

The Education Report

A weekly report of public policy issues in American Education from

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1. Election Night Impact

The obvious results of the midterm elections on November 5th are now well known. The Republicans hold a 2-vote majority in the U.S. Senate and the Republican majority in the U.S. House was strengthened by 4 more votes. Several races were so close that these numbers might be adjusted in the next few weeks. In the governors races the Democrats picked up state house seats in key places, but not nearly as many as they had hoped. In other words, it was a very unexpected Republican victory all around, for which the President is receiving the lion’s share of the credit.

Republican leadership means a change in tone, greater likelihood of cooperation with the Administration’s policy goals and new Chairmen for the Senate Committees that control the consideration of legislation that can then move to the floor for debate. Of major importance is the new role for Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) who moves to the Chairmanship of the Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee and into a more senior position on the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee. Gregg is a conservative member on most HELP Committee issues, but in recent years has worked cooperatively with Senator Kennedy (D-MA) on important education

policy—most particularly the No Child Left Behind Act. It is hoped that this bi-partisanship will continue.

Another critical change will take place on the Senate Budget Committee. Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) must now step aside for Senator Don Nickles (R-OK), a Republican leader in the Senate and perhaps its most conservative voice. The Budget Committee proposes the annual blueprint for a budget resolution—the guiding principles for the 13 annual appropriations bills. It is now far more likely that this document will very closely resemble the President's own spending priorities.

On the Senate Appropriations Committee, the changes are less dramatic. Senators Specter (R-PA) and Harkin (D-IA) have worked closely on the crafting of spending bills for education for many years. That cooperation is likely to continue. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), who now must switch roles, are similarly close working colleagues. Additionally, the key appropriators in the House remain the same. These 7 individuals—add Ralph Regula (R-OH), David Obey (D-WI) and Bill Young (R-FL) to the list-- have worked together for several years and have philosophies regarding domestic spending by the government that are surprisingly similar.

Another area where the changes are quite significant is the leadership positions in both parties and both Houses of Congress. Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) retired from the House and the new Majority Leader will be Tom DeLay (R-TX). Though both men are conservative leaders, DeLay's brand of conservatism is uncompromising. He lacks Armey's humor and rules by fiat rather than consensus. For the Democrats, it appears that Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) is clearly in the lead to replace Dick Gephardt (D-MO) since he has announced his retirement from the Minority Leader's position. Martin Frost (D-TX) had indicated interest in the position early on, but dropped out of the race just as Harold Ford Jr. (D-TN), a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and a Blue Dog Democrat, threw his hat into the ring. Ford is a long shot next to Pelosi, the current Minority Whip and a strong liberal voice in the Congress who would be the first woman in either the House or Senate to hold such a high position.

These are the more obvious observations and conclusions about the election night impact. More information comes out each day, and some of the most significant decisions remain for the party caucuses to debate. Though the Republican victory will undoubtedly make for a more conservative Congress, less willing to expand and spend on domestic issues of greatest concern to educators, Republicans and Democrats alike won in part by expressing strong support for education. The tone in the very closest races was a moderate one—education was an issue of keen interest to voters. The public wanted candidates to express support for improving the quality of the public schools, the achievement levels of students and the caliber of the teaching force. Promises to address these issues were made by all the candidates', Republicans and Democrats alike. Only time will tell how committed individuals are to these promises.

2. How "Lame" is that Duck?

When Members of Congress went home to campaign in mid-October, they left behind 11 out of 13 unfinished spending bills for fiscal year 2003. It appears that 5 more are now agreed to between both bodies and ready for final pass. At least among House appropriators, there is a desire to get the job done next week when the House will be in session for 3-days of lame duck, primarily for organizational purposes. If that happens, the Senate would be likely to follow suit when and if they come to town.

For the Senate, convening for lameduck sessions is a bigger challenge—the flock is in disarray and they are missing a navigator. As of today, the Senate is planning to meet—at least as party caucuses—during the week of November 11th. The unfinished race in Louisiana and the awkward timing of new Senate appointments in Minnesota and Missouri make the question “who’s in charge?” hard to answer. Without an answer, it is hard to imagine how much work could be accomplished.

If a “lameduck” session does occur in early December in both Houses of the Congress, discussions about the fate of the remaining 6 appropriations measures (including the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education) will take place in earnest. There are few choices—the President and the Congress could agree on an overall level of spending for these bills that is high enough to be supported by both parties. The continuing resolution could be extended until March 1, with the hope that the month of February will provide enough time to work out differences. The third and most unpleasant option is a continuing resolution that runs until September 30th, effectively avoiding the need for individual spending bills altogether for those government agencies and retaining funding at current levels.

3. Bush Signs Education Sciences Reform Act

On Tuesday, President Bush signed the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002. Also known as H.R. 3801, the new law is designed to improve the quality of Federal education research and information, and to improve the dissemination of that research and information. H.R. 3801 does away with existing education research methods and puts in place new methods that rely on high quality, scientifically proven research findings.

