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Public Education Policy And Progress



APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS UNDERWAY...SORT OF: Senate Appropriations Committee Passes Education Funding Bill While House Appropriations Committee Delays; Final Decisions Not Expected Until 2009

In mid-June, Congress began an appropriations process that will likely last into early next year because of differences between President Bush and Democrats in Congress over how much to spend. In crafting their plans, Democrats in the House and Senate rejected numerous funding cuts in the Bush budget while also increasing spending for certain domestic priorities. As a result, the difference between the president's budget and the plan adopted in the House of Representatives is about \$21.1 billion. The Senate's plan comes in slightly lower at \$20.6 billion.

On June 26, both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees were scheduled to consider their respective versions of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill. By the end of the day, the Senate Appropriations Committee had passed its bill, but the timetable for the House version was unclear.

The Senate Appropriations Committee bill would provide the U.S. Department of Education with \$61.8 billion, an increase of \$2.6 billion over the president's budget, which proposed freezing funding at last year's level. Among individual programs, the Senate committee would provide \$14.5 billion for Title I, an increase of \$630 million, and \$100 million for statewide data systems, an increase of \$51.1 million. (A chart containing funding levels for other education programs is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Fiscal09ProgramChart.pdf>.)

The House version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill would provide \$64 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, an increase of \$4.8 billion over last year. But instead of voting on the bill, the committee adjourned after **Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA), the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee**, offered an amendment to strip the text from the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill and replace it with the text from the appropriations bill for the U.S. Department of the Interior. **House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI)** called the move a "cheap political stunt;" Lewis maintained that the passage of the Interior bill would help alleviate rising gas prices before the Fourth of July.

After this snafu, it was unclear when the committee might consider the bill, which would normally be needed to fund these government agencies starting October 1, 2008, when FY 2009 begins. However, **Senate Majority Whip Richard Durbin (D-IL)** said that he did not expect the Senate to vote on any of the annual appropriations bills this summer except for one that funds the Department of Defense.

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Given the partisan tensions and unclear schedule in the House of Representatives, the need for sixty votes to accomplish almost anything in the Senate, and the standoff between Democrats in Congress and President Bush over spending levels, it is increasingly likely that Congress will not pass any appropriations bills that would fund government agencies other than the Defense Department for FY 2009 until well after the November elections. Rather, they are likely to pass a continuing resolution that will keep governmental agencies operating at current spending levels until a new president takes control of the White House and negotiations can resume.



SPELLINGS CONTINUES PUSH FOR NCLB IMPROVEMENTS: *New York Times* Article Captures Secretary's Role in NCLB's Creation and Modification

In 2008, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has visited more than twenty states and testified in support of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in numerous state capitals. A recent *New York Times* article profiles a recent trip that she made to Kentucky in her push to overcome the negative view of NCLB held by many parents, educators, and policymakers, as well as to “do everything in her power” to improve the law before the end of President Bush’s stay in the White House. The article also looks back at the role Spellings played in the law’s creation and examines how it became such a lightning rod for criticism.

Signed into law in January 2002, NCLB was due to be reauthorized in 2007, but it has yet to move beyond the committee level in the House and Senate. Given the growing focus on the upcoming presidential and Congressional elections, any hope that Congress would reauthorize NCLB this year seems to have faded. And, according to Spellings, it’s not likely that the new president would tackle NCLB reauthorization right away. “I’m pretty sure that the new president, whoever it is, will not show up and work on George Bush’s domestic achievement on Day 1,” Spellings says in the article.

Instead, Spellings, at the direction of President Bush, is moving ahead with administrative fixes for the law, which do not need Congressional approval to take effect. For example, on April 22 she proposed new regulations to strengthen and clarify NCLB around improved accountability and transparency, uniform and disaggregated graduation rates, and improved parental notification for supplemental educational services and public school choice. (See box at the top of page 3.)

