



The Parent Point

A MONTHLY BRIEF FOR WASHINGTON'S PRIVATE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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Policy agenda 2003

Each fall, WFIS holds regional gatherings throughout the state to guide the Board of Directors in establishing direction as well as its educational policy agenda. As a result of this process, the bulk of our 2003 agenda in support of the state's independent schools will be focused in the following areas:

APPROVAL AND ACCREDITATION

The current method of quality assurance for independent schools includes two forms under the supervision of the State Board of Education. At the request of the Board, both avenues have been undergoing a review with active participation from WFIS. We vigorously encourage visionary leadership and innovative forms of outstanding educational practice in our member programs. To this end, WFIS seeks to re-define the nature of school approval and the accreditation process to more fully encourage fresh approaches for the new century, reflective of the mission of the sponsoring community, while guaranteeing safe and effective educational environments.

EDUCATIONAL LIBERTY

WFIS believes that while parents with children enrolled in private, independent schools value a strong public school system and willingly accept their responsibility to contribute to the common good, our state's constitution does not equally affirm their parental right to educate their children in the school of their choice. This past June, the U.S. Supreme Court demonstrated how locally supported choice programs could successfully meet federal constitutional restrictions. Now the focus shifts to the states.

Recognizing the increasingly diverse background of the families we serve, WFIS will renew its efforts in the pursuit of similar legal opinions that would pave the way for funded educational choice programs for families who so desire to participate. These programs must include both: (1) a priority for assistance to low and middle-income families, providing increased educational options for their children; and (2) an inclusion of private and religiously affiliated school options among those choices.

TEACHERS AND STAFF

WFIS stands in concert with the belief that a quality professional teaching and administrative staff is one of the most critical elements for a successful educational program. To that end, we have actively supported all state proposals designed to recognize, support and enhance professional instruction in Washington's public and private schools.

WFIS believes that all school sponsors (whether a publicly elected board or private institution) should have the ability to attract and retain the professional staff that best meets their local mission and educational philosophy. Each system is ultimately accountable to the families it serves and has a responsibility to hire the best staff possible with the resources available. That fact should be the driving force for any regulation on required licensing of staff rather than arbitrary teacher-student ratios and class-size targets.

Of immediate concern, we support all efforts that would reinstate the once common practice of allowing students enrolled in this state's publicly funded colleges of education to be placed in private religious schools to complete their student teaching or administrative internships.

EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION AND EQUITABLE APPLICATION

WFIS will continue to advocate for private school student access to all programs designed to enhance the quality of education in this state. In addition, we will seek resolution in cases where local application results in double standards or inequities.

FEDERAL - The recent re-authorization of the educational entitlements in the No Child Left behind Act includes newly strengthened provisions for private school student inclusion. We will work for seamless application of those programs in all districts within the state. The coming re-authorization of the Individuals with Dis-

abilities Education Act (IDEA) will also be monitored for opportunities to increase the overall level of funding for children of special needs and for greater flexibility for their parents to choose the provider of those services.

STATE - WFIS supported the Educational Reform Act of 1993 and the right for independent schools to voluntarily participate. The final legislation leaves the decision to participate to each independent school. We will continue to insist that a school's curriculum is best determined at the local level in concert with a community-discerned mission and vision. At the same time, WFIS believes that where the independent school community finds resonance with the goals and performance objectives crafted for the state-operated schools, they should be welcomed and encouraged to embrace and fully participate in the resources available to ensure quality implementation.

LOCAL - We will continue to actively encourage counties and municipalities to exercise their leadership role to the benefit of all children within their jurisdiction whether they are enrolled in public or private schools. While these local charters exclude any specific role in K-12 education, the regulations they enact - specifically in land-use, health and safety, and parks and recreation - often neglect to include the perspective of private school students and their families. The creation and application of these policies must be evenly maintained.

OUR COMMITMENT AS PEERS AND PARTNERS

... is important to WFIS and its member schools. We believe that privately funded AND state-controlled schools serve the same public: the student-citizens of our state. We have more in common than we often acknowledge. WFIS believes we should build and focus on what we share in common rather than perceived differences. Our member schools will not tolerate efforts to penalize one sector to benefit the other. At the same time, we will not accept being left out of the design. We pledge to work together for a larger commitment to K-12 education, not to take away from one hand to the advantage of the other. Only in building each other up does the State of Washington benefit. We are committed to strategies that do so.

Visit our web site at www.wfis.org for more information on Washington's private schools.