The new statute replaces the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) with the new Academy of Education Sciences, which will be comprised of three separate centers (the research, evaluation, and statistics centers) to help ensure autonomous research.

The passage of H.R. 3801 comes less than a year after the President’s landmark No Child Left Behind Act was passed this last January.

To view the President’s statement, go to:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/20021105-4.html>.

4. Karen Johnson to be Assistant Secretary of Education for Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the Department of Education

President Bush announced his intention to nominate Karen Johnson to be Assistant Secretary of Education for Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the Department of Education. Ms. Johnson currently is Vice President of Social Marketing and Public Affairs for Porter Novelli, where she provides strategic public affairs and communications counsel for a wide variety of clients.

“Maintaining strong relationships with Congress is essential to meeting our goal of leaving no child behind. Karen Johnson’s strong background will enable her to be an advocate for President Bush and me as we work in a bipartisan way to help achieve the Bush administration’s legislative goals,” said Secretary of Education Rod Paige.

5. IDEA Reauthorization Bills Will Be Introduced in January

According to top Senate and House education committee aides, current Senate education committee chairman Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and House education committee chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) decided earlier this fall to put the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on the table at the start of the next Congress this upcoming January. It is still unclear how the change in the Congressional leadership will affect these plans.

This year the Senate education panel formed seven bipartisan work groups, and the committee is now working on its sixth draft of the proposed IDEA legislation. Among the issues addressed in the latest version of the legislation are professional development and transition services.

Senator Kennedy has said he would like to see Part C of IDEA, grants for infants and toddlers, receive more funding and become permanently reauthorized during this reauthorization process. Another important issue emphasized by education committee members is the need to link Medicaid and the child welfare system with IDEA programs and efforts. More controversial issues, such as vouchers for special education students, are of keen interest to incoming HELP Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH), and have yet to be addressed.

The Department of Education reported receiving nearly 1000 comments on the Presidential Commission Report on Special Education. Those comments are currently under review in preparation for the administration’s IDEA reauthorization blueprint, which should be introduced early next year as well.

6. Department of Education Grants Awarded To Improve Teaching Skills of Preschool Educators

On Monday, US Education Secretary Rod Paige announced that \$14.6 million in grants had been awarded to enrich the skills and the teaching knowledge of early childhood educators in poverty-stricken communities. Nine projects from eight states received the department's funding, and all nine projects are built upon a foundation of scientific research in childhood development and early learning. The teachers participating in the funded projects will take part in professional development workshops aimed at improving young children's cognitive skills to better prevent learning problems that tend to surface in the early elementary school years.

The Secretary's announcement builds upon President Bush's Good Start, Grow Smart program he announced this past spring, an initiative that aims at strengthening Head Start and other early childhood programs by instilling scientific research on cognitive development into curricular development. Furthermore, early childhood cognitive development has been an important issue for First Lady Laura Bush. Just last year, Mrs. Bush held the first ever White House Summit on Early Childhood Development.

Beginning next week and extending through the early spring, the Department of Education will be sponsoring four regional Early Childhood Educator Academies to share scientifically based research on cognitive development with pre-K teachers and other child care providers. For more information about these academy sessions, go to <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/earlychildhood/eceacademy.html>.

For a list of the grant award winners, go to <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SASA/ecprofdev.html>.

7. Report Says U.S. Lags Behind in Secondary Graduation Rate

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has released its annual report that evaluates elementary and secondary schooling in 32 of the world's industrialized countries. The report, titled "Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2002," indicates that only 74% of US students who are of typical high school graduation age actually graduated in 2000. Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Sweden all have higher proportions of high-school-age graduates than the United States.

The report also analyzed the proportion of those who have high school diplomas or their equivalent within certain age ranges. The United States ranks first in the 55 to 64 year old group with a graduation proportion of 83%. However, seven countries have a greater percentage of graduates for 25 to 34 year-olds, with the US graduation percentage rate at 88% in this category.

The OECD report found that the United States joins numerous other countries that have demonstrated a large disparity between high and low academic performers.

For the United States, such statistics are disappointing considering our status as one of the richest nations in the world with a very high per-pupil spending rate.

The report can be downloaded from the OECD website at:

<http://www.oecdwash.org/DOWNLOAD/educationglance2002.pdf>

8. Study Questions Effectiveness of Teacher Incentive Programs

A study conducted by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has found that teacher incentive programs do not necessarily address those subjects with the largest teacher shortages. Additionally, teacher incentive programs often are not tracked for success and effectiveness. Specifically, the study found that 35 states list special education as an area of significant shortage, but only four incentive programs are targeted at special education teachers. Other states reported having incentive programs for “state-defined shortage areas,” but did not provide NASBE study authors with any information pertaining to what teaching areas needed to be addressed. Funding for teacher incentive programs climbed to nearly \$217 million nationwide, but the amount of funding from state-to-state varied dramatically.

The report, titled “State Incentive Programs for Recruiting Teachers: Are They Effective in Reducing Shortages?” can be purchased for \$6 from the NASBE, call 1-800-220-5183.