

IRA Government Relations
Monthly Update
April 11, 2008

Overview

The House of Representatives has all but given up any hope of passing a new No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) this year. The Senate is still saying that they are working on a new version. What we have heard is that the Senate's bill may not be comprehensive but rather reflect where there is consensus on changing NCLB. The House may take some of the programs of NCLB and pass them individually, but even this is unclear. What is happening is that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act is moving ahead and is being actively discussed by the education committee staffs of both chambers with the expectation that they may be able to pass a compromised version soon.

Funding

Funding for education is currently being debated in two separate, yet related Congressional processes. First is the budget where overall spending levels are fixed. Both the House and Senate are pushing for budget allocations for education that would be increases over this year's level, both are planning for modest increases. Parallel to this process is the appropriations process which takes the overall allocation and distributes it to the specific programs. Currently the House and Senate appropriators are taking testimony from government and non-government experts. Next week the Senate appropriators are going to talk with the Department about teacher programs. It is anticipated that the House and Senate will propose increased levels, but at the end of the year that they will not have an appropriations bill that the president will sign.

Selected Reading Legislative Issues

Reading First

Reading First is a part of No Child Left Behind that has been highly controversial. Over the past several years the U.S. Department of Education issued several inspector general reports that found fault with how the program was administered. Last year, the Secretary of Education reorganized the program and stated that she would follow all of the recommendations. However, Congress cut the program by over 61%.

Now there is a push to take many of the procedural recommendations from the inspector general reports and codify them into federal law. There is both a Democratic and a Republican proposal to accomplish this task. What is unclear is whether or not this legislation will need to wait for the full reauthorization of NCLB or whether it may move alone.

Striving Readers

Striving Readers is the name of a small adolescent literacy program administered by the US Department of Education and a legislative initiative long backed by IRA. The legislation, when passed, would provide funds to high-need school districts to support new reading programs designed to help "struggling readers" to become proficient readers. It has been hoped that when NCLB is rewritten that this new legislative initiative would be passed. The legislation has a wide range of bipartisan support.

Higher Education Reauthorization (HEA)

Currently staff members from the Senate, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) and the House Education and Labor Committee are meeting to iron out on any differences between the House (HR 4137) and Senate(S 1642) bill. They are working against an April 30th deadline (which can be extended).

Of particular IRA interest is the literacy training provision for elementary and secondary school teachers and literacy coaches along with a definition of literacy coach.

In the current House HEA draft is a section defining partnership grants. It establishes:

` (6) LITERACY TRAINING- Establishing and implementing a program that strengthens content knowledge and teaching skills of elementary and secondary school teachers or literacy coaches that--

`(A) provides teacher training in reading instruction for elementary or secondary school teachers or literacy coaches who train classroom teachers to implement literacy programs; or who tutor students with intense individualized reading, writing, and subject matter instruction during or beyond the school day;

`(B) develops or redesigns rigorous evidenced-based reading curricula that are aligned with challenging State academic content standards, as required under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and with postsecondary standards for reading and writing;

`(C) provides opportunities for teachers to plan and assess instruction with other teachers, school leaders, and faculty at institutions of higher education;

`(D) Provides training and professional development for principals to prepare them to understand the teaching of reading, guide instruction, and foster school improvement.; and

‘(E) establishes an evaluation and accountability plan for activities conducted under this paragraph to measure the impact of such activities.

One draft definition for a literacy coach being proposed includes the following:

The term `literacy coach' means a professional:

whose primary role with teachers and school personnel is to--

(i) provide high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers and school personnel;

(ii) collaborate with paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, and the community served by the school in the areas of reading and writing; and

(iii) work cooperatively and collaboratively with other professionals in planning programs to meet the needs of diverse population learners, including children with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient; and

(C) who may provide students with--

(i) reflective, inquiry-based reading or writing diagnosis, instruction, and assessment; and

(ii) reading and writing assessment, in cooperation with other professionals (such as special education

teachers, speech and language teachers, and school psychologists).

IRA Professional Development Initiative

During the February 2008 Legislative Workshop IRA members went to meet with their representatives. Ten reported back that they thought that their member had an interest in championing IRA's Professional Development Initiative. Currently, staff is meeting to follow-up.

The initiative proposes that professional development funds for reading be available for all grade levels plus pre-service teacher education. The purpose would be to provide for:

- Resources to Ensure That Reading Instruction Is Continuously and Effectively Improved,
- Recruiting and Retaining High Quality Teachers in High Needs Schools,
- Identifying, Implementing, and Disseminating Effective Evidence-Based Reading Practices, and
- Raising Reading Performance and Closing the Achievement Gap Through High Quality Professional Development.

Regulations from US ED

In late March, Secretary Spellings of the US Department of Education issued a statement outlining a new program to allow ten states to apply for a new program that would change how schools identified for school improvement are treated. Specifically, states will be able to differentiate how schools with many groups of students who are not making AYP are treated with respect to intervention in contrast to the schools that have only one or two groups that are failing to make AYP. Both groups will still need to be eligible for public school choice and supplemental education services. Any state that chooses to apply must state how their program will insure that high need students are receiving the high levels of instruction that they need. Applications are due to the US Department of Education by May 2nd.

Next steps

Questions about when the Higher Education Act may be finalized and whether or not the provisions IRA supports are included in the final version are still open. The lack of a full reauthorization of NCLB is stimulating discussion around the idea that some parts may move this year while other more controversial parts await a future debate. Meanwhile, the US Department of Education continues to issue guidance on areas of NCLB where there is a consensus that change needs to be pushed such as on the differentiated accountability pilots (this follows the changes that have allowed for growth models to be used). Even when there is little going on, there are changes taking place.

Richard M. Long, Ed.D.
Director, Government Relations
International Reading Association
Suite 523
444 North Capitol Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 624-8800
(202) 624-8826 (fax)