Education groups push for increased funds in omnibus

Congress poised to extend continuing resolution through Dec. 17

By Frank Wolfe

Education groups are pressing Congress to pass an FY 2011 Omnibus Appropriations Bill that increases funding for education above FY 2010 levels — a proposition that faces political backlash in the wake of Republican victories in last month’s elections and continued economic travails nationwide.

Education groups are hoping that Democrats can assemble the votes required to pass an omnibus spending bill in the lame duck session, as increased education spending will be an arduous task once the 112th Congress is seated in January.

Congressional Democrats are putting together an omnibus and plan to vote this week on extending the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution, which expires on Friday, until Dec. 17. Democratic leaders want the CR, which funds the government at last year’s levels, to buy legislators time to build an omnibus bill for passage before Congress recesses for the winter. Education groups, however, fear that the political pressure on legislators to reduce the federal deficit may mean that they delay action on a spending measure until the new session of Congress.

The Senate Appropriations Committee’s version of the FY 2011 Labor-HHS-Education Bill provided a $2.8 billion increase for education programs, including Title I, IDEA state grants and Impact Aid, while the House Appropriations Committee’s Labor-HHS-Education panel included a $2 billion increase for such programs.

The Committee for Education Funding “urges you to not freeze funding for critical education programs through a Continuing Resolution for Fiscal Year 11, but to instead complete action through an omnibus appropriations bill,” according to a Nov. 24 CEF letter to congressional offices. “These funds are urgently needed to continue progress on improving student achievement, closing achievement gaps and increasing high school graduation.”

Lawmakers urge passage of Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

By Kim Riley

With time running out on the congressional lame-duck session, several Democrats on Tuesday called for House members to pass S. 3307, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which unanimously passed in the Senate earlier this year and may see a House vote on Wednesday.

“We will vote on it as it is tomorrow. We haven't made any changes to the Senate bill and we won't make any,” said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, during a press call Tuesday afternoon. “We want to get this piece of legislation to the president for his signature.”

The bipartisan bill contains several important proposals for schools and districts, including funding to establish Farm-to-School Programs and to improve the nutritional quality of school meals, as well as direct certification allowing more students to receive free school meals.

The bill also includes several key items designed to reduce childhood hunger and obesity and to modernize and streamline existing child nutrition programs.

Bill sponsor Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutri-

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District uses collaboration tools to support ELLs

By Adam Dolge

When ELLs enter a classroom in Saint Paul (Minn.) Public Schools, they often are walking into an environment that focuses on content-based programs rather than on the traditional English-language-proficiency model.

While it was uncommon in the district for ELLs to be mainstreamed like this right away, SPPS Superintendent Valeria Silva said she wanted to move beyond the pull-out ELP model. In her former tenure as the district's ELL director, she had worked to change the old model, and in the '90s, schools started to experiment with a model that brought ELLs out of seclusion and into classrooms with their non-ELL peers.

"My thinking was: We bring English speakers and we set them all day with people who speak their own language and at the same time teach them a second language," Silva said. "So why can't we do the reverse?"

Silva, who became the SPPS superintendent in December 2009, knew a different approach would benefit the students.

"There is no time for students to learn language first and content later," Silva told Education Daily®. "ELL newcomer students are fully mainstreamed from the time they come into our system."

Success through collaboration

One of the biggest problems with the pull-out model was that ELLs often didn't learn the same things as their non-ELL peers, Silva said.

For example, students in a regular classroom were learning about butterflies while ELLs who were pulled out of class were being taught about whales. When the ELLs returned to the regular classroom, they knew nothing about butterflies, she said.

The district's success with ELLs — evidenced by their improved test scores — is largely based on the collaboration model, which relies on different tools, many of which have been around since the '90s. The district's ELL program includes:

- **Language Academies** are designed for newcomer students in grades 1 through 6 who have no English proficiency or some basic communication abilities. These classrooms are filled with native English speakers, while ELLs work alongside their classmates with adaptations and scaffolding support. The goal is to develop English proficiency through content. ELL teachers keep the English learners for two hours to work on basic reading and math, and then social studies and science is co-taught by ELL teachers and content teachers.

- **English Language Centers** provide intense social and academic support for ELLs in grades 7 through 12 who have recently arrived in the U.S. Students spend 75 percent of the day in state-aligned courses that emphasize English proficiency through math, geography, and science content. The rest of the day is spent on electives with non-ELL peers. Students receive instruction from ELL-licensed teachers, or are co-taught by content teachers. Bilingual support is also available. A year-long transitional math course is also provided for students in the ELCs. It usually takes two academic years to complete the ELC curriculum, and then students take up to 80 percent mainstream courses.

- **International Academy — LEAP** is an optional program for recently arrived ELLs between the ages of 14 and 21 years. Native language support is available, but the academic emphasis is on English-language development. Similar to ELC, the IA-LEAP curriculum is aligned with state standards and the goal is for students to obtain a diploma. Students also may take career exploration courses in addition to music, art, and PE. Many staff members in the program are bilingual and are dual-licensed in ESL and content areas.

