

Council for American Private Education

# CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

## Big Blue Illinois Enacts School Choice Legislation

School choice advocates across the country have been collectively celebrating landmark scholarship tax credit legislation that Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner signed August 31. Although 17 other states have similar programs, this was the school choice movement's "first victory in a big and overwhelmingly Democratic state," according to Scott Jensen, senior government affairs advisor for the American Federation for Children (AFC). "Hopefully, this victory for children in the big blue state of Illinois, will encourage other large Democratic states to embrace school choice," he added.

The Illinois program provides tax credits to individuals and corporations that donate to organizations that award scholarships to students to attend private schools. The tax credits will be worth 75 percent of the donation's value, so a \$1,000 donation will yield a tax savings of \$750. Up to \$75 million in tax credits will be issued each year, translating into \$100 million in scholarships. The legislation allows individual donors to direct their contributions to particular types of schools or even a particular school, but prohibits corporate donors from doing so.

### Lowest-Income Families First

Students from families with incomes at or under 300 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) are eligible for scholarships, but priority will be given to families with incomes at or under 185 percent of FPL. Students from the latter group will receive scholarships covering 100 percent of tuition and fees. Other eligible students will receive scholarships worth 75 percent or 50 percent of expenses, depending on family income.

Scholarships are capped at the state's average per-pupil operating payment (roughly \$12,300), with amounts increased for English learners, gifted students, and those with special needs.

Schools enrolling scholarship students must annually test those students using the same state assessments given to public school students, an obstacle for some private schools.

Surrounded by children and political leaders, Governor Bruce Rauner signed the historic legislation as part of a comprehensive bipartisan school funding package. "Every Illinois student, regardless of where they live, how much money their parents make, or what school they attend, will now have the resources they need to achieve their dreams," he said. "Parents will be empowered with more choice so they can decide which school is the best fit for their child. This historic legislation represents the start of a brighter future for Illinois schoolchildren and gives each student an equal chance at an excellent education."

House Speaker Michael J. Madigan (D-Chicago) called the compromise funding bill "a victory for our schools, our students and our communities."

### Fulsome Praise

Naturally, the school choice advocacy community offered effusive praise for the measure, singling out the efforts of One Chance Illinois for its leadership in the campaign.

Tommy Schultz, national communications director for the American Federation for Children, said that as a result of the legislation, families "who desperately want options in education will now finally have

access to high quality schools that families with means already benefit from today."

EdChoice President and CEO Robert Enlow called the new program "an outstanding example of what happens when elected officials, advocates, state partners

and community leaders work together on behalf of families." Enlow said his group was looking forward "to thousands of families having access to educational equity and options that previously were out of reach."

Excellence in Education

Chairman Jeb Bush called the last day of August "an historic day for thousands of Illinois families who have been granted the freedom and ability to choose the learning environment that best matches their children's individual needs."

### Social Justice Issue

Advocates in Illinois also hailed the measure. The Illinois Catholic Conference said access to quality education "is one of the greatest social justice issues of our time, and is much too important to be determined solely by where a student lives." The conference expressed gratitude "to the governor and the legislative leaders on both sides of the aisle."

Rabbi Shlomo Soroka, director of government affairs for Agudath Israel of Illinois, called the legislation "a huge victory for our community and for all the children in the State of Illinois." He added, "We couldn't have done it without the vision and efforts of our elected officials and coalition partners."



Gov. Bruce Rauner signs the education bill at Ebinger Elementary School in Chicago. (Office of the Governor Photo)

**CAPE member organizations:**

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Council of Islamic Schools in North America
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Islamic Schools League of America
- Jesuit Schools Network
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- Affiliated State Organizations

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

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13017 Wisteria Drive #457  
 Germantown, MD 20874  
 (tel) 301-916-8460  
 (fax) 301-916-8485  
 (email) cape@capenet.org

[www.capenet.org](http://www.capenet.org)



## GenForward Survey: Millennials Support Vouchers

Millennials support vouchers, according to the GenForward Survey at the University of Chicago. The support is especially strong among millennials of color and gets stronger still for voucher programs targeted to low-income students.

