

# The Education Report

*A weekly report of public policy issues in American Education from*

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**September 13, 2002**

## **Posturing Continues on Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Bill**

With the close of the fiscal year just days away (September 30, 2002), Congress continues to lack a clear game plan on how to keep the government funded. The FY 2002 Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations bill is at the center of the dilemma. In the House, Appropriations Chairman, Bill Young (R-FL) has introduced HR 5320, which includes President Bush's funding requests. Frustrated along with other House Republican moderates, Chairman Young hopes to bring this bill directly to the House floor, where he anticipates its defeat because the numbers are too low.

House conservatives are firmly opposed to such an effort. Both groups have appealed to Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), who is reported as leaning toward the conservatives' position, but open to both arguments.

On the Democratic side, ranking member of the Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee, David Obey (D-WI), wrote an open letter to Speaker Hastert urging the Speaker to waive points of order, bypass the committee process and take up Rep. Young's bill directly on the House floor. In addition, he urged that three other bills be considered on the House floor – one drafted by conservative Republicans, one drafted by Chairmen Young and Regula (R-OH) and one drafted by Committee Democrats.

Inactivity on the Senate side may be coming to an end sooner than expected. Originally Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-WV) planned to wait until the House had moved the Labor/HHS/Education funding bill until acting further. But momentum may be shifting, as the Senate grows impatient for House action. Some believe the Senate could bring the bill to the floor within the next two weeks. However, before Senate consideration of the appropriations bill could occur, the Homeland Security bill would need to be completed

Senator Kennedy's (D-MA) office continues to work to put together support for a floor amendment to the Labor/HHS/Education funding bill that would add \$4.5 billion for education. The potential amendment would add about \$1.5 billion for IDEA, \$1.5 billion for No Child Left Behind Title I and increase funding for the Pell grant maximum for higher education students by \$500. Education groups are working hard with Sen. Kennedy's office and others to gain support for this amendment.

Looming in the background is the possibility of a Continuing Resolution to keep funding flowing while efforts continue to pass appropriations bills. With Members eager to go to their districts and campaign, pressure to act is increasing. Whether or not the Congress will be able to complete its work and avoid returning in a lame duck session is not known. Many Washington veterans are betting that a lame duck session is in our future!

### **Senate Committee Hearing on Implementation of *No Child Left Behind***

On Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, at 10:00 am, Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-MA) convened Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on the “Successful Implementation of Title I: State and Local Perspectives”. He was joined at the hearing by Senator James Jeffords (I-VT) and Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). Witnesses included Belle Whelan, Virginia Secretary of Education; William Maloney, Colorado Commissioner of Education; Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of Great City Schools; and Wanda Gaddis, PTA member from the District of Columbia.

In his opening remarks, Senator Kennedy focused on the inadequate funding the Bush Administration had requested for Title I in this year’s budget request to Congress. He referred to Title I as the foundation of federal support for education. By shortchanging Title I—as well as Teacher Quality and Pell Grants—Kennedy feared these programs were being placed in real jeopardy.

In spite of this opening statement and several questions on the topic by the Senators present, none of the witnesses took the opportunity to ask for more funding. To a person the witnesses endorsed the notion of “leaving no child behind” as a valid and important goal for the Administration, the Congress and the Nation. Secretary Whelan said that in Virginia they are already making progress in the poorest school districts in that state. She spoke of a program called PASS that has galvanized support among teachers, Administrators and community members to provide supplemental tutoring and mentoring services to those students and schools most in need.

Commissioner Maloney commended the Department of Education for the guidance that had been provided to quickly implement the important provisions of NCLB. Mr. Casserly similarly praised the Department for its effort regarding implementing the new law, and said the two biggest challenges facing major city school districts are finding enough options to implement public school choice and getting enough providers approved to meet the supplemental services requirements. Casserly did acknowledge that more technical assistance and more federal funding would certainly help. Ms. Gaddis commented that meaningful parental involvement, better curriculum, smaller classes and up to date facilities all require more federal support.

Senator Jeffords asked each witness to discuss how under funding of IDEA by the Congress was causing shortfalls in local education budgets. None of the witnesses were able to provide a specific response. Senator Jeffords’ second question was on testing. He asked if expanded testing would result in over-identification of students for special education. Commissioner Maloney commented that the US actually required fewer tests

than other industrialized nations. Secretary Whelan stated her view that over identification was not a problem and that the NCLB requirements actually brought special education students into the mainstream. Casserly acknowledged the risk but said he hoped the result would be better tests. At that point, because Senators Kennedy and Bingaman had already departed, Senator Jeffords thanked the witnesses and adjourned the hearing (10:55 am).

### **Bush Administration's Attachment to Phonics Under Attack**

Just one day after Education Secretary Rod Paige's annual Back-to-School speech championing the importance of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, *The Washington Post* reported a renewed conflict between the phonics and whole language factions of the reading community as a direct result of certain NCLB provisions. According to some educators and administrators, the Bush administration has made the qualifications for receiving its federal reading funds so restricted that they have severely limited the program options for state and local education agencies. To those in the whole language camp, these regulations appear to place heavy favoritism on phonics-based reading programs. Many educators believe that there is no single right way to teach children to read and that the provisions of NCLB virtually dictate what teachers can and cannot do inside their own classrooms. Furthermore, the *Post* reported, a recent study of 32 countries found that the effectiveness of a reading classroom is based upon the talent of the teacher, not the program that he/she utilizes to teach.

