

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Raising the Debt Ceiling: Deadline Looms

During the last year, we have significantly increased the federal deficit and we're quickly approaching the limit that Congress has set on how much money the federal government can borrow. Unlike many of our states, the federal government can spend more than it receives by borrowing funds from a variety of sources.

As the current "debt ceiling" is being approached, a debate is underway in Washington about whether members of Congress are willing to raise that limit again without significant "strings" that include reductions in spending.

Originally, it was estimated that we would need to raise the debt ceiling of \$14.3

trillion by May 2011; *however, it has now been estimated that we have until August 2011 to make these decisions.*

Three Provisions That May End Up in a Deal to Raise the Debt Ceiling

- **A target for future budgets:** The Republicans want to focus a target on spending. The President wants deficit caps which would allow lawmakers to reduce spending and raise revenue.
- **Triggers for enforcing the budget:** Spending points at which automatic cuts will come into play if Congress doesn't meet the budget targets.

- **Spending Cuts:** These would be enacted by Congress.

Questions to Answer

As the debate continues there are some very important questions to be answered.

1. Should the target be to bring down spending to certain levels by a certain date, annual deficits or total debt?
2. Should the trigger enforcement mechanism be restricted to spending cuts and, if so, should any programs be exempt from cuts? Should the trigger include tax increases too?
3. Spending cuts..what should be sliced?

YouCut Phase II: Giving Citizens a Vote

In a press conference on May 11, 2011, House Majority Leader **Eric Cantor, (VA)** announced that the Republican majority in the House was reviving the **YouCut** program. The program was created a year ago to allow interested citizens to have input into ways to cut spending in the federal budget.

In Phase II, voters can access the YouCut website and vote on three different spending reduction proposals each week. The proposal will then be introduced as legislation by the designated House Member and the progress of the legislation can be tracked by voters on the YouCut website. <http://majorityleader.gov/>

YouCut/ Three Republican freshman from SECA states have taken the lead on Phase II: **Renee Ellmers (NC), Mick Mulvaney (SC) and Austin Scott (GA).**

"We as Republicans remain committed to employ the latest technologyso that more and more Americans can be involved in the legislative process."

Source: www.majorityleader.gov

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New Resources for Professionals

Healthy Beginnings, developed by the Maryland Department of Education/Early Childhood Development and Johns Hopkins University/ Center for Technology in Education, provides a set of newly updated developmental guidelines for families and those who work with children from birth through 3 years of age. www.marylandhealthybeginnings.org/

Full-Day Kindergarten: A Proven Success has been released by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and includes information about the relationship between full day kindergarten and improved 3rd grade reading proficiency. www.post-gazette.com/pg/pdf/201104/20110421p_pc_k_study.pdf

A Framework for State Leadership and Action in Building the Components of an Early Childhood System by Build Initiative. www.buildinitiative.org/files/resources/Bruner%20Four%20Ovals.pdf

Developing a Common ELL Definition

On April 19, 2011, the U.S. Department of Education released a grant announcement to fund the development of enhanced assessment instruments that would assess English-language-proficiency as part of the Common Core Standards Initiative. The assessments will also be utilized to determine when students must leave special programs designed to assist them in learning English.

The \$10.7 million available under this program will be utilized by states or consortia to design the assessments that will be utilized with the Common Core

Standards. (For more information on the consortia and standards, go to the March 2010 and June 2010 editions of *Public Policy Notes*.)

Two consortia, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, are already required to have a common definition; however, these new rules appear to be pushing the issue of a common definition nationwide.

These new assessments will:

- Have a common definition of

English learner adopted by the state or consortia.

- Include diagnostic (screener or placement) and summative assessment.
- Measure students' English proficiency against a set of standards that correspond to a common set of standards in English language arts and mathematics.

Sources: *Education Week*, 4-27-2011/
Federal Register, 4-2-2011, FR DOC # 2011-9484

Partnership for Assessment: Florida DOE Takes the Lead

Under the "Race to the Top" program, the U.S. Department of Education awarded funds to develop K-12 assessment systems aligned to the Common Core Standards in English, language arts and mathematics. To access these funds, states came together to form consortia that would undertake this work to develop a common assessment that would be utilized by all states.

The Partnership for Assessment of

Readiness for College and Careers formed to access the grant funding and develop an assessment system that would give "students, parents, teachers and policymakers the tools they need to help students—from grade three

The goal of PARCC is to create an assessment system that will help states dramatically increase the number of students who graduate high school ready for college and careers.

through high school—stay on track and graduate prepared."

