

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Tennessee Wins “Race to the Top” Grant

On Monday, March 29, 2010, the U.S. Department of Education announced the first round winners in the “Race to the Top” program. This program was created to support educational innovation at the state and local levels and was funded at \$4 billion. (For information on the Fund, go to the February 2010 edition of *Public Policy Notes*.)

Sixteen finalists for the first round were announced and only two awards were made in March. The states of Delaware and Tennessee were the two states to receive funding in the first round: Tennessee was awarded \$500 million and Delaware was awarded

\$100 million.

The core criteria used to evaluate the Phase I applications were:

1. Alignment of ALL interest groups within a state to Race to the Top goals.
2. State support of using standards and assessments and using them to help determine teacher/principal/school performance.
3. High levels of participation by both school districts and charter schools.

Source: <http://racetotop.com>

Some comments from the technical review form for Tennessee’s application:

- “Tennessee has a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda that describes its strengths, challenges and goals There is unanimous support from its 136 school districts and 4 state special schools.”
- “New and innovative organizational support structures and teams have been created to manage and operate the states reform agenda.”

For copies of the state applications, review summaries and other information, go to <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html>

First to the Top/Tennessee’s New Direction

In January 2010, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee signed into law two bills that composed the “Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010” and the “Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010.” The new laws included a range of measures that were designed to support improve-

ment in Tennessee education, specifically improving student performance and graduation rates at the high school and college levels.

Many of these changes had been discussed for years but the “Race to the Top” grants gave impetus to passage of the reforms, making Tennessee more competi-

tive in the application process. “With these new laws in place, we’ve got a landmark opportunity to move Tennessee public education forward in a dramatic and positive direction,” Governor Phil Bredesen said.

For more information about each Act, go to page 2 of this newsletter.

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2011 Public Policy Luncheon

We are pleased to announce that **Dr. Joe Thompson**, Director of the National Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity, will be our featured speaker at the 2011 Public Policy luncheon in Savannah, GA.

Tennessee: First to the Top & the Complete College Acts

With the receipt of \$500 million in Race to the Top grant funds, these new laws helped put Tennessee's application for the grant on top.

The *First to the Top Act* included a series of reforms (many of which had been debated for years).

The Act:

- Establishes an "Achievement School District" that allows the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing school districts.

- Requires an annual evaluation of teachers and principals.
- Creates a 15 member teacher evaluation advisory committee to recommend guidelines and criteria to the State Board of Education.
- Allows local school systems to create local salary schedules for teachers and principals, with state approval.
- Removes limitations on use of certain student-achievement data so the data can be used in making decisions on teacher tenure.

The *Complete College Act*:

- Funds higher education based in part on success and outcomes.
- Makes community colleges the centerpiece in Tennessee's education reform strategy.
- Creates a statewide transfer policy.
- Requires the establishment of dual-admission and dual-enrollment policies at all two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

Source: <http://news.tennesseeanytome.org>

How Will Tennessee Spend the Money?

The state of Tennessee submitted an application for the Race to the Top funds that included a request for \$501.8 million in grant funds.

Under federal guidelines for the grant, one-half of the funds received by Tennessee will be distributed directly to local school districts under the Title I formula. The other half will be used to create a "State Innovation Fund" that will support a series of new investments over a four-year period.

These new investments include:

- Approximately \$108.8 million will be used to help turn around struggling schools.
- Approximately \$62.2 million will support professional development

"Tennessee's proposed investments under Race to the Top are aligned not only with the needs of our state but also with the core reform priorities."

Timothy Webb, TN Commissioner of Education

and "human capital" programs, including the creation of a new educator leadership program.

- \$54.5 million will be used to improve access and use of technology in the public schools.
- \$22.5 million will be invested in STEM programs
- \$2.9 million will establish a *First to the Top Oversight Team* at the Department of Education.

Source: <https://news.tennesseeanytome.org>

Elections 2010: Where to Find Information

As the campaign season heats up, it's vital that concerned children's advocates stay informed and knowledgeable about candidates and their positions on issues of interest to early childhood professionals.

Many sources of information about the candidates and elections can be found on the Internet, but one source we've found that is easy to navigate and that provides extensive information is <http://www.politics1.com>.

This site provides information on:

- State and Federal candidates
- Political parties
- The election calendar
- Current issues
- Campaigns
- Local news sources, etc.

The site includes a US map and you can click on any state to find information specific to that state.

You'll also find blog postings and links to local news articles.

SECA does not endorse this site: we're simply providing you information about sites that include basic and helpful information to keep you informed.

