

# Public Policy Notes

## Southern Early Childhood Association

### The Fall Election: Will the SECA States Elect Democratic or Republican Governors?

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The fall 2010 mid-term elections are close at hand and our region has some closely contested political races with the outcome potentially affecting the balance of power in your state.

According to the latest information available by Rasmussen Reports, the following election outcomes are anticipated in the SECA gubernatorial races. (States with current **Republican** governors are in **red**: states with current **Democratic** governors are in **blue**.)

**Alabama**/Solid GOP

**Arkansas**/Leaning DEM

**Florida**/Toss-up

**Georgia**/Leaning GOP

**Oklahoma**/Solid GOP

**South Carolina**/Solid GOP

**Tennessee**/Solid GOP

**Texas**/Solid GOP

Source: *Election 2010, Gubernatorial Scorecard, Rasmussen Reports, October 12, 2010*

[www.rasmussenreports.com](http://www.rasmussenreports.com)

For three states (**Florida, Oklahoma and Tennessee**), the election may bring a new party into the Governor's Office and possible new directions in state government.

In **Florida**, Republican Rick Scott holds a 3% point lead over Democrat Alex Sink. *Rasmussen Reports, 10/11/10*. The winner will replace outgoing

Governor Charlie Crist who is running for the U.S. Senate as an Independent. (See *Public Policy Notes, Volume 3, Issue 5*.)

In **Oklahoma**, Republican Congresswoman Mary Fallin had a 26 point lead over Democrat Jari Askins. *Rasmussen Reports, 9/24/10*. The winner will replace outgoing Governor Brad Henry, a Democrat.

In **Tennessee**, Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam, Republican, holds a near two-to-one lead over Democrat Mike McWherter. *Rasmussen Reports, 10/11/10*. The winner will replace outgoing Governor Phil Bredesen, a Democrat.

*Rasmussen Reports is a national polling organization.*

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#### **West Virginia Senate Race is a Toss Up**

Current West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin is running to fill Senator Byrd's Senate seat, and, although the Democratic Governor is very popular in his state, he's now in a dead heat with his Republican challenger. It appears that his personal popularity is being pitted against President Obama's unpopularity with West Virginia voters. 10/13/10

### Which Party Will Voters Choose in November?

In three weeks, election day will be upon us and the trends are favoring Republican candidates.

According to the Generic Congressional Ballot poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports, Republicans hold an eight point lead over Democrats if voters are asked which party they

would vote for.

One factor in mid-term elections is that these elections typically feature an older electorate with a smaller share of minority voters. This electorate tends to vote conservatively and Republican. Projections are that 35% of voters will be Republicans and

33% will be Democrats.

The most important issues:

- 46% – the economy
- 14% – domestic policy
- 10% – national security
- 4% – cultural issues.

Source: *Generic Congressional Ballot, Rasmussen Reports, 10/11/10*

# Guidelines for Virtual Teacher Quality

With the growth of on-line and virtual schools, states are developing standards and indicators to define “quality” for on-line teachers.

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) based in Vienna, Virginia and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) have both published guides to assist in the development of state standards.

The Southern Regional Education Board published its guide in 2009 and it contains guidelines for the development of on-line teachers. These stan-

dards define the qualifications for a quality on-line teacher and the standards necessary for “academic preparation, content knowledge, online skills and delivery.”

According to the guidelines, “Providing quality professional development for online teachers is extremely important to ensure ongoing quality teaching and learning—just as it is for teachers in traditional classrooms. The professional development of online teachers should be well-planned and organized



Guidelines for Professional Development of Online Teachers

to meet the specific academic and instructional needs of online teachers.” Early childhood educators are slowly moving into the realm of on-line courses and staff development.

These guidelines are a practical guide to making sure that quality education is provided through on-line courses and are already in use in SREB’s 16 states.

Source: [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)

# Income, Poverty & Health Insurance Coverage

On September 16, 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau issued a report based on information gathered in the 2010 Current Population Survey.

Their key findings included:

- The real median household income in the U.S. in 2009 was \$49,777, not statistically different from the 2008 median.
- The nation’s official poverty rate was 14.3%, up from 13.2% in 2008.

- The percentage of uninsured persons rose from 15.4% to 16.7% in 2009.

***“The poverty rate in 2009 was the highest since 1994, but was 8.1% points lower than the poverty rate in 1959, the first year for which poverty estimates are available. The number of people in poverty in 2009 is the largest number in the 51 years for which poverty estimates are available.”***

Source: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

The South fared worse in many of these categories than other areas of the country. Our region, along with the Midwest and West experienced increases in the poverty rate, with our region’s increase at 1.4% exceeding the rates of the other regions.

The poverty rate for children under age 18 in the U.S. grew by 1.7%.

For a copy of the report, go to <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

# Florida Gubernatorial Candidate Releases Education Platform

Alex Sink is running for Governor of Florida and has issued an Education Plan that includes significant commitments to quality Pre-K in Florida.

According to Candidate Sink, “Florida needs a Governor who will lead on statewide education reform—by inspiring more local innovation and supporting the spread of best practices to all school districts.”