Specifically, among millennials, 79 percent of African Americans, 76 percent of Asian Americans, 77 percent of Latinxs, and 66 percent of whites support vouchers to pay some of the tuition for low-income students to attend private schools. Asked about voucher for all students (not just low-income students), 69 percent of African Americans, 60 percent of Asian Americans, 66 percent of Latinxs, and 49 percent of whites support the idea.

As the report on the survey put it succinctly, there is “widespread support for vouchers” among millennials.

### Views on Education

Released September 12, the report describes itself as providing “an extensive look at millennials’ views about education in America today, including their current evaluations of public schools, their thoughts about what makes a school great, the ways in which they are reimagining education, their perspectives on issues of equity in schools, and their beliefs about the promises and challenges of higher education.”

Data for the report were collected between June 23 and July 10 of this year.

### Grading Education

Support for vouchers may be related to how millennials regard public schools. Although a majority of millennials rate their own education an A or B, they give much lower grades to public schools in general.

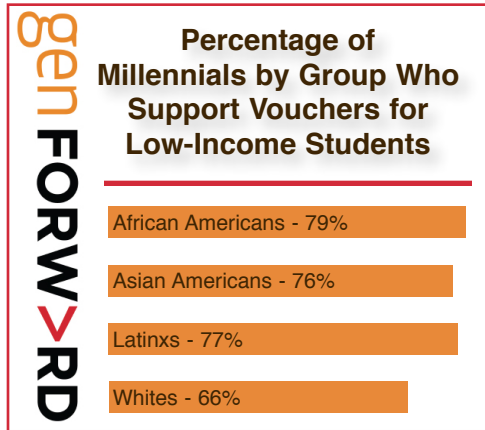
“Only 26 percent of African Americans, 31 percent of Asian Americans, 32 percent of Latinxs, and 20 percent of whites give the public schools in the nation a grade of A or B,” according to the report.

### Racial and Ethnic Divide

The report also finds “a racial and ethnic divide among millennials in their views about the importance of race to education.” It turns out that “majorities of African Americans (59 percent) and Asian Americans (56 percent) say that students of color get a worse education than

white students, while majorities of Latinxs (55 percent) and whites (51 percent) say that race plays very little role in determining the quality of education.”

When it comes to holding schools accountable, “Overall, a majority (55 percent) of millennials agree that U.S. schools are not being held accountable for the performance of students of color, including strong majorities of African Americans (69 percent) and Asian Americans (67 percent).”



Views about the importance of integration in education also differ by race and ethnicity. “Majorities of African Americans (54 percent) and Asian Americans (52 percent) believe that students should go to racially diverse schools even if that requires travel, whereas Latinxs (61 percent) and whites (73 percent) say that students should go to local com-

munity schools even if that means most students are of the same race.”

And on the topic of school discipline, “African American millennials (34 percent) cite lack of sensitivity among teachers and administrators to issues confronting Black and Hispanic students as the primary reason these students are suspended at higher rates than other students. Asian Americans (35 percent), Latinxs (39 percent) and whites (40 percent) attribute disproportionate suspensions to Blacks and Hispanics attending schools with fewer resources that have to rely on strict discipline.”

### First of Its Kind

According to the report, the GenForward Survey is “the first of its kind.” In brief, it is “a nationally representative survey of over 1,750 young adults ages 18-34 conducted bimonthly that pays special attention to how race and ethnicity influence how young adults or millennials experience and think about the world.”

The report notes that millennials “now represent the largest generation of Americans, and they are by far the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the country.”

Specifically, “[a]bout 19 percent of millennials identify as Latino, Latinx or Hispanic, 13 percent as Black or African American, and 6 percent as Asian American.”

The GenForward report is available in full at [genforwardsurvey.com](http://genforwardsurvey.com).

