

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Breakfast: A Crucial School Supply?

We all know that paper, pencils, crayons, glue, etc. are “crucial school supplies.” But have you ever considered that **breakfast** might just make that list? A new report, [Hunger in Our Schools](#), from Share our Strength makes the case that breakfast can be just as important as those traditional school supplies.

“At a time when a majority of America’s public school students come from low-income backgrounds, childhood hunger is a reality in American public schools. Among educators surveyed in the report, 76 percent say they have students who regularly come to school hungry.” *Source: <http://blogs.usda.gov>*

The report describes a “host of problems” that educators note when children regularly come to school hungry.

- ◆ Inability to concentrate (88%)
- ◆ Tiredness (82%)
- ◆ Lack of energy or motivation (87%)

- ◆ Behavioral problems (65%)
- ◆ Poor academic performance (84%)
- ◆ Students feeling sick (53%)

Teachers list the **benefits** of breakfast as:

- Helps students concentrate throughout the day (93%)
- Prevents headaches and stomachaches (74%)
- Better academic performance (87%)
- Better behaved students (68%)
- Healthier students (76%)

A Solution that Works

Some schools have moved from breakfast served in the cafeteria to breakfast served in the classroom. It becomes a regular part of the school day and all students in the class participate.

Schools that have implemented this model say it has been positive for students because 1) students

have been fed, 2) students are energized and ready and 3) no one is singled out.

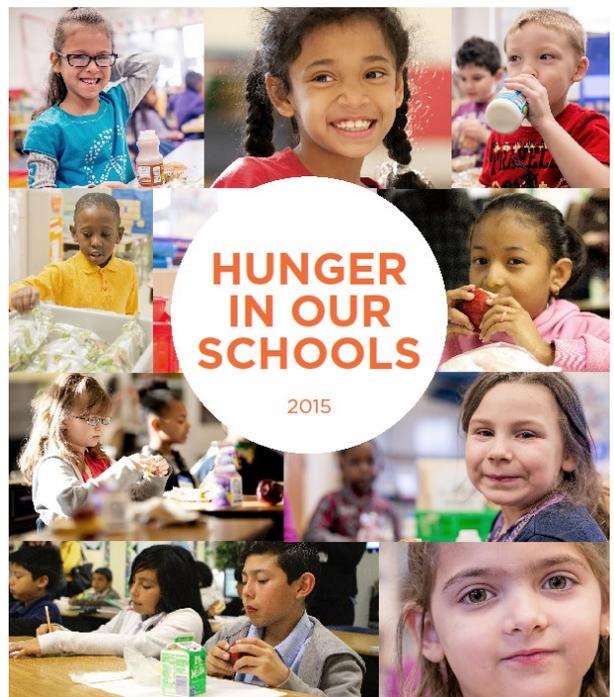
Other schools have had success with “grab n’ go” carts, an approach that works particularly well in high school. They have also tried the “second chance breakfast” which is served later in the morning. *Source: [Hunger in our Schools, 2015](#).*

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Scaling Back on Testing

The debate has been raging in education circles concerning student testing and “how many is too many?” Just as in early childhood education, the questions that are being asked are about age appropriateness, curriculum alignment and frequency.

As a result of this debate, several states in the SECA region have moved forward to eliminate some tests and reduce the time spent in testing students throughout their educational career.



Florida

Governor Rick Scott issued [Executive Order \(2015-31\)](#) on

February 24, 2015 that suspended the state’s required 11th grade test in English Language Arts. The Or-

der stated that “The Commissioner of Education is hereby authorized to suspend the schedule for the administration of the grade 11 Florida Standards Assessment for English language arts to give the Legislature sufficient time during this legislative session to consider repeal of the requirement.”



Oklahoma

Middle school students who are taking advanced mathematics courses will, as of this spring, no longer be required to take grade-level math tests. In February the U.S. Department granted a [request](#) from the state to eliminate double testing for those students.



West Virginia

The West Virginia Board of Education approved a [measure](#)

to eliminate testing in social studies and reduce examinations in science. (The information may be found in the February 12, 2015 minutes of the West Virginia Board of Education.) The rationale given was a concern about over-testing.

Although these measures do not directly impact assessment and testing in pre-K and the early grades, the discussion concerning the amount and quality of assessment will continue to be a hot topic in education. It’s encouraging that the issue is being discussed and hopefully the discussion will broaden to early learning.

Making the Case for Early Childhood Funding

Congress is currently in the process of developing appropriations requests and national advocates are asking that local and state advocates help to make the case for including funding for early learning in these appropriations.

The House will recess on March 27th and the Senate on March 28th. Prior to that time, members of both houses are being asked to submit requests for discretionary funding. There are several areas where discretionary early childhood funding could be inserted.

⇒ Increases in funding for the Child Care & Development

Block Grant (CCDBG) and Early Intervention.

