Arizona Makes Every Child Eligible for ESAs, but Program Caps Remain

By Harry Painter

The U.S. Supreme Court sided with a family that sued its local school district.

In the suit, the family alleged the child wasn’t receiving a quality education at his local public school.

Endrew F. attended by their son Endrew, who was diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and autism and had received an individualized education plan (IEP), was not providing him an adequate education.

Endrew’s parents transferred him to a private school, where he made better school tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona established the nation’s first ESA program in 2011 with its Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA). ESAs were initially only for children with special needs, but eligibility was expanded to include other students, including children living on Indian reservations and those with a parent in the armed forces. Approximtely: Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona established the nation’s first ESA program in 2011 with its Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA). ESAs were initially only for children with special needs, but eligibility was expanded to include other students, including children living on Indian reservations and those with a parent in the armed forces. Approximtely: Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona established the nation’s first ESA program in 2011 with its Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA). ESAs were initially only for children with special needs, but eligibility was expanded to include other students, including children living on Indian reservations and those with a parent in the armed forces. Approximtely: Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.

Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

By Teresa Mull

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed into law a bill expanding the state’s education savings account (ESA) program to make all schoolchildren in the state eligible to receive an ESA after a multyear phase-in period, though the number of children allowed to participate in the program will remain capped.

An ESA grants parents access to all or a portion of the funding allocated for their child’s public school education, to use on educational alternatives such as private tuition, learning therapies, tutoring, or home-schooling textbooks.

Arizona has a long history of educational innovation and choice, with its first ESA program established in 2011. The new law builds on that tradition by extending eligibility to all schoolchildren, but it also includes important safeguards to ensure that the program remains sustainable and affordable.
Turning Point USA’s Young Women’s Leadership Summit is a 4-day conference for young, conservative women. The 2017 YWLS will take place from June 15-18, 2017 in Dallas, TX. TPUSA will invite 750-1,000 young women between the ages of 16 and 24 to attend.

Throughout the Summit, attendees will hear from some of the nation’s most well-known conservative leaders and activists, receive first-class professional development and leadership training, and network with other attendees and organizations from all across the country.

REGISTER AT www.tpusa.com/YWLS

From Top Left to Right: Kellyanne Conway, Wayne LaPierre, Susan LaPierre, Antonia Okafor, Kimberly Corban, Tomi Lahren

Learn more and apply for an invitation at www.tpusa.com/YWLS. The deadline to apply is May 25, 2017.

Please visit www.ywls.org for an updated agenda and list of confirmed speakers.
Tennessee Legislator Introduces School Voucher Bill for 12th Consecutive Year

By Elizabeth BeShears

A Tennessee senator has for the 12th year in a row introduced legislation to bring school vouchers to his state.

Tennessee currently has one school choice program, an education savings account that grants parents of special-needs students with an Individualized Education Account access to a portion of the money allocated for their child’s public education, to use on educational alternatives.

State Sen. Brian Kelsey (R-Germantown) introduced the Opportunity Scholarship Pilot Program (Senate Bill 161) in January. The bill, which passed out of the House Education Administration and Planning Subcommittee in March, would institute a private school voucher pilot program in Shelby County, which includes Memphis.

Beginning in the 2018–19 school year, low-income students enrolled in the bottom 5 percent of public schools, determined on the basis of academic performance, who qualified for free and reduced-price lunches would be eligible for vouchers. The program would be evaluated for five years to determine whether it’s successful.

SB 161 has been referred to the Government Operations Committee, where, as of press time, it remained under consideration.

‘A Lot of Momentum’

Kelsey says he’s optimistic about the bill’s prospects in the current session.

“I’m highly encouraged that this year all 14 legislators who have voted on the bill [in committee] have voted yes, so that’s thrilling,” Kelsey said. “So far, we have a lot of momentum, and I feel like this is the year the bill will finally pass the House. The House sponsor this year is the chairman of the Education Committee, and that has helped tremendously as he’s lent his expertise on this subject. I am cautiously optimistic that this will be the year.”

Kelsey says this year’s bill represents a new approach.

“This has never been proposed as a pilot program before,” Kelsey said. “The state House has been reluctant to pass the legislation, so this year we’re just going for a pilot program. It’s time once and for all to figure out if this program works, and I think this pilot program will show that school choice can and will have a positive influence on children’s lives.”

Rural Superintendents’ Influence

Kelsey says he narrowed the scope of the bill this year because school superintendents in rural districts have pressured legislators to fight choice.

“I think that rural school superintendents have done a disservice to the state by trying to stop our urban areas from getting access to school choice,” Kelsey said. “Those rural superintendents have been quite influential, especially over rural, Republican House members, and that’s quite a shame. For a lot of rural House members, the largest employer in their district is the school system, so the opposition of their school superintendent obviously weighs heavily on their decision-making, even though it’s not good for moving forward all the students in the state, especially those students in the urban areas.”

Pressing for ESAs

Lindsay Boyd, director of policy at the Beacon Center of Tennessee, says Kelsey’s voucher proposal and believe that a voucher program and an ESA program can coexist and complement each other fairly well in Tennessee.

“We’re hoping that many or all of the bills that are out there will pass, and we’ll be doing what we can to ensure that each bill has the best chance of making it to the House and Senate floors,” Boyd said.

Boyd says the Beacon Center favors universal ESAs for which all K–12 Tennessee students would be eligible.

“You have these various approaches out there now that are giving legislators the opportunity to really think about the issue and where they really stand,” Boyd said. “Do they think it’s the right of every child and every family to chart their educational path, or do they think it should be limited to just a few students who are dealing with unique needs or struggling in low-income families or attending a failing school?”

Elizabeth BeShears (liz.erb@gmail.com) writes from Trussville, Alabama. 
Public Schools Must Raise Standards for Disabled Students, SCOTUS Rules

Continued from page 1

progress, they said. Endrew’s parents sued the district to reimburse them for the tuition for Endrew’s new school.

The Supreme Court’s unanimous decision, issued in March, overruled the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals’ ruling against Endrew’s family in 2015.

“The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, guarantees a ‘free appropriate public education’ to all students with disabilities,” the Highlands Ranch Herald reported in March. “The court decision expands the definition of what ‘appropriate’ means.”

“When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all,” wrote Chief Justice John G. Roberts in the Court’s Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District opinion. “For children with disabilities, receiving instruction that aims so low would be tantamount to sitting idly … awaiting the time when they were old enough to ‘drop out.’”

‘Very Little Concrete Guidance’
Tim Keller, managing attorney of the Arizona office for the Institute for Justice, says the Court’s decision is open to interpretation.

“The decision provides very little concrete guidance to either public school districts, IEP teams, or lower courts,” Keller said.

Nancy Reder, deputy state director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, says she is glad the Court didn’t go further in defining guidelines for schools.

“We did not want the Supreme Court to define a standard, and they did not do that,” said Reder.

“The first word [in IEP] is ‘individualized,’” Reder said. “Even if [students] have the same label, their needs are different.”

Although the Court did not define an “appropriate” education under IDEA, it made it clear a de minimis standard is less than what the law requires, says Keller.

“The Court correctly rejected the notion that, under IDEA, school districts need only provide educational benefits to children with disabilities that are barely a step above babysitting,” Keller said.

Says School Choice Is the Answer
Increasing parents’ choices of where to send their children to school in the first place is a much simpler solution, Keller says.

“The best way to truly protect the rights of students with disabilities is to empower them with educational choice,” Keller said.

Keller says choice programs give parents a direct solution “without any adversarial processes.”

Harry Painter (harrypainter@gmail.com) writes from Brooklyn, New York.

California Private School Makes Millions from Snapchat Investment

By Michael McGrady

A private California high school made millions of dollars by selling some of its shares in Snapchat, a popular smart phone app.

St. Francis High School, a Roman Catholic school in Mountain View, California, invested $15,000 in Snap Inc. in 2012 at the recommendation of a parent. When Snapchat went public in March, St. Francis sold two-thirds of its shares and made about $24 million.

In a letter to parents of St. Francis students, who pay on average $17,000 per year to attend the school, administrators said the money would go toward financial aid, professional development, teacher training, and funding of school programs.

‘Creative, Innovative Approaches’
Terry Stoops, director of research and education studies at the John Locke Foundation, says without government, schools are free to innovate.

