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SERVICE LEARNING

Senate poised for action on national service bill

Legislation would increase funding for education-related initiatives

By Kim Riley

The Senate is scheduled to move today on sweeping reform that would reauthorize and expand national service laws. The action follows an overwhelming 74-14 vote on Monday to end debate and move toward consideration of the Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act, H.R. 1388.

The GIVE Act, sponsored by Reps. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., and George Miller, D-Calif., received endorsement from President Obama, who cited the act as part of "a renewed spirit of national service" in his February address to Congress.

The legislation, slated to cost roughly \$6 billion over five years, would, among other initiatives, increase funding for the AmeriCorps program; bump up monies for education; establish a summer service program for students; and fund community service-learning opportunities for elementary and secondary, college, and graduate students, including youth who are disadvantaged or disabled.

The House passed the GIVE Act on March 18, and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee that day advanced a companion bill, the Serve America Act, S. 277, sponsored by HELP Committee Chairman Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and ranking member Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

The Serve America Act would also expand AmeriCorps and create an Education Corps under which states and nonprofit organizations would receive formula and competitive grants to fund national service programs to improve graduation rates, as well as student engagement and achievement.

"Americans may find themselves with less time and money to donate than in years past, but we remain a generous country," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Monday following the Senate's cloture vote. "It is fitting that the Congress now moves to consideration of the Serve America Act."

Today's Highlights

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Q&A: ARNE DUNCAN

Duncan urges extended time, creative use of stimulus funds

By Sarah D. Sparks and Frank Wolfe

Former Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan has not yet reached the 100-day mark as education secretary, but with Congress' passage of the stimulus and the FY 2009 omnibus spending packages, he's already well over the \$100 billion mark.

So far, Duncan still operates with a skeleton crew — many top-level positions remain unfilled — and he admitted to *Education Daily*® that his staff is still working to develop additional guidance and a process to streamline the thousands of waiver requests he expects from districts receiving Title I and stabilization money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Yet the new secretary is determined to use the largest increase to federal education spending in more than a generation to patch not just local budget gaps but also a much-criticized hole in NCLB: the lack of effective, large-scale improvement strategies for the schools that the law has identified as needing dramatic turnaround.

Duncan sat down with *Education Daily*® to talk about the vision for education reform and what he hopes to see from states and districts going forward.

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Report: 5 management issues can curb safety efforts

Findings could be preview of report to Congress in 2010

By Karen Bagwell

According to a recent safety report, school officials should focus on evaluating school safety management more. While school security audits typically hone in on equipment, such as security cameras and the facility, officials need a sharper picture of how management barriers can stymie student safety efforts, the report said.

Findings in *Five Critical School Safety Issues* are based on interviews of security personnel, principals, teachers and police in 120 school districts nationwide. The report was released by a research team from SERAPH, a security firm in Phoenixville, Pa., that provides reports on school safety to Congress in alternate years.

“This covers some of the issues in our upcoming report” to Congress for 2010, said Dale Yeager, president of SERAPH. He said officials who evaluate school safety at management levels can use the results to improve student safety in fundamental ways.

SERAPH research team leader Andreas Demidont found the typical school safety audit focused on physical security hardware or the facility but didn’t analyze management decisions that dictate safety policies. He noted in the report that many districts do not adequately assess “everyday management of the schools” when it comes to preventive safety.

The report listed five top school safety management barriers and recommended ways to overcome them:

1. Failing to comprehend school safety issues. Investigate management areas, such as whether:

- Teachers use effective classroom management techniques.
- Principals address schoolwide social climate issues, such as gangs.
- Safety solutions are included in administrators’ educational objectives.
- Safety emergency policy meets special ed students’ needs.
- Administrators have a plan to address sexual issues in schools.
- Managers have efficient ways to collate security data to create meaningful action plans.

2. Reacting instead of being proactive. Most schools have policies that prohibit student aggression and criminal acts. But districts need to go a step further and develop clearer guidelines to help principals and staff predict and prevent these problems.

