Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

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Inside this issue:

SECA Joins Other National Organizations in Supporting the Early Learning Challenge Fund

SECA has signed a letter in support of legislation that will create the **Early Learning Challenge Fund**. The Fund is included in H.R.. 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, and it is anticipated that the bill will come to the House floor sometime after the August recess. The letter will be distributed to all U.S. Representatives. Following are excerpts from the letter:

"The following organizations strongly support the Early Learning Challenge Fund included in H.R. 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act and urge the bill's passage. The Early Learning Challenge Fund is an important new initiative which will help to expand young children's access to high quality early learning opportunities, especially disadvantaged children. The pathway to success in school, to college, and to work begins with a strong early learning experience…….

We are pleased that the Early Learning Challenge Fund has the goal of increasing the number of disadvantaged children in high-quality programs at each age from birth to five, an essential period of a child's development. It emphasizes the components necessary to achieve this goal and help early learning programs raise their quality. These components include core program standards, professional development linked to better compensation, comprehensive supports for young children and their families, improved equipment and resources, data systems, parent outreach, and coordination with health screenings and referrals.

The Early Learning Challenge Fund, as well as sustained and increased investments in the other core early childhood programs such as the Child Care & Development Block Grant, Early Head Start, Head Start, the Child and Adult Food Program, Section 619 and Part C of IDEA, will help states to ensure that our most disadvantaged children get the strong start they need to become productive and successful citizens."

A policy brief on the Fund is posted on the public policy page of the SECA website.

Joan Lombardi Joins DHHS

Dr. Joan Lombardi, a longtime friend of SECA and nationally recognized children's advocate, has been named the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families and will also serve as ACF's interdepartmental liaison for early childhood development.

Dr. Lombardi was the founder of the World Forum Global Leaders Project and she served as the deputy assistant for children and families under President Bill Clinton. Since then she has served as director of The Children's Project which helped foundations develop programs. She is the author of *The Dawn of a New Era: Investing in Early Childhood Helps America Recover and Grow* in the July/August 2009 issue of *Exchange.*

Dr. Lombardi is the invited speaker for the 2010 SECA Public Policy Luncheon.

Your State Legislative Session: How Did Children Fare?

As a resource for our state affiliates and members, SECA has compiled a policy summary of legislative actions in each state that will impact children.

Find our summary on the Public Policy page of the SECA website.

The Achievement Gap Begins Early

A new study by Child Trends highlights the evidence that learning disparities begin as early as 9 months of age.

The study was commissioned by the Council of Chief State School Officers and was based on four (4) questions.

1) Are there disparities by family income for cognitive development, general health and social-emotional development emerging as early as 9 months of age for infants?
2) Are there disparities for cognitive development, general health, and social-emotional development at 9 and 24 months based on other demographic characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, home language and maternal education)
3) What proportion of infants and toddlers have multiple risk factors, taking into consideration low family income, racial/ethnic minority status, non-English home language and low-maternal education?
4) What are the disparities for cognitive development, general health and social-emotional development at 9 and 24 months when children have only low family income as a risk factor versus multiple risk factors.

Some highlights from the study, *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort*, included:

- Compared to their peers from higher-income families, infants and toddlers from low—income families score lower on cognitive assessments and are less likely to receive positive behavior ratings at both 9 and 24 months.
- Toddlers from lower-income families are less likely to have a secure attachment to their primary caregiver.

For a copy of the Executive Summary or full report, go to *www.childtrends.org.*

Oklahoma Using Stimulus Funds for Early Childhood Centers

Governor Brad Henry announced on August 5, 2009 that Oklahoma had awarded a $15 million grant from the discretionary stimulus education funds to establish three early childhood education centers in Tulsa. The grant was awarded to the Tulsa Public Schools and they will receive an additional $15 million grant from the George Kaiser Family Foundation to enhance the stimulus funding. The grants will establish three (3) centers for 3-year-olds that will also include an infant-through-3 program.

Superintendent Keith Ballard has not determined the location for the centers but has stated that a district bond issue could be considered next spring for additional funding.

"Oklahoma has long been thought of as a leader in early childhood education, especially the state's emphasis on enrolling disadvantaged children."

www.earlyedcoverage.org

Ballard has stated that the Community Action Project of Tulsa County will operate the centers and the Tulsa Public Schools will assume responsibility for pre-K programs that serve about 2,800 children in Tulsa over the next year.

"They will be the first of their kind in the nation. Tulsa will continue to be a leader in early childhood education." Governor Brad Henry

Source: www.tulsaworld.com

Florida Loses Population

For the first time since World War II, the state of Florida has experienced a drop in population. The last documented population decline was in 1945-1946.

The University of Florida reported on Friday, August 14, 2009 that the state lost about 50,000 residents between April 2008 and April 2009. The loss has been blamed on the housing market crash and the recession. The latest population numbers reflect a trend that surfaced earlier in the US Census.

Because the state has no income tax, it is heavily dependent upon sales tax and property and real estate tax revenue. The state has long counted on the migration of retirees to boost revenue and create jobs, but the stock market collapse has helped to stop some of that.

