

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Obama and Biden Have Strong Ties to Religious and Independent Schools

President-elect Barack Obama and Vice President-elect Joe Biden have long and close connections with religious and independent schools. Both men graduated from private schools, sent their children to them, and have sustained strong ties to them.

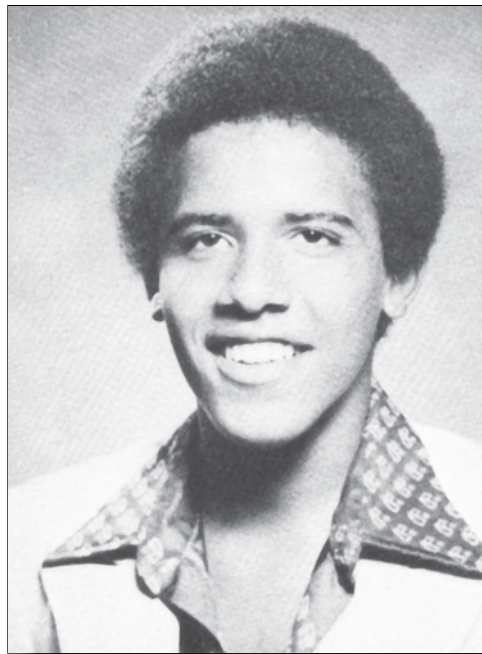
Obama's first school was a Catholic school, the St. Francis Assisi Foundation School in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he attended first and second grade. (His family had moved from Hawaii to Jakarta when he was six.) In third and fourth grade, he attended an Indonesian public school, but after returning to Hawaii, he enrolled as a fifth grader at Punahou School, a K-12 college prep school in Honolulu and the largest independent school in the United States. He graduated from Punahou in 1979, having played on the varsity basketball team that won the state championship that year. Other co-curricular activities included the boys chorus in ninth grade and the concert choir in tenth.

Fifth-Grade Memories

In his autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama recalls that Miss Mabel Hefty, his fifth-grade teacher at Punahou, had invited his father, a Kenyan, to speak to the class. On the day of the visit, Miss Hefty welcomed the elder Obama eagerly and announced to the class, "We have a special treat for you today. Barry Obama's father is here, and he's come all the way from Kenya, in Africa, to tell us about his country." Obama wrote that his father spoke about "the wild animals that still roamed the plains, the tribes that still required a young boy to kill a lion to prove his manhood"—matters that must have captivated his pre-teen classmates. But his father also described the political struggles in the country and how Kenyans longed to be free. "When he was finished," wrote Obama, "Miss Hefty was absolutely beaming with pride. All my classmates applaud-

ed heartily." And one fellow student offered what may be the ultimate fifth-grade compliment: "Your dad is pretty cool."

In an article for the *Punahou Bulletin* in the fall of 1999, Obama, who had attended the school on scholarship, wrote, "I believe that the carefree childhood I expe-



Barack Obama in his 1979 high school yearbook. (photo courtesy of Punahou School)

rienced in Hawaii, and the wonderful education I received at Punahou, should not be left to the luck of the draw, but should rather be every child's birthright."

Extraordinarily Grateful

In December 2004, then U.S. Senator-elect Obama returned to Punahou to speak to students and faculty. The *Punahou Bulletin* reported that Obama recalled the school's effect on his life this way: "There was something about this school that embraced me, gave me support and encouragement, and allowed me to grow and prosper. I am extraordinarily grateful."

The day Obama was elected president, Punahou School President James K. Scott said, "This is a historic moment for America and the world, and for Hawaii.... At Punahou School, our calling is to foster each student's potential to reach his or her promise and effect meaningful change in society. President-elect Obama is an inspirational embodiment of that vision."

Obama's education in private schools continued well beyond Punahou. He attended Occidental College, a small liberal arts college in Los Angeles, for two years and then went on to earn a B.A. in political science in 1983 from Columbia University and a J.D., *magna cum laude*, in 1991 from Harvard Law School, where he was elected the first black president of the *Harvard Law Review*.

