

Washington Update September 16, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

TGIF! I hope you have had a great week. The House left town Thursday after passing its mega spending bill. The Senate will be in next week, but just for three days. All eyes look ahead to what's next: enactment of DACA, the wall, tax reform, new "deals" between President Trump and his best friends, Chuck and Nancy? It's an unfolding mystery with a lot at stake and we are staying tuned!

1. House Passes Mega Spending Bill with Big Cuts to Education

Just before heading for the planes, trains and automobiles, House Members passed a \$1.2 trillion spending bill, which will undoubtedly be rejected by the Senate. The bill passed with a 211-198 vote—not an overwhelming victory for sure. But the House now has full bragging rights about completing action on all 12 of the required appropriations bills before the Sept. 30 deadline when the government's fiscal year ends – an accomplishment that is hard to come by and hasn't actually happened in many years. Over 460 amendments were debated on the floor.

For education, the bill includes a \$2.4 billion cut for education from last year's level. The House adopted an amendment by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) to increase spending for after-school programs by \$100 million. The funds would be taken from the administration budget for the Department of Education. The House rejected an amendment by Rep. Jason Lewis (R-MN) to increase funding for Career and Technical Education and one offered by Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI) to reduce funding for three administrative offices at the Department. An amendment offered by Joe Courtney (D-CT) to increase funding for charter schools was rejected. To the relief of education advocates, an amendment which had been filed by Rep. F. Rooney (R-FL) to cut funding for IES by one third was withdrawn.

The Senate Labor/HHS education appropriations bill is more generous than the House bill. It funds education with a \$29 million increase over FY 2017 spending, not including the rescission from the Pell grant surplus. So this leaves an approximate \$2.5 billion gap between the two bills for education funding—a gap that is more like a chasm that will be challenging to straddle. One area where the bills are in agreement is in rejecting the Trump Administrations proposals for expanding school choice. Neither bill includes those recommendations.

As you will recall, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution that carried all government spending, including education, through December 8 at last year's level. So negotiations are likely to begin shortly to determine a funding bill which would take effect when the Dec. 8 provision expires.

<https://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=394995>

<https://cef.org/charts-and-resources/charts/>

2. Cuts to Student Financial Aid and School Choice Expansion May Ride the Reconciliation Train

On September 30 the FY 2017 budget resolution will expire. The House is poised to pass its FY 2018 budget resolution as early as the end of this month. The Senate will likely markup its proposal this fall in Committee and seek to resolve it with the House quickly so that a final Budget Resolution will be in place.

The Congress needs a new Budget resolution for FY 2018 in order to use the reconciliation procedure to pass controversial measures with only a 51 vote majority in the Senate. Without the protection of the budget reconciliation process, the Senate must have 60 votes to pass a measure, thus requiring bipartisan support.

Discussions indicate that the big ticket item which the Congress will try to move under this new Reconciliation bill will be tax reform. However, many education advocates believe it could also be a vehicle for consolidating and/or eliminating some student financial aid programs as well as the Trump Administration's school choice proposals. Of particular concern to educators are the public service loan forgiveness programs which some have targeted for elimination. Some of these programs offer significant incentives to public school teachers, particularly those in high need fields such as special education and STEM, as their loans are forgiven over a period of time in which they are serving as teachers. Many are skeptical that reconciliation would also take up school choice proposals, as there is little appetite for them on Capitol Hill and many choice advocates do not want to see the federal government more involved with school choice. However, the Administration remains committed to pursuing them.

3. Secretary DeVos On a Back-to-School Field Trip

Like her predecessors, Secretary Betsy DeVos headed out for a back-to-school bus tour this week. Dubbed "Rethink School", the tour covers 6 states (Wyoming and head to Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Indiana) and features "creative ways in which education leaders are meeting the needs of students in K-12 and higher education." Her visits to 13 schools spanned traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools home schools, 4 year colleges and community colleges. DeVos has been met with some protestors along the way.

One particularly interesting stop was at Firefly Autism House in Denver – the private school where a student (named Endrew) who was the center of a recent Supreme Court

decision attends. The Court found that school districts must meet more than a “de minimus” standard when providing an education to students with disabilities. Endrew’s parents removed him from public school and placed him at Firefly believing his needs were not being met in the public system. The parents were seeking tuition reimbursement from the school district. On the tour DeVos noted that the notion of minimum progress for students with disabilities was “preposterous” and that parents should not have to sue their way to the Supreme Court.

