



# KEYSTONE SENTINEL

Protecting and Promoting Christian Education



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Michael Clater, Editor

## boardroom

By  
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“I CAN DO ANYTHING I WANT!!!” – CHAPTER 4

September—Chapter 1: Christian school leaders, some civil laws apply to your schools.

October—Chapter 2: Students, don't form one's aspirations on contemporary models of self-esteem, self-determination, and entitlement.

November—Chapter 3: Schools and teachers, academic programs are better when properly supervised by a principal.

Now for Chapter 4: Parents, it is important for your kids to be in school every day except for an urgent reason – no matter what you want. I begin with an actual case covered by multiple sources in the media.

A member of a public school board had the reputation of considering student attendance to be extremely important. This member championed several policy changes toward that end. This member wanted the district to be tough in its policies. Subsequently, this member decided to have a family excursion to ski in Switzerland for two weeks. The district rules did not allow this to be an excused absence. The member initiated a lawsuit and overturned the district rules – rules that the member wrote and pushed fellow board members to enact.

In general terms, “everyone” believes children and youth should be in school. As illustrated above, *some* parents condemn in others what they themselves do. In general terms, *some* parents are quick to make an exception for themselves whenever they wish. This writer may not have “seen it all,” but has seen a variety of parental actions (provided on “excuse notes”). This includes:

- ◆ We needed to shop for clothes for college next fall.
- ◆ Grandpa and grandma came to visit.
- ◆ We wanted to visit a mission field for three months and took our kids with us.
- ◆ My son and his friends needed to go out for break-

fast together for a few hours.

- ◆ I think my daughter should stay home each month for the entirety of her menstrual period.
- ◆ My work schedule was full, and I could not take the time to drive my kids to school.
- ◆ We took two weeks off to go deer hunting.
- ◆ My daughter didn't want to go to school.
- ◆ We had work to do on the farm and needed our kids' help.

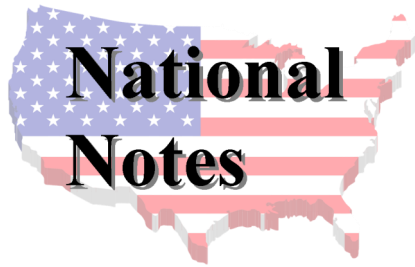
Some in our society articulate that this is an issue of parental rights, that it is no one's business whether a parent has their child in school or not. Some even cloak their position in biblical language. Some threaten (overtly or by implication) to withdraw their student(s) if a private school chides or places any impediment to their free choices regarding attendance. “I can do anything I want!”

In the United States, legislatures and courts view school attendance as having the weight of legitimate state interest. Parental rights are honored, but they are not without limits. Beginning in 1852, states began instituting Compulsory Attendance. The last 17 of the states enacted their laws in the 1900s, all by 1929. Why? The literature supports multiple reasons, including:

- ◆ Improve literacy rates and improve academic performance
- ◆ Help combat against child labor abuses
- ◆ Minimize children getting in trouble
- ◆ Teach accountability and fulfilling responsibility
- ◆ Improve the chances for a person to succeed in college, employment, and life
- ◆ Strengthen societal and emotional skills
- ◆ Develop life patterns of fulfilling one's most important activities as one's priority

Observe that many of the above have nothing to do with the core academic side of schooling. Beginning in the 1960s we moderns began using largely overlapping, related terms like soft skills, essential skills, employment skills, core skills, common skills. They are an essential part of successful adulthood, citizenship, employment, marriage and parenthood – and practicing Christianity. See <https://www.amle.org/soft-skills-preparing-kids-for-life-after-school/>.

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## Federal Preferred Pronoun Mandates Expand

The trend of coddling those supporting LGBTQ views continues to expand. The federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a new mandate on preferred pronoun use in mid-October. The new rules affect some 80,000 nationwide staff in the Department. The proclamation, titled “Gender Identity and Non-Discrimination Guidance,” has been promoted as a protective measure enabling people to be their “authentic self” at work, regardless of recognized status, disability, or religion.



