

Washington Update March 30, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

Despite Congress being in recess this week and next, there has been a lot of education policy activity.

1. School Safety Developments: Trump Commission Meets/Sen. Alexander Says No Guns for Teachers/ Democrats Request Hearing/ New Data on School Crime

Trump School Safety Commission Holds First Meeting

With the goal of developing solutions to stop school violence, the Trump School Safety Commission met for the first time on Wednesday. Comprised of four Trump Cabinet members: Secretary of Education DeVos (chair), Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, the group held a closed-door session and reported discussing staffing, timeline, meetings with stakeholders, coordination with state and local partners and the scope of the Commission's work. Sec. DeVos posted a video on twitter (see below) reporting on the Commission's meeting. She noted they will be traveling around the country to meet with those with ideas and solutions to ensure student and teacher safety. In addition, the commission has set up an email to receive recommendations on how to improve school safety: safety@ed.gov

The Commission is slated to consider a number of issues – including the Obama-era guidelines on disproportionality in discipline which are intended to address racial disparities in discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion. Some Republicans have argued that those guidelines have resulted in making schools dangerous and encouraging violent students to be kept in school. Some have implied that the Parkland School shootings were in part a consequence of that guidance, however there is no evidence to support that claim. In a related development, the Wall Street Journal reported that the Department of Education would be holding a summit featuring advocates on “both sides” of the discipline guidance.

Senate HELP Committee Chair Lamar Alexander on Guns and Teacher

Sen. Alexander (R-TN) told the Chattanooga Times Free Press that he was not a fan of arming teachers and that that is up to the states. He noted “I think teachers have their hands full without carrying guns.” He added: “We don't arm pilots. ... We arm marshals who are trained professionals, who ride the airplanes from time to time. So we need resource officers or policemen in schools, that's one thing. I think teachers ought to teach and let policemen have the guns.” His position stands in contrast to President Trump who has promoted the arming of teachers and the “hardening” of schools.

Senate Democrats Request Hearing on School Shootings

Ten Democrats on the Senate HELP Committee have sent a letter to Chair Lamar Alexander requesting a hearing on mass shootings, including school shootings. "As Senators, it is our responsibility to address gun violence like the public health crisis that it is, investigate the causes of these deadly acts of violence and hatred, and make policy changes to ensure that they no longer happen," the letter says. Sec. DeVos has also requested hearings on school shootings. To date, no response from Sen. Alexander.

New Data on School Crime:

According to a new report issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2017*, only 3% of students age 12-18 report being a crime victim during the 2015-16 school year, down from 10% two decades ago. A few key findings:

- The percentage of public schools that had a plan in place for procedures to be performed in the event of a shooting increased over time, from 79 percent in 2003–04 to 92 percent in 2015–16 (Indicator 20).
- The percentage of public schools reporting the presence of security staff was higher during the 2015–16 school year than during the 2005–06 school year (57 vs. 42 percent). The percentage of schools reporting the presence of sworn law enforcement officers was also higher in 2015–16 than in 2005–06 (48 vs. 36 percent), as was the percentage of schools reporting the presence of a School Resource Officer (42 vs. 32 percent; Spotlight 1).
- During the 2015–16 school year, about 76 percent of public schools reported providing training for classroom teachers or aides on recognizing physical, social, and verbal bullying behaviors, 48 percent reported providing training on recognizing early warning signs of student violent behavior, and 30 percent reported providing training on recognizing signs of students using/abusing drugs and/or alcohol (Spotlight 2)

School Safety Commission: https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-convenes-organizational-meeting-federal-commission-school-safety?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

Trump School Safety Commission: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/28/politics/trump-school-safety-commission-betsy-devos/index.html>

Sec. DeVos video via twitter:

<https://twitter.com/BetsyDeVosED/status/979141311310843905>

Sen. Alexander on guns and teachers:

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/breakingnews/story/2018/mar/26/alexander-arming-teachers/466879/>

Ed session on “both sides” of school discipline guidance:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/lawmakers-focus-on-obama-era-discipline-policies-after-florida-school-shooting-1522069200>

Senate Democrats’ letter: <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/download/help-hearing-mass-shootings>

New data on school safety: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018036>

2. **Higher Education Developments: Reauthorization Fades and TEACH Grants Under Scrutiny**

Update on Higher Ed Reauthorization

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce endorsed its partisan version of the reauthorization of the higher education act – HR 4508, the PROSPER Act. The list of opponents grew this week as thirty five veteran groups submitted a letter with concerns about the bill’s roll back of protections for veterans and military service members. The letter says "The proposed legislation fails to protect service-affiliated students harmed by predatory and fraudulent practices most commonly employed by proprietary institutions," and that the legislation "would enable these institutions to use deceptive recruitment practices that emphasize enrollment numbers rather than positive student outcomes."

