

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Secretary Spellings Meets with Private School Leaders

With a solid command of the issues, an engaging presence, and a down-to-earth demeanor, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings held her first meeting with representatives from CAPE and in the process generated an abundance of respect and good will. The meeting on March 14 provided the secretary and private school leaders a valuable opportunity to establish a working relationship and discuss issues of common concern.

Secretary Spellings, known for her focus on essentials, used the forum to communicate her respect for the role played by private schools in American education and

to encourage those schools to serve as providers of supplemental services to children in poor-performing public schools. Attributing the success of private schools to the high expectations they have for students, Spellings told the group, "You truly are leaving no child behind."

A principal architect of the administration's accountability and standards approach to school reform, Spellings proclaimed her support for performance-based assessment. "In God we trust; all others bring data," she said.

Topics of conversation that CAPE brought to the table centered on three themes: choice, accountability, and equitable participation in federal programs. Dan Vander Ark, executive director of Christian Schools International and president of CAPE, chaired the meeting, presented some indicators of private school

success, and invited the secretary to visit private schools, which she enthusiastically agreed to do.

School Choice

Ken Smitherman, president of the Association of Christian Schools International and vice president of CAPE, acknowledged the accomplishments of the Bush administration in the arena of school choice and urged the secretary to continue to lead the charge for choice. Adding a sense of urgency to that call, Michael Guerra, president of the National Catholic Educational Association and CAPE's treasurer,

recounted the closings in recent years of hundreds of private schools in central cities, affecting hundreds of thousands of students. Guerra called those schools "civic assets" and described their demise as a loss for the communities, cities, and country they served.

Spellings pledged to use her bully pulpit to promote the president's school choice initiatives. She reminded the group of the "aggressive choice agenda" advanced and realized by the Bush administration—the D.C. voucher program being the most notable example—and said no other administration has promoted school choice so successfully. Referring to the president's budget proposal for \$50 million for a Choice Incentive Fund, she said success for such initiatives starts at the local level with grassroots support. The fund, according to the Department of

Education's 2006 budget summary, would "provide the parents of students who attend low-performing schools with expanded opportunities for transferring their children to higher-performing public, charter, or private schools." Similar to the opportunity scholarship program in the District of Columbia, the program would only apply to states and school districts willing to participate.

Accountability

Patrick Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools, described the multiple accountability mechanisms at work in private schools, which include but go beyond standardized assessments. He said that although private schools test students regularly using national standardized tests like the SATs, CTPs, and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, one of the real measures of accountability is "how our graduates succeed at the next level of schooling and in the workplace." He noted that "mountains of evidence," including studies by the federal government, demonstrate above-average levels of performance and dramatically higher college-going and college-completion rates for private school students.

One of the reasons private schools succeed, Bassett explained, is that "they are not burdened with onerous regulations and government testing and so have the freedom to teach what and how their mission dictates they should." And while private schools comply with applicable government regulations, for example in the area of health and safety, Bassett noted court determinations that such rules should never be so extensive as to dismantle the distinction between public and private schools.

Bassett listed the various entities that hold private schools accountable, including boards of trustees, membership asso-



Education Secretary Margaret Spellings at a meeting with CAPE officials. (USDE photo)

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CAPE

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
Executive Director: Joe McTighe

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White House Officials Brief CAPE Group

CAPE's board and state representatives were treated to an up-close look at White House policy last month by some of the top officials responsible for developing, implementing, and explaining it. During a parade of distinguished presenters in the historic Indian Treaty Room on March 15, the CAPE group learned about the president's faith-based initiative and the first lady's youth outreach project. But perhaps more important, they got a glimpse of the personalities and values that help drive the White House agenda.

Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, explained that the president's faith-based program is about giving people choice and ensuring that the religious perspective has a place in the public square. Time and again, Towey has had to assure audiences that the agenda is not to favor one religion over another, or even religion over non-religion, but to prevent discrimination against religious organizations when it comes to accessing government grants. The rules for such access are clear: organizations cannot use government money for religious activities and cannot discriminate on the basis of religion in delivering services.

Towey reviewed a recent court decision supporting the administration's position. On March 8, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that AmeriCorps grant recipients could teach in religious schools without violating the First Amendment. The court said the participants could not teach religion while being paid by the government, but could do so on their own time. The day the decision was handed down, Towey called it "a key victory" for the administration, and "an extraordinary victory for the poor children who are served in these programs."

To illustrate how faith-based initiatives expand individual choice, Towey turned to an example not of school choice, but prison choice. A faith-based prison in Florida, which has a waiting list of inmates from other prisons trying to transfer in, uses religion as a component of rehabilitation and, by doing so, hopes to reduce the recidivism rate. During a visit to the prison, Towey spoke with the mother of an inmate, who

showed new hope about her son's future.

