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## Early Education Policy Update

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The following memo provides a summary of recent developments in public policy issues of interest to Early Childhood Advocates.

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### **This Week in Washington**

After months of ongoing, prolonged and heated debates in the House and Senate, among education policymakers, between economists and elected officials at all levels, the Education Jobs package was signed into law today. The bill, which provides \$10 billion to states to prevent teacher layoffs or to rehire teachers, was approved by the House yesterday, when Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) called her colleagues back into session from their August recess. The measure passed the House on a vote of 247-161, and President Obama signed the bill at a White House ceremony today.

Yesterday's floor debate of the proposal prompted Republicans to question the wisdom and sustainability of giving more money to states to address economic hardship. Representative John Kline (R-MN), Ranking Member of the House Education and Labor Committee, said of the bill, "Spending another \$10 billion we do not have will not balance state budgets or bolster our economy... At worst, another bailout will make states more dependent on the federal government and more susceptible to Washington's political whims." His colleague, Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA), offered a different view, saying, "[W]ith this vote today, we're taking decisive action to prevent our children from becoming victims of this economy by ensuring more teachers remain in the classroom. This legislation won't save every job but it will certainly provide much-needed relief and a critical lifeline to schools. It was the right decision to come back to Washington to take this important vote."

Ultimately, the approved measure included a nearly \$12 billion cut to food stamps, a \$50 million cut to the Striving Readers program, a \$10.7 million cut to Ready to Teach, and an \$82 million cut to federal student financial aid administration accounts in order to offset the bill. The legislation also includes \$16 billion in Medicaid funding to states. Heralding the package and its investments, the Administration has released interactive, state-by-state maps detailing jobs "potentially saved" by the *Education Jobs and Medical Assistance Act* (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/08/10/teaching-our-way-a-stronger-economy>).

For more information, including a bill summary, a lengthy statement from House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI), and the bill text, visit:

<http://appropriations.house.gov/>.

While education advocates overall were very pleased with the action taken by the Congress to help states facing serious budget problems with both education and healthcare costs in the current economy, other troubling issues regarding spending remain on the horizon. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) conceded last week that in order to pass a FY 2011 budget, with necessary Republican support, approximately \$6 billion will have to be eliminated from the 12 appropriations bills that have been written and acted on in both House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees. In addition, the bill that the Senate Appropriations Committee adopted for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education needs to find another \$7 billion to make good on promises included in the bill for Pell Grant funding and adequate funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program. Those are staggering numbers that could lead to deep cuts in education spending in the coming year.

### **ED Holds Webinar on Making Student and School Data Meaningful to Families**

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) sponsored a webinar titled, “Data Driven: Making Student and School Data Accessible and Meaningful to Families” in partnership with United Way Worldwide, the National PTA, SEDL and the Harvard Family Research Project. This was the third in ED’s webinar series “Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School and Community Engagement.” The preceding webinars highlighted strategic family engagement as well as utilizing family engagement as a tool for increasing student academic success. Tuesday’s webinar focused on how to make student and school data understandable and useful to families further encouraging them to participate in their children’s academic life.

Anna Hinton, Director of Parental Options and Information for the Office of Innovation and Improvement at ED, provided an introduction to the webinar, followed by remarks by Kevin Jennings, Assistant Deputy Secretary of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Jennings explained that safety in schools is paramount to keeping youth in school. He stated that bullying is nearly twice as likely a predictor of school avoidance, such as skipping school, as is crime, such as theft at school. Data on failing grades or unexcused absences can indicate to a parent that something may be amiss and needs to be addressed. Zena Rudo, Project Director of the National PIRC Coordination Center for SEDL, explained that good data and data systems must be accessible, understandable, valid, updated and utilize new technology. She stated that data should be individualized so that it is specific and provides important information for families regarding their children. Rudo also emphasized that data must meld all academic institutions, from the morning’s first class through participation in afterschool programs. “Without data, we are just people with opinions,” Rudo commented, expressing the invaluable role that data can play. Highlighting the ARIS Parent Link, Jennifer Saltzstein, Project Director of the ARIS Parent Link for the New York City Department of Education, explained that ARIS, New York City’s data reporting system, links parents and teachers to student data. The tool provides an array of information, from explaining the importance of a standardized test score to specific grades and school-wide comparisons. By providing the same data to teachers and families, the families become empowered to communicate with teachers to help the student improve. For families without access to computers, the tool can be accessed at libraries, food pantries and other community-based organizations. Similarly, Barbara Taveras, Director of Community Engagement of New Visions for Public Schools, explained that data can help achieve a focus on college- and career-readiness. The *Good to Go* tool provides a color coded representation of the

