

PAFPC Legislative Update
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Senator Tom Harkin, Democrat, Iowa, is the new Chair of the Senate, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. He is an advocate for increasing Title I fund and IDEA funds. More importantly he opposed Secretary Duncan's efforts to remove Title I funds from Title I Part A basic grants and put those funds into school improvement and early child hood programs. Duncan's efforts were first thwarted by Congressman Obey of the House Appropriations Committee and Senator Harkin. Title I Part A funds are the only remaining Title I funds that are distributed equally for all poor children regardless of where they live. Since the implementation of NCLB, all increases in Title I funds are in formulas which distribute Title I funds weighted on areas of high poverty.

Limited specific information pertaining to the reauthorization of NCLB has been formally presented by the Obama administration. USDE began to host a series of public meetings at the USDE in September in preparation of the USDE proposal on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The No Child Left Behind name has been dropped and reference is now made to the original Title I act passed by President Johnson in 1965. The USDE staff report that it wants a reauthorized ESEA to be less compliance driven and more focused on innovation.

It is evident from (1)the four tenets of Secretary Duncan's for education reform, (2) the USDE Waiver Guidance, (3)the USDE proposed requirements for the School Improvement Grants under ARRA and Title 1 of NCLB section 1003g, and (4) the Title I Stimulus Guidance that certain elements will be included in the new ESEA.

It is also evident that Secretary Duncan decided to shape this administration's education goals by using money, policies, waivers, program requirements and guidance rather than waiting for the long drawn out reauthorization process for a new law.

Upon review of the use of money, written policies, waivers, and guidance, one can predict what will be included in the administration's proposal for reauthorization of ESEA:

1. Four fundamentals to school reform: changing low performing schools including increased emphasis on charter schools, improving teacher and principal quality, strengthening state data systems, and enacting common (maybe national) academic standards will be the core elements.
2. Districts and Schools identified for School Improvement will be permitted to be SES providers.

3. SES will be permitted to be offered concurrently or before School Choice for schools in improvement
4. Current time requirements for schools to notify parents about school improvement and the availability of School Choice and SES will be modified.
5. Percentage and/or funds used to meet the 10% set aside requirement for staff development will be modified.
6. The state's ability to define greatest need and allocate school improvement 1003g funds to schools and districts will be limited by restrictive language.
7. Intervention Models believed to be proven by USDE will be provided. Current models are turnaround model, restart model, school closure model, and transformation model.
8. School districts will have greater flexibility to direct funds to schools that have normally been excluded because of the current ranking process.
9. Greater flexibility in maintaining and training principals will be allowed.
10. School pilot programs can be funded with the purpose of implementing the pilot in every school.

In March 2007, the Legislative Committee of PAFPC wrote recommendations for the reauthorization paper for NCLB on particular issues that our membership thought important.

The current changes made by the USDE impact each funding and school improvement recommendation that the Committee made in March 2007 and the reauthorization process has not yet begun! (You can review the 2007 PAFPC reauthorization recommendations under legislative updates.)

Currently, this administration's funding, policies, regulations and guidance are directed to large, high poverty districts and schools that are in need of improvement. About one third of the current Title I funds go to these one hundred large high poverty districts which number less than one percent of the school districts in the nation.

We need funding, policies, regulations, and guidance in reauthorization that fairly address the needs of the remaining ninety-nine percent of the school districts in the nation that may not have the same issues as the large districts. ***In Pennsylvania, we need an ESEA reauthorization that addresses the diversification of our state from our large urban areas to our small rural areas.***