3. Exercising poor business sense. School safety may be ineffective because of:

- Wasted time. School officials need to think like business executives. For example, administrators may not understand how to use technology for mundane tasks to give themselves more time to ensure the learning environment is safe as possible.
- Decisions not based on data. Personnel need effective ways to access data already available in schools. Even school board officers are asked to make crucial decisions apart from essential data. Administrators must find ways to access this data and to execute decisions that are on target. Also, train key staff members to base their decisions on hard data.
- Failure to think outside the box.
- Poor community communications. School authorities must regularly interact with parents and community members to update them about student safety. Beyond a lone yearly parents’ night, administrators must reach out, such as with automated phone messages or by appearing at school events for the public.

4. Using ineffective strategies to curb truancy, tardiness. District officials aren’t effectively engaging local, state and federal social service agencies as partners to help reduce truancy and tardiness. Develop a formal action plan to collaborate with local courts, social services and law enforcement to address these serious problems.

5. Neglecting emergency management training. While many schools have emergency plans on paper, officials aren’t adequately training staff to carry them out. For example, special ed students are often placed in regular classrooms; however, teachers aren’t trained to assist them in a crisis. Children with emotional or mental disabilities can panic in emergencies, and staff must be trained to manage the inevitable chaos and emotion.



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Q: *What education reforms do you want to see during your administration?*

A: We're pushing real hard around more time. That means lots of different things, but really it's a recognition that six hours a day, five days a week, nine months out of the year doesn't quite work. It's really trying to redefine fundamentally what it means to be a school. So I think it means a longer day; I think it means all the values and principles around community schools: art, drama, academic enrichment, GED, [English as a second language], family literacy nights. Really engaging the community: health care clinics, early childhood, the whole gamut. Making school the center of family life.

What I worry about a lot is summer reading loss. You have kids who don't have a lot of books at home and aren't read to. People around the country have experienced this — it's nothing unique to Chicago — but you get kids to a certain point in June, and when they come back in September, they're further behind than when they left you three months ago. It's heartbreaking. I'm not saying we need to do more of the school day in the summer, but it's all the opportunities that middle class kids have, to develop a skill or interest, to get drama or athletics, to get tutoring or be read to.

I'd love to get a hell of a lot more fifth- and sixth-grade kids on college campuses. When I grew up, my dad was a college professor, and I was in that environment every day. You feel like you belong; you feel like that's part of who you are.

Q: *When you get state applications for the stimulus, what are you going to be looking for?*

A: Despite the tremendous financial pressure that states and districts are under — and that is real, and it is devastating — but despite that, we can't just be satisfied with filling budget holes. We have to use this money to try to leverage change, to push a reform agenda and try to get dramatically better. So, whether it's thinking about time in different ways, thinking about talent in different ways, thinking about great professional development for continuous improvement, what we want is folks investing in strategies that have demonstrated ability to really make a difference. There have been a lot of people out there doing really innovative things that they haven't been able to take to scale. It's been in little pockets — one school, two schools. Here's an opportunity, if you're really creative and thoughtful, to really drive some significant change despite the tough budget times.

Q: *During your tenure, do you see performance pay becoming the norm in school districts nationwide?*

A: I think we've been really clear that we want to find new and creative ways to reward excellence,

and I think there needs to be a lot of careful work around what that means, and teachers should be involved with that conversation. ... There are some things you just can't do. You can't create competition between teachers, and a lot of these programs have failed because of that. It can't be a zero-sum game ... it's got to be incenting everyone to move in the same direction. As you know, many teachers don't have a test score tied to their particular work. The librarian doesn't, and the librarian can play a huge role in driving student achievement.

One thing I liked about what we did at home was we rewarded everyone in the building — custodians, security guards, lunchroom attendants — and really built a culture in which every adult in the building was driving student achievement. In schools that are taking off around the country, that's what you see, and we're really trying to recognize that and reward that.

Q: *How do you see that happening?*

A: I want to put a little bit more money on the table, but if that's all you're doing, you're kidding yourself. You're going to have no impact. You'll waste your money, and [teachers] are going to [leave] anyway. But if you give great teachers a chance to shape, and build a culture, and do it collectively, you have a chance to do something special. Getting critical mass into historically underserved communities is something that's going to be really important. I think there are a lot of potentially great pipelines for talent, but it's getting a critical mass of that talent to go in together that will give you a real opportunity to succeed.