When asked how well President Bush fared in his goal to be the “education president,” Spelling couches her answer in terms of what could have been. “Well, you know, obviously, absent 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I think the whole domestic agenda would have been different,” she said. “He ended up being a wartime president and as such has devoted—appropriately so—time and energy to those issues. But with respect to how education fares compared with other domestic priorities, I think we’ve done well.”

“Bush Loyalist Fights Foes of ‘No Child’ Law” is available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/washington/12spellings.html>.

Alliance for Excellent Education, Other Organizations Submit Comments on Proposed NCLB Changes

The Alliance for Excellent Education was joined by the National PTA, the Public Education Network, the United Way of America, and twenty other education, civil rights, and advocacy organizations in submitting comments to the U.S. Department of Education in response to the regulations on graduation rate reporting and accountability that U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings proposed on April 22.

“[Our] comments represent consensus that has emerged on how to calculate and report graduation rates, and how to hold schools and districts accountable for graduating all students,” the letter reads. “While we believe this effort would be better served through a No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reauthorization, we agree that measurement of graduation rates is critical in determining a high school’s success and an equally critical step in ensuring all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and the workplace.”

The letter then goes on to outline suggestions on how to define graduation rates, the department’s use of the averaged freshman graduation rate as an interim measure, graduation rate goals and growth targets, and other related issues.

The letter, as well as the complete list of organizations that signed on, is available at http://www.all4ed.org/files/AEEComments_GradRateNPRM.pdf.



REACH HIGHER, AMERICA: National Commission on Literacy Finds Ninety Million Americans Unprepared for Demands of Twenty-First-Century Workforce

The nation’s failure to address the education and workforce skills needs of its citizens is putting the country in great jeopardy and threatening its standard of living and economic viability. So says *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce*, a new report from the National Commission on Adult Literacy. According to the report, between eighty-eight and ninety million adults are not prepared to meet the demands of today’s global economy or secure a job that will pay a family-sustaining wage. It finds that these individuals face at least one “educational barrier to economic success:” eighteen million Americans do not have a high school diploma, fifty-one million have not gone to college, and eighteen million are not proficient in their English language and literacy skills.

“The harsh fact is that we have a crisis today in America,” writes **David Perdue, chairman of the National Commission on Adult Literacy**, in the report’s foreword. “At a time when one out of three of our children is not graduating from high school, the competitiveness of our workforce at all levels has significantly declined, threatening our standard of living and way of life. It is time to act. It is widely known that a vast number of adults need educational services to be ready for the college and the job training that our global economy requires. But our adult education and workforce skills development programs, designed for a different reality, are not meeting the needs of America’s citizens or its workers.”

At a time when the nation is becoming “less educated,” other countries are catching up to and surpassing the United States. The report notes that the United States is the only country of the thirty free-market countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development where young adults (ages twenty-five to thirty-four) are less educated

Reach Higher, America

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than members of the previous generation. In addition, the United States continues to fall behind other countries in terms of high school diplomas and two- and four-year college degrees awarded.

Each year, the U.S. adds another approximately 1.2 million Americans to the dropout total. For the eighteen million Americans who do not have a high school diploma, dropping out of high school will “haunt them, their families, and our economy for the rest of their lives,” the report says, and adds that individuals who fail to complete high school are much more likely to end up in prison.

“Even more alarming,” the report reads, is that many students who do complete high school “are deficient in basic skills and job and college readiness.” It notes that about 40 percent of all college students must take a least one remedial course while the same is true for over 60 percent of two-year college students.

Other challenges that the report addresses are the demographic shifts that are already underway in the United States and the extensive need for English language instruction. It finds that every year, almost two million immigrants come to the United States, but low literacy levels, combined with a lack of high school education and English language skills, severely hinder about half of these individuals in their attempts to earn family-sustaining wages. Changing demographics present problems in other ways, as well. According to the report, eight thousand Americans turned sixty each day in 2006. As these highly educated baby boomers leave the workforce, they are replaced, on average, by workers who are less educated.

Noting that the current solutions to these problems, such as the Workforce Investment Act, workforce and adult education, and literacy services, fall short, the report calls on Congress to “transform the adult education and literacy system into an adult education and workforce skills system with the capacity to effectively serve 20 million adults annually by the year 2020.”