Respect for Catholic Schools

Another Obama encounter with private schools came in the mid-1980s when he worked as a community organizer for the Developing Communities Project (DCP) in Chicago. From 1985-88, Obama worked out of an office in the rectory of Holy Rosary Catholic Church in the city's south side. In a booklet "The Catholic Case for Obama," Dr. Patrick Whelan reports that about 200 mostly non-Catholic children attended the Catholic school connected with the parish. "Barack did not teach at the school, but he had an opportunity to get acquainted with many of the parents." One of the priests involved with another nearby Catholic school told Whelan, "Senator Obama certainly had a respect for the Catholic school system, particularly when it was the only alternative for education of the poor. He recognized that Catholic schools became a vehicle by which children could be prepared to compete in life." Whelan also reports that during the 2004 Senate race, "Barack's campaign filmed one of its television com-

continued on page 2

CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- 31 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
Executive Director: Joe McTigue

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$25. ISSN 0271-1451

13017 Wisteria Drive #457
Germantown, MD 20874
(tel) 301-916-8460
(fax) 301-916-8485
(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org



continued from page 1

mercials in a Catholic school, championing the education that the children were receiving there.”

Laboratory Schools

The president-elect’s connection with private schools continues to this day. His two daughters, Malia Ann (10) and Natasha (7), have been attending the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, established in 1896 by John Dewey. According to the mission statement, the Lab Schools “provide an experience-centered, rigorous and well-rounded education for a diverse community” and “strive to exemplify educational practice at its best.” David W. Magill, the schools’ director, writes, “We are more than just test scores and college admissions statistics.... Our academic program is rigorous, but we are as interested in the development of character as we are in scholastic achievement.... In short, we are among the leading independent schools in the nation and pride ourselves on creating conditions for a purposeful search for knowledge and truth.” Michelle Obama, who describes herself as “mother-in-chief,” has served on the board of directors for the Lab Schools.

Sidwell Friends

When they move to Washington, the Obama girls will attend Sidwell Friends School, a PK-12 Quaker day school located in Washington and Bethesda, MD. Sidwell’s statement of philosophy describes the school community as “inspired by the values of the Religious Society of Friends and guided by the Quaker belief in ‘That of God’ in each person.” The school, founded in 1883, offers students “a rich and rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum designed to stimulate creative inquiry, intellectual achievement and independent thinking.” Capturing the Quaker respect for the efficacy of quiet, the statement acknowledges that the community draws “strength from silence—and from the power of individual and collective reflection.” It continues, “We cultivate in all members of our community high personal expectations and integrity, respect for consensus, and an understanding of how diversity enriches us, why stewardship of the natural world matters, and why service to others enhances life.”

The school’s Web site explains that the belief that there is “That of God” in each person “shapes everything we do at Sidwell Friends School. It inspires us to show kindness and

respect toward one another. It motivates us to recognize and nurture each person’s unique gifts. It teaches us to apply our talents in service to others and to work courageously for peace.”

Chelsea Clinton attended Sidwell in the 1990s, and three grandchildren of Joe Biden are current students.

Michelle Obama spent a few days in November scouting out private schools in Washington. In an interview on CBS News’ *60 Minutes*, she talked about the school choice process, saying, “What we have asked people to understand

is that the decision that we make will be based on the best interest of the girls.” Once the selection was announced, Katie McCormick Lelyveld, a spokeswoman for Mrs. Obama, echoed a similar sentiment: “In the end, the Obamas selected the school that was the best fit for what their daughters need right now.”

Vice President-elect

Like Obama, Vice President-elect Joseph Biden also has a lifelong acquaintance with private schools. St. Paul’s Catholic School in Scranton, PA, Holy Rosary in Claymont, DE, and St. Helena in Wilmington, DE,

all helped shape the vice president during his elementary school years. He writes about the influence of nuns on his life in his autobiography, *Promises to Keep*: “Wherever there were nuns, there was home. I’m as much a cultural Catholic as I am a theological Catholic. My idea of self, of family, of community, of the wider world comes straight from my religion....The nuns are one of the reasons I’m still a practicing Catholic.”

