

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Lawmakers Signal Support for Equitable Participation in ESEA

Within days of the Obama administration releasing its blueprint for the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, lawmakers and key education staffers directly involved in the eight-member bipartisan, bicameral congressional talks on the legislation offered positive assessments regarding provisions in the law relating to the equitable participation of students in religious and independent schools.

At a Capitol Hill gathering of private school leaders March 16, sponsored by CAPE and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Rep. Dale E. Kildee (D-MI), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, said the private school community would “find friends on both sides of the aisle” in support of equitable participation, and added that he himself would seek to enhance equity in the coming reauthorization.

Keep Repeating Those Words

Regarding the term “equitable participation,” Kildee urged the group to “keep repeating those words because both of those words are positive words. You are asking for equity and you are asking for participation.”

Kildee unveiled a list of current ESEA programs he would like to add to those already requiring equitable participation. He also announced interest in a dual-enrollment proposal to allow high school students to secure college credit from local universities and community colleges. He

said he would insist that private school students be provided the opportunity to participate equitably in such a program.

The congressman also addressed the consultation provisions in ESEA, saying he wanted to strengthen those provisions so that private school representatives would not be “in a secondary position” during discussions with school district officials about services to students.

Kildee said that throughout the ESEA reauthorization process, lawmakers have to remember that “a child is a child is a child,” regardless of the kind of school he or she

attends. When the federal government is developing education programs, Congress should “make sure that no one is deprived of their tax dollars for education because their parents have chosen a private school.” Such schools are “an integral part” of the country’s education system, and describing them as “private” is misleading because they are performing “a very important public function.”

Incredible Value and Importance

Rep. John Kline (R-MN), the senior Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, also addressed the gathering of private school leaders. Acknowledging the “incredible value, incredible importance” of religious and independent schools, Kline said that many members of Congress “want to do everything we can to make sure that you are being treated equitably, fairly, and that you have every opportunity to succeed.”

Kline said that so far the bipartisan

reauthorization discussions have been “exactly what I think the process should be for enacting major pieces of legislation.” He said there was no preordained bill language, but instead, all parties came to the table to discuss how to get the legislation written in a bipartisan way.

Kline outlined certain principles that Republicans would use to guide the process, including restoring local control, empowering parents, letting teachers teach, and protecting taxpayers. With respect to empowering parents, he said, “We believe that parents need to have as much choice as possible, as much decision-making power as possible, when it comes to influencing their children’s education.”

Tragic and Appalling

Turning to the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, Kline said it was tragic and appalling not to let the program continue. He described a presentation by the mother of a scholarship student at a recent Republican meeting. She talked about the door to opportunity that the scholarship program opened for minority children and the pain “associated with slamming that door.”

On HR 4247, relating to the restraint of students—a bill that CAPE opposed because of its potentially harmful impact on students and its excessive mandates on private schools—Kline, who led the floor fight against the legislation, said the bill was a “horrific overreach” that the House “should never have passed.”

The congressman urged participants to stay engaged with members of Congress and not assume that any issue has a foregone outcome. “Not everybody is an enemy that you might think,” he said. Talk to members, whether they are friends on an issue or “those that you want to become your friends.” Letting lawmakers know your position matters. “You can have an



Rep. Dale E. Kildee

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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 McTigue

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

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CAPE Board Approves Issue Paper on Accreditation

Responding to the “movement in the direction of unified national standards, national tests, and national accreditation,” CAPE’s board of directors approved an issue paper in March that calls for “preserving pluralism in accreditation and diversity in education.”

“The right of parents to choose an education for their children consistent with their beliefs and values should never be compromised through an attempt to standardize schooling,” according to the document. “Nationalized standards, testing, and accreditation must not be allowed to erode the role of private education as a healthy alternative to government schools.”

The paper, approved by the CEOs of the nation’s major private school associations, embraces five principles for preserving pluralism. First, when seeking validation and improvement through accreditation, schools should be able to “select from a range of accrediting bodies that reflect a variety of rigorous standards and procedures for accreditation.” The school community itself “is best suited to make a determination about which accreditation process best reflects its mission and culture.”

Second, “accreditation for a system of schools or an individual school should respect and in-

corporate the unique identity and purpose of a school by including standards and indicators that reflect the school’s particular mission and culture.”

Third, because mandatory government assessments and procedures can threaten the independence and diversity of private schools, “states should recognize multiple accrediting bodies, providing schools with a choice in accreditation philosophies and protocols.”