## DeVos to Educators: Focus on the Needs of Students

Affirming that every student “deserves the opportunity to learn in an environment that meets his or her unique needs,” U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos recently restated her strong support for parent choice in education. “There are too many parents who are denied the fundamental right to decide the best way to educate their child,” she said September 27 at the annual conference for private school leaders that the Education Department has been hosting for the past 13 years. “Every American family should feel proud of the school or schools to which they send their children.”

Agnostic about whether a child attends a public, private, or charter school, and more concerned about whether the school offers a quality education, the secretary said, “We need to focus less on the word that comes before school—the kind of school—and focus more on the needs of the students the school serves.”

Observing that some families are denied access to quality schools because of their ZIP code or income and others because of a “blind defense of the status quo” among educators, the secretary challenged every school, including private schools, to strive to do better. “Not even the best private school in America meets the needs of every child,” she said.

The annual conference, sponsored by the Education Department’s Office of No-Public Education (ONPE), was packed with practical information and inspiring ideas designed to help private school leaders navigate the intersection between public policy and private education.

### Ombudsman

A key discussion at the conference centered on the work of the state ombudsman, a new position established under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) to ensure that school districts comply with the act’s provisions requiring equitable services to students in private schools.

This was the first Education Department conference to involve ombudsmen as full participants.

Chris Kelly, the ombudsman from Virginia, and Shaun Owen, his counterpart from Georgia, described in practical terms the positive

steps they have taken with private school officials in their states to fulfill the role of the office and implement the programs in ESEA that apply to private school students. They also described the pioneering work of a State Ombudsman Collaborative they established and the webinar series the collaborative continues to sponsor.

Mark Siegel, a member of CAPE’s board and head of the Oregon CAPE, described the solution-oriented, cooperative work being done between private school officials and state officials in his state. He urged all parties to strive for a “collaborative culture” and a “friendly face” in pursuing the purposes of the ombudsman.

### Timely Topics

Special sessions throughout the conference covered a host of timely topics. A panel discussion focused on empowering private school officials to participate in timely and meaningful consultation relating to services for students under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).

In another session, David Esquith, director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students, identified all the resources the department is making available to assist public and private schools affected by recent hurricanes. He touted the wealth of tools and links available on the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center Web site ([rems.ed.gov](http://rems.ed.gov)).

In a segment spotlighting CAPE, Joe McTighe talked about the past, present, and future of private education in America, highlighting how private schools serve the public good.

Rev. Joe O’Keefe, the private school representative on the National Assessment Governing Board, and Chris Chapman, associate commissioner at the National Center for Education Statistics, urged the private school community to participate in NAEP assessments and unveiled a new plan to increase participation rates.

Also, a lively legal discussion on the implications of the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer* featured attorneys from the department’s Office of General Counsel and David Cortman of the Alliance Defending Freedom, who argued the case before the court.



Education Secretary Betsy DeVos addresses private school leaders September 27. (U.S. Department of Education Photo)

## School Visits

Secretaries of education generally like to visit schools, but not necessarily all kinds of schools. Private schools in particular typically get short shrift on a secretary’s travel itinerary. No so with Betsy DeVos, who in just eight months as secretary has already toured 10 private K-12 schools—probably a record.

Covering a rich array of excellent programs, Secretary DeVos’s school trips extend to all sectors: traditional public, charter, religious, and independent. Her visits to private schools alone have conveyed considerable variety.

As part of her Rethink School tour last month, the secretary showcased the Kansas City Academy, a small independent school with a diverse student body that emphasizes creativity through visual arts, music, theater, and culinary arts. While there, Secretary DeVos created a clay bowl in the pottery room and cooked a veggie burger in the kitchen.

At another stop on the tour, the tuition-free Nelson Mandela Elementary School in Omaha, which employs a “multi-sensory, evidence-based” curriculum, the secretary witnessed an impressive display of musical skills by young students in a violin class.

During her stay at the Van Andel Education Institute in Grand Rapids, a school that emphasizes science education through hands-on learning, the secretary observed fifth- and sixth-graders in the STEM program studying the eating habits of animals.

