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Ellen Fern and Audrey Busch

[efern@wpllc.net](mailto:efern@wpllc.net)

[abusch@wpllc.net](mailto:abusch@wpllc.net)

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

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### **This Week in Washington**

The Senate remained mired in financial reform legislation this week, and while they have made some progress on the bill, the end is not yet in sight. At last count, there were over 500 filed amendments remaining to be considered, guaranteeing at least one more week of debate if not more. Money talk in the House has focused on a tax extenders bill that Members hope to pass before the Memorial Day Recess so they will have some positive news to take home to constituents. The week has also been filled with press conferences and hearings on the two major developments which occurred 10 days ago—the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that will likely devastate the economy in the region, and the remarkably quick apprehension of the perpetrator of what was almost a terrorist act in Times Square.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the House Education and Labor Committee held more hearings last week on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The self-imposed May deadline for a draft bill is fast approaching and the likelihood of that target date is growing more and more unrealistic. The Senate HELP Committee asked for comments from stakeholders on current law and ideas for the reauthorization weeks ago, and those were due on Friday, May 7th. A similar request from the House Committee drew many thousands of suggestions, an indication of the intense public interest in the new law, and the formidable task of sorting through the issues.

### **ED Releases Early Learning Recommendations for Reauthorization of ESEA**

This week the Department of Education (ED) distributed a document to stakeholders outlining its early learning proposals for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The document reflects ED's commitment "to an early learning agenda beginning at birth and continuing through third grade, with seamless transitions between preschool and elementary school." The recommendations support the continued use of Title I funds to fortify effective preschool programs, and it also supports new initiatives like the Promise Neighborhoods, Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation programs. The document also highlights the need to strengthen professional development for early childhood educators, not only to provide effective instructional and intervention strategies but also to strengthen STEM and comprehensive literacy efforts. A proposal for more joint professional development opportunities is also included. These "programs could address such issues as school readiness across all the major domains of early learning and the transition to elementary school." Lastly,

ED's proposal suggests expanding learning opportunities for young children through increased learning time, developing proper assessments, and building a pipeline of highly qualified early childhood educators. ED's document outlining all its early learning proposals for ESEA is attached.

Also related to the reauthorization of ESEA, ED released research supporting all its proposed changes as outlined in its Blueprint document. To view this research visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/05/research-behind-the-obama-administration%E2%80%99s-proposal-for-reauthorizing-the-elementary-and-secondary-education-act-esea/>

### **Task Force on Childhood Obesity Releases Action Plan**

Charged with reducing childhood obesity rates from 20 percent to 5 percent by 2030, the Task Force on Childhood Obesity kicked off their initiative by ordering a 90-day review back in February 2010. The culmination of the 90-day review, released on Tuesday with great fanfare was a report titled "Childhood Obesity Action Plan." First Lady Michelle Obama, joined by Domestic Policy Council Director, Melody Barnes, and several Cabinet officers, hosted the press conference to release the report and to highlight five key recommendations made in the document. These five recommendations include: 1) Providing children with better overall care from birth; 2) Educating and aiding parents to make better nutritional choices; 3) Offering healthier food in schools; 4) Making healthy food more affordable and accessible; and 5) Getting children more physically active. The First Lady stated, "With this report, we have a really solid road map that we need to make these goals real...and we need everyone to do their part." With over 70 recommendations included in the report, and clear benchmarks to meet, the report poses a challenge to both the public and private sector. To read the full report visit:

[http://www.letsmove.gov/tfco\\_fullreport\\_may2010.pdf](http://www.letsmove.gov/tfco_fullreport_may2010.pdf)

