Federal Education News Roundup

U.S. Department of Education Releases Blueprint to Reauthorize Career and Technical Education Programs

The U.S. Department of Education released its blueprint to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, which funds various career and technical education (CTE) programs. The law is due to be reauthorized in 2013. The blueprint offered four core principles for improving the law and its programs: effective alignment between CTE programs and the labor market; strong collaboration among secondary/postsecondary institutions, businesses, and industry partners to improve the quality of CTE programs; meaningful accountability for improving academic outcomes and building 21st century skills; and increased emphasis on innovation supported by systemic reform of state policies and practices. A summary of the blueprint can be found at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/transforming-career-technical-education-summary.pdf. Source: U.S. Department of Education press release (4/20/12)

GAO Report Finds Districts Face Difficulties Meeting School Improvement Grant (SIG) Requirements

A new Government Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded that states and local school districts faced challenges sustaining reform efforts due to lack of capacity and lack of extensive planning and coordination among various stakeholders. The study, School Improvement Grants: Education Should Take Additional Steps to Enhance Accountability for Schools and Contractors, GAO-12-373, also discovered that several states had little evidence about school performance under the SIG program when making decisions to renew grants at the local level. Additionally, school districts used most of their funding to secure contractors for various services, and contractor evaluations were inconsistent and not timed with grant renewal discussions. The report recommends the U.S. Department of Education provide additional support to states in making evidenced-based grant renewal decisions, as well as ensuring contractors’ performance at the local level are reviewed. The study is available at www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-373. Source: Government Accounting Office (4/11/12)

Secretary Duncan Testifies Before House Education Policy Committee on President’s FY2013 Budget Proposal

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan testified on March 28 before the House Education and Workforce Committee to explain and defend President Obama’s FY2013 nearly $70 billion education budget proposal. The proposal consolidates 38 education programs into 11 silos of programs that integrate technology and rural education as priorities throughout. The proposal, which would provide $69.8 billion in discretionary spending for the U.S. Department of Education (a $1.7 billion increase), also addresses elevating the teaching profession and increased higher education costs. To access the archived webcast and for further information about the hearing, go to http://1.usa.gov/Hmjrry.

NASBE Legislative Conference Attendees Urges Congress to Pass ESEA Reauthorization

NASBE members came together at the association’s annual legislative conference March 22-23 and urged Congress to pass comprehensive Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization legislation. The current iteration of ESEA, known commonly as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has been
awaiting reform and reauthorization since 2007. Meanwhile, the law continues to punish states, school districts, and individual schools for not meeting adequate yearly progress even when there is continued student academic growth and school improvement. In addition to discussing ESEA and state-specific education issues with their Congressional delegations, NASBE members heard from U.S. Department of Education officials on ESEA waivers and President Obama’s FY2013 education budget proposal. Attendees engaged with leaders from other national education organizations concerning ESEA waivers, their education priorities, and how state boards of education play an integral role in education policy and implementation.

Report Finds Minority Students Continue to Face Educational Inequities

A report by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights found minority students are more likely to face harsher disciplinary measures and be taught by less experienced teachers than other students. The data was culled from a survey of more than 72,000 schools serving 85 percent of the nation’s students in 2009-10. The Office reported that African American males are disproportionately suspended and expelled as a student group, significantly fewer schools with a high-minority enrollment offer calculus than schools with low-minority enrollments, and teachers in high-minority schools are paid more than $2,000 less than peers in low-minority schools. More survey data can be found at http://ocrdata.ed.gov/. Source: U.S. Department of Education Press Release (3/6/12)

26 States and DC Apply for Second Round of Waivers

Twenty-six states and DC applied for the second round of waivers to release themselves from portions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act, in return for making certain reforms. The reforms include implementing college-and-career-readiness standards, differentiated accountability systems, and evaluation systems that support teachers. State applicants would be released from annual yearly progress requirements and receive more program and spending flexibility under current law. The Education Department will announce approvals for the second round sometime during the spring. The Department set September 6 as the deadline for applying for the third round of waivers. States also have the option of applying for a one-year waiver to freeze student achievement targets at current rates. Further information can be found on the Department’s website at www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/26-more-states-and-dc-seek-flexibility-nclb-drive-education-reforms-second-round. The 26 states include Arkansas, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin, plus the District of Columbia. Source: U.S. Department of Education press release (3/1/12)