

## Legislative Update

**International Reading Association**  
**March 14, 2008**

### Overview

The Congress has recessed for the next two weeks. Each chamber has finished their version of the budget for the upcoming year. When they come back they will meet to finish that work and write one budget. The rewriting of the Higher Education Act is coming close to the end and when members return it is expected that they will finish. Sitting in the wings is the rewriting of the No Child Left Behind Act. While most now think there is little to no chance of finish rewriting it this year, there is still some discussion of taking parts out and seeing if they could pass. All of this is taking place in an election year, which means that the number of legislative workdays is fewer, and the willingness to compromise is smaller. As the days tick off, legislators begin to wonder if they will get a better deal by finishing their task now or by waiting a year.

### Budget and Appropriations

Both the House and Senate have finished working on their individual versions of the budget. The budget is a congressional blueprint that allocates money between various areas (mandated programs, defense and non-defense discretionary) and, in theory, balances spending in these areas against anticipated revenues. They do this by planning in five-year segments. These overall categories are then used to allocate money to the appropriators.

During this debate both chambers stated that they wanted to spend more money on education than the president proposed in his budget and what was spent last year. Several key areas were voted on. One was to put more money in the budget for high school and drop out prevention programs. While this doesn't have the force of law, it does indicate what many members of Congress think is important.

When the Congressional members get back to DC, they will then discuss both bills and create a joint budget document. The next step is the appropriations.

This year the appropriations process will have a special twist. Most Democrats believe that if they wait until next January they will have a larger majority in the Congress AND someone different in the White House. This last point is important because the President has said he will veto any appropriations bill that is higher than his recommendation.

Clearly it will be important to push for higher amounts for literacy and education programs. Pushing for higher amounts now will result in Congress having to build from this base.

### Higher Education Act

Usually this Act has moderate interest to IRA. Generally speaking, the bill provides money for student loans and grants, with some attention to other areas such as teacher education. Over the last five or six years, the awareness that teacher education is important has impacted how this bill is structured. In the current House and Senate drafts there is language to support literacy coaches and increased reading education programs for elementary and secondary teachers. As this language is debated we

may be asking for support from the IRA Legislative Action Team. During the recent IRA Legislative Workshop, several members of the IRA were able to reinforce the importance of reading pre-service and in-service programs to their state representatives.

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

At the beginning of the year, most pundits in education policy were saying that there was no chance for NCLB would be rewritten this year. It looks like they were right. Every day that ticks by means that there is less chance of passing this massive bill. Still, Senator Kennedy (D-MA) is saying that his staff is drafting a bill that will be released soon. The question now is: will they be moving a comprehensive bill or a slimmed down version that would only include areas of agreement. Congress has until early October to finish their legislative work, but realistically the summer will be shortened with the two presidential party conventions in addition to adjourning for the fall elections (which includes the entire House and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Senate).

### **IRA Professional Development Initiative**

IRA believes that there must be a major national investment in teacher preparation and professional development to ensure that high-need students are provided continuous high-quality reading instruction throughout their schooling experiences.

Therefore, IRA has developed a set of legislative recommendations for a new federal program to provide funds to consortiums of local school districts, state education agencies, and higher education teacher preparation programs to support and sustain the reading professional development of educators.

This comprehensive initiative will include all grade levels plus pre-service teacher education to ensure that every teacher is competent to teach reading to students of various ability levels through:

- o Resources to Ensure That Reading Instruction Is Continuously and Effectively Improved,
- o Recruiting and Retaining High Quality Teachers in High Needs Schools,
- o Identifying, Implementing, and Disseminating Effective Evidence-Based Reading Practices,
- o Raising Reading Performance and Closing the Achievement Gap Through High Quality Professional Development, Developing Community Partnerships.

Currently we are following up with a set of meetings with ten members of Congress who told their IRA Legislative Action Team members who visited them during the Legislative Workshop that they would be interested in considering sponsoring this measure.

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