“When government is not the sole financier of an educational institution, school leaders can focus on new and creative ways to build capacity,” Stoops said. “Otherwise, they would spend much of their time, as public schools do, saying that cruel politicians and taxpayers don’t provide adequate funding. As we know, the definition of ‘adequate’ means ‘never enough.’”

“In general, this story is an excellent example of the creative and innovative approaches for those outside the government school sector,” Stoops said. “The long-term viability of their institution is tied to the strength of their endowment.”

Corey DeAngelis, a distinguished doctoral fellow at the University of Arkansas, says government schools lack the incentives necessary for achieving such success.

“Even if, for some reason, it were legal to invest like this in the public system of schooling, and they put $15,000 in and made $20 million, you can’t expect the same result,” DeAngelis said. “It is not necessarily true that [public schools would spend] the $20 million they made efficiently.”

Michael McGrady (mmcgrady@uccs.edu) writes from Colorado Springs, Colorado.
Texas ESAs Would Increase Teacher Pay, Study Finds

By Ashley Bateman

 teachers in Texas would receive substantial pay increases if the state were to enact legislation establishing education savings accounts (ESAs), a study found.

ESAs grant parents access to a portion of the money allocated for their child’s public education to use on educational alternatives, such as private school tuition, homeschooling textbooks, tutoring, and learning therapies.

Texas currently has no education choice programs. The Texas Senate voted in late March to approve Senate Bill 3, legislation to establish ESAs and a tax-credit scholarship program. In April, the House blocked SB 3 by approving an amendment to the Senate budget to prohibit public funds from “[paying for or supporting] a school voucher, education savings account, or tax credit scholarship program, or a similar program through which a child may use state money for nonpublic education.”

Teacher Pay Could Increase

According to the study, titled “The Effects of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) on Teacher Pay in Texas,” “Our estimates of the effects of education freedom through education savings accounts (ESAs) in its inaugural year in Texas indicate that teacher pay could substantially increase, with some teachers receiving as much as $28,000 more per year.”

The study was published in March by the Texas Public Policy Foundation. “Advancing education freedom through ESAs will affect teacher pay primarily by: 1) Influencing budgets of public school districts and private schools, and 2) Increasing competition in teacher labor markets while perhaps reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies,” the study states.

Student and Teacher Benefits

Study coauthor Vance Ginn, an economist at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, says even teachers unions should support ESAs.

“There’s been a lot of talk that says ESAs will take money away from public schools and this will hurt teacher pay over time,” Ginn said. “[Study co-author] John Merrifield has been working on this issue for years and developed the school choice fiscal calculator so we can look at a state’s data, put that data in the calculator, and based off historical trends with that data, we can see what we would expect to happen if we put [an] … ESA program in place in Texas in the 2017–18 school year.

“We saw [teacher pay] was something that’s been missing in this research, so we said, let’s study that,” Ginn said. “From a policy and political economy standpoint, teacher unions are fighting school choice the most. There’s a gap in the research, and if you can show teachers who are fighting against this that teachers will benefit from this program, it is more palatable to them. There would be money following the students and benefitting teachers in the process.”

‘More Negotiating Power’

Ginn says competition could have a huge, positive impact on schools and their employees.

“Allowing the opening up of that marketplace would give [teachers] more negotiating power and power to negotiate these higher wages,” Ginn said. “Those individuals taking ESA dollars and going to a private school market could increase the revenue to private schools by $1.6 billion. The average public school teacher salary is $51,000. The average private school salary is $41,000. Once you allow for the market to open up, these two salaries would converge.”

‘Teachers Matter a Lot’

Martin Lueken, director of fiscal policy and analysis at EdChoice, says with more freedom, schools could attract higher-quality teachers.

“We know that school quality is dependent on the quality of the workforce,” Lueken said. “Teachers matter a lot. I think that [with] ESAs, by virtue of giving schools more freedom and discretion in realigning incentives, schools, especially public schools, may be spurred to rethink how they operate or do some things, such as compensate and hire their teachers. I think school choice can be a mechanism to get to that point.”

Public School Benefits

Like public school educators, public schools would benefit by ESAs, Ginn says.

“A lot of maintenance and operation dollars stay at the public school,” Ginn said. “They no longer have the cost but still keep some [funding] in spite of no longer having to serve the students.”

Lueken says school choice can provide much-needed options.

“It’s important to acknowledge that school choice mechanisms are a necessary part of the answer and solution to a lot of the challenges that we face in K–12 education and a way to free up resources and provide flexibility for local officials on how they control how they use their resources,” Lueken said.

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
Arizona Makes Every Child Eligible for Education Savings Accounts, but Program Caps Remain

Continued from page 1

mately 3,300 students participated in the program during the 2016–17 school year.

Phase-In, Participation Cap
Ducey signed Senate Bill 1431 into law in April. SB 1431 “is not as expansive as the original proposal, which would have allowed all 1.1 million public-school students to use the program by 2021,” AZCentral.com reported in April. “Instead, the legislation will allow within several years all students to apply for the program, but limits the number who could become eligible. An estimated 5,500 additional students would be allowed to sign up each year, but no more than about 30,000 could sign up by 2022.”

SB 1431 will grant parents access to 90 to 100 percent of the money allocated for their child’s public education, depending on family income, with the average ESA being worth $4,400 per year.

U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, an outspoken supporter of education choice, tweeted the passage of SB 1431 is a “[b]ig win for students and parents in Arizona.”

‘Still Have Very Strict Limits’
Drew Catt, director of state research and policy analysis at EdChoice, says Arizona’s ESA expansion is a good start but leaves much room for improvement.

“It is wonderful that the state realizes more students should be eligible for the program,” Catt said. “Here at EdChoice, we believe all K–12 students should have the ability not only to choose the learning environment that is best for them but also be able to have the funds to make that choice become a reality.

“While [SB 1431 does] expand the eligibility pool, [the state] still has very strict limits on the number of students who can actually use the program,” Catt said. “Currently, there is a 0.5 percent of the prior year public school’s enrollment cap on the number of new participants. For example, there are currently a little more than 3,500 students participating in the program; however, there can only be an additional 5,000 to 6,000 new students participating over the next few years.”

Phase-In to Quell Fears?
Jonathan Butcher, education director for the Goldwater Institute, says the gradual expansion of the ESA program will prevent the mass exodus many public school supporters fear.

 “[The bill] does two things,” Butcher said. “It expands access to the program, but it also phases the program in so that the fears that traditional opponents of education savings accounts have often, [that] public schools will be bankrupt because kids will leave in droves and take money from the public schools, [will be reduced]. This sets it up so that the program kind of paces itself with its own expansion, and so it takes care of that concern.”

Butcher says he’s optimistic the cap will disappear after a few years as more parents realize the value of ESAs.

“If ESAs do as they have been doing, and that is serving the needs of the families using them, [then] there will be families calling for greater access to them, if, for some reason, they don’t fit under the cap,” Butcher said. “I would hope that the accounts would be working so well for the families who use them that other families would say, ‘We want access to this as well.’”

Parents ‘Overwhelmingly Supportive’
Catt says parents across the country recognize the worth of ESAs.

“Through all of our polling work that we’ve done at the national level, and especially at the state level, parents are overwhelmingly supportive and in favor of not just vouchers and tax-credit scholarships but also of ESAs,” Catt said. “They’re usually unfamiliar with them at first, but once they’re given a general description of the program, the favorability jumps even higher.”

Catt says parents love ESAs because they can customize their child’s education.

“ESAs allow parents to pick any type of learning environment for their child, which does include schools, at-home learning, depending on the state, but also tutoring services, and it opens it up for a variety of services that you’re not necessarily going to get at a single brick-and-mortar location,” Catt said. “It does allow you to supplement your child’s current education and see how you can meet that highest level of need for your child. Because you’re their parent, you know what the best fit is for them. You know what they need, and this is a type of program that allows you to make that a possibility.”

‘Laws Can Be Customized’
Butcher says other states should use Arizona’s program as a model they can adapt to suit their political and demographic landscapes.

“These laws can be customized to fit the needs of the states where lawmakers are looking to enact them,” Butcher said. “There are certain things Arizona has done that we’re very proud of that have led the way. There are other states that have taken this idea of flexible education options and been able to make it fit their funding formula and their student population.”

Teresa Mull (tmull@heartland.org) is a research fellow in education policy at The Heartland Institute.

“It is wonderful that the state realizes more students should be eligible for the program. Here at EdChoice, we believe all K–12 students should have the ability not only to choose the learning environment that is best for them but also be able to have the funds to make that choice become a reality.”

