



## Federal Update – May 9, 2008

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Questions?  
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### House Democrats Weigh Strategies on Appropriations for Domestic Programs

Three months after the president released his budget request for fiscal year 2009, Democrats in Congress seem intent on bypassing the president and waiting for a new administration to take office before approving appropriations for domestic programs. The Democratic leadership has seized on the current debate over supplemental spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to advance their domestic priorities.

According to an [analysis conducted by First Focus](#), the president's budget would decrease spending on programs that affect children by 0.8 percent in real dollar terms, even as spending on these programs has declined as a portion of federal spending throughout his administration. Children's advocates in Congress had hoped to restore badly underfunded programs such as Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant through provisions inserted into a supplemental war funding package, but these proposals so far have given way to emergency measures designed to ameliorate the impact of the slowing economy.

Supporters of this strategy have encountered resistance from fiscally conservative Democrats opposed to increasing spending on veterans' education benefits without also mandating cuts elsewhere to compensate for the increases. The Democratic leadership hopes the package will pass before the Memorial Day recess, although disputes over procedural measures for such a mixed-spending package threaten its progress. In the Senate, Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd has indicated that his committee will offer separate amendments for domestic spending and war funding to be considered by the full chamber within the next two weeks.

## **House and Senate Act on Student Loans, Wait on Higher Ed Act**

The Senate responded to mounting concerns over the availability of loans for student borrowers by quickly approving a bill that would enable the Education Department to purchase existing student loans. The measure would allow lenders participating in federal loan programs to buy more students' debt with funds that would otherwise be required to balance their existing obligations. The credit crunch has affected student lenders along with other debt-financing institutions, causing more than 50 lenders to stop participating in the federally subsidized student lending program.

The bill is slated to return to the House for modifications. In order to reach as many borrowers as possible, members of both parties and the White House hope to pass the bill before the summer when the volume of applications for student loans normally peaks.

In other areas of federal support for higher education, Congress passed another extension of the Higher Education Act through May 31, buying more time for House and Senate negotiators to iron out differences between their respective bills. Both versions contain significant improvements in federal support for prospective pre-k teachers through student loan relief, training, and induction programs. For more information on how the Higher Education Act impacts pre-k, [visit the Federal Initiatives page](#) on Pre-K Now's website.

## **House Pre-K Bill Garners 64 Cosponsors**

As of today, May 9, the PRE-K Act (H.R. 3289), a bill that would create a federal incentive grant to help states improve the quality of their pre-k programs, has received the formal endorsement of all Democrats on the House Education and Labor Committee, which has jurisdiction over the bill. Sixty-four members of the House have now signed on to the bill. Although pre-k has been marked by bipartisanship at the state level, the bill has not yet won the support of any Republican co-sponsors. [Click here to view a list of cosponsors.](#)

## **Office of Head Start Announces \$5 Million in Grants to Upgrade Teacher Credentials**

The Office of Head Start issued a memorandum on April 16 announcing \$5 million in grants to assist Head Start agencies in complying with the new staff qualification requirements mandated by the recent Head Start reauthorization. The grant funding will be available to Head Start grantees to help teachers obtain bachelor's degrees and to enable assistant teachers to earn Child Development Associate credentials. For more information, please [visit the Administration for Children and Families website.](#)

## **Pre-K Now Releases White Paper Calling for Federal Aid to Serve Pre-K Students in Rural Areas**

On Monday, May 5, Pre-K Now released a white paper documenting the obstacles that rural communities face in providing high-quality pre-k and calling on the federal government to offer additional support to states in serving rural areas. The paper, entitled "Meeting the Challenge of Rural Pre-K," draws on the research of a

range of authorities on rural education policy to offer recommendations to help guide federal policymakers. Among other guidelines, the paper calls on Congress to:

- Authorize grants to establish or improve high-quality pre-k programs targeted to rural areas;
- Ensure that such grants are accessible to rural pre-k providers by apportioning funds according to a state-determined formula that eliminates competition for grants with suburban and urban applicants;
- Allow grants to be applied toward a range of statewide and local activities, including teacher workforce development, the advancement of professional development opportunities in rural areas, and incentives for teachers to make a commitment to teach in rural communities; and
- Enable rural pre-k providers to build on partnerships with local school districts, Head Start agencies, and community-based child care to provide flexibility at the local level.

To obtain a copy of the paper, please visit the [Federal Initiatives page](#) of Pre-K Now's website.

### **U.S. Department of Education Soliciting Input on New Title I Regulations**

(courtesy of Fritzwire)

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings recently announced a series of upcoming public meetings to discuss [proposed changes to regulations for Title I under No Child Left Behind](#). The meetings seek comments from the public on the proposed regulations at the following dates, times, and locations:

#### **Wednesday, May 14, 2008 – Boston, MA**

Hilton Boston Back Bay Hotel

40 Dalton Street

Boston, MA 02115

Time: 9 a.m. - noon and 2 - 5 p.m. EDT

Meeting Room: Fenway Room

#### **Thursday, May 15, 2008 – Dunwoody, GA**

Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody Campus

2101 Womack Road

Dunwoody, GA 30338

Time: 9 a.m. - noon and 2 - 5 p.m. EDT

Meeting Room: Auditorium, C1100, North Campus

#### **Monday, May 19, 2008 – Kansas City, MO**

Sheraton Kansas City Sports Complex Hotel

9103 East 39th Street

Kansas City, MO 64133

Time: 9 a.m. - noon and 2 - 5 p.m. EDT

Meeting Room: Royal Ballroom

**Thursday, May 22, 2008 – Seattle, WA**

W Hotel

1112 4th Avenue

Seattle, WA 98101

Time: 9 a.m. - noon and 2 - 5 p.m. EDT

Meeting Room: Great Room 1

Here are details on submitting comments on the proposed regulations, from the Department of Education:

The Department is accepting public comments on the proposed regulations through June 23, 2008. All comments must be submitted in writing to the Department in accordance with the instructions in the proposed regulations. We look forward to receiving your comments on these proposed regulations to ensure that they accomplish our intended objectives.

Individuals who wish to present comments during a public meeting should register at [Special.Events@ed.gov](mailto:Special.Events@ed.gov), at least a week before the public meeting. Any meeting time that remains after the website registrations are processed will be made available on the day of the meeting. Individuals who have not registered on the website and wish to present comments should do so at the on-site registration desk on the day of the meeting. We will process website and on-site registrations on a first-come, first-served basis.

The purpose of the proposed regulations is to build on the progress states have made in accountability and assessment systems under No Child Left Behind in the past six years, while incorporating key feedback from the field into a more clear vision of what it takes to educate each and every student. Issuing regulations that strengthen Title I implementation will help bring about higher-quality assessments and stronger accountability for results, as well as provide parents with the information they need to make informed decisions about public school choice and supplemental educational services.

### **Pre-K Now Federal Working Group Call**

In order to coordinate Pre-K Now's work on Capitol Hill with state advocates' perspectives on federal issues and standing relationships with Members of Congress, the federal policy team at Pre-K Now invites state partners to participate in an informal monthly conference call.

This month's call took place on Thursday, May 8. Among other subjects, the call discussed the pre-k legislation pending in the House and strategies to coordinate national priorities with governors and the National Governor's Association.

Please email Pre-K Now federal policy director Kathy Patterson at [kpatterson@preknow.org](mailto:kpatterson@preknow.org) to register for this informal monthly call series.