

Federal Update — August 21, 2008

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Questions?

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Congress Approves Higher Ed Act with Pre-K Provisions

In the last hours before adjourning for recess, the House and Senate passed H.R. 4137, the conference bill reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. It includes provisions for reducing student loan liability and increasing funding for training and professional development of pre-k teachers and other early education professionals.

The highlights of early educator provisions are:

- Teacher quality partnership grants in Title II, which may be used to compensate early education teachers who obtain an associate's or bachelor's degree.
- Loan forgiveness for prospective borrowers who work in licensed or regulated child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and state pre-kindergarten programs.
- Grant program for states to create cross-sector, integrated, and comprehensive professional development systems for early childhood educators working with children from birth to age five.

President Bush signed the bill into law on August 14. The text of the public law (PL No: 110-315) is not yet available,

but you can access the text of the bill [here](#) (PDF).

Committee Approves PRE-K Act with Bipartisan Support

On June 26, the House Education and Labor Committee approved legislation to improve the quality of state pre-k programs. The decision came after several hours of deliberations on June 25 and a motion by Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) to postpone the final committee vote until the following morning.

H.R. 3289, the Providing Resources Early for Kids Act (PRE-K Act), was passed by a bipartisan vote of 31 to 11. Introduced in August 2007 by Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), the bill currently has 120 co-sponsors, including every Democrat serving on the House Education and Labor Committee. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) became the first Republican co-sponsor of H.R.3289, before five Republican members of the House Education and Labor Committee voted in support of the bill, joining their Democratic colleagues. [See [roll call vote](#)].

The PRE-K Act establishes a federal-state partnership to improve the quality of early childhood educational opportunities for all children. It provides incentives to states to ensure that their pre-k programs meet children's developmental and educational needs. Under the bill, states receive federal incentive grants that could be used for a variety of program improvement purposes, including:

- increasing the number of early childhood educators with bachelor's degrees;
- reducing student-teacher ratios;
- implementing research-based curricula; and
- providing comprehensive services such as health screenings and nutritional assistance.

The next step for the PRE-K Act would be a vote by the full House of Representatives, but with such limited time before the Congress adjourns for the fall election, a floor vote appears unlikely at this time.

Education Begins at Home Act Passed in Committee

The Education Begins at Home Act (H.R. 2343), a bill that aims to increase access to voluntary early childhood home visitation programs, was approved by the House Education and Labor Committee, on June 18. Introduced by two members of the committee, Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-IL) and Rep. Todd Platts (R-PA), the legislation would improve both access to and quality of the services that help prepare young children for school, prevent child abuse and neglect, and provide parents with support when raising infants and young children.

Existing home visitation programs involve visits by trained individuals to expectant mothers and parents of young children in underprivileged families. If passed, the legislation will create a federal grant to help states and communities plan and provide better home visitation services to families, while facilitating links to existing community

and social service programs. Also, H.R. 2343 would create competitive grant programs to expand access to home visitation services for military families and families with limited English proficiency.

Witnesses at a Committee hearing on the Education Begins at Home Act cited research showing that home visitation programs bring significant financial benefits for taxpayers. Visit <http://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/fc-2008-06-11.shtml> for witness testimony and an archived webcast of the hearing or <http://edlabor.house.gov/publications/20080618EBAHFactSheet.pdf> to learn more about H.R. 2343.

House and Senate Committees Consider 2009 Budgets for Children's Programs

On June 20, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, began consideration of the 2009 Labor, Health and Education appropriations bill including funding for Head Start and Title I grants. Six days later, the Senate Appropriations Committee cleared its own version of the legislation. Both bills propose modest increases for early childhood education.

Both the House and the Senate propose to increase federal support for Head Start to \$7.1 billion -- \$242 million more than last year and \$93 million more than requested in the president's budget. They disagree on Title I funding, with the House version of the bill committing \$15.1 billion and the Senate version stopping at \$14.5 billion. The House bill also makes provisions for \$2.1 billion in funding for Child Care and Development Block Grants. It appears likely that the Congress will again opt for an omnibus spending bill rather than taking final action on the individual appropriations measures. In this case, the actions to date will serve as a guideline for a new president and the 111th Congress.

Sen. Robert Menendez Introduces the Children's Budget Act

New Jersey Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez introduced S. 3277 to require the president to detail allocations for children's programs in the annual budget proposal. The "Children's Budget" would gather the diverse sources of federal funding for children's program into one document. The bill, currently carrying seven co-sponsors, can be read [here](#) (PDF).

Pre-K Now joined First Focus and other organizations in a [sign-on letter](#) (PDF) supporting the bill's introduction.

Seven in 10 Voters Want Federal Support for Early Education

In June, Pre-K Now released results from a national survey on voter views of state and federal support for high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. The findings reveal broad support for making voluntary pre-k for all children a larger fiscal priority, and suggest that candidates' positions on the issue could influence votes this fall.

A bipartisan polling team from Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. and American Viewpoint surveyed 800 registered voters, along with an additional 200 "swing voters," to gather the data. The results, showing strong support

for a new federal investment in pre-k, ran across nearly all demographic groups surveyed.

Seven in 10 voters -- and 7 in 10 swing voters -- support a new federal grant program to help states increase the quality and availability of their pre-k programs. When given an estimated price tag of such a grant (\$45 per tax payer), more than 60% of the respondents still favored the proposal. In fact, voters were found to be more likely, by nearly a 3:1 margin, to support a Congressional candidate who backs increased funding for pre-k. For more national poll results and a look at our charts, visit <http://www.preknow.org/advocate/opinion/nationalpoll.cfm>.

Pre-K Champions Honored

In July in the U.S. Capitol, Pre-K Now presented the 2008 Pre-K Champion awards to Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) for her leadership in introducing and securing co-sponsors and a committee vote on the PRE-K Act; Adele Robinson, vice-president of the National Association for Educating Young Children for her long-standing advocacy for sound and effective early childhood education policy; and Pre-k Now's partners in Alabama and Louisiana.

The Alabama School Readiness Alliance, represented by Linda Tilly and Brittany Winfree, and the Alabama Office of School Readiness, represented by Marquita Davis and Trellis Smith, were honored for their leadership on pre-k policy and their successful quality early education campaign. Pre-K for All Louisiana was recognized for its strategic efforts to expand quality early education in the state, and the award was accepted by Geoff Nagle, director of the Tulane Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

To view pictures of the Capitol Hill ceremony, visit <http://www.preknow.org/advocate/awards/index.cfm>.

"Step Up for Kids Day" Main Event in Visibility Campaign

Every Child Matters Education Fund has launched its "I'm Voting for Kids 2008" campaign to make children, youth, and families a national political priority. With support from a variety of organizations, including Pre-K Now, ECM will hold events around both parties' national conventions and the major presidential debates.

The nationwide "Step Up for Kids Day" is scheduled for September 16, 2008. According to ECM's plan, advocates, volunteers, and children across the country will gather on the steps of all 50 state capitols. Pediatrician Dr. T. Berry Brazelton will kick off the event at the National Press Club in Washington D.C.

For more information and a full schedule of events, please visit www.everychildmatters.org.

Pre-K Now National Conference to Take Place December 10

Pre-K Now's National Conference, a live broadcast designed to connect advocates, policymakers, community leaders and education professionals with the national pulse of the pre-k movement, will take place on December 10, 2008, at 1pm ET. Hundreds of local viewing sites will bring together an audience of thousands across the country, allowing participants to learn from one another and hold their own small-group discussions.

To learn more about the 2008 Pre-K Now National Conference, please visit <http://www.preknow.org/advocate/conference2008/>.

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