

Washington Update, April 2, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

While Congress was out of session this week, President Biden had no problem filling the policy void. It really is hard to believe that he has been in office just over two months. His team is working nonstop, and on BIG initiatives. With the ink barely dry on the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, he has put forward his next proposal – at \$2.5 trillion.

1. President Biden Unveils Massive Infrastructure Bill with Billions for Education

On Wednesday, President Biden took his first steps towards a [months-long sprint](#) to pass a \$2.5 trillion infrastructure and jobs bill. The robust plan includes an emphasis on rebuilding America's schools, broadband access, and increasing access to Community Colleges. Biden is [proposing](#) \$100 billion to help repair crumbling classrooms and build new public school buildings. The plan includes \$50 billion in direct grants for school construction and an additional \$50 billion through bonds. The allocation is slightly less than what House Democrats have proposed in their school construction legislation. The bill, H.R. 604 (117), introduced by House Education and Labor Chair Bobby Scott (D-VA) calls for \$100 billion in direct grants and another \$30 billion in interest subsidies on bonds that states or school districts issue to pay for school construction. The President's plan also has provisions aimed at allowing schools to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental policies, including helping school kitchens "go green by reducing or eliminating the use of paper plates and other disposable materials," according to a [White House fact sheet](#).

Additionally, the package pitches \$12 billion in new funding for states to upgrade the physical and technological infrastructure of their community colleges. Part of that funding will involve "identifying strategies to address access to community college in education deserts," the White House said. Additionally, the plan asks Congress to allocate \$48 billion for workforce training and worker protection programs. The new funding would double the number of new registered apprenticeships and support career pathways programs in middle and high schools. The White House said the proposal also includes "focused investments" in STEM programs for students at historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions. Of \$40 billion targeted to [improving research infrastructure](#) and labs, half would be directed to HBCUs and other MSIs. An additional \$50 million is provided for the National Science Foundation.

Other [education related items](#) include \$45 billion to upgrade the nation's drinking water infrastructure and \$100 billion to expand broadband, with a focus on addressing inequities highlighted by the pandemic.

The road from Wednesday's announcement to bill passage will be a bumpy one. Republicans are already balking, dismissing Biden's efforts to gain bipartisan support as disingenuous, and preparing a messaging campaign against the package that will almost

certainly force Democrats to go it alone while they simultaneously juggle competing wish lists from their members across the ideological spectrum. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) said the proposal is “not nearly enough.” and she’s not alone; Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) proposed a \$10 trillion [climate plan](#) this week.

Earlier this year, Democrats used a fiscal 2021 budget resolution to unlock the [reconciliation](#) process for the American Rescue Plan Act. The resolution allowed Democrats to pass the measure with a simple 51-vote majority in the Senate. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) is now asking the Senate parliamentarian if he can revise that budget resolution so that he can use the reconciliation process again to pass the infrastructure bill with a simple majority. It is unclear how the Senate parliamentarian will rule on Schumer’s request.

President Biden [hopes](#) to see Congress enact the proposal by mid-summer.

2. GAO Examines The Education Department’s Tracking of Federal COVID Relief Money

The Education Department’s tracking of federal COVID relief money for K-12 education paints an “incomplete” picture of how states and schools are actually using the money, the [Government Accountability Office said in a new report on Wednesday](#). The GAO found the department’s current approach to tracking the billions of dollars in relief funding captures only when states request reimbursements for funding but not when school districts legally commit to spend it. This process “can result in a significant gap between when a state reports it has spent the funds and the actual rate at which the funds are being obligated, or ‘used,’” the GAO said. As of Feb. 28, the GAO said the Education Department reported states and schools as having spent about \$6.1 billion of the \$16.7 billion for K-12 schools in the CARES Act, which then-President Donald Trump signed in March 2020.

This data reflects only the money that states requested from the federal government on behalf of school districts. It does not include the COVID relief money that school districts have actually spent by signing contracts, placing orders, or paying for equipment.

“Absent information on the degree to which school districts have obligated their COVID-19 relief funding, policymakers will not have an accurate, complete picture of the status of school district spending,” the GAO said. “Further, given the gap that often exists between when funds are obligated and when they are disbursed, absent information on obligations, policymakers will not have complete information on how these funds are being used to address the pandemic-related education needs of America’s schoolchildren.”

3. Professional Development Opportunities

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) is hosting a panel discussion to examine how principal supervisors can strengthen principals' abilities to lead instruction and develop leaders within their school teams. Using findings from NIET's upcoming report, *The Untapped Potential of the Principal Supervisor: How Support for School Leaders Should Change*, which will be released at the event, the discussion will highlight strategies principal supervisors can use to maximize their effectiveness – and in turn, maximize the effectiveness of principals. The panel will be co-hosted by NIET CEO Dr. Candice McQueen and ASCD's *Educational Leadership* Editor Anthony Rebor. ***The panel discussion will take place on Tuesday, April 13 at 11:00AM EST. Register here: [The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching \(NIET\)](#)***

[The Institution of Education Sciences in partnership with the Educator Pipeline Research Alliance](#) invites you to join a webinar exploring how a new tool that predicts patterns of teacher shortages is being used to address the teacher supply chain in Missouri. Presenters Paul Katnik of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Joshua Stewart of REL Central will describe the development and use of the Missouri Teacher Predictor Model and share how the model might be adapted for other states. ***The webinar will take place on Thursday, April 15 from 3:30-4:30PM EST. Register here: [The Institution of Education Sciences in partnership with the Educator Pipeline Research Alliance](#)***

4. New Resources

- [The National Institute for Early Education Research](#) is out with a new proposal to expand preschool access to an additional 5 million 3- and 4-year olds in the coming decades.
- [The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the United States Secret Service](#) issued a report examining school violence. The report shows that students were most often motivated to plan an attack on their schools because of conflicts with classmates, according to a new assessment of 67 averted school attack plots between 2006 and 2018 from the U.S. Secret Service.
- [Education Reform Now](#) is out with a new report detailing its four recommendations for how states can use federal relief funds to address pandemic-related learning loss.

Washington Update will be taking the next two weeks off. I'll be headed to the Outer Banks – leaving my abode for the first time since August. Fully vaccinated, I am beginning to inch out to test the waters. We will return April 23, no doubt with much to report from Washington.

Until then, take good care --

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