

MAY 19, 2010

Ellen Fern and Audrey Busch

efern@wpllc.netabusch@wpllc.net

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

This Week in Washington

It continues to be a tumultuous week on Capitol Hill with little progress made on Congress' long "to do" list. The heated debate on a financial reform package moves in fits and starts trying to get closer to the finish line. Today Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) tried to end debate on the bill by calling for a cloture vote; however it failed by three votes so it will be at least another week before there is a final vote on the bill. In the House, an effort to reauthorize the once wildly popular America COMPETES Act fell into contentious disarray two times, forcing Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) to pull the bill from the floor before a final vote even when changes were included in the bill requested by the Republicans. The culprit was cost, with Republicans objecting to the funding authorized by the bill, and Democrats unable to defeat the tactics used to discredit the measure. The debate was a sharp contrast to the bipartisan concern about the status of the nation in the global marketplace that led to the enactment of the legislation during the Bush years.

With Memorial Day approaching and the military anxious for their funds, Senate appropriators met last week to mark-up an emergency supplemental bill that would pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and address crises on the domestic front brought on by oil spills, floods and other natural disasters. For education advocates, the bill, clocking in at \$60 billion, was a disappointment. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) tried unsuccessfully to convince his colleagues that the pending loss of 300,000 education and other public sector positions also constituted a significant national emergency. Harkin will instead be forced to offer his \$23 billion *Jobs for Education* bill as an amendment when the supplemental is debated on the Senate floor. The 60-vote threshold required for its inclusion in the supplemental is an enormous barrier even with the support of President Obama and Secretary Duncan.

One topic that remains *not* part of the conversation or debate is the FY 2011 Budget Resolution. Budget Committee Chairmen in the Senate and House—Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Representative John Spratt (D-SC)—are anxious to move, but clearly the leadership is hesitant to give Republicans or Blue Dog Democrats the opportunity to spotlight a government wide spending target that would add to the deficit. They have not yet given up, but as each week passes it appears increasingly likely that a deeming resolution will be necessary to get the appropriations process moving. Though the mid-term elections are several months away, resignations and primary upsets are on the minds of all legislators and added to the partisan tensions.

The defeat of five-term Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA) in the state's Democratic primary, three-term Senator Bob Bennett (R-UT) at the state's Republican nominating convention, and Congressman Alan Mollohan's (D-WV) denial of a 15th term in a primary upset sent shock waves throughout the Capitol. Pundits continue to analyze these surprising election results and make predictions for November, but it appears the anti-incumbent sentiment across the nation is nonpartisan.

House Ed and Labor Committee Holds Hearing on GAO Investigation of Head Start Grantees

On Tuesday, the House Education Committee held a hearing titled, "Examining GAO's Review of Selected Head Start Grantees." Upon learning about the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) investigation of fraudulent behavior by some Head Start grantees, Chairman George Miller (D-CA) and Ranking Member John Kline (R-MN) felt it important to continue the oversight that Congress has provided the Head Start program in the past. As a result the full Education and Labor Committee held a hearing to look into the GAO's findings and the action the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is taking to prevent future violations. During the hearing, the representative from the Government Accountability Office, Gregory Kutz, explained that six states and the District of Columbia were investigated. The GAO discovered administrators of seven centers in four of the states investigated were fraudulently representing financial information from applicants. The enrollment process was manipulated so that applicants above the program's income limitations were allotted slots instead of low-income, eligible children. The representative from HHS reported that under instruction from Secretary Sebelius swift action to remediate this problem was taking place. This included the retraction of funds to these centers found violating the regulations; setting up a hotline where fraud and abuse can be reported; conducting frequent, unannounced oversight visits to Head Start Centers; and releasing new regulations for the Head Start program this summer. A full summary of this hearing will be forthcoming from Washington Partners. To view the witness' testimony visit: <http://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/2010/05/examining-gaos-review-of-selec.shtml>