Fourth, since the focus of an accreditation process should be to ensure school improvement and growth, the process must include “peer-review, self-study, and a comprehensive and thorough examination of all the indicators of a quality school, including a rich pedagogical/cultural life and sound business practices.”

Finally, “accreditation should examine, affirm, and improve a school’s culture, including the extent to which the school fosters a caring and supportive environment, promotes parental involvement, and develops values, ethical motives, basic beliefs, respect, integrity, enthusiasm for learning, and authenticity among its students.”

The full text of the issue paper is available on CAPE’s Web site at: <<http://www.capenet.org/pubpol.html>>.

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influence,” he said. “Stay engaged. Stay in the fight.”

Big Eight

Both Kline and Kildee and their top aides are participating in the “big eight” discussions on ESEA, involving the chairs and ranking members of the four House and Senate committees and subcommittees with jurisdiction over education. Other big eight members include Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Michael B. Enzi (R-WY), chair and ranking member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee; Senators Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chair and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Children and Families; Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chair of the Education and Labor Committee; and Michael N. Castle (R-DE), senior Republican on Rep. Kildee’s subcommittee.

CAPE’s Capitol Hill briefings also included

presentations by chief education aides for key members of Congress. On the ESEA reauthorization issue, they had somewhat similar messages. Jason Unger, education policy director for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), said his boss has been supportive of equitable participation provisions in current law and would want to see them maintained. Lindsay Hunsicker, senior education policy advisor to Senator Enzi, also expressed support for equitability provisions. Katherine Haley, top education policy advisor to House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH), said the leader’s office will be pressing to make sure the private school community has equitable access to programs that may be

consolidated under the reauthorization. And David Cleary, chief education aide to Senator Alexander, expressed strong support for having the private school community included in the new competitive grant programs that the Obama administration is proposing for ESEA.



Rep. John Kline

Commissioner Urges Schools to Participate in NAEP

The acting commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) invited the private school community to cooperate more fully in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and to engage in a dialogue about how private schools might participate in new state-level data-collection efforts without compromising their principles and independence.

Speaking last month at a meeting of private school leaders that CAPE cosponsored in Washington, DC, Stuart Kerachsky, who heads the principal federal entity that collects and analyzes education data in the United States, reviewed a range of the agency's data-collection projects that extend to religious and independent schools. Major projects include the Private School Survey (PSS), which collects comprehensive data on the total number of private schools, teachers, and students in the country; the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, which will follow ninth graders through high school, college, and early careers; and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies program. "The collection of full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States would not be possible without the inclusion of the private schools in all of our data collection," Kerachsky said.

NAEP

Turning to NAEP, the commissioner said federal law requires NCES to conduct the assessment of student academic achievement in both public and private schools. He reviewed the painstaking measures taken to ensure that NAEP is "a definitive, objective tap on the quality of education in the country." In 2011 NCES hopes to report up to four categories of private school performance: Catholic, Lutheran, Conservative Christian, and other private schools. It has been working on bolstering private school participation rates through a variety

of initiatives, including outreach to the private school community, training workshops and conferences for association representatives, and the solicitation of endorsement letters from state and national leaders. Kerachsky said NCES is committed to taking additional steps—such as providing newsletter articles or distributing informational materials—to shore up private school involvement in NAEP.



Stuart Kerachsky, acting commissioner of NCES, addresses private school leaders in Washington, DC, March 15.

identify problem areas and find practices that promote success. Kerachsky acknowledged the reservations that private school officials might have about participating in such data systems, but suggested the concerns could be addressed and that there might be value in private schools harnessing the power of the data as a tool for improving student performance. He called for a continuation of dialogue on this issue.

State Data Collection

The commissioner discussed growing efforts to establish statewide educational data systems in order to track student progress and to link achievement with various educational experiences. The idea behind these efforts is that having more data and being able to measure changes over time will help

NAEP Reading 2009 Average Scores by Type of School

Grade	Public Schools	Private Schools
Fourth Grade	220	235
Eighth Grade	262	282

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

and independent schools showed a substantial performance advantage over students in public schools. According to the report, "In 2009, the average reading score for fourth-graders attending public schools was 15 points lower than the overall score for students attending private schools." Private school fourth-graders had a mean score of 235, compared to 220 for public school students. At eight grade, the private school student advantage grew to 20 points (282 to 262). Ten points on the 500-point reading scale represent about one full grade level.