Teachers go into this for the most altruistic of reasons, but if you ask a phenomenal teacher to go into a dysfunctional situation, no amount of money in the world is going to make them do that. So you have to think about: How do you change the culture? How do you bring teams of folks in together? How do you engage the community? How do you think about turning around both neighborhood high schools and their feeder elementaries at the same time to change the opportunity structure for a whole neighborhood, not just a single child or family? There's lots of room to be creative here.

[Also,] I want to think differently about areas of shortage: math and science, foreign language. We have 50 English teachers for every job available, and math and science vacancies. That doesn't make sense, so let's put some money on the table and try to get more people to go into math and science. Let's put some money on the table to get folks with other credentials to go back to school to get their math and science endorsement to become math and science teachers.

So, it's rewarding excellence, it's trying to get excellence into the toughest communities, and it's trying to meet areas of critical need.

Education Department

Duncan calls for 'new era' of science education

Addressing teachers at the National Science Teachers Association Conference on Friday, Education Secretary Arne Duncan called for increased attention to science education, saying it "is central to our broader effort to restore American leadership in education worldwide."

"I plan to work closely with [Energy Secretary Steven Chu] and with all of the other key agencies from NASA to the EPA to the National Science Foundation — to launch a new era of science education in America," Duncan said.

During his speech, Duncan also noted that a portion of the \$100 billion for education included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was slated for science.

"Many of the teaching jobs we will save with stimulus dollars will be in science labs all across America. I can promise that some of that money will help modernize those science labs — although those decisions will be made at the local and district level."

Duncan also referenced the education technology grants; the Title I, IDEA and School Improvement funding streams; and the "Race to the Top" fund, saying that monies from those pots would "find their way into science classrooms."

Study Hall

RAND finds 'little difference' between charter, public schools

The number of charter schools continues to grow, and both President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan support the creation of more such schools as a cornerstone of their education reform agenda.

But a new RAND Corp. study on charter schools muddies the debate water over whether they really constitute a better education choice than traditional public schools.

The study, released March 18, looked at charters in several cities and states using longitudinal, student-level data. Among the RAND findings was "little evidence that charter schools were producing, on average, achievement impacts that differ substantially from those of traditional public schools."

The most promising results relate to the long-term outcomes of high school graduation and college entry. In Chicago and Florida, the charter high schools appeared to increase the probability of graduation by 7 to 15 percentage points over regular public schools and increased the probability of students attending college by 8 to 10 percentage points.

The study is available at www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9433.

STIMULUS FUNDING

Stimulus funds will put new equipment in school cafeterias

By Carol MacDonald

A \$100 million grant program that's part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will provide funds for school nutrition programs to replace old food service equipment.

Money for food service equipment used to be included in reauthorizations of the National School Lunch Program, said Alexis Steines, public affairs associate at the School Nutrition Association's Child Nutrition and Policy Center. However, it was cut five years ago, leaving cash-strapped food service departments to find resources to replace equipment on their own.

The NSLP comes up for reauthorization this year, Steines noted, but whether equipment funding will be included is not known. The stimulus provided an immediate opportunity, and SNA pushed hard to convince Congress of the need, sending almost 5,000 messages since the beginning of the year to make the case.

When \$198 million in equipment funds was removed from the Senate version of the bill, SNA members again went into action in February, resulting in the \$100 million program in the final bill. Although that is less than the original request, it still leaves members "very, very pleased," Steines said.

Benefits

The grant program means a chance to replace equipment that in some cases has been in use for

as long as three or four decades. For example, SNA said a South Dakota district still uses a 38-year-old oven that could only be repaired after a local auto mechanic created a needed part for it.

"Generally speaking, school food service facilities are outdated, and equipment is inadequate to meet the production demands of today," said Jill Conklin, director of national school accounts for Winston Industries, which manufactures commercial equipment for more than a third of the nation's school districts. School nutritionists have a harder time implementing new programs and energy-efficiency standards because their equipment is outmoded, she added.

SNA President Katie Wilson made a similar argument in a letter to Congress, pointing out that districts in some parts of the country must replace items such as deep fryers with more expensive convection ovens to meet requirements set by state nutrition guidelines or local wellness policies.

Guidelines to come

At press time, guidelines and deadlines to apply for the grants had not been released by the Agriculture Department. Steines suggested LEAs should keep in touch with SEAs for updates.

For more information, see www.schoolnutrition.org.