



Early Education Policy Update

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Ellen Fern and Audrey Busch

efern@wpllc.net

abusch@wpllc.net

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

Washington Update

Members of Congress want to get out of town and get home to campaign. That seems to be the bottom line. On Capitol Hill, the past two weeks have not been productive ones. Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) had hoped to begin deliberations on a Department of Defense (DOD) reauthorization bill last Tuesday that would have been a vehicle to move the Dream Act, which has been a longtime goal of many in Congress. Unable to muster a single Republican vote, and with the defection of two in his own party, that effort failed, and the Senate was left with time on their hands. In the House, a light schedule got even lighter as Members waited for the Senate to take some hard votes on the DOD bill or move on tax extender legislation. Neither came to fruition, so both bodies announced that what was a brief three-week legislative period set to end on October 8th would get even shorter. A new adjournment date of October 1st was announced.

The one “must pass” bill that is keeping Members, who would rather be campaigning, in the Nation’s capital is the budget for Fiscal Year 2011. In order to avoid a government shutdown on October 1st, a continuing resolution (CR) must be negotiated and passed. The administration pushed for billions of dollars in education funding to address the Pell Grant shortfall and ensure another round of Race to the Top (RTTT) and Investing in Innovation Grants (i3) be added to the CR. The response from Congress was negative. A CR only extends funding in the new year for programs that were funded in the previous year’s spending bill. Because RTTT and i3 were funded through a supplemental spending bill, they would be left out of the CR. This request makes one think that the administration believes that a rare year-long CR is a distinct possibility.

As of today’s publication deadline, the Senate continues to work on getting agreement on a CR. Yesterday, they overwhelmingly voted to end debate on the bill and move forward. However, today Senate Republicans announced that they would offer two amendments. One proposes to extend the CR until February 1, 2011 so that newly elected members of Congress can vote on how to proceed with the budget. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Chair of the Appropriations Committee, wants the CR to extend until December 3, 2010. The second Republican amendment will propose a five percent across-the-board cut. If the Senate passes the bill tonight,

the House is expected to take the measure up unless it gets too late. Congress has until midnight Thursday, the last day of the fiscal year, to pass the measure.

One other education bill that the administration is pushing hard to make it across the finish line before the adjournment date is the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, the funding source for school lunches and other feeding programs. While education advocates have been pushing hard for Congress to act on this important legislation, the fact that the bill is paid for by cutting food stamp benefits is a significant sticking point. One hundred Members signed a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) objecting to the food stamp offsets, but in the interest of time, and because no other revenue sources are available, the bill just might move forward as written.

The overarching conversation on Capitol Hill all last week, and the real obstacle to getting any work done, is the pending mid-term election. Nervous Members have watched once-popular colleagues get defeated by unknown candidates who rail against big government spending and business as usual on Capitol Hill, and they appear unwilling to vote on anything that might annoy constituents. Polls show support for the President in decline and toss up races all over the country. At this point, no one knows for sure if voters are angry at everyone or just angry at the majority party. That question won't be answered until November 3rd.

California Working to Prioritize Early Learning

On Tuesday, First Focus and Preschool California hosted a briefing titled, "California: the State of Early Learning," in an effort to showcase the progress of California's early learning activities. Catherine Atkin, President of Preschool California, described the different roles entities in the community are playing in the early learning landscape in California. The variety of panelists at the event, including Susan Trigueros, Regional Public Affairs Manager for the Southern California Gas Company, and Sandra Weese from the California Federation of Teachers, represented the diverse community groups in California that have taken a vested interest in providing high-quality early learning services. Kris Perry, Executive Director of First 5 California, described the creation of the state's Early Learning Advisory Council that will aid in developing and guiding policy for early education in California. This includes supporting the implementation of the QRIS data system, which will ensure accountability and quality of early learning services throughout the state. Larry Powell, Superintendent of Schools in the Fresno County Office of Education, stated "we know we could unfill prisons if we can get kids reading," and educating for this outcome must start at birth. Powell stated that "we get nothing out of high school reform," but the investment in early education is so extraordinarily substantial that "we may need to lose a generation of our high school students in order to take that funding and invest in early education." Powell explained that through the creative use of Title I dollars and his district's ambitious efforts to win grants and engage the business community in their efforts; they have successfully prioritized funding early learning programs. Each panelist added how important efforts from all members of the community are to ensure quality, program availability and funding. To read more about what California is doing in early learning, visit: www.preschoolcalifornia.org.

