



The Education Report

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The Education Report, a weekly publication of WPLL, provides an executive summary of public policy issues affecting American education. **Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:**

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1. Budget and Appropriations

On Tuesday, the new Congress took on an old tradition—hosting the President for the annual State of the Union address—and added a new twist by mixing up the seating so Republicans and Democrats sat side-by-side instead of being divided by party. Building up to the address, pundits speculated that innovation, education and infrastructure would be front and center, and they were proved right. President Obama also addressed the federal deficit, the nation’s involvement in the Middle East and the angst surrounding the controversial healthcare reform bill passed by the 111th Congress. Overall, the President spoke of creating an efficient, effective, competent government that fosters innovative economic growth to sustain this nation’s place as “a light to the world.” Borrowing terms from the era of President John F. Kennedy, the President asserted today to be our generation’s “Sputnik moment.” He noted the importance of maintaining the nation’s “leadership in research and technology” and linked this imperative to innovatively educating America’s youth. The President, concerned as U.S. students continue to fall behind their international peers in math and science achievement and college graduation rates, expressed his continued support for what he considers to be the most “meaningful reform of our public schools in a generation,” the Race To the Top initiative, and pointed to the program as one that might serve as a framework for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Overall, education was a substantial piece of the President’s address and is a clear priority.

As the President spoke to the nation, materials flooded the White House’s web site that include fact sheets on the policy areas he discussed, organized around the address’ four themes: innovate, educate, build, reform and responsibility. These materials emphasized issues familiar to education advocates: raising expectations to reform America’s schools; preparing 100,000 new STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) teachers; promoting college access and completion; and reforming immigration laws to stop expelling talent. These

documents can be found at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/fact-sheet-state-union-president-obamas-plan-win-future>.

While the Congressional audience at the State of the Union address tried to demonstrate a new tone of civility in the Nation's capitol, the week wasn't without some new posturing as evidenced by the approval of legislation in the House that would support the new Republican majority's rhetoric on cutting federal spending. Hours before the State of the Union address, every House Republican and 17 Democrats, voted to approve legislation that not only gives the Chairman of the Budget Committee, Paul Ryan (R-WI), authority to issue a new budget allocation for the still-unfinished FY2011 budget, but also approval to reduce non-security discretionary spending to FY2008 levels for FY2011. This means that when the House begins debate on the FY2011 Continuing Resolution the week of February 14th, deep cuts in discretionary spending should be expected. It's important to remember that the current Continuing Resolution expires on March 4th. Also on tap for the week of February 14th is the release of the President's proposed FY2012 budget. Not a week full of warm, fuzzy Valentines for education, almost surely.

The Senate also reconvened this week and debated rules and procedures for the 112th Congress. At the top of this list was the filibuster. Ironically, without a filibuster, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) reached a compromise or "gentleman's agreement" as they describe it: Republicans will limit the use of the filibuster on "initial, motion to proceed votes" and, in return, Reid will "exercise restraint" on amendments which will enable more Republicans to file their own amendments to bills. Civility, apparently, is not dead. For now.

Lastly, another point of contention between Democrats and Republicans that will be debated in coming days is the issue of raising the debt limit. Democrats believe that allowing the limit to be capped at current levels will result in catastrophic economic ills while Republicans cite raising the limit as another example of irresponsible, reprehensibly frivolous spending by the federal government. This argument will begin to ramp up as the end of March deadline approaches and the federal budget is debated in Congress. You didn't think they were going to play nice on this one, did you?

