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I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed.

Booker T. Washington

Pushback over Federal Standards

Only seven states are not participating in the movement to adopt [national education standards](#). These states are voicing concern about the strong push for national standards, asserting that one size does not usually fit all in the area of education. Recently in Massachusetts, the Tantasqua Regional School Board has garnered attention for questioning the state's move toward adopting national standards. The Massachusetts State House is considering a bill that would undermine the current state assessment system, the Comprehensive Assessment System, which has produced some of the best results in the country. Massachusetts' national standard opponents question why their state should adhere to national standards when their students' scores are higher than the national average. Students have scored in the top five in the nation, as well as worldwide among the fourth and eighth grades in English and math standardized tests scores. Elsewhere, [Texas Governor Rick Perry](#) has been very vocal in his opposition to the adoption of common core standards. In interviews, he has alleged that the Administration is directly endorsing the standards by tying the "Race to the Top" funds to their adoption. The Governor maintains that a one-size-fits-all approach is not wise and does not acknowledge that states have different challenges. The Administration continues to assert that adoption is not compulsory and that states do have a choice; however, Governor Perry insists that the funding is an "incentive [that] cash-strapped states could not easily resist." The pushback against standards has also occurred in Virginia. Originally, Virginia did participate in the program but later withdrew when the funding was offered again citing the strings that came with federal funds. Their own assessment (Standards of Learning Test) has been defended by both political parties in the state as an adequate measure of student achievement. The Administration's blueprint for education reform does indicate that Title I funding (one of the largest sources of federal funding for K-12 education) should be linked to the adoption of national standards. The pending reauthorization of ESEA could very well hinge on this key issue.

School Choice Advances in Indiana

This week in Indiana, the House of Representatives passed [H.R. 1002](#) (59 – 37) that could usher in a "revolutionary transformation" in the state's public school system. The bill seeks to establish a charter school board that would sponsor charter school openings, establish regulations under which charter schools can take over existing public school facilities, and require public schools to share their transportation vehicles and funding budget with charter schools. This legislation would allow non-profit organizations, universities, and towns with 35,000 or more residents to set up charter schools in their districts. Currently, over 3,500 students are on waiting lists to attend the 62 existing charter schools. Governor Mitch Daniels has received a firestorm of criticism from the Indiana State Teachers Association and Indiana Federation of Teachers. According to [Indystar.com](#), angry demonstrators, mostly teachers, raised such a din in and outside of the chamber that lawmakers had to raise their voices during the debate and passage of the bill. Rally attendees were literally pressed against the windows waving signs urging lawmakers to defeat the measure. While the Governor contends that the teachers want "more money, no change," the teachers view the proposed changes as personal attacks on their

dedication to their students. Prior to passage, several Democrats gave speeches vehemently decrying the transfer of public school funds to charter schools. They cited the potential rise of property taxes if a budgetary shortfall occurs and suggested that a focus on early education (full-day kindergarten) would be a better solution. Republican lawmakers maintained that [expanding school choice](#) was in the best interests of the students and their parents. All eyes are on the state senate as it considers the bill next.

APSCU v. the Department of Education

The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (1,500 member institutions) is [suing](#) the Department of Education over its [latest regulations](#) that sought to rein in for-profit online universities and “diploma mills.” In order to curtail the unscrupulous practices of a few for-profit colleges (aggressive tactics to pressure ill equipped students to enroll in online programs, use of misleading information, issuance of worthless degrees, high rate of dropouts and defaults on loan repayments), the department issued regulations that penalize everyone. Since finalizing the rules, the Department has received numerous complaints from an array of higher education institutions that deem that the rules are overreaching and need further clarification. The regulations require additional state authorization in addition to accreditation, establish a federal definition for a credit hour, and set gainful employment requirements (certain percentage of graduates must be gainfully employed). The single religious exemption in the regulations provides a very narrow definition which could potentially affect the ability of Christian colleges to offer liberal arts degrees in addition to religious degrees. The APSCU lawsuit contends that the regulations were “vaguely and poorly written” which will result in a flurry of frivolous litigation. Initial estimates suggest that schools with online course offerings will have to spend millions to meet the compliance and implementation requirements which vary by state. Schools that do not meet the qualifications will not be eligible to receive Title IV funding (the largest source of federally backed school loans). The Department issued a statement indicating that it felt the regulations were appropriate and that it intended to continue to implement them. Although accountability standards are expected when taxpayer revenue funds a program, overzealous federal regulations will cause schools needlessly to divert money that could be used to enhance their programs and help students, in order to comply with the varying regulations and fight protracted legal battles.

Pro-Life Agenda

Many consider the 112th Congress to be comprised of one of the most pro-life group of legislators in recent history. The call to end taxpayer funding of abortion procedures is gaining momentum as tragedies such as the Philadelphia abortion doctor’s murder of babies born in a federally funded clinic and Live Action’s shocking [Planned Parenthood videos](#) have come to the public’s attention. Both of these horrific accounts clearly show that these abortion providers did not care about the pain they caused the infants, the health of the mothers, parental notification, or the sexual exploitation of minors by unscrupulous adults. Currently, the House of Representatives is considering three bills ([H.R. 3](#), [H.R. 217](#), and [H.R. 358](#)) that seek to unilaterally end taxpayer funding of abortion government wide and to amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (healthcare law) to prohibit government subsidies for insurance plans that cover elective abortions. A joint [press conference](#) by the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus, Susan B. Anthony List, Live Action, and several other pro-life groups was held on Thursday to promote these critical pieces of legislation.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Abortion Debate Heats up on Capitol Hill](#)