

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

America's Healthy Future Act Passes Senate Finance Committee

On October 13, 2009, the much debated health care reform legislation was voted out of the Senate Finance Committee. The bill passed with a vote of 14-9 and one lone Republican voted "yes" to move the bill out of Committee.

The SECA states have a large representation on the Committee with 3 Democrats and 2 Republicans.

Our Senators are:

John D. Rockefeller
(D-WV)

Blanche Lincoln
(D-AR)

Bill Nelson
(D-FL)

Jim Bunning
(R-KY)

John Cornyn
(R-TX)

Some changes to note in the proposed Act.

1. The Children's Health Insurance Program will remain largely untouched until 2019. States will receive additional federal funding to expand the scope of the program.
2. The parameters to access the Health Care Affordability Tax Credits have been increased to allow individuals or families up to 400% of poverty to qualify.
3. The maximum amount of income that a family would have to pay for health insurance premiums has been decreased

decreased from 3-13% to 2-12%.

4. The penalty for failure to purchase health insurance has been changed and will be phased in over 4 years.
5. If you itemize your taxes, you will now need medical expenses that total 10% of adjusted gross income in order to deduct them from your income taxes.

A policy brief, *Health Care Reform: Chapter 3*, is posted on the SECA website. It contains information on the amended bill.

You can find a copy of the amended bill at www.senatefinance.gov

Senate Finance Committee Considers HHS Nominees

The White House has submitted three nominations for executive positions at the Department of Health and Human Services. The Senate Finance Committee began deliberations on their nominations on October 15, 2009. **Bryan Samuels** has been nominated for the position of Commissioner

of Children, Youth and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services. As Commissioner, Samuels would administer federal social services programs that promote the growth and development of children and youth, as well as their families.



He has served as the Director of Children and Family Services in Illinois and most recently as the Chief of Staff, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois.

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Two SECA State School Districts Finalists for Grants

The Hillsborough County, Florida and Memphis, Tennessee School Districts are among the five finalists to receive grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Foundation is setting aside \$500 million for projects that will measure and promote teacher effectiveness.

Source: *Education Week*, August 26, 2009

Schools Selling Less Candy and Soft Drinks: Congratulations MS & TN!

The Centers for Disease Control issued the results of a survey on the availability of less nutritious snack foods and beverages in secondary schools on October 5, 2009.

Although this report dealt with the availability of those snacks in secondary schools, in most states in which the study was conducted, reduced availability was the direct result of state action concerning the nutritional content of food that children receive. This state action has ramifications beyond the secondary school and encompasses efforts beginning in kindergarten to help children learn to make healthy choices. These efforts are particularly

critical in the South as we attempt to reduce the incidence of childhood obesity.

The School Health Profiles have been conducted since 2002, and all SECA states participate in the on-going study. During the period of 2002-2008, the percentage of secondary schools in which students **could not purchase** candy or salty snacks increased in 37 or 40 states. The percentage of schools that eliminated the purchase of soft drinks was significantly higher in 2008 than in 2002.

Of note to the Southern states:

From 2006 to 2008, the largest increases in the percentage of schools in

which students could not purchase candy, salty snacks and soft drinks were observed in **Mississippi and Tennessee**. These two states have been among those with the highest rates of adult obesity in the United States but have now adopted statewide nutrition standards for foods in schools outside of school lunch programs. In Tennessee these standards were adopted for grades pre-kindergarten through eight in 2008 and in Mississippi the standards were approved in 2006.

For more information on how your state has improved over the past 6 years, go to www.cdc.gov.

Source: Centers for Disease Control

Mississippi Delta Grassroots Caucus Presses for Leadership Change

In September, the Mississippi Delta Grassroots Caucus met in Washington, DC with Congressional members from the Delta region, and one person was notably absent: The chairman of the Delta Regional Authority was at the federal agency's headquarters in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Pete Johnson, a Bush-era appointee has never attended a meeting of the Caucus in DC.

The Delta Regional Authority was created to "enhance economic development and improve the quality of life for

the hard-working residents of this region." The federal-state partnership provides a unified voice for the region and is a regional advocate, planner and coordinator.

The Authority is comprised of 8 states: **Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri** and

"When you move from one administration to another, you lose a little steam. We want some gun-ho leadership."

Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR)

Arkansas Democrat Gazette 9-17-09

Tennessee. The Authority has a \$13 million annual budget and provides grants for education, health, road and water projects, including a major diabetes awareness and prevention program. Planning efforts are focused on the areas of information technology and transportation. The Authority conducts a Delta Leadership Institute in coordination with the University of Alabama.