Towey believes that faith-based institutions engender values that can help counter some of society's destructive "cultural currents." His approach to public policy has roots in idealism and pragmatism. He once worked for Mother Teresa, and his life continues to be motivated by her example and words (e.g., "It isn't how much you do, but how much love you put into the doing."). But he also wants to see programs that work—that effectively change people's lives, produce results, and make a difference.



Jim Towey

One of the challenges facing the president's faith-based agenda is getting Congress to support legislation allowing religious organizations that participate in federal programs to retain their religious identity when they hire workers. Allowing participating organizations to employ co-religionists is one of the provisions in the president's charitable choice legislation. In a speech on March 1 highlighting his faith-based initiatives, President Bush said Washington has to understand that "one of the key reasons why many faith-based groups are so effective is a commitment to serve that is

grounded in the shared values and religious identity of their volunteers and employees."

Helping America's Youth

Sonya Medina, acting director of projects and policy for First Lady Laura Bush, provided the CAPE group an overview of President and Mrs. Bush's Helping America's Youth initiative, aimed at generating public awareness of, and solutions for, the problems facing young people who engage in destructive behaviors such as drug use, violence, crime, and early sexual activity.

A centerpiece of the program will be a conference at the White House this fall, at which the first lady will bring together researchers, policy experts, faith-based providers, educators, and parents to discuss existing successful programs and to generate new approaches for putting at-risk children on the path toward success. At the conference, the first lady will introduce the "Community Guide to Helping America's Youth," which, according to the White House, "will be designed to help



Sonya Medina

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communities identify the challenges they face and take specific steps to improve the lives of boys and girls living in their areas.”

Ms. Medina reported that in recent weeks the first lady had visited various venues to learn about successful programs and to spotlight the issue of at-risk youth. On March 9 at a school in Atlanta, Georgia, Mrs. Bush said the new initiative will encourage action in families, schools, and communities and will “highlight the importance in every child’s life of a caring adult, whether that’s a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a coach, a pastor, or a mentor.”

Ms. Medina described some of the effective programs the first lady has come across in her travels. In Baltimore, educators are teaching children proper behavior using the Good Behavior Game, and in northwest Philadelphia a Boys and Girls Club conducts a program called Passport to Manhood, in which boys age 8-16



Tim Goeglein

discuss and develop the character traits needed to become responsible men.

Mrs. Bush summed up the thinking behind the Helping America’s Youth program during one of her recent speeches on the topic when she said, “Each of us has the power to make the difference in the life of a child.”

Character Education

Rounding out CAPE’s briefing at the White House was a presentation by Tim Goeglein, deputy director of the Office of Public Liaison. Mr. Goeglein offered some philosophical reflections on challenges facing

educators and parents who want to convey core moral values to children in an era where so many forces, such as the breakup of the family, seem to undermine such values. Citing data and anecdotes that suggest a rise in self-indulgent behavior, Goeglein proposed that the principal purpose of education is to develop character and a solid moral compass. He recognized the role played by private schools in doing that.

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ciations, accrediting bodies, local communities, and graduates. But families have a privileged place in holding private schools accountable. “Private schools are like businesses,” said Bassett, “in that they are held to a daily accountability by their families. If private schools don’t serve their clients well, they fail. This is accountability in its truest sense: immediate, decisive, and real.”

Bassett said the government has directly recognized the value of schools being free of regulatory burdens by creating charter schools. He said he hoped that “the government will continue to recognize the benefits that our private school freedoms bring to our students, to our schools themselves, and to our schools in their public purpose. Not only are private schools ‘good for kids and good for families,’ but also they are ‘good for America.’”

Equitable Participation

Joe McTighe, CAPE’s executive director, took up the topic of equitable participation of private school students in federal programs. Acknowledging differences within the private school community about whether or not to participate in federal programs, McTighe said there was, however, unanimous agreement on this point: “Federal programs that benefit public school students and teachers should offer equal benefits to comparably situated private school students and teachers.” He said that

principle has been part of much of federal education law since the mid-1960s.

During his remarks, McTighe said that, despite some notable exceptions like Title I and IDEA, recent trends in federal spending and proposed spending have been in the direction away from some programs that private schools have participated in for years (e.g., Title V, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, and EdTech) and toward programs that do not provide equitable services. He said that given the value of these traditional programs, especially in schools with scarce resources, the shift in funds was causing considerable concern within the private school community. He urged that some way be found to ensure equitable participation or comparable assistance for students in those private schools that want to participate in federal programs.