To meet this goal, the report calls for the enactment of a new Adult Education and Economic Growth Act to overhaul and expand adult education and workforce skills training. It says that the act is “at the very heart of the Commission’s action plan” and should be as “bold in scale and crafted to excite the public imagination” as the GI Bill and the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. The act would “strengthen and align the nation’s existing adult basic education and workforce skills systems to address the priority education needs of American adults...[and] better prepare [them] to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and job training and move more seamlessly into well-paying jobs of the future.”

The report says that delaying this action will mean that the nation will have to “bear the burden of meeting the needs of an even larger pool of adults with low skills and language deficiencies” by 2020. “We cannot begin too soon,” it warns.

The complete report is available at
<http://www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/ReachHigherAmerica/ReachHigher.pdf>.

Report Finds That Subprime Mortgage Crisis Will Impact Lives of Two Million Children

Over the next two years, approximately two million children will be directly affected by the subprime mortgage crisis, according to *The Impact of the Mortgage Crisis on Children*, a new report from First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization. The report also finds that, in addition to being forced from their homes, children affected by the housing crisis also see their educations disrupted.

"We often hear about the impact that the mortgage crisis is having on the stock market and on the nation's economy, but we hear little about the impact this crisis is having on the lives of two million of our nation's children," said **Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus**. "When families lose their homes, kids often lose their schools and access to services. Such changes not only impact their education but their physical and mental health as well."

According to the report, "mobile students," or students that change schools often, are less likely to be proficient in math and reading than their stable peers. It also finds that mobile students are more likely to be held back and eventually drop out. As evidence, the report points to a government study that found that third graders who have changed schools frequently are 2.5 times more likely to repeat a grade than their peers. "Other researchers have found that school and residential changes can reduce the chances that a student will graduate by more than 50 percent," it reads. Student mobility is also associated with poor and delinquent behavior and negatively affects a child's health. On the other hand, stable housing has been shown to correlate with more positive health outcomes, such as better nutrition and a healthier body weight.

Because the housing crisis has affected such a wide swath of the country, each state has significant numbers of children impacted by it; estimates in the report range from one thousand children in North Dakota to 311,900 children in California and a total of 1.95 million throughout the United States. First Focus cautions that its overall estimate is likely to be on the low end as it does not include children who are evicted from rental units that are going into default, nor does it include children whose parents default on conventional loans.

In an effort to limit the number of children affected by the housing crisis, First Focus offers several recommendations to the federal government. First, it calls on Congress to better regulate mortgage lending practices, provide targeted strategies to reduce the number of foreclosures, and invest more in affordable housing. It also suggests that Congress provide an emergency, one-time, infusion of funds to the Emergency Food and Shelter program to prevent families facing foreclosure from becoming homeless. For students who are already homeless, it recommends additional funding for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education program, which allows students who are forced from their homes to stay in their schools even if they move out of the school district. The program also provides homeless students with a variety of supports, including tutoring, school supplies, and counseling.

"As the federal government continues to cut interest rates and take other actions to minimize the impact of the economic downturn, it is critical that they also address the needs of our nation's children, who are innocent victims in this crisis," Lesley said. "If nothing is done, children will continue to be impacted in a variety of respects that will have long term repercussions on their lives."

The complete report is available at <http://www.firstfocus.net/Download/HousingandChildrenFINAL.pdf>.



HAS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INCREASED SINCE 2002?: Yes, Says New Report from the Center on Education Policy, But With Caveats

Reading and math scores on state tests have remained level or increased and achievement gaps have narrowed since 2002, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted, according to a recent report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). However, it is not possible to determine to what degree NCLB was a factor in these changes.

The report, *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002?: State Test Score Trends Through 2006–07*, examines state test results at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and

Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002?

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compares patterns in fourth- and eighth-grade scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as the “nation’s report card”—to those found in state test scores.

To perform this comparison, CEP looked at two indicators: the percentage of students that scored above the “proficient” level on the state test, and the “effect size,” which relates to average test scores. A number of states had the necessary data for both indicators, but not all did.

