



JUNE 16, 2010

Ellen Fern and Audrey Busch

efern@wpllc.net

abusch@wpllc.net

The following memo provides a summary of a recent study evaluating the effects of the economic downturn on children's access to preschools.

This Week in Washington

Congress has returned to the Nation's Capitol following the Memorial Day Recess for what proved to be a very short work week. Last Tuesday was an important primary election day in many states, so no real work was started until mid-week. The results of the primary races were mixed, and pundits spent the rest of the week trying to make sense of them. While little has happened in the way of floor debates, intense negotiating over the Jobs and Tax Extenders legislation and the FY 2010 Emergency Supplemental Spending bill continue. The House has passed the former, and the Senate the latter, but neither bill was really satisfactory to either chamber. The House leadership had to eliminate billions of dollars in unemployment benefits to get the extenders package passed. Senators were forced to limit the emergency supplemental to funds for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and natural disasters to move that bill. Now, both sides are debating just how to proceed.

The supplemental bill is of particular concern to education advocates. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) had hoped to add the \$23 billion Jobs for Education measure to the supplemental spending bill, but couldn't corral the necessary 60 votes. Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-WI) was forced to cancel a House markup prior to the Memorial Day recess for the same reason—Republicans and moderate Democrats were unwilling to further antagonize voters by adding more than what is absolutely necessary to the national debt. After a week at home with constituents, it will be interesting to see if the number of willing spenders has grown or been further diminished.

Currently, House Democrats are considering so-called "unspent stimulus" money to pay for the teachers' jobs measure. While it remains unclear exactly what "unspent 2009 stimulus funds" are being targeted and exactly how much support there is for such a move, it is clear that a struggle is underway between the House leadership and Blue Dog Democrats. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) had suggested early last week that the House might take up the Senate-passed spending bill and work from there, skipping an Appropriations Committee markup, but it soon became evident that Chairman Obey had not agreed to that action, forcing Hoyer to "revisit his remarks".

The Administration was also looking for ways to calm voter angst about the deficit. Office of Management and Budget Director Peter Orszag sent all agency heads a memorandum requiring them to submit a plan to cut funding in their agencies by five percent. The plans are due September 12 and should not propose across the board reductions, but the elimination of duplicative or ineffective programs. This request is on top of the spending cuts that will be required in the FY 2012 budget plans.

Lastly, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) produced at the end of last week a long list of bills and other actions that the Senate must complete prior to the August recess that caught some colleagues by surprise. Absent from the list: floor time to debate a proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Zero to Three Hosts a Webinar on Early Childhood Literacy

Today, the national nonprofit Zero to Three hosted a webinar, “Building Connections to Support Literacy: Systems of Early Learning for Children Birth to Age 8.” This webinar is just one of several pre-conference events being held to provide a foundation for participants attending the Reading Institute, hosted by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in Anaheim, CA in July. Jacqueline Jones, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Education for Early Learning, kicked off the webinar stating children must be exposed to literacy starting from birth. Panelist Dr. Ross Thompson, a professor of Psychology at the University of California – Davis, discussed research proving early childhood education is essential. The research revealed language-rich environments, social interaction with peers and adults, small group size with a high adult-child ratio, and warm, responsive adult – child interactions are essential components to a child’s development. Peter Mangione, Co-Director of WestEd’s Center for Child and Family Studies, recommended that standards and curriculum reflect the importance of teacher-student interaction and guided play and he stressed the need to provide positive emotional connections with the children. Carolyn Stevens, Senior Policy Advisor for the Department of Defense’s Development System of Care, shared how the military’s child development program is implementing the suggestions made by both Mangione and Thompson to support literacy in the early years. By using a facility design guide and criteria, all facilities housing early childhood centers are consistent and support the needs of a comfortable, language-rich environment where quality books and learning centers are available. Furthermore, staff training plays a critical role and all staff are provided ongoing training and support. Finally, all parents are engaged, given opportunities to participate inside the classroom for both formal and informal events, and provided with bits of information that help them reinforce what children are learning in the classroom. The next webinar to support the preparation of the Reading Institute will be held on June 29. To view additional materials please visit www.zerotothree.org/policy and to access the webinar please visit www.zerotothree.org/literacywebinar.

Administration Launches Let’s Read. Let’s move.

