

## IRA Legislative Update May 29, 2009

### Introduction

Events in Washington are picking up speed as the Obama Administration changes from a government in transition to a government in motion. The Administration is currently implementing the new economic stimulus act (ARRA) with over \$100 billion for education. In addition, it has also submitted a budget proposal to the Congress for the upcoming fiscal year and is working on a wide range of new proposals. Overall, the new government is putting significant sums of money into education and it is also signaling what parts of education reform they think are important. The Congress, while working closely with the new President and his team, is also moving its education agenda by introducing legislation, holding hearings on key topics and working on the appropriations process. IRA continues to monitor these actions, hold meetings, discussions and other activities but is also pushing for the introduction of a comprehensive literacy bill.

These items, however, aren't the only action. The nation's governors and chief state school officers are working on a set of national standards that they hope will create a massive and significant change.

This, along with the tone that is being set by the new administration's focus on schools, teachers and accountability, is going to make the entire process of reauthorization of NCLB/ESEA much more complex.

### Stimulus Package

The first wave of funds was sent to the states in mid April. As of this writing less than half the states have plans filed to spend their education stimulus dollars. (For details on the education stimulus package go to <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/index.html> <<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/index.html>> ). To evaluate the effectiveness of these funds, the government will be requiring quarterly reports posted on school district websites that report what the money is being used for. In addition and significant to IRA, is that one of the reporting requirements is for schools which are not performing well to publish the district's teachers group rankings and how they are rated by their own district's evaluation system. To see the ARRA ESEA Title I LEA allocation for your school district, go to:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy09recovery/index.html>  
<<http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy09recovery/index.html>>

In June the US Department of Education is going to publish information on how they expect funds in the areas of special concentration – early childhood, middle and high school to be used. These areas are part of the Title I stimulus package which is a *formula* program. A *formula* program is one that sends money to a specific school based on the numbers of students and the money to automatically allocate to each school district and school. There will be more funds spent on these areas by a competitive grants process that requires schools to apply directly to the US Department of Education for money for specialized programs.

### President's Budget Proposal for 2010

The next fiscal year begins on October 1, 2009, and while the stimulus package will still be sending additional money to the states during the fall, the regular spending process, appropriations, will still be in play. The following chart indicates selected literacy programs and the amount being asked.

There are several positive areas in the proposal such as the funding for a new K-3 literacy program (Reading First was eliminated in the past year). In addition the President proposes increased funding for the very limited middle and high school literacy program. Funding for school improvement programs is also slated for an increase (in addition to the \$3 billion in the stimulus package). Frequently, funding for school improvement has meant more money for literacy coaches.

Of concern are the proposed cuts to Title I Part A. This is because after the stimulus ends, this will remain as the main engine for support for high need students. Also of concern are the proposed elimination of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and of Even Start – a multi-generational literacy program that provides funds to schools to help with family based literacy programs.

### **US Department of Education 09 Appropriations/10 Proposed budget**

#### **FY 2009 FY 2010 (Proposed)**

Title I Early Childhood Grants	N/A	\$500 million
Early Learning Challenge Fund	N/A	\$300 million
Striving Readers - Adolescents	\$35.40 million	\$70.4 million
Striving Readers - Early Literacy Grants	N/A	\$300 million
Early Reading First	\$112.50 million	\$162.5 million
School Improvement Grants	\$ 545.6 million	\$1.5 billion
Title I Grants to LEAs	\$14,492.4 million	\$13.0 billion
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	\$2947.7 million	\$2947.7 million
Title III English Language Acquisition	\$ 730 million	\$ 730 million
Literacy Through School Libraries	\$19.1 million	\$19.1 million
Fund for the Improvement of Education	\$116.0 million	\$67.1 million
National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)	\$6.5 million	Eliminated
Even Start	\$66.5 million	Eliminated

The next step for the budget proposal is for the Congress to take it up under consideration as part of the appropriations process. Of note, the proposal for the \$300 million for K-3 literacy is listed as a part of the Striving Readers program. This had been \$35.40 million for adolescent literacy, now the authority is being expanded. This means that the Congress would only need to appropriate funding, it doesn't need to create new legislation.

### **Comprehensive Literacy Bill**

Late in 2008 it became clear that the free standing adolescent literacy bill that had been drafted by IRA and several other groups (Alliance for Excellent Education, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Council of Teachers of English and others) wasn't going to pass on its own. In addition, with the demise of funding for Reading First, it was unlikely that a bill designed to provide funds for schools to promote middle and high school professional development to improve reading was going to move. In addition, with the victory of Senator Obama and his emphasis on early childhood development/education the entire bill needed to be redrafted. Therefore a new plan was needed, and the working group expanded. Working from the base of the previous middle and high school bill a new proposal was drafted. The current draft can be found at <http://sites.google.com/site/iralatupdate/> . As of this writing, the measure is being reviewed by both House and Senate members and changes are being proposed. We expect a formal introduction sometime in June.

## **National Standards**

The governors and the chief state school officers in the United States have decided to work together on creating a set of education standards. As of May 28th, 44 chief state executives have agreed to this goal. Over the summer the group hopes to draft standards with more to follow in December.

According to Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the group working on the standards is hoping to fundamentally improve the quality of education for all children by having standards that can be defined as “readiness standards” for post-high school learning either on the job, in college, or some other type of learning environment. The group working on these standards is hoping that they are: “fewer, clearer, and higher” than the existing set of state standards.

In summary, Wilhoit said that the proposed standards are to be internationally benchmarked and not the wide range set of state content standards that are currently in play. He hopes that they are about “dynamic learning, not just schooling.”

## **Looking ahead**

Even without the national standards movement of the governors and chiefs, the education agenda of the Obama administration is looking to make many changes. A quick look at the funding initiatives gives a strong indication that the US federal government intends to work more directly with schools than with states and districts. In addition, they are looking to make changes by using traditional and non-traditional means. Private companies that have a track record of improving school leadership, such as KIPP, are being encouraged, as well as charter schools. Merit pay is on the table and so is increased funding for technology to provide more tools for teachers and students to use in non-classroom environments to promote learning. Yet, the administration isn’t proposing to eliminate the teacher. The teacher is being seen as the core to success and programs are being supported to enhance teacher professional development.

Where is all of this going? While it looks like there are a wide range of individual programs, they will come together in the rewriting of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and its last iteration, the No Child Left Behind Act. While accountability will remain a key part of the revision, all of these areas of early childhood, middle and high school reform, teacher enhancement, technology and other components will be brought together. Hearings on early childhood and high schools have already been held in the House of Representatives, more hearings will be held over the summer and a legislative proposal isn’t out of the question for the Fall of this year.

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)