DREW CATT
DIRECTOR OF STATE RESEARCH AND POLICY ANALYSIS
EDCHOICE

LEARN MORE
Proposed Mandates Could Force Closing of Independent Schools in Vermont

By Ashley Bateman

The Vermont Board of Education is considering imposing mandates on independent schools that could force many to close.

Vermont has had a “town tuitioning” program since 1869.

“The school voucher program provides educational options for students whose towns do not have public schools,” EdChoice reports. “The sending town pays school tuition directly to the ‘receiving’ school, which can be any public or private, non-religious school in or outside Vermont.”

In the 2016 legislative session, the state Senate’s Education Committee rejected legislation imposing strict requirements on independent (nonpublic) schools. The state Board of Education is currently considering imposing new requirements on schools that receive tuitioning students, including costly special-needs services.

Susan Vigne, cofounder and president of an independent school in Middlebury, told Watchdog.org in February, “The cost of that is so prohibitive to a small school,” said Vigne.

Rather than close, Vigne’s school “would surrender their state-approved status for accepting tuitioning students from school choice towns,” Watchdog reported.

Forced Closures Intentional?

Robert Roper, president of the Ethan Allen Institute, says Vermont’s Board of Education wants independent schools to shut down.

“The gist of what the state board of education is after is to force independent schools that accept taxpayer-funded ‘tuitioning’ students via Vermont’s 150-year-old school choice system to follow many of the same standards and guidelines of public schools,” Roper said. “These include things like hiring only licensed teachers, full financial disclosure to the public, and, most critically, requirements to accept all students regardless of ability or disability who apply, and by lottery if space is not available, and to be certified in all 13 areas of special education. The cost to comply with this last point would drive many small Vermont independent schools out of business, and this is the point.”

Roper says public school advocates feel threatened by independent schools.

“The reason the public education establishment wants these laws is because Vermont has lost about 25,000 K–12 students over the past two decades, which is a loss of roughly 1 percent per year,” Roper said. “The public school folks are trying to drive the independent schools out of business and capture their students.”

Public School Skimming?

Rick Gordon, director of the Compass School in Westminster, says public school advocates are misrepresenting the facts regarding independent schools.

“The special ed part is aimed at skimming,” Gordon said. “The pro-public-school people make the claim that public schools serve all kids, so independent schools taking public funds should serve all categories as well. Again, this is a fairly gross mischaracterization that never gets questioned. Public schools outsource many of the most challenging students, often to independent schools that are designed to serve these students.

“The financial disclosure argument is a red herring about fiscal responsibility,” Gordon said. “I know of no financial malfeasance of independent schools. This, taken with the other provisions, could be construed as efforts simply to undermine independent schools.”

Special-Needs Challenges

Although Compass would embrace the special-education provision, composed of 13 categories, as a general principle, in practice, it cannot work for every single student in a small school, Gordon says.

“Two examples of challenges we would struggle with, as do public schools, are a student with multiple handicaps that require a huge number of services, such as a child with developmental delays and physical health needs for a full-time nurse and limited mobility, and a very loud, disruptive child,” Gordon said. “It is unlikely the public schools would provide adequate funding, nor would this be an efficient way to deliver services that might exist more easily elsewhere.

“We are a small school in a small building,” Gordon said. “Public schools typically shunt these kids off in some wing where they don’t disrupt others too much. We simply don’t have the space to move a child away, and our program is designed to include all kids in every aspect of our school. Having to segregate a kid because of a disability would run counter to our efforts to be inclusive.”

Funding Problems

Gordon says his school would not be able to meet the cost of complying with the proposed regulations.

“Compass operates on a per-pupil cost at least $5,000 below surrounding public schools, maybe more than $7,000 less,” Gordon said. “Over 50 percent of our kids are on free or reduced [price] lunch, and 93 percent receive financial aid. We don’t at all have the funds to meet a lot of new demands.”

With a special educator on staff and more than 20 percent of students identified as having special needs, the school suffers because funding does not always follow the child as it should, Gordon says.

“Although the law says special-education funds should follow publicly funded students, in reality there are times public schools work to alter designs or modify plans so a student will not get special-education funding if going to an independent school,” Gordon said. “We have no way of funding these costs if the money doesn’t follow the student.”

‘Less Attractive Options’

Roper says the proposed rules would seriously constrict Vermont’s education landscape.

“The state Board of Education rules would drive independent schools out of business, creating less diversity and fewer choices for parents and students,” Roper said. “They would leave the remaining schools [with] less attractive options, as they would be handcuffed in their ability to define their own culture and pursue a unique educational mission.”

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
Texas Bill Amended After Unusual Alliance Opposes School Choice Law

By Jenni White

A group of Texas homeschoolers united with public school advocates in the state to oppose a school choice bill.

As introduced, Senate Bill 3 would have allowed parents of children born after September 1, 2012, or who attended a public school for a full year preceding application, to set up an education savings account (ESA) or take part in a tax-credit scholarship. ESAs give parents access to the money allocated for their child’s public education to spend on educational alternatives, such as private school tuition, homeschool textbooks, or tutoring.

‘Different Reasons’ for Opposition

The public education establishment fought SB 3, claiming it would divert funds from public schools and cause public school closures. Some homeschooling families, meanwhile, already practicing their own brand of choice by exiting the public school system altogether, opposed the bill, saying they feared it would lead to unwanted regulation.

Jube Dankworth, treasurer of Texas Home Educators, says her group and the public education advocates united from opposite sides of the choice issue.

“We have very different reasons for fighting this bill,” Dankworth said. “The fact that the legislature is wanting to intrude into and exert legislation over private education, a whole industry that up until now it left alone, is enough to cause people to gather together in this fight.”

‘It’s Very Complicated’

Merrill Hope, a writer for Breitbart Texas who has reported extensively on Texas homeschooling families’ opposition to school choice initiatives, says many homeschool parents just want to be left alone.

“It’s very complicated,” Hope said. “Nothing is simple. There are many sides to the story. In Texas, they set up homeschools as non-accredited private schools to avoid the state’s compulsory education laws. That’s what’s protected homeschoolers. While public schools see ESAs as diverting money and collapsing the system, homeschool families are concerned with government interference and government regulations.”

Legislation Amended

SB 3 passed the Texas Senate, with amendments, on March 30.

“The original bill did not require kindergarten or first-grade students to attend public school for the entire preceding academic year before homeschooling,” Hope reported in April at Breitbart.com. “Now it does, and it means existing homeschool families cannot participate.”

Jenni White (jlwplusdmw@gmail.com) writes from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

St. Louis Elementary School Uses Yoga to Address Discipline Problems

By Elizabeth BeShears

A public elementary school in St. Louis, Missouri is using yoga to address student misbehavior.

The St. Louis Public Schools Special Administrative Board approved in April 2016 a new discipline policy forbidding schools from punishing children in preschool through 2nd grade with out-of-school suspensions.

During the 2016–17 school year, Carver Elementary School students practiced “mindfulness yoga” on Fridays, and misbehaving students were sent to a “reflection room” to talk to a counselor about their feelings.

Discipline a ‘Vexing Challenge’

Mike McShane, director of education policy at the Show-Me Institute, says student discipline is a complex issue, and innovation should be encouraged.

“I think that student discipline is one of the most vexing challenges that teachers and school administrators face, and I don’t think that there’s necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution,” McShane said. “So, we see some charter schools that are known to have very rigid discipline—no excuses schools—but you also see some schools that have very lax, freeform systems, like Montessori schools or Waldorf schools, where students have a lot more freedom to do stuff. When I see a school trying something new or experimenting, I tend to think, ‘More power to them. Give it a shot, and let’s see how it works.’”

‘Probably No One Best Way’

McShane says, like education itself, choice of classroom discipline policy should be left up to parents.

“In many ways, it’s the same animating force as school choice, which is to say that there’s probably no one best way to do this,” McShane said. “We need to experiment and try different stuff to see what happens. One of the things that makes school choice a superior way of dealing with this is that students are able to actively choose their environment and teachers and administrators all actively, affirmatively choose to participate in that school. Now, unfortunately, doing stuff like this in schools where students might be geographically assigned to attend, they don’t have as much say. Maybe that child wouldn’t thrive in that particular environment, and if they had the choice, they would go somewhere else.”

Discouraging Parent Involvement

Michael Schaus, communications director at the Nevada Policy Research Institute, says the real problem Carver and other public schools face is not involving parents enough in their children’s educations.

