New U.S. Education Head Opposes DC’s Opportunity Scholarship Program

**By Andrea Dillon**

Under questioning from lawmakers during U.S. Senate confirmation hearings, John King Jr., President Barack Obama’s education secretary appointee, acknowledged he opposes the Washington, DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP), a school choice voucher program created by the DC School Choice Incentive Act of 2003 to provide at-risk students with tuition assistance.

In February, King, formerly the commissioner of education for the State of New York, was questioned by U.S. Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) about his stance on reauthorization of DCOSP, which expires this year.

“I do not personally believe that vouchers are a scalable solution to the equity and excellence challenge and prefer the route of public school choice, but [I] certainly respect your position on it,” King replied.

**Georgia School Choice Victory**

A Georgia judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging the state’s school choice tax credit scholarship program, and the kids are the real winners.  

**Ohio Homeschool Harassment**

Local government officials in Ohio are trying to send homeschooling parents to jail for filing late paperwork.

**Connecticut Charter Promise**

Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy (left) offers plan to increase aid to charter schools in recent budget proposal.

**Chicago Charter Expansion**

As the Chicago Public Schools system continues to fail, school officials consider expanding parents’ school choice options.

**WV Making Paperwork Easier**

West Virginia’s governor signed into law a bill making homeschooling paperwork less burdensome for parents.

**Group Wants Common Core Repeal off Ballot**

**By Kimberly Morin**

A coalition of business organizations and government school leaders supported by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his nonprofit organization is suing to prevent a proposition that would repeal Massachusetts’ Common Core curriculum standards from being placed on the ballot in November.

In January, members of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) and members of the Massachusetts Parent-Teacher Association (MPTA) sued state Attorney General Maura Healey and Secretary of State William Galvin. MBAE and MPTA are demanding the removal of the ballot initiative. The complaint argues the ballot question, certified by Healey in 2015, is unconstitutional because it “is
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Pennsylvania School District, Union Sued Over Work ‘Release Time’

By Kate Patrick
A former member of the Allentown, Pennsylvania school board is suing the city’s government school district and the Allentown Education Association (AEA), the local chapter of the National Education Association teachers union, over “release-time provisions,” an entitlement benefit often included in collective bargaining agreements that allows government teachers to be paid with taxpayer funds while working for the union but not educating children.

The Fairness Center, a public-interest law firm offering free legal services, filed a lawsuit in February against the Allentown School District and AEA, challenging the district’s contract agreement with AEA President Debbie Tretter.

Some Things for Nothing
Scott Armstrong, a former member of the government school district’s Board of School Directors, says the district is paying Tretter’s salary as a teacher even though she is not working as a teacher. The Fairness Center filed the lawsuit on behalf of Armstrong and two other Allentown residents.

“I publicly raised the question that this couldn’t be right,” Armstrong said. “I asked at a public meeting if anyone has explored if this was even legal or not. Several weeks later, the solicitor[,] John Freund[,] supplied an opinion that it wasn’t legal for any school district to provide payment to someone that wasn’t providing a direct benefit to the school district and that it wasn’t legal to be paying her salary.”

Sleeping Watchdogs
Armstrong says the school board was uninterested in addressing his concern.

“This wasn’t a fight they cared to engage in, not in any way, shape, or fashion,” Armstrong said. “Why are we, who are representing the taxpayers, condoning and making it official that they pay the salary of a person who is acting as an agent against their best interests? The union president is not working for the students or the district. She’s working for her collective bargaining group.”

Officials ‘Already Knew’
Karim Sweigart, an attorney with the Fairness Center, says the government school district’s administrators are aware they are breaking the law.

“Allentown already knew this was a problem for them legally,” Sweigart said. “Public dollars should not be going to the president of a private association. The baseline of it is teachers should be paid to teach, and this is union work.”

Sweigart says the plaintiffs are demanding repayment of the illegally funneled funds.

“We’re asking the Allentown School District and union to reimburse the school district and the State of Pennsylvania for the money they have used inappropriately, which since 2000 has been more than $1.3 million,” Sweigart said. “We don’t know how much more, because the information the school gave us was incomplete. They weren’t able to get us all the records in time.”

‘Just Not Fair’
Bob Dick, a policy analyst at the Commonwealth Foundation for Public Policy Alternatives, says ending union release time is in the best interests of students, teachers, and the school district itself.

“This is coming at a time when the Allentown School District is in financial straits and actually had to lay off 270-plus teachers since 2011. It’s just not fair to those teachers and students and taxpayers that this one teacher is still being paid for time spent away.”

BOB DICK, POLICY ANALYST
COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC POLICY ALTERNATIVES

IN OTHER WORDS . . .

“Of eight Allentown school board directors, only one voted against the teachers’ contract last week. Michael Welsh said he wasn’t comfortable with the release-time provision.

“Many of my constituents were not aware this practice existed in our district and expressed their concerns to me,’ Welsh told Watchdog. ‘It was my belief that the best settlement would have included a sharing of cost between the district and the union for this position, with the return of the union president to at least half-time classroom instruction. As this was not part of the final contract, I could not support it.

“School Board President David Zimmerman did not respond to a request for comment.”


“This is coming at a time when the Allentown School District is in financial straits and actually had to lay off 270-plus teachers since 2011,” Dick said. “It’s just not fair to those teachers and students and taxpayers that this one teacher is still being paid for time spent away.”

Kate Patrick (katepatrick211@gmail.com) writes from Clarksville, Ohio.
New Education Head Opposes DC Scholarship Program

Continued from page 1

to Scott’s questioning, indicating his opposition to extending the program.

In March, King’s nomination was confirmed by the Senate.

‘Infusing Equity and Excellence’
Lindsey Burke, an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation, says school choice is the way to ensure children have a chance to succeed in life.

“School choice is both scalable and a major part of the answer to infusing equity and excellence in American education,” Burke said. “For a fraction of what is spent in DC public schools, where revenue per pupil tops $29,400 annually, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has had resounding results, not the least of which is a 91 percent graduation rate for participating students.”

Burke says the scholarship program is an economical way to help children achieve success in life.

“The DCOSP achieves that success at roughly $12,000 per scholarship,” Burke said. “There is proof-positive that the DCOSP works: The program has shown a 91 percent high school graduation rate, while the DC public schools have only reached around 56 percent. It’s hard to square that circle when we know empirically, according to a random assignment evaluation published by the U.S. Department of Education itself, that [DCOSP] improves academic outcomes for participants and significantly improves graduation rates.”

Opportunity, Options for All
Burke says Obama, whose daughters have been enrolled in and benefited from private schools, should not force disadvantaged children to remain in failing government schools.

“No one should begrudge the president for sending his children to a school that works best for them,” Burke said. “But the administration should not try to shutter a scholarship program in the nation’s capital that affords the same opportunity to poor children in the District.”

Matt Frendeway, communications director of the American Federation for Children, says King should rethink his opinion on school choice.

“I think it’s tremendously important that the secretary of education recognizes school choice, both in terms of private choice and public choice, whether it’s one public school to another or one public school to a public charter school,” Frendeway said. “That’s because ultimately, choice is about empowering parents, often those with lesser means.”