On the issue of accountability for federal resources, McTighe said the private school community is not opposed to mechanisms that ensure federal dollars are well spent. He noted, for example, that Title I teachers in private schools, who are public school employees, take baseline data and measure student progress. But the private school community is opposed “to regulations that would destroy the distinctiveness of private schools” or destroy the ability of those schools to fulfill their unique missions. Picking up on Pat Bassett’s point, he said “Our independence and freedom help make us good for students, good for families, and good for America.”

Bolick at CAPE

What do these ten states—Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin—have in common? According to Clint Bolick, president and general counsel of the Alliance for School Choice, they are all “actively in play” with pending school choice legislation. Monitoring such legislation and encouraging its passage are part of what the Alliance does.

Bolick, who met with CAPE’s board and state representatives March 15, outlined several ambitious projects of the Alliance.

Voucher remedy litigation is one of them. Bolick explained that a number of tax-equity lawsuits have been filed in various states, which seek as a remedy additional state money for failing school districts. That remedy, as Bolick sees it, is like asking the government to give car manufacturers millions of dollars to build a better car when a consumer successfully shows he has bought a lemon. The typical remedy in such a suit is to give the consumer his money back so he can purchase another vehicle. A money-back remedy is what the Alliance would like to see when parents sue over faulty education.

Another Alliance activity is to convene a series of task forces around choice-related topics. One of those task forces has tackled the issue of accountability. The Alliance is trying to develop balanced legislation that protects private school autonomy while ensuring financial accountability and academic results.

Bolick reminded the CAPE group that this year the country commemorates the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education II* decision, rendered to implement the original *Brown* decision “with all deliberate speed.” Bolick said, “The most sacred moral imperative of our nation is to deliver on that promise.”

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Facts About Private Schools:** Private high school students have “a more positive perception of their school environment” than public school students, according to a government report released last month. *A Profile of the American High School Sophomore in 2002*, published by the National Center for Education Statistics as part of the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002, shows that private high school sophomores are more likely than their counterparts in public schools to report “good quality teaching, teacher interest in students, or that students and teachers [get] along well.” The following items are excerpts from the report:

- Some 80 percent of public school sophomores reported good quality teaching in their schools, compared to 91 percent of Catholic and 90 percent of other private school sophomores.

- When asked whether teachers were interested in students, 73 percent of public school sophomores agreed, compared to 86 percent of Catholic and 88 percent of other private school sophomores.

- Some 73 percent of public school sophomores indicated that students and teachers got along well with each other in their schools, compared to 86 percent of Catholic and 87 percent of other private school sophomores.

★ Parents looking for help in deciding where to send their children to school can get step-by-step assistance in a new tool

published by the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education. *Choosing a School for Your Child* walks parents through the process of deciding what school offers the best combination of philosophy, curriculum, academic performance, discipline, safety, teachers, culture, and other factors that determine whether a school is a good match for a particular child.

The book covers the panoply of options available to parents, including public schools, private schools, and homeschools. The nonpublic school section offers this advice to parents: “In addition to public schools, there may be a variety of religious and other nonpublic schools available in your area or boarding schools away from home. These schools of choice have been part of the fabric of American education since colonial days. These schools have been established to meet the demand to support parents’ differing beliefs about how their children should be educated.”

The publication’s value is not limited to parents. Administrators might want to see how their school measures up to the various criteria suggested in the book. They might also want to provide copies to parents of prospective enrollees to help walk them through the selection process.

Choosing a School for Your Child may be ordered at <<http://www.edpubs.org/webstore/content/search.asp>>. The publication ID is EU 0121P. An online version will be available soon at <[\[www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose\]\(http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose\)>.](http://</p></div><div data-bbox=)

★ The Arizona legislature last month approved a corporate tax credit for contributions to private school scholarship programs, but Gov. Janet Napolitano vetoed the legislation as part of a package of state budget bills she rejected. There is still hope that the measure may be part of a final budget agreement worked out by the governor and the legislature.

The bill would have provided corporations up to \$10,000 annually in tax credits, with the total amount of statewide credits capped at \$10 million in FY 2006 and progressing up to \$55 million in FY 2015. A recipient school tuition organization (STO) could grant scholarships up to \$4,200 for grades K-8 and \$5,500 for grades 9-12 in 2006, with the limit increased by \$100 each year thereafter.

★ **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, including expanding and invigorating the State CAPE Network. 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 the “Support” page on our Web site, where you can make a contribution. Your gift will help CAPE be an even more effective voice for private education. Thank you.