“The initial troubles Carver Elementary was facing weren’t a product of too few yoga classes or too few ‘safe spaces’; it was a product of the government’s monopoly on education,” Schaus said. “While it might be nice to see Carver Elementary attempt some sort of innovation, in the end, mindfulness yoga simply isn’t going to be able to address the root of the problem in public education. That’s because at its core, the problem isn’t so-called ‘school climate,’ it’s that the system is designed to distance parents from their child’s education.

“We should be doing the inverse,” Schaus said. “We should be doing everything we can to encourage more parental involvement in their child’s educational career. After all, involved parents are always far better equipped to mentor and coach their children through behavior issues than a bureaucratic school system.”

Choice as Solution

Schaus says giving parents educational choice will do wonders for solving disciplinary and other problems children face.

“The first step should be giving parents more choice when it comes to their child’s education,” Schaus said. “That freedom to choose their children’s educational path will not only facilitate, but it will encourage parents to become more involved. I suspect that most people would be amazed at how much of a difference parents can make when they are given the opportunity.”

Elizabeth BeShears (liz ero@gmail.com) writes from Trussville, Alabama.
Study: New York City Public School Discipline Reform Leads to More Violence

By Kenneth Artz

Reformed disciplinary policies in New York City Public Schools have made school climates worse, a new study has found.

“There has been a dramatic shift in school discipline policy, spurred by national statistics showing stark racial differences in school suspension rates and the assumption that bias was behind the differences,” wrote Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Max Eden in “School Discipline Reform and Disorder: Evidence from New York City Public Schools, 2012–16,” published by the Manhattan Institute in March. “From 2011–12 to 2013–14, the number of suspensions nationwide fell by nearly 20 percent.”

School Violence Increase

“While school climate is impossible to measure in most districts, it can be measured in New York City, America’s largest school district, thanks to surveys that question students and teachers about learning conditions in their school,” Eden wrote. “Over the last five years, two major discipline reforms have taken effect in New York: one at the beginning of the 2012–13 school year, under former mayor Michael Bloomberg; and one in the middle of the 2014–15 school year, under current mayor Bill de Blasio. Though the reforms resulted in similar reductions in total suspensions, Bloomberg’s reform prevented teachers from issuing suspensions for first-time, low-level offenses. De Blasio’s reform required principals to seek permission from district administrators to suspend a student.

“This report analyzes student and teacher surveys covering the five-year period of 2011–12 to 2015–16,” Eden wrote. “The key findings: school climate remained relatively steady under Bloomberg’s discipline reform, but deteriorated rapidly under de Blasio’s. Specifically, teachers report less order and discipline, and students report less mutual respect among their peers, as well as more violence, drug and alcohol use, and gang activity. There was also a significant differential racial impact: nonelementary schools where more than 90 percent of students were minorities experienced the worst shift in school climate under the de Blasio reform.”

Federal Funding Threats

Eden told School Reform News the Obama administration pressured schools to implement these failing reforms.

“The Obama Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights threatened to pull federal funding if school districts didn’t launch discipline reform efforts in the spirit of de Blasio’s reform,” Eden said. “Usually, discipline reformers claim victory whenever suspensions fall, but what truly matters is how schools are affected, and while there’s always clear data on suspension numbers, there’s rarely much data at all on school climate.”

Eden says the evidence shows the reforms had the opposite of their intended effect.

“The data tells us students and teachers believe schools have become less respectful and more violent under de Blasio’s discipline reform,” Eden said. “This is alarming enough in itself, but given this is our only data point, we have to face the prospect this might be happening in hundreds of districts nationwide.”

‘Acting on Ideological Conviction’

Eden says it’s hard to imagine de Blasio reversing course.

“It’s clear he’s acting based on ideological conviction rather than a data-driven examination on the effects of his actions,” Eden said. “I’m more optimistic about the prospects for change in other districts. My hope is once the coercive federal pressure is removed, districts will be able to do discipline reform right.”

Mike Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a research fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and executive editor of Education Next, says the disciplinary reforms have gone too far and are hurting students.

“I am sympathetic to the argument we have been suspending too many students under zero-tolerance policies, which in many cases tied the hands of administrators and made them suspend kids for infractions where this wasn’t necessary and perhaps other approaches might have worked better,” Petrilli said. “But now we’ve gone to the other extreme, and the peers of the disruptive students are paying the price.”

Petrilli says the Trump administration should make it clear the Office for Civil Rights is not going to try to push school districts into changing their school discipline policies the way the Obama administration did.

“I think this would help a lot, otherwise it’s up to people at the state and local level to raise questions about these policies,” Petrilli said. “If school districts feel they are suspending too many students, and they want to try some different things, fine, but they need to make sure they do it without creating more disorder in the classroom.”

Kenneth Artz (kartz@heartland.org) writes from Dallas, Texas.
Wisconsin Schools of Choice Outperform Public Schools, Study Shows

By Jenni White

Private schools participating in Wisconsin’s school choice programs outperform the state's public schools, a new study has found.

In 1990, Wisconsin passed the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), a voucher plan establishing the nation’s first private school choice program. MPCP granted vouchers to approximately 28,000 children from low-income families to attend private schools during the 2016-17 school year. Wisconsin is also home to several other school choice programs, including the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program, a statewide voucher program for low-income students.

According to the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty’s (WILL) study, titled “Apples to Apples: The Definitive Look at School Test Scores in Milwaukee and Wisconsin,” “Private schools in the choice programs and public charter schools in Milwaukee and Wisconsin perform significantly better on the ACT and [Wisconsin’s state assessment] than traditional public schools when a proper apples-to-apples comparison is made. This means, when things like poverty, race, and English language learners are taken into account and properly controlled for, we are finding that student outcomes on test scores are simply better in the private and charter sector as opposed to traditional public schools.

“Private schools in the MPCP significantly outperform traditional Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS),” the study states. “On [Wisconsin’s state assessment], students in the MPCP were approximately 5 percent more likely to be proficient in English/Language Arts and about 4 percent more likely to be proficient in Math. On the ACT, students in the MPCP score, on average, 2.8 points higher than students in traditional public schools.”

Children in charter schools also have higher academic proficiency rates than MPS, the study reported.

‘This Study Is Unique’

Tommy Schultz, national communications director for the American Federation for Children, says WILL’s study is different from others because it shows how school choice affects the neediest children.

“There are many studies and testimonials that illustrate the positive impact of school choice, but this study is unique in its specific breakdown of how this is impacting children from low-income families and closing the achievement gap,” Schultz said.

Will Flanders, WILL’s research director and the study’s author, says the study provided data not previously available.

“Until this year in Wisconsin, we had no data on race and socioeconomic status, but part of the additional reporting requirements for schools last year included these data,” Flanders said.

“We loaded all these data into an econometric regression model and isolated the effect of the school itself, so we controlled for those aspects.”

Religion Matters

The “Apples to Apples” study found students enrolled in private religious schools were 7 percent more likely to be proficient in math and 14 percent more likely to be proficient in English than MPS students.

Flanders says teaching morals plays a role in student success.

“The people who run [religious schools] know how to run them well,” said Flanders. “These schools have the ability to instill moral values, something that is somewhat absent in traditional and nonreligious choice schools. They can actually call to a moral authority in explaining to a kid why they have to behave in class and listen to the teacher.”

Schultz says it’s important religious schools remain a legal option for students using choice programs.

“This is an important reason why religious schools must be one of the options available to parents,” Schultz said. “The U.S. Supreme Court and many state courts have found that these programs are constitutional and do not violate the separation of church and state because the parent, rather than the government, is choosing the school that receives these educational funds.”

Choice ‘Creaming’ Myth

The study found Wisconsin public specialty schools, which cater to gifted students, are not in fact better than traditional MPS schools.

“When schools’ race and socioeconomic status are taken into account, specialty schools perform no better than neighborhood MPS schools and are outperformed significantly by the MPCP average,” the study says. “The reason? MPS’ specialty schools—many of which have admissions policies—are more affluent and ‘white’ than the rest of MPS, MPCP, and charter schools.”

Choice programs are open to up to their enrollment limits. Any relegated to a waiting list must be admitted via lottery. Flanders says this finding on specialty schools is further evidence of the worth of private school choice programs.

“I think one of the biggest counter-arguments we hear on choice is that of ‘creaming the crop,’ taking the best kids from the available population,” Flanders said. “Specialty schools have application procedures and requirements. Wisconsin public schools will hold these up as great performers, but then they cream the crop. These kids are going to have better test scores because [their schools] are taking the best kids.”