ED Launches a National Teacher Recruitment Campaign

This week, NBC held an Education Summit in New York City at Rockefeller Center where Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced a new national teacher recruitment campaign. Acknowledging that more than a million teachers are expected to retire in the coming years, Duncan cited this as "a historic opportunity to transform public education in America by calling on a new generation to join those already in the classroom." The campaign's goals are to increase the number, quality and diversity of people seeking to become teachers, particularly in

high-need schools (rural and urban) and subject areas in greatest demand including: science, technology, engineering, math (STEM), English language learners and special education; reveal the variety of pathways to become a teacher; and celebrate and honor the profession of teaching. The Department of Education also launched a website providing prospective teaching candidates information and resources about how to become a teacher. For more information about this initiative, visit: www.teach.gov.

House Republicans Present “A Pledge To America”

Last Thursday, House Republicans presented their promise for a new governing agenda built on what they consider to be the priorities, principles and founding values of the United States, calling it “A Pledge to America.” While the creation of jobs and economic recovery were front and center, the “Pledge” strikes a similar tone to the 1994 Republican “Contract With America.” Promises to stop “out-of-control spending and reduce the size of government; create a smaller, more accountable government; lower taxes; implement fiscal responsibility; protect life, American values, and the Constitution; and provide for a robust national defense” underline their election-year agenda. Republicans included proposals to rescind unspent American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, block any extensions for additional ARRA funds, and reduce government spending to FY 2008 levels to save “at least \$100 billion in the first year alone.” Regarding cuts to specific education programs, Republicans propose a “hard cap on new discretionary spending” and the end – or “sunset” – to certain federal programs. The document includes a pie chart of all federal agencies and the number of programs per agency that should be eliminated, including 173 programs at the Department of Education. Largely absent from the “A Pledge to America,” are plans for continued investment in high-quality education for young children or a promise to grow science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education or increasing technologies and fields of training for key industries like clean energy and manufacturing for rebuilding our roads, rails and runways. The text of “A Pledge for America” can be found at: <http://pledge.gop.gov>

ED Announces TIF Grant Winners

Last Thursday, the U.S. Department of Education announced 62 applicants of the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant competition. The recipients include state education organizations, nonprofit organizations and school districts. A total of \$442 million has been distributed, which is the first two years of funding in the program to last five years and provide \$1.2 billion dollars to support performance-based compensation of school personnel. To view the list of winners, visit: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherincentive/awards.html>.

McKinsey Examines Teacher Recruitment and Retention

McKinsey & Company held a webinar to release the report, Closing the Talent Gap: Attracting and Retaining Top-Third Graduates to Careers in Teaching, on Monday, September 20. This report examines the best practices of three countries: Singapore, Finland and South Korea. This new research attempts to answer how these best practices might apply here, close the talent gap and help the US develop a talent strategy for world class education. The study revealed that 100 percent of teachers in these three countries come from the top one-third of their college class, unlike in the United States, where only 23 percent come from this same echelon. Here, over 90 percent of the top one-third of students do not want to teach. The question posed by the report: Why? Ultimately, the report suggests that if you improve the working environment of teachers, which includes the caliber of co-workers and opportunities for professional development, and double their pay, the United States could quadruple the percentage of students from the top tier of colleges and universities. Armed with this information, McKinsey recommends the United States pilot a top-third talent strategy in a district, a collection of districts or a state and, as a

nation, develop a national teaching talent plan. Kaya Henderson, Deputy Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools, said these results charge the Nation to rethink the talent quotient in the classroom if we are going to change outcomes. Louis Malfaco, Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and President of Education Austin, said colleges of education are seen as the path of least resistance to get a university degree in the United States, and this must change. In order to set rigorous criteria to enter teacher preparation courses, Kate Walsh, President of the National Council on Teacher Quality, said that both the state and the colleges themselves should implement higher standards. Malfaco suggested that such standards be developed similarly to Common Core Standards, which were not federally mandated but nationally coordinated. To view this report, please visit:

http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/closing_the_talent_gap_september_2010.pdf.