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“A watchful eye must be kept on ourselves lest, while we are building ideal monuments of renown and bliss here, we neglect to have our names enrolled in the Annals of Heaven.”

James Madison

Parents Consider School Safety to be a Key Factor When Utilizing School Choice

As state legislative sessions begin around the country, the new season offers opportunity to advance school choice. Proponents of school choice rightly champion the academic successes and opportunities that school choice programs yield, but research is showing that parents are increasingly choosing private schools because they want a safe learning environment for their children. In a study conducted last fall, families that participate in [Florida’s tax credit scholarship program](#) were surveyed regarding their educational preferences and decisions. When asked their reason for choosing a private school, school safety was ranked third, with the top two factors being religious instruction and values and moral instruction. Interestingly, authors Jason Bedrick and Lindsey Burke noted that “the least important factor was standardized test scores, which only 4 percent of parents listed as one of their top three factors.” Similar results were seen in a 2015 study of the DC Opportunity Scholarship program, a voucher program helping low-income families in the nation’s capital. Conducted by Thomas Stewart and Patrick J. Wolf of AEI Research, the [study showed](#) that parents’ chief concern when choosing a school through the choice program was the safety of the school. As Stewart and Wolf explained, “Safety is parents’ first priority. Once they are confident that their child is in a safe school, parents shift their attention to the academic rigor and curricular offerings of the school.” A [recent article](#) from the Heritage Foundation focused on the importance of school safety to advancing school choice. Author Jude Schwalbach points out that “five empirical studies now bear that out, demonstrating how private school choice offers children not only access to a better education and a better life, but to learning environments that are safe.” One of these studies specifically [compared](#) the safety of public and private schools. Conducted by Corey DeAngelis of the Cato Institute and Harvard University’s M. Danish Shakeel, the study found that students in private schools were less likely to experience violence and bullying or gang-related activities. Data such as this, along with the evidence that school safety is a strong priority for parents, prompted the Heritage Foundation to suggest last year that school choice legislation should be advanced that would provide “[safe school scholarships](#)” to students who have been the victims of school violence or who are in schools deemed unsafe. Education experts Jennifer Marshall and Lindsey Burke [pointed out](#) that current federal education law actually includes an Unsafe School Choice Option which allows students in “persistently dangerous” public schools to transfer to a different public or charter school. However, they also note that this option is rarely utilized and has inherent limitations. Safe school scholarships would be an opportunity for states to address the issue of school safety while also providing school choice options for parents who are seeking to find a safe learning environment for their children.

Department of Education Undergoes Reorganization

Last weekend, the Trump administration introduced its official plan for reorganizing the Department of Education. According to Department of Education spokeswoman [Elizabeth Hill](#), “The reorganization effort is focused on streamlining our internal processes in an effort to make the department more efficient, coordinated, and responsive for students, educators, parents, and taxpayers.” Led by Secretary DeVos, the reorganization does not include [changes](#) that would require legislative action, such as moving the Office of English-language Acquisition into the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. However, the [reorganization efforts](#) do affect major operations of the Department. For example, the Office of Nonpublic Education (ONPE), which works to build relationships with private and religious schools, will now report to Secretary DeVos, and the rest of the Office of Innovation and Improvement will merge with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. In addition to these changes, there will be a new Student Privacy Policy Office, which will combine two divisions and focus on investigating privacy complaints and aiding states and school districts. Secretary DeVos will also convert the department’s budget office into a new Office of Finance and Operations. While the Department of Education undergoes reorganization, the President’s plan to combine the Departments of Education and Labor has yet to be considered by Congress. The Department of Education reorganization was announced last fall and was slated to begin January 6.

National School Choice Week is Just Around the Corner

On January 20–26, National School Choice Week (NCSW) will be celebrated across the country as families and schools seek to highlight the positive impact that school choice has had in the lives of thousands of students. NSCW began in 2011 as [an effort](#) to “raise awareness about the K-12 education options available to children and families, while spotlighting the benefits of school choice.” What began with 150 events that first year has grown exponentially, with [more than 40,000 events](#) planned for this year’s NSCW. The week is intended to celebrate all forms of school choice and educational options, and private schools are encouraged to highlight the benefits and successes of the school choice programs in their areas. To receive more information or register your participation, click [here](#).

Coming Soon—March for Life—January 18, 2019

The [March for Life](#) will take place in Washington, D.C., on January 18 to commemorate the anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* case which legalized abortion in 1973. The [Evangelicals for Life](#) conference, also scheduled for January 16–18 to correspond with the March for Life schedule, offers encouragement and instruction for evangelical Christians involved in the pro-life battle. For more information on the March for Life, click [here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Court Allows Christian Baker Jack Phillips to Sue Colorado for Anti-Religious Hostility](#)

[Congresswoman Hartzler Introduces New Bill to Defund Planned Parenthood Abortion Business](#)

[Hillary Clinton/Andrew Cuomo Bill to Legalize Abortions Up to Birth Expected to Easily Pass New York Legislature](#)