



The Washington Flyer
October 27, 2023

“The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states, of worshipping Almighty God agreeable to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights.”
George Washington

Congressional Hearing Highlights School Choice

The House Ways and Means Committee held a [hearing](#) on Wednesday to discuss “Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers.” In his opening remarks, Chairman Jason Smith (MO) supported expanding 529 accounts as a way to provide families with more educational options for their children. In 2019, [529 accounts](#) were expanded to include savings for K-12 education tuition. Rep. Smith [stated](#) that these accounts should now be expanded further “to cover other educational costs like books, tutoring to help kids catch up after multiple years of forced virtual school, educational therapies for students with disabilities, and supplies for the many families now choosing to homeschool.” Witnesses included Corey DeAngelis, senior fellow at the American Federation for Children (AFC), and Hera Varmah, also with AFC serving as the communications and events assistant. DeAngelis offered [testimony](#) explaining the benefits of school choice to children and families and called on Congress to expand 529 accounts to include more educational options for K-12 students and also to pass a national tax credit program through the Education Choice for Children Act (ECCA). Ms. Varmah described how school choice allowed her and her siblings to be successful in school and called on Congress to take steps to ensure every child in America has the same opportunities. Jerome Redmond, president and CEO of American Truck Training, [testified](#) of the many jobs that require career training rather than college education and explained the importance of expanding the use 529 accounts for career training and credentialing expenses. A [parent testimony](#) was brought by Sharon Sedlar, who described the life-saving help that school choice brought to her daughter when her second-grade school brought extreme emotional stress that hindered her academic progress. Sedlar’s experience spurred her to found the PA Families of Education Choice, which helps other families find educational options that best meet their children’s needs. Democrat witness Dr. Girard Melancon, director of the National Green Jobs Advisory Council, [testified](#) of the growing number of jobs needed for the function of a green society and called for equitable access to job training programs.

Comments from Congressmen showed a partisan divide, with Republicans praising the testimonies of the witnesses who shared the benefits of school choice and Democrats charging that school choice hurts public schools and helps only the wealthy. A [recent poll](#), however, shows that the majority of Americans—nearly 70%—believe that expanding educational freedom will strengthen the educational system in the country. Conducted by the organization [yes. every kid. foundation](#), the poll also revealed a strong majority support for expanding education savings accounts (63%), expanding tax credit programs (66%), and ending school assignments by zip code (67%). “Americans believe more education options will improve our nation’s education system,” [stated Matt Frendewey](#), vice president of the yes. every kid. foundation. He added, “By expanding opportunities for families to customize the education to meet their kids’ needs, we can improve education more broadly.”

Oklahoma Attorney General Files Suit Against Religious Charter School

Gentner Drummond, Oklahoma's attorney general, has [sued](#) the school board that approved the nation's first religious charter school. As [AACCS](#) has previously reported, the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board approved the application of the St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School in a 3-2 decision. Drummond has opposed the school's approval from the start, warning the board members they would violate both the state and national constitutions by approving the charter school. "This is a gross violation of our religious liberty," [said Drummond](#), claiming the religious charter school violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment by using public dollars to fund a religious school. He promised to fight the case all the way to the Supreme Court. However, advocates for the religious charter school base their support in part on recent [Supreme Court decisions](#) protecting religious organizations against government discrimination. Nelson Tebbe, a professor from Cornell Law School, [noted](#) that "a lot depends on whether they're public schools or private schools. And that's where the debate is shaping up." Drummond's attack against St. Isidore has also put him at odds with his fellow Republican, Gov. Kevin Stitt. "Drummond seems to lack any firm grasp on the constitutional principle of religious freedom," [said Stitt](#), blasting the lawsuit as a "political stunt." This lawsuit is the second against the school. Still, St. Isidore hopes to resolve the lawsuit quickly so it can refocus "on its critical mission to open the door to a new and innovative learning opportunity."

The Battle over Appropriate Books in Education

Parents and elected officials across the country are fighting to remove sexually explicit materials from school libraries. These efforts to keep children from pornographic materials are often incorrectly named "book bans." In reality, these age-appropriate restrictions are designed to protect a child's innocence by giving parents the right to remove graphic content from their schools. Some states, such as Florida and Texas, have passed legislation protecting a parent's right to challenge sexually explicit books. The laws have drawn support—and backlash. The book publisher and distributor Scholastic Trade Publishing previously announced that books on race and LGBT issues would be in a separate, optional section at its book fairs, citing state laws in its decision to make the collection optional. "We cannot make a decision for our school partners around what risks they are willing to take," [said Scholastic](#). However, this week Scholastic [reversed its decision](#) and apologized for creating the separate section. "We will find an alternate way to get a greater range of books into the hands of children," [said Ellie Berger](#), the president of Scholastic. Berger also affirmed that Scholastic's commitment to LGBT authors and stories "remains foundational." Yet, parents remain resolved to continue the work to protect children from sexually explicit content. "I really want to empower parents," [said Karen England](#), the executive director of Capitol Resource Institute. "I want parents and local community members to decide what is appropriate and what isn't for your community."

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](#)

[Former AG Barr Recognizes Importance of Christian Schools and School Choice](#)

[School Choice is Better for Democracy Than Government Schooling](#)

[Newly Elected Speaker of the House Mike Johnson \(LA\) Gives First Speech to Congress](#)

Jamison Coppola: Government Relations Director

Olivia Summers: Government Relations Assistant

Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst

Washington Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003