NAEP Results

About a week after the commissioner met with private school leaders, NCES released NAEP reading results for 2009. Students in religious

Child by Child

"What are we afraid of?" asked Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) during a stirring intervention in the Senate last month on an amendment to extend the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. After movingly recounting stories of several students—Shirley-Ann Tomdio, Carlos Battle, and Sanya Arias—whose lives were changed by the program, Feinstein asked, "Why don't they enable us to see that choice in education is not something that is threatening?"

Sadly, the senator's pleas fell on deaf ears. The amendment, championed by Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), was defeated 55 to 42, ensuring that future students would be shut out of the program and all but ensuring that some schools currently enrolling scholarship students would be forced to shutdown for good.

The response to the defeat was swift. Theodore Hesburgh, former president of the University of Notre Dame, wrote the next day in *The Wall Street Journal* that he was once "especially heartened to hear Education Secretary Arne Duncan repeatedly call education the civil rights issue of our generation," and said he "cannot believe that a Democratic administration will let this injustice stand."

Columnist George Will wrote a few days later, "No segregationist politician is blocking schoolhouse doors against DC children; congressional Democrats are." He called Duncan "complicit in strangling the scholarship program."

Perhaps the Obama administration will have a change of heart and find a way to keep the program going. Duncan has said his ambition is someday to transform an entire system of schools rather than save a relatively small number of students. But the two objectives are not at odds, as should be evident to a person whose first exposure to education reform was helping his mother change lives in an after-school tutoring program—one child at a time.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ While the White House, Congress, and the Education Department have abandoned the successful school choice program in Washington, DC, the Illinois Senate, where President Obama once served and which Democrats control by a 37-22 margin, has taken a totally different approach to school choice. By a vote of 33 to 20, it approved a bill last month to create a school voucher program for students in Chicago's public schools, which Education Secretary Arne Duncan once led.

Sponsored by Rev. Sen. James Meeks, Senate Bill 2494 would create a pilot voucher program for children attending the lowest performing public schools in the city. Meeks said the bill would help students "escape the dismal realities of Chicago's public schools."

"This is a huge step forward for school choice, for Illinois, and, most important, for families in need of educational change," said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Foundation for Educational Choice. "Illinois lawmakers proved they have the courage to give Chicago's residents an opportunity to escape poorly performing schools. We are happy to be involved with this effort." The foundation is the continuation of the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

"Thanks to Rev. Sen. Meeks and other leaders in the Senate, Illinois could be the next state to bring safer, quality schooling options to its families in need," said Collin Hitt, director of education policy for the Illinois Policy Institute.

★ School choice is gaining ground in other states as well. During a meeting last month of state CAPE representatives, Maryland CAPE leader Rabbi Ariel Sadwin, from Agudath Israel of America, reported on progress being made with the BOAST Maryland Tax Credit (SB 385/HB 946), which would provide businesses with a state income tax credit for donations to organizations that support students and teachers in religious, independent, and public schools. The bill passed the Senate March 17 by a vote of 30 to 17.

New Jersey CAPE leader Rabbi Josh Pruzansky, also from Agudath Israel of America, provided an update on promising school choice developments in the Garden State, and a week after his report, State Sen. Raymond Lesniak (D) and Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R) introduced the Opportunity in Education Scholarship Act, which would provide tax credits to corporations that donate to scholarship funds to provide low-income students in persistently failing public schools the chance to attend religious and independent schools. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie supports the legislation.

★ Meanwhile in Florida, thousands of parents and students came to Tallahassee last month to rally in support of the Florida Scholarship Tax Credit Program. While they were there, the Senate passed a bill to expand the program.

According to information released by the office of Governor Charlie Crist, "In

the 2008-09 fiscal year, \$88.6 million in scholarships were awarded to nearly 25,000 students enrolled in more than 1,000 participating Florida private schools, which was an enrollment increase of more than 15 percent from the previous school year." The state estimates that the program saves taxpayers \$39 million a year.

Governor Crist addressed the rally, saying the program "provides parents an invaluable opportunity to choose a learning environment that gives their children the best chance for success." He added, "Nothing is more important to Florida's future than the talent and knowledge of tomorrow's leaders."

The bill, sponsored by Senator Joe Negron, enjoyed bipartisan support and passed by an overwhelming 27-11 vote. It would raise the annual state allocation for the program, increase the value of the vouchers, and bump up the income eligibility levels for voucher recipients.

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