Image by [12019](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Assistant Secretary Rachel Levine, identifying as a transgender woman, has claimed all employees should have “equal protections in the workplace.” The effort, according to Levine, is to ‘help’ employees make a “welcoming workplace” by

“improving the feelings of inclusion” for coworkers. The policy also encouraged employees to use the bathroom facilities associated with their preferred gender (or non-gender).

There has been significant opposition to the requirement from both religious and social avenues:

- ◆ The mandate is unclear on appealing compliance (or conformity) for those with genuine religious beliefs that clearly contradict the policy. (Scripture clearly includes numerous passages referencing the existence of only two genders, man and woman. Basic study of human biology also supports two genders from genetic, anatomical, musculoskeletal, and biochemical criteria.)
- ◆ Arguments are being made that the Department has discarded basic biological science in favor of social activism and ideological positioning.
- ◆ Many have referenced the clear indication of “compelled speech,” which runs afoul of First Amendment protections. The mandate also gives preferential treatment by elevating the importance of an ideology over individual rights of free speech and religion.

[Biden’s Trans Health Official Imposes ‘Pronoun Mandate’ \(msn.com\)](#)

[New ‘Orwellian’ HHS pronoun mandate forces employees to ‘deny reality,’ violate law: legal expert \(foxnews.com\)](#)



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## **I Can Do Anything I Want!** *Continued from page 1*

Pennsylvania enacted its Compulsory Attendance law in 1895 for all of the normal reasons. In today's life, many public school districts admit that student absence is a major impediment to student development and well-being. Yet, many districts confess that they do little to enforce the law. Is our society reaping negative results? The legislature periodically expresses its deep concern and seeks reform, action.

*Even apart from the law, what about Christian education? The simple answer is that the goals of a Christian school are not advanced in a student's life when the student is not present. The higher the number of absences, the lower the achievement of our mission.* Secondly, as a student is absent, the workload of the teacher is increased. Thirdly, to do little or nothing about a problem is not beneficial. Five thoughts:

1. Review the purpose of Compulsory Attendance and soft skills integrated into the curricular day.
2. Regularly find ways to teach parents the importance of students being in school every day except for a truly urgent reason. Parts of this instruction rely upon logic, some on the practical, some on the law, and some on the general principles of Scripture. This can be in the Student Handbook, in written or verbal announcements, through teacher communications, and even through a school's award system.
3. Abstain from fooling yourself into thinking that you and your school can somehow "win" by allowing enrollment without regular attendance. Your school does not need a bad reputation. Your faculty do not need more work. Your principal's office does not need the headaches. Christian school attendance is not parallel to attendance expectations for Sunday School or church services. As in other areas of your school, if a family is out of step with your program, work to get them in-step or find a polite way to cease their enrollment.
4. Be proactive with written policies, and follow them. This includes areas like accurate records, a working definition of an "urgent" reason to miss school, a written policy defining an "educational trip" and its allowable duration, listing of days/weeks when attendance is expected (early months for beginners, testing days and weeks, Bible emphasis weeks, etc.), and advisement that the school obeys the law.
5. Know and follow the law applicable to a religious school regarding Compulsory Attendance. We know of no violation of Scripture in these laws. If your school is a legal school, your school promised to obey all applicable laws.

*Some* parents incorrectly say or practice "I can do anything I want" in the area of school attendance. You are benefitted to disagree.

## ***The Bible and Society***

Recent Items of Interest for Believers

### **Southern Baptist Convention Encourages Limiting Liability against Abuse Survivors**

In a case completely separate from any Convention involvement, the SBC filed an *amicus* (friend of the court) brief discouraging a retroactive application of Kentucky law extending the statute of limitations period when victims could bring lawsuits against alleged attackers. If applied retroactively, a court ruling would enable abuse victims to sue in civil court under a longer statute of limitations.

KCEA has argued against extending the statute of limitations, not because we have been accused of wrongdoing but because it endangers fairness. In the eyes of some, this filing is troubling. The Convention already has a task force working since 2022 to make changes within the denomination, which has about 47,000 congregations. And the court filing bears the weight of an official position in an unrelated court case. By extension, it would appear to be an attempt to limit denominational liability for abuse events that took place within specific congregations and outside of denominational control. As a result, the SBC's own credibility has taken a significant hit with victims.

