

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Moderates in Congress: The Southerners Line Up

The Southern region is known for political and cultural conservatism that often places its elected representatives in the “middle of the pack” in terms of issues such as fiscal conservatism and accountability.

In 1995, a policy-oriented group was formed in the House of Representatives to give moderates and conservatives a common sense, bridge-building voice within the institution.

Made up of 47 conservative and moderate Democrats who come from throughout the US, the group acknowledges its Southern ancestry through its nickname, *The Blue Dog Coalition*. The name is taken from the South’s description of a Democratic party loyalist as

“one who would vote for a yellow dog if it were on the ballot as a Democrat.” The Coalition has been particularly active on fiscal issues and has pushed a balanced budget agenda. Rep. Charlie Melancon of Louisiana serves as the Co-Chair for Communications and Rep. Heath Shuler of North Carolina is the Blue Dog Whip. Source: www.house.gov

The Senate has now followed suit with its own *Moderate Dems Working Group*, composed of 15 Senate Democrats. The group is more conservative than the Senate Democratic Caucus as a whole, and its purpose is to “work collaboratively with the Obama administration and Senate leadership to make sure legislation is crafted in a practi-

cal way that will solve people’s problems.” Source: politicaltickers.blogs.cnn.com

Southern members of the new Senate group include Senators Blanche Lincoln (AR), Kay Hagan (NC), Mary Landrieu (LA), Bill Nelson (FL) and Mark Warner (VA). Senators Bayh (IN), Lincoln (AR) and Carper (DE) will lead the group.

These moderate blocks of votes will be influential in the debate and passage of the President’s agenda.



Arkansas Senator
Blanche Lincoln

Child Care Bureau Issues Guidance for CCDBG Economic Recovery Funds

On April 9, 2009, the Child Care Bureau issued guidance on the use and allocation of new stimulus funds for the Child Care & Development Block Grant.

The guidance provides details on the following:

- How and when the

funding can be used

- Clarification of the “supplement, not supplant” language, and
- Coordination between CCDBG and other early childhood programs that receive funding through the ARRA.

For a copy of the guidance, go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs or www.nwlc.org.

SECA Policy Issues: Will your state utilize these new funds to serve more children through child care subsidies? How will the quality dollars be used?

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Special points of interest:

- South Carolina and the Stimulus
- Tennessee’s Education Collaborative
- 4-Year-Olds & Obesity
- Monitoring School Air Quality

South Carolina Continues the Stimulus Debate

Governor Mark Sanford of South Carolina continues to debate the acceptance and potential impact of receipt of the state's allocation of stimulus funds.

From an initial discussion concerning rejection of any stimulus funds, the Governor has submitted a certification letter to the federal government stating that "On behalf of the people of South Carolina, please allow this letter to certify that we will accept funds and use them to create jobs and promote economic growth to the extent that our state and respective agencies and governmental programs are able to do so. Although we have questioned the effectiveness of this legislation, we have said all along that we will not prevent the

state from certifying and receiving stimulus dollars which are scheduled to come to the state programmatically through existing federal formulas. We, therefore, would ask that this letter serve as...certification and that funds be released to the appropriate state agencies to spend in accordance with guidelines set forth in the ARRA and by federal agencies.

Let me be equally clear though that this letter in no way represents an application for State Fiscal Stabilization Funds. These monies are further defined as

Educational Stabilization and Governmental Services funds in the US Department of Education guidelines issued on April 1, 2009."



Governor Mark Sanford

The Governor leaves the way open to apply for these funds at a later date, depending upon the policy makers of the General Assembly of South Carolina. Source: SC Stimulus Certification Letter

On March 20, 2009, Governor Sanford formed the South Carolina Stimulus Oversight, Accountability and Coordination Task Force to monitor the use of stimulus funds in South Carolina.

All SECA States Now Have Recovery Websites

Each state will create a "Recovery Website" to track the use of stimulus funds and to provide "transparency" to the process. These websites are designed to:

1. Allow citizens to track projects that are funded through stimulus dollars
2. Ensure transparency by posting all state contracts and information about recovery programs. All SECA states now have recovery

websites available. Check past issues of *Public Policy Notes* for the addresses of other state sites.

In **Florida**, go to www.FlaRecovery.com

In **Kentucky**, go to www.KentuckyatWork.ky.gov

Many of the state websites contain guidance on how to apply for state contracts and grants under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

In **Louisiana**, go to www.stimulus.la.gov

In **Mississippi** go to www.stimulus.ms.gov

In **South Carolina**, go to www.stimulus.sc.gov

In **Texas**, go to www.state.tx.us/recovery

You can go to www.recovery.gov (the national site) for a map that has direct links into your state recovery website. Click on **State Progress and Resources** on the right side of the home page.

Tennessee Forms State Collaborative on Reforming Education

On March 30, 2009, former U.S. Majority Leader Bill Frist announced the formation of a new nonpartisan initiative that will work to make education a top policy priority for Tennessee and accelerate education reform.

The Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) will have three main components:

- Ten (10) public meetings across the state that will be convened by a

Steering Committee of education, community, political and business leaders. A statewide strategic plan will be developed.