When it came time for high school, Biden “had [his] heart set on Archmere,” as in Archmere Academy, a Catholic, independent, college preparatory school in Claymont, DE. He attended the school through the help of a work-study program for, as he put it, “students whose families couldn’t swing the tuition,” which was \$300 a year at the time. According to its mission statement, Archmere “focuses on the education of the whole student” through “dedication to academic excellence, social development, community service, and faith reflection.” The school “encourages and supports the unique qualities and differences of students in achieving the maximum level of their abilities.”

Biden writes, “I began to grow into myself at Archmere....In almost any group I was the leader.” In senior year he was class president and

continued on page 3



Joe Biden at Archmere Academy. (photo on the senator’s Web site)

What Is Next for School Choice?

With the 2008 elections behind us and a new administration ready to hit the ground running, the school choice community is wondering what lies ahead. To help figure that out, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) invited several heavyweights in the school choice movement to discuss what's next. The lively exchange took place November 10 at AEI's headquarters in Washington, DC.

Two Decades of Progress

School choice has made significant progress in the past 20 years. Robert Enlow, executive director of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and a discussant at the AEI event, explained that in 1990 only five states had school choice programs, while today 14 states and the District of Columbia operate 24 choice initiatives. Nearly 190,000 families with children in private schools are using vouchers or tax-credit scholarships, said Enlow, and almost a half-million families offset educational expenses through tax credits or deductions.

Choosing Holistically

Sol Stern, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, argued that the choice movement has placed too much emphasis on the academic success of choice initiatives as measured by whether participants score a few points higher on standardized tests. He said that such an approach “basically misunderstands the very reason that parents want more options and more choice. It has nothing to do with them getting their kids into a school where the test scores are a few points higher.” Parents choose a school holistically, said Stern, weighing a series of factors such as whether the school is safe or whether it imparts good values. He said the movement should focus on the fact that giving parents more choice “is a good in itself.”

continued from page 2

top scorer on an undefeated football team. But, he adds, “If I was going to be a leader, I meant to lead the right way. I made sure to look out for the kid who was being made fun of. I knew how that felt.” Biden had a stutter as a child, and he describes his “proudest accomplishments at Archmere” as delivering a five-minute public speaking requirement during morning assembly in sophomore year and a welcome to graduates and parents at his commencement ceremony in senior year. “[I]t was the final confirmation that the stutter was not going to hold me back.”

Biden's connections with Archmere have continued. His adult children—Beau, Hunter, and Ashley—all graduated from the school, and he served as honorary co-chair of the Campaign for

Howard Fuller, distinguished professor of education and director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University, said that, for him, school choice “has always been about social justice.” Unpacking that point, he said, “We ought not to have an America where only people with money are able to choose the best school for their children.” Fuller railed against “the grinding hypocrisy” that he has witnessed over the years in people who, when it comes to education, have the money to “take care of their own children” but are reluctant “about giving poor people options.” He said, “it borders on criminality what we have allowed to happen to poor children in this country.... We have miserably failed literally thousands and thousands of these children. And for many of these children, the power to choose provides them the only possibility of trying to make a difference in their lives.”

Inevitable

Joe Williams, executive director of Democrats for Education Reform, said he believes that an expansion of school choice is “inevitable.” In a society where selecting a movie on pay-per-view and making a host of other choices is routine, it is only a matter of time before choosing a child's school will become “a part of regular activity.” He said the Democratic Party will get on board the choice movement because it's going to have to respond to “the choosers who want the choice, particularly in urban areas where this is going to become loudest.” He predicted, “The party is not going to be able to survive without responding to the desire that's out there for choice.”

Audio and video recordings of the AEI discussion “What Is Next for School Choice?” are available for download on the AEI Web site at <http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.1829,filter.all/event_detail.asp>.

Archmere, launched in 2003 to raise funds for capital improvements.

Biden, the country's first Catholic vice president, connects his elementary and secondary education to the development of his sense of public service. Talking about the election of John F. Kennedy, he writes in his autobiography: “The thing that struck me most about his inaugural address in January 1961 was not the newness of his ideas but how much those ideas rhymed with the lessons I'd learned at Saint Paul's and Holy Rosary and Saint Helena's and Archmere—and especially at my home. We have to do good works on earth, Kennedy reminded us, because it is our duty:...[H]ere on earth, God's work must truly be our own.”