Frendeway says giving more educational options to parents and children benefits everyone.

“It’s disappointing that Sec. King, while he might be open to some public charter schools, doesn’t recognize the full host of options available for kids. Options allow education to meet the individual needs of every child,” Frendeway said. “The system should work for the kids, not the kids working for the system.”

Andrea Dillon (thell1885@gmail.com) writes from Holly Springs, North Carolina.

“School choice is both scalable and a major part of the answer to infusing equity and excellence in American education. For a fraction of what is spent in DC public schools ... the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has had resounding results.”

LINDSEY BURKE, EDUCATION POLICY ANALYST
THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

IN OTHER WORDS . . .

“As members of the US Senate HELP Committee were preparing for the confirmation hearing of Dr. John B. King, Jr. for US Education Secretary, Washington, DC students and parents were pressing Senate officials to help reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DC OSP) to see that unspent funds are released and to remove the uncertainty of the successful program’s continuation.

“Their visit to Capitol Hill would result in an important exchange between US Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) and Acting Secretary King during his hearing that makes clear that this issue will be front and center during King’s remaining time in office.

“What can we do to move the administration, and you as perhaps the new Secretary, in the direction of using that $35 million to fund more scholarships?” asked Scott.

“In response, King answered that the carryover funds were a safeguard against the program not being continued: ‘We think the carryover funds should be maintained to ensure that the currently enrolled students, if new appropriations are not made, have the opportunity to complete their education.’”

— “US Education Secretary Nominee Gets Pressed on DC OSP,” Center for Education Reform, February 26, 2016
Chicago Charter Creation Slowed by Board, Unions

By Kenneth Arzt

Charter school operators are asking the Chicago Public School Board of Education for permission to open more than 20 new charter schools over the next few years.

In February, the Chicago Public School (CPS) Board of Education received 16 “letters of intent,” non-binding notifications requesting the creation of new charter schools. The 16 letters proposed 21 new charter schools in the Chicago area.

CPS is currently negotiating with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers labor union, to formulate contract agreements, which could include provisions that restrict the number of publicly funded non-government schools CPS is allowed to authorize.

‘More Education Options’ Needed

Lennie Jarratt, project manager for education transformation at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, says 21 new charter schools would not be enough to improve the city’s school system.

“Based on the lack of education happening across CPS, children and parents need more education options than just 21 new charter schools,” Jarratt said. “Less than 10 percent of CPS schools had at least 50 percent of their students score ‘proficient’ on Common Core-related testing. They need to allow choice to extend to private schools as well, to rapidly increase the seats in quality schools for the students not being properly taught in CPS.”

Unions Blocking Competition

Jarratt says the teachers union has an economic incentive to fight charter school creation.

“CPS is in total control of the number of charter schools allowed within the district,” Jarratt said. “They will negotiate the number with the CTU during contract talks, because the union wants the number capped. They don’t want the competition and the potential loss of union jobs that accompany more students choosing a nontraditional public school within the system. It’s all about the money flowing to the union’s coffers.”

‘Sad Reality’ for Chicago Children

Jelani McEwen, director of external affairs for the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, says the current system is not adequately serving Chicago’s children.

“All students in Chicago deserve access to a high-quality education, but the sad reality is that there are still pockets of our city where few, if any, of these opportunities exist nearby,” McEwen said. “When families face competing priorities, such as safety, logistical ease, and academic rigor, some are forced to sacrifice academic outcomes due to constraints on their resources, information, or mobility.”

School choice is increasingly popular with Chicago parents and students, McEwen says. “Charter public schools are giving families access to high-quality schools in under-resourced areas, and the demand for them is growing. Quality alone, and not school type, should determine which schools serve Chicago students.”

Jelani McEwen, Director of External Affairs
Illinois Network of Charter Schools

Tennessee Lawmaker Withdraws School Choice Bill

By Andy Torbett

A Tennessee lawmaker withdrew a proposed bill that would have provided school choice scholarships to students in low-income households after lobbyists working for a teachers union successfully waged a prominent opposition campaign, which had eroded support for the legislation.

State Rep. Bill Dunn (R-Knoxville) withdrew House Bill 149 in February. Lobbyists had claimed publicly the proposal would apply to the entire state, despite language contained in the bill that limited it to a single county. They also erroneously claimed the bill lacked accountability and would enact untested reforms.

Siding with Special Interests

Justin Owen, president of the Beacon Center of Tennessee, says lawmakers who abandoned support for the bill failed to stand up for the state’s children.

“Legislators stood with special interests, not students,” Owen said. “That’s very unfortunate. Polling consistently shows that Tennesseans support school choice. Tennesseans also sent thousands of e-mails to legislators in support of school choice this year. But, unfortunately, special-interest groups like the teachers union have louder voices than parents and children.”

Targeted the Needy

Owen says Dunn’s bill would have helped the children most in need of a quality education receive it.

“Those children who are in low-income [households] and stuck in schools failing to meet their needs are the ones who could use opportunity scholarships the most,” said Owen. “Unfortunately, even those children will likely have to wait at least one more year before being given those opportunities.”

Owen says Tennessee children and parents urgently need the power to leave failing government schools.

“For families whose children are stuck in bad schools, there is very little they can do,” Owen said. Legislators need to provide these children with the lifeline they deserve, rather than toeing the union line.”

Dunn told School Reform News his colleagues’ fear of lobbyists led to the legislation’s demise.

“It’s not indifference,” Dunn said. “It’s lack of political will to help these students.”

Dunn says government teachers unions have an economic interest in fighting school choice.

“They are putting their interests before that of the students,” Dunn said. “They don’t want to compete.”

‘I Will Not Give Up’

Dunn says he won’t stop until parents are empowered to rescue their children from failing government schools.

“I will not give up on giving children trapped in a failing school the opportunity for a better education,” Dunn said.

Andy Torbett (meconservativevoice@gmail.com) writes from Atkinson, Maine.
Georgia Judge Tosses Suit Against Education-Expense Tax Credit

By Jenni White

A Georgia county judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging the state’s education-expense tax credit program after determining the plaintiffs lacked standing to challenge the program’s constitutionality.

The decision left the reform program in place, allowing students to receive privately funded scholarships to attend the school of their family’s choice.

In February, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Kimberly Esmond Adams dismissed the lawsuit, filed in 2014 by representatives of the Southern Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization promoting the interests of government schools. The plaintiffs claimed offering tax credits for private school scholarships and tuition gave the program’s donors illegal benefits and allowed government schools to be commandeered by private organizations donating to the program.

Reformers ‘Very Pleased’

Kelly McCutchen, president of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, says Georgia’s children will benefit from the lawsuit’s dismissal.

“We are, of course, very pleased the court struck down this spurious lawsuit,” McCutchen said. “We think low- and middle-income children deserve access to the education that best fits their needs.”

Currently, the fund is capped at $58 million per year, or about $63 per Georgia child between the ages of 5 and 18. McCutchen says the program should be expanded so more children can benefit.