Of the twenty-eight states with sufficient data, half posted moderate-to-large gains in middle school reading scores on both indicators between 2002 and 2007 while six showed at least a slight gain in both indicators. The remaining states did not have enough information for either criterion. In middle school math, twenty-two states showed striking improvements while two improved slightly. In high school math, twelve states had significant gains, and two more had at least slight ones, but the results were not nearly as positive in high school reading. Only eight states made substantial gains while seven posted less-dramatic gains.

In comparison, twenty-one states made moderate-to-large gains in elementary math, and seventeen made this level of improvement in elementary reading.

Findings indicate that achievement gaps between white students and students of color have narrowed since 2002 in many more cases than they have widened or not changed. Of all the gaps analyzed across the among the five groups studied (African American, Latino, Native American, low-income, and white), and in the three grade levels and two subjects, 77 percent of the gaps in percentages of students scoring at proficient on state tests narrowed, as did 68 percent of the gaps concerning effect size.

CEP drew on other research—its own and that of other groups—when considering possible explanations for the trends identified. Many districts devote more time to reading and math, often by reducing time for other subjects, CEP notes. Also mentioned are potential “subtle manipulations in test design” that could have made state tests easier over time, such as changes in the choice of test items. In addition, due to factors such as state and local reforms that occurred at the same time as NCLB-related changes, a causal connection between the federal law and these trends cannot be made.

Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP, was positive about the results of the report, but acknowledged that there was still room for improvement. “Through NCLB and many state and local efforts, the nation has sought to raise test scores and to narrow the achievement gap. These results show that we are making progress, although much more work needs to be done,” he said. Noting a similar study CEP did the previous year, he added, “Last year, we sought to determine whether NCLB had resulted in increased student achievement, but discovered that it is not possible to make a causal connection. We know, though, that NCLB required a vast expansion of student testing and we now have a better understanding of whether students, in general, have achieved more.”

The full report is available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/>.



MAYORS CALL ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE GREATER COLLEGE PREPARATION AND ACCESS FOR AMERICA'S STUDENTS: Resolution Endorses Graduation Promise Act and GRADUATES Act

During their seventy-sixth annual meeting on June 20–23, the U.S. Conference of Mayors called on the federal government to take a more active role in ensuring that students are prepared for and have access to college. They passed a resolution that asks for increased funding for the GEAR UP and TRIO programs, asks Congress to adopt and fund the Graduation Promise Act and the GRADUATES Act, and urges support for financial assistance for all students who want to attend college.

“The U.S. Conference of Mayors recognizes that to compete with their international peers, American students must graduate from high school with the academic foundation they will need to participate in postsecondary education and succeed in a twenty-first 21st century economy,” the resolution reads.

The resolution was introduced by **Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco** and cosponsored by **Mayors Michael Bloomberg of New York, Cory Booker of Newark, Martin Chavez of Albuquerque, David Cicilline of Providence, Richard Daley of Chicago, Karl Dean of Nashville, Carlos Diaz of Miami, Phil Gordon of Phoenix, Michael Nutter of Philadelphia, R.T. Ryback of Minneapolis, and Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles.**

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, praised the mayors' resolution. “By calling for Congress to take major action to improve high schools, the nations' mayors directly link quality education to creating safe and economically thriving communities,” he said. “These mayors, many in charge of our largest cities, are the first responders to America's toughest challenges—a declining economy, inadequate health care, and fighting crime. Their resolution endorses the Graduation Promise Act and the GRADUATES Act, which will use data and proven methods to identify troubled high schools and will work with local and state officials to increase graduation rates and academic success.”

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of thirty thousand or more. Currently, there are over 1,100 such cities in the United States, each of which is represented in the conference by its mayor.

More information on the U.S. Conference of Mayors and its annual conference is available at <http://www.usmayors.org/>.

More information on the Graduation Promise Act and the GRADUATES Act is available at http://www.all4ed.org/federal_policy/legislative_updates.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America's six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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