

CASN News November 2009

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And in the spirit of the Thanksgiving season:

"Thanks to all the teachers that have inspired, challenged and changed our lives. A good education is no longer just one road to opportunity — it is the only road. And good teachers aren't just critical for the success of our students, they are the key to the success of our economy." - Michelle Obama

TOWARD A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUDGET 2010

Several months ago, President Obama outlined five pillars for reforming schools that are guiding both the implementation of the Recovery Act and the President's fiscal year 2010 budget request for the Department of Education:

First, investing in early childhood education and expanding access to quality childcare.

Second, challenging States to adopt world-class college- and career-ready academic standards and assessments.

Third, recruiting, preparing, and rewarding effective teachers.

Fourth, promoting innovation and excellence in America's schools by expanding charter schools, extending learning time, and turning around low-performing schools.

And fifth, increasing the number of people pursuing higher education and earning a post-secondary degree or certificate.

To build on the levels of support provided for these goals in the Recovery Act, Obama is requesting \$46.7 billion in discretionary appropriations for the Department of Education, an increase of \$1.3 billion over the comparable discretionary total provided in the regular 2009 appropriations act. In addition, the President's mandatory funding proposals would help make available more than \$129 billion in new grants, loans, and work-study assistance for post-secondary students in 2010, an increase of \$31.7 billion, or 32 percent, over the 2008 level.

The 2010 request is focused on laying the foundation for the expansion of early childhood education as part of the President's Zero-to-Five initiative; supporting and rewarding effective teaching; expanding State and local efforts to turn around low-performing schools, including the so-called high school "dropout factories" that graduate 60 percent or fewer of their students; and expanding opportunities for students to go to college and graduate by increasing grant and loan assistance, shifting resources from banks and middlemen toward students, and creating new incentives for colleges to focus on student completion.

Key proposals in the 2010 budget include the following:

- \$ 500 million for a new program of Title I Early Childhood Grants which would encourage LEAs to use Title I Recovery Act funds to start or expand Title I preschool programs.
- \$300 million for a new Early Learning Challenge Fund, a central component of the President's Zero-to-Five initiative, to help States develop or refine systems for rating and improving the quality of early learning programs.
- \$10 million for the Promise Neighborhoods initiative to provide 1-year planning grants to non-profit, community-based organizations to develop plans for comprehensive neighborhood programs that provide the necessary support for children and youth from preschool through college so that they may succeed in school and beyond.
- \$162.5 million for Early Reading First, an increase of \$50 million to expand support for high-quality, research-based early literacy services for preschool children.
- \$370.4 million for an expanded Striving Readers program, a \$35 million increase for adolescent literacy demonstration grants and \$300 million for a new initiative to help school districts implement comprehensive and coherent programs of reading instruction for children in the elementary grades.

- \$517.3 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund, an increase of \$420 million over the regular 2009 level, to stimulate comprehensive State and local efforts to strengthen the educator workforce, in particular by providing financial rewards for principals, teachers, and other personnel who raise student achievement, close achievement gaps, and work in hard-to-staff schools.
- \$1.5 billion for Title I School Improvement Grants, an increase of \$1 billion to help ensure that States and LEAs have the resources to develop and implement comprehensive, research-based improvement plans for the growing numbers of schools (including middle and high schools) identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.
- \$50 million for a High School Graduation Initiative to promote innovative strategies for increasing high school graduation rates, particularly in the so-called "dropout factories."
- Raising the maximum Pell Grant award to \$5,550, an increase of \$200 over the 2009 level, indexing the maximum grant to grow faster than inflation in future years, and making Pell Grant funding mandatory to eliminate the perennial uncertainty created for students, parents, and the Congress created by the difficulty of estimating required discretionary appropriations.
- Saving \$21 billion over 5 years by making all new post-secondary student loans through the Direct Loan program. The Administration also is proposing to restructure and expand the Federal Perkins Loans program to serve five times as many students while saving taxpayers \$3.2 billion over 5 years.

The 2010 request for the Department of Education supports these priorities while also proposing significant mandatory and discretionary savings that are essential to meeting the President's goal of cutting the annual Federal deficit in half over the next 5 years. For example, the discretionary request includes the proposed elimination of 12 programs for a total savings of \$551 million.