Other private schools Mrs. DeVos has visited during her brief tenure include Christian Academy for Reaching Excellence (CARE) Elementary School in Miami; Cornerstone Christian School in the District of Columbia; Firefly Autism House in Denver; Holy Comforter Episcopal School in Tallahassee; Providence Cristo Rey High School in Indianapolis; St. Andrew Catholic School in Orlando, and St. Mary’s Catholic School in Lincoln.



## CAPE notes

★ U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced September 28 the names of 342 schools identified by the U.S. Department of Education as the National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2017.

Schools were selected either because their test scores in reading and math placed them among the top-performing schools in the nation or state, or because they made notable improvements in closing achievement gaps.

Fifty private schools were among the awardees this year. Each state's commissioner of education nominates public schools for the award, and CAPE nominates private schools. All winning schools will be honored at an awards ceremony November 6-7 in Washington, DC.

"National Blue Ribbon Schools are active demonstrations of preparing every child for a bright future," said Secretary DeVos in a video announcement streamed by the Department of Education. "You are visionaries, innovators and leaders. You have much to teach us: some of you personalize student learning, others engage parents and communities in the work and life of your local schools and still others develop strong and forward-thinking leaders from among your teaching staff."

Now in its 35th year, the program has cumulatively recognized more than 8,500 schools.

More information about the program, including the application, procedures, and assessment standards for the 2018 cycle, is available on CAPE's Web site at <[www.capenet.org/brs.html](http://www.capenet.org/brs.html)>.



The following private schools were named 2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools:

**Arizona** — Seton Catholic Preparatory, Chandler • **California** — Capital Christian Middle School, Sacramento • Santa Fe Christian Upper School, Solana Beach • **Connecticut** — Bicultural Day School, Stamford • **Florida** — Mount Dora Christian Academy Elementary School, Mount Dora • **Georgia** — Savannah Christian Preparatory Lower School, Savannah • St John the Evangelist School, Hapeville • The Atlanta School, Roswell • **Illinois** — Central Catholic High School, Bloomington • Holy Family Catholic Academy, Inverness • Peoria Christian School, Peoria • St Edward School, Chicago • St Gilbert Elementary School, Grayslake • St Josephat School, Chicago • St Joseph School, Libertyville • St Joseph School, Wilmette • Wheaton Christian Grammar School, Winfield • **Kentucky** — Christ the King

School, Lexington • Holy Trinity Parish School, Louisville • St Joseph School, Crescent Springs • St Joseph School, Bardstown • Villa Madonna Academy Elementary School, Villa Hills • **Maryland** — Little Flower School, Bethesda • St John Regional Catholic School, Frederick • St John the Evangelist Catholic School, Long Green Valley, Hydes • St John's School, Hollywood • St Louis School, Clarksville • St Mary Catholic School, Hagerstown • St Peter's Elementary School, Waldorf • **New Hampshire** — Nashua Catholic Regional Jr High School, Nashua • **New Jersey** — All Saints Catholic Academy, Bayonne • Cedar Hill Prep School, Somerset • Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft • Hoboken Catholic Academy, Hoboken • The Academy of Our Lady of Peace, New Providence • Our Lady of the Lake School, Verona • St Francis Cathedral School, Metuchen • St Peter Academy, River Edge • **Pennsylvania** — Gwynedd Mercy Academy Elementary, Spring House • SS Simon and Jude, West Chester • St Joseph School, Downingtown • St Maximilian Kolbe School, West Chester • St Teresa of Calcutta School, Schwenksville • **South Dakota** — Immaculate Conception School, Watertown • **Tennessee** — St Bernard Academy, Nashville • St Matthew School, Franklin • **Texas** — Grace Community Elementary School, Tyler • Legacy Christian Academy Upper School, Frisco • **Virginia** • Trinity School at Meadow View, Falls Church • **Wisconsin** — Blessed Sacrament School, La Crosse.