The Florida Department of Education is acting as the fiscal agent for this consortia and six of the fifteen governing states (**Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee**) are in the SECA region. **Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi** and **South Carolina** are participating states. Source: <http://www.fldoe.org/parcc/>

Strategies to Fix Failing Schools and Districts

On March 24, 2011, the National Governor's Association released an issue brief, *State Strategies for Fixing Failing Schools and Districts*.

Under the No Child Left Behind law, failing schools were given a certain amount of time to turn around and that effort continued under ARRA, as stimulus funds were tied to turnaround scenarios. (For more information, go to the July 2010 edition of *Public Policy*

Notes.) According to the issue brief, thirty-five states and territories had more than a quarter of all schools missing adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB in 2008-2009.

In 2009, the National Governor's Association provided grants to four states, including **Mississippi**, to "develop policies and plans that create conditions to turn around chronically low-performing schools." Although these efforts have

been successful only about 10-20% of the time, some recommendations came from these projects. It was noted that states can **1) build state capacity to assist schools and districts, 2) engage external partners, 3) set ambitious but realistic goals that incorporate multiple measures, and 4) develop a human capital strategy**. These lessons will be particularly important as ESEA reauthorization moves forward.

Source: www.nga.org

Healthy Food Environments for Children

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued a new report, *The 2011 Children's Food Environment State Indicator Report and National Action Guide*, on April 26, 2011. The report concludes that “communities can influence children’s diets by ensuring that nutritious, healthy food choices are accessible in their areas.”

Data about food access, regulations and policies that may improve childhood obesity are included. The report looks at:

- **Behavioral Indicators** including how many sugar-sweetened sodas are consumed per day, the percentage of high school students who watch TV more than 3 hours per day, the percentage of children ages 6-17 with TV’s in their bedrooms and the percentage of children ages 12-17 who do not eat meals with their families most days of the week.
- **Policy and Environmental Indicators** including the 1) Child Care Facility Food Environment, 2) the School Food Environment and 3) the Community Food Environment.

Child Care Data From the Report Regulations to Restrict Sugar Drinks

NO: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

YES: Georgia

Regulations to Require Access to Drinking Water Throughout the Day

NO: Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi

YES: Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

Regulations to Limit Screen Time

NO: Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia

YES: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia

Source: *Children’s Food Environment State Indicator Report, 2011*, page 8

For a copy of the report and the National Action Guide, go to

<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/ChildrensFoodEnvironment.pdf>



National Action Guide

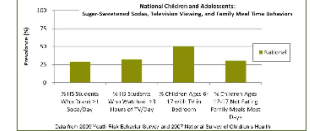
The Children’s Food Environment State Indicator Report, 2011 National Action Guide highlights selected behaviors, environments, and policies that affect childhood obesity nationally. It provides information on selected food environment indicators related to less healthy behaviors among children such as the consumption of less healthy foods and sugar drinks. The behavioral indicators describe sugar-drink consumption, television viewing, television in the bedroom, and family meal time among children and adolescents. The policy and environmental indicators measure components of food environments across child care facilities, schools, and the community. For detailed descriptions of the indicators and how they relate to healthy eating and obesity, please see the Children’s Food Environment State Indicator Report at <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/>.

This guide provides potential actions that state leaders, coalitions, community-based organizations, and professionals can take alone or in partnership to support state residents’ purchase and consumption of more healthful foods.

Behavioral Indicators

The National Action Guide provides an overview of four behavioral indicators for the nation:

- Percentage of high school students who drink 25 sugar-sweetened sodas per day
- Percentage of high school students who watched television 23 hours per day
- Percentage of children, ages 6-17, with television in their bedroom
- Percentage of children, ages 12-17, who do not eat meals with their families most days of the week



Policy and Environmental Indicators

Child Care Facility Food Environment

State licensing regulations that ensure child care facilities maintain healthy food environments can help instill healthy eating habits.

Indicator	National Data
• State regulations restrict sugar drinks in child care centers and family child care homes	2 states
• State regulations require access to drinking water throughout the day in child care centers and family child care homes	27 states
• State regulations limit television and video time in child care centers and family child care homes	18 states

Potential Actions

- Enact or revise licensing regulations and Quality Rating Improvement Systems to reduce or eliminate the availability of less healthy foods and sugar drinks, and to restrict screen time in child care settings.
- Encourage child care providers to conduct self-assessments of their centers or homes to identify improvements that they can make in their policies, practices, and environment related to healthier foods and beverages.
- Integrate nutrition and screen time best practices into provider training, certification and continuing education opportunities.
- Provide technical assistance and resources to child care providers through a state network of early childhood development and health that includes multiple stakeholders including Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, Cooperative Extension, Advisory Councils, Health Consultants, and the AAP State Chapter Child Care contact.
- Increase access to healthier foods in child care with Farm to Preschool programs, purchasing cooperatives, and gardening initiatives.

