

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

New Advocacy Groups Created: What Impact on Education?

During the last two months, three new advocacy groups have been created that have the potential to impact education and the political process. These groups have risen from discussions concerning the future of education in the United States and the current issues of partisanship in the U.S. Congress.

Students First was announced on December 7, 2010 and was launched by Michelle Rhee, former chancellor of the Washington, D.C. school system. She was a vocal proponent of a national movement to transform the nation's schools, including linking teacher evaluations to student test scores, closing low performing schools and firing ineffective teachers.

During her tenure, she drew fire from the teachers' union in the District and implemented reforms that challenged the status quo.

Ms. Rhee hopes to raise \$1 billion to send to "political candidates who support her policies and to local school districts that adopt the group's recommendations."

Source: *Rhee Starts School-Advocacy Group*, *Wall Street Journal*, 12-7-10.

Chiefs for Change is a new group created to support "bold, visionary education reform for improved student achievement that leads to success in college and careers." The founding members of the group are all

Chiefs of Education in their states and three of the five are from the SECA region.

The group, unveiled on November 30, 2010, will work in concert with the Council of Chief State School Officers but wishes to pursue "a much more aggressive path toward success."

Source: www.excelined.org

NoLabels.org was launched on December 13, 2010 and is an organization dedicated to "put the labels aside and do what's best for America." This group is in direct response to the 2010 elections and the partisanship that has developed in the U.S.

Congress. Source: <http://nolabels.org>

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act Becomes Law

On December 13, 2010, President Barack Obama signed the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* into law.

This law reauthorized the federal child nutrition programs (school lunch, child care, etc.) and makes the largest investment in the programs since they were created.

The Act was a final legislative victory for **Senator Blanche Lincoln (AR)** who was defeated in the November 2010 election. This piece of legislation had been one of her legislative priorities in the U.S. Congress and as Chair of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee.

"Today, we made an historic investment in our children that will last a lifetime. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act puts us on a path toward improving the health of the next generation of Americans, providing common-sense solutions to tackling childhood hunger and obesity." Source <http://lincoln.senate.gov>

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News to Note

Richard Brent Houston, principal of **Shawnee Middle School in Shawnee, Oklahoma** has been appointed to the National Assessment Governing Board.

Yale University will close its undergraduate **early childhood and secondary certificate programs** in 2012.

Michelle Rhee has joined **Florida** Governor-elect Rick Scott's education transition team. See lead article on **Students First**.

Students First

Students First was launched on December 6, 2010 to create “a national movement to defend the interests of children in public education and pursue transformative reform. *Students First* is designed to mobilize parents, teachers, students, administrators, and citizens throughout the country to channel their energy to produce meaningful results on both the local and national level.” Source: <http://blogs.ajc.com>



Michelle Rhee

Students First has adopted four guiding principles:

- Great teachers make a tremendous difference for students of every background; all children deserve outstanding teachers.
- Public dollars belong where they make the biggest difference—on effective instructional programs. We must fight ineffective practices and bureaucracy.
- Parent and family involvement is crucial to increased student achievement but the entire community must also be engaged in the effort to improve schools. Source: <http://www.studentsfirst.org>
- Attending a great school should be a matter of fact, not luck; every family should be able to choose an excellent school.

Ms. Rhee will serve as CEO of *Students First*. To find out more about the movement and to “sign the pledge,” go to www.studentsfirst.org

Chiefs for Change



Eric Smith Florida

Chiefs for Change is a “coalition of state school chiefs and leaders that share a zeal for education reform. Together, they provide a strong voice for bold reform on the federal, state and local level.” The group was founded by five state school chiefs and three (3) of the founding five members are from SECA States. They have

developed a *Roadmap to Excellent Education* that encompasses five Guiding Principles:

- 1) Achievement-focused Teacher and School Leadership Effectiveness
- 2) Rewarding Excellence and Replacing Failure with Success
- 3) High Academic Standards



Gerard Robinson Virginia

- 4) Transparent and Rigorous Accountability
- 5) Viable Options for All Students

The organization will be supported by the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

Source: <http://excellined.org>



Paul Pastorek Louisiana

NoLabels.org

“In American politics right now, mostly the far left and the far right dominate the debate. What No Labels is here to do is to organize the other 70% of the electorate.” Jon Cowan, CNN, 11/24/10.

This new organization is attempting to inject the idea of bi-partisanship into the national political debate by rewarding and supporting politicians who work in a bi-partisan manner. The **No Labels Declaration** asks politicians to “put the

labels aside and do what’s best for America.”

Some themes from the Declaration:

- We are not labels—we are people.
- We care deeply about our country.
- We are passionate about addressing America’s challenges.
- We are Democrats, Republicans and Independents. Most importantly, we are Americans.