Annie E. Casey Foundation Releases New Report Focused on Early Literacy

On Tuesday, the Annie E. Casey Foundation held an event at the National Press Club to release a KIDS COUNT special report, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. Joining Patrick McCarthy, President and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was Jacqueline Jones, Senior Advisor to Secretary Duncan for Early Learning Initiatives; Roberto Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the President for Education; Alma Powell, Chair of the America's Promise Alliance; Brigadier General Velma Richardson from Mission: Readiness; and Stacey Stewart, Executive Vice President of United Way Worldwide. All the speakers agreed that the number one predictor of a young person's success is whether they graduate high school and early reading skills are essential to achieving this goal. "When kids are not reading by fourth grade, they almost certainly get on a glide path to poverty," said Ralph Smith, Executive Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. As a result, the foundation is focusing renewed attention on the critical importance of achieving grade-level reading proficiency for all children by the end of third grade to help ensure a child's success in school, life-long earning potential and the ability to contribute to the nation's economy and security. The report specifically recommend four steps to close the achievement gap and "raise the gap" for all students. This includes: 1) developing a coherent system of early care and education; 2) encouraging and enabling parents; 3) prioritizing, supporting and investing results-driven initiatives to transform low-performing schools; and 4) developing and utilizing solutions to two of the most significant contributors to under achievement by low-income families—chronic absenteeism and summer learning loss.

For more information on the report and access to state and local data, visit:
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/readingmatters.aspx>.

Study Reveals High-Quality Child Care Has Lasting Impact on both Academic Achievement and Behavior in Children

The National Institutes of Health released a new study on May 14 which reported that children who received low-quality child care for their first four and one-half years of life demonstrated differences in behavior and academic achievement than those children who received high-quality care. This study, the most extensive and longest-running of its kind, has tracked over 1,300 children since 1991 who attend day care from seven to 80 hours per week. Researchers looked at the quality of care of children received through age four and one-half and assessed factors such as the relationship of the primary caretaker to the child and the “caregivers’ warmth, sensitivity, emotional support and how much cognitive stimulation they provided.” In addition, parents, teachers, and children involved in the study were all questioned and given assessments. The children were assessed on their academic and cognitive skills while the parents and teachers answered questions about the child’s behavior. Overall, children that received higher-quality care in their early years, had fewer behavior problems and had higher academic achievement in math, reading and other cognitive skills throughout elementary school. Children who received lower-quality care were more likely to engage in problem behavior, were more impulsive and scored lower on tests measuring math and reading skills. The results also indicate that early childhood care has lasting effects on children. Followed through age 15, children who received lower-quality care demonstrated persistent obedience and academic problems. Researchers plan to continue to follow the children observed in this study to gauge long-term impact. To view a copy of the full report visit:

http://nieer.org/pdf/Effects_of_Early_Child_Care_Extend_to_Age_15.pdf

ED Hosts Final Meeting in Chicago on their Listening and Learning About Early Learning Tour

On Tuesday, May 11, the Department of Education (ED) held their fourth and final session in Chicago, Illinois, 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, again hosted a discussion on early learning standards and assessments. The panelists discussed the variation among states in early childhood assessments; focusing on observational assessments for children under the age of eight years old; developing new and reliable ways to assess dual language learners; and ensuring that assessments designed for early learners allow for the learner to demonstrate competencies in a variety of ways. The panelists included: Dr. Catherine Scott-Little, Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the School of Human and Environmental Sciences, University of North Carolina; Sam Meisels, President of the Erickson Institute; Dr. Linda Espinosa, Associate Professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia; and Kathy Hebbeler, the Manager of the Community Services and Strategies Program at SRI International and the Director of the Early Childhood Outcomes Center. To review more information about the conversation in Chicago visit:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/tour.html>

Recovery Act Funds Support Child Care Programs in Various States

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recently released an update on the use of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds being used in Region V, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, targeting young children

and their families. In Minnesota, ARRA funds are being used to support a pilot project called School Readiness Connections (SRC) that provides incentives to organizations offering child care assistance to promote school readiness. This program is seeing results. The data shows the quality and continuity of child care and the promotion of skills that children need to enter school has improved. Some ARRA funds in Wisconsin are supporting the Program Integrity Unit that resides within the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. This program identifies and prevents fraud in the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program and ensures that “continuous improvement efforts” are underway across the State. Next door, the state of Illinois utilized their ARRA funds to expand funding for Great Strategy to Attract and Retain Teachers (START). Great START is a wage supplement program that rewards early care providers for receiving higher education course credit while maintaining their job with their current employer. ACF also reported that Michigan has set aside ARRA funds for consumer education and other quality enhancements. The use of ARRA funds have helped at least 3,000 additional children in both the state of Illinois and Indiana and over 55,000 children continue to receive subsidies in Ohio as a result of this funding stream. To review this report visit: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/initiatives/arra/cchawal/cchawal_v1_n3.pdf