“The cap for this program has been [reached] on the very first day it was opened for contributions for the last two years,” McCutchen said. “Now that all legal challenges have been clearly overcome, it is time for the Georgia General Assembly to raise the cap.”

Efficient Use of Money Cited

Jim Kelly, general counsel for Georgia Greater Opportunities for Access to Learning (GOAL) Scholarship, Inc., one of the nonprofit organizations tasked with awarding scholarships under the tax credit program, says the program gives taxpayers more bang for their buck than government schools can provide.

“The average adjusted gross income of GOAL scholarship families has been $25,496,” Kelly said. “Yet, GOAL is able to offer scholarships to both low- and middle-income families while keeping its average scholarship award to around $3,682, which is significantly less than the $4,500 average per-pupil amount the state spends to educate a student in public school.”

Calls for Expansion

Kelly says the cap on the tax credit program keeps far too many children in substandard public schools.

“Of course, low-income families who cannot access financial aid to send their children to better schools face the tragic reality of having to keep their children in substandard public schools,” Kelly said. “But an underappreciated reality is that so many middle-income families who desire to send their children to safe and character-forming private schools” cannot afford to do so.

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

Lawmaker Vows to Fight Veto of Virginia Homeschooler Athletics Bill

By Jenni White

For the second year in a row, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D) has vetoed a law that would allow Virginia homeschool athletes to participate on public school athletic teams and in their facilities.

The bill is referred to as the “Tebow bill,” named for former National Football League quarterback and 2007 Heisman Award winner Tim Tebow. In 2003, Tebow, who was homeschooled by his parents, joined a Florida government school’s athletics team, in accordance with the state’s homeschoolers’ access laws.

Tebow bills prevent government schools from prohibiting homeschooled students from participating in government school-sponsored sports.

Senate Bill 612 would have allowed public schools to charge homeschoolers a fee in exchange for enrolling on a public school sports roster. The fee would help offset participation costs.

Keeping Kids Out

Chris Freund, vice president of government relations and communications at the Family Foundation, says rules passed by the Virginia High School League (VHSL), which oversees inter-scholastic high school athletic competitions, prevent homeschoolers from participating in sports with their peers.

“VHSL has a ‘take five, pass five’ rule, meaning that sports participants must take and pass five core subjects the previous semester to participate,” Freund said.

Plans to Try Again

Virginia state Sen. Thomas Garrett (R-Buckingham), the bill’s sponsor, says the people of the state support his bill, even though McAuliffe does not.

“Right now, I’m going to carry the bill over, because we don’t have the votes to override, but I want to encourage those who want equal access to write letters to the governor and to the legislators who voted ‘no’ on the bill,” Garrett said. “We need six more votes than we have, but you can’t accomplish anything without trying.”

Exposing ‘Public School Monopoly’

Garrett says the governor’s opposition to the bill is puzzling.

“I don’t know why this governor doesn’t want this to pass. I think the people in the public school monopoly are afraid of being exposed. I think what’s going on is that the product produced by homeschoolers is superior to the public schools. They don’t like the public knowing that, and when these kids are given the ability to shine, that is exposed.”

Thomas Garrett
State Senator
Buckingham, Virginia

Jenni White (jlwplusdmw@gmail.com) writes from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
Louisiana Education Funding Lawsuit Threatens School Choice

By Kate Patrick

Governement school officials are joining teachers unions to challenge how Louisiana funds its charter schools, putting school choice options for almost 13,000 children at risk.

Elected officials on the Iberville Parish School Board and the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE), the state’s chapter of the National Education Association teachers union, are appealing a May 2015 decision by the 19th Judicial District Court for the Parish of East Baton Rouge. The court upheld a 1995 law allowing state officials to fund charter schools in government school districts receiving poor ratings from the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), bypassing local officials who may be hostile to these alternatives to traditional government schools.

In March 2016, government school officials and LAE appealed the district court’s ruling, arguing BESE lacks the authority to directly fund charter schools established in poorly performing school districts, called “Type 2 schools.”

Protecting Monopoly

Kevin Kane, president of the Pelican Institute for Public Policy, says the school district and LAE are working hard to maintain their education monopoly.

“I tend to view these lawsuits skeptically because, in reality, they are simply attempts to choke off competition,” Kane said. “That’s really what this is about. They don’t want to have to compete with charter schools or any other kind of school. They make these legal and policy arguments, but it all comes down to them not wanting any competition.

They act as though they have some divine right to taxpayer support, but they don’t want anybody else to receive taxpayer support.”

Kids Before Money

Caroline Roemer, executive director of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, a non-profit organization that advocates for the state’s charter school movement, says challenges to public charter schools’ funding distract from the schools’ primary purpose: helping children learn.

“Very rarely do we really get to spend a lot of time on academic progress, academic challenges, and things we can be doing to innovate in those areas of public education,” Roemer said. “It’s always about money.”

Roemer says her organization will continue to fight for Louisiana children’s right to a quality education.

“If the ruling goes all the way to the Supreme Court and doesn’t favor us, we’re willing to take this to the ballot,” Roemer said. “If we can’t win it in the courts, we’ll take it to the voters, to moms and dads, and we’ll win it there.”

Kate Patrick (katepatrick211@gmail.com) writes from Clarksville, Ohio.

INTERNET INFO

“Threat,” PublicSchoolOptions.org, February 18, 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8f89o26is/
Ohio Homeschooling Families Face Jail Time Over Late Paperwork

By Kenneth Artz

Government officials in Ohio are pursuing criminal charges against two homeschooling families for allegedly failing to file homeschooling paperwork.

If the parents are found guilty, they could face decades of jail time and thousands of dollars in fines.

The families, whose names and locations are being withheld by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), have been charged by local government officials with contributing to the delinquency of minors for failing to turn in paperwork to the local government school district by the required deadline.

HSLDA is providing legal representation for the families in their respective local juvenile court cases. According to HSLDA, one trial is scheduled to begin on May 31, and the status of the other case is unknown.

Setting Different Standards?

Melanie Elsey, a legislative liaison for Christian Home Educators of Ohio, says the government officials may be misreading the state’s homeschooling laws.

“Homeschooling in Ohio is very easy to do,” Elsey said. “However, I believe the two districts where these two families are may be applying a different set of regulations to homeschooling families. There are only six regulations covering homeschooling in the state, so all you really have to do is turn in the paperwork and refill every year and let the district know your intentions.”

Michael Donnelly, a staff attorney with HSLDA, says most states do not have deadlines for filing a notice of intent.

“Most states do not have specific deadlines for when parents must submit notification,” Donnelly said. “Schools start at different times. People start homeschooling mid-year and move into the state, so deadlines create certain related problems.”

Districts Applying ‘Undue Force’

Donnelly says the government authorities are being unnecessarily rigid.

“Authorities in these jurisdictions should have handled these cases differently,” Donnelly said. “Instead of communicating with the family, these school districts have applied undue force for unreasonable justification. These charges are meritless, and we hope the court will agree with us.”

Donnelly says the government’s prosecution of these cases sends the wrong message to homeschooling families thinking about moving to Ohio.