- We believe hyper-partisanship is destroying our politics and paralyzing our ability to govern.
- We believe that together we can make the future better and brighter.

For the complete Declaration go to <http://nolabels.org>. The website includes an option to sign on to the Declaration.

Digital Learning Now

The former governors of two SECA states, Florida and West Virginia, have joined forces to create a new organization, the **Digital Learning Council**. Introduced in August 2010, the Council is designed to “identify policies that will integrate current and future technological innovations into public education.”

“Technology has the power to customize education for every student in America,” according to Governor Bush, co-chair of the Council. “Providing a customized, personalized education for students was a dream just a decade ago. Technology can turn that dream into reality today. The Digital Learning Council will develop the

roadmap to achieve that ultimate goal.”

“We must not squander the opportunity to promote digital innovation to reform our nation’s schools and ensure that all students are prepared to confront the challenges in our economy and society with the tools and skills that digital technology offers,” said Governor Bob Wise, co-chair of the Council. *Source:*



Former Governor
Jeb Bush (FL)



Former Governor
Bob Wise (WV)

Digital Learning Council Press Release, 8-18-10, <http://edreformer.com>

The Policy Roadmap developed by the Council outlines 10 policies that it says must be in place in states and districts to support high quality digital learning. *Source: Digital Changes Seen as Key for K-12, Education Week, 12-8-10*

Does Class Size Matter? How Low Do We Have to Go?

Class size or staff/child ratios have been a mainstay of “quality” education theory for many years. As state budgets face huge revenue shortfalls, a debate has begun about whether this is indeed a strategy that produces a quality educational experience for children. The “gold standard study” to support the effect is Tennessee’s Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio or STAR project, a four-year longitudinal, randomized controlled study that began in 1984 and tracked more than 7,000

students in 79 schools. Researchers studied the effect of class size on children in kindergarten through third grade and, at the end of the first year, found that children in the smaller classes scored higher than children in the “regular” classes. Follow-up studies showed that these children maintained better outcomes throughout subsequent years of their education. (Small classes constituted 13-17 children, an unlikely target for most state class-size reduction policies.)

According to **Arne Duncan**, U.S. Secretary of Education, “*I anticipate that a number of districts may be asked next year to weigh targeted class size increases against the loss of music, arts and after-school programming... We support shifting away from class-size based reduction that is not evidence-based.*” *Source: Policymakers Reconsider Benefits of Limiting Class Sizes, Education Week, 12-1-10*

The State of the American Child

On December 2, 2010, retiring U. S. Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut announced a new partnership between two major child advocates, **Save the Children** and **First Focus**, to develop an **annual report card** on the state of the American child.

This partnership grew from a series of hearings that Senator Dodd held during 2010. “The hearings looked at all aspects of children’s lives: their health from birth to adulthood, their educational experi-

ence in and out of the classroom, and their life at home with their families and in their communities, with the focus of the hearings being on the interconnectedness of all of these aspects and how they shape and define the lives of our children.”



“The report card will monitor the well-being of our nation’s children and provide benchmarks for their progress. The results will help identify areas where public policy is needed to improve the well-being of our children.” *For more information and a summary of the hearings, go to <http://dodd/senate.gov>.*

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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.

Teacher Evaluation 2.0

Released in October 2010, a report by **The New Teacher Project** provides a roadmap for developing new teacher evaluations.

The New Teacher Project (TNT) was created in 1997 and has recruited or trained approximately 37,000 teachers, benefiting an estimated 5.9 million students. It has also released a series of studies on the policies and practices that affect the nation's teaching workforce, including the new report, *Teacher Evaluation 2.0*.

Teacher Evaluation 2.0 provides a set of six design standards that any "rigorous and fair evaluation system should meet." The development of the standards was based on the premise that the "teacher evaluation system is bro-

ken" and they are designed to "provide states and school districts with a blueprint for better evaluations that can help every teacher thrive in the classroom—and give every student the best chance at success."

The Guiding Principles of the recommendations are:

1. All children can master academically rigorous material, regardless of their socio-economic status.
2. A teacher's primary professional responsibility is to ensure that students learn.
3. Teachers contribute to student learning in ways that can largely be observed and measured.
4. Evaluation results should form the

foundation of teacher development.

5. Evaluations should play a major role in important employment decisions.
6. No evaluation system can be perfect—in teaching or in any other profession.

The six standards included in the Guide are: 1) Annual process, 2) Clear, rigorous expectations 3) Multiple measures 4) Multiple ratings 5) Regular feedback and 6) Significance. For a copy of the report, go to www.tntp.org.