



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

Over a week ago the House of Representatives approved a spending plan for FY 2011 that would slash federal spending and give the government \$100 billion less than President Obama's request for the year. No agency was spared, and the proposed cuts to education totaled \$10.5 billion or 15 percent. Fifty-six (56) programs would be eliminated and many other high priority initiatives—including Title I, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Head Start and the Pell Grant program—would sustain serious reductions under the plan. The Senate's immediate response to the House plan was "no," while the White House threatened the veto pen. Immediately following the early morning vote of 235 to 189, with only three Republicans opposing the plan, the House joined the Senate in a week-long recess.

With the March 4th deadline of the current Continuing Resolution (CR) looming, dueling press releases poured out of House and Senate leadership offices all last week, marking lines in the sand on spending and outlining dire consequences and a convoluted blame game if a government shutdown occurred. By Thursday evening, with a nod to compromise from the White House, both sides began softening their positions. The Senate Appropriations Committee stated they were prepared to sacrifice \$8.5 billion in earmarked spending along with many programs already designated for elimination by the Administration's FY 2012 budget proposal. Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) stepped back from his "read my lips" promise that the House would not take up a short-term CR unless it included significant spending reductions, and Representative Hal Rogers (R-KY), Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, released a new two-week CR late last Friday night. This CR keeps the government in business until March 18th and reduces spending by \$4 billion. Republicans claimed that the majority of program cuts, including any program defined as a Congressional earmark, even authorized, directed funded programs, were included for elimination in the President's FY 2012 budget proposal. Based on this fact, and wanting to avoid a federal government shut down, many Democrats felt they had no choice but to vote in favor of the 2-week CR, H.J.Res.44, which included many cuts to programs they have supported for years. The House passed H.J. Res 44 on Tuesday and sent it over to the Senate which quickly passed it. While dodging a disastrous government shutdown

this round, the battle still rages on as the House and Senate work to draft a long-term CR for the remaining seven months of FY2011 while simultaneously discussing FY2012.

Specific programmatic cuts of most significance to early childhood advocates include a \$1 million cut to the Child Care and Development Block Grant that would eliminate the Child Care Aware program. Also, the CR eliminates funding for the Even Start (\$66.5 million) and the Striving Readers Program (\$250 million). While this short-term CR spared the Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant, this program may not be spared when Congress begins the long-term CR debate, once again. Therefore, advocates must continue to communicate with Congress about the importance of funding for Head Start, Title V MCH Block Grant, and the Parent Information Resource Centers. Washington Partners will continue to monitor this process as the debate moves forward.

Shelton Remarks on Literacy Achievement Gap

On Monday, February 28, Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement provided remarks at the kick-off for “The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading,” a three-day conference sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation focused on bringing attention to the need for children to be reading fluently by third grade. Shelton clearly stated in his remarks that “if we don’t get kids reading by third grade, it makes everything else much more difficult.” And, while this nation has discussed solutions to this growing crisis, “no one has cracked the code.” Framing the solution in terms of a comprehensive strategy involving all stakeholders, Shelton described a public-private partnership as the cornerstone for true and sustainable gains in a student’s ability to make significant academic gains. He noted this time in our nation’s history as a powerful opportunity for “us to come together to do something big...and if we know what works for some, why don’t we do it for all?” Providing substantive answers to this issue by using innovative techniques that we know work is necessary, Shelton stated, and he emphasized the need for all players to provide “little money for programs with a little bit of evidence and a lot of money for those with a lot of evidence.” Shelton explained the partnership the Department of Education has formed with the business community through the i3 grant program and highlighted the requirement that mandates grant recipients to have a private entity provide a 20 percent match to their federal grant. Additionally, the Department of Education (ED) is developing a comprehensive outreach strategy with the business community. The reason for ED’s emphasis on public-private partnerships, he declared, was because “their [the private sector’s] expertise is important and their voices of support are both powerful and sustainable.” The term of a chief executive officer is far longer than that of a superintendent. Therefore, having business and community leaders invested in closing the literacy achievement gap is essential for sustained progress. For more information, visit: <http://www.gradelevelreading.net/>.

ED Officials Discuss PIRC Funding Issues

Both the President’s FY2012 budget and H.R. 1, the long-term Continuing Resolution passed by the House on Saturday, February 19th, propose defunding Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) either through consolidation or direct elimination of funds. An education news publication *ED Daily*, reported current recipients see the loss of these funds as counterintuitive to the Administration’s priority to support family engagement. According to Vito Borrello, President of Every Person Influences Children, “The move to defund PIRCs will cost states and districts a wealth of expertise at a time when the federal expectations for family engagement are increasing.” Anna Hinton, Director of Parental Options and Information at the Department of Education’s (ED) Office of Innovation and Improvement, reasoned that the proposed consolidation of PIRCs in the President’s FY2012 budget is intended “to create funding streams

that allow more flexibility for states in how they use funds for family engagement.” This consolidation, according to Hinton, by no means represents the elimination of funding for PIRCs. Furthermore, Zollie Stevenson, former director of ED’s Office of Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs, commented that if PIRCs were consolidated, they would simply become an option states could choose to support family engagement without a line item. To support family engagement, ED is also proposing a one to two percent set-aside within Title I that is dedicated and tied to measurable objectives for parent involvement policies. According to Carl Harris, Deputy Assistant Secretary in ED’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, this set-aside will be accompanied by a “technical assistance plan for states and districts that will specifically address family and community engagement. Overall, Hinton stated that, “What we are trying to do at this point is really to look at family engagement as our cross-cutting focus and approach it from a new and more thoughtful way.” For more information, visit: <http://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2010/05/05052010.html>.