“This behavior shows there continue to be authorities who are unable or unwilling to enforce proper laws relating to home education,” Donnelly said. “This demonstrates a level of either hostility or incompetence that should not be accepted. Families in Ohio have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and not criminally charged over minor paperwork issues.”

Kenneth Artz (iamkenartz@hotmail.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.

School Legal Defense Association

MBAE: A Utilitarian Education

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Kenneth Artz (iamkenartz@hotmail.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.

Donna Colorio, president of End Common Core Massachusetts, says the lawsuit is intended to protect MBAE’s investment in promoting Common Core.

“When special-interest elitists reveal their disdain and contempt for hard-working Americans, ... it motivates us even more to pass this initiative.”

DONNA COLORIO, PRESIDENT, END COMMON CORE MASSACHUSETTS

“Like so many things in politics, follow the money,” Colorio said. “It is well-documented the MBAE has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. MBAE has no credibility as an objective authority on Common Core.

“When special-interest elitists reveal their disdain and contempt for hard-working Americans, it is noticed, and frankly, it motivates us even more to pass this initiative. It gets more and more people involved in this crusade,” Colorio said.

Kimberly Morris (kimberlyamorin@gmail.com) writes from Brentwood, New Hampshire.
By Andrea Dillon

The Fort Worth, Texas government school district banned a student’s parent from the premises of Maudrie Miller Walton Elementary School in February, after the parent discussed with administrators concerns related to the district’s spending.

Randy Gamel, a former vice president of the Fort Worth Independent School District’s (FWISD) Parent-Teacher Association, was banned after allegedly speaking to government school district officials in “threatening tones,” stated a memorandum written by Nikita Brewer, a FWISD elementary school principal.

According to media reports, Gamel was upset about the government school district’s spending priorities, citing hanging electrical wiring, stained carpets in classrooms, and filthy bathrooms as problems that have gone unaddressed. A May 2015 audit of the school district cited Maudrie Miller Walton Elementary School for losing track of funds and poor financial controls.

Costly Errors

In 2007, FWISD government school district administrators spent approximately $7.6 million on new software and equipment for use in the district’s offices and classrooms. Between 2007 and 2009, errors caused by the new computer systems cost FWISD about $1.6 million in fines and legal fees, and a 2014 internal audit of FWISD found about $2.7 million in “unnecessary” equipment and software purchases.

Michael Barba, an education policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, says Texas parents should ask why the Fort Worth government school district is failing.

“When Texans hear stories like this, our immediate reaction should be to ask, ‘Isn’t there a better way?’” Barba said. “Aren’t there things we can do to ensure that educational funds directly benefit our children? The wasted money could have paid the annual salaries of over 50 FWISD teachers.”

‘Parents Must Be Empowered’

Barba says parents deserve more control over their children’s education.

“Parents must be empowered to control where the money goes,” Barba said. “The waste of $2.7 million is an example of tragic inefficiency. The funds were sent to a company which provided no benefit to Texas kids.”

Michi Iljazi, a policy manager for the Taxpayers Protection Alliance, says he’s disappointed in school officials’ failure to handle taxpayers’ money properly.

“My first thoughts are of disappointment for the children in that school,” Iljazi said. “That’s nearly $10 million that could have gone to anything other than a failed computer software system that was discovered to be an abject failure after seven years.”

Deserve ‘Better Results’

Iljazi says taxpayers have the right to oversee government school spending.

“Time and again our institutions are failing in their mission,” Iljazi said. “In many cases, public money is being wasted. Taxpayers deserve better results for their investment. I think better oversight is paramount to helping identify and solve these problems before they become outlandish examples, like the one we’re talking about today. It took seven years to figure out this software system was a failure. That’s unacceptable.”

Andrea Dillon (thell1885@gmail.com) writes from Holly Springs, North Carolina.
Ill. Lawmakers Propose State Supervision of Chicago Public Schools

By Kenneth Artz

Illinois lawmakers took steps toward enacting state supervision of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), including proposing a bill that would strip Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel of his authority over the government school district and launch a financial investigation that could force the school system to acknowledge it has become insolvent.

Illinois law permits the State Board of Education to block government school districts in financial distress from borrowing money. In February, state authorities launched an investigation into CPS’ finances, as the district works to find money to pay bills due in late June.

In January, Gov. Bruce Rauner (R) announced his intention to place CPS under the supervision of a state panel, citing existing authorities’ continued inability to spend tax money responsibly or make fiscally manageable deals with local government teachers’ prima-

try representative, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU).

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A Greater Battle for Chicago

Lennie Jarrett, project manager for education transformation at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, says the dispute between Illinois lawmakers and CPS officials is part of a much bigger conflict.

“This is not only about control of CPS; it’s about control of Chicago itself,” Jarrett said. “As seen in the last mayoral election, the Chicago Teachers Union wants to take over City Hall. CTU doesn’t want to be held accountable for its failure to educate the children of the district.

“CPS, being the largest school district in the state, is a symbol of all that is wrong in Illinois: the overspending, high taxation, corruption, and the belief taxpayers are just an open wallet for their desires,” Jarrett said.

Failure All Around

Ted Dabrowski, vice president of policy at the Illinois Policy Institute, says CPS’ leadership is failing children and teachers alike.

“You’ve got a system where the pensions weren’t funded, corruption exists, and even your superintendent is indicted,” Dabrowski said. “The teachers union ignores the finances of the school district and the people who pay taxes and is willing to strike two contracts in a row, and you have a mayor and a board that don’t know how to say ‘no’ to unions in order to preserve the fiscal stability of the school districts.”

Dabrowski says the failures of CPS’ adults are hurting the city’s children.

“It’s a battle between all the adults, and the victims are the children. They’re talking about who’s going to control the system, but what they should really be doing is talking about how to empower families so they’re the ones who have control. ...”

TED DABROWSKI, VICE PRESIDENT OF POLICY, ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE

IN OTHER WORDS . . .

“At a news conference in Springfield[, Illinois] to discuss legislation that would change the state’s procurement process, [Gov. Bruce] Rauner said he’s already told the state Board of Education to begin the process of identifying who can take over as superintendent of CPS.

“The state’s going to be ready to step in and take action,” Rauner said a day after the Chicago Teachers Union rejected a contract proposal from CPS.

“I asked our administration. I believe it’s coming. I believe a state takeover is appropriate,” Rauner said.

“The teachers union on [February 1] unanimously voted to reject a four-year contract offer, citing a lack of trust and concern about long-term school funding.

“I hope the rejection by the Chicago Teachers Union is a wake-up call for the mayor and the taxpayers in Chicago and around the state. The mayor proposed an unaffordable contract. It was unaffordable. It was more kicking the can and just getting by and he was pushing off the day of reckoning and the teacher’s union still rejected that,” Rauner said.

“Rauner blamed the union for CPS’ bad financial habits. He said he hopes the contract rejection pushes a CPS state takeover bill through the General Assembly.”