### **Representative McCarthy Introduces Legislation on Family Engagement**

On Tuesday, May 5, Representative Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), introduced *The Family Engagement in Education Act of 2010* (H.R. 5211). This bill is intended to incentivize schools and districts to use research-based practices that would better engage families and would result in improved student achievement. Research indicates that family engagement not only improves behavior and attendance, but it also decreases drop-out rates and contributes to improved emotional and physical well-being of children. Hosting parent leadership academies; providing professional development to both teachers and principals on how best to engage families; and having family engagement coordinators in schools are methods included in this legislation to foster family engagement. Importantly, the bill calls for the expansion of the Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCS), a program targeted for consolidation in the Administration's FY 2011 budget plan. This bill would authorize \$195 million each year to support the creation of statewide family engagement centers, statewide family engagement coordinating councils, and local family engagement centers. On introducing the legislation Congresswoman McCarthy stated, "Family engagement is a cost-effective way to turn around struggling schools and close the achievement gap." To view a copy of the bill, visit <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr5211IH/pdf/BILLS-111hr5211IH.pdf>

### **STEM Learning Encouraged in Early Years**

On May 5, the Wheelock College Aspire Institute released a report titled, "Foundation for the Future: Strengthening STEM Education in the Early Years." The report states science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education should begin in early childhood.

Researchers claim early exposure to STEM issues fosters long-term interest in these critical content areas. While widespread consensus is budding throughout the education community regarding the important role STEM education should have in early childhood, there are several barriers to providing this service. The pipeline for early childhood STEM educators faces a recruitment challenge. Qualified STEM educators typically advance to teach in secondary education programs or pursue STEM-related degrees. The report states that in order to provide a robust pipeline of early childhood STEM educators, government intervention mandating more science instruction will be necessary. Additional solutions proposed include increasing “math and science content and pedagogy courses that teachers take” and focusing on STEM education training for early childhood educators. To read the full report visit:

<http://www.2.wheelock.edu/wheelock/x3146.xml>

### **ED Announces the 2010 Reading Institute**

In July, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) is hosting the 2010 Reading Institute in Anaheim, California. While the Institute will focus on reading comprehension this year, ED is also offering a new feature during this event. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ED will offer an Early Learning and Development Strand. The many break-out sessions that will be held during the Institute will include topics as varied as developmentally appropriate practices in language and literacy for children from birth to third grade; and strategies to plan and build comprehensive early learning systems and infrastructure. Registration for the Reading Institute and Early Learning Strand is open until July 5, 2010 and registering comes at no cost to the participant. To view more information on this Institute visit:

<http://www.mikogroup.com/2010readinginstitute>

### **ED Hosts Third Meeting in Orlando on their Listening and Learning About Early Learning Tour**

On Tuesday, May 4, the Department of Education (ED) held their third session in Orlando, Florida 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 on the “challenges and policy recommendations for family engagement in early learning programs.” The panelists included: Dr. Heather Weiss, Founder and Director of the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP); Carol Brunson Day, President of the National Black Child Development Institute; Dr. Eugene Garcia, Vice President for Education Partnerships at Arizona State University; and Don Bailey, Distinguished Fellow at RTI International. The panelists discussed successful parent involvement strategies for special populations; developing a family engagement strategy that is “systematic, sustained and integrated”; creating an evaluation for family engagement programs; and fostering an early learning workforce that is not only highly qualified but also diverse. All panelists were in agreement that both “formal and informal approaches” should be representative of their respective communities and is only one of many strategies that should be utilized to improve early learning programs. To review more information about the conversation in Orlando visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/05/experts-discuss-family-engagement/>

The final meeting of this tour took place on May 11 in Chicago, where the discussion focused on standards and assessments. A summary of this event will be included in the next issue of the Policy Update.

## **Study Released Showing High Level of Social Competency Among Latino Children**

An article in the May issue of *Developmental Psychology* reports that Latino children start kindergarten with the same level of social skills as middle-class white children. Bruce Fuller, co-editor of this article and a professor of education and public policy at the University of California, along with Claudia Galindo, an assistant professor in language, literacy and culture at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, interviewed more than 19,000 kindergarteners from diverse backgrounds to assess their social competency levels. What they discovered contradicted the commonly held belief “that low-income parents always raise disadvantaged children.” Fuller and Galindo found that Latino children begin school with strong social and other readiness competencies but lose these gains if they attend low-performing schools. Moreover, the study revealed a “strong correlation between their social competency when entering kindergarten and the gains made in math skills during kindergarten.” To review this study visit <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev-46-3-579.pdf>