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"Government should uphold—and not undermine—those institutions which are custodians of the very values upon which civilization is founded: religion, education and, above all, family."

Ronald Reagan

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Visits AACS School

Last week, [Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke](#) at Hidden Treasure Christian School in Taylors, South Carolina, as part of her promotional tour for a federal school choice initiative. The bill, titled Education Freedom Scholarships, is sponsored by Bradley Byrne (AL) in the House and by Ted Cruz (TX) in the Senate. [Education Freedom Scholarships](#) would enable states to set up scholarship granting organizations whereby individuals and businesses could contribute to the organization and receive a federal tax credit. The donated money would then be distributed as scholarships for needy students to pay for private or Christian education, books, tutors, transportation, online classes, and other fees associated with K-12 education. While in South Carolina, Secretary DeVos joined Governor Henry McMaster and state education superintendent Molly Spearman for a roundtable discussion at Hidden Treasure Christian School to discuss how the Education Freedom Scholarship could help more students attain a quality education. Hidden Treasure specializes in providing a quality Christian education to special needs students, drawing families from across the country with a holistic and individualized approach to education. Many students who attend Hidden Treasure benefit from South Carolina's Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund, which can provide approximately \$10,000 for qualifying students to use toward K-12 education. Many South Carolina legislators are looking to expand the state's school choice programs this year. One bill introduced this February would provide parents with vouchers equaling a district's per-pupil education costs to be used for non-public education. The vouchers would range from \$5,000 to \$11,000 per student, based on the district, but the bill stalled in the education committee as the legislative session closed. Governor McMaster has also expressed interest in raising the funding cap for the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund from \$12 million per year to \$20 million, possibly removing the cap completely. McMaster also [supports](#) the federal Education Freedom Scholarships, stating, "I'd like to see a lot of it in the rural areas—perhaps have teachers or have special classes, or special sessions or resources of some kind to the rural areas of the state because that's where a lot of the children need help." Edward Earwood said, "The meeting afforded various stakeholders to discuss needs for school choice options in our state as well as hear from Secretary DeVos discuss her plan to provide school choice funding at a national level. Currently, Exceptional SC, a state-wide SFO, offers the only school choice in South Carolina, a \$14 million program for exceptional needs students to attend qualifying private and Christian schools."

New Research Shows Military Families Support School Choice

EdChoice, a non-profit organization dedicated to researching and furthering school-choice policies, recently [released a report](#) that involved its 2017 survey of military families' opinions on school choice. The survey endeavored to find out if military families favored varying school choice policies and what type of school was

their top choice for their children. EdChoice discovered that military families show a [strong favoritism](#) for school choice policies. Over 72% of the families surveyed supported Education Savings Accounts, and only 15% opposed them. When asked about school vouchers, 64% of the families favored the option, as opposed to the 27% who did not favor them. The families were also asked their opinions on tax-credit scholarships, and 63% gave their support for those scholarships, compared with the 23% who did not. EdChoice also inquired as to the families' preference in the types of schools they sent their children to. The top two choices, regular public school and private school, were nearly tied with 34% of the vote and 33% of the vote, respectively. Another 17% had public charter school as their first choice. A mere 6% would choose to homeschool their child, and 4% picked virtual school as their preferred option. Drawing from this data, the survey states that "the average military household is overwhelmingly supportive of ESAs and other educational choice mechanisms." The survey concludes by encouraging policymakers to provide military families with more school choice options.

Pew Report on Religious Freedom and Persecution of Christians

According to a [report](#) released on Monday, government restrictions on religion have grown in the past ten years. The Pew Research Center studied 198 countries over a period of ten years and compiled a comprehensive list of the countries with the most government restrictions on religion. The study also analyzed the increased incidents of individual harassment and persecution toward religious individuals by other citizens. Christians are [persecuted](#) in 143 countries, Muslims in 140, and Jews in 87. The report found that the Middle East and North Africa had the highest levels of persecution with the Asia-Pacific region following close behind. However, the largest increase in restrictions took place in [Europe](#). The number of countries in Europe that place restrictions on religious dress, such as [burqas and face veils](#), grew from five to twenty. Spain has placed restrictions on religious dress and has restricted some proselytizing by certain religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The current report labels 52 countries as highly restrictive. Only a decade ago, there were only 40 countries listed as highly restrictive. The study concluded that the countries with the highest levels of restrictions were China, Iran, Russia, Egypt, and Indonesia. The least-restrictive countries were South Africa, Japan, the Philippines, Brazil, and South Korea.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[State Department Hosts Religious Freedom Summit](#)

[Administration Rule Goes into Effect Cutting \\$60 Million from Planned Parenthood](#)

[Judge Upholds Oklahoma's Ban on Dismemberment Abortion](#)