

The Education Report

A weekly report of public policy issues in American Education from

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1. Senate to Introduce Bi-Partisan IDEA Reauthorization Bill

Washington Partners has just been informed that Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) and Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) have agreed to introduce a bi-partisan reauthorization bill for IDEA early in the 108th Congress, probably in February. When the 108th Congress convenes on January 7, Sen. Gregg will be appointed to serve as the new chairman of the Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions (the HELP Committee) and Sen. Kennedy will become the ranking minority member. Despite this shift in leadership, the two Members have and plan to continue working on a bi-partisan bill. During the 107th Congress, staff of the two Members, as well as staff of the other Members on the Committee, worked diligently to pound out bi-partisan initiatives in areas such as transition, early intervention, personnel preparation and paperwork reduction.

Resolution of the most controversial issues, such as vouchers and full funding for Part B, will likely be left out of the initial bill and be addressed by the full Senate on the floor.

The House Republicans have indicated that they are eager to work in a bi-partisan fashion and avoid a protracted and controversial reauthorization, like the one that occurred in 1997. The House Democrats have not yet sent a clear signal about how they would like to proceed. Some observers anticipate that the "Big Four" model that was used so effectively in developing and enacting the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), will emerge again as the working process. The "Big Four" are Senators Gregg and Kennedy and Rep. Boehner (R-OH), chairman of the Committee on Education and the

Workforce and Rep. Miller (D-CA), ranking member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce. These four Members worked in a bi-partisan, bi-cameral manner with the White House to produce the far-reaching NCLB in a record 12 months.

The Administration continues to indicate that it hopes to have a blueprint ready to release in January. In the meantime, they are focused on finalizing two sticky special education issues in NCLB – the number of significantly cognitively impaired students who may be held to alternative standards in the assessment process, and the application of “highly qualified” to special education. Another proposed regulation is expected out shortly on the first issue and guidance is anticipated on “highly qualified.”

Stephanie Lee, Director of OSEP, reported this week that 28 states were put on “special conditions” by the Department of Education for not ensuring that students with disabilities are participating in state-wide assessments, which is required by IDEA.

2. Department of Education Issues Guidance on School Choice in NCLB

On Monday, the Department of Education released guidance on the No Child Left Behind Act school choice provisions. Under the provisions, parents of children who attend schools in need of significant improvement are given the option to transfer their children to better-performing schools.

The departmental guidance provides general information and answers to frequently asked questions about parent’s choice options, such as who is eligible to take advantage of the transfer option and how to go about the transfer process.

Other issues related to the school choice provisions, such as special education, desegregation plans and funding for transportation, are included in the guidance.

The guidance is available on-line at:
<http://www.ed.gov/OESE/SASA/schoolchoiceguid.doc>.

3. GAO Study and National Forum Tackle Teacher Quality Issues

This week, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report on the teacher quality grants authorized by Title II of the Higher Education Act. The report concluded that the \$460 million awarded as state grants, partnership grants and teacher recruitment grants was poorly administered by the Department. Vague definitions provided by the Department enabled grant recipients to inflate results, the study found. The Department did not articulate the definition of a teacher program graduate, but instead defined a “program completer” as someone who meets the requirements of a state-approved teacher training program. Thus, grantees reported 100% pass rates for their programs by excluding those who finished classes but failed tests.

The GAO recommends that the Department create a systemic approach for evaluating grant activities and clearly define terms such as pass rates, allowing time to verify information.

A forum at the National Press Club this week also tackled the problem of recruiting and retaining quality teachers. Sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education and the American Association of School Administrators, the forum highlighted three key reports on teacher quality – “New-Teacher Excellence: Retaining our Best” by the Alliance for Excellent Education; “Higher Pay in Hard-to-Staff Schools: The Case for Financial Incentives” by the American Association of School Administrators; and State Incentive Programs for Recruiting Teachers: Are They Effective in Reducing Shortages?” by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).

Panelists focused on a range of efforts underway to recruit and retain highly qualified classroom teachers and pointed out pitfalls. Brenda Welburn of NASBE noted that despite the many recruitment incentive programs developed by states, few are targeted to identify need areas. Most states list shortages for special education, for minority teachers and in particular geographic areas. Yet few states designed their incentive programs to target these particular needs.

Panelists offered a range of suggestions for improving teacher recruitment and retention including intensive new teacher induction programs, financial incentives, improved management practices modeled after the private sector, improved conditions in hard-to-staff schools, and improved teacher training with an emphasis on clinical practice.

The GAO report, “Higher Education: Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Reporting on These Activities Could Be Enhanced,” is available at www.gao.gov

For more information on “New-Teacher Excellence: Retaining our Best,” go to the website of the Alliance for Excellent Education at www.All4Ed.org.

For more information on “Higher Pay in Hard-to-Staff Schools: The Case for Financial Incentives,” contact the author, Cynthia Prince of the American Association of School Administrators at cprince@aasa.org.

For more information on “State Incentive Programs for Recruiting Teachers: Are They Effective in Reducing Shortages,” contact the National Association of State Boards of Education at www.nasbe.org.

4. New Report on Special Education Funding Released

On December 11, the Manhattan Institute released a report entitled “Effects of Funding Incentives on Special Education Enrollment.” The report examines the effect of state funding systems and high stakes testing on special education enrollment. It concludes that special education enrollment grows 1% more under “bounty” funding systems than it does under lump-sum funding systems. It also holds that high stakes testing has no statistically significant effect on special education enrollment.

For more information, check the Manhattan Institute’s website at www.manhattan-institute.org.

5. The National Academy of Sciences Releases New Book on Teacher Preparation

The National Academy of Sciences has released a new book, entitled “Preparing Our Teachers: Opportunities for Better Reading Instruction.” The book is based upon reports issued by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Reading Panel, as well as other research. Its purpose is to provide teacher educators and policy-makers important information about what pre-K and fourth-grade teachers need to know about literacy.

The book can be downloaded for free at: <http://www.nap.edu>.

6. NCLB Compliance Survey Completed by Education Newspaper

In preparation for the release of their comprehensive survey of state education policy this coming January known as *Quality Counts 2003*, *Education Week* surveyed all 50 states (plus the District of Columbia) to determine what the individual states were doing to comply with the numerous fundamental provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. The survey was able to chart where the states stand on issues of state testing and assessment, school report cards, local accountability for school performance, and teacher quality.

For charts and more extensive information, go to www.educationweek.org.