

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Early Learning Challenge Grants Awarded

The second round of Early Learning Challenge Grants was awarded last week. The South was largely left out of the funding mix, with only the state of **North Carolina** receiving a grant. Other states that were funded included: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington.

The SECA states of **Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia** also applied; however, reviewers did not rate the applications highly enough to qualify for funding. **The cut-off score to receive funding was 243.6.**

Following are the scores from the SECA states.

- Arkansas 174.2
- Florida 212.60
- Georgia 189.8
- Kentucky 208.4
- North Carolina 269.60
- Oklahoma 175.6
- West Virginia 198.4

For this round of grants, a list of reviewers was posted on the website. The list included a significant number of reviewers from the Southern states.

You can find the following information on the Race to the Top website:

- 1) Letters to the Governors announcing the winners
- 2) Summary of Chart Scores

- 3) State Data Workbook
- 4) Biographies of Peer Reviewers

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge>

Grants will be used to build statewide systems of high quality early learning systems including:

- Aligning and raising standards.
- Improving training and support for professionals.
- Evaluation systems.

Grant amounts will be finalized after discussions between the grantees and the federal agencies.

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New Guide Available from NIEER

NIEER has released

Improving Early Education Programs through Data-based Decision Making

The guide discusses five different methodologies for evaluating early education programs and the merits of each. It also provides a list of assessment instruments that evaluators can use to measure child outcomes and program quality.

The guide can be found at http://nieer.org/pdf/Preschool_Research_Design.pdf

Federal FY 2012 Budget Passes

The U.S. House and Senate have reached a compromise on the FY 2012 budget. (FY 2012 began in October.)

The Labor-HHS-Education section of the bill includes a total of \$156.3 billion in appropriations, about \$1.1 billion less than last year.

Some appropriations to note:

- ⇒ The Child Care & Development Block Grant received \$2.28 billion, an increase of \$60 million over last year.
- ⇒ IDEA Part C (Infants/Toddlers) was funded at \$443.5 million, an increase of 5 million.
- ⇒ Head Start was funded at \$7.98 billion, an increase of \$424 million.
- ⇒ IDEA Preschool was funded at existing levels.
- ⇒ Promise Neighborhood Grants were funded at \$60 million, an increase of \$30 million.

For a summary of the legislation: <http://appropriations.house.gov>

Professional Development Going On-line for Educators

Two SECA states, [Florida](#) and [West Virginia](#), have developed on-line professional development systems for teachers and administrators.

The [Florida](#) system is available through the professional learning portal of the William Cecil Golden School Leadership Development Program. The Program was established by the 2006 Florida Legislature. All state-approved university and district school leadership development programs are required to incorporate appropriate elements of the William Cecil Golden Program to ensure a statewide foundation for leadership development. The website contains:

- ⇒ Florida's principal leadership standards
- ⇒ Information on the Florida Continuous Improvement Model
- ⇒ Resources and tools to help educators take advantage of on-line courses.

The website can be found at www.floridaschoolleaders.org.

In [West Virginia](#), the Department of Education, in collaboration with West Virginia Public Broadcasting, provides more than 30 online workshops for teachers and school leaders. Each workshop consists of 7 one-week sessions and

45 hours of participation will meet course requirements. 3 hours of non-degree credit is awarded.

"The e-Learning for Educators initiative will help bridge the barriers of time, distance, and inequities for all West Virginia teachers by providing access to web-based professional development opportunities." Superintendent Jorea M. Marple, Ed.D.

More information may be found at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/elearning/>

What's Happening in Texas

Texas is currently experiencing two events that have significant implications for both its political structure and the state funding provided to its schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a challenge filed by Texas Republicans to judge-drawn maps that would govern next year's state and federal elections. Arguments will be held before the Court on January 9, 2012.

These maps were the outcome of judicial challenges to the re-districting maps that

were drawn up by the Texas state legislature. A panel of federal judges created the new maps in November. All filing for legislative and congressional elections

that were scheduled for March 2012 has halted.

Additionally, a coalition of about 120 property-wealthy school districts sued the state, contending that the state system for funding education is inadequate and unconstitutional. The plaintiffs are districts that give property-tax money back to the state, which is then distributed to less wealthy school districts. *Source: AR Democrat-Gazette, December 10, 2011, p. 7A*

The "Robin Hood" school funding plan is under fire. Plaintiffs contend that the school property tax is effectively a statewide property tax, which is unconstitutional in Texas.

Federal Constitutional Amendment No Go

With all the turmoil in Washington D.C. and the ballooning federal deficits, the U.S. Senate defeated two proposed constitutional amendments this month.

The proposed amendments would require the federal government to present a balanced budget each year. Currently, Congress can adopt a budget that includes deficit spending and borrows money to cover that deficit.

Both the Republicans and Democrats

offered amendments and both failed. A 2/3 majority is required in both the House and Senate to pass an amendment. Upon Congressional approval, the amendment is submitted to the states for consideration. The amendment must then be adopted by 3/4 of the 50 states in order to be added to the U.S. Constitution.

Most Senate Democrats opposed both amendments, concerned about the

depth and breadth of budget cuts that would be necessary to balance the federal budget.

