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*Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing.*

**Thomas Edison**

**Alabama Court Strikes Down Innovative School Choice Program**

Last week, Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Eugene Reese ruled Alabama's educational choice program unconstitutional. The innovative program allows students from low-income households assigned to failing public schools to receive a scholarship to attend a private school of their parent's choosing. This second legal challenge was spearheaded by the primary Alabama teachers union. Since the first lawsuit against the Alabama Tax Credit Scholarship program was dismissed by a federal judge, this ruling will be appealed to a higher court. Kevin Chavous, executive counsel of the American Federation for Children (AFC), stated that the group "remains committed to defending educational choice and advancing the cause of parental empowerment" and noted that it is hypocritical for the head of the public school teachers union to enroll his own children in private school while simultaneously working to block other parents from doing the same. Both the latest National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics and English proficiency rates and the abysmal graduation rate for Alabama children from low-income households underscore the need for alternative educational options. According to the AFC, the Alabama Education Association (state teachers union) spent more than \$4.5 million in the June 3<sup>rd</sup> primary elections to promote state senate candidates. In spite of this large expenditure, pro-school choice candidates defeated their heavily backed opponents which demonstrates that parents understand the importance of a variety of educational options.

**States Continue to Pull Away from Common Core**

Although Indiana was the first state to pull out of the Common Core Standards, it does not appear to be the last. Recently, several other [state](#) legislatures—Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Missouri—have passed or are considering legislation to drop the Common Core standards for mathematics and English in favor of standards approved and adopted by the state. Last week, Arizona became the 16<sup>th</sup> state to downgrade or sever ties with either of the Common Core assessment development groups. The two groups—SMARTER Balanced and [PARCC](#)—were awarded \$330 million by the Department of Education to formulate assessments aligned to the Common Core. In the case of Oklahoma, the state would revert to the prior academic standards which have already been vetted. South Carolina has withdrawn from the Common Core assessment consortia and pledged to craft new standards by the 2015–2016 school year. Missouri State Senator Ed Emery (R-Lamar) asserts that the bill in his state "puts the process back into the hands of the people." Finally in North Carolina, Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest has continued to [oppose](#) the standards. Last July, he requested information pertaining to Common Core Standards implementation. In response, the NC Department of Education sent him "40,000 sheets of paper, with a cover letter that did not directly answer any of his 67 questions, but rather referred him

to 134 separate websites, linking to over 100 separate pages, 320 separate reports, hundreds of original source documents, 40 presentations, 1 blog post and a thumb drive.” He concluded that this exercise in futility illustrated the reason the standards are not in the best interest of North Carolina students. The state legislature is considering a bill this session that could potentially roll back their participation in the standards.

### **Update on Sudanese Christian Mother**

While international pressure is growing for the Sudanese government to release Dr. Meriam Ibrahim and her children (who are American citizens) from prison, the government is still holding them [captive](#). Since late January, Mrs. Ibrahim, the wife of an American citizen, has been jailed on trumped up adultery and apostasy charges. After the desertion of her Muslim father, her mother reared her as a Christian. The charges are based on her marrying a Christian man, a practice that is prohibited in the predominately Muslim country. A court sentenced the expectant mother to receive 100 lashes and then be hanged. After public outcry, the government relented and said that it would allow her to deliver her child before carrying out the sentence. Last weekend, reports indicated that the government would free Mrs. Ibrahim and her children, but the government has since clarified that the matter will be left up to the courts. In the states, Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) have implored the State Department and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to intervene on the Ibrahims’ behalf. The State Department has now acknowledged the Senators’ letter and is investigating the matter. At a recent Congressional hearing, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson [stated](#) that he was aware of the case. The African Commission on Human Rights has requested that President Obama use the tools at his disposal to free the family. There are over 37,000 [signatures](#) on a White House [petition](#) calling for their immediate release. A minimum of 100,000 signatures is needed by June 27<sup>th</sup> to garner a response from the White House.

### **CHOICE Act Introduced in the House of Representatives**

Last week, Education and the Workforce Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN) introduced the Creating Hope and Opportunities for Individuals and Communities in Education (CHOICE) Act in the House of Representatives. This bill is the companion to Senator Tim Scott’s (R-SC) previously [introduced](#) bill, S. 1909. The bill seeks to increase school choice opportunities by expanding the highly successful DC Opportunity Scholarship program, by launching a pilot school choice program for military families, and by increasing options for students eligible for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act benefits. In a speech at this year’s Conservative Political Action Conference, Senator Scott stated, “When the parents have a choice, the kids have a chance.” To learn more about the bill, [click here](#).

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

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

[How Will Common Core Affect College Instruction?](#)

[Regulations on Abortion Providers Provide Safety for Women](#)

[Houston City Council Approves Controversial Ordinance](#)

[College Student Wins Free Speech Case](#)