Resources

- Preventing Obesity in the Child Care Setting: Evaluating State Regulations: http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/State_Reports_Final.pdf
- Caring for Our Children: Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs: http://www.cdc.gov/CCFCE/PreventingObesity_060910.pdf
- Food Research & Action Center: Child Care Food Program Wellness Tool Kit: <http://www.foodresearchactioncenter.org/child-care-wellness-tool-kit/>
- National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center: Quality Rating & Improvement System Resource Guide: <http://hrdc.aft.org/qrimsresourceguide/>
- National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies: <http://www.nacrcra.org/>
- AAP State Chapter Child Care contact: <http://www.aap.org/childcare/>



Some recommendations for states to address the problems identified in child care.

- Enact or revise licensing regulations and QRIS to reduce or eliminate the availability of less healthy foods and sugar drinks and to restrict screen time in child care settings.
- Integrate nutrition and screen time best practices into provider training, certification and continuing education opportunities.
- Increase access to healthier foods in child care with Farm to Preschool programs, purchasing cooperatives and gardening initiatives.

The Texas Rising Star Program: Enhancing the Standards

HB 2269 was filed in the Texas legislature on March 4, 2011 and contains a number of quality initiatives in regard to the Texas Rising Star Program, a “voluntary, quality-based child care rating system of child care providers participating in the commission’s subsidized child care program.”

The bill:

- Establishes higher reimbursement rates for providers meeting the tiered star rating system.

- Establishes an expanded definition of quality child care programs.
- Mandates the use of 2% of funding from the Texas Workforce Commission to the local boards for quality initiatives.
- Defines the criteria to be used as “quality child care indicators”.
- Establishes the Texas Rising Star Program Review Work Group to develop proposed revisions to the

rules governing the program.

- Enhances training requirements for child care staff, including new staff orientation.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission, “this bill would result in a shift of existing appropriated funds from direct child care services to quality child care initiatives. “ The bill is pending in committee. For a copy of the bill go to:

www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup

Virginia: Governor Announces Merit Pay Plan

On April 19, 2011, Governor Bob McDonnell announced an initiative to award \$3 million in merit-based bonuses to recruit and retain teachers in select schools in Northern Virginia and throughout the state. This initiative, approved by the 2011 General Assembly, is a centerpiece of the Governor's *Opportunity to Learn*, his education reform agenda.

The Governor named 169 eligible schools, including about 50 in Northern Virginia. The grant money is available in hard-to-staff schools that earn exemplary ratings during the 2011-2012

school year. Awards of up to \$5,000 per teacher will be available for those persons deemed "exemplary" in hard-to-staff schools.

Schools that receive funding must also implement a "comprehensive teacher-evaluation system aligned with performance standards and model evaluation systems approved by the Board of Education. At least 40 percent of teacher evaluations must be based on student academic growth, including, when available and appropriate, student-growth data provided by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)."



McDonnell

"Teachers who make a commitment to students in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools, despite circumstances that often prompt colleagues to seek assignments elsewhere, deserve our admiration, and when they succeed in raising the achievement of students in these schools, their performance should be rewarded," according to McDonnell. Source: Press Release, 4-10-2011, www.governor.virginia.gov

Home Visiting Programs: New Opportunities for States

Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), \$1.5 billion over 5 years was allocated to support the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will distribute funds to states according to a formula that accounts for the number of children in poverty in each state. States have al-

ready received their 2010 allocation and in that same year, states were required to designate a lead agency for

"Home visiting programs are an important component of state early childhood systems."

Issue Brief—*Maximizing the Impact of State Early Childhood Visitation Programs*, March 8, 2011, www.nga.org

the new federal funds. The most common state level administrator for these funds is the state department of health.

More information about the program can be accessed from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,

Administration for Children and Families, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov>

or the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, <http://mchb.hrsa.gov>.

Welfare Reform Act of 2011

The Republican Study Committee (RSC) released the Welfare Reform Act of 2011 (H.R. 1167) on March 17, 2011.

According to the press release of the RSC, *"Since the War on Poverty began in 1964, Americans have spent \$16 trillion on state and federal welfare programs. In the two decades leading up to 2008, welfare spending grew by 292%....These spending programs have not achieved the stated aim of their authors, which was to reduce poverty and to increase self-sufficiency...In*

order to reverse course, the RSC offers the Welfare Reform Act of 2011."