[Chaos erupts over Southern Baptist legal filing in Louisville abuse lawsuit \(msn.com\)](#)



### **Sixth Grader Wins National Science Contest**

From 65,000 entries submitted by middle school students to the Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge, Shanya Gill stepped away with the top prize for her invention. What was it? A fire-detection device. Traditional devices in homes only detect smoke particles in the air. Gill's device combined a thermal camera with a small computer coded to "detect an unattended fire and send a text message to you." The unique combination of technologies allows the device to detect fires sooner than smoke detectors. *Encourage your students to not only gain knowledge and understanding, but to apply it throughout their lives.*

[Middle Schooler Wins National Science Fair for Fire-Detection System \(businessinsider.com\)](#)

# **In the Classroom**

## Instructional Flexibility: Public Schools Gain Options Long Enjoyed by Nonpublic Schools



Image by [WOKANDAPIX](#) from [Pixabay](#)

For decades, Pennsylvania's public schools have been required to abide by the state's Public School Code mandating compliance for both minimum number of instructional days (180) and number of instructional hours (900 for elementary, 990 for secondary) in a given academic year. Pennsylvania's nonpublic non-licensed schools (religious), including Christian schools, have enjoyed a more flexible instructional standard, established by Act 178 of 1986 thanks in substantial part to KCEA's heavy lobbying efforts. Since that legislation's enactment, religious day schools in the Commonwealth have been able to make their academic year either the 180 days or 900/990 hours requirement, without the paired days-and-hours mandate. This has given religious schools substantial flexibility over the years to meet or exceed the minimum standards while also producing students who consistently score higher in standardized testing settings.

This flexibility for using days or hours now applies to public schools, thanks to the unanimous passage of House Bill 1507 by both houses in the General Assembly and Gov. Shapiro's signature on Dec. 14. The law takes effect immediately, and schools can act on the change for the current school year.

Ramifications are both vast and potentially complicated for both schools and families.

- ◆ Will some public schools continue to rely on liberal numbers of Act 80 days (which count toward the instructional totals) for curricular development, in-service for new programs, parent-teacher conferences, etc.?
- ◆ Will public schools opt for a shorter instructional week, with longer instructional time per day? (Future passage and enactment of HB 1848 could further complicate the instructional schedule, possibly delaying the start of the school day until 9:00am and forcing school to end at 4:00pm.)
- ◆ If schools and districts opt for the shorter instructional week, will that impact how districts interpret transportation mandates for nonpublic school students? In a hypothetical scenario, will a public school district only transport nonpublic students on the same scheduled instructional days, or will they continue to transport students at nonpublic schools that stay on the traditional five-day instructional week?
- ◆ How will a shortened instructional week impact extracurricular

ular after-school events and group meetings, like year-book or STEM club, sports teams, etc.?

We expect that little will change during the current academic year. Strategic planning for scheduling, transportation, and other affected areas will ramp up in 2024. Radical departures in the first year from the *status quo* may be met with harsh resistance from many stakeholders, so do not expect a significant systematic overhaul to come quickly.

## Lack of Consequences Yields Chaos in Virginia Public Schools: The Importance of Discipline



Image by [Gerd Altmann](#) from [Pixabay](#)

In late November, the Charlottesville (VA) High School closed for three days ahead of the Thanksgiving break, with teachers unwilling to set foot on campus. Why? Unruly students.

Reports indicate a toxic mix of conditions enabled the unruly behavior to blossom and overwhelm the school staff and the learning environment:

- ◆ **Lack of enforcement of rules**, progressing from phone use to skipping class to harassment of school staff, including the principal.
- ◆ **Lack of discipline for disobedience**, with no consequences for verbal or physical confrontations, or for general rule-breaking.

[Chaos closes Virginia high school after rules not enforced \(msn.com\)](#)

The inherent value and importance of Christian schools having a structured learning environment with a comprehensive integration of Scripture and a Biblical worldview cannot be understated.