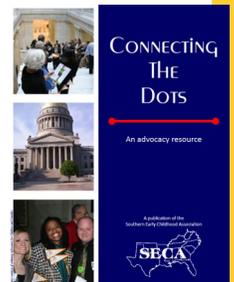
- ⇒ Increased funding for Head Start.
- ⇒ Increased funding for Preschool Development Grants (This effort is being led by a SECA state Senator, Bobby Scott of Virginia.)
- ⇒ Inclusion of a dedicated funding stream for early learning in the ESEA reauthorization.

Dear Colleague letters are being circulated on all these issues to gain support for increasing and enhancing funding for early learning. Advocates in the states are being encour-

aged to utilize the Congressional process to contact their Representatives and Senators to encourage them to support this enhanced funding.

If you would like to send a message or make a call to your Congressional representatives in support of these increases, you can find the contact information on the SECA website under [Our States/State Advocacy Contacts](#).

If you’d like some help in learning how to get your message across, check out [Connecting the Dots: An Advocacy Resource](#).



Education Savings Accounts: A New Strategy?

One of the newest innovations in education is Education Savings Accounts (ESA's), an evolution in parental choice.

These accounts have been established in Arizona and **Florida** and incorporate the following:

- ⇒ Parental choice and educational customization to meet the needs of individual students.
- ⇒ Direct payments by the states into accounts for individual students that allow parents to make customized educational choices for their children.

How does it work?

Education savings account programs give money based on the state's per-pupil funding to parents of eligible children and rely

on parental choice to bring together a customized education system that will support the child. To qualify, children must generally have a disability and these funds are designed to support a variety of educational programs and therapies that meet the needs of these children.

Florida's program, [Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts](#), is only for students with disabilities like autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. The average payment per year is \$10,000 and these funds can be used on qualifying expenses such as tutors or private school tuition. Any funds that are not spent can be saved for college tuition. This year, approximately 1,400 students are using ESA's in Florida.

The program, included in a bill that also expanded tax-credit scholarship programs, was passed in 2014 and is currently being challenged in court.

This year, several SECA states have proposed similar programs:

Georgia/[HB 243](#): *The Georgia Education Savings Account Act*

Mississippi/[SB 2695](#): *Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs*

Oklahoma/[SB 609](#): *Oklahoma Education Empowerment Act*

Tennessee/[SB0027 & HB0138](#): *Individualized Education Act*

Virginia/[HB2238](#): *Virginia Parental Choice Education Savings Account*

Source: *Some States Put Parents in Charge of Pupils' Aid* by Arianna Prothero, *Education Week*, 2/25/15, p. 1 & 19

Education Week Offers a Variety of On-line Info

Education Week has developed a series of [on-line blogs](#) that provide information on differing topics of interest to educators.

These blog posts are developed by reporters for *Education Week* and cover the following topic areas:

- Politics and Policy
- Technology, Industry, & Innovation
- Research
- In the Classroom
- P-16 Connections
- Leadership
- Teaching Profession

- Educating Specific Populations
- Health & Wellness
- Parents and Community
- Charters & School Choice

You'll find these blogs that may be of special interest to our membership within those categories.



[Early Years](#): News and analysis on topics relevant to early learning.



[Learning the Language](#): Issues around dual-language learners.



[On Special Education](#):

News and trends in special education for administrators, teachers & parents.



[K-12 Parents and the Public](#):

Information about how parents and the community are re-shaping education policy.



[Politics K-12](#): Follow federal and state developments in education.

These blogs are available without a subscription.

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"A Voice for Southern
Children"

How to Use Public Policy Notes

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.

This monthly newsletter is produced by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director.

SECA strives to provide non-partisan and non-biased information

that is of interest to early childhood educators. Sign up at

http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/policy_newsletter_sign.php

to receive notice of its availability each month.

News to Note

Texas

This legislative session has seen a variety of early learning bills filed for consideration. Governor Greg Abbott has made early childhood education an important part of his agenda for the session. Companion bipartisan bills ([HB 4](#) & [SB 801](#)) would spend up to \$118 million in aid to school districts to provide high-quality early childhood education.

The bills introduce quality standards and allocate \$1,500 per qualified student. Children who will qualify for the program are foster and homeless children or those from low-income, non-English speaking

families. The bill would not require a full-day preschool program.

State of the State Addresses

Georgia



In his January 14th address, **Governor Nathan Deal** asked lawmakers to approve a state constitutional amendment to

allow the creation of an [opportunity school district](#). This would allow the state to take control of academically struggling schools. The proposal is modeled after the Recovery School District in Louisiana.

Virginia

Governor Terry McAuliffe focused on education as a means to



economic development for Virginia in his [January 14th speech](#). He asked lawmakers to help him protect K-12 and higher education from budget cuts.

West Virginia



Governor Earl Ray Tomblin highlighted two new education initiatives: funding to establish a science,

technology, engineering and math or STEM network and proposed legislation to help skilled state residents to enter the teaching field with a streamlined teacher certification program. He also proposed legislation to overhaul the state's juvenile justice system in his [January 14th address](#).