Sources: www.dra.gov; *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 9-17-09

New Leadership in the US Senate

With the death of Senator Edward Kennedy, a major leadership change occurred in a Senate Committee that is responsible for reviewing much of the legislation that impacts children and families. **Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)** is now chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) which deals with legislation that concerns child care, Head Start, elementary and secondary education, special education, higher education,

education research and many other issues related to these topics. Senator Harkin also chairs the subcommittee on Health and Human Services, Labor and Education Appropriations. To learn more about Senator Harkin, go to

<http://harkin.senate.gov>

Senator Harkin represents a state that has many of the same rural issues as those in

the SECA states. He has been an advocate for rural issues, particularly health care access and education.



Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)

Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) has assumed the chairmanship of the Senate Agricultural Committee, which oversees the federal child nutrition programs that provide vital nutrition support in child care and schools throughout the South.

Arkansas Welcomes New Commissioner of Education

Dr. Tom Kimbrell assumed the position of Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education in September, and the state has gained a knowledgeable and supportive advocate of early childhood education.

"Tom shares my philosophy that education is Arkansas's top priority and he knows that we can continue increasing student achievement through strong standards and rigorous curriculum. He has also proven his ability to work with the diverse range of individuals and groups it takes to build an excellent education system." *Governor Mike Beebe, September 14, 2009.*

Dr. Kimbrell has been in education for

over 25 years and most recently served as the Executive Director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators.

He previously served as Superintendent of the Paragould and North Little Rock School Districts, which both have large, quality pre-school programs within their districts.

Dr. Kimbrell graduated from an Arkansas high school and received both his Masters and Doctorate at Arkansas State University, which boasts a significant teacher preparation and early childhood faculty. Dr. Dianne Lawler-Prince, a former SECA President, is a member of that faculty, as is the current



Tom Kimbrell, Arkansas Commissioner of Education

Arkansas Board representative, Dr. Joanna Grymes.

Welcome to Dr. Kimbrell and congratulations Arkansas!

Blue Ribbon Schools Program Honors Southern Schools

On September 15, 2009, Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education announced the 2009 list of Blue Ribbon Schools. 314 schools from throughout the US were honored with this designation for 2009, and each school will receive a plaque and flag to fly outside the school.

The Blue Ribbon Schools program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achieve-

ment. Schools must meet either of two criteria:

1. Schools that have at least 40% of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance in ac-

cordance with state assessment systems.

2. Schools that score in the top 10 percent on state assessments.

Each SECA state had schools recognized with Texas topping the list with 26 schools and North Carolina having only 1 school on the list.

The Department of Education's website includes information on the award and list of your state's schools.

Source: www.ed.gov

For a list of the schools that are being honored in your state, go to www.ed.gov and search for Blue Ribbon Schools.

New Data Tool on Children of Immigrants

The Urban Institute has published *The Children of Immigrants Data Tool* that provides detailed information on children ages 0-17 who come from immigrant families. The data is available nationally and by state.

Statistics include information on:

- Citizenship and immigrant status (foreign vs. native-born).
- Children's race.

- Ethnicity.
- School enrollment.
- Parents' Education and English proficiency.
- Family composition & income.

The data tool allows you to build a table based upon the characteristics that you request and will make comparisons by any of the groups.

Did you know?

- **Alabama** has a higher percentage of Hispanic children in its population of 4-year-olds than **Florida** (14.56 % in Alabama & 11.50% in Florida)
- **Kentucky** has almost the same percentage of Hispanic children in its 4-year-old group as **Florida** (11.85% in Kentucky & 11.50% in Florida)

Source: <http://datatool.urban.org>

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Southern Early Childhood Association



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.

State Child Care Assistance Policies 2009

The National Women's Law Center has published an issue brief, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2009: Most States Hold the Line, But Some Lose Ground in Hard Times*.

The report covers the period from February 2008 to February 2009, and most states had no changes in the policies covered in the report. Those policies included:

- Income eligibility limits to qualify for child care assistance.
- Waiting lists for child care assistance.
- Copayments required of parents receiving child care assistance.
- Reimbursement rates for child care providers serving families receiving assistance.

The SECA States

- Only **Arkansas** decreased its income eligibility limit for a family of three with an income at 150% of poverty— from \$34,524 in 2008 to \$27,145 in 2009. Most states either held the limit at 2008 levels or increased that limit.
- As of early 2009, the SECA states had a combined total of **136,507 children on waiting lists** for child care subsidies.
- In 2009, **Arkansas and Florida** increased the percentage of monthly copayment for a family of three with an income at 150% of the poverty level. **West Virginia** lowered the percentage from 5% to 2%.

This year, the report also includes information about how states are utilizing the additional funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

- **Alabama, Florida and Mississippi** are utilizing the funds to maintain or increase the number of subsidized slots available in the state.
- Both **Arkansas and Texas** are utilizing the funds for provider training and integration of children with special needs.
- **Texas** is working on quality assessment and improvement.
- **Arkansas** is funding infant/toddler consultants and grants to providers for equipment.

Source: www.nwlc.org