



## Federal Update – January-March 2009

### Federal Update

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Questions?

Contact: Anya Malkov  
[amalkov@pewtrusts.org](mailto:amalkov@pewtrusts.org)

### Rural Early Education Access Act Introduced

Members of Congress came together across party lines to introduce legislation that would improve access to high-quality early childhood education in rural communities. Under HR 1755, the Rural Early Education Access Act, states would receive incentive grants to establish pre-k programs and to improve the quality of existing programs in rural areas.

"Every study shows that children who attend preschool programs are more likely to achieve success in school," said the bill's author, Rep. Phil Hare (D-IL). "This leads to additional college graduates and a more competitive workforce. In other words, it is not only good education policy, it makes economic sense." A fellow member of the House Rural Education Caucus and original co-sponsor of the bill, Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) added, "Education provides the foundation for the economic and civic future of our nation, and we can't afford to leave millions of children who don't live in urban or suburban population centers behind." Other original co-sponsors of the bill are Representatives Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Dave Loebsack (D-IA).

The press release issued by Congressman Hare's office included a quote from "Meeting the Challenges of Rural Pre-K," a Pre-K Now white paper released last year, recommendations from which made it into the bill's language.

## **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, [P.L. 111-5](#), commonly known as the stimulus bill, was signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009. It included a “down payment” on the President’s campaign promises to invest in early childhood education:

- \$53.6 billion for state stabilization with the bulk going for elementary and secondary education, “and, as applicable, early childhood education programs and services;” some funding also available for modernization
- \$2.1 billion for Head Start (includes \$1.1 for Early Head Start and \$1 billion for Head Start)
- \$2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, including a \$255 million set-aside for quality improvements, of which \$93 million is allocated for improvements to infant and toddler care
- \$10 billion for Title I (ESEA) grants to school districts; this allocation came with guidance from the bill’s authors that states are expected to “use some of the funding provided for early childhood programs and activities.”
- \$3 billion for Title I school improvement grants
- \$11.3 billion for IDEA Part B state grants for special education
- \$500 million for IDEA Part C (infants and families)
- \$400 million for IDEA Section 619 (children before the age of school entry)
- \$100 million for teacher quality partnership grants

Pre-K Now has hosted a series of weekly calls, developed summaries and talking points, and has launched the [Recovery Round-Up](#) page on its website to share the resources compiled in the process. Although state needs vary, strategic investment themes have emerged, driven by the focus on investing one-time stimulus money in areas that would provide ongoing benefits. Some examples include investing in workforce development, purchasing supplies, modernizing facilities, developing effective curricula and assessments and creating pre-k-to-college data systems.

To learn more about the impact of stimulus funds on pre-k, recommended uses and advocacy strategies, please visit the [Recovery Round-Up](#).

## **President Signs FY09 Spending Bill**

When the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress adjourned at the end of 2008, it had yet to pass a funding bill for fiscal year 2009, which runs October 2008 – September 2009. To keep government programs operating at prior funding levels, the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress opted for a continuing resolution, which was set to expire in March 2009.

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress acted quickly on the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which increased funding from FY08 levels for several children's programs, including a total of \$7.1 billion for Head Start, \$2.1 billion for Child Care and Development Block Grant and \$15 billion in Title I grants. The President signed the bill into law on March 11, 2009.

### **President Obama Outlines Budget for FY10**

In his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Obama underscored the need to rethink, rebuild and reprioritize in the face of serious economic challenges. Among the solutions he proposed to help to bring about our short- and long-term recovery: greater investments in education and building human capital, starting with the youngest Americans.

The [outline of the President's budget proposal for FY10](#) (PDF) was released shortly after the February 26 address to Congress. The specifics of the budget proposal have not yet become available, and it is uncertain whether the plans to invest in early childhood education will include state pre-k. The budget summary provides "big picture" ideas, mentioning incentives to states to invest in early learning, which is consistent with the concept of the Early Learning Challenge Grants – a campaign promise eagerly watched by the early education community.

