

# Public Policy Notes

## Southern Early Childhood Association

### Health Care Reform: After the Recess

Congress has returned from the August recess and the rhetoric is beginning to sizzle as the health care reform debate continues.

Advocates anticipate that a bill will be released from the Senate Finance Committee this week and the chairman, Senator Baucus, has released a preliminary document that includes a proposed framework from the Finance Committee's deliberations.

The major items outlined in the chairman's framework include:

- Elimination of exclusions for pre-existing conditions and prohibition of limited benefit plans and lifetime limits for individuals

- Insurance Reform in the small group market
- Risk sharing among entities
- Interstate sale of insurance
- Immediate relief for families and small businesses
- State Health Insurance Exchanges
- Health Care Affordability Tax Credits
- Requirement that all persons purchase health insurance
- Requirement that employers provide health insurance or pay a fee per employee
- The creation of non-profit, member-run health insurance compa-

nies that serve individuals in one or more states.

- Reform of Medicare & Medicaid to combat fraud, waste and abuse
- Promotion of disease prevention and wellness
- Additional scrutiny of non-profit hospitals

During the recess, members of Congress held town meetings to discuss health care reform, and these meetings were contentious in many districts. It appears at this point, that the "public option", creation of a government-run health care program, will not receive favorable review by Congress.

Source: [www.finance.senate.gov](http://www.finance.senate.gov)

### Health Proposal Eliminates CHIP Program

**With the passage of health care reform, the current Children's Health Insurance Program will be discontinued.** In order to ensure that children will not lose benefits or coverage under reform, the Senate proposal includes a provision that will require states to maintain their current

CHIP eligibility levels through 2012.

In order to make the transition, CHIP recipients would enroll in exchange plans and states would provide a "CHIP-wrap" to provide supplementary benefits, including EPSDT benefits for all children. A federal floor for

CHIP income eligibility would be set for children and pregnant women at 250% of poverty. States would continue to be reimbursed for CHIP at the enhanced Medicaid rate.

Children's advocates need to be vigilant as this progresses.

Source: [www.finance.senate.gov](http://www.finance.senate.gov)

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#### What's Next?

The Broward County School District has developed a unique plan to cut budget deficits....school administrators will serve as substitute teachers in the classroom. The District estimates that it will save about \$200,000 annually. The idea came from a 2nd grade teacher when the district solicited money saving proposals from employees.

Source: *Education Week*, August 26, 2009

## Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High-School Graduation

The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) recently joined forces to release a report that addresses the challenges facing Latina students in the United States. This report brings “new voices to the conversation: those of Latina students themselves and the adults who work with them on a daily basis.”

Some themes emerged as the authors reviewed current literature and conducted interviews.

1. “Latinas have high aspirations but too many doubt their ability to reach their goals.”

2. “The Latino community faces many challenges that help to explain the discrepancy between Latinas’ dreams and actual expectations.”
3. “Latinas face particular challenges related to the intersection of their ethnicity and gender.”

Poverty, immigration status of family members, Limited English proficiency, gender and ethnic stereotypes, discrimination based on ethnicity and gender, pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, lower involvement in public schools and other caretaking responsibilities all played a part in developing barriers to completion of high school.

Recommendations in the report include:

- “Invest in the future of Latino children.”
- “Connect Latinas with role models and engage them in goal-setting.”
- “Ensure that school environments are culturally inclusive and free of race/ethnicity and gender discrimination.”
- “Help Latino parents get more involved in the education of their children.”

For more information about the Latina perspective, go to [www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org) for a copy of the report.

## ARRA Funds Support Projects in Rural Areas

On September 10, 2009, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack announced grants and loans totaling \$17.5 million for community facility projects in rural areas. These projects are being funded immediately through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Our region had projects funded in four states. A total of 12 states received funding nationally.

Grants and loans were awarded to:

Georgia

- Valley Healthcare Systems

North Carolina

- Town of Lillington
- Outer Banks Community Development Corporation
- Penland School of Crafts, Inc.

**The Campbell County Children’s Center in Jacksboro, TN will construct a new facility to serve the needs of young and abused children in Campbell, Claiborne and Union Counties.**

Tennessee

- Campbell County Children’s Center
- City of Collinwood

Virginia

- Craig County Rural Health Care Corporation
- Eastern Shore Rural Health System
- Free Will Baptist Family Ministries

*For more information go to [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).*

## States of Disclosure: Some SECA States Flunk/Louisiana #1

Since 1999, the Center for Public Integrity has reported on financial disclosure requirements for state legislatures. These requirements have to do with personal financial and business reporting for state legislators.

The rankings are based on a “43-question survey that measures public access to information on legislators’ employment, investments, personal finances, property holdings or other

activities outside the Legislature.”

**Louisiana moved from 44th in 2008 to #1 in 2009,** primarily due to Governor Bobby Jindal’s sweeping ethics reform package. This is the first time that a disclosure of outside financial interests of legislators has been required in Louisiana.

Four SECA states received a

**failing grade of F:** Oklahoma, Tennessee,

Virginia and West Virginia.

