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Educate for Eternity.

AACS Co-Hosts U.S. Capitol Briefing on Education

On Tuesday, the American Association of Christian Schools joined the Home School Legal Defense Association and the Association of Christian Schools International in hosting a luncheon briefing in the U.S. Capitol on “Protecting Religious and Home Schools in ESEA Reauthorization.” The purpose of this briefing was to educate Hill staffers and other organizations on the importance of keeping language in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which protects the autonomy of private, religious, and home schools, and also prohibits a nationalized curriculum, nationalized test, nationalized mandatory teacher certification, and a national student data base.

Speakers at the briefing included AACS President Dr. Keith Wiebe; Will Estrada, HLSDA Director of Federal Relations; Dr. John Holmes, ACSI Director of Government Affairs; and Maureen Wiebe, AACS Legislative Director. Close to 80 people attended the briefing, including Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) and Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ). Also attending were representatives from other private school organizations and family groups, as well as staffers from Congressional offices from both the House and the Senate.

Opening the briefing, AACS President Dr. Keith Wiebe emphasized the great success that private, religious schools and home schools have enjoyed in educating children nationwide from all backgrounds. He pointed to three reasons that help them achieve this success: their commitment to parents, their commitment to their mission, and their autonomy. He stated, “Christian schools operate according to a mission that allows them to provide religious and theological teaching while providing excellent academics in a healthy and safe environment. Their mission requires that they operate according to the dictates of their faith. For these Christian educators, the heart of education is truly the education of the heart.”

Dr. John Holmes, ACSI Director of Government Affairs, stressed the value of high quality teachers, explaining that there are many exceptional teachers who may not necessarily be certified. While teacher certification is helpful, it is not the determining factor in making a “high quality” teacher. He also emphasized that a federal teacher certification program could become mandatory, forcing all teachers, including private school teachers and home school parents, to submit to curricula and training that they may find offensive, or antithetical to their values.

Maureen Wiebe, AACS Legislative Director, also had the opportunity to speak at the briefing, and emphasized the importance of maintaining the language in ESEA that prohibits the establishment of a nationalized curriculum and nationalized test. She stated, “A nationalized curriculum would not take into account the autonomy of private, religious, and home schools that allows them to use a curriculum consistent with their mission and purpose. This would have a debilitating effect on the ability of these schools to continue providing a quality education that is in accordance with the theological, spiritual, or pedagogical nature that makes them distinctive. Specifically, the religious freedom of faith-based schools would also be jeopardized should they be forced to comply with a nationalized curriculum.” In addition, a nationalized curriculum would take away from the local control and individualized instruction that is essential to successful education, and it would be easily susceptible to politicization of special interest groups.

Concluding the briefing, HSLDA Director of Government Affairs Will Estrada discussed the potential danger that would be posed to students' and families' privacy if a national student data base were established. He also stressed the importance of maintaining specific legislative language that states specifically that private, religious, and home schools are not regulated under the law. The inclusion of this language is vital in protecting parental rights in education, and in protecting the autonomy of private, religious, and home schools.

Common themes in recent ESEA hearings on Capitol Hill and in the [blueprint](#) of the Administration's education agenda have been high quality teachers, national standards, and graduating "college and career ready" students. This briefing held on Tuesday was timely because it gave us an excellent opportunity to explain how federal control would jeopardize the freedoms enjoyed by faith-based, private, and home school participants and thereby hurt the excellent education these institutions provide.

In an effort to ensure that our message was clear, attendees received documents which highlighted the specific legislative language that protects our schools and home schools and the reasons this language is so important. These documents can be read [here](#).