On Tuesday, June 8 a new “United We Serve: Let’s Read. Let’s Move.” initiative was launched by First Lady Michelle Obama, four Cabinet Secretaries and the CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, Patrick Covington. The initiative aims to motivate Americans to volunteer to help fight childhood obesity and stem summer learning loss among students by providing nutritious foods, engaging youth in physical activities and encouraging them to read throughout the summer. Related to the announcement, Mrs. Obama said, “The United We Serve Summer Service initiative is a nationwide effort calling on all Americans to make service a part of their daily lives.” She continued, “We are asking individuals and community organizations, corporations, foundations and government to come together and devote their time and energy to

help our kids stay active and healthy – and to keep them learning – all summer long." The Secretaries of the Departments of Education, Interior, Health and Human Services and Agriculture each explained the role their Departments will play in the success of the initiative. The Department of Education recommends that each child read at least five books during the summer in order to stem learning loss. The Department of the Interior is working to provide information to parents about outdoor activities. The Department of Health and Human Services recommends each child have 60 minutes of physical activity per day. The Department of Agriculture is encouraging organizations to engage youth in planting community gardens and learning about nutritious foods. The initiative is also supported by a number of organizations and corporations including: First Book, the National Military Families Association, Target, Microsoft and General Mills. For more information, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/first-lady-federal-agencies-launch-summer-initiative-curb-childhood-obesity-and->

Knowledge Alliance and Learning First Alliance Host Briefing on Education Research & Policy

On Tuesday, June 8, the Knowledge Alliance and Learning First Alliance hosted a briefing on the use of research to drive education policies and practices. The event featured a discussion of a new study from Education Northwest in collaboration with the Center for Knowledge Use (an affiliate of the Knowledge Alliance), “Toward a Research Agenda for Understanding and Improving the Use of Research Evidence.” Although the study, which consisted of interviews and focus group sessions with policymakers, offered some troubling findings for those who support evidence-based research driving policies, it provided an excellent starting point for a discussion on making research more useful for policymakers and practitioners alike. The featured panel, which consisted of a leading teacher, researcher, and education reporter, took directed questions from moderator Sharon Robinson of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education on the intersection of research, policy and practices. Susan Freiman, a teacher in Silver Spring, MD, pointed to maintaining continuity; understanding the challenges with implementing new practices; and empowering teachers to understand not only that certain practices needed to be changed, but also *why* those changes were being made. Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins agreed there was often a disconnect between practitioners and researchers, but noted the work of the urban research consortiums and the progress these local research centers have made at the local level. He advocated for networking these research centers, which he said would allow the evidence to become “practice validated” in a much more timely fashion. The study and the discussion pointed to the role of intermediaries in disseminating exciting new research and best practices. Freiman suggested that trade publications of professional organizations and other entities use their roles as intermediaries to introduce education professionals to best practices in an easy to read format. A forum booklet, including the executive summary of the report, is available at:

<https://knowledgeall.box.net/shared/zcxxxn4olr>. The full study, *Toward a Research Agenda for Understanding and Improving the Use of Research Evidence*, is available at: <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/694>.

Chairman George Miller Introduces Bill to Improve School Meals

On Thursday, June 10, the House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) was joined by Rep. Todd Platts (R-PA), Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) to introduce the bipartisan *Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act*. The 253-page bill “aims to revamp how children—particularly those from low-income families who attend high-poverty schools—eat every day.” Major initiatives addressed in the bill include: 1) the expansion of National School Lunch and

Summer Food Service programs; 2) the setting of nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools; 3) the implementation of local school wellness policies; and 4) the improvement of management and monitoring of federal food service programs. Miller is attempting, through the passage of this new bill, to tackle what First Lady Michelle Obama has called an “epidemic of childhood obesity.” This bill includes a provision for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and will provide “categorical eligibility to children and youth in foster care” for free school meals. Additionally, Medicaid and SCHIP data will be used to determine student eligibility and help ease the process for high-poverty schools to serve free meals. The bill proposed to eliminate the current application system and instead determine community eligibility through census data. Finally, the bill would require states to establish plans to increase rates of direct certification in the program, institute school breakfast expansion grants, and implement year-round school-based meal services. Miller called this legislation a step toward creating “a nutritional safety net for many children who rely on the child nutrition programs by meeting children’s nutritional needs at every step along the way.”

Department of Education Hosts a Hearing to Discuss Parental Engagement

The Department of Education (ED) hosted a forum May 26 with a panel of senior ED officials to discuss ways to include and encourage family engagement in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), supporting children with special needs and Title I funding. This 90-minute forum, which was attended by more than 250 parents, grandparents, community members, and caregivers from 17 different states, allowed attendees to voice their concerns and ask questions of officials responsible for constructing and implementing federal education policies. Assistant Deputy Secretary Jim Shelton in the Office of Innovation and Improvement, who oversees the Department’s resources for parents, stressed the need for school districts to make the school environment more welcoming to parents and to “ensure that there is two-way communication between school and family.” Parents at the meeting expressed a profound interest in their children’s education and in maintaining an active role in the education process. “I want to be the one raising them,” explained one parent, “but I want teachers involved by engaging my children, and then I will do my part at home.”