Kenneth Artz (iamkenartz@hotmail.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.
Florida Lawmakers OK Open-Enrollment Bill

By Ashley Bateman

Florida lawmakers approved a bill that would allow parents to enroll their children in any government school they wish, regardless of where they live.

House Bill 669 was approved in February by the Florida House of Representatives, but it was not taken up by the state Senate’s education committee before the legislature’s session ended on March 11. However, the bill was included in an omnibus education bill, House Bill 7029, which was signed into law in late March.

The cosponsor of HB 669, state Rep. Manny Diaz Jr. (R-Hialeah Gardens), says the bill helps children in low-quality government schools get a better education by allowing them to transfer across district boundaries.

“We have a lot of higher-performing schools, or ‘A’ schools, that are under-enrolled, and we have ‘D’ and ‘F’ schools that are over capacity,” Diaz said. “With this bill, we are finding another place where we can give an opportunity to parents to meet their children’s needs. We are continuing to provide more choices. This creates more uniformity across the state and continues to provide opportunities for these seats.”

‘Clear, Consistent Procedure’

Diaz says the bill establishes a reliable process for parents to transfer their students.

“You have to have a clear, consistent procedure present, so if a parent comes in and has a request there has to be something constant, not an arbitrary rubric,” Diaz said. “It puts that procedure in place, and it’s clear to the parents so they know what they’re doing.”

Shan Goff, a policy director with the Foundation for Excellence in Education, says Florida parents are fortunate to have lawmakers supportive of choice in both government and private schools.

“We’ve been incredibly fortunate and lucky [to have] wonderful legislators sponsoring this on both the House and Senate sides,” Goff said. “This really is public school choice.”

Tearing Down Those Walls

Allison Aubuchon, communications director for the Foundation for Excellence in Education, says the primary goal of Diaz’s bill is to take down barriers to better education for children.

“We know already that so many families are doing everything they can to get into a school that’s perfect for them,” Aubuchon said. “They are either moving or bending over backwards to get into a school. Maybe there’s a program that’s only offered at a certain school. This bill will impact every single child. Barriers are coming down.”

Aubuchon says the bill is a practical reform of the state’s government school system.

“With this bill, we are finding another place where we can give an opportunity to parents to meet their children’s needs. ... This creates more uniformity across the state and continues to provide opportunities for these seats.”

MANNY DIAZ JR., STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HIALEAH GARDENS, FLORIDA

Colorado Lawmaker Proposes End to Charters’ Regulatory Exemptions

By Johnny Kampis

A Colorado state lawmaker is proposing a bill that would eliminate charter schools’ exemption from some state laws, but a charter school group says the proposal is unnecessary and burdensome.

House Bill 16-1343, sponsored by state Rep. Dominick Moreno (D-Commerce City), would eliminate charter schools’ exemption from 18 state laws, including regulations on observation of national holidays, requirements for competitive bidding, and compulsory attendance laws. Under current law, once a charter school is approved by government authorizers, it is automatically granted waivers for these regulations.

The proposed legislation would require charter schools to apply for the waivers on a case-by-case basis. Charter schools would be required to submit rationale-and-replacement plans to the local school district and the state board of education that show how the school plans to satisfy the intended purposes of any waived law.

Will Cause Greater Burdens

Dan Schaller, director of advocacy for the Colorado League of Charter Schools, says the bill will lead to greater burdens for charter schools.

“If successful, HB 16-1343 will undo a common-sense approach that eliminates unnecessary paperwork,” Schaller said.

Waivers Common

According to the Colorado League of Charter Schools, waivers have become commonplace over the past two decades, which led to the creation of the current system, where automatic waivers are applied under a law passed in 2014.

Schaller says current law allows traditional public schools to pursue waivers from certain state requirements. Most of the waivers, he says, refer to laws regulating government schools and are not applicable to charter schools.

In 2014, state Reps. Millie Hamner (D-Dillon) and Carole Murray (R-Castle Rock) sponsored House Bill 14-1292, the Student Success Act (SSA). Provisions in SSA automatically waive some state mandates previously required for new charter schools. SSA received near-unanimous support in the state’s legislature when it was proposed.

Johnny Kampis (jkampis@watchdog.org) is a content editor for Watchdog.org. Reprinted with permission.

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Charter schools will receive increased government support if Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy’s (D) proposed budget for fiscal year 2017 passes.

Malloy’s budget proposal increases state aid for public charter schools by $9.3 million and reduces state taxpayers’ funding of traditional local government schools by more than $11 million.

In 2015, Malloy told state lawmakers he would propose a funding increase for traditional government schools in return for increased funding for charter schools. Malloy’s budget proposal does not include the increased funding for traditional public schools.

“Public charter schools [in Connecticut] currently receive nearly $4,000 less in public operating funding per student than traditional district schools. If state leaders choose to invest in per-pupil funding to bring it closer to what districts receive, that’s a fair and critical funding increase.”

CHRIS HARRINGTON
CONNECTICUT POLICY MANAGER
NORTHEAST CHARTER SCHOOLS NETWORK

Harrington said, “If state leaders choose to invest in per-pupil funding to bring it closer to what districts receive, that’s a fair and critical funding increase.”

Harrington says Malloy’s budget proposal doubles down on success.

“Nearly 6,000 students are on waiting lists for public charter schools because they are doing right by kids and communities and offering a pathway to success,” Harrington said. “The governor and state legislators are reacting to that demand by investing in what works.”

More Bang for the Buck
Carol Liebau, president of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, says charter schools are a better use of taxpayer money than government schools.

“They’re receiving an increase, but again, it’s a reflection of their greater success in actually providing students with a quality education.

“Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the nation; compared to other students, our poor children receive the lowest test scores in the nation,” Liebau said. “It could well be that Gov. Malloy is aware of this and is trying to improve educational outcomes.”

Andrea Dillon (thell1885@gmail.com) writes from Holly Springs, North Carolina.
College Admissions Offices Adapt to the Boom in Homeschooling Popularity

By Andy Torbett

More parents than ever are turning to homeschooling as an alternative to enrolling their children in failing government schools, and colleges and universities are now adapting their admissions processes to better accommodate homeschooled children’s unique backgrounds and skills.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education suggest the number of homeschooled children in the United States has increased by 61.8 percent between 2002 and 2013.

‘Better Prepared’

Lennie Jarratt, the education transformation project manager at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, says home education generally prepares children for college better than government schools do.

“For the most part, homeschoolers are better prepared,” Jarratt said. “They have already learned how to study independently and are very self-directed. According to the National Home Education Research Institute, homeschooled students achieve a higher [American College Testing] score, 26.5 compared to 25 for the overall population. They also have higher retention and graduation rates.”

Challenges for Parents

Jarratt says colleges and universities are now seeking out homeschooled children.

“There are colleges that are actively recruiting homeschooled students,” Jarratt said. “Just one decade ago, this didn’t happen.”

Rise of the Homeschooled College Kid

William Estrada, director of federal relations at the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a non-profit “advocacy organization established to defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children,” according to its website, says the boom in homeschoolers heading off to college is the result of significant growth in homeschooling nationwide.