Team Obama

The Obama-Biden Transition Project has moved quickly to put two teams together to review education policy and the agency charged with carrying it out.

The Education Policy Working Group is responsible for setting the stage for implementing “Obama's promise to provide every child a world-class education.” The group will advise the president-elect on how to carry out his commitment “to invest in early childhood education; recruit, train, retain, and reward an army of new teachers; create school designs for the 21st century; and make higher education affordable for all.”

Linda Darling-Hammond, professor of education at Stanford University and an education spokesperson for Obama throughout the campaign, is heading the working group. Darling-Hammond is prominent in the standards movement, and in 2006 was named by Education Week's Editorial Projects in Education Research Center as “one of the nation's ten most influential people affecting educational policy.”

Obama's Education Department Review Team will conduct a “thorough review” of the department in order to provide the new administration with the “information needed to make strategic policy, budgetary, and personnel decisions prior to the inauguration.” The team will also “ensure that senior appointees have the information necessary to complete the confirmation process...and begin implementing signature policy initiatives immediately after they are sworn in.”

Judith A. Winston is leading the review team. Winston, a former general counsel and undersecretary at the Department of Education during the Clinton administration, is currently a consultant on education and civil rights law, and cofounder of the law firm Winston Withers & Associates.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact:** Contrary to popular assumptions, most children from upper-income families in the United States attend public schools, not private schools. Specifically, 85 percent of families with children in grades K-12 and with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more (the highest bracket calculated in the survey) have children who attend public schools. The U.S. Census Bureau collects data each year on school enrollment sorted by a number of variables, including family income. The latest figures are based on data collected in October 2006. They are available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2006.html>.

★ The Institute for Justice Washington Chapter (IJ-WA) filed a lawsuit last month challenging Washington state's policy requiring that services provided under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* to students attending religious schools be delivered at a "nonsectarian" location, such as a public school.

"No parent should be forced to choose between her child's physical needs and the school she believes is best for her child," said Michael Bindas, an IJ-WA staff attorney. "Washington is singling out families who choose religious schools and denying only their children the special education services they need to thrive. Under the U.S. Constitution, that is religious discrimination and it is unconstitutional."

IJ is filing the suit on behalf of Shari and Derrick DeBoom and other fami-

lies. The DeBoom's son Michael attends Lynden Christian School in Lynden, WA. According to an IJ news release, Michael "suffers from attention-deficit, anxiety, and motor-skills problems that hinder his ability to learn." Although he is eligible for services under IDEA, "Washington forbids them at the school his parents have chosen for him." Part of the assistance he requires is "a specially equipped laptop for note-taking," which is "useless outside the classroom where he needs to take notes." As a result of the state's policy, "the DeBooms must either take their son out of the school of their choice or forgo needed assistance."

"We simply want Michael to get the education he deserves and needs so that he can be the best he can be and make a positive contribution to society," said Shari DeBoom. "We should not be forced to choose between services he needs and a school that shares our core beliefs."

The lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, argues "that Washington's discriminatory policy violates the U.S. Constitution, specifically the First Amendment's right to free exercise of religion and the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the law."

Washington's policy relies on the state's Blaine Amendment. The lawsuit is intended "to make clear that Blaine Amendments do not justify religious discrimination under the U.S. Constitution—and to sweep away these provisions as obstacles to parental choice in education."

★ "For too long, opponents of school choice have relied on Blaine Amendments to thwart educational opportunity," said Chip Mellor, IJ's president and general counsel. "This cynical ploy built on religious discrimination ignores the real-life needs of special needs families in Washington and families across the country for a quality education. We aim to put an end to the favorite legal tactic of school choice opponents and clear the path ahead for school choice nationwide."

★ The Van Lunen Center of Calvin College is now accepting applications for its 2009-10 Fellows Program, "designed to develop the executive knowledge and skills needed by younger heads of faith-based schools." The application deadline is February 15, 2009. For more information visit <http://www.calvin.edu/vanlunen/fellows-program.html>.

This issue of *Outlook* is sponsored by



See the Difference that **InformationNow**
can make for your school
administrative software needs.

800.326.0527

www.HunterSystems.com

Learn more about CAPE's sponsors at
capenet.org/corp.html