Make sure you're an educated voter and take the time to evaluate the candidates who will be the leaders in your state.

Listening and Learning Tour

The U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services will hold a series of “Listening and Learning About Early Learning” meetings over the next few weeks.

The meetings will focus on topics related to early learning (birth through 3rd grade):

Understanding Preschool-Grade 3 Structures (April 23, 2010/Washington, D.C.)

Workforce and Professional Development (April 26, 2010/Denver, CO)

Family Engagement (May 4, 2010/

Orlando, FL)

Standards and Assessments (May 11, 2010/Chicago, IL)

Jacqueline Jones, Secretary Duncan’s Senior Advisor on Early Learning and **Joan Lombardi**, HHS’s Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development at the Administration for Children and Families, will lead the meetings.

The meetings will include 3 components:

1. Opening statements by officials from Education & HHS

2. Input from invited panels of experts

3. Open opportunity for public speakers to share input. (You must be registered to speak.)

The Department of Education announced the experts that will speak at each meeting and you can find that information at:

www.ed.gov/blog/2010/04/expert-panels-announced-for-listening-and-learning-about-early-learning/

Webinars will also be available.

National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform

In late January 2010, President Obama issued an Executive Order that created the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. The Commission, comprised of 18 members, will make recommendations that put the budget in primary balance, reducing the annual deficit to about 3% of GDP.

Twelve members of the Commission will be appointed by the House/Senate

leaders. The additional 6 members are appointed by the President. It will take 14 of 18 votes to pass recommenda-

“Far too long, Washington has avoided the tough choices necessary to solve our fiscal problems—and they won’t be solved overnight.”
President Obama

tions. Chairmen of the Commission are **Erskine Bowles**, President of the University of North Carolina (D) and former US Senator **Alan Simpson** of Wyoming (R).

Appointments made in March from SECA states are **Representative Jeb Hensarling** (TX) and **Senator Tom Coburn** (OK).

Source: www.whitehouse.gov/ArkansasDemocrat-Gazette, March 13, 2010.

Distrust, Discontent, Anger & Partisan Rancor

On April 18, 2010, the Pew Research Center issued an update to a research study of public attitudes toward the federal government that was begun in 1998.

The study consists of a series of interviews from telephone surveys conducted on landline and cell phones of nationwide samples of adults living in the continental United States. The main survey was conducted on March

12-21, 2010 with a sample of 2,505 adults. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. Three other surveys of approximately 1,000 adults were conducted in the period March 18-April 11, 2010.

Some findings from the survey:

- The public wants government reformed and its power curtailed.
- Trust in government is the lowest

it has been since the surveys began in 1998. Only 22% of respondents say they can trust the government in Washington almost always or most of the time.

- The public’s hostility toward government is likely to be an important election issue this fall.

For more information go to <http://pewresearch.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.

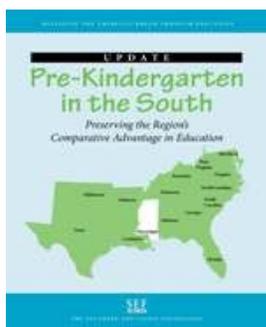
You'll find information that:

- **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.

Pre-K and the South: An Update

In March 2010, the Southern Education Foundation published an update to a report published in 2007, *Pre-Kindergarten in the South: Preserving the Region's Comparative Advantage in Education*.



The update notes that the South continues to lead the nation in 2010 in only one area of public educa-

tion: **pre-kindergarten**. The South has the highest enrollment of three-and-four-year-old children in early education programs of any region of the country. It also notes that, during the last two years, in spite of a severe recession, Southern states have maintained enrollment in public pre-K programs.

According to 2008 data provided by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the South has approximately 20% of 3 and 4 year old children enrolled in state supported pre-K. Twelve (12) of the South's fifteen states are in the top 20 states for pre-K enrollment of three-and-four-year-old children. In 2008, **Oklahoma (1st), Florida**

(3rd), **Georgia (4th), Texas (6th), West Virginia (7th), and Arkansas (8th)** ranked in the top 10 states. **South Carolina (12th), Kentucky (13th), Louisiana (15th), North Carolina (16th) and Tennessee (17th)** were also in the top 20 states. The only SECA states that didn't make the top 20 in enrollment were **Alabama and Virginia (Mississippi has no pre-K program)**.

"Publicly supported, pre-kindergarten of quality is the one area where Southern states are in the vanguard of progressive reform in the nation...All our children deserve to have access to quality pre-kindergarten services and bright futures."

Source: *Southern Education Foundation, www.sefatl.org*