Her Pre-K platform entitled, “*Quality*

*Pre-K: Building a Strong Foundation*” includes the following components:

1. Put a Bachelor-degreed teacher in every pre-K classroom.
2. Require a consistent curriculum for all pre-K providers.
3. Advance partnerships with businesses to enhance early childhood education.



For a copy of the plan go to [www.alexsink2010.com](http://www.alexsink2010.com)

# Proposed Head Start Rules Bring Competition to the Table

The U. S Department of Health and Human Services has submitted proposed rules for Head Start that would force under-performing programs to compete for their federal funding. This marks one of the largest changes in federal Head Start policy in the 45 years of the program.

The proposed rules require that at least 25% of programs being evaluated (those not meeting Head Start performance standards) would be required to “re-compete” for their grants against other interested parties in the community.

“For the Office of Head Start and the

department, we are really trying to get the message out to grantees that it’s about increasing quality and holding grantees accountable,” said Yvette Sanchez Fuentes, the director of the federal Office of Head Start. *Source: Education Week, 10/6/10*

Head Start was designed to meet the social, educational, and physical needs of young children and has shown mixed results in terms of quality and child outcomes. The proposed rule will not change the current rules about terminating a grant or closing a program. Programs can be closed immediately if a program has serious violations related

to child care or financial integrity.

In 2007 Congress made major changes to Head Start and programs were no longer able to keep their grants indefinitely. Grants are now made for 5 years and, at the end of the period, existing grantees must prove their capability to meet Head Start performance standards.

“Potentially, it’s the most serious reform in the history of Head Start. It’s a signal that we’re really serious. We intend to close bad programs.” Ron Haskins, co-director of the Brookings Center on Children and Families. *Source: Education Week, 10/6/10*

## Alabama Indictments Unveiled

Governor Bob Riley and owners of the state’s electronic bingo halls have been at war since he began raiding the halls and closing them two years ago. Electronic bingo halls were a growing business until Governor Riley formed a task force to shut them down.

On Monday, October 5, 2010, the Justice Department unveiled indictments that accused the owner of Alabama’s largest casino, four state senators and several lobbyists of scheming

to buy and sell votes in the Legislature. The indictment contends that the bribes were designed to pass a state law that would legalize the operation of the bingo halls. State legislators tried to

*“For many months, Governor Riley has warned Alabamians that organized gambling is a threat to our state because of its corrupting influence...and today’s action by the Justice Department shows he was sadly, right.”*

*Jeff Emerson, Riley’s Communications Director*

pass bills in 2009 and 2010 to allow the games to operate but both bills failed. Early in the discussion about the bingo halls, proponents of legalizing them suggested that the revenue to the state could help fund education.

If convicted, the defendants face up to 5 years in prison for conspiracy, 10 years for bribery and 20 years for honest services fraud. *Source: Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 10/5/10*

## Texas In the News Again: Textbooks and iTunes

The state of Texas continues to make education news.

The Texas State Board of Education narrowly adopted a resolution in September to warn textbook publishers against incorporating “pro-Islamic/anti-Christian distortions” into their materials. The resolution was approved by a 7-6 vote by social conservatives who warned of “what they describe as a creeping Middle Eastern influence in the nation’s publishing industry.”

*Source: www.edweek.org, 9/24/10*

On another note, **teachers across Texas have gained a new professional development tool this fall.** Governor Rick Perry announced on September 1st the creation of a **Texas Education iTunes U channel.**

The channel will use “the iTunes U platform, a service that offers free downloads of lectures, lab demos and even campus tours as audio or video

files. It also will include online access to education content from state agencies and non-profit associations.”

The channel builds on **Project Share**, a collaborative effort of the Texas Education Association, *The New York Times* and the Public Broadcasting System. Project Share provides a collection of Web 2.0 tools to Texas Teachers for Professional Development. *Source: www.edweek.org, 9/1/10*

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Children"

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## 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.

## Professional Development: Trends and Challenges

In July 2010, the National Staff Development Council issued a report, *Professional Development in the United States: Trends and Challenges, Phase II of a Three-Phase Study*. This three phase project is designed to provide the most comprehensive picture and analysis of professional learning that has ever been conducted in the United States.

The phase two report found that:

- Nearly 75% of beginning teachers now participate in induction programs and 80% report having a mentor.
- Those opportunities are more available to teachers in suburban districts than to those in

urban and rural districts.

- More teachers had access to professional development regarding the content they teach.
- There has been a decline in the intensity of professional development in all other areas.
- In 2008, teachers nationwide had fewer opportunities to engage in sustained professional learning opportunities (more than 8 hours of duration).
- In areas like reading instruction, use of computers, teaching of English Language learners and special education students, investments in teacher learning appear to be in short-term work-

shops, the least effective method of professional development.

- The opportunities for collaborative planning among teachers is limited, averaging only about 2.7 hours per week.

**Two SECA states were noted for improvements.**

**South Carolina** has made significant strides in offering induction opportunities for beginning teachers.

**Arkansas** has made significant strides in offering professional development for veteran teachers.

For a copy of the report, go to <http://www.learningforward.org/news/NSDCstudytechnicalreport2010.pdf>