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“Education, in the broadest of truest sense, will make an individual seek to help all people, regardless of race, regardless of color, regardless of condition.”

George Washington Carver

Victory for Religious Freedom of Private Schools in New York

The New York State [Board of Regents](#), which oversees education in the state, decided Monday not to finalize troublesome regulations that would have [posed a significant threat](#) to the autonomy of private religious schools. The proposed regulations were issued as a response to concerns that certain Orthodox Jewish yeshivas were not including enough instruction in the areas of English and math to educate their students adequately. New York state law has long required that local public officials ensure that private school students receive a “substantially equivalent” education that was measured by the standards for public schools. Currently, a private school wishing to receive a “substantially equivalent” designation sends a letter to the local public school superintendent providing assurance of a safe school building, the names of students and their districts, the school calendar, and an accounting of enrollment numbers for each grade level. The new guidelines mandate that every private school be visited and undergo an extensive review by a local education official that would include an examination of the private school’s curricula for compliance with state standards. For many private schools, this was viewed as an infringement of their rights and exposed them to the whims of the public education official who would have incredible power over their entire program. The guidelines also threaten loss of some public services if a private school did not meet a requirement of at least 36 hours of instruction each week in the areas of English, math, science, and social studies. The proposed regulations were first published in November 2018 but were then [struck down](#) by the New York State Supreme Court with the charge that the correct lawful process was not followed for establishing the new rules. The regulations were then reissued last July, with a notice of a 60-day public comment period which ended in September. Over 140,000 comments were filed, most opposing the new regulations. After hearing a [summary review of the comments](#), the Board of Regents decided to table the issue until more input could be received and concerns could be addressed.

Tom Stiles, executive director of the New York Association of Christian Schools, has been following the regulation since before its introduction and has worked to ensure protection of religious freedom and parental rights for Christian schools and the families they serve. After attending Monday’s meeting, he called the decision by the Board of Regents “a victory for religious freedom in New York.” He further explained, “The proposed regulations posed a potential threat to our Christian schools and other religious schools and would have meant more entanglement with the local public school authorities and the state. The fact that the Regents received over 140,000 letters and emails impressed them, and caused both them and the State Education Department to delay the approval of the proposed regulation. Their desire to consult all ‘the stakeholders’ is very encouraging.” Mr. Stiles also serves on the NYS Commissioner’s Advisory Council for Religious and Independent Schools, and he offered a word of caution: “Like all victories, this victory may be temporary.”

Federal Commission on School Safety Launches SchoolSafety.gov

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently unveiled a new website aimed at helping teachers, administrators, parents, and law enforcement promote safety in their schools. The product of President Trump's Federal Commission on School Safety, the website, SchoolSafety.gov, is a collaborative effort of DHS and the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. The website provides resources to promote safer schools, including threat assessment; security personnel; and training, exercises, and drills. It also has dedicated pages to specific school safety concerns, including bullying and cyberbullying, mental health, school climate, and emergency planning. Along with these resources, the website has a tool for school leaders to create an action plan. School leaders can take the online quiz that assesses the school's current safety needs and develops a personalized action plan for the school. Covering the wide range of possible safety threats, the website divides sections into "Prevent," "Protect and Mitigate," and "Respond and Recover." The website is a practical achievement for the Trump administration, which has worked to develop school safety tools after the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida. As Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, chair of the Federal Commission on School Safety, stated, "Because every school community has its own unique needs, SchoolSafety.gov equips decision makers with resources for developing, customizing, and implementing actionable school safety plans." With the help of SchoolSafety.gov, more schools can be better prepared to stop threats to school safety before they become a crisis.

AACS Signs Amicus Brief in Voucher Case

[The AACS has signed an amicus brief](#) authored by Alliance Defending Freedom for the case *Mark Elster and Sarah Pynchon v. The City of Seattle*, which concerns Seattle's "democracy voucher" program. At first glance, the democracy voucher might appear to mirror school choice vouchers, which have been found to be constitutional in many states. However, in this case, the AACS is asking the Supreme Court to decide that the democracy voucher bears little resemblance to traditional school choice vouchers and instead tramples on the First Amendment's free speech clause by compelling taxpayers to support personal political speech. The brief argues primarily that the Supreme Court can rule the democracy vouchers unconstitutional without harming school choice vouchers because the state cannot compel someone to support speech that he believes is "morally objectionable." According to Seattle, the democracy vouchers are necessary to give residents "equal opportunity to participate in political campaigns and *be heard* by candidates." Because Seattle forces taxpayers to fund democracy vouchers, and, therefore, to fund political speech, the city runs afoul of the First Amendment. School choice vouchers are an example of "true private choice," in which parents direct voucher funds to the school of their choice. While the Court has upheld school choice vouchers, it ruled in *Janus v. AFSCME* that individuals cannot be compelled to "subsidize private speech on matters of substantial public concern." The AACS hopes the Court will agree with *Janus* that Seattle's democracy vouchers, unlike school choice vouchers, violate important First Amendment principles.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Trump to Seek Nearly 8 Percent Cut in Education Spending](#)

[Multiple Choice: Increasing Pluralism in American Education](#)

[House Republicans Stand for Life During Hearing for "Abortion on Demand Act"](#)