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2. In Brief

ED HOLDS STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

On Monday, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) hosted another in its ongoing series of Stakeholders Forums to update advocates, national education organizations and parent and community organizations about ED's reform efforts and programmatic activities. This briefing included information on the upcoming Labor-Management Conference; the launch of the U.S. Education Dashboard; an update on the School Improvement Grants; and an address by Secretary Arne Duncan providing an overview of his expectations for 2011. Describing the Conference on Labor-Management Collaboration funded by the Ford Foundation and hosted in partnership with the Department of Education, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the Council of the Great City Schools and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, Jo Anderson framed the intent and format of the two-day event being held February 15 -16. With over 150 districts represented at the conference, ED's goal is to engage marquee education players across the country that can support the momentum this event is expected to create and foster an environment where key stakeholders can make good

on their commitments to affect change in their schools back home. Secretary Arne Duncan then took to the stage and discussed his hope for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) this coming year and, upon request, highlighted the places where the Administration and Republicans can find agreement. He highlighted: 1) a smaller federal “footprint” and allowing more state control; 2) more flexibility; 3) shortening of ESEA; 4) providing better incentives to obtain faster rates of growth; 5) the importance of comprehensive education that includes music, art and financial literacy; and 6) supporting research and development. Additionally, ED introduced a new data tracking tool called the United States Education Dashboard, www.dashboard.ed.gov, which currently reflects 16 key indicators including equity, early education and STEM education. According to Tony Miller, Deputy Secretary of Education, this tool uses data to create greater transparency and will allow the education community to “focus on best practices that yield the best results in tough budget times,” enabling a better informed discussion regarding education reform. Finally, Sandra Abrevaya, Press Secretary at ED, shared that the Department has awarded approximately \$4 billion in School Improvement Grants. Of those funds, \$3 billion was from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and \$500,000 was from FY2009 funds. Throughout 44 states, in both rural and urban settings, 1,000 districts are implementing the “turnaround” model. Soon to be launched is a map of where these schools are and information regarding the schools’ demographics and the improvement model chosen. A video and transcript of the forum is available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/news/events/forum.html>.

NAEP SCIENCE SCORES DISAPPOINT

On Tuesday morning, hours before President Obama delivered a State of the Union address that emphasized the importance of reforming education and supporting innovation in the United States, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) released the disappointing 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science scores for the country. Just 34 percent of fourth-graders, 30 percent of eighth-graders, and 21 percent of twelfth-graders are performing at or above “proficient” in the most recent NAEP snapshot, which gives science scores from tests administered in 2009. A very small number of American students—only 1 or 2 percent at each grade level—reached scores at the “advanced” level, and relatively large numbers of students did not reach “basic” levels of achievement. This NAEP science test was revised since the last time students were tested, and, as a result, scores from previous years cannot be compared to this year’s scores. The new testing framework takes into account scientific advances, science educators say, and does a better job of measuring higher-level scientific thinking. For instance, many questions are open-ended and ask students to design or evaluate experiments. Science educators consider the changes a marked improvement. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan issued a statement related to the news, which said, in part, “The results released today show that our Nation’s students aren’t learning at a rate that will maintain America’s role as an international leader in the sciences. When only 1 or 2 percent of children score at the advanced levels on NAEP, the next generation will not be ready to be world-class inventors, doctors, and engineers.” The statement goes on to say, “President Obama is committed to improving achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). He has made a call for all hands on deck to parents, teachers, administrators, academics, local leaders and the private sector to work together to advance science and mathematics education, and has set a goal to recruit 10,000 new science and mathematics teachers over the next two years. Our Nation’s long-term economic prosperity depends on providing a world-class education to all students, especially in mathematics and science.” For more information on the NAEP results, visit: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

ED AND WORKFORCE HOLDS FIRST HEARING – “THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE”

