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The most important thought that ever occupied my mind is that of my individual responsibility to God.
Daniel Webster

The Heritage Foundation Highlights Top Education Stories of 2011

Heritage Foundation policy analyst [Lindsey Burke](#) has compiled a report on the top ten education stories of 2011. Her research demonstrates the ever increasing federal involvement in all facets of education. From the crackdown on for profit and online universities to the No Child Left Behind waivers, the Administration's overreaching attempt to correct problems in the educational community has created a hodgepodge of confusing regulations resulting in numerous hearings and clarifications. On the Congressional level, the House of Representatives pursued an incremental approach to education reform while their Senate counterparts offered a comprehensive revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. There were several significant shifts outside the Beltway. A major surge in online learning and virtual school and charter school offerings occurred across the country. The favorable Supreme Court ruling in the Arizona school tuition case allowed other states to consider bills that would enact similar legislation to give parents more educational options. Finally, the *Wall Street Journal* designated 2011 as the "year of school choice." To read the report [click here](#).

Christian Colleges Urge Removal of Mandate

In a [letter](#), the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (which has 115 member institutions across the country) [urged](#) the White House to reconsider the mandate from the healthcare bill (Obamacare) that will require almost all universities to [provide](#) insurance plans that cover abortion, abortion inducing drugs, sterilization, and a variety of other services. This mandate is the result of a provision in Obamacare which requires an array of "free" well-woman services be provided by employers. Although the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been the most vocal [opponent](#) of the mandate, other Protestant groups share similar concerns about being forced to provide services through student or employee health plans that violate their religious doctrines or face exorbitant fines for noncompliance. The proposed rule is slated to take effect in August 2012. The narrow religious exemption included would not alleviate the concerns of most religious institutions. In order to qualify for the exemption, institutions must primarily hire and serve members of their own faith, meet IRS guidelines for churches or religious associations and have the "inculcation of religious values" as their main function. Since most Christian higher education providers have open enrollment, that stipulation alone would disqualify them from receiving the exemption. Legal challenges have been brought by Belmont Abbey College and Colorado Christian University, as [CCCU](#) president Paul Corts has acknowledged this issue is not just a Catholic issue anymore.

Abstinence Funding Reinstated in Spending Measure

The National Abstinence Education Association [applauds](#) the reinstatement of abstinence-based sexual education funding (5 million dollars) in the year-end "omnibus" appropriations [package](#) (\$662 billion). The NAEA [promotes](#) a Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) curriculum approach as opposed to the Administration-favored contraceptive-based sexual education. Since 2009, contraceptive-based sexual education has enjoyed [funding](#) levels of 16 to 1 over SRA-based education. Over 100 million dollars has

been committed to teach students graphic, sexual education classes from curriculums that studies have demonstrated produce negligible success at discouraging risky behaviors among program participants. The contraceptive-based programs are based on the faulty premise that students will engage in immoral behavior and should therefore receive lessons on how to mitigate the negative consequences (teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.). The NAEA promotes abstinence as the only method that is 100% effective and seeks to communicate character training to students in public schools.

Homosexual History Bill Update

On Sunday, the controversial homosexual history law (SB 48) went into [effect](#) in California. Despite a host of [concerns](#) from pro-family groups, Governor Jerry Brown signed the law which is expected to have widespread implications across the country. Although teachers are currently using supplemental materials to provide gay history lessons, experts surmise that textbook publishers will begin to shift their social studies content to meet the standards set forth in the legislation. Since California is the largest purchaser of textbooks in the country, educational analysts believe that this will affect the curriculum offerings for other states in the future. Parental rights advocates have grave concerns about the lack of opt-out provisions in the law. [Opponents](#) that seek to repeal SB 48 are working to gather over 500,000 signatures in 150 days. Although the referendum push fell short by less than five thousand votes, [signature gatherers](#) believe that the extra time granted for initiatives will allow them to achieve the required number of certified signatures. If the petition drive is successful, the measure will be placed on the 2012 ballot.

Maryland Focuses on Special Needs Bullying

A recent [article](#) in the *Baltimore Sun* has reignited the conversation about the bullying of special needs children. Although a recent, high profile case brought by the parents of a special needs child was dismissed for lack of evidence, advocates have tapped into public outrage over comments made by school officials during the trial. The comments have been characterized as a dismissal of legitimate concerns about the seriousness of the detrimental effects of bullying on special needs students who are unable to defend themselves against harassment by their peers. The Education Advocacy Coalition will be meeting with Maryland state officials to discuss strategies to increase reporting and investigation of bullying incidents that are linked to the students' IEP (Individualized Education Program).

Virginia Pro-Life Victory

In December, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell signed a bill imposing new [regulations](#) on abortion clinics in the state. Pro-life groups believe that increased health and safety regulations will close or curtail the twenty-two existing abortion clinics. New guidelines will require abortion facilities to meet the 2010 standards for surgery centers, hire more medical personnel, and submit to random inspections and reviews of patient records. [Atrocities](#) like the thirty-five bodies discovered in a freezer at a Maryland abortion clinic have provided the momentum to enact tougher standards on clinics across the country. Pundits point to this pro-life gain as confirmation that elections do have consequences.

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Religious Freedom Victory in Higher Education](#)

[“Silent No More” Awareness Campaign](#)

[Hawaii and Delaware Recognize Gay Civil Unions](#)

[Coming Up – March for Life, January, 23, 2012](#)



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