

# **Legislative Update**

## **IRA Monthly Update**

### **January 19, 2008**

#### **Introduction**

The 111th Congress has convened and begun its work on January 6th. The House and Senate are working on producing a stimulus bill with the goal of having it on the President's desk by mid-February. The second article in this newsletter reports on the education section of the economic stimulus package. The Senate is holding confirmation hearings for cabinet level officials. The lead article has notes from the confirmation hearing of Arne Duncan, the nominee for the post of US cabinet secretary for education.

This weekend in Washington DC there are a series of receptions, parties, plus the swearing in and the parade. At one reception a senior Obama education aide called for new spending on education and health care for all children. Part of this impromptu speech included inviting the education community to work towards a vision where all children had books, computers on their desks, and other components of successful schools that were not dependent on SES, race or other barriers to success. In addition there were repeated references to working with teachers and supporting their work. It is important to note that in the House Democratic stimulus plan that there is money for teachers as well as programs such as Title I, IDEA, school construction, technology improvements and other programs.

The weekend is exciting, but on Wednesday morning the House will begin its public work at the committee level on the economic stimulus package. To monitor this and other legislative initiatives and activities, please go to the IRA Legislative Action Team website at <http://sites.google.com/site/iralatupdate/>.

#### **Duncan's Senate Hearing Highlights Innovation, Professional Development**

Arne Duncan, for the past seven years CEO of the Chicago public school system, appears to be headed for unanimous Senate approval after his enthusiastic reception at his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday January 13.

Senator Tom Harkin, D-IA noted, "We are counting on you for bold and aggressive leadership."

#### **Early Literacy**

Harkin wants more links between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to improve early childhood programs. Duncan noted that president-elect Obama wants to create a commission on early childhood education.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee members admired Duncan's dedication to public service and education, which began when he was a child working daily along side his mother in her tutoring and mentoring program in Chicago's South Side.

"Teacher talent matters tremendously," said Duncan.

## **Professional Development**

An activist reformer by nature, Duncan spoke frequently of the need for creating and maintaining a high quality teaching force. Willing to face controversy with an attitude of inclusion and open discussion with community members and teacher unions, Duncan favors charter schools, public school choice, merit pay for teachers and school leaders, and accountability and public reporting. Details of these goals remain to be formulated, and Chicago, under Duncan's leadership, has some success on these issues. Pay for performance can help attract the best and the brightest teachers to high need areas, Duncan noted.

Before beginning her questioning, Senator Lisa Murkowski, R-AK, said, "I am quite pleased to see that your young son is sitting behind you reading books instead of amusing himself with the latest electronic gadget."

Murkowski voiced a need to focus on the middle school years. Duncan responded that education is a continuum of high expectations with no magic bullet anywhere along the line. He intends to raise K-12 standards, scale up what works, strengthen teacher quality by innovation and challenges to the status quo, and reward excellence in teachers and teacher leaders across the spectrum.

Duncan noted he will pay attention to T-II and preservice teacher training, as well as professional development. "The day we stop learning is the day we let our students down. Our best teachers continue to improve their skills. We need to support our teachers as they progress through their careers."

Duncan said that during his seven years as school chief in Chicago they moved from 11 to 1200 board certified teachers. One of the results of these improvements: last year Chicago students won an unprecedented \$150,000,000 in grants and scholarships.

Senator Harkin, sitting in for the ailing committee chairman Senator Edward Kennedy, concluded that the education secretary — as leader of the education system — has the most influence on how we progress as a country, provide for equality of opportunity, and maintain our standard of living and quality of life. Harkin said that the secretary of education and HHS have the task of defining America, "who we are as a people, how we progress, and what kind of society we are going to be. We look forward to you defining America."

## **House Proposes \$141.6 Billion for Education in Federal Stimulus Plan**

On January 15, 2009, the House unveiled an \$825 billion economic stimulus package which includes \$141.6 billion in federal spending for education. It is intended that these investments will prevent cuts to critical education programs and services as states are facing a projected \$350 billion in budget shortfalls. Most provisions are temporary as a comparable Senate package has not yet been released. Proposed areas of investment in education include:

School Construction: \$14 billion for K-12 for renovation and modernization, including technology upgrades and energy efficiency improvements. Also includes \$100 million for school construction in

communities that lack a local property tax base, and \$25 million to help charter schools build, obtain, and repair schools;

Ed Tech: \$1 billion for 21st Century Classrooms, including computer and science labs and teacher technology training;

IDEA: \$13 billion for formula grants to increase the federal share of special education costs;

Title I: \$13 billion for grants to help disadvantaged children reach high academic standards;

Statewide Data Systems: \$250 million for competitive grants to states to design and develop data systems to improve student achievement;

Improving Teacher Quality: \$300 million, including \$200 million for competitive grants to school districts and states to provide financial incentives for closing achievement gaps in high-need schools, and \$100 million for competitive grants to states to address teacher shortages and modernize the teaching workforce;

Head Start: \$2.1 billion to provide comprehensive development services to help 110,000 additional children succeed in school. Funds will be distributed based on need.

### **Next Steps**

The pace of legislative activity has gone from almost dead slow in the previous Congress to rapid fire in this one. What does that mean? As all eyes on are the stimulus package there is also discussions on moving the Workforce Investment Act, which has adult education as one section. There is a coalition working on drafting a new comprehensive literacy bill with a high degree of Congressional interest. The Obama team is talking about a national commission to look at building a 0 - 5 program for young children.

All of these items seem to be taking place while a new administration is being built, this means that aides are being hired, sub-cabinet level officials selected (Undersecretary and assistant secretaries for ED) and an entire agenda is rolled out.

Expectations are high in almost all parts of the government for instant change. How this change unfolds and what it's emphasis will be is unclear, many leaders talk openly about the differences within the Obama camp as to how to move education change. To monitor events please log into our legislative website at: <http://sites.google.com/site/iralatupdate/>