On Wednesday, the House Education and the Workforce Committee held the first hearing of the 112th Congress to discuss the state of the American workforce. Witnesses included Governor Bob McDonnell (R) from the Commonwealth of Virginia; Doug Hotlz-Eakin from the American Action Forum; Dyke Messinger from Power Curbers, Inc.; and Heather Boushey with the Center for American Progress. In his opening statement, Chairman Kline asserted the purpose of the hearing was “to learn about the policies that may be standing in the way of job creation and find better solutions to protect the rights, safety and prosperity of the country’s workers.” This was the hearing’s primary focus, but the first witness to testify, Governor Bob McDonnell, included higher education as a key point in his remarks. Emphasizing that Virginia’s economic success is attributed to limited regulations, low tax rates and a competent labor force, McDonnell announced his state has the ninth lowest unemployment rate in the Nation. While his efforts have been focused on attracting businesses to the state, simultaneously, he also has been working to “strengthen the workforce.” In his written and verbal testimony McDonnell announced his “Top Jobs for the 21st Century” initiative that will enable the state’s higher education institutions to issue an additional 100,000 degrees over the next 15 years, making Virginia one of the most highly educated states in the nation. According to McDonnell, “Our initiative also places a greater emphasis on the high demand science, technology, engineering and math subjects through the formation of a public-private partnership that will engage the business and professional community in leveraging best practices for K-12 and higher education.” While this was the extent of his comments regarding K-12 education, when asked by Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA), “What will it take to create 100,000 new degrees?” McDonnell provided a more comprehensive answer. He explained that Virginia must expand the opportunities offered to students by expanding the option of degrees and methods to achieve them. Currently, only 38 percent of Virginian students applying to college are able to obtain a degree from a Virginia institution due to capacity limitations. Therefore, McDonnell maintained that schools need to “utilize distance education and use virtual learning experiences and there must be a focus on STEM education.” For more information on this hearing, visit:

<http://edworkforce.house.gov/Calendar/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=220429>.

SECRETARY DUNCAN HOLDS EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

As a supplement to the education portions of President Obama’s State of the Union address, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan participated in an on-line roundtable discussion via Facebook on Thursday with community representatives and the general public. Moderated by Kori Schulman from the White House Department on New Media, Kevin Short, representing MTV, asked the first basic question—even in difficult economic times, should education funding be cut? Secretary Duncan replied that there are “thoughtful” ways to cut even education spending and stated that the federal government “can’t stave off all cuts.” Linda Murray from babycenter.com asked about early childhood education, to which Secretary Duncan responded that investments in early education are the “best investment[s] we can make,” and he explained that the Department of Education (ED) is pushing for universal access to high quality early education programs. Murray also inquired about the federal role in education. Secretary Duncan stated that the goal is for ED to play a narrower role as an “engine of innovation” that encourages and recognizes “good work” because “answers are locally” found and the federal government should “shine a spotlight on what is working.” He also highlighted key Administration initiatives including Race to the Top Assessment grant program; teacher merit pay; increasing funding for Pell Grants; and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. To view the roundtable discussion, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/video>.

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3. New Publications

“The Nation’s Report Card: Science 2009 Grades 4, 8, and 12” (January 2011)
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2011451.pdf>

“Meeting the Challenge: The Role of School Leaders in Turning Around the Lowest-Performing High Schools” (January 2011) <http://www.all4ed.org/files/MeetingTheChallenge.pdf>

"Charter School Laws Across the States" (January 2011)
<http://www.edreform.com/download/charterlawdl.cfm>

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4. In the News

“College Test Leaves Questions Unanswered” Wall Street Journal (1/22/11)
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704754304576095912537891034.html?KEYWORDS=education>

“Public Universities Relying More on Tuition than State Money” New York Times (1/24/11)
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/24/education/24tuition.html?scp=56&sq=education&st=nyt>

“Less than Half of Students Proficient in Science” Washington Post (1/25/11)
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/25/AR2011012502526.html>

“State of the Union Mystery: What so Obama’s Race to the Top Plans Mean?” Christian Science Monitor (1/26/11) <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2011/0126/State-of-the-Union-mystery-What-do-Obama-s-Race-to-the-Top-plans-mean>

“Senators Pledge to Work Jointly on Education” Washington Post (1/26/11)
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/26/AR2011012605600.html>

“The Political Education of Michelle Rhee” Politico (1/27/11)
<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0111/48275.html>

“A Clash Over Drug Curbs at Schools” Boston Globe (1/28/11)
http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/01/28/patrick_proposal_to_shrink_drug_free_school_zones_draws_fire/

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5. About WPLLC

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