House Republican Education Leadership Completes Package of ESEA Reauthorization Bills

The House Republican education leadership, led by House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline from Minnesota, released a final set of bills for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The bills, the Student Success Act and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act, are expected to receive consideration in the Committee and possibly receive full House floor time. This is compared to the Senate comprehensive bi-partisan ESEA reauthorization bill passed by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, Pensions (HELP) Committee late last year.

Student Success Act

The bill, as introduced, reforms current law by doing the following:

- Returns responsibility for student achievement and school improvement to the states, local school districts, and parents, while maintaining high accountability;

- Provides states and local school districts greater flexibility to address their students’ needs; and

- Strengthens programs for targeting specific populations.

In particular, the bill requires states to develop and implement college-and-career-readiness standards that would apply to all students in at least reading and mathematics. States would be able to develop and implement more rigorous standards in other subjects at their discretion. Further, states could develop alternative standards for their severely disabled student populations.

States would need to develop and implement assessments aligned to their standards. These assessments are to given annually in reading and mathematics. As under current law, states would not be required to assess their students in science, but could do so at their discretion.

States would still be required to disaggregate data based on certain student subgroups and assess the English proficiency of English language learners.

The bill eliminates the adequate yearly progress (AYP) provisions under current law that requires 100 percent proficiency of all students by 2014. States would be allowed to develop and implement their own differentiated accountability systems.

The bill eliminates the school improvement provisions under current law and the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program that requires states and local school districts to choose from four school turnaround models of improvement. The freed-up funding would go into the Title I program.

States and local school districts would still have to issue and distribute annual report cards, but the bill specifies that the information must be easily available and meaningful for parents and communities.

The bill eliminates the highly qualified teacher (HQT) provisions under current law. States and local school districts would be able to determine the effectiveness of their teachers.
Other highlights of the bill include providing significant spending flexibility to states and local school districts to meet their needs and placing new limits on the Secretary of Education’s authority in the regulatory process.

**Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act**

The Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act, as introduced, is intended to reform current federal law by doing the following:

- Ensuring parents are provided meaningful information on teacher effectiveness;
- Increasing school choice and parent engagement; and
- Eliminating unnecessary and ineffective federal education programs.

The bill provides greater flexibility to school districts to develop and implement teacher evaluation systems based on several parameters, including student achievement data, using multiple measures, and incorporating input from various stakeholders.

The proposal caps the use of funds for class size reduction at 10 percent, as the bill’s authors have concluded that such funding produces little to no effect on student learning.

The bill consolidates all of the teacher quality programs into a teacher and leader flexible grant program that would reward states and local school districts with funds based on evidence-based initiatives. The bill establishes a local academic flexible grant program for states and local school districts to develop and fund initiatives based on addressing their unique challenges.

The bill also eliminates more than 70 current elementary and secondary education programs deemed too small to provide successful outcomes, deemed ineffective by the federal government, or which have never been funded.

**Outlook for Reauthorization Remains Bleak in Divided Congress**

House Committee Chairman Kline remains dedicated to reauthorizing the current federal education law in a piecemeal fashion. This is opposite from the approach taken by Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (Iowa), who is committed to addressing the current law in a comprehensive fashion to deal with the whole child—from academics to school safety to the social, mental, and physical health of all students. Chairman Harkin indicated he will not take the Senate bill to the full Senate until there is a bi-partisan consensus for legislation in the House.

It remains to be seen whether that consensus will develop. George Miller (California), the leading Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee has already indicated his opposition to the House bill and predicted non-passage of ESEA reauthorization in 2012.

**Resources**

U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee website at edworkforce.house.gov.