Choice ‘Closing the Education Gap’

Shultz says Wisconsin is a microcosm of school choice’s national potential.

“This study shows how school choice is closing the education gap in Wisconsin and illustrates the successes we have seen across the country,” Schultz said. “Having a wide array of educational options directly benefits students and is convincing to legislators who are looking for ways to improve education in an impactful way.”

Flanders says choice programs should be open to more families.

“We have building evidence that charters are working,” Flanders said. “Therefore, we need to get as many students in them as possible. Having 1 percent too high of an income shouldn’t be an impediment to a parent accessing the best educational options for their child.”

Jenni White (jlwplusdmw@gmail.com) writes from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

**LEARN MORE**

Ohio Budget Proposal Requires Teachers Complete ‘Exterships’

By Ashley Bateman

Ohio Gov. John Kasich’s (R) proposed state budget would require teachers to complete an ‘externship’ to have their licenses renewed.

Ohio teachers renew their licenses every five years. Kasich’s proposed budget states, “Beginning September 1, 2018, the state board of education’s rules for the renewal of educator licenses shall require each applicant for renewal of a license to complete an on-site work experience with a local business or chamber of commerce as a condition of renewal. Work experience obtained pursuant to this section shall count toward any required continuing education. Each local professional development committee established under section 3319.22 of the Revised Code shall work with its teachers to identify local work experience opportunities that meet the requirements of this section.”

The governor’s Executive Workforce Board developed the recommendation in response to identified shifts in workforce needs. As of early April, neither the Ohio House nor Senate had voted on their versions of the state budget.

Attention to Business

Ryan Burgess, director of the governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation, says the externship idea is a response to real needs.

“Last fall, the workforce board responded to a challenge the governor put to them with the backdrop of thinking about our economy and workforce, the type and speed of change we’re going to see because of technology, and [how to] come up with ways to train and continually prepare for jobs today and tomorrow,” Burgess said. “About 25 members went back to their local communities, talked to business owners, nonprofits, and educators to locate key workforce challenges.”

The board, comprising representatives from the business community, nonprofit organizations, education institutions, labor establishments, and four state legislators, returned with a series of recommendations, several of which focus on better collaboration between businesses and schools.

“The overarching theme of the report is how do we better align business and education?” Burgess said. “In-demand skills and jobs are changing so quickly. Educators should have greater context when they’re doing career counseling for students for what in-demand skills and jobs are.”

Bursting the ‘Education Bubble’

Michael Andric, assistant principal at Barberton High School in Barberton, Ohio, says programs like the one Kasich is proposing have helped his teachers.

“We have personally seen how teachers have been affected after they have been given the opportunity to visit and speak with local employers in the Barberton community,” Andric said. “From my experience, many teachers have always been in the classroom environment, from K–12 to college, to working in a school. Having the opportunity to go outside of that education bubble and learn about what employers are looking for and what opportunities are available to our students has been a valuable experience for our teachers.”

“Beginning September 1, 2018, the state board of education’s rules for the renewal of educator licenses shall require each applicant for renewal of a license to complete an on-site work experience with a local business or chamber of commerce as a condition of renewal.”

FY 18-19 EXECUTIVE BUDGET - OHIO

“For the past few years, we have been working on and developing what we call our ‘Do Your Job Program,’” Andric said. “In brief, this program is focused on teaching defined employability and soft skills to our students. We created a committee of teachers to designate what skills would be taught and when within each grade level. One of the most valuable activities we did with this committee was to get them out to employers in the Barberton community.

“These visits and tours gave our teachers the opportunity to see firsthand what opportunities are available to our students,” Andric said. “This was crucial in getting this message to our students because the teachers are the ones who interact with the students every day. Another benefit of this is that teachers made contacts with these employers that led to collaboration between individual teachers and employers.”

Prefers Voluntary Participation

Burgess said externship parameters under the proposal would be set at the local level by professional development committees.

Andric says teachers should be free to decide for themselves whether to participate in the program.

“Even with these benefits, I’m not sure how I feel about these externships being mandated for every teacher in every school,” Andric said. “Just as students need flexibility in how they learn and grow, I believe the same is true for teachers. I would like to see a well-defined externship option as one pathway for teachers to earn their credentials to earn their license. I believe we’ve been successful with this because the teachers who participated were interested in learning about these opportunities and working with local employers.”

Andric says mandating externships could pose practical challenges.

“The only challenge with what we have done is time and logistics,” Andric said. “It is difficult to schedule teachers out for these visits because they need maximum instructional time with their students. It can also be challenging to work out times that are optimal for the employers and our staff. With that being said, the benefits have outweighed the negatives for the teachers who have participated. Again, we have limited challenges because the teachers have chosen to participate.”

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@gmail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
U.S. Teachers Unions Oppose School Choice in Africa

By Michael McGrady

A company operating a chain of private schools in Africa is facing criticism from U.S. and international teachers unions.

Bridge International Academies (BIA), a for-profit startup founded in 2009 and funded by high-profile donors—including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and the World Bank—operates more than 500 schools, primarily in Kenya and Uganda.

“Independent research shows Bridge pupils have fluency and comprehension scores 27 percent higher, and maths [sic] scores 24 percent higher than their peers in neighboring government schools,” BIA’s website states. “In the 2016 Kenyan National Exam, Bridge pupils got an average of 59 percent compared to the national average of 44 percent.”

Legal Challenges, Union Opposition

In November 2016, Uganda’s high court ordered the education ministry to close BIA’s 63 Ugandan schools, alleging teachers are unqualified and the schools are not up to the country’s standards.

As of April 2017, BIA was appealing the high court’s ruling, and the schools were still operating. BIA has also been criticized by teachers unions throughout the world.

In March, Kenya’s high court ordered an injunction prohibiting the secretary general, agents, and officials of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) from making or publishing defamatory statements against BIA.

Education International (EI), a global federation of teachers unions, said in October 2016 BIA “has created a business plan based on strict standardizations, automated technology, cheap school structures, and internet-enabled devices that are used to carry out all activities that make up an education system.”

National Education Association President Lily Eskelsen Garcia said BIA’s “for-profit educational model is robbing students of a good education and depriving them of their natural curiosity to imagine and learn,” calling the company’s model “morally wrong and professionally reprehensible.”

In a March Wall Street Journal article, Eric Hanushek wrote, “Unprecedented [academic] gains led World Bank president Jim Yong Kim in 2015 to single out Bridge for helping lift students in the developing world into the modern age. His words of praise enraged Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. ‘The World Bank’s promotion of the fee-charging, for-profit Bridge International Academies in Kenya and Uganda is not an appropriate role for the institution,’ she said.”

Says Unions’ Concern Is Money

Lennie Jarratt, project manager for the Center for Transforming Education at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, says educating children is, at best, a secondary concern for teachers unions.

“If the teachers unions were truly interested in an educated populace, they would embrace any innovation that delivers access to a quality education to poor students around the world,” Jarratt said. “Instead, they invariably choose to use the power of government to stifle and prevent any innovation that does not provide unions with the ability to fill their coffers with more money.”

Jarratt says U.S. teachers unions use predictable tactics to stifle competition.

“Teachers unions in the United States use the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and local teacher unions in [other countries] to put pressure on foreign nations’ governments, to crack down or shut down low-cost private schools,” Jarratt said. “They use much of the same rhetoric they do here. For instance, they might say, the teachers in these schools are ‘unqualified,’ or that these schools are ‘not accountable to government authorities.’

Larry Sand, president of the California Teachers Empowerment Network, says the unions have reason to fear competition.

“Probably because if privatization works in Africa, the unions are afraid its success will spread,” Sand said. “And their fear is justified.”

Union Rule Consequences

Sand says he’s experienced first-hand the destruction teachers unions can cause.

“I was [last in, first out] in New York in 1975,” Sand said. “I taught at a tough school in Harlem, and the city was in dire fiscal straits. Hence, a few thousand teachers had to be laid off—based on seniority—and I was one of them. I may not have been the best teacher in the world, but I was far more competent than some of the more senior teachers who held on to their jobs.

“Also, wherever I have taught in my 28-year career, every teacher, every kid, every parent, and even the janitors knew who the incompetent teachers were,” Sand said. “We all knew, and so did the principal, but all she could really do was minimize the damage by curtailing students’ exposure to these teachers as much as possible. Imagine having to decide which unfortunate students get stuck with him or her.”