- Formation of project teams to create statewide and local education projects on topics such as teacher quality, school leadership, technology and community engagement.
- Town hall meetings across the

state to foster local dialogue about improving schools.

Vanderbilt Peabody College in Nashville, TN will serve as the project's research partner. Brad Smith is the Executive Director of the Collaborative.



William H. Frist

Go to www.tennesseescore.org for a list of the first public meetings and more information.

Pre-K Programs and the Middle Class

Pre-K Now released a recent report entitled, *The Pre-K Pinch: Early Education and the Middle Class*.

The report took a look at the current eligibility system for state pre-K programs and determined that, although low income families benefit from state pre-K programs, middle income families are often struggling to finance their children's early education.

Of the 38 states that fund pre-K programs, 20 of those states use household income as the main or sole criterion for eligibility. In most of the states, fami-

lies earning more than double the federal poverty threshold (\$42,400 for a family of four) are ineligible to participate.

The report recommends:

- Phasing in expansion of pre-K for all children, regardless of income
- Using factors other than income to determine eligibility
- Adequately funding a "universal" pre-K program
- Creating full-day programs to meet the needs of working families

- Establishing high-quality before making substantial program expansions.

The full report is available at www.preknow.org and gives extensive information about the challenges that middle class families face.



American Four-Year-Olds and Obesity

According to a research study published April 6, 2009, in the journal *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, an estimated 18.4 percent of 4-year-olds in the United States are considered obese based on measures of weight in reference to their height.

The study also found that there are racial/ethnic differences in the obesity rate, and American Indian/Native Alaskan children are **twice as likely** to be obese as their white or Asian counterparts. The study also found that His-

panic and Black children were more likely to be obese. "Based on body mass index measures, obesity prevalence was estimated at 31.2% among American Indian/Native Alaskan children, 22% for Hispanics, 20.8% for blacks, 15.9% for whites and 12.8% for Asians."

The study was conducted by Sarah Anderson, assistant professor of epi-

"The implications are that childhood obesity prevention efforts must begin early in life."

miology at Ohio State University, and Robert Whitaker of Temple University.

"This is certainly not about stigmatizing any particular subgroups", Anderson said. She noted that the analysis does not provide information about why these disparities exist. Future research may focus on families and what cultural and behavioral factors might influence this tendency. For more information, go to www.researchnews.osu.edu.

Sources: www.researchnews.osu.edu and www.ahiphewire.org/News

A New Resource for Public Policy

The Center for the Study of Social Policy, with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has launched a website that offers a one-stop shop for information on effective state and local approaches to improve and enhance the lives of children and families.

The new website features:

- A step-by-step guide to making effective policy decisions

- Data on the status of children and families in each state
- Successful examples of "what works" to improve the well-being of children and families
- Numerous tools for self-assessment and results-based budgeting
- A blog for state and local officials to share their own experiences and

share good ideas with their peers.

The site includes topics such as helping families succeed economically, ensuring children are reading at grade level and ensuring that children live safely in permanent homes rather than in foster care or unnecessary juvenile detention.

The website address is PolicyForResults.org. For more information contact the Center at info@cssp.org.

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Southern Early Childhood Association



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.

EPA to Monitor Air Quality at Schools

On Monday, March 30, 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency began notifying selected school districts across the country that it would begin taking air samples outside schools. This initiative by the EPA was undertaken because of concerns that students at certain schools might be exposed to high levels of chromium and other toxic chemicals.

The issue was first raised by a USA TODAY investigation, and the newspaper subsequently partnered with John Hopkins University and the University of Maryland to sample air quality near 95 schools in 30 states.

The EPA plans to install monitoring equipment on school grounds in most cases. SECA states that will participate in the initial study include:

Alabama

Hudson K- Eight Elementary School (Birmingham) Lewis Elementary School (Birmingham) Riggins School (Birmingham) Tarrant Elementary School (Tarrant City)

Kentucky

Charles Russell Elementary (Ashland) Crabbe School (Ashland) Hatcher School (Ashland)

Louisiana

Eden Gardens Fundamental Elementary School (Shreveport)

Mississippi

Enterprise High School (Enterprise)

South Carolina

Chicora Elementary (Charleston)

Tennessee

Ashland City Elementary (Ashland City) West Greene High School (Mosheim) Lakeview Elementary (New Johnsonville) Vonore Elementary (Vonore) Vonore Middle School (Vonore)

Texas

I C Evans Elementary (Burkburnett) Lamkin Elementary (Cypress) NW Harilee Elementary (Dallas) Deer Park Junior High (Deer Park) San Jacinto Elementary (Deer Park) Temple Elementary (Diboll) Young Scholars Academy (Houston)

Virginia

Solid Rock Academy/Early Learning Center (Madison Heights)

West Virginia

Follansbee Middle School (Follansbee) Cabell County Career Technology Center (Huntington) Jefferson Primary School (Follansbee) Neale Elementary School (Vienna)

Schools were selected based on results from an EPA computer modeling analysis, the mix of pollution sources near schools and information from state and local sources.

Source: www.epa.gov/schoolair
