

Washington Update February 23, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Like you I'm sure, I am overwhelmed by the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. But likewise, I am so encouraged by the leadership and activism of the amazing students there. There is a lot of talk about meaningful policy change in Washington with a range of ideas being floated. An analysis of the various proposals is beyond the scope of this blog, but I fully anticipate (and hope) that this dialogue will be reflected in a constructive manner in multiple venues – through funding and appropriations as well as education-related bills. I will do my best to keep you posted. In the meantime, lead on Douglas students, lead on!

1. FY 2018 Appropriations: Will the March 23 Deadline be Met?

Despite the fact that we are almost 5 months through the 2018 Fiscal Year, the Congress has one month -- until March 23 -- to finalize spending that will take us to September 30. October 1 is the start of the FY 2019.

With the budget deal cut to raise the spending levels for both defense and non-defense discretionary spending, the next step is to divvy up the pie between the 12 appropriations bills. Education advocates are urging that the Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill receive its fair share. This is critical for retaining and possibly increasing funding for education programs. But so far these 12 allocations appear to be undetermined, or at best a mystery.

With Congress in recess this week, little activity was apparent. They return on Monday, so hopefully there will be new developments.

2. Higher Education Reauthorization Update

Today is the deadline for the submission of recommendations to the Senate HELP Committee regarding proposals for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This bi-partisan request from Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) is a hopeful sign for the possibility of a bi-partisan bill. Virtually every education organization in Washington will be

providing comments. Below is some information from a few of the letters submitted.

From the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education and the Teacher Education Division of CEC:

The Higher Education Act and the Teacher Shortage

HECSE and TED have become increasingly alarmed about the shortage of teachers, particularly special education teachers, in recent years. One of the all too common responses to the shortage in states has been to lower the standards for entry into the profession. Given the results noted above for students with disabilities, we know that lowering the bar for teachers will not bring us the student outcomes needed in PK-12 for students with disabilities to move successfully into higher education and eventually into the workforce. Teachers need strong preparation in order to learn evidence-based strategies, such as how to provide multi-tiered systems of support, positive behavioral interventions and supports and universal design for learning. These are not skills that are learned on the fly. HECSE and TED want to draw a straight line between student outcomes and teacher preparation.

A recently released report concluded: “Evidence shows that underprepared, out-of-field, and substitute teachers typically depress student achievement and have higher attrition rates...Research has found that special education training significantly improves teachers’ capacity to effectively teach students with special needs.” (Learning Policy Institute, 2017)

We are compelled by the following facts:

- Special education is the field with the greatest teacher shortage with 48 states and DC reporting shortages.
- Those prepared through alternate pathways with less coursework and student teaching are 25% more likely to leave their schools and the profession than those who are well prepared.
- Teacher preparation program enrollment is down 35% in the last 5 years (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

The Higher Education Act plays a critical role in attracting and retaining teachers into the profession, particularly those in high need fields such as special education.

Many organizations concerned about the teaching profession converge on a similar set of recommendations in their letters. For example, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), HECSE, and TED all recommend:

- Continuing and strengthening loan forgiveness programs for teachers including the Stafford Loan Forgiveness for Teachers, Direct Loan Public Service Loan Forgiveness, and Loan Forgiveness in Areas of National Need (note: they would be eliminated in the House Republican reauthorization bill, the PROSPER Act)
- Strengthening and continuing TEACH grants for prospective teachers (note: they would be eliminated in the PROSPER Act)
- Strengthening and continuing the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants in Title II (note: they would be eliminated in the PROSPER Act)

The question as to whether we will actually see a reauthorization bill from the Committee remains. Time will tell.

3. New Resources for Educators

- The **Rand Corporation** has released a report finding that most teachers do not have a clear understanding of which reading instruction approaches are most aligned to their state standards. See: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2258.html
- **The Center for American Progress** has issued a brief *The State of Civic Education* finding that no state currently provides a “sufficient and comprehensive” civic education. See: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/02/21/446857/state-civics-education/>

- **AASA, The School Superintendents Association**, released a new survey, *Cutting Medicaid: A Prescription to Hurt the Neediest Kids 2018 Addendum*. 1000 school leaders detailed the educational and economic consequences of a potential 30% cut in Medicaid reimbursements, including:
 - Two-thirds of respondents indicated they use Medicaid funds to pay salaries of health care professionals who provide services for students. If a 30 percent cut were to occur, many districts would have to furlough or lay off school personnel who are paid for, in part or mainly through Medicaid reimbursements.
 - The loss of Medicaid funding could result in new local tax levies or requests for higher taxes to subsidize special education programs and health services for students in poverty.
 - Nearly half of respondents said they use Medicaid funds to expand health-related services for students. See: http://aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/Resources/CuttingMedicaid2018Addendum.pdf
- **The American Enterprise Institute** has issued *Saving the Liberal Arts Making the Bachelors Degree a Better Path to Labor Market Success*. The report is co-authored by Mark Schneider, President Trump's nominee to lead the Institute of Education Sciences. See: <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Saving-the-Liberal-Arts.pdf>
- **Bellwether Education Partners** is out with *It Takes a Community: Leveraging Community Colleges to Transform the Early Childhood Workforce*. The report examines the role of community colleges in preparing early childhood educators. See: <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/it-takes-community-leveraging-community-college-capacity-transform-early-childhood>

My daffodils are peeking up – about 3 inches and unstoppable at this point. Always a thrill, though tempered by the memory that this used to happen in mid-March!

I will be participating in AACTE's annual convening next week. Hope to see you there. Look for the next Washington Update on March 9.

See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane