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*“Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men,
but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature.”*
Benjamin Franklin

School Choice Enthusiasm Leading to Victory in Arkansas, Facing Loss in Wyoming

A [recent Scott Rasmussen](#) survey shows that 51% of Americans believe that school choice provides better educational opportunities for students and 60% favor a system where education funds can follow students to the school of their parents’ choice. This type of system is best established through education savings accounts (ESA) in which eligible families are given a specified amount of money to be used on a variety of educational methods, including curriculum, therapies, tutoring, and tuition. Currently, [ten states](#) have some type of ESA program in place, including Utah and Iowa, which just established universal ESA programs earlier this year, ensuring that every family in these states will have access to school choice options. According to the February report in the [EdChoice podcast](#), ESAs have quickly become the most popular form of school choice program, with 50 ESA bills being considered in 23 different state legislatures this legislative season. One of these is in [Arkansas](#), where the state senate recently passed Senate Bill 294 which will establish a universal ESA. The program would provide \$6,000 scholarships for every student in the state, making it on par with the universal ESA programs recently passed in Utah and Iowa. Moving quickly, the bill passed a house committee on Tuesday this week, and will now be considered by the full house. Should the bill pass, it is sure to be signed by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who has made school choice a key part of her agenda. Other states considering school choice options through legislation include Georgia, Idaho, Ohio, Oklahoma, Nevada, South Carolina, and Texas.

Despite the widespread enthusiasm for school choice, efforts in [Wyoming](#) have hit a wall with Speaker of the House Albert Sommers refusing to bring to the floor a bill that would create a universal ESA. The bill passed the state senate with an overwhelming majority and has the necessary votes to pass the house. Republicans hold a super majority in the state house by 57-5, and 33 of those Republicans are sponsors of the school choice bill showing the bill’s majority support among the legislators. Yet, the speaker refuses to allow a vote on the bill, claiming that the bill infringes on the local control of school boards. Supporters of the bill charge that Sommers is siding with the teachers’ unions as he also refused a vote on a bill that would protect children and parental rights by banning gender education in early grades and prohibiting doctors from prescribing and performing transgender treatments on children. He defended his position by [stating](#), “Fundamentally, I believe in local control. I’ve always fought—regardless of what really the issue is—against taking authority away from local school boards, town councils, county commissions. And in my view, that’s what this bill does.” However, Rep. John Bear, who chairs the Wyoming Freedom Caucus, disagrees, [stating](#), “This bill actually gave control to the most local of all, the parents, in regard to the education of [kindergarten] through third graders.”

AACS Submits Public Comments on DOE’s “Low-Financial Value” Program

The AACS submitted public comments on a [request for information](#) (RFI) issued by the Department of Education (DOE) on so-called low-financial value programs offered at colleges. In its RFI, the Department

expressed concern that some college students are being misled by their institutions regarding the level of financial success they could expect to achieve after graduation. The RFI claims that the DOE wants to expand transparency and, therefore, proposed to create a public list of institutions that the DOE deems to offer low-financial-value programs. The AACCS submitted public comments pointing out the danger of viewing the value of higher education primarily through an economic lens rather than on the vital character development that many religious institutions prioritize in their programs. The comments note, “Education is about more than earning a high wage. . . . The goal of education is not merely to pursue material wealth, but to contribute to human flourishing by forming the souls of our students according to enduring truths. . . . We urge the Department of Education to consider the spiritual and moral component of higher education and not seek to make judgments about the worth of a college degree or program based merely on the relatively small consideration of a students’ market value after graduation.”

Indiana House Tackles Gender Identity Instruction in Schools

The [Indiana legislature](#) is considering a bill which would prohibit schools from teaching lessons with sexual content to kindergarten through third-grade children. [House Bill 1608](#) also includes the requirement that a school must notify the parents of students who request to change their names or pronouns. Furthermore, the bill states that a school “may not discipline an employee or staff member of the school for using a name [or] pronoun . . . to identify a student that is consistent with the student’s legal name.” Despite some vocal opposition to the bill, it passed through the House Education Committee by a vote of 9-4, and then the state house by a vote of 65-29. During the debate in the house committee, Rep. Jake Teshka, a supporter of the bill, responded to charges that the bill presented dangers for students by simply reading from the text of the bill which concisely states that the bill applies only to teachers and staff and that a teacher had an obligation to report concerns of abuse to the Department of Child Services. The bill is now being considered in the state senate which holds a Republican majority. The bill is similar to Florida’s Parental Rights in Education Act passed in March 2022, also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which requires schools to report to parents if their child has expressed gender dysphoria and restricts gender identity instruction in certain schools.

In Case You Missed It:

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

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

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[ADF Video: Respect for Marriage Act: What Church and Ministry Leaders Should Know](#)