

November, 2012

### The Next Four Years

After a hotly contested election for President not much has changed – particularly the things that matter most. Just as before the election, Christians will continue to proclaim each day, *“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalm 118:24, ESV)

The political playing field in DC also remains largely unchanged. The reelection of President Obama coupled with the reelection of a strongly Republican House of Representatives and a U.S. Senate that is controlled by the Democrats, but without the 60 vote majority required to override filibusters, will continue Congressional gridlock. It is widely expected that Arne Duncan will remain Secretary of Education for the foreseeable future as he is viewed as one of President Obama’s most successful cabinet heads.

The practice of selectively granting waivers from *No Child Left Behind’s* onerous testing requirements based on states meeting requirements determined by the US Department of Education is likely to continue to be the primary vehicle used by Secretary Duncan and the President to drive education policy.

Two nights after the election in a [speech](#) before the Education Trust, Secretary Duncan said, “Our goals for waivers in remaking NCLB are clear: protect children, set a high bar, and provide as much flexibility as possible.” This all sounds fine, all goals that most of us could support, but the fact that this is being done solely by fiat of the Department of Education and that the waivers are being used to force states to take specific actions without Congressional action leaves some observers (me for one) quite uncomfortable. Perhaps I worry too much about process rather than outcomes. Duncan seems quite confident about the outcomes. In the same speech he said, “Contrary to what you may have read, these waivers will push states to dramatically accelerate achievement and attainment for disadvantaged students and students of color.” Speaking further about expected outcomes he also said, “What matters most is results: Whether kids are learning, and if achievement gaps are narrowing dramatically,” and, “No accountability framework will ever be perfect—and we have more work to do to ensure flexibility is implemented correctly and that states help all students succeed. But we can't let the perfect become the enemy of the good. We can't let the utopian become the enemy of the excellent. And we can't let rhetorical purity become the enemy of rigorous practice.”

Clearly Secretary Duncan is all about pragmatism. So if gridlock remains in Congress it is very likely that the Secretary will find a way to move education policy through regulations or waivers designed to wrest from states changes in their state education regulations. This will further

erode state and local control of education policy and continue the slow, relentless shift toward federal control of public school policy that we have seen for the past few decades. This policy shift coupled with federal court decisions has resulted in restrictions on student discipline policies, the development of burdensome federal regulations controlling Title I and special education programs, and oppressive student assessment programs.

Of concern to many Christian teachers is that the federal policy shift has also diminished the free exercise of religious liberties of students in the public schools. This erosion of the student's right to speak freely about their faith is a concern because we know that the true source of all strength and stability both for individuals and nations is the Lord:

*5 The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high;  
he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness,  
6 and he will be the stability of your times,  
abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;  
the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.*

*Isaiah 33:5–6 (ESV)*

### **“Face to Faith” Supports Religious Freedom in Classrooms**

On a positive note for religious freedom, at a meeting in Washington DC last month, the First Amendment Center introduced to education organizations an international initiative, “*Face to Faith*.” This program was developed by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to promote the teaching of comparative religion classes in public and private schools. In the past, the First Amendment Center has developed excellent materials explaining teacher and student religious liberties in the public schools. The *Christian Educators Association* has disseminated these materials to many of our members and they are available at [www.CEAI.org](http://www.CEAI.org). The “*Face to Faith*” initiative appears to be another good idea promoted by the First Amendment Center. For more information about this program visit the [Tony Blair Foundation website](http://www.TonyBlairFoundation.org).

If you have thoughts or comments on this issue or other Federal education issues please share them with us. You can address your thoughts and comments to [JMitchell@ceai.org](mailto:JMitchell@ceai.org).

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