“There is absolutely an increase in the number of homeschooled students applying to college for one simple reason: The number of homeschoolers is continuing to grow, and homeschool graduates are graduating from high school and heading to college,” Estrada said. “HSLDA’s research has shown that homeschool students are better prepared for higher education than their traditionally educated peers. In addition, homeschoolers, due to their unique flexibility in learning, often have more diverse life experiences, including volunteering, politics, and community service.

“As homeschooling has become more popular, colleges and universities have gone from skeptical of homeschooled graduates to welcoming them with open arms,” Estrada said. “The system is working and does not need to be changed.”

Greater College Demand Expected

Estrada says Common Core, a set of national curriculum standards for government schools, may make homeschooled college applicants even more attractive to college admission officers.

“As the Common Core gains traction in public schools, you will see colleges and universities want more homeschool graduates, not less,” Estrada said. “They know that homeschoolers will be the best higher-education students because of their rigorous homeschool education. Homeschoolers have shown that education needs to be about what is best for the person, not about some hierarchical system.”

Andy Torbett (meconservativevoice@gmail.com) writes from Atkinson, Maine.

Mich. Lawmaker Proposes Using School Buses for Traffic Enforcement

By Tom Gantert

A Michigan lawmaker has proposed a bill that would allow Detroit government school buses to serve as mobile traffic enforcement cameras, which he says will help boost revenue for Detroit Public Schools (DPS), the city government’s financially distressed school system.

In March, state Sen. Bert Johnson (D-Highland Park) introduced Senate Bill 852, which would allow DPS to help collect traffic fines using traffic cameras mounted on school buses. Under the proposed law, the owner of a car whose driver illegally passed a school bus unloading or picking up children would be fined between $300 and $1,000, depending on the number of previous offenses associated with the vehicle’s owner.

Detroit Public Schools would get to keep most of the revenue from the traffic fine collections, with a portion being diverted to a private contracting business that would be responsible for operating the camera system.

Johnson did not return calls or e-mails from Michigan Capital Confidential reporters seeking comment.

‘Pure Money Grab’

Jim Walker, a spokesman for the National Motorists Association, says the true purpose of the bill is to raise more money, not improve children’s safety.

“It’s a pure money grab,” Walker said. “It’s about money. What they are trying to prevent is extremely rare.”

Walker says National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data show buses are more dangerous to children and pedestrians than cars.

From 1999 to 2013, there was an average of 3.53 child pedestrian fatalities per year caused by vehicles passing stopped school buses in the United States. Over that same period, an average of 9.15 child pedestrian fatalities per year were caused by school buses.

“It’s a pure money grab. It’s about money. What they are trying to prevent is extremely rare.”

JIM WALKER
NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

An Old Idea

In 2015, state Sens. Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge) and Goeff Hansen (R-Hart) introduced Senate Bill 183, which would have allowed any local government to mount automated ticket-issuing cameras on school buses.

Similar to SB 852, SB 183 was referred to the state’s Senate Transportation Committee, but no action was taken.

Tom Gantert (gantert@mackinac.org) is a senior capitol correspondent for Michigan Capitol Confidential, a daily news site of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Reprinted with permission.
A nationwide survey of 1,500 U.S. middle and high school science teachers, conducted by the National Center for Science Education and published in the February 12 issue of Science, found half of the teachers who discuss climate change in the classroom ignore evidence of the role of natural factors.

The survey found approximately 70 percent of middle school and 87 percent of high school science teachers discuss global warming in the classroom, spending an average of less than two hours over the course of an entire academic year on the topic.

More than half of the middle and high school science teachers discussing climate change teach humans’ use of fossil fuels is mostly responsible for recent global climate changes. About 30 percent of science teachers discuss human actions and natural processes as potential causes of climate change, and 12 percent of science teachers addressing climate change do not emphasize possible human causes.

The study’s lead author, Eric Plutzer, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, told National Public Radio that “are sending clear messages that human consumption of fossil fuels is the major cause of recent warming” are right. He said the 30 percent of teachers telling students natural factors have a role in climate change are creating a problem because their teaching sends “mixed messages” about whether the causes of climate change are still up for debate.

‘Suppressing Controversy’

Rachelle Peterson, director of research projects at the National Association of Scholars, says the suppression of hypotheses in the name of promoting favored narratives contradicts the scientific process, which is based on questioning theories and examining evidence.

“Suppressing controversy is the real tragedy in the classroom.” Peterson said. “The idea the climate changes in only one way due to only one cause is reductionist.”

Peterson says teachers should teach the controversy, instead of favoring one hypothesis over another.

“Teachers who acknowledge the ongoing debates in climate science do their students a service and should be applauded,” Peterson said. “To claim teachers must validate the theory of global warming and cast 100 percent of the blame on human actions is to demand teachers adopt and pass on to their students a simplistic and counterproductive view of science.”

Although nearly 68 percent of those surveyed said they personally believed humans were causing global warming, many left their personal opinions out of the classroom, choosing to teach the controversy by presenting a balanced view of the evidence.

‘Horrifying’ Truth Suppression

Jane Shaw, former president and current board member of the John W. Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, says the study’s authors are the ones getting the science wrong.

“The survey’s authors assume humans ‘are causing’ climate change, as though that were the only cause,” said Shaw. “That assumption is not scientific at all. Humans may be contributing, but [they are] exclusively causing it? That’s ridiculous.”

Shaw says teachers should teach the truth, not worry about sending mixed messages.

“Equally bad is the claim teachers should shave the truth in order to avoid sending ‘mixed messages’ to middle school and high school students,” said Shaw. “Telling the truth is bad because it sends ‘mixed messages?’ That’s a horrifying claim.”

H. Sterling Burnett, Ph.D. (hburnnett@heartland.org) is a research fellow at The Heartland Institute.

**IN OTHER WORDS . . .**

“Using the loaded and insulting term ‘denial,’ NCSE programs and policy director Josh Rosenau lamented that ‘at least one in three teachers bring climate change denial into the classroom.’

“Worse, half of the surveyed teachers have allowed students to discuss the supposed ‘controversy’ over climate change without guiding students to the scientifically supported conclusion,” Rosenau said.

“The nerve of teachers allowing debate, when climate alarmists insist there is ‘no debate.’”

— Alatheia Larsen, “Climate Group Dismayed That Students Are Allowed to Discuss Climate Change ‘Controversy,’” Newsbusters, February 16, 2016
West Virginia Governor Vetoes Bill to Repeal Common Core

By Andy Torbett

On April 1, West Virginia Gov. Earl Tomblin (D) vetoed a measure that would have repealed the state’s Common Core curriculum and prohibit the state’s Board of Education from implementing the national curriculum standards and aligned testing programs.

In March, the state Senate had approved House Bill 4014, sponsored by state Del. Jim Butler (R-Mason), and sent it to Tomblin for his signature.

Butler says his measure would have increased the quality of education in West Virginia government schools by removing government bureaucracy from the classroom.

‘Get the Bureaucracy Out’

“The goal is actually to make our education system better for West Virginia kids and also for West Virginia teachers,” Butler said. “When I first ran for office, almost four years ago now, everything I heard from teachers was ‘get the bureaucracy out of the classroom, and let us teach.’”

