



Straight A's:

A Citizen's Update on Education

Special Edition: December 21, 2001



CONGRESS PASSES LANDMARK EDUCATION BILL

Over the last two weeks, Congress passed landmark education legislation that includes historic increases for Title I, changes to improve teacher quality and recruitment, and new initiatives designed to improve school accountability. The conference report on H.R. 1 also requires annual state testing in grades three through eight, gives states greater flexibility to transfer federal dollars among programs, and uses a new formula to better target federal funds to economically disadvantaged students.

The conference report represents a compromise between differing House and Senate versions of H.R. 1, the "No Child Left Behind Act." The report passed the House by a vote of 381 to 41 and the Senate by a vote of 87 to 10. It now goes to the White House where the President will sign it.

In his introductory remarks on the House floor, **House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH)** made the following remarks about the bill:

"The legislation before us today lays the foundation for the most significant Federal education reforms in a generation. It will mean immediate new hope for students in failing schools and new choices for parents who want the best education possible for their children. It will mean new freedom for teachers and school districts to meet higher expectations and give our children the chance to learn and to succeed."

The conference report authorizes most federal elementary and secondary education programs through 2007, including Title I, Teacher Training, Safe-School Programs, Afterschool Development, and Smaller Learning Communities. Funding for these programs for fiscal year 2002 will be determined when the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill is passed later this month.

Title I Authorization Hits Record Levels, Targets Funds to Disadvantaged Communities

Title I, the largest program in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizes federal aid to state and local educational agencies to help economically and educationally disadvantaged students achieve to the same high State academic standards as all other students.

The conference report sets funding levels, or goals, for the next six years. It authorizes approximately \$13.5 billion for Title I in fiscal year 2002, compared to between \$10.2 and \$10.5 billion that will actually be appropriated this year. Out year authorizations for Title I are as follows: \$16 billion in 2003, \$18.5 billion in 2004, \$20.5 billion in 2005, \$22.75 billion in 2006, and \$25 billion in 2007. The next real challenge for Congress will be to meet these goals in the annual appropriations process to ensure that Title I is fully funded for all children by 2007.

The conference report also includes unprecedented targeting of Title I funds to the neediest school districts. In remarks on the House floor, **Rep. George Miller (D-CA)** stresses that each child should have an equal opportunity to learn:

“We believe that an impoverished child does not mean a child that cannot learn. We believe that because an individual is a minority does not mean they cannot learn. And the evidence is overwhelming that we are right. What we did with this legislation was redirect those resources to dramatically enhance the opportunities for success by America’s children. The opportunity for success. We cannot guaranty the success, but we can provide the opportunity.”

Teachers, As Well as Students, Must Meet Higher Standards

Teacher training and recruitment play a vital role in closing the achievement gap and leaving no child behind. All across the country, school districts are facing a shortage of quality teachers. To this end, the report authorizes \$3.2 billion, an increase of \$1 billion, over previous funding, to fund grants for teacher and principal training and recruiting in fiscal year 2002.

The conference report requires states to have a highly qualified teacher in every public classroom within five years. The report gives great latitude to state and local authorities to develop their own plan for training and recruiting highly qualified teachers and principals. Funds under this program can be used for effectively recruiting and training teachers and principals and other activities including:

- Signing bonuses, scholarships, and other financial incentives
- Tenure reform, merit pay, and teacher testing
- Teacher mentoring and supporting novice teachers and principals
- Training to integrate technology into curricula
- Professional development on how to teach children with different learning styles, special needs, or in improving student behavior in the classroom
- Programs and activities related to exemplary teachers

A former teacher himself, **Rep. Bill Thomas (R-CA)** commented on the current problem facing our nation’s teachers during floor debate on the conference report:

“Our teachers face an enormous task every day to provide our young people with the tools needed to succeed in the 21st Century world. Teachers make sacrifices often at the expense of their own time, and in some cases, their own funds ... This legislation will give teachers the resources they need and will financially reward them for their excellence when their students make significant achievement gains ... Finally, the Act will make it easier for school districts to recruit and train qualified teachers, and encourages school districts to hire secondary teachers who have advanced education in the subject they will teach.”

Conference Report Includes a Key Provision From President Bush's Presidential Campaign—Testing All Students

The inclusion of annual student testing in the conference report represents President Bush's campaign promise to increase accountability among our nation's schools and students. Under the conference report, all students in grades three through eight will be tested annually in math and reading. Test scores will then be used to inform parents, as well as state and local officials, on how well students are performing in individual schools.

Under the agreement, states would be allowed to design their own tests, but a small sample of students would take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test. The NAEP test would be used as an "independent benchmark" to determine the validity of the state-designed tests. Any federal sanctions or rewards are based solely on state-designed tests. **Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI)** underscored the importance of student testing in her statement on the House floor:

"We will have a chance to look at all the school districts in the country and measure them against national standards. Parents all across this country will finally have an opportunity to know whether their schools are performing to the best interests of their children."

In addition to test scores, the conference report includes a number of other provisions designed to make a school accountable for the performance of its students. For example, states, school districts and individual schools must issue report cards to parents and the public detailing student performance and teacher qualifications. Under the legislation, parents could transfer their child to a new public school or pursue several other avenues if their child attends a low-performing or failing school.



INSIDER'S VIEW INTO HISTORIC EDUCATION BILL

A recent Washington Post article offers a unique insider's view on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and provides a "partial account of how [landmark education legislation] managed to survive intensive lobbying pressures and deep suspicions harbored by many in both parties, as well as a political upheaval in the Senate and the outbreak of a war on terrorism."

Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A52337-2001Dec16.html>



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