The *Capitol Connection*, an e-newsletter of NACCRRRA, states that the resolution includes these provisions:

1. Required disclosure of the total for means-tested welfare expenditures.
2. An aggregate spending cap on means-tested welfare expenditures limited to the level of 2007 plus inflation.
3. Enforcement of the budget cap

through the budget resolution.

4. Extension of work requirements to Food Stamp recipients.
5. Reallocation of \$300 million of current welfare spending to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency.

For more info, go to <http://rsc.jordan.house.gov/Solutions/wra.htm>. Sources: Press Release, RSC/Capitol Connection, 3-25-2011, www.naccrra.org

Chiefs for Change: Two New SECA Members

In the December 2010 edition of *Public Policy Notes*, we introduced you to a new education group, **Chiefs for Change**. This group is headed by former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush.

The group is working to:

- promote new approaches to evaluating teachers,
- improve standards and testing, and
- foster overall academic innovation.

The group now consists of 10 state schools chiefs and, of the original five members, three were from SECA states.

Chief Eric Smith of Florida, Gerard Robinson of Virginia and Paul Pastorek of Louisiana were founding members of the group. (Chief Smith of Florida resigned on March 21, 2011 and will depart the Florida Department of Education in June 2011.)

Five new members have joined the group, and two of those are Chiefs of Education in SECA States. Janet Barresi of Oklahoma and Kevin Huffman of Tennessee have joined the group, making five of the ten members from a SECA state. Sources: *Education Week*, 4-27-2011, www.excelined.org



Left: Chief Janet Barresi, Oklahoma



Below: Chief Kevin Huffman, Tennessee

Raise Your Hand Texas



Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT) is a grassroots non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization dedicated

to increasing student achievement in Texas. Created in 2007, RYHT counts business and community leaders, taxpayers and concerned citizens as members. It has engaged in efforts to ensure that every child receives a quality public education to meet Texas' economic and societal needs in the next 25 years.

Actor Tommy Lee Jones, a spokesman for Raise Your Hand Texas. To see his video supporting adequate funding for education in Texas, go to www.raiseyourhandtexas.org.

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For more information, go to www.raiseyourhandtexas.org

Remove Red Tape, Improve Assessment Systems

Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado have joined forces to introduce legislation that would create a national task force at the U.S. Department of Education to “*examine which regulations and assessments schools must comply with and separate red tape from the stuff that has an impact on student learning.*” The legislation requires the task force “to make recommendations for policymakers to remove red tape, reduce regula-

tory compliance while ensuring important regulations remain in place, and improve the quality of assessment systems.”

According to Senator Alexander, “Every minute that a teacher spends on an unneeded rule or test is a minute that could be devoted to teaching a child.... We want teachers and principals in Tennessee and Colorado to tell us which regulations and tests are use-

ful and which ones we can get rid of.”

The Senators are moving ahead with this work in their states by establishing a working group composed of persons from Tennessee and Colorado, including both governors. Bennet and Alexander will serve as co-chairs. Source: <http://alexander.senate.gov>



Sen Alexander

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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.

Rating Education Schools: Two SECA States Say "NO"

In January, the National Council for Teacher Quality and U.S. News and World Report, announced their plans to rate education schools on up to 18 standards, basing the ratings primarily on examinations of course syllabuses and student teaching manuals.

The project raised controversy from the start, and two SECA states have informed the researchers that they will not "voluntarily" participate in the rating survey. Both **Georgia** and **Kentucky** have formally declined to participate, and researchers plan to gather information from non-participating states by utilizing open records and FOI requests. Those requests have already been sent to **Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee** and Colorado.

According to a press release from the National Council for Teacher

Quality, they lamented the fact that *"the field lacks a large, solid research base connecting aspects of teacher preparation to effectiveness, a fact made abundantly clear by the exhaustive review conducted in 2004 by the American Educational Research Association....In areas where there is strong research evidence—such as the degree of selectivity in choosing teacher candidates—our standards are based firmly on that evidence. Our other standards, where research is not as strong, have coalesced from research findings on teacher effectiveness, consultations with expert panels, the best practices of other nations and the highest performing states in the nation, and, most importantly, what superintendents around the country tell us they are looking for in teachers they hire."*

The standards are grouped into five major areas:

- **Grounded Clinical Practice**—

classroom management, practice planning instruction, measurement, all children can learn and student teaching.

- **Preparation of Elementary Teachers**—early reading, elementary mathematics, elementary content, ELL, struggling readers.
- **Preparation of Secondary Teachers**—middle school content, high school content, secondary methods.
- **Preparation of Special Education Teachers**—grade-level subject preparation, instructional design
- **Entry into Program and Profession**—selectivity, outcomes. Sources: *Education Week, 4-27-11/National Council for Teacher Quality, www.nctq.org*