Michael McGrady (mmcgrady@uccs.edu) writes from Colorado Springs, Colorado.
Protesters Disrupt Speakers at Elite Colleges

By Jane S. Shaw

Turmoil and ideological divisiveness continue at America’s colleges, evidenced by recent incidents at two elite liberal arts schools in New England: Middlebury College in Vermont and Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Rioters Injure Speaker

Protestors prevented libertarian writer Charles Murray from speaking at Middlebury in March. The student chapter of the American Enterprise Institute had invited Murray to discuss his 2013 book, Coming Apart, with a left-of-center Middlebury professor, Allison Stanger.

Murray is considered controversial because of his 1994 book The Bell Curve, which he authored with Richard Herrnstein. A lengthy discussion of intelligence and its impact, the book included evidence American whites, Asians, and blacks differ in average measured intelligence. This led the students to call Murray a white supremacist, among other names.

An earlier book by Murray, Losing Ground, helped spur welfare reform during the Clinton administration, by showing the system harmed the poor.

At Middlebury, protesters confronted Murray with signs and chanting. After about 20 minutes, Murray and Stanger were escorted off stage and taken to a studio in a building where their conversation could be livestreamed. Protesters banged on the building’s walls and set off a fire alarm.

After their talk, Murray and Stanger were led to a car, where they were confronted by about 20 people—some masked students, some possibly outsiders—who tried to prevent them from getting in. Stanger was injured to the point where she had to be treated at a hospital.

Professors Protest Free Speech

A week after the Middlebury affair, Laura Kipnis, a professor at Northwestern University’s School of Communication, spoke at “Censorship Awareness Week,” sponsored by Wellesley’s Freedom Project, an on-campus organization fostering intellectual debate. After Kipnis’ appearance, six professors publicly stated she should not have been invited because of her controversial views.

Kipnis is an outspoken feminist who gained notoriety because of an article in Chronicle Review in 2015 titled, “Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe.” In it, Kipnis ridiculed Northwestern’s new rules on sexual activity on campus, including a ban on romance and dating between professors and undergraduates.

That article mentioned a specific case of a professor accused of “unwelcome and inappropriate sexual advances” by a student. Kipnis did not name the parties, but two Northwestern students demanded an investigation of Kipnis for sexual harassment, based on the article. Kipnis was cleared of the charge.

Avoiding Arguments—by Force

In their March 20 e-mail, the six Wellesley professors wrote speakers such as Kipnis “impose on the liberty of students, staff, and faculty.”

“We are especially concerned with the impact of speakers’ presentations on Wellesley students, who often feel the injury most acutely and invest time and energy in rebutting the speakers’ arguments,” the professors said. “Students object in order to affirm their humanity.”

Support for Kipnis came from many quarters, including the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a national group that supports free speech. Alex Morey and Samantha Harris, staff members at FIRE, wrote the e-mail is “remarkable in its contempt for free and open dialogue on campus.”

‘An Illiberal Tendency’

Marilynn Willey, a 2014 Wellesley graduate who now serves as alumnae liaison for the Freedom Project, an organization that advocates for free-speech rights on campus, says these protests contradict the principles the protesters profess.

“Claiming the authority to silence others, no matter how just or moral your cause may be, is an illiberal tendency that fundamentally undermines progressive ideals and the ability to change others’ minds or cooperate in the real world,” Willey said.

‘Managed by Cowed Bureaucrats’

John W. Sommer, an emeritus professor at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and a former board member of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, says most colleges are not run by people who value truth.

“The sad truth is that most institutions of higher education are managed by cowed bureaucrats, rather than led by thinkers who possess the knowledge and the nerve to defend freedom of speech with words and actions,” Sommer said.

In an effort to encourage reconciliation, a conservative professor at Princeton University, Robert P. George, and a socialist professor at Harvard University, Cornel West, issued a joint statement late in March emphasizing the value of free speech. The professors urged those on campus to “seek respectfully to engage with people who challenge our views. And we should oppose efforts to silence those with whom we disagree—especially on college and university campuses.”

Jane S. Shaw (janeshaw5966@gmail.com) is School Reform News’ higher education editor.
By Jane S. Shaw

Bowing to pressure initiated during the Obama administration, the University of California-Berkeley is removing thousands of online lectures it previously provided free to the public.

The elimination of these massive open online courses (MOOCs) from its website, along with dropping lectures from YouTube and ITunes, is the university’s response to the threat of a government lawsuit. In August 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice sent a letter to UC-Berkeley Chancellor Nicolas P. Dirks complaining some of the thousands of videos were not fully accessible to people with disabilities, especially those who are blind or deaf.

The letter said if the school could not sufficiently upgrade the MOOCs, “the Attorney General may initiate a lawsuit.”

Videos for the Blind?

The letter cited matters such as the failure of some videos to provide non-visual ways to access information in graphs, charts, captions, and animations. Many of the videos “have incorrect alternative text, videos without captions, undefined headings, a lack of color contrast, inaccessible PDFs, and inaccessible keyboard links,” the letter said.

These failings violate Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, said Rebecca B. Bond, head of the department’s disabilities section, in her letter.

“Under title II, public universities must afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from any aid, benefit, or service provided to others,” Bond wrote.

Cathy Koshland, Berkeley’s vice chancellor for undergraduate education, initially responded by saying that to meet the department’s demands, the university “would have to implement extremely expensive measures to continue to make these resources available to the public for free. We believe that in a time of substantial budget deficits and shrinking state financial support, our first obligation is to use our limited resources to support our enrolled students.”

In March, Koshland announced the university’s decision to limit its online content to enrolled students.

‘This is Insanity’

James D. Gwartney, a professor of economics at Florida State University and director of the Gus A. Stavros Center for Economic Education, is legally blind. He says what the government is forcing Berkeley to do is absurd.

“This is insanity,” Gwartney said. “The Justice Department apparently thinks if lecture material is not perfect for everyone, then let’s make sure it is not available to anyone.

“As a blind person for more than two decades, I can assure you that I have derived enormous benefit from audio material that failed to provide a description of the visuals,” Gwartney said. “Clearly, the blind as well as others are made worse off when access is denied to materials unless they provide a descriptive audio of all visuals. With friends like the Department of Justice, those of us with sight and hearing handicaps do not need enemies.”

Demand ‘Poses Real Problems’

Walter Olson, a legal writer and senior fellow at the Cato Institute, says the Justice Department’s demands “[pose] very real problems for the development of distance learning of both paid and unpaid varieties.”

“Transcript-style captioning of spoken dialogue is not cheap, and the further synopsis-of-action captioning demanded by disability groups is more expensive by an order of magnitude,” Olson said. “Impairing the development of distance learning is distinctly harmful to persons with mobility and health impairments, who benefit especially from access to such learning methods. So the Department of Justice policy disproportionately harms disabled students themselves.”

Olson says the Supreme Court has yet to weigh in on the issue.

Jane S. Shaw (janeshaw5966@gmail.com) is School Reform News’ higher education editor.
Another Professor Shouted Down—This Time Over Pronouns

By George Leef

Universities in the United States do not have a monopoly on intolerant and disruptive students; Canada has them too, as shown by a recent incident at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

The school had arranged for a panel discussion on the subject of free speech and political correctness in Canada. Four speakers were invited. One of them was Jordan Peterson, professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. Peterson is a staunch opponent of what he calls “the radical postmodern left” and its plans for reforming society. That opposition extends to the demand people use gender-neutral pronouns when referring to transgendered individuals.

When McMaster announced that Peterson would be one of the panelists, opposition quickly mounted, much as was the case with the talk conducted by Charles Murray in March at Middlebury College in Vermont. The other three panelists backed out when protests were announced by the Peterson resistance.

Professor Philippa Carter expressed concerns over her safety, no doubt prompted by the violent attack by Middlebury protesters that injured Professor Allison Stanger. She said in an Inside Higher Ed story, “I think his views are wrong. ... But my decision didn’t have anything to do with not wanting to be in the same room with him. I had heard there were going to be protests and I wasn’t persuaded that the [student] organization had taken enough precautions around security at the event.”

Air Horns, Cowbells, and a Megaphone

When Peterson attempted to speak, he was drowned out by protesters using air horns, cowbells, and a megaphone. Their chants included: “This is where we draw the line!” and “Trans rights are human rights!” Some audience members asked the protesters to stop, but they refused, displaying the same lack of concern for the rights of everyone else that we witnessed at Middlebury and other schools where intolerance has triumphed.