**Four states received a grade of D:** South Carolina, Florida and

Mississippi. **Three States received a grade of C:** Arkansas,

Kentucky and Alabama. **Texas & Georgia received a grade of B.**

**Congratulations to Louisiana!**

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



Louisiana’s Capitol  
Baton Rouge

# Florida Welcomes New Senator

George LeMieux was sworn in as Florida's newest Senator on Thursday, September 10, 2009. Senator LeMieux replaced Senator Mel Martinez who resigned in the middle of his term. Senator LeMieux will serve the remainder of the term (16 months) and has stated that he will not seek the job when it appears on the November 2010 ballot.

Because Senator LeMieux is a Republican and replaces a Republican Senator, the party balance in the US Senate has not been affected.

The youngest member of the Senate at 40, LeMieux previously served as Gov-

ernor Crist's Chief of Staff, returning to a private law firm in January 2008.

Some political strategists in Florida have called LeMieux "a political seat warmer" because Governor Crist has already declared his intention to seek the seat vacated by Martinez.

When Governor Crist and LeMieux visited his hometown on the day of his appointment, he told the crowd that he was "pro-life, pro-gun and pro-family."

"I really need to learn and listen more and I'm going to be spending the next week or two really trying to immerse myself in health care issues...I don't have a firm position yet because I just



Senator LeMieux, wife Meike, sons Max, 6, Taylor, 4, and Chase, 2.

got sworn in, so we're going to wait, listen and learn. "

Source: [www.tallahassee.com](http://www.tallahassee.com)

## Alliance for Childhood

The Alliance for Childhood is a non-profit organization that promotes "policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning and joy in living."

The Alliance website includes reports of interest to early childhood educators, including the newest, *Crisis in the Kindergarten*.

Founded in 1999, it is a "partnership of educators, health professionals, and other advocates for children who are concerned about the decline in chil-

dren's health and well-being and who share a sense that childhood itself is endangered."

The National Advisory Board for the Alliance is composed of luminaries in the early childhood education field.

**"The Alliance's current work focuses on the recovery of creative play, which is disappearing from childhood."**

Members include:

*Sue Bredekamp* of the Council for Professional Recognition

*Linda Darling-Hammond* of Stanford University

*David Elkind* of Tufts University

*Samuel J. Meisels* of the Erikson Institute

*Larry Schweinhart* of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

For more information go to [www.alliancechildhood.org](http://www.alliancechildhood.org)

## West Virginia Proposes Regulation of Out-of-School Time Programs

On June 29, 2009, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau for Children and Families, announced proposed rules and regulations for Out-of-School Time Child Care Centers. An out-of-school time program was defined as "one that offers activities to school children before and/or after school, on school holidays, when school is closed because of an emergency, and on school calen-

dar days set aside for teacher activities.

The proposed regulations include:

- Personnel qualifications
- Preliminary and on-going training requirements for staff
- Standards for volunteers
- Facilities standards, including both in-door and outdoor space
- Environmental safety requirements

- Staff/child ratio of 1-12 if pre-school children are in the group: maximum group size of 24

- Staff/child ration of 1-16 if school-age children only.

The proposed regulations are on their way to the Legislative Rule Making Committee, and consideration by the WV Legislature in February 2010.

Source: <http://www.wvdhhr.org>

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## Southern Early Childhood Association

1123 South University, Ste 255  
Little Rock, AR 72204

Phone: 800-305-SECA

Fax: 501-227-5297

Email:

[info@southernearlychildhood.org](mailto:info@southernearlychildhood.org)

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A Voice for Southern Children

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org](http://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.*

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## The Times, They Are Changing!

Once the domain of Caucasian white males, the State Legislatures of the South are beginning to represent the population diversity that exists in our states. Not only have the Legislatures become more ethnically balanced, we're seeing a gender balance as well in 2009.

The National Council of State Legislatures released a survey in August that provides a look at the demographics of state legislatures across the nation. Comparatively, the South is doing well in promoting diversity and gender balance.

Since 1969, the number of women serving in state legislatures nationally has increased from several hundred to 1,789. Women legislators are predominantly Democrats (about 60%). **Arkansas, Florida, North**

**Carolina and Texas** lead the South with over 20% of their state legislature composed of women.

One startling change is the move from part-time state legislators to full-time legislators. The major occupational group previously had been attorneys; however, in 2009, 16.4 % of legislators reported themselves as full-time legislators. That made them the largest occupational group, surpassing the attorneys.

Additionally, the average age of a state legislator has risen slightly with 47.9% of our nation's legislators between the ages of 50 and 64 years of age. Only 24.6% of legislators nationally are between the ages of 35 and 49 years.

The ethnic composition of state legislatures has also changed. Cau-

casians are still the majority group but the percentage of African-Americans is now second. Latinos follow in third place and Asians and Native Americans are fourth.

The South' legislative bodies are predominantly Caucasian and African-American. Percentages of Caucasian legislators range from 79-99% in the SECA states.

**North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas** each have Latino legislators.

**North Carolina** and **Oklahoma** also have Native American representatives. No SECA states have Asian legislators.

*For more in-depth information, go [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org). Check out the State Legislator Demographic Flash Map.*

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