This letter adds one more nail in the coffin to the PROSPER Act which week after week has drawn more criticism. The likelihood of the bill finding floor time during this election year fades by the day. The Senate HELP Committee has indicated that it wants to put forward a Higher Education Act reauthorization bill, but to date no progress is evident. It appears more and more likely that reauthorization will spill into the 116th Congress which will begin in 2019.

TEACH Grants

On another note, the TEACH grants are back in the news with the issuance of a new report conducted by AIR for the Department of Education *Study of the TEACH Grant Program*. The report, a follow up to a 2015 GAO study on TEACH grants and loan forgiveness programs for teachers, reinforces repeated concerns about the conversion of grants to loans and management deficiencies with the program. TEACH grants provide up to \$4000 a year in scholarship funds for students pursuing becoming teachers in high need fields. In exchange for the scholarships, teachers are required to teach in high need schools and fields for four years out of the following 8 after they graduate. Those who do not complete the teaching requirement have their Grants converted to loans which they must pay back.

The report found that 63% of the grants were converted to loans, with thirty-nine percent teaching in a field that did not qualify. Nineteen percent said they were unaware of the requirement for annual certification that they were teaching in a high need field and high need school and thirty two percent said they did not understand the requirements of the program. Thirteen percent reported that they encountered challenges with the certification process.

In 2015, the GAO cited 2252 erroneous conversions from Grants to loans due to errors on the part of the loan servicer. The GAO report made the following five recommendations to the Department of Education on how to improve the program, including the following:

- Explore and implement ways to raise awareness about the TEACH Grant and the loan forgiveness programs.
- Take steps to determine why participants are not able to meet TEACH Grant service requirements and examine ways to address those challenges.
- Review the underlying cause of the known erroneous conversions to ensure steps Education has taken are sufficient to address the problem, and establish time frames for transferring the approximately 2,600 loan conversions currently with other loan servicers.
- Review the TEACH grant-to-loan conversion dispute process and disseminate to appropriate audiences clear, consistent information on it, including that recipients have an option to dispute, how to initiate a dispute, and the specific criteria considered in the adjudicating process.
- Establish program performance measures for the TEACH Grant and the loan forgiveness programs to assess against established goals and to inform program administration.

It is unclear what, if any, steps the Department has taken to implement these recommendations in the three years since the 2015 report. NPR reported on several teachers who felt blindsided when their grants were converted to loans.

Letter from Veterans' groups:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/21/veterans-organizations-oppose-republican-higher-education-bill>

NPR report on TEACH: <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/03/28/596162853/dept-of-education-fail-teachers-lose-grants-forced-to-repay-thousands-in-loans>

2018 TEACH report: <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/teach-grant/final-report.pdf>

2015 GAO report on TEACH: <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-314>

3. New Director for the Institute of Education Sciences

Before adjourning for recess, the Senate confirmed Mark Schneider to be the new director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Schneider will serve a six year term and fills a vacancy in the post of nearly four years. Schneider was the Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics from 2005 to 2008. He currently serves as Vice President of the American Institutes for Research and College Measures and Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2018/03/mark_schneider_confirmed_as_nations_education_research_director.html?cmp=soc-edit-tw&print=1

4. Forty Two Senators Send Letter Opposing HR 620 – a House- Passed Bill that Weakens the ADA

Before recessing, the House of Representatives passed HR 620, a bill that would weaken the protections afforded to people with disabilities by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This week 42 Senators, led by Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), sent a letter to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell vowing to defeat the bill if it were to be brought up on the Senate floor. “We are writing to express our strong opposition to the ADA Education and Reform Act and any legislation that would repeal or weaken rights under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability in certain places of public accommodations,” they wrote. With 42 signatories committed to opposing raising the bill on the floor, it would be very difficult for the bill to move on to the agenda, as a vote of 60 is needed to proceed to consideration of most bills. This is a remarkable pre-emptory move by so many Senators. Hundreds of disability, civil rights and related organizations oppose HR 620. The strong advocacy of the disability community was in full force urging Senators to sign on to the letter. Clear evidence of the power of advocacy!