The reason why the protesters were so adamant that Peterson should not be allowed to speak is that he will not adopt the gender-neutral speech that “trans” activists demand. He uses the traditional English pronouns “he” and “she,” even though the activists say they are offended when others use those words when referring to transgender people.

Peterson argues there is “no clinical evidence that gender-neutral pronouns benefit trans people.” Moreover, he resists the coercion of being told to conform to other people’s language conventions—what he calls “compelled speech.”

Because Peterson is one of the few outspoken critics of the gender-neutral language campaign and his opinions are well known in Canada, he has become a lightning rod for protesters, much as Murray is in the United States. Zealous opponents don’t want him to be able to speak. Disrupting an attempted discussion of free speech and political correctness is supposedly justified, since Peterson is so wrong on his views about the proper use of English.

If the protesters had waited until Peterson had finished his talk and then asked why he has refused to adopt their gender-neutral, “inclusive” language ideas, a fruitful exchange may have occurred. Peterson would have had to explain his position and defend it against criticism. People in the audience who were undecided on the issue would have heard his reasons; some might have been persuaded. Others would have evaluated his reasoning and rejected it. But if you engage a scholar in public discussion, you’d better be ready to present and defend your own case. Evidently, the protesters were not willing to do that.

It is much easier to make noise to drown out someone you dislike than to prepare a set of arguments and counter-arguments. It is also psychologically safer, since there is always the risk in a public debate that you’ll come off badly—that previously undecided people will decide your case is weak.

‘Important Aspect of Education’

McMaster’s president, Patrick Deane, released a statement after the incident in which he denounced the stifling of debate.

“Taking the opportunity to listen to a speaker, even one with whom one may vehemently disagree, is an important aspect of education and a cornerstone of academic debate,” Deane said. “It has not, therefore, been my approach, nor that of this University, to intervene to shut down events, exclude speakers, or prevent discussion of issues even where controversial topics are under discussion.”

He’s right, but after-the-fact statements of regret from college presidents are not going to stop people such as those who rioted at Berkeley over Milo Yiannopoulos, mobbed Murray at Middlebury, or blew air horns at Peterson at McMaster. Those who think shouting and rioting are acceptable means of registering disagreement aren’t likely to pay any attention to college presidents telling them to respect freedom of speech.

It’s time for college presidents—and indeed educational leaders at all levels—to see that we’re facing a deep educational failure when students won’t listen to someone they’re sure they disagree with and cannot see that they’re doing something wrong in preventing civil discussion. They have been imbued with a primitive, “our side good, your side bad” mentality. That is what college leaders must tackle.

George Leef (think@heartland.org) is director of research for the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal. This article was originally published by The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal and is reprinted with permission.

“Taking the opportunity to listen to a speaker, even one with whom one may vehemently disagree, is an important aspect of education and a cornerstone of academic debate. It has not, therefore, been my approach, nor that of this University, to intervene to shut down events, exclude speakers, or prevent discussion of issues even where controversial topics are under discussion.”

PATRICK DEANE
PRESIDENT
MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

It’s time for college presidents—and indeed educational leaders at all levels—to see that we’re facing a deep educational failure when students won’t listen to someone they’re sure they disagree with and cannot see that they’re doing something wrong in preventing civil discussion. They have been imbued with a primitive, ‘our side good, your side bad’ mentality. That is what college leaders must tackle.
Colorado Considers Bills Tackling Expected Teacher Shortage

By Harry Painter

Colorado lawmakers introduced several pieces of legislation this session to address concerns over an expected teacher shortage in the state.

One-third of Colorado’s more than 33,000 public school teachers will reach retirement eligibility in the next five years, and enrollment and graduation rates for traditional teacher-education programs are declining.

Graduation from teacher-preparation programs decreased by 2.2 percent for the 2015–16 academic year, the sixth straight year for which completion rates have dropped, the Colorado Department of Higher Education reported in December 2016. In 2010, 3,274 students earned their teaching credentials through such traditional programs, and that number declined by more than 24 percent, to 2,472, in 2016.

Proposed Legislation

State Rep. Barbara McLachlan (D-Durango) introduced House Bill 1003, which would require the state Departments of Education and Higher Education to collaborate with schools, districts, and interest groups to determine what makes hiring teachers difficult and why teachers leave the profession.

State Rep. James Wilson (R-Salida) introduced House Bill 1178 to allow “a rural school district to hire a non-licensed person to fill a vacant licensed teacher position if, after trying to fill the position with a licensed teacher, the board of education of the district passes a resolution declaring a critical shortage of licensed teachers,” the bill states.

State Rep. John Becker (R-Fort Morgan) introduced House Bill 1176 to enable retired public education employees to return to work without adversely affecting their retirement benefits.

As of early April, HB 1003 had passed the House and been referred to the Senate. Wilson withdrew HB 1178 amid low support. HB 1176 passed the full House.

Concerns ‘Are Not New’

Ross Izard, a senior education policy analyst at the Independence Institute, says the claims of a teacher shortage ignore many potential sources of new teachers.

“Concerns about teacher shortages are not new, and it’s important to note the limitations of the most frequently cited research on the topic in Colorado,” Izard said. “Analyses that look only at the number of students in traditional teacher preparation courses exclude many other potential hiring sources for school districts, such as teachers moving here from out of state—particularly important given the high number of people migrating to Colorado each year; Colorado students who choose to complete their educator-prep programs out of state; and teachers coming from various professional backgrounds into Colorado’s growing charter sector who may or may not pursue a teaching license.”

Steady Student-Teacher Ratio

Izard says there are several ways to solve teacher shortage problems.

“Teacher shortages are primarily a problem when the number of teachers in the state cannot keep pace with enrollment growth, but Colorado’s statewide pupil-teacher ratios haven’t changed radically in recent years, rising only slightly from 17.3 in 2010–11 to 17.53 in 2015–16,” Izard said. “However, these admittedly rough figures can mask significant hiring problems in certain districts, particularly those located in rural areas of the state. These districts certainly face many challenges when it comes to staffing.

“We can use technology to allow teachers to effectively teach larger numbers of students in nontraditional ways, using blended learning or other techniques,” Izard said. “We could adopt a private school choice program that would allow students to access high-quality education in the private sector using tuition assistance, which would provide a release valve of sorts to districts with high populations of disadvantaged students and/or rapidly increasing enrollment.”

‘A Unionized, Bureaucratic Mess’

Larry Sand, a former teacher and current president of the California Teachers Empowerment Network, says teaching should be treated the same as any other profession.

“Teaching needs to become an honest-to-God profession, not a unionized, bureaucratic mess,” Sand said. “The market has a way of sorting the wheat from the chaff. It works in the business world, and there is no reason it can’t in education also.”

Izard says teachers should be rewarded for their work, not just the number of years in the job.

“We could take steps to make the teaching profession more attractive for new teachers,” Izard said. “One of the best ways to do this would be to realign our teacher pay systems to compensate teachers for performance rather than longevity. That way, potential teachers wouldn’t feel discouraged by rigid pay systems under which they often need the better part of a decade to work their way up to a decent salary. Instead, they could see a high salary much more quickly if they work hard and demonstrate strong performance in the classroom.”

Harry Painter (jharrypainter@gmail.com) writes from Brooklyn, New York.
Utah Bill Would Require Additional Test for Alternative-Certified Teachers

By Jenni White

The Utah State Legislature is considering a bill that would require people entering the teaching profession through an alternative-preparation program to complete a pedagogical assessment.

State Sen. Ann Millner (R-Ogden) introduced Senate Bill 78, which would require people who become licensed as teachers through nontraditional ways to take an additional assessment.

Nontraditional pathways currently available in Utah include the Academic Pathway to Teaching program, which enables school administrators to hire people with at least a bachelor’s degree who can earn their teaching license with three years of supervision and mentoring from a veteran teacher.

SB 78 would require such teachers to pass a pedagogical assessment testing them on their skills in such areas as lesson planning and classroom management before obtaining their license in their third year of teaching.

The cost of taking the test is estimated to be $300, The Salt Lake Tribune reported in February.

The bill passed overwhelmingly in the state’s Senate, by a 22–3 vote, in early February and is currently awaiting a hearing in the House Rules Committee.

‘We Hate This Bill’

Wendy Hart, a member of the Alpine School Board, representing the largest public school district in Utah, says she and fellow members are against SB 78.