From the White House: "We do not need to amend the Constitution for only the 28th time in our Nation's history to do the job of restoring fiscal discipline."

Source: Arkansas Democrat/Gazette, December 15, 2011, p. 2A

Virginia Governor Releases Proposed Budget

Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell released his proposed FY 2013-2014 budget on December 19th.

According to *Voices for Virginia's Children*, a statewide advocacy group, it's a "mixed bag when it comes to children and families. The Governor's biggest priorities are in the areas of transportation, VRS (state retirement system) higher education and job creation."

Positive developments in the proposed budget include:

- Community services boards did not receive cuts and Medicaid provider rates remain the same.
- The Virginia Preschool Initiative

received a \$5 million annual increase and no reduction in current slots.

- Funding for adoption subsidies was increased.

The proposed budget did not include items that were on the Voices 2012 legislative agenda. Community-based mental health services for children were not included and CHIP and Healthy Families, two home visiting programs received cuts, on top of cuts made in previous years. The Voices legislative agenda is based on

- ◇ *"Protecting existing funding for safety-net services so critical to vul-*



nerable and hard-hit children and families.

- ◇ *Preserving the recent gains in key policy areas such as foster care and early education."*

For a copy of the Voices agenda, go to <http://vakids.org/>.

For a copy of the Governor's News Release, go to <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1059>

2011 Promise Neighborhoods: Four Grantees from the South

On December 19, 2011, the Obama Administration announced the 2011 Promise Neighborhood Implementation and Planning Grant recipients.

Two of the 5 implementation grant recipients represented communities in the SECA region. **Berea College of Kentucky** (Clay, Jackson, and Owsley counties) and the **United Way of San Antonio & Bexar County, Texas** received implementation grants. These implementation grants followed planning grants that were released last year.

Recipients of planning grants in 2010 that did not receive implementation funding were:

- ◇ Athens Clarke County Family Connection, GA
- ◇ Delta Health Alliance, Inc., Indiana, MS
- ◇ Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, Georgia
- ◇ Neighborhood Centers, Inc., Houston, TX

- ◇ University of Arkansas at Little Rock

There were also four recipients of 2011 planning grants in the SECA region. (15 grants were awarded.)

- ◆ **Mercer University**
Macon, GA
- ◆ **Community Action Project of Tulsa**, Oklahoma
- ◆ **Children Youth & Family Services/Charlottesville**, VA
- ◆ **Martha O'Bryan Center**
Nashville, TN

"The Promise Neighborhoods program aims to address significant challenges faced by students and families living in high-poverty communities by providing resources to plan and implement a continuum of services from early learning to college and career. Plans include a range of services from improving a neighborhood's health, safety and stability to expanding access to learning technology and Internet connectivity and boosting

family engagement in student learning.

For the recipients of the implementation grants, significant review points were received for targeting neighborhoods participating in Choice Neighborhoods or Hope VI, affordable housing transformation programs supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These recipients will also be eligible for funding from the Department of Justice to support and expand their public safety strategy.

If you're interested in more information, the government website is <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html>.

PolicyLink also has created a website with resources that could work in your community. Find them at <http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org>.

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"A Voice for Southern Children"

We're on the Web!
www.southernearlychildhood.org

How to Use This Newsletter

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- *Compares your state to other SECA states*—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- *Brings the national scene to your fingertips* and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you...You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

48% of Schools Fail to Make Adequate Yearly Progress

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) released a report on December 15, 2011 that estimated that 48% of U.S. public schools failed to make AYP (adequate yearly progress) under the standards contained in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. The 2011 report recorded an increase in the number of schools failing to meet AYP (going from 39% in 2009 to 48% in 2011) and the highest percentage of failing schools since NCLB took effect in 2002.

NCLB requires states to set yearly targets for the percentage of students that score "proficient" on state tests. States annually determine the status of schools, based on tests administered the previous year.

According to the report,

⇒ In 24 states and D.C., half or more of the public schools did not meet the adequate yearly

progress standard.

- ⇒ In five states (**Florida**, Missouri, New Mexico, Massachusetts, and **South Carolina**), 3/4 or more of schools did not meet the standard.
- ⇒ Wide variations appeared in the number of schools that were not meeting AYP. About 11% of schools in Wisconsin failed to meet AYP; in **Florida**, about 89% failed.
- ⇒ State comparisons are difficult because of differences in states' tests, demographics, proficiency targets and other factors.
- ⇒ Results can vary from year to year, even in the same state, especially if the state's proficiency targets have recently increased. NCLB requires this incremental increase.

⇒ States with a higher percentage of schools failing to make AYP should not automatically be considered to have weak educational systems—they may have harder tests or higher proficiency targets.

The U.S. Department of Education has offered a waiver option for states to achieve flexibility from some of the NCLB mandates. (See the November 2011 edition of *Public Policy Notes* for an explanation of these waivers.) The CEP is offering two publications, *Major Accountability Themes of Initial State Applications for NCLB Waivers* and *Preliminary Findings about Waivers: CEP Survey of State Education Agency Officials*.

They can be found at
<http://www.cep-dc.org/publications>