Butler says his bill would have improved West Virginia children’s education experience by removing unnecessary restrictions imposed by out-of-state interference.

“This is not a political move by any stretch of the imagination,” Butler said. “What this is all about is giving West Virginia students the best opportunities, the best education experience, and giving teachers the best opportunities, the best education experience, and freedom to teach, rather than forcing them to excessively teach to the test and have to follow these cumbersome strategies that are part of Common Core. What we’re trying to do is give teachers freedom to use what works.”

Butler says the State Board of Education began implementing the Common Core curriculum and testing programs years ago in order to establish an argument that suggests the state must keep the standards because money has already been spent on implementation.

“The problem is we started asking questions about this … over three years ago,” Butler said. “I told them we had concerns and wanted to do intra-committee meetings, … find out what they were doing, how much money they were spending, and all of that, … three years ago, before they had spent all of this money.

“They have done that intentionally, I believe,” Butler said. “They have spent the money and really almost accelerated what they’re doing so they would have this argument.”

‘Assailed’ by Federal Interference

Terry Wallace, an education policy expert with the Public Policy Foundation of West Virginia, says West Virginians are fighting back against top-down policies coming from Washington, DC.

“West Virginia voters have been assailed with a range of top-down federal regulatory overreaches in several areas that have crippled the state’s economy, leading to job losses, out-migration of the population, and a diminution of citizens’ quality of life,” Wallace said. “Common Core is viewed as one more unnecessary federal intrusion.”

Andy Torbett (meconservativevoice@gmail.com) writes from Atkinson, Maine.

Oklahoma Homeschooling Group, State University Make Athletics-Access Deal

By Jenni White

An Oklahoma government-supported university is working with a local grassroots homeschooling athletics organization to give home-educated children in the region the opportunity to play organized league sports with other home-educated teams.

In March, the Northeast Oklahoma Association of Homeschools (NOAH), “a homeschool organization with the specific objective of providing athletic and educational services to the homeschooling community,” according to its website, entered into an agreement with Rogers State University (RSU), a regional four-year university in northeastern Oklahoma, to allow NOAH’s boys’ and girls’ soccer teams to hold “home” matches at the college’s soccer venue, Soldier Field.

Win-Win Situation

Derek Larkin, head coach for the men’s soccer team at Rogers State University, says the deal is a win-win for the university and area home-educated children.

“NOAH came to RSU and asked about the possibility of the soccer clubs using the field,” Larkin said. “The groups rent the facility for a reasonable price, and the kids get to play at a state-of-the-art facility, which is pretty cool for them,” Larkin said. “It allows us to get students and families on our campus to check us out.”

Larkin says the deal is ultimately all about helping the area’s children.

“It’s great that we can partner with anyone and help the kids, because it’s all about the kids,” Larkin said.

‘Makes Perfect Sense’

Brandon Dutcher, senior vice president at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, says the agreement between NOAH and RSU shows how government officials can use common sense to save taxpayers’ money.

“It’s encouraging to see homeschooled students and their parents—who are, let us remember, taxpayers—getting the opportunity to use public facilities,” Dutcher said. “That’s a lot of money that policymakers can now use to spend on things like health care, roads and bridges, and higher-education institutions such as Rogers State University. I think the partnership between the homeschoolers and RSU makes perfect sense.”

Dutcher says the deal also shows how government school officials can promote a sense of togetherness in their communities.

“Letting citizens use their facilities is one small way school officials can [promote community spirit] and demonstrate added value to the community,” Dutcher said.

Jenni White (jlwplusdmw@gmail.com) writes from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
West Virginia has passed into law a bill easing homeschooling parents’ paperwork burden, reforming the way the state’s “notice of intent” process works.

Gov. Earl Tomblin (D) signed House Bill 4175 into law in March. When the law takes effect in May, homeschooling parents will be required to submit notice of intent paperwork to government school district officials only once, instead of every year.

The bill also expedites the process for parents wishing to withdraw their children from government schools and reduces the frequency of required curriculum assessment reports.

‘Trusting the Parents’
State Del. Brian Kurcaba (R-Monongalia County), the bill’s sponsor and a homeschooling parent, says the new law supports parents’ right to choose how to educate their children.

“This bill is about liberty and freedom and trusting the parents,” Kurcaba said. “Parents have proven themselves historically across the country, and homeschooling kids have earned the reputation of scoring very well on tests.

“You know your kids better than anybody else,” Kurcaba said. “You can work one-on-one with your child, versus 20 in a classroom. Ultimately, it’s a trust issue. It’s nice to know you’re trusted.”

Parents Empowered
Kurcaba says more parents are realizing they can take charge of their children’s upbringing.

“[Homeschooling is] the fastest-growing form of education,” Kurcaba said. “If you’re really capable.”

Kurcaba says the law reduces government intrusion into parenting and education.

“This bill takes the hassle away,” Kurcaba said. “It’s a matter of respecting homeschooling parents and recognizing that homeschooling kids are equal. Homeschooling parents are just as busy, if not busier, than public school parents, and this bill takes many things to do off their plate.”

Paperwork Reduction Act
Stephanie Butcher, a board member of the West Virginia Home Educators Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting and defending home education in the state, says the new law will make home education less confusing for new homeschooling families.

“This bill reduces the paperwork, limiting the confusion that frequently accompanies it,” Butcher said. “Eliminating the two-week waiting period to withdraw a child from public school is huge. Every year we hear from parents of students being threatened by bullies. It’s better to make a quick, clean break when your child doesn’t feel safe in the classroom or in the halls.”

Getting with the Program
Butcher says Tomblin’s decision to sign the bill helps modernize the state’s home-education laws.

“Numerous states have successfully removed burdens for home educators,” Butcher said. “It’s a very exciting time to be part of the home-education community in the Mountain State. Our numbers continue to grow, and our youngsters continue to excel and succeed.”

Teresa Mull (tmull@heartland.org) is an education research fellow for The Heartland Institute.
John King was nominated for the position of secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in March, replacing former DOE head Arne Duncan.

Forty-nine senators voted in favor of confirming King and 40 voted “no.” Opposition to King’s confirmation did not originate from conservatives alone; it also came from many liberal Democrats, who have expressed their opposition to King’s disdain for free speech, his support for Common Core-aligned testing, and his mismanagement of New York’s schools during his tenure as the New York State education commissioner.

Ignoring Facts?
Support for King also came from both sides of the political spectrum. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, said King would fix broken federal education policies.

“We need an education secretary confirmed by and accountable to the Senate, so that the law that 85 of us voted for to fix No Child Left Behind can be implemented the way we wrote it,” Alexander said during King’s nomination hearings.

Apparently, Alexander was ignorant of King’s track record of bypassing laws and public opinion to accomplish his education agenda, or perhaps Alexander chose to ignore that record.

Opposition from Liberals
In March, Washington Post writer Valerie Strauss outlined King’s record in a news article, prefacing it with a parade of progressive education leaders’ open-letters opposing a “yes” vote on King, which included a damming summary of his record in New York.