- ◆ It reinforces that God is the author of order and law, and Christ is our Redeemer from our sinful rebellion.
- ◆ It promotes a cohesive classroom with an authoritative teacher figure.
- ◆ It creates a consistent environment for students of all learning types, economic backgrounds, and family structures to learn simultaneously and collaboratively.
- ◆ It reinforces student recognition of their place in the world, and on the need for each student to have a submissive, willing heart to yield to the leading and conviction of the Holy Spirit.



### Budget Code Enacted: The Impact on Student Teachers

House Bill 301, signed into law by Gov. Shapiro on Dec. 13 as Act 33 of 2023, impacted numerous educational funding areas: community colleges; “environmental repairs” and improvements for schools; school safety; mental health; and more.

This legislation also authorizes a new stipend for student teachers of \$10,000 (and up to \$15,000 if the participant is in an “understaffed district.”). The supervising teacher (at the school level) would receive a \$2,500 stipend. On its face, given the widely decried teacher shortage, this sounds helpful for all student teachers and for all schools. Yet the law was written so as to require the supervisor to be a currently state-certified educator. KCEA staff opposed this wording on philosophical grounds: the state program is not content neutral in its mandates for the collegiate or continuing education curriculum. The PA certification requirements are not neutral like the old days, but reflect secular society. Thus, schools are wise to not embrace their credentials. KCEA lobbied for alternative professional credentials, but ultimately we were unsuccessful.

The Sentinel is an electronic publication of the Keystone Christian Education Association, 6101 Bell Road, Harrisburg, PA 17111 (717-564-1164; [TClater@kcea.com](mailto:TClater@kcea.com)). Affiliating ministries should refer to their Special Reports and monthly News Notes for additional information on these and other topics.

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### EITC Funding Receives Increase for 2023-2024

Educational choice is a good philosophy: every household, regardless of income, should be able to choose the best schooling option for their child(ren). KCEA-affiliating ministries have received regular briefings from KCEA both through the years and recent months. EITC/OSTC is an acronym for three tax credit programs in Pennsylvania to encourage educational choice. They carefully avoid government aid to schools. The new law of December 13 includes EITC/OSTC being increased by \$150M per year.

Program	2022-23	2023-24
Education Improvement Org.	\$44.5M	\$54.5M
PK EITC	\$20.5M	\$30.5M
K-12 EITC	\$263M	\$325M
K-12 OSTC	\$65M	\$85M
Economically Distressed School	\$12M	\$60M

#### NOTES:

1. Educational Improvement Organization money goes toward funding some auxiliary education programs sponsored by libraries, special public school programs, etc.
2. Economically Distressed School (EDS) money goes to students enrolled in a day school where 50% or more of the students receive \$1,000 or more in EITC/OSTC scholarships. To qualify, the household income cannot exceed \$108,444 plus \$19,088 for each dependent. (Credit: DCED, September, 2023) This program was created to aid eight Roman Catholic schools in Philadelphia. It now appears that students at about four dozen schools are now qualified for this \$60M. The underlying claim has been that the EDS schools enroll more low-income students. After all, if they receive a scholarship they must be low-income!

While we should all rejoice when the legislature increases the legal and practical options available to parents, any rejoicing over this \$150M increase should be tempered by two observations: (a) The EDS funnels money to kids in a school that is already swimming in tax credit funds, regardless of real student need. Kids of true need in other schools go without. (b) Probably 90% of the remaining \$92M of the scholarship increase has already been claimed by organizations that had advanced applications for more funds than they used last year. *Between these two observations, most students in most schools will never see a dime of the \$150M. (You can talk to your legislator about that.)*

KCEA is a loose association of Bible-believing churches and Christian schools in PA uniting under a common banner for the furtherance of a common goal: the protection and promotion of Christian education as a philosophy and methodology of training our youth.

The Association is a faith ministry that serves Bible-believing ministries in Pennsylvania. Churches and other ministries are encouraged to support the Association with regular prayer and financial gifts. Dr. Allen Harris, President. Rev. Ross Ritchey, Vice-President. Mr. Michael Boole, Secretary-Treasurer. Dr. Theodore Clater, Executive Director.