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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.

This Week in Washington

This Monday marked the release of the President's FY2012 budget proposal. On the heels of an economy emerging from catastrophic economic woes, President Obama's proposed \$3.72 trillion budget includes a \$2 billion increase from the FY2011 Continuing Resolution levels in the Department of Education's (ED) budget while simultaneously calling for a five-year freeze on all domestic discretionary spending. Therefore, while some education programs didn't feel "the love" this Valentine's Day, overall increases to ED reiterates the President's vision for revamping the education system as a tool to boost the economy and place the nation on a path to global competitiveness. Not all education programs were maintained—35 programs were specifically consolidated down to 11—but Secretary Arne Duncan asserted in a statement made on the day of the release, "We are cutting where we can to invest where we must."

The President outlined five priority areas for the Department of Education: 1) Early Learning; 2) Sustaining Innovation and Reform; 3) Great Teachers and Leaders; 4) College Completion; and 5) Commitment to Students most At-risk (e.g., students with disabilities, English language learners, migrant and homeless children).

Within the early childhood priority area the Administration offered specific increases and funding for programs seen as "making significant investments in early learning to help all children succeed, especially children with high needs." Specifically, the Administration proposed \$350 million to fund an Early Learning Challenge Fund intended to drive innovative early learning systems in states that also conform to high standards of quality. This initiative is an attempt to "ensure that more children enter school ready to succeed." Also, the Administration proposed to increase investments in programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Child Care and Development Fund all of which foster the preparation of school-ready, healthy children and support parental employment. Furthermore, perpetual concerns that the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is repeatedly underfunded were addressed by increased funding for the Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities—Part C of IDEA—along with Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities—Part B of IDEA. A continued emphasis to fold early childhood into the helm of ED policies is seen throughout the budget. This means in marquee programs for the Administration like Race to the Top, Investing

in Innovation and the College-and Career-Ready Students grants will prioritize applications that improve early learning outcomes.

The President’s budget proposal served as a highlight, however, in what would otherwise be a glum period in Washington. The expiration date for the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution (CR) that is currently funding all government agencies is fast approaching and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) set the overall spending target for the year at \$74 billion below President Obama’s request for FY 2011 last Tuesday. The Appropriations Committee—chaired by Hal Rogers (R-KY)—immediately got to work dividing up the total and reviewing the budget line-by-line to determine where cuts could be made. Under the Ryan-Rogers initial plan, spending under the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) bill will be reduced by \$13.5 billion. However, on Wednesday, a preview of the cuts, which Rogers acknowledged would be deep and painful and affect all agencies, was released and was not well received by many members of the Republican Caucus. The response of the 117 newly elected House Republicans, who had campaigned on a promise to cut this year’s budget by \$100 billion, was swift and critical. The result: Rogers took his plan back to the drawing board, directing the 12 spending subcommittees to make even deeper cuts.

The new plan was made public late Friday night, and the LHHS portion of the new CR includes a share of the pain. Programs such as Parental Information Resource Centers, the National Writing Project and Teach For America were eliminated entirely in this second draft and programs such as Head Start, Part B of IDEA and Title I saw significant rollbacks in funding from FY2010 levels.

An open debate on the CR began on the House Floor on Tuesday, with a final vote set for Thursday. House Democrats have been harsh in their assessment of the Republican plan. They assert the proposal will hurt the people that need help most and will negatively damage a fragile economy that is just beginning to recover. In the meantime, Senate Democrats remain relatively silent about their plans. Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Daniel Inouye (D-HI) appears to be in no hurry to react to the House proposal. The Congress will be in recess during the week of February 21st, so the earliest the Senate can act will be February 28th, perilously close to the March 4th deadline.

The focus in the short-term for all advocates is on the CR with a guiding light from the Administration that all hope is not lost in these brutal economic times and help is on the way in the next stage of this drawn out FY2011 budget process.

Program	FY 2010 Final (Minibus)	<i>Proposed</i> FY2011 CR	President’s FY 2012 Request
Child Care Development Block Grant	\$2,126.70	\$2,087.00	\$2,927.00
Community Services Block Grant Program - Grants to States	\$700.00	\$395.00	\$350.00
Maternal and Child Health Block Grant	\$661.00	\$451.00	\$654.00
Head Start	\$7,234.78	\$6,151.8	\$8,100.00

Early Learning Challenge Fund	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$350.00
Title I Parent Information Resource Centers	\$14,492.00	\$13,798.5	\$14,792.4
IDEA	\$12,587.04	\$12,587.04	\$12,861.35
<i>Grants to States Part B</i>	\$11,505.21	\$11,505.21	\$11,705.21
<i>Infants and Toddlers Part C</i>	\$439.43	\$439.43	\$489.42
<i>Parent Information Centers</i>	\$28.03	\$28.03	\$28.03

Advocates Attempt to Promote Title I spending on Pre-K Programs

During the 2011 National Title I Association meeting in early February, early childhood advocates voiced the need to continue to serve the needs of pre-K classrooms even in tough budget times. In fact, Joanne Evert, the District Director of Child and Family Services for the Washoe County School District, discussed the “ah-ha” moment their district had in 2001-2002 when they realized they could use Title I funds for early learning efforts. Unfortunately, many districts Evert explained have still not had that moment and are unaware of Title I’s flexibility as it relates to early childhood education. Another struggle districts face is figuring out how they can combine multiple funding sources in their efforts to “build practical partnerships with local Head Start programs or with other community preschool sites.” Collaboration is a key component to foster comprehensive and effective early learning services. The focus, however, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research, even during strained budgets, should always be on program quality and this should be exemplified through early learning standards, licensed teachers, small staff-child ratios, health and support services. Since many districts are unaware of being able to use Title I dollars to offer pre-K services, the National Association for Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education is beginning a project that will clarify confusion surrounding the steps to make this possible. In efforts to inform and clarify how Title I funds can be used towards early childhood efforts, the Association will host web conferences and publish briefs on Title I and Pre-k issues and attempt to garner support for dedicating Title I funds for early childhood programs. For more information, visit: <http://www.naecs-sde.org/>.