(NOTE regarding funding for **Smaller Learning Communities**:

	2008	2009	2010 Request
B.A. in millions	\$80.1	\$88.0	\$88.0

The Smaller Learning Communities program helps LEAs create smaller, more personalized learning environments in large schools. LEAs use the funds to, among other things: (1) study the feasibility of creating a smaller learning community or communities; (2) research, develop, and implement strategies for creating smaller learning communities; and (3) provide professional development for school staff in

innovative teaching methods that would be used in the smaller learning community or communities. The 2010 request would support 55 continuation and 7 new awards that would support a total of 174 high schools.)

GRADUATION FOR ALL ACT INTRODUCED

Recently, U.S. Representative George Miller (D-CA), chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, introduced legislation that would provide \$2 billion to improve the nation's lowest-performing middle and high schools. The bill, the Graduation for All Act, would target the nation's approximately two thousand "dropout factories," which have dropout rates above 40 percent, and the middle schools that feed into them.

"We are failing our students, failing our communities, and failing our nation if we allow this dropout crisis to continue," said Miller. "Ending this epidemic is a civil rights imperative, a moral issue, and an economic necessity. This bill says that it is no longer acceptable to let an at-risk student fall through the cracks and empowers schools to make the changes needed to help at-risk students thrive in school, earn a diploma, and go on to college or a good job."

The bill would provide school districts with clear guidance on turn-around strategies while also providing students at risk of dropping out with the tools they need to stay in school and succeed. For example, it would combine rigorous course work with academic and social support services to keep students engaged in school and help high schools implement a data system to identify students at risk of dropping out based on key indicators such as being frequently absent and failing core courses.

The Graduation for All Act would also promote college enrollment and career readiness by providing students with information about financial aid options and allowing high school students to earn up to two years of college credit through Early College High Schools and dual enrollment programs. It would also help students develop graduation and career plans.

<http://edlabor.house.gov/newsroom/2009/11/house-democrats-introduce-legi-1.shtml>.

STATES SLOW WORK ON STANDARDS IN MIDST OF PUSH FOR 'COMMON CORE'

As states wait for the grade-by-grade, K-12 common national standards, many states are putting off or slowing the revision of their own academic standards to avoid wasted effort and spending.

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are overseeing the work to develop the "Common Core" of expectations for America's students and have already released a draft of college- and career-readiness standards for math and English/language arts. Experts writing the standards are also drafting grade-by-grade K-12 standards for math and English/language arts that are expected to be put in final form early next year. That's the

document that many states are waiting to see before proceeding with work on their own standards.

Scott Montgomery, the deputy executive director of the CCSSO, said state schools chiefs were shown a sample of those grade-by-grade standards at a meeting in Chicago at the end of October. "They like what they see," said Mr. Montgomery. "The discussion isn't about whether the standards are right or wrong. The discussion is about how do we adopt, implement, and get them into the hands of the teachers in our states so students can be competitive around the world."

Forty-eight states—all but Alaska and Texas—have pledged to adopt the whole package of common standards, and that package will constitute no less than 85 percent of what the states ultimately have committed to adopt and implement. (source Education Week, U.S. Department of Education)

TENNESSEE PLANS TO ENROLL MORE STUDENTS IN ONLINE PROGRAM

An additional 20,000 students in Tennessee will be able to take advantage of online classes over the next two years because of \$6 million in stimulus funding that is being directed toward expanding the state's popular virtual-learning program. According to program officials, enrollment in Tennessee's online courses has increased by 900% since the program began in 2006.

SOME NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOLS REPLACE ELECTIVES WITH TEST PREPARATION

A growing number of New Jersey high schools are providing test-preparation courses during elective and study periods for struggling students at risk of failing a state graduation exam. While some parents have expressed concerns about the increased focus on testing, especially for younger students, educators say the new classes allow them to spend less time in subject classrooms discussing test preparation. "You don't want algebra class to be teaching to the test," said one teacher. "You want it to be teaching algebra."

FORD FOUNDATION PLEDGES \$100 MILLION FOR URBAN SCHOOL REFORM

The Ford Foundation has pledged \$100 million over seven years to fund reform efforts at urban high schools in seven cities: Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, Detroit and Newark, New Jersey. The initiative will focus on teacher quality, student assessment, funding and the amount of time students spend in school. Jeannie Oakes, a school-reform advocate who will lead the initiative, said it will not support any one political ideology. "We just want to cut through this and think about building an outstanding public-school system for the kids who are least likely to have one now," she said.

