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I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.
Abraham Lincoln

Education Department Releases Private School Education Statistics

Last week, the National Center for Education Statistics, housed within the Department of Education, published the [Digest of Education Statistics 2012](#) and selections of [findings](#) from 2013. These resources cover a wide range of prekindergarten through graduate level data from the private school community. While projected enrollment in private schools is expected to remain relatively stable over the next several years, enrollment has dropped significantly since 2005 (11%). Approximately, 5.4 million American children attend private schools. Among private schools, the number of full-time staff dropped slightly from 0.4 million to 0.5 million. From the fall of 2010 through spring of 2011, significant progress was made in kindergartners' mathematics and reading scores which rose 12.9 and 14.2 percent respectively. Parental involvement has risen to 74% among parents of K-12 students, which when combined with the dedicated faculty may contribute to the significant gains made by the students.

Administration's Universal Preschool Push Continues

Although the Administration's request for \$75 billion to fund Preschool for All was denied in the January budget deal, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that their respective agencies will be conducting a competition focused on improving early learning. Instead of conducting a fourth round of the [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge](#) program, which has awarded \$1 billion to 20 states, the recent \$250 million RTT-ELC appropriation will be used to further the universal preschool (early learning) goals of the Administration. The program seeks to expand access to high quality preschool programs for low- to middle-income families. Since the available funding stream is much less than needed for such an ambitious project, the secretaries will target grants to states with high quality early learning systems in place or those with no system at all. Both agencies have solicited [input](#) from stakeholders. Comments are due by February 26. After reviewing the comments, the agencies will release an executive summary and then draft a final Notice Inviting Applications to states. In addition, the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships will be awarding approximately \$500 million to expand early learning opportunities to 100,000 children from 0 to 3.

Mississippi Legislature Close to Establishing ESA Program

Both chambers in Mississippi have passed legislation that would establish an education saving account option for children with special needs. There are slight differences between the two versions of the Equal Opportunity for All Students with Special Needs Act. If the bills can be reconciled, Mississippi will become the second state

in the nation to establish ESA's. Arizona's program, which is on the cutting edge of school choice options, has experienced great success and enjoys rave reviews from parents.

House Republicans Question Higher Education Actions

Leaders of the House Education and the Workforce Committee have [sent](#) the President a letter requesting information about recently announced plans to circumvent Congress in order to enact favored higher education reforms. In the letter, Education Committee Chairman John Kline notes that both Houses were able to come together to find a palatable solution to prevent student loan hikes in 2013. Furthermore, he stated that a bipartisan commitment to reform is needed instead of attempts to "obstruct legislative progress with executive actions and reckless rulemakings." In the letter, the leaders wrote that "instead, the department continues to propose prescriptive, one-size-fits-all policies that not only ignore the realities of our nation's diverse higher education system, but are also strongly opposed by many higher education stakeholders." Finally, they requested a briefing from the White House Domestic Policy Council on any planned unilateral, executive actions.

Senators Act to Defend Marriage

Last week, activist judges in Kentucky and [Virginia](#) issued rulings that partially invalidated voter approved constitutional amendments that defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman. In Kentucky, a judge ruled that the state must recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. In a 41 page opinion, Virginia Judge Arlenda Wright Allen stated that traditional marriage laws perpetuate "bigotry" and opined that current law causes "stigmatic harm" to gay couples. Liberty Counsel President Matthew Staver stated, "Judges should be careful to render decisions grounded in the Constitution and the rule of law. Otherwise, judges and courts will render themselves impotent when the people lose confidence in the judicial system." The controversial Virginia ruling was immediately stayed pending further appeal. On February 12, Senators Mike Lee (R-UT) and Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced [S. 2024](#), the State Marriage Defense of Act of 2014, which has been [introduced](#) in the House of Representatives by Rep. Randy Weber (R-TX). The measure would require the federal government to respect state level definitions of marriage when awarding federal benefits. The bill would base benefits on the "state of domicile" standard versus the "state of residency" standard. In the wake of the *Windsor* decision, federal agencies have adopted a patchwork of policies to determine whether same-sex couples receive over 1,000 different benefits. This legislation would clarify many of the conflicting agency guidance on this issue and respect state level definitions of "marriage" and "spouse." Currently, seventeen states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. Ryan Anderson, William E. Simon Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, has written extensively on the impact of redefining marriage on society. To read his essay, [click here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Are Americans Rejecting National Standards?](#)

[Obamacare Anti-Conscience Mandate at the Supreme Court](#)

[Christian Airman Relieved of Duty for Marriage Beliefs Now Granted Military Honors](#)

[NYT: Common Core Curriculum Now Has Critics on the Left](#)