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*“Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves;
and, under a just God, cannot long retain it.”*

Abraham Lincoln

AACS Attends Panel Event on SEL: Social-Emotional Learning

The AACS Legislative Office recently attended an event hosted by Politico entitled, [“What’s Next in Education: Teaching Coping Skills in the Classroom.”](#) The event focused on a trend currently sweeping through the education world called social-emotional learning, or SEL. A previous *Washington Flyer* [article highlighted research](#) that shows some problems with an SEL approach to education. SEL claims the creation of a [learning environment](#) where students are taught self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. During the Politico event, proponents argued that mindfulness training, mediation, meditation, and trauma-informed practices should be brought into the classroom to support the whole child. The trend toward SEL shows that society sees a problem in education, often manifested in increased violence among students, poor markers of achievement or excellence in schools, high drop-out rates, discipline problems, student stress, and mental health issues. To SEL proponents, character development is only one factor in creating an environment where kids can thrive. Three of the panelists—Elizabeth Albro from the Department of Education, Melissa Kim from D.C. public schools, and Rep. Tim Ryan (OH)—praised SEL for addressing the trauma many children experience and for teaching life and interpersonal skills instead of focusing solely on test scores. However, the warm tones invoked by these speakers still left much unanswered, as final panelist Robert Pondiscio of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute asserted. Pondiscio pointed out that SEL’s focus on student self-evaluation combined with the instruction for teachers to be more understanding of varying life experiences (“trauma”) would likely result in low expectations for undriven students. He also feared that a federal SEL policy—as proposed by Rep. Tim Ryan—would be unworkable on the ground and would cause teachers to focus primarily on meeting certain SEL achievement markers instead of on teaching the academic information children need to learn. The vagueness of SEL also presents an obstacle: how do teachers actually put SEL into practice, and what methods should they use? SEL proponents were unable to answer these questions, instead pivoting to the need for the vaguely described attitudes that SEL should produce in the classroom. As explained by proponents, SEL is not simply a lesson or class, but a spirit of inclusiveness woven throughout the learning process. A Christian evaluation of SEL reveals that this method correctly highlights a problem in education without identifying the proper solution. SEL proposes to instill values and character development in students but avoids establishing what absolute truths the students’ social and emotional wellbeing should be based on. Without distinguishing between right and wrong value systems, SEL can teach only general habits that students learn in order to get along better with others. In essence, SEL seeks to develop a whole, unified person without ever accounting for the inherent brokenness of the human heart and what should be done for healing. SEL rightly recognizes that education is more than mere academics. But teaching good social-emotional habits without establishing a foundation of truth falls short of SEL’s goal to teach the whole child.

AACS Legislative Office Prepares for Annual Youth Legislative Training Conference

This month, the AACS Legislative Office was pleased to congratulate the high school students who have been accepted to attend the Youth Legislative Training Conference (YLTC) this summer. The YLTC is designed to give high school students from AACS member schools an opportunity to experience the political workings in our nation's Capital in a biblical worldview setting. The week-long conference includes legislative training, meetings on Capitol Hill, presentations from some of the nation's top conservative thinkers, participation in mock Senate sessions, and tours of the national monuments. It is encouraging to see many YLTC alumni who are now working as attorneys, serving on Capitol Hill, and helping numerous Christian ministries. They are putting into action the lessons learned from their time at the YLTC. This week, AACS legislative staff Jamison Coppola and Maureen Van Den Berg had the opportunity to meet with two of these students who are now serving on Capitol Hill, and both point to the YLTC as the event that sparked their interest in politics and gave them the tools to pursue their goals. Luke Ball, press secretary for Rep. Matt Gaetz (FL), stated, "YLTC inspired me to pursue a position in government where I could influence our nation's political fabric." Peter Holland, legislative assistant also working for Rep. Gaetz, agreed: "YLTC sparked my interest in politics and showed me that even a kid from a small Christian school in New Jersey could help bring about positive change on a national level." The AACS is looking forward to this year's YLTC and the potential represented by the students who will attend. For more information or to offer your [financial support](#), please [click here](#).

White House Indicates Concerns with the Equality Act but Does Not Threaten to Veto It

A White House official [indicated](#) earlier this week that President Trump's administration has concerns about the Equality Act but did not say the President would veto the bill should it come to his desk. White House watchers have patiently waited for a promised statement clarifying the President's official position on the bill, but as of late last night, no statement of administration policy had been issued. The Equality Act adds "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the list of protected classes under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and supporters of the bill claim this is necessary to ensure equal rights for LGBT people. However, the bill contains no religious exemption for people of faith or religious organizations whose conscience and faith direct them to hold to a biblical view of sexuality. Furthermore, the bill would partially repeal the [Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#), signed into law by President Bill Clinton and intended to protect religious liberty from undue government interference. The bill is expected to receive a vote in the House of Representatives on [Friday of this week](#), and many expect the bill to pass the Democrat-controlled chamber despite warnings from multiple conservative organizations that the bill presents serious [threats to the religious liberty](#) and women's rights. Last week, a group of nearly [100 conservative leaders](#) issued a statement of opposition against the bill, and multiple other organizations, including the AACS, have communicated to members of Congress the dangers this bill poses to religious liberty. A White House official stated on Monday that the administration recognizes the problems with the legislation: "The Trump administration absolutely opposes discrimination of any kind and supports the equal treatment of all; however, this bill in its current form is filled with poison pills that threaten to undermine parental and conscience rights."

In Case You Missed It:

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

[VP Pence Tells Christian Grad Students to Prepare for 'Persecution'](#) Full Speech: [Watch Here](#)

[Alabama Governor Signs Bill Banning Abortions, Makes Killing Unborn Babies a Felony](#)

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