“During that tenure, King led a series of highly controversial school reforms that included a new teacher evaluation system using student standardized test scores that critics say is nonsensical, for example, art teachers were evaluated by student math test scores,” Strauss wrote for the Washington Post. “His oversight of the implementation of the Common Core standards and aligned Pearson-designed standardized tests was considered such a disaster that New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo wrote in a letter to top state education officials that ‘Common Core’s implementation in New York has been flawed and mismanaged from the start.’”

Backlash
But that’s not all; Strauss says a significant number of New York parents opposed King’s education policies. “King’s testing policies led to the creation of an opt-out movement in New York, in which 20 percent of test-takers statewide sat out the tests this spring,” Strauss wrote.

Opposition from Parents
In March, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) alerted its conservative-leaning supporters about King’s record.

Mike Smith, HSLDA’s president, encouraged his organization’s members to express their concerns about King’s opposition to parental involvement in the education process and his support for Common Core policies in an e-mail to supporters.

“King is one of Common Core’s staunchest advocates and a firm believer in the power of educational bureaucracy,” Smith wrote. “During his time as New York’s education commissioner, from 2011-14, King repeatedly shut down important political discourse, particularly involving discussions related to whether New York should adopt Common Core. King canceled town hall meetings, limited comment time for parents and educators, and called concerned protesters ‘brainwashed.’”

King’s Appointment Will Protect Common Core
King’s promotion will stall states’ efforts to extricate themselves from the Common Core web, Smith says. “Promoting King to U.S. secretary of education will have a negative effect on the progress states have made away from Common Core since Arne Duncan’s resignation,” Smith wrote. “An outspoken proponent of student data tracking, King is known for his support of failed data hubs, such as inBloom, which compromise the safety and privacy of personal student information. Parents and educators should be concerned for his possible data-tracking policies at a national level.”

Unifying Against Bad Ideas
Nominating King shows Obama is politically tone-deaf. Over the years, Obama has said he wants to find points of agreement between the left and right. The opposition from both sides of the aisle against King’s nomination shows finding agreement is possible, though not in the way Obama meant it.

Joy Pullmann (jpullmann@heartland.org) is a research fellow on education policy for The Heartland Institute. An earlier version of this article first appeared in School Choice Weekly. Reprinted with permission.

IN OTHER WORDS . . .

 “[The Home School Legal Defense Association] strongly opposes [John B.] King’s nomination due to his outspoken support for national databases and the Common Core. Even though the recent Every Student Succeeds Act includes strong language prohibiting national databases and limiting the federal role in Common Core, King’s past actions indicate that he will seek to thwart Congress’ intent if he is confirmed to be the newest U.S. Secretary of Education. … ”

“New York’s own state Assemblyman Raymond Walter describes King as ‘somebody who doesn’t listen to teachers, doesn’t listen to parents, and pushes his own agenda.’

“We agree. We urge parents—whether they are homeschoolers, public schoolers, or private schoolers—to oppose John King Jr.’s nomination for U.S. Secretary of Education. … ”

“It is important to note that this is not a Republican or Democrat issue. Education experts and analysts on both sides of the aisle have noted King’s inflexibility, inefficiency, and lack of approachability. Analysts from the Washington Post, Salon, and The Nation, along with commentator Michelle Malkin, among many others, have denounced his leadership style, pleading for the American people to look out for their rights.”


INTERNET INFO

Reading Is Not ‘Getting Meaning from Print’

By Bruce Deitrick Price

If you want to be promoted to the upper echelons of the U.S. education establishment, there is one big claim you have to repeat with endless enthusiasm: “Reading is about getting meaning from print.” This phrase, in all of its various forms, is ubiquitous in K–12 education.

What does it mean? Consider a 1st grade student who is trying to follow this blueprint. The child is instructed not to be concerned with letters or sounding out words. He or she is told to be concerned only with figuring out the meaning of what is on the page.

**Noodle-y Sophistry**

For example, imagine you are in Japan and see a poster advertising noodles. You guess the ad is saying, “Our noodles are tasty.” Even though you can’t read a word of Japanese, a teacher can declare that you have determined the correct “meaning from print,” and, therefore, you would be considered a good reader!

The shift from emphasizing sounds to emphasizing meaning is one of the greatest switcheroos in all of intellectual history. English is a phonetic language, and like all the other phonetic languages found in Europe, it ought to be learned phonetically. Not learning to read in this way is a strange aberration that ought to be avoided whenever possible.

**Quick History of Reading Education**

The historical background for this strangeness is complex in the details, but the basic idea is simple enough. At the start of the twentieth century, leading educators in the United States did not advocate for widespread academic education and literacy among all groups within society. They had a low opinion of what workers, immigrants, and ordinary people needed to know in order to be productive in society.

G. Stanley Hall, one of the most prominent voices in American education at the time, pontificated, “Little mamie insistence that if a child says ‘horse’ instead of ‘pony,’” even though the written word on the page is “pony,” the child grasps the true meaning of the passage and is essentially reading. Imagine the confusion that will follow this child forever. If “pony” can be pronounced “horse,” can “horse” be pronounced “pony?” Reading becomes a completely illogical and imprecise exercise.

Kenneth Goodman, another important twentieth century education guru, built a career on his cockamamie insistence that if a child says “horse” instead of “pony,” even though the written word on the page is “pony,” the child grasps the true meaning of the passage and is essentially reading. Imagine the confusion that will follow this child forever. If “pony” can be pronounced “horse,” can “horse” be pronounced “pony?” Reading becomes a completely illogical and imprecise exercise.

In 1906, one of Hall’s graduate students, Edmund Burke Huey, wrote a book that boldly articulated the views that his mentor presumably encouraged. Huey’s book seems to be the first explicit statement of the meaning-over-sound sophistry. In Huey’s 1908 book *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading,* he wrote that pronunciation was irrelevant to understanding.

“It is not indeed necessary that the child should be able to pronounce correctly or pronounce at all, at first, the new words that appear in his reading, any more than that he should spell or write all the new words that he hears spoken,” Huey wrote.

For most of the past century, the education establishment has declared phonics dead and worthless. But the results of favoring meaning over sound prove such a technique can’t be justified, as Rudolf Flesch argued in *Why Johnny Can’t Read,* his most famous book, published in 1955.

‘Getting Sounds from Print’

Reading is about attaining sounds from print, either aloud or in your head. Here is the sequence: print, sounds, meaning. The education establishment wants to pretend you can skip the central step by memorizing thousands of words visually.

**Teaching What Works**

Research has shown children enter 1st grade recognizing 15,000 words or more. These words, many of them long and sophisticated, such as “digital” and “quarterback,” are in their brains as spoken words.

Phonics lets children sound out a printed word and realize they already know what it means. Schools should rely on what has always worked: focusing on the alphabet and the sounds the letters represent.

Bruce Deitrick Price (bruce@improve-education.org) is an essayist focusing on education issues. This article was originally published by American Thinker. Reprinted with permission of the author.
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