<https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/18.03.28%20-%20Joint%20Letter%20to%20Majority%20Leader%20Opposing%20H.R.%20620.pdf>

5. Facebook Live Event on April 5: Fulfilling the Promise of IDEA in the 21st Century

The American Institutes for Research will host a forum on IDEA focusing on connecting research, policy and practice to improve outcomes for students with disabilities from 12-4 EST in Washington DC. The agenda is as follows:

12:00– **Lunch and Welcoming Remarks**
12:30 David Myers, President and Chief Executive Officer, AIR
p.m. Allison Gruner Gandhi, Director of Special Education Practice Area, AIR

12:30– **Opening Presentations**
2:00 p.m. *Free Appropriate Public Education From Rowley to Endrew*
Mitchell Yell, Fred and Francis Palmetto Chair in Teacher Education and Special Education, College of Education, University of South Carolina

The Challenge: Intervention, Individualization, and Identification
Douglas Fuchs, Professor of Special Education and Nicholas Hobbs Endowed Chair, Vanderbilt University, and AIR Visiting Fellow
Lynn Fuchs, Professor of Special Education and Dunn Family Endowed Chair, Vanderbilt University, and AIR Visiting Fellow

Audience Questions and Answers

2:00– **Facilitated Small-Group Discussions**
3:00 p.m. Participants will identify policy and system barriers, gaps in practitioner knowledge, and potential solutions.

Group 1: Intervention and Individualization. Facilitator: Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds, AIR

Group 2: Identification. Facilitator: Stephanie Jackson, AIR

3:00– **Town Hall: A Call to Action to Fulfill IDEA's Promise**
4:00 p.m. Participants will come together to share suggested solutions and identify action steps to move forward. The discussion will be facilitated by Douglas Fuchs and Louis Danielson, Managing Director, AIR.

AIR will be broadcasting the first two hours of this event on [Facebook Live](#) starting at 12 p.m. Eastern on Thursday, April 5. Follow [AIR on Facebook](#) to take part in this event.

6. New Resources for Educators

- **The American Education Research Association (AERA) presented a forum in the Senate this week “ *In an Age of Inequality, Does Public Schooling Make a Difference?*”**

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw07ALbb5xs&feature=youtu.be>

- **The National Council on Learning Disabilities has launched *Agents of Their Own Success: Self-Advocacy Skills and Self-Determination for Students with Disabilities in the Era of Personalized Learning***. The report highlights steps stakeholders in our education system can take to ensure that all students are equipped with self-advocacy skills and self-determination—elements critical to the success of personalized learning.

See: <https://www.nclld.org/archives/reports-and-studies/self-advocacy-skills-and-self-determination-for-students-with-disabilities-in-the-era-of-personalized-learning/>

- **The National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools** released an online tool which breaks down disparities across states in the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in traditional public schools vs. charter schools.

See: <http://www.ncsecs.org/crdc-stats>

- **State Higher Education Executive Officers Association has issued *State Higher Education Finance Fiscal Year 2017*** reporting that over half of states relied more on tuition dollars than government allocations to fund their public systems of higher education – for the first time ever.

<http://www.sheeo.org/projects/shef-fy17>

- **New America has issued *Guiding Principals State Efforts to Bolster Instructional Leadership*** is out with an analysis of principal evaluation and support systems across the country, examining whether states are incorporating instructional leadership in their evaluation systems.

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/guiding-principals/>

- **The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching is out with *Unleashing Teacher Leadership*** on how teacher leadership roles can improve instruction and student success.
<http://teachfactor.niet.org/resources/>

- **The Center for American Progress issued *7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018***. They are:

1. Provide a tutor for every child performing below grade level

2. Offer free breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of income
3. Ensure opportunities to combine college preparatory academics with technical training and workplace experience
4. Transition to a 9-5 school day to better fit parents' needs
5. Support, train, and pay teachers like professionals
6. Create a safe and healthy environment in every school
7. Eliminate crumbling school buildings

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/03/28/448156/7-great-education-policy-ideas-progressives-2018/>

Wishing you all a Happy Easter and a Happy Passover. I think we can safely say now that spring is here! Hooray!

Best,

Jane