



A Publication of the American Association of Christian Schools

The Washington Flyer
April 24, 2026

“The only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government is the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible.”
George Washington

AACS Hosts National Bible, Fine Arts, and Academic Competition

Last week, the AACS hosted the 48th annual AACS National Competition in Greenville, SC. Approximately 1,900 students from 186 schools in 33 states gathered to compete in the five basic areas of Bible, music, speech, art, and academics. A total of 1,171 entries were submitted across the field of 80 categories. The Bible competition included Bible quiz teams, preaching, and teaching. The academic competition included academic testing, creative writing, and a science fair. Art students displayed their pieces for the art contest, and music students challenged each other in solo and group competitions in both vocal and instrumental music. Speech contestants participated in several categories, including debate, dramatic interpretation, original oratory, acting, and other group and individual categories. Several states were recognized for achieving the highest point total in the five areas: Texas won for Bible, New Jersey for Speech, Virginia for Art, Tennessee for Music, and Georgia for Academics. The AACS Cup of Excellence was awarded to the state that accumulated the highest point total, going to Virginia this year, with Tennessee and Illinois as second and third place, respectively. Bob Jones University faculty, staff, and students graciously facilitated the annual student competition and provided activities and accommodations for the event. During the three-day competition, students heard special messages during chapel time and an evening service. The competition culminated Thursday night with an [awards ceremony](#), which included a showcase highlighting some of the best entries by several individuals and schools. The AACS offers our warmest congratulations to all the students who participated and made this year’s National Competition a memorable event. To view the complete list of this year’s winners, click [here](#). For pictures and information from the event, please visit our Facebook page [here](#).

Four State Legislatures Vote on Federal School Choice Program

Recently, four state legislatures have passed bills that would opt their states into the Education Freedom Tax Credit (EFTC). The EFTC is a provision that allows every taxpayer who donates up to \$1,700 to a scholarship-granting organization to receive a 100% federal tax credit. However, governors must opt into the EFTC for families in their state to receive scholarships. The [Kansas](#) legislature passed a bill requiring the state to opt in, but Democrat Gov. Laura Kelly vetoed it. The Republican supermajority recently overrode that veto in an 85-38 House vote and a 29-10 Senate vote. Lawmakers in [Kentucky](#) also overrode a veto of a pro-EFTC bill. The General Assembly overrode the veto in a 77-14-1 House vote and a 31-5 Senate vote. Lawmakers in other states have passed bills opting their states into the EFTC but have yet to override the governors’ vetoes. In Arizona, Democrat Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed the bill and [said](#) it would be “irresponsible” to opt in before the federal government releases regulations. Republican state Sen. Shawna Bolick [said](#) the legislature will continue trying to opt the state in. In Wisconsin, Democrat Gov. Tony Evers vetoed a similar bill and [said](#) that “it remains unclear how this bill will do what’s best for the more than 800,000 Wisconsin public school kids.” In a press release, state Rep. Jessie Rodriguez [said](#), “This was a missed opportunity for Wisconsin.” Republicans lack a

supermajority in both the Arizona and Wisconsin legislatures. Democrats would have to vote for the EFTC to override the governors' vetoes.

Final Meeting for Religious Liberty Commission

The Religious Liberty Commission held its [final hearing](#) last week at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. The hearing consisted of three sessions that featured [witnesses](#) sharing knowledge of the history of religious liberty as well as personal experiences of the profound benefits of religious liberty. During the first hour, the commission heard from [Helen Alvaré](#), a professor of law at Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University, who emphasized the central role of religious liberty in the foundation of the nation's freedoms. Her testimony sparked a robust discussion on the true meaning of the principle of "separation of church and state," as well as concerns about how the phrase is sometimes used in ways that critics argue can limit the ability of people of faith to exercise their First Amendment rights. "For too long, the anti-God left has used this phrase to suppress people of religion in our country," stated Commission Chairman Dan Patrick. "During all seven Commission hearings, witness after witness testified that the so-called 'separation of church and state' was used to take their God-given religious liberty rights away." Nine additional witnesses highlighted religious liberty's importance to civil rights, individual freedom, safety, and a free society. These included [Clarence Henderson](#) on the role of faith in the civil rights movement; [Helen Aguirre Ferré](#) on her family's experience under authoritarian rule in Nicaragua; [Heather Rice-Minus](#) on faith-based prisoner rehabilitation; and [Sister Mary Elizabeth SV](#) on the importance of faith in helping women in crisis. The hearing concluded with commission members outlining recommendations to protect and advance religious liberty. A final report of their recommendations will be published and submitted to President Trump by July 4.

Federal Court Bars Religious Textbooks in Publicly Funded Homeschooling

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has [prevented](#) three homeschool families from using publicly available education funds to purchase religious curriculum. The families enrolled in independent study programs at California charter schools that subsidized the parents' curriculum choices. However, the charter schools prevented the parents from purchasing curriculum from publishers like BJU Press because of their religious nature. The parents sued and argued that the state had violated their First Amendment rights. The state argued that state law prevented it from subsidizing the curriculum because the independent study programs were a part of the public education system. A three-judge panel ruled against the parents last fall. The parents requested that the full 9th Circuit rehear the case, but the 9th Circuit recently denied that appeal. The 9th Circuit maintained that the independent study programs qualified as public schools under *Carson v. Makin*. However, several judges dissented and argued that the majority misapplied *Carson*. "In no way did Carson announce a new test for state action by private parties," [said](#) Judge Patrick Bumatay in his dissent. Under the majority's logic, "pretty much anything can qualify as a governmental program exempt from First Amendment scrutiny." Judge Lawrence VanDyke concurred and argued that the state misunderstood a section in California's [Blaine Amendment](#) that prohibits funding "sectarian" schools. VanDyke argued that historical and grammatical context show that public funds can go to religious schools so long as the instruction is not denominational. The families are likely to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[Presidential Message Commemorating 250 Years of the Bible in America](#)

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