

IRA Legislative Update

April 9, 2011

Summary –

1. Money for education and literacy programs continues to be imperil as the first phase of the three pronged attack on funding enters it's final stage. With the budget agreement for FY 11 being agreed to the next question is what will be cut to reach the savings number. This is currently being decided.
2. Drafting of the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act (to replace No Child Left Behind) is entering an interesting phase as Senate staff is drafting a new measure and the House is now talking when they will be drafting.
3. The Common Core Standards implementation continues as some states are revising their “agreement” while others are moving ahead with implementation and the development of the assessments is moving forward.
4. For up-to-date information participate in an IRA Webinar on Tuesday, April 19th at either 2:00 PM EASTERN or 8:00 PM EASTERN. To register go to:
<https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dEJ2N1RSNIRfOXk2dUx5Ny1BcEJ3dWc6MQ>
5. CALL-IN DAY to support the reintroduction of the LEARN ACT – April 28th

Details – Funding

The funding measure to keep the government open is currently a shell, over the next few days details will emerge (and be put on the IRA website). What is known is all programs will be cut by 1%. Second the DC vouchers program will be reenacted (it had been law for five years) and there will be \$700 million for Race to the Top in the fiscal year 2011 spending plan. What we don't know is will there be cuts to other education programs. The last seven weeks have seen a back and forth on funding for Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (including a push (that failed) this week by the House to cut back the money for the current grant application that states are applying for now). In addition funding for Title I isn't clear nor is how a \$6 billion shortfall for the Pell Grants will be handled.

But this is only the first part of a three part process. Part two is funding for FY 12. That budget blueprint is to be voted on the House floor on Thursday. In this plan is a push to reduce domestic discretionary spending by 18%. But unlike the FY 11 fight there are cuts to mandatory spending.

Next up will be the debate on raising the debt ceiling. The US is borrowing at an unsustainable rate to cover its 30% budget deficit. The fight will be with those who want to make big spending cuts now versus those who are seeking a longer-term spending reduction plan and/or new taxes. One of the proposals being added to the debt ceiling measure would be to limit spending to 18% of the Gross Domestic Product. This would cause a significant cut in all areas of spending. This debate will be front page in May.

ESEA Reauthorization

What we know now is that the Senate education committee staff is working on a draft. Several Senators are involved in discussions, it involves both majority and minority and that there are agreements on some super-ordinate points.

In the House education committee, the first hearing was held on April 7th and the chairman said that he wants to hold more hearings soon and start on drafting reauthorization in three to five separate bills. The first of these bills might be out by the end of May.

What everyone is agreeing to is that the new bill must have: more flexibility for state and local schools, an increased emphasis on innovation and a push to reduce duplication. The problem is how to do these things.

It does look like the Senate committee is interested in incorporating a literacy professional development section as well as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The Senate seems more supportive of the common core standards. Both are supportive of an increased role for parents, each seems to want to decrease the set-asides in Title I (required funding for public school choice and supplemental education services). Teacher education programs are being seen as an area that needs to be more directly linked to the needs of schools with challenges. It also seems that the Senate will include a group of programs, or an emphasis to direct funds to middle and high schools; as well as to increase links between pre-K programs and elementary schools.

Common Core Standards

The two assessment consortia (PARCC and SMARTER Balance) are seeking staff to help them to design their assessment programs. They are moving quickly to meet their deadline of having assessments to pilot in the next two years. One idea they seem to be participating in is developing model curricula in order to then develop assessment programs. Some observers are very concerned that there is going to be a greater emphasis on skills as it is easier to design the large scale assessments based on these principles. Others are concerned that the model of using technology will be beyond the reach of a significant number of schools. Still others are wondering how the transition will be made from the current system (of making AYP) to the new and more complex areas of the common core.

To add to the mix, several state legislatures have been reviewing and voting on whether the agreement that their governor or chief state school officer made to endorse and implement the standards is what they want.

Webinar

Log into the webinar on April 19th to learn more about all of these issues, plus ask questions.

Call-in on April 28th

Working with NCTE, NASSP (secondary school principals), and the National Center for Learning Disabilities we are asking our memberships to call their Senators and ask them to support the introduction of the LEARN Act (Literacy for Every American, Results for the Nation). This can be done by calling 202-224-3121 (the Capitol Hill Switchboard) and asking to be connected to your senator (mention your state). When connected ask your Senator to support the introduction of the LEARN Act with a floor statement, co-sponsoring or issuing a press release. Senator Murray (D-WA) will be introducing the measure.

LEARN would provide funds to high need schools to support professional development that they select and need. Funds are provided to programs for those aged 0 to 5 and grades K-12. 46 states have already drafted state

plans using their state literacy teams -which have included many IRA state literacy councils as part of the process.

A reminder will be sent out with a summary of LEARN and other materials on April 25th.

Overall

These are demanding times; funds are going to continue to be cut over the next two years at all levels; teaching positions will be lost, class sizes are going to increase; high need students are going to suffer from a lack of access to high quality programs aimed at supporting their literacy instruction. However, there will be some areas of new opportunities for those who are able to adapt.

Remember the Webinar on the 19th, call-in day on the 28th, the upcoming legislative workshop on June 27th & 28th.

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