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*Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.*

**Ronald Reagan**

### **School Choice in America Assessment**

Major newspapers, such as the venerable [The Wall Street Journal](#), have dubbed 2011 the “year of school choice.” The Heritage Foundation released a comprehensive [report](#) detailing the triumphs of school choice around the nation. The successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship was reinstated in April. Throughout the course of the year, twelve school choice programs have been created or expanded by various localities. Over 200,000 students are now able to attend the private school of their parent’s choice as a result of vouchers, tax credits or tax deductions. [Legislation](#) supporting charter school expansion has been introduced in the House of Representatives. Approximately 1.5 million students attend charter schools in 39 states and the District of Columbia. Homeschooling and online education are also gaining popularity. According to data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of students forced to attend schools within their assigned district has steadily decreased as more districts allow inter-district and intra-district transfers. Positive outcomes-- increased parental satisfaction, student safety, higher graduation rates, better academic performance--are credited to the gains made by school choice advocates.

### **Standards Adoption Unnecessary for NCLB Waiver**

As the Department of Education moves forward with the “No Child Left Behind” waiver program, a firestorm of controversy has erupted about the unspecified reforms that states would be required to adopt in order to be eligible for a waiver. The majority of school districts are not expected to attain 100% proficiency in math and reading by the 2014 deadline. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has estimated that [82%](#) of schools will face punitive measures as a result of noncompliance. Bipartisan disagreement has stalled the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as NCLB). In response to calls for regulatory relief, the secretary presented the waiver option early this summer. Despite constitutionality issues, the Department of Education has decided to offer waivers to states. Education policy experts have written a plethora of editorials attempting to surmise what reform requirements would be linked to the waiver program. This week, Secretary Duncan [stated](#) in no uncertain terms that adoption of the controversial Common Core Standards will not be a waiver application requirement. In his statement, he stressed the importance of establishing high standards in general. States that do not adhere to the Common Core standards will still be able to qualify if their standards are endorsed by the state’s postsecondary institutions. Texas, Alaska, Virginia, Nebraska and Montana are currently the only states who have not adopted the Common Core Standards.

### **Virtual School Trend**

Online education options are becoming a main [component](#) of [blended education](#) models. States, such as Florida and North Carolina, have led the move from “brick and mortar” campuses to virtual schools and online course offerings. Florida recently adopted a law that requires future graduates to take at least one online class in order to graduate from high school. State officials say that the impetus behind the requirement is the need for

technology skills along with significant savings (23% less per pupil). Approximately 150,000 students are currently enrolled in Florida's Virtual School program. Proponents of online education point to the many benefits such as improved subject offerings, access to more teachers, ability to work at one's own pace, and around-the-clock availability. They also tout the ability of online classes to help states meet class size mandates and reduce custodial, transportation, building and cafeteria costs. Furthermore, they say that the move to virtual schools is a natural transition. Detractors cite the decrease in the public school funding, the potential for apathetic students without engaged facilitators to fall behind, and the lack of social interaction. Some districts have established computer labs to help negate the so-called "digital divide" that exists between those who have computers at home and those who do not have access. Experts predict that anywhere from a quarter to one half of high school classes will be online by 2019.

### **Arizona Abortion Regulations Upheld**

On August 15, the [Arizona](#) Court of Appeals [upheld](#) an earlier ruling that established safeguards for women seeking abortions. Abortion advocates vehemently opposed the regulations. The regulations require that the patient must meet with the doctor performing the procedure a minimum of 24 hours before, that minors seeking abortions must have notarized parental consent forms, that procedures can be performed only by licensed physicians. Regulations also establish [conscience protections](#) for those healthcare professionals who wish to abstain on moral or religious grounds. Pro-life advocates hope to introduce similar [measures](#) around the country.

### **Religious Liberty Defended in the United Kingdom**

Conscience protection (freedom to disagree) provisions are the latest front in the battle to prevent the gradual erosion of religious liberty. As values antithetical to Christianity are promoted under the guise of toleration and religious plurality, attorneys are working to carve out legal protections for Christians who object to rules forcing them either to facilitate or participate in activities that are diametrically opposed to their religious or moral convictions. Liberal activists are using the court system to force Christian professionals to participate in medical procedures and provide services to homosexual couples. The Alliance Defense Fund was recently granted permission by the European Court of Human Rights to intervene in four precedent-setting [cases](#) in the United Kingdom. The cases have been combined into two cases, *Ladele and McFarlane v. United Kingdom* and *Eweida and Chaplin v. United Kingdom*, which deal with the right of Christian employees to wear religious symbols and the rights of Christian professionals (registrar and counselor) not to provide services to homosexual couples that violate their religious beliefs. In the first case, exceptions had been granted to employees of other faiths but were categorically denied to Christian employees. Although some same-sex advocates claim that toleration is their goal, it is becoming increasingly clear that acceptance and validation are the true aims. Alliance Defense Fund attorney, Roger Kiska stated that "Christian employees should not be singled out for discrimination. No one should have to hide [his] faith or act contrary to it, especially when public employees of other faiths are accommodated but Christians are not. That type of intolerance is inconsistent with the values that civilized communities should have." To view summaries of similar cases [click here](#).

### **In Case You Missed It:**

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

[For 2012, an Unconventional Approach](#)

[In Indiana, It's Back to School Time at the School of Your Choice](#)

[Liberty Alert](#)

[Judge: North Carolina Must Fund Planned Parenthood](#)



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