### **Next Steps in the Budget Process**

Based on the President's proposals, the House and Senate Budget Committees drafted FY 2010 Congressional budget resolutions, which provide overall totals on spending and revenues, but not program-by-program amounts. Each chamber approved its own budget resolution on April 2. The House and Senate are expected to agree on a compromise version later in April.

Once a final budget resolution is adopted by both the House and Senate, the appropriations committees begin their work of allocating funds to all of the annually-appropriated federal programs (markups often begin in early June). A dozen appropriations subcommittees produce funding packages that are submitted to the full Appropriations Committees in House and Senate, and must gain the support of both chambers of Congress before each appropriations bill is sent to the President to be signed into law.

Frequently the budget and appropriations process becomes even more complicated. If the budget resolution calls for changes in ongoing mandatory funding (such as Medicare or Medicaid), and revenues/taxes, the process of "reconciliation" comes into play.

During "reconciliation" the Committees with authority over relevant mandatory programs and tax decisions (the "authorizing committees"), such as the House Education and Labor Committee or Senate HELP Committee develop the necessary legislation, which is then considered on the House and Senate floors. A reconciliation bill has special requirements and procedures and must also be passed in identical form by the House and Senate to be sent to the President for enactment.

If Congress does not complete an appropriations bill or a set of bills by September 30, it must pass “continuing resolutions” in order for those federal programs to continue operating until the appropriations bills are signed into law.

### **Home Visiting in President’s Budget, Legislation**

One of the few programs expressly highlighted in the President’s budget plan is a nurse home-visiting initiative, funded at \$87 million, increasing to \$1.75 billion in FY 2019 to provide services to at-risk families

Congress is also staying active in the home-visiting discussion. The Senate version of the [Education Begins at Home Act](#) has been reintroduced. Senator Kit Bond (R-MO), the author of S 244, has pledged to make home visiting his legacy before he retires in 2010. The House version of the bill has not yet been re-introduced by Representatives Danny Davis (D-IL) and Todd Platts (R-PA), however Representative Platts spoke in support of home-visiting at an Education and Labor Committee hearing on March 17.

### **President Gives Major Education Address, House Committee Holds Hearings**

President Obama gave his first education speech as President on March 10, in an [address to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#), during which he emphasized the importance of investments in early learning programs to the nation’s future. The House Education and Labor Committee immediately announced hearings on early education, which were held the following week.

Notable experts testified before the full committee on [March 17](#) and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education on [March 19](#), mostly speaking in support of federal investments in young children. The witnesses discussed innovative practices as well as the obstacles faced in their states and confirmed the need for more federal dollars to improve program quality and expand access. The members of the committee questioned the panel on topics ranging from workforce development to the efficacy of early education research.

The Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Harriet Dichter, summed up the overarching sentiment of the hearings: “We need to commit to new federal funding that will push a unified approach across all the early childhood programs [and] insist that the states have meaningful research-based standards.” The House Education and Labor Committee is expected to play a major role in crafting legislation around the President’s early learning initiative.

### **111<sup>th</sup> Congress Gears Up for Action on Early Learning**

Two major early learning bills from the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress have recently been reintroduced. Rep. Hirono (D-HI) – whose PRE-K Act successfully cleared the Education and Labor Committee

in the last session – reintroduced the bill, now [HR 702](#), on January 27, 2009 with two Committee Republicans as original co-sponsors, including Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE), ranking Republican on the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education. The bill would provide incentive grants to states to invest in the quality of early learning programs. At this time, it has 71 co-sponsors.

Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Kit Bond (R-MO) are championing the Ready to Learn Act, [S 240](#), with Senator Murray stepping into the role previously played by now-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton as lead Democratic sponsor of the bill. The legislation proposes competitive grants for states to improve quality and provide pre-kindergarten to all four-year-olds. The age-specific focus in the Ready to Learn Act is one of the several differences between it and the PRE-K Act, but the two bills are similar in concept.

[HR 555](#), the Universal Prekindergarten Act, by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), and [S 206](#), the Early Education Act of 2009, by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) have also been re-introduced.