



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

Last Wednesday, the Senate Budget Committee began the process of debating its Budget Resolution with opening remarks. On Thursday, the Committee continued the mark-up of the resolution with contentious debate making it clear that floor deliberation and final passage would not be easy feats in the Senate.

Following lengthy tributes to retiring Senators Judd Gregg (R-NH) and Jim Bunning (R-KY) at what was the last Budget Committee mark-up either will attend, Chairman Conrad provided an overview of his spending proposal. He said his version of the FY 2011 budget resolution would reduce the federal debt to 3% of GNP by 2015, an important step endorsed by economists and a more significant reduction than proposed by the President. His overall federal budget is also \$4 billion less than what the Administration requested in February for the year. Furthermore, the bill cuts taxes by \$780 billion over 5 years and requires the Finance Committee to find \$2 billion in deficit reduction savings from the spending programs it oversees in the proposal's reconciliation instruction.

The proposal's policy highlights include promoting job creation through tax cuts for small businesses, extension of COBRA and unemployment benefits and a jobs reserve fund. For education, Conrad noted that the \$5 billion Pell shortfall is addressed in the measure. Unfortunately, that gap is addressed by raiding other discretionary programs, a strategy that will put great pressure on appropriators charged with education spending decisions. Other proposed investments include early childhood, elementary and secondary education programs and efforts to make college more affordable. A Pell grant maximum of \$5550 is accommodated, as are increases in Head Start. The bill would freeze discretionary spending over the next three years.

In an interview with *Ed Daily*, Joel Packer, Executive Director of the Committee for Education Funding, said, "For education, the resolution is a mixed bag." Packer said the Senate Budget Committee's mark assumes \$4 billion will be cut from the international relations category of discretionary spending, but "that assumption is not binding" on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Support for and rejection of the plan split along party lines, with the exception of Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI), who voted with the Republicans. Even the harshest critics, however, mentioned education in one context or another. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) noted that the extraordinary cost to the government of interest payments on the debt meant that there would not be enough money for important investments that he would support, like education. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) expressed his concerns about the government overusing its “credit card” to build unsustainable debt for future generations. Job creation is his prime concern and he urged the passage of the Workforce Investment Act as a bi-partisan investment in knowledge and skills.

The next step in the budget process is for the Committee to produce a report and bring the budget resolution to the floor for debate most likely to occur next week. In spite of Senator Conrad’s best effort at bipartisanship, Republican reaction to the bill was decidedly negative. There is no reason to think that this sentiment will disappear when (or if) the measure is debated on the floor.

Across the Capitol, House leadership want to pass their own budget resolution, however, there is a concern Democrats do not have enough votes to pass it. Blue Dog Democrats, for example, want to cut the deficit would like to propose a 2 percent cut in non-security discretionary spending for the next three years versus a freeze proposed in President Obama’s and Senator Conrad’s budget plans. Time will tell what direction each chamber will take.

ED Hosts Second Meeting in Denver on their Listening and Learning About Early Learning Tour

On Monday, the Department of Education (ED) held their second session in Denver, Colorado as part of their Listening and Learning about Early Learning Tour. Senior Advisor for Early Learning at ED, Jacqueline Jones, and Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development at the Department of Health and Human Services, Joan Lombardi, hosted a discussion regarding policy recommendations and challenges for the early learning workforce. The panelists included: Dr. Marcy Whitebook, Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment; Ellen Glainsky, President and Co-Founder of the Families and Work Institute; Dr. Phil Strain, Director of the Positive Early Learning Experiences Center at the University of Colorado-Denver’s School of Education and Human Development; and Sue Russell, President of the Child Care Services Association. The panelists discussed the need to improve the quality of the early learning workforce; the lack of training early learning educators receive to prepare them to work with challenging behavior among students; and the State’s role in regulating compensation and retention of members of the early learning workforce. The participants agreed that in order to improve early childhood education, improving the early learning workforce was an integral first step to achieve this goal. To review more information about the conversation in Denver visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/04/experts-discuss-the-early-learning-workforce/>.

There are two additional meetings planned as part of this tour. On May 4 in Orlando, the topic of the meeting will be family engagement, and on May 11 in Chicago, the discussion will focus on standards and assessments.

Illinois Could Mandate Rules for English-Learners in Pre-K

The Illinois Board of Education is poised to adopt standards currently applied to older English Language Learners (ELL) at the Pre-K level. If adopted, these will be the most prescriptive regulations in the country for ELLs in preschool as the current statutory language in No Child Left Behind regarding language proficiency does not apply to this age group. Additionally, these rules will require each district to give a home-language survey to parents in order to determine

the dominant home language and the child's English proficiency. Once this survey has been conducted, the district would be required to provide transitional bilingual education in preschools where 20 or more ELL students speak the same native language. A consensus among early learning experts on the education of minority students on the proposed new regulations has not been reached. Some advocates believe these changes will help to ensure ELLs' needs are met, while others believe such a prescriptive method to requiring transitional bilingual education for children this young is not an age-appropriate solution. In addition, the ability to administer the home-language survey to preschoolers has proven to be controversial. Assessing a 3-year old's language skills is difficult and frequently provides inaccurate information some early learning specialists believe. It is expected that Illinois State Board of Education will vote on the proposed rules in May, and after that, the State's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, a panel of lawmakers, must approve them.

Center for Mental Health Services Offers Grant Opportunity to Promote Wellness of Children in Communities

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Mental Health Services announced a new \$3.9 million grant opportunity to promote the wellness of young children in local communities. Called Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health), the goal of the program is "to promote the wellness of young children, birth to 8 years of age, through the implementation of a systematic community planning process." The grant announcement defines "wellness" in a comprehensive manner and includes the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral health of young children. Cooperative agreements to bring together stakeholders across the child-serving system to develop a vision and a comprehensive strategic plan for promoting the wellness of all young children will be awarded. This community-based coordinated network will develop policies, financial mechanisms and other reforms to improve the integration and efficiency of the child-serving system ultimately ensuring that children are in a supportive, safe environment that allows them to enter and succeed in school. Those eligible to apply include communities, along with public and private nonprofit entities. States are not eligible, but local governments, federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native Tribes and tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations, public or private universities and colleges; and community- and faith-based organizations may apply. The deadline for applications for this grant is **May 17, 2010**. To view additional information about this funding opportunity visit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/Grants/2010/SM-10-012.aspx>.

What Works Clearinghouse Announces New Topic Area on Early Childhood Education for Children with Disabilities

On April 27th, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), which is part of the Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences and provides a central clearing house for scientific evidence for what works in education, announced a new topic area on Early Childhood Education for Children for Disabilities. This new focus area for the WWC will review and evaluate research on curricula and instructional strategies that pertains to improving the school readiness of children with disabilities ages 3 -5 who are not yet in kindergarten or older children attending preschool. The first study highlighted in this topic area focuses on the effectiveness of Dialogic Reading. To review this report visit: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/wwc_dialogic_reading_042710.pdf.