“We hate this bill,” Hart said. “Our board, [during a February meeting,] stated that we are unanimously opposed to it.”

During that meeting, Board President John Burton, secondary field coordinator for the School of Education at Utah Valley University (UVU), called the bill “ridiculous” and questioned the costs to students, especially while Utah is experiencing a teacher shortage and student-teachers are already required to take a $150 teacher licensing test called Praxis.

“I’m seeing fewer and fewer kids come to UVU and enroll in secondary ed and elementary ed, and then we want to do this on top of all that?” Burton said. “Just say, ‘Hey we really want to price you out of becoming teachers?’” Burton said.

David Cox, a retired teacher, author of the Teaching Conservative blog, and a former Utah state legislator, says the additional assessment is unnecessary.

“SB 78 basically sets up a philosophical purity test for teachers who get alternative certification,” Cox said. “My district is opposed to this bill, and I’ve been told that many teachers also oppose it.”

Cronyism Accusations

Cox says adding another assessment for teachers will benefit the test-makers.

“The colleges of education will end up being the ones who create the test,” said Cox. “They want it because that means these teachers would have to take classes in it in order to pass the test, so there is a vested interest, financially.”

Hart says it’s not clear what would happen to this new test if the Utah State Office of Education were to change the state’s educational standards.

“There is a vested interest, financially.”

The colleges of education publish their ‘effective teaching standards,’ which include the Utah Core Standards,” Hart said. “So, do we have to pay to realign this test every time we change a standard or two? How exactly will that work?”

‘The Constructivist Philosophy’

Cox says the pedagogical assessment could be another pathway for the state to intrude into the classroom.

“These colleges of education have become so inbred with the constructivist philosophy that they are trying to impose that philosophy on all teachers,” Cox said. “They already propagandize all potential teachers in their regular programs, and now they want to prevent anyone coming in through alternative certification who is not completely indoctrinated or propagandized in this faulty philosophy as well.”

Hart says because this new test is pedagogically based, it could further impose a discredited methodology and marginalize direct instruction in skills and knowledge.

“Personally, I believe a pedagogical assessment will further curtail the ability of parents to get things like traditional math or a classical education in our public school system,” Hart said. “One of the biggest complaints parents have had about math is the Common Core, constructivist, math methodology.”

Constructive teaching methods for math focus more on process than memorization, and they often involve forcing students to learn several different ways to approach solving a math problem.

“You can’t just say 2+2=4,” Hart said. “It is assumed that if you can’t show five different ways of doing basic arithmetic, you don’t understand it. This test, of course, like the Common Core-aligned tests, will penalize those who use a traditional math methodology.”

Jenni White (jlwplusdmw@gmail.com) writes from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
Common Core: A Clandestine Disaster

By Jay Lehr

I have reviewed a dozen books on Common Core, all deploring it and all very good, but Joy Pullmann takes the reader to a new level of understanding of the inner workings and political backstory of this insidious effort to transform our children into mind-numbed robots and sap them of their creative spirit.

Common Core’s Clandestine Origins

Beginning in 2001, the federal government’s No Child Left Behind program mandated schools focus on standardized tests in math and reading in exchange for significant penalties for not toeing the line and, in Pullmann’s words, “a gush of federal funds.”

Instituted in 2010 and after, Common Core, the national standards dictating what a student should know at the end of each grade level, does not build a solid foundation of cultural knowledge and practical skills. It replaces thought-provoking fiction with doctrinaire informational texts and pistions proven math techniques in favor of convoluted processes unknown to earlier generations.

Of even greater concern is the way the government pulled off the standardized takeover through clandestine activities, which took years to formulate, without exposure to skilled educators, concerned parents, or elected officials. It was all made possible by nonprofit organizations, the bulk of them heavily financed by Bill Gates, whose fortune enabled him to force on children his own uneducated views on education and meaningless tests now required.

Fact-Filled Exposé

Pullmann invested four years crisscrossing the nation to talk to parents, teachers, legislators, and despicable leftist goon squads, the latter of whom resemble characters out of George Orwell’s 1984 with their constant attempts to remodel society in their narrow-minded vision. The Common Core proponents largely remained silent, but Pullmann uncovers the entire plot against our children and supports every fact in this book, which includes 486 detailed endnotes.

The Education Invasion reads like a mystery novel, and the reader will wish it were fiction. Pullmann brings the reader to classrooms with her as she describes exactly how Common Core was sold, implemented, and imposed on our children—in spite of so many warrior parents fighting vigorously against it.

Methodology Replaces Content

Common Core has removed detailed content from teaching colleges in favor of methodology proponents of the standards claim will work across any discipline, Pullmann reports.

For instance, they invented a technique called “close reading,” which teaches a student to rely only on the words in the text (they no longer use the word “book”) to gain understanding. The new standards require outside knowledge not be used in understanding a work, in order not to disadvantage students from disadvantaged environments, where a variety of books may be less available.

Standardized Tests and Data Mining

Grading methods under Common Core are tied to standardized tests, which were developed by well-paid nonprofit organizations and never tested in any meaningful way to prove their efficacy. In California, where the teachers union rules largely unopposed, the lack of transparency in the construction of tests was easily ignored, but in other states, many political battles occurred, Pullmann reports.

The greatest uproar has occurred over the fact the standardized tests require students to list a wide variety of personal data for a centralized database. Big Brother tiptoes around the controversy by commissioning nonprofit organizations to maintain the databases.

Parents across the country have attempted to opt their children out of the standardized tests, and Pullmann includes a detailed account of a mother’s hard-fought efforts to exclude her daughter from the tests in Massachusetts, a struggle repeated across the country, as evidenced by the fact Truth in American Education, a website for similarly distressed parents, was accessed 49,882 times during the 2013–14 school year.

In response to these expressions of concern, Duncan personally threatened federal government action against states with high opt-out rates.

Dissenters Abused

The number of Common Core state repeal bills tracked by the National Conference of State Legislatures has now passed 700. Behind each is a small army of zealous parents who want better for their children.

As you might expect, they have taken a lot of abuse. A man in Baltimore was arrested for resisting an eviction from an education hearing for complaining Common Core was dumbing down his children. Pullmann provides numerous such examples.

As dissent mounted, the federal government used large amounts of taxpayer money to finance public-relations campaigns to convince the public Common Core is benign. Many private foundations also participated in these PR initiatives using government grant money. To hide from the opposition to Common Core, 25 of the 42 states now using Common Core have renamed their standards.

Downfall and Success

Pullmann includes in her book numerous sad stories of wonderfully dedicated teachers who have chosen to leave the profession rather than subject their students to the harmful, regimented education and meaningless tests now required. Pullmann also details the tremendous success of many parent-run private schools and charter schools that rely upon common sense, creativity, and long-established practices for raising intelligent young people.

It will be difficult to undo the harm Common Core has already caused, but a journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first step.

Jay Lehr, Ph.D. (jlehr@heartland.org) is science director at The Heartland Institute.
Legislators:

Make Us Your New Legislative Aide!

Join Heartland’s Legislative Forum today and stay on top of the latest research and policy solutions.

Why Join?
Simply, The Heartland Institute delivers what elected officials need. Busy elected officials have little or no staff and need a reliable source of research and commentary on the most important public policy issues of the day. For 33 years Heartland has been that resource.

Benefits of membership include:
• Travel scholarships to Heartland’s Emerging Issues Forum
• Priority access to your very own free-market think tank
• Bringing experts to your state
• Invitations to Legislative Forum members-only events
• Complimentary copies of Heartland Policy Studies and books

Membership is limited to current elected officials and costs just $99 for two years or $179 for a lifetime membership. As a lifetime member, you will enjoy the great benefits the Legislative Forum offers for your entire time in office, as well as alumni benefits thereafter.

Visit heartland.org/sign-forum to sign up.

For more information, please contact Lindsey Stroud at 312/377-4000 or email her at lstroud@heartland.org.

“Heartland’s research and advocacy for science-based policies that improve people’s lives have been very helpful to me and my colleagues.”

REPRESENTATIVE ISAAC LATTERELL
SOUTH DAKOTA
YOU ARE OFFICIALLY INVITED!

WESTERN CONSERVATIVE SUMMIT 2017
MAKING GOODNESS FASHIONABLE

★ JULY 21-23 ★

Colorado Convention Center ★ Denver
Reserve your seats today!
wcs17.com/Summit | 877.798.6298