TEACHERS WEIGH IN ON THE SALE OF LESSON PLANS & CLASS MATERIALS

Through a Teacher Leaders Network online discussion, teachers are debating who owns lesson plans and class materials. A recent New York Times article highlighted

the many teachers taking advantage of a growing online market for classroom lesson plans. Some argued that teachers should be allowed to supplement inadequate compensation by engaging in entrepreneurship -- just like members of any other industry. Others fear that allowing a for-profit lesson-plan trade to grow will mean an end to free collaboration among educators.

OPINION: NEED TO CHANGE OUR ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

An unfortunate truth uncovered by the No Child Left Behind Act, writes John Porter Jr. in an op-ed for The San Jose Mercury News, is that many children were indeed left behind -- especially children of color, poor children, immigrant children, and children labeled "educationally handicapped" by the system. Porter, superintendent of Franklin-McKinley School District in California and himself a formerly "educationally handicapped" student, says that if his state is to resolve its ongoing achievement gap, it must address key weaknesses in its accountability system. First, it must measure performance of individual students rather than groups, as it now does. Next, state tests must move beyond a narrow, multiple-choice format, which doesn't let students respond in ways that reflect learning experiences. He'd also like student growth to be measured against a baseline year and to continue over time. Results should be given during the same school year so teachers and students can address weaknesses as they are identified. Finally, results should count for part of a student's end-of-year review, factored in with effort, homework, class participation, and portfolio work.

A FEW WEB SITES OF INTEREST

English Central

This site teaches English pronunciation to students by showing videos and TV programs on a wide variety of subjects. Listeners then pronounce the speech selection and record it to the site. The site grades the student's pronunciation and shows where they have errors. The site also offers more practice for problem areas in students' pronunciations. With a free registration, students practice and keep track of their problems and progress. Video categories include Business, Daily Life, Dining/Food, Environment, Movies & TV, Music, News & Politics, Shopping, Social Life, Sports, Technology, Travel, and Video Gaming. Along with the variety of topics and subjects to appeal to everyone, English Central allows students to sort listening selections into three levels of difficulty. <http://www.englishcentral.com/en/videos>

Using English Central in the Classroom and Beyond: Registration does require an email address. Tip: rather than using your personal or work email, create a free Gmail account to use for memberships. If you plan to have students register individually, you may want to create your own Gmail account with up to 20 subaccounts for each group of students (by code name or number) within your classes. Suggestion: Refer your ESL/ELL or speech articulation students to this site to use with a microphone to record their voices. Be sure to show them the demo so they can learn how to use the tools on the site and click to "allow" the mike to record. Help weaker readers by allowing them to see the text of film clips as they listen along, then speak the words back. As they practice English pronunciation, they will also be learning about current events and other topics.

Atom Builder

This web resource challenges students to build a carbon atom one subatomic particle at a time. Students begin with a hydrogen atom consisting on 1 proton and 1 neutron. They then add protons, neutrons, and electrons. Before adding any nucleons they must assemble them from up quarks and down quarks. The student receives feedback about the radioactivity and ionization of the atom as they go. If they make a mistake a warning flashes and depending upon the mistake, the atom may be destroyed. Information about scientists who were instrumental in uncovering the mysteries of the atom is also included. Shockwave, a freely available plugin, is required to use the Atom Builder activity. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/tryit/atom/builder.html>

SOME FUNDING AND AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

AFN International: Young Eco-Hero Awards

Action for Nature International Young Eco-Hero Awards recognize the individual accomplishments of young people whose personal actions have significantly improved the environment. Maximum award: \$500. Eligibility: youth ages 8-16. Deadline: February 28, 2010. <http://www.actionfornature.org/eco-hero/ecoheroawards.html>

Earthwatch: Educator Fellowship

The Earthwatch Institute offers educators fully funded fellowships for hands-on learning with leading scientists doing field research and conservation on one of 130 projects around the world. Maximum award: fully funded fellowship. Eligibility: Elementary, middle, and high school educators and administrators of any discipline. Deadline: Applications accepted on a rolling basis. (Note: Summer Fellowship applications for students and teachers are due in February.) <http://www.earthwatch.org/education>

Grant Competition Seeks Best Ideas in Digital Learning

A \$2 million grant competition is looking for the best new ideas in digital learning. Sponsored by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the contest is calling on educators, experts, designers and researchers to create 21st-century learning labs to help students learn through digital collaboration. "This competition will help ensure that the new and highly engaging approaches to science, technology, engineering, and math find their way into schools, libraries, museums, and other spaces for learning," the foundation's education director said. <http://www.dmlcompetition.net>