The article even ventured to suggest a connection between President Bush and the McGraw-Hill Company. Before taking office, Bush tapped both Chairman Harold McGraw III and McGraw-Hill board member Edward Rust Jr. to sit on his White House transition team. This past spring at the *Reading First* implementation seminars run by the Department of Education, two phonics-based reading programs published by McGraw-Hill subsidiary SRA-McGraw Hill were continually touted as "successful materials."

In addition, the article noted that SRA/McGraw Hill had a "stellar year" in 2000 with its phonics-based reading programs capturing 37 percent of the \$100 million spent on textbooks in Texas when President Bush was governor there. This year the state of Florida alone has \$100 million to spend on "research based" instructional materials. Florida was one of the first states to win these funds for a federal program called *Reading First*.

Bush officials defend their position that phonics is the best approach for teaching reading, but deny that they are promoting any specific programs.

(See the Washington Post, 9/10/02, Page A1)

### **House Holds Hearing on Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization**

On September 12, the Subcommittee on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competitiveness held an initial hearing on the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), a 1998 law

intended to reform the nation's job training system by bringing together the previously disjointed employment and training services into all-encompassing, state-run entities. The law is up for reauthorization next year, and the intention of the hearing was to learn about the successes and failures of WIA implementation on both the state and local levels. Chairman Buck McKeon (R-CA) said in his opening statement "the WIA system contains the federal government's primary programs for investment in our nation's workforce preparation," and its purpose should be expanded upon to create even stronger workforce development programs with greater connectedness to the communities it serves.

The witnesses on the panel were experts at the local, state and national levels. Bruce Stenslie, the Director of the Ventura County, California, Workforce Investment Board and Deputy Director of the Ventura County Human Services Agency, testified first, highlighting what has worked and what has created challenges for his programs in Ventura County. Among their successes, Mr. Stenslie cited integrated welfare reform and workforce investment available through their One-Stop Job & Career Center system as a major achievement. Other positive aspects of the Ventura County system include customized worker training, a business enhancement program that identifies failing businesses and attempts to keep them from dismantling, the local use of discretionary training programs, youth development programs and Workforce Board leadership in the local communities under WIA. Mr. Stenslie's key recommendations for improving the WIA system were related to funding. First on his list of recommendations was the need to improve coordination between multiple funding sources, such as TANF and WIA. Next he addressed the importance of continued funding for the One-Stop system, citing that improvements can only continue if funding is increased. He emphasized that on-going worker training is essential in creating a long-term workforce. He asked the committee to consider eliminating the current restrictions placed on such training. Finally, he suggested that the income eligibility rules be lifted from the WIA youth programs to match the adult system that does not have similar income specifications.

Following Mr. Stenslie's lead, Diane Rath, chairperson and commissioner of the Texas Workforce Commission, praised WIA. Her major recommendation also dealt with funding; she stated that there should be less emphasis on the process of allocating funds and more focus on the outcome of the WIA-sponsored programs. She focused much of her testimony on the lack of integration across the various Texas WIA partnerships: "We need to establish a core set of common performance measures such as employment, retention, and earnings that would apply across partner programs."

The most compelling testimony came from Danny Wegman, President of Wegmans Food Markets. Wegmans Food Markets established a program called Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection in 1987 to help his youth employees stay in school, achieve academic success and earn their high school diplomas. Youth employees were matched with youth advocates who acted as mentors, helping them to learn the life skills needed to succeed. The program has been an amazing success, and Mr. Wegman suggested that his program be the model for a national program in next year's WIA reauthorization.

The majority of the members were very interested in Mr. Wegman's program: Chairman McKeon and Mr. Isakson (R-GA) stated they intended to visit the Work-Scholarship Connection program personally. Joining the hearing following the majority of the testimony had been given, Mr. Andrews (D-NJ) asked panel member Timothy Barnicle, Co-Director of the Workforce Development Program at the National Center on Education and the Economy, whether the composition of the Workforce Boards should be made up of more members from the private business sector, or if the Workforce Boards should be made up primarily of members in the Vocational Education and Community College communities. Mr. Barnicle answered rather diplomatically that individual jurisdictions should determine who is on their Boards. He added that private sector members would likely better serve the purpose and needs of the Workforce Boards.

The hearing ended with Rep. Hinojosa (D-TX) expressing his concern over the many areas of the country that continue to have double digit levels of unemployment in spite of the WIA programs. He advised his colleagues and the panelists that if and when WIA is reauthorized next year, a better job must be done to address the rampant unemployment problems in certain pockets of the country.

### **107th CONGRESS, 2nd SESSION**

#### TENTATIVE SENATE CALENDAR 2002/ NON-LEGISLATIVE PERIODS

Tom Daschle, Majority Leader

***September 16 (Mon.)***      ***Yom Kippur (NO VOTES)***

***October 4***                      ***Target adjournment***