The Capitol in Tallahassee

Overall, the US population is growing about 1% annually, and it's anticipated that Florida's population will grow again in 2010 and 2011. By 2016 the state could have as many as 20 million people.

Source: www.tampbay.com

Sales Tax Breaks Costing States

Twelve (12) of the fourteen SECA states provide "sales tax holidays" that allow consumers to buy school clothing and supplies, energy efficient appliances and other products during a brief period without paying sales tax. Because of the economic downturn, many states are re-thinking this policy and one SECA state has removed the holiday for 2009.

Following are the states that have maintained the 2009 holiday: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

Florida cancelled the 2009 holiday because of the potential loss of $2.9 million in revenue. Estimated tax losses in other states: *Alabama* $3.25 million/ *Georgia* $13 million/ *Louisiana* $6.1 million/*Mississippi* $2 million/ *Oklahoma* $6.6 million plus another $3 million paid to reimburse municipalities/ *South Carolina* $2.9 million/ *Tennessee* $14-15 million/ *Texas* n/a/ *Virginia* $2.29 million/ *West Virginia* $330 million (Energy Star products)

Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and **Virginia** have ***tax holidays that are targeted to school clothing and supplies.*** Other tax holidays reflect state policy goals, such as the Energy Star holiday in West Virginia to promote energy conservation.

Tax holidays are a "mixed blessing" for states as consumers plan purchases around the dates. This can result in lowered sales tax revenue at other times of the year, depriving the states of revenue needed to fund agencies and operations.

Source: www.stateline.org

Oklahoma and Louisiana Offer Early Retirement to State Workers

Two SECA states have opted to provide financial retirement incentives to state workers to try to shield their state workforces from significant cutbacks.

This option has been selected to avoid massive lay-offs and, hopefully, to avoid a loss of morale among the state workforce. Oklahoma has restricted eligibility for these buyouts to employees in the state's Corporation Commission and Department of Corrections. Louisiana has made the offer to employees that are already eligible to retire.

Advocates express concerns that the buyout may not achieve its intended result if the positions are filled too quickly, meaning the state must pay not only the incentives but also the new personnel costs. They also voice a concern about a potential "brain drain".

> **"The buyouts are a piece of larger cost-cutting efforts as states work to balance their budgets."**
>
> ***Source: www.stateline.org***

Tennessee employed the same strategy in 2008 and the strategy netted the state $46 million in savings. Only employees in jobs considered "expendable" were offered the incentives and the jobs will be left permanently open.

Connecticut employed the strategy in 2003 and the ultimate result was no long term savings but instead "higher costs of providing salary, pension and health benefits to the combined populations of retired and active employees."

Obesity: No Good News for the South

According to the report, ***F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America,*** that was released in July 2009 by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, **over 30 states in the US have a population of overweight or obese children that is at or above 30%.**

Not surprisingly, the SECA states didn't fare well. Mississippi had the highest rate of overweight and obese children at 44.4%, followed by Arkansas at 37.5% and Georgia at 37.3%.

Mississippi also had the highest adult rate of obesity at 32.5% and three SECA states, Alabama, West Virginia and Tennessee, joined this category with adult obesity rates topping 30% for the first time.

The discouraging news

Overweight and Obese Children

25 to 30% Oklahoma

30 to 35% Texas, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina & Virginia

35 to 40% Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia

40 to 45% Mississippi

For a copy of the report, go to

http://healthyamericans.org

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SECA

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 how to find additional information.*

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

After the August Recess: The 2010 Budget

As Congress reconvenes in September after a month-long recess, they will face one major issue immediately. The proposed 2010 budget will come under scrutiny and the 2010 fiscal year begins on October 1, 2009. **Some things to note in the 2010 budget:**

- **Head Start/Early Start** received increases in both the House and Senate budget bills for 2010. The increase is $122 million over 2009 levels.
- The **Child Care & Development Block Grant** is level-funded.
- **Title I Grants** are level-funded. (Schools have the option of using this money for early childhood programs.)
- **Even Start** received a $3 million cut in the House bill.   The Senate bill eliminates the program.
- The House bill keeps the **Early Reading First Program** with a $15 million increase and funds **Striving Readers** at $146 million. $66 million of that is directed to early literacy. The Senate has proposed a new bill that would incorporate the Early Reading First Program into the Striving Readers Program.
- **IDEA Preschool Grants & Grants for Infant/Toddler** are level-funded.
- **IDEA Part B** is level-funded.
- **21st Century Community Learning Centers** received a $50 million increase in the House but is level funded in the Senate.
- **Pell Grant** levels will increase.
- **Perkins Loan Forgiveness** funding is cut for 2010 in the House bill.
- **WIC** funding is slated for a significant increase.

In order for the federal government to operate with an approved budget, it will be necessary for Congress to pass all budget bills by October 1. If that doesn't happen, action is taken to extend the current budget until the new budget is adopted.

Many of these programs received additional funding in 2009 through the ARRA.