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“Education means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free.”
Frederick Douglass

House of Representatives Considers ESEA Reauthorization

The U.S. House of Representatives is poised to vote on “The Student Success Act” (H.R. 5) which would reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The [goal](#) of the bill, as stated in a fact sheet produced by the House Education Committee, is to “reduce the federal footprint, restore local control, and empower parents and education leaders to hold schools accountable for effectively teaching students.” The bill eliminates 65 current programs that are believed to be unnecessary, and attempts to drive decision-making power back to the states through a Local Academic Flexible Grant. In addition, the bill allows for public school choice through Title 1 portability, a program which would [allow](#) “Title I funds to follow low-income children to the traditional public or charter school of the parent’s choice.” Rep. Luke Messer, Chairman of the School Choice Caucus, [offered an amendment](#) which would expand this program to include private school options, and a group of conservatives have urged the Congressmen to include language in the amendment to also protect the autonomy of participating private schools. Protection for the autonomy and religious mission of private, religious schools is already included in “The Student Success Act” as the bill retained language from its predecessor No Child Left Behind which explicitly states that the law would not apply to private schools which do not receive government funds. This protective language is of great importance to AACCS and the rest of the private school community as it ensures that our schools can continue operating according to a faith-based mission. Additionally, the bill includes strong language against the establishment of national standard and test, specifically citing the Common Core as a national test that has been forced on the states through coercion by Race to the Top grants and NCLB waivers. The bill also prohibits the establishment of a national student database and a mandatory national teacher certification program. Some conservative organizations have opposed the bill because they believe the bill is not as conservative as it can be with a Republican-controlled Congress. However, they do recognize that the bill takes steps towards shrinking the federal footprint on education. ESEA has been due for reauthorization since 2007, but there has not been a unified effort in Congress for passage until this year when both Houses are controlled by Republicans. The Senate is deliberating their own version of ESEA reauthorization, with a plan for a vote in the spring. Should that bill pass, the two will then go to conference to iron out differences and present a unified bill to the President for his signature.

Common Core Update in the States

Efforts to repeal the common core standards in South Dakota failed this week when the state House [voted down](#) a measure which would have required the standards be removed by June 2017. The bill was originally defeated in committee, but a special provision allowed it to be brought directly to the floor with the agreement of a certain number of legislators. The state is slated to begin testing on the common core next month, and has spent \$4 million on the implementation of the standards. In Arizona, the state senate has also [voted to keep](#) the

standards by defeating a bill (19-10) which would have given districts freedom to choose their own standards. While there is a similar bill advancing in the state House that would stop the state education department from implementing the standards, it will not have senate support so likely will not become law this year. The battle is intense, however, with both the new Governor Doug Ducey and the new education superintendent Diane Douglas voicing strong opposition to the common core. In both Mississippi and North Dakota, efforts to repeal the common core have also failed. To date, three states have been successful in repealing the standards: Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.

Attorney General Attacks Religious Liberty of Florist

Last week, Benton County Superior Court Judge Alex Eckstrom in Washington state ruled that a [Christian florist was guilty](#) of violating the state's anti-discrimination law when she declined to service the wedding of a same-sex couple. In When Baronelle Stutzman was approached by long-time customer, Robert Ingersoll, about arranging the flowers for his upcoming wedding to his partner Curt, Mrs. Stutzman explained that she could not because of her "relationship with Jesus Christ," and recommended three other florists. She reports that their conversation was friendly, so the lawsuit came as a surprise to her. In fact, the suit was actually filed by the State Attorney General, Bob Ferguson, of his own volition without receiving a complaint from Ingersoll. Since the court's ruling, he has offered Mrs. Stutzman a \$2000 settlement if she agrees not to discriminate in the future. However, she has refused, [stating](#), "It's about freedom, not money. I certainly don't relish the idea of losing my business, my home, and everything else that your lawsuit threatens to take from my family, but my freedom to honor God in doing what I do best is more important." Mrs. Stutzman is represented by the Alliance Defending Freedom, and her case has been appealed to the 8th Circuit Court.

Oklahoma State House Passes Bill to Protect Pastors

Last week, Oklahoma's State house of representatives sent a bill to the state senate which would [protect pastors](#) who refuse to perform or recognize same-sex marriage. The bill, sponsored by Republican Representative David Brumbaugh, was passed by the House 88-7. If approved by the State Senate and made into law, gay rights activists have threatened legal action. However, Representative Brumbaugh has pointed out, "It's not about discrimination or anything like that, it's just that we want to make sure they were protected." Since the state's marriage amendment was overturned by a federal judge in 2014, many pastors have voiced the need for protective legislation of their first amendment rights to follow their religious convictions in refusing to perform same-sex weddings. The bill would extend protection to any authorized official of a religious organization against any "civil claim or cause of action" if he or she were to deny marriage to a same-sex couple.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Stems Cells From Teeth May Restore Sight to the Blind](#)

[If Gays Are Offended, Do Christians Have Rights?](#)

[Texas Attorney General Asks State Supreme Court to Void Same-Sex Marriage License](#)

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