student's progress in reaching college-ready qualifications so that families and educators are able to assist the student in difficult areas or encourage the student to continue achieving. D'Lisa Crain, Grant Administrator of the Nevada State PIRC Education Alliance of Washoe County, provided an overview of workshops her organization held in community-based organizations and schools to introduce parents to the technology that would allow them to track their child's achievement, called Edline. The workshops also explained basic academic principals, such as the grading system and what qualifies as an unexcused absence, which was found to be helpful in closing cultural gaps and misunderstandings. During these workshops, small groups of parents are encouraged to access the tool, explore it and ask questions. More information and access to other useful tools will be posted at: <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/projects/achieving-excellence-and-innovation-in-family-school-and-community-engagement-webinar-series/webinar-3-data-driven-making-student-and-school-data-accessible-and-meaningful-to-families>.

## **Stakeholders Call for More Early Childhood Professional Development for Principals**

Early-childhood education and school leadership groups are publicly promoting the critical role of principals as an important factor in closing the achievement gap that typically affects the school readiness of low-income and minority children. Many groups, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), are advocating for more specialized, high-quality training that provides “concrete practices” for principals that can be applied at the school level in order to construct developmentally appropriate practices for early learning at elementary schools. The Executive Director of NAESP, Gail Connelly, stated, “We believe through the right kind of focused, targeted professional development for principals we can level the playing field and close the gap for more of those children.” The type of training the principals receive is key. Douglas Reeves, the Founder of the Denver-based Leadership and Learning Center, said, “Principals require the kind of training that helps them lead their schools with the nuanced understanding of early learning needed for success.” Learning what is developmentally appropriate for early learners is essential, and if principals learn these best practices, they can share these skills with the teachers and “coach” them to serve this age group more efficiently and effectively. In response, Senator Mark Udall (D-CO) introduced S. 3658 on July 27th, which would award grants, on a competitive basis, to partnerships at the local level to provide professional development opportunities for elementary school principals in early childhood education and development in order to create high quality early learning environments and to support increased school readiness for those children entering kindergarten already behind their peers. To read more about this legislation visit: [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:s3658is.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:s3658is.txt.pdf)

## **States May Not Be Ready for Common Core Pre-K Standards**

While Common Core State Standards have been developed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) for grades K-12, there has been a hesitation to create similar standards for early childhood education. During the U.S. Department of Education's Reading Institute 2010 in California, a panel discussed the “apprehension” to implement early childhood Common Core Standards and the necessary next steps before implementation of such standards. Most early childhood experts agree that more “research, database development and program alignment of the various early care and education standards” is required before states can collectively identify what common standards should be implemented for early learners. Another concern of experts is the potential unintended

consequences of implementing standards that may have educators focusing on inappropriate techniques in an effort to prepare children for kindergarten in accordance with a certain set of benchmarks. The type of approach educators take when teaching literacy and math in early childhood education is important according to Dorothy Strickland from Rutgers University. And, when reviewing best teaching practices for early childhood, Strickland believes applying a Common Core to the curriculum may benefit instruction so early childhood educators can focus on the “why and how” of early literacy instruction. According to Ellen Frede, Co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, the benchmarks set for young children should focus “on how they discuss letters they encounter during their instruction with other children” and not require a set number of letters sounds. For more information on this session visit: <http://www.mikogroup.com/2010readinginstitute/sessions.htm>.