There has been some talk that the Department might issue guidance on the Endrew decision, but none has been forthcoming to date. Given the work underway at the Department to shrink guidance, policy letters and regulations, that seems unlikely. However, the Department has set up an email address for parents to seek answers to questions about the Endrew decision from the at andrewf@ed.gov

<https://www.ed.gov/news/media-advisories/secretary-betsy-devos-announces-rethink-school-tour>

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/09/13/minimum-progress-for-students-with-disabilities-preposterous-betsy-devos-says-in-denver/>

4. Two Divergent New Reports Out on Teacher Prep

The Council of Chief State School Officers is out with *Transforming Educator Preparation: Lessons Learned from Leading States*. The product comes from the work of the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation, a multi-year collaborative of states and national education organizations dedicated to ensuring that teachers are “learner ready” from their first day in the classroom. The report includes tips for success in achieving results and highlights multiple examples of states which are innovating in areas such as licensure, preparation program standards and approval and using data to measure success and continued improvement. An audit tool for states to use is included.

The second report, *New Colleges of Education – A Path for Going from Concept to Reality*, offered by Education Reform Now, offers quite a different perspective. Co-authored by Michael Dannenberg, the Department of Education staffer who is generally credited with drafting the now-repealed teacher preparation regulations, the report asserts that teacher preparation is generally broken and the path to progress is through a new accrediting entity – one which eliminates the “fox guarding the henhouse” structure currently in place at CAEP, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation.

The report offers three policy options: create a new accrediting entity for teacher prep; work with an existing accreditor to create a separate commission for teacher prep; or

takeover an existing accrediting entity. The new entity would be comprised of employers of graduates of teacher prep programs, including state and local superintendents and charter school leaders. The new accreditor would focus on learning gains of K-12 students taught by program graduates and assessments of employers as to whether the graduates of programs were adequately prepared. Furthermore, the report recommends that the Secretary of Education utilize existing authority to enable a teacher prep program that is not a part of an institution of higher education to gain access to federal student financial aid so long as outcomes are validated by an entity authorized to do so by the Secretary. The report concludes that “the cartel of teacher preparation program providers needs to be broken up.”

http://www.ccsso.org/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/CCSSO_Releases_Playbook_for_Transforming_Educator_Preparation.html

<https://edreformnow.org/teacher-education-reform-now/>

5. New OECD Report Shows Low Earnings for Teachers

This week the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development issued *Education at a Glance 2017*, new data from 34 countries comparing education on multiple variables. A few key findings include:

- Only 66% of 4 year olds were enrolled in preschool in the US in 2015, compared to the OECD average of 87%
- In 2016, 45% of US adults ages 25-64 held a post-secondary degree, compared to the OECD average of 36%
- U.S. teachers earn less than 60% of salaries of other workers with a similar education, landing the U.S. at the bottom compared with teacher earnings of other OECD countries.

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>

6. CAP Report on Teacher Diversity and Tough Certification Standards: At Odds?

The Center for American Progress issued a report this week considering whether the two goals of increasing the diversity in America’s workforce and raising standards for entry into the teaching profession are compatible. The report proposes prioritizing both goals and pursuing solutions such as increased cultural competency among today’s educators thus inspiring a more diverse set of future educators. The report considers the possibility of making candidate diversity and ability equally important in the recruitment and selection of teachers. Exemplars are reviewed.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/>

7. Consensus Statement on Social/Emotional Learning Released

This week a group of 28 experts on social and emotional learning issued a set of consensus statements affirming the interconnectedness of social, emotional and academic development. “The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic Development” was unanimously issued by the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development at the Aspen Institute. The report recommends a greater use of social/emotional learning in classrooms and training for educators. The report draws from brain science, medicine, economics, psychology and education research and considers how social/emotional competencies can be taught throughout life. Authors believe the dialogue now should not be about *whether* schools should highlight social/emotional learning, but rather *how* they should do it.

https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/09/SEAD-Research-Brief-9.12_updated-web.pdf

Here’s wishing you a fun-filled weekend that brings you back refreshed and ready to roll on Monday!

Don’t forget to visit me on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane