

IRA Legislative Updates

From Rich Long, Director, Government Relations

November 2, 2009:

The IRA has been working with several groups for years on an adolescent literacy bill. Last year, with the collapse of Reading First, it became clear that no stand alone adolescent literacy bill would pass. So a K-4 literacy section was added. Then, with the election of President Obama, we were asked to include an age 0 – 5 literacy section. Now the proposal is Age 0 to grade 12. It has three basic sections - age 0-5, K - 4, and 5 -12.

The House and Senate education committees have been working at introducing this measure with different levels of intensity. That has changed, in the past two weeks both chambers have become fully engaged. Drafts have been discussed, criticism raised, counter offers made, and finally the phrase, "well we can fix it later" has become the operational comment.

As of right now, it is looking like sometime in the next two weeks - or even this week, the bills might be introduced. But then again...it hasn't happened yet.

November 3, 2009:

The National Coalition for Literacy, a coalition of adult education oriented organizations has been proposing to the Congress that they redraft the language governing the National Institute for Literacy. They wish to refocus that entity to solely adult basic education and workplace literacy. This proposal is being considered by the Congress as they consider the Workforce Investment Act. The Obama Administration, in their budget submission, proposed to zero out the agency. If you want a copy of the side by side (proposal to current law) please email irawash@reading.org.

November 5, 2009:

Late today (Thursday, November 05, 2009) Senator Murray (D-WA) introduced the comprehensive literacy professional development bill the LEARN Act. It's number is S. 2740.

We will be putting out a more detailed summary shortly, but basically it provides \$2.35 billion for literacy professional development. The money is divided as follows:

\$350 million for age 0 – 5
\$1 billion for K - 3
\$1 billion for 4 – 12.

The House of Representatives will be introducing its companion measure within a few days. We have a long haul ahead of us to take this through the legislative process (and thanks to the many of you who have helped put this together), and let me warn you, the legislative process will have many twists and turns and the outcome is never perfect. But what we have right now isn't working. Soon, we will be asking you to consider writing your Senators and Members of Congress to ask them to support this measure.

But for right now, we have made progress.

November 6, 2009:

This afternoon the LEARN Act was introduced in the House. This is the outline from the House Education and Labor Committee.

Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act (HR 4037)

The LEARN Act will support comprehensive State and local literacy initiatives to ensure that children from birth through 12th grade have the reading and writing skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Specifically, the bill will:

I. Provide federal support for literacy initiatives by:

- Authorizing \$2.35 billion each year for comprehensive, high-quality State and local literacy initiatives that span birth through 12th grade;
- Enabling States to design a comprehensive literacy plan and make subgrants to early learning providers and school districts to develop and implement high-quality literacy initiatives that will improve the reading and writing skills of all children and students;
- Designating that funds must be allocated as follows:
 - o 15% for children birth through kindergarten entry
 - o 40% for kindergarten through grade 5
 - o 40% for grades 6 through 12;
- Targeting funding to high-need student populations and schools;
- Requiring a rigorous national evaluation of the programs; and
- Including stringent conflict of interest restrictions for the programs' peer review process.

II. Enhance each State's role in improving literacy instruction by:

- Supporting the formation of a State Literacy Leadership Team made up of literacy experts and key stakeholders to assist in the development of a comprehensive State literacy plan that includes a needs assessment, a capacity survey, and an implementation plan to ensure high-quality instruction in reading and writing;
- Requiring States to provide technical assistance to early learning providers and local educational agencies on implementing high-quality professional development programs for literacy instruction; and
- Requiring each State to review pre-service coursework as well as State licensure and certification requirements and make recommendations to improve training in high-quality

literacy instruction.

III. Support the creation of local high-quality literacy initiatives by:

- Providing high-quality professional development for instructional staff that is job embedded, ongoing, and research-based, and supporting teachers in analyzing assessment data to improve student learning;
- Providing children and students with high-quality early literacy instruction and reading and writing instruction;
- Utilizing assessment systems to inform and improve instruction and student learning at all age and grade levels; and
- Supporting school-wide literacy initiatives and additional literacy supports to address the specific learning needs of English language learners, students with disabilities, and struggling readers and writers.