

Washington Update, July 30, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

It's hard to believe that August is upon us. What in the world happened to July? Despite the many swirling controversies, Congress is working hard to leave town with some accomplishments in place.

1. Momentum in Congress Pushes Funding and Infrastructure Bills Forward

This week, Members of the House of Representatives completed debate on a 7-bill appropriations package, which includes the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. As you will recall, the bill includes a 41% increase for the Department of Education, bringing the total to \$102.8 billion.

Nearly 200 amendments were filed to the FY2022 Labor-HHS Education bill with 15 education amendments taken up for debate. Three of the amendments added relatively small amounts of funding to programs, but these increases were offset by equal or larger cuts to Departmental Management. The result of the combined amendments cuts the total Department of Education funding by less \$89,000. The funding changes include:

- increase of \$2 million for School-Based Mental Health Services Grants
- increase of \$1 million for Statewide Family Engagement Centers
- increase of \$1.4 million for the Office of Civil Rights
- cut of \$4.5 million for Departmental Management

The Senate plans to begin marking up their first three FY 2022 spending bills next week. This kicks off the appropriations process in the upper chamber just in time before the August recess. The bills to be considered include Agriculture-FDA, Energy-Water, and Military- Construction-VA. The education spending bill will not be considered until September, or possibly even October.

On Wednesday, the Senate voted to [move forward](#) on the \$550 billion bipartisan infrastructure package, with 17 Republicans joining all 50 Senate Democrats voting in support of the measure. [In a statement](#), the White House noted, "Today, the President and the bipartisan group announced agreement on the details of a once-in-a-generation investment in our infrastructure, which will be taken up in the Senate for consideration. In total, the deal includes \$550 billion in new federal investment in America's infrastructure. The bipartisan infrastructure deal will grow the economy, enhance our competitiveness, create good- jobs, and make our economy more sustainable, resilient, and just."

The package is primarily focused on what some are calling "traditional" infrastructure. The next infrastructure bill, packaged as a reconciliation proposal, will focus on "human"

infrastructure, including education. However, there are a few education-related items included in this bipartisan package:

- \$2.5 billion investment for zero emission school busses
- \$2.5 billion for low emission school busses
- \$55 billion to repair lead water lines in homes, schools, and childcare centers
- \$65 billion to ensure every American has access to reliable high-speed internet

While Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) remains optimistic that the package will pass before the August recess, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) has emphasized that she will ultimately not take up a bipartisan infrastructure package without it being accompanied by a budget resolution. In order for this to happen all Senate Democrats must be on board. Late this week, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) said she does not support the \$3.5 trillion price tag of the potential reconciliation bill. This left many Democrats in the lower chamber [frustrated](#) with the potential hang up. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) tweeted:

“Good luck tanking your own party’s investment on childcare, climate action, and infrastructure while presuming you’ll survive a 3 vote House margin - especially after choosing to exclude members of color from negotiations and calling that a “bipartisan accomplishment.”

Sinema said that while she supports beginning the reconciliation process, she does not "support a bill that costs \$3.5 trillion," per The Arizona Republic. Her reservations combined with those of Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) are cause for concern among Democrats who are hoping to get a budget resolution passed as soon as next week. Passage of the resolution paves the way for the reconciliation bill to be developed.

Stay tuned as more details continue to unfold. The House adjourned today for the August recess, while the Senate will continue to work through next week. There is no question but that Congressional work will continue during the Congressional recess -- both behind the scenes and through Committee activities.

2. CDC Reverses Guidance on Masking Indoors for Teachers and Students with Ripples on Capitol Hill

This week, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released [updated guidance](#) on masking. The new recommendations detail that everyone in grade schools wear masks indoors, “including teachers, staff, students and visitors, regardless of vaccination status.” “In areas with substantial and high transmission, CDC recommends fully vaccinated people wear masks in public, indoor settings to help prevent the spread of the delta variant and protect others. This includes schools,” CDC Director Walensky said. New data show the variant behaves “uniquely differently from past strains of the virus,” indicating that some vaccinated people infected with the delta variant “may be contagious and spread the virus to others.”

The revised guidance comes as the American Academy of Pediatrics released [guidance](#) for schools just last week, recommending that all students over 2 years old, along with staff, wear masks, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Despite these recommendations, the guidance is only a recommendation, leaving it up to states and local officials whether to reintroduce their mask rules for certain people. But many schools won't be able to require masks for the coming school year due to recently approved legislation and mandates. [South Carolina](#) and [Texas](#), for example, have prohibited districts from mandating masks for students or staff.

With the increasing concern over the spread of the delta variant coupled with states and the CDC at odds on guidance, the fall could lead to even more problems and controversy surrounding masking and other mitigation strategies for schools. But it doesn't stop there.

Republicans and Democrats on Wednesday [battled](#) over the House of Representatives' new mask mandate, with more than a dozen Republicans voting twice without masks, despite the new requirement. In response, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) called House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) "such a moron" when asked about his criticism of the new mask mandate in the House. McCarthy fired back "The same bureaucratic 'public health experts' who completely upended our society by pushing lockdowns and yearlong school closures now want to force Americans to return to pre-vaccine control measures. By forcing vaccinated Americans to return to masks, the Biden administration is not only casting doubt on a safe and effective vaccine but contradicting why vaccines exist. Make no mistake — the threat of bringing masks back is not a decision based on science, but a decision conjured up by liberal government officials who want to continue to live in a perpetual pandemic state." It appears we may be on track for even more controversy surrounding pandemic mitigation efforts--everywhere from Capitol Hill to kindergarten classrooms. It is another reminder that politics plays out at the local, state and national levels.

3. New Resources for Educators

- [The White House](#) released a fact sheet outlining how the Biden-Harris Administration is advancing educational equity, highlighting efforts via the American Rescue Plan and the President's Build Back Better agenda.
- [NWEA](#) this week released data on students in grades three through eight and compares their progress this year to similar students from before the pandemic. The data suggest that the average student fell behind where they would normally be. Students of color, students with disabilities, and students attending high-poverty schools saw the greatest drops.
- [Diverse](#) reports on a new Ed Trust analysis recommending recruiting Out of School Time Workers into teacher education programs in order to diversify the teacher workforce.
- [The Learning Policy Institute and AASA](#), The School Superintendents Association, released a blog following a series of 5 webinars in the Spring of 2021 that highlights best

practices for accelerating learning that were elevated by district and state leaders during the series.

Have a great weekend,

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