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“The liberty, prosperity, and the happiness of our country will always be the object of my most fervent prayers to the Supreme Author of All Good.”
James Monroe

Office of Non-Public Education Hosts Conference for Private School Leaders

Last Thursday, the [Office of Non-Public Education](#) (ONPE) hosted its annual National Private School Leadership Conference online. After brief opening remarks from Secretary Miguel Cardona, the conference split into four different streams of topics: equitable services, creating just and caring school communities, recognizing your school community, and private schools by the numbers. AACCS staff joined several sessions in different categories to capture a broad view of what the conference entailed and how it might be helpful for Christian education. One theme that seemed to permeate most sessions was the repeated focus on equity and diversity. Starting with opening remarks from Secretary Cardona, the theme of equity and racial diversity formed a common thread throughout the day. In his remarks, Secretary Cardona stated that “equity in education is about providing all students, from all backgrounds and all parts of the country, with the resources and supports that they need to succeed and thrive in our society.” Secretary Cardona did credit private schools with their “extraordinary efforts” in maintaining educational excellence during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting how their independence and autonomy was necessary to pursuing their mission and serving families in their communities. However, he also stressed that equity for all students must be a priority in both public and private schools, potentially contradicting his praise of private schools’ independence and autonomy. The equity theme continued in the session “Education for Liberation of Human Potential,” featuring faculty and staff at New Roads School in Los Angeles, CA. After opening with a nod to the success of American “ideas built on inherent worth and dignity of each person,” the school staff soon shifted the discussion to how the Declaration of Independence’s promise of equality to all men continues to exclude minorities. In describing the ethos of the school, faculty stated that “diversity is essential to academic excellence,” a sentiment shared by Shane Martin, president of Seattle University in the session “Fostering Communities of Common Purpose and Shared Values.” When asked why diversity is a priority at his college, Mr. Martin replied, “Because it’s as real as the air we breathe. . . . Those with power and control have tried to impose” that power on those that are different. Mr. Martin encouraged faith-based colleges to have “cultural humility” that does not view one way of being human as better than another.

Additional sessions featured the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) with a special focus on non-public education. Although private schools did not meet the 70% participation threshold to report results, NAEP staff stated that historically, “Private school students score higher on average than students in public schools . . . across NAEP subjects, grades, and time.” The next NAEP assessment will begin in January 2022, and NAEP staff hope to discover any significant differences between private schools that largely stayed open during the pandemic and public schools that remained closed. Overall, the ONPE conference was informative and revealed the Biden administration’s agenda to elevate equity and diversity in every school in America.

House Passes Abortion Bill with Only Partisan Support

Last Friday, the House of Representatives [voted to pass](#) the Women's Health Protection Act, an extreme pro-abortion bill that would legalize abortions up to birth and remove existing protections for unborn babies in state and federal law. The bill passed 218-211, with no Republicans supporting and only one Democrat, Representative Henry Cuellar (TX-28), opposing. The bill moved quickly through the House, fueled by the controversy created by pro-abortion advocates about the Texas Heartbeat Act that went into effect in September and the impending case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* which is scheduled for oral arguments at the Supreme Court in early December. The bill is meant to be a safeguard for abortion rights should the Court overturn *Roe v. Wade* and return the issue of regulating abortion back to the states. The AACS wrote about the [dangers](#) of the Women's Health Protection Act in last week's *Washington Flyer*, noting that the bill would eliminate prohibitions on federal funding of abortions and ban state-level restrictions such as waiting periods, parental consent, and requirements that a mother be shown ultrasound images of her unborn baby. House Democrats also [denied](#) a Republican-offered amendment that would have protected babies that are born alive after an attempted abortion. Called the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, the amendment has been offered by members in the House and Senate for years, so far without success. Although the abortion bill has passed the House, it is unlikely to get near the sixty-vote threshold to overcome the filibuster in the Senate.

Supreme Court Has Opportunity to Rule for Religious Liberty

The U.S. Supreme Court is poised to begin its next session on October 4 and has [several cases](#) on the calendar that could affect religious liberty. In [Carson v. Makin](#), the court will hear arguments over whether a school choice program in Maine can include funding to religious schools. At issue is a program that provides tuition assistance for families to attend private schools in rural areas where a district public school is not available. The program allows the funding to be used towards private schools but excludes religious schools, a policy that parents are charging violates their religious liberty. The AACS has joined an amicus brief arguing that religious schools must not be excluded from the Maine school choice program. In [Ramirez v. Collie](#), the court will determine whether First Amendment rights extend to a death-row inmate who has requested his pastor be present and able to pray with him during his execution. Two other cases have sent requests for appeal to the High Court, and although they have not yet been accepted, the cases offer an additional opportunity for the court to protect the employment rights of religious institutions. In [Margaret DeWeese-Boyd v. Gordon College](#), a faith-based college is seeking a decision that would clarify the scope of the ministerial exception to include all employees in a religious institution, and in [Seattle's Union Gospel Mission v. Woods](#), the gospel mission is seeking a ruling that protects its freedom to hire people who share its religious beliefs. The AACS has filed an amicus brief urging the Supreme Court to take up the case involving the Seattle mission, in recognition of the ramifications that such a ruling will have on the hiring and firing rights of religious institutions, including Christian schools.

In Case You Missed It:

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

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

[Promise to America's Children](#)