionately high number of AP exams. Moreover, private school students scored a 3 or higher on 72 percent of the exams they took, well above the national success rate that year of 62 percent. (The College Board considers a score of 3 or higher “predictive of college success,” and most colleges offer credit for such scores.)

Looked at another way, private schools, which, it is worth repeating, enrolled 7.5 percent of high school students in 2003–04, accounted for 18 percent of all AP exams on which students achieved scores predictive of college success.

★ If your school has an exemplary program in math or science, it could be eligible for the 2010 Intel Schools of Distinction Award. Eighteen finalists will win prize money and a trip to Washington, DC. Six of the 18 will receive an additional cash award plus products and services from the sponsors. Finally, a single “Star Innovator” school will be awarded a \$25,000 grant.

For more information, visit <<http://www.intel.com/education/schoolsofdistinction/application.htm?iid=CAG6290>>.

★ A national task force commissioned by the University of Notre Dame published a report last month on expanding the number of Latino students in Catholic schools. The goal is to provide a Catholic

school education to one million Hispanic children within the next decade. The report details a multi-step action plan for doubling the percentage of Latino families that choose Catholic schools.

The task force was co-chaired by Juliet V. Garcia, president of the University of Texas at Brownsville, and Rev. Joseph Corpora, C.S.C., director of university-school partnerships for Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE).

“Much is at stake,” Garcia said, “no less than the future generation of leaders for our country. Catholic schools must remain a steady and strong conduit for the many new generations of Latinos at their doorstep.”

The 65-page report, titled *To Nurture the Soul of a Nation: Latino Families, Catholic Schools, and Educational Opportunity*, is available at: <[http://catholicschooladvantage.nd.edu/assets/19176/nd\\_ltf\\_report\\_final\\_english\\_12.2.pdf](http://catholicschooladvantage.nd.edu/assets/19176/nd_ltf_report_final_english_12.2.pdf)>.

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