Silva said the goal is not to alienate ELLs, but to provide them with the same educational opportunities as their non-ELL peers.

"The idea is that we could provide ELLs with the opportunity to be exposed to everything else that the other kids have," Silva said.
Q&A: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parent relationships, involvement ignite student achievement

By Larry Graff

The Miami-Dade County School District recently named Howard Weiner, principal at Miami Palmetto High School in Pinecrest, Fla., its 2010 Principal of the Year. Weiner, who has served as principal for 9 years, has focused on developing relationships with parents. He recently spoke with Education Daily® about his efforts at boosting parental involvement. Following are edited excerpts of the conversation.

Q: How have you boosted parent involvement?

A: Membership in our Parent Teacher Student Association has grown to more than 1,000 individuals, while our school volunteer program has more than 700 members. A membership table is set up at every PTSA meeting to encourage participation. A designated school staff member actively recruits new volunteers. The PTSA provides annual financial resources in the form of teacher wish lists to support student achievement.

This past school year our PTSA processed expenditures exceeding $37,000 to purchase SMART Boards® and projection equipment to upgrade technology-based instruction in our classrooms. With such a large cadre of volunteers available, a wide variety of services are generated, such as support in our attendance office and media center.

However, even with a high degree of participation, improving overall family involvement is a challenge. I’ve worked with the PTSA to initiate an outreach partnership with the Perrine Community Action Agency to engage our underrepresented population in activities to build a strong connection between the school and the community.

We’ve held student orientation programs and Parent Academy workshops at off-campus venues. Through participation in these events, lines of communication have been opened. The anticipated results are an increase in PTSA membership and continued growth of the school volunteer program.

Q: What advice do you have for your peers when it comes to parent involvement?

A: The secret to success in this area is determining the level at which you actually value parental involvement. In some cases, parental involvement can be at such a high level that it can be interpreted as being somewhat threatening. In other cases, involvement can be nonexistent and therefore have a negative impact on student achievement and success.

Regardless of where you stand philosophically, parents are our greatest resource. That resource should be tapped every day by scheduling morning and evening parent meetings. If attendance is low at school site meetings, schedule them in local religious institutions that are closer to your parent base. Also, create a telephone tree utilizing influential parents to invite parents to meetings. When new students have been registered in your school, follow up with a personal phone call or note inviting the parent to join your parent organization.

Create a PTSA newsletter and mail it to every household in your school. Most importantly, bring your parents into the decision-making circle. They need to be heard and they need to feel valued. If you give them a voice in the process, they will support the process.

Q: What are some of the ways principals can increase their visibility and transparency?

A: Visibility and transparency can be increased through a simple commitment of participation and availability. Make it a priority to be in the hallways during every passing. Choose a different location in the school after every period. By doing this, you will increase the number of students who see you.

During dismissal time, find a spot near the front entrance. Students and parents will not only see you, but they’ll also have a chance to interact with you. They believe that you, as principal, can answer all of their questions. Even if you can’t, you can give them direction to the proper resource. Increasing your rating on the principal-to-student contact meter can pay huge dividends. Post pictures of yourself and your administrative team in the lobby of your building.

In large schools, some students and parents might not even know who you are. Utilize your school’s closed-circuit television system to make announcements. This makes the message more powerful, believable and effective. Also, take some time to work the front counter in your main office every day. This will build staff morale in an important arena and showcase you as a problem solver.

Finally, attend as many school events as you can. Parents and students will interpret this as a support mechanism. Remember, you are the head cheerleader for your school. You can’t be out there rooting for them if you’re not present.

Q: What does being named as the Miami-Dade County Principal of the Year mean to you?

A: The recognition is somewhat overwhelming at times. I see this as an affirmation of a body of work of all principals in our district. The commonality we share is that this has not been accomplished in isolation. There have been a number of people we have all met along our career path who saw something in us that we ourselves might not have noticed.

These folks have been our friends, colleagues and mentors. Without their impact and influence we would not be who we are today. I am humbled by this designation and proud to be our district’s Principal of the Year.
LAWMAKERS (continued from page 1)

tion and Forestry Committee, called the bill “an historic opportunity” to address the twin issues of childhood hunger and obesity, which she said costs the U.S. billions of dollars annually in related health-care costs.

She noted that the legislation would eliminate junk food from schools by requiring them, for the first time, to apply nutritional standards to food served outside the cafeteria.

“This legislation will get junk food out of schools,” Lincoln said during the press call. “It will [also] make sure we can start to help schools that want to have a supper program for students do it.”

Pertinent to education stakeholders are bill proposals that would:

• Provide $4.5 billion over 10 years for investments in and improvements to child food programs.
• Expand the Afterschool Meal Program to all 50 states.
• Automatically enroll children who are in foster care for free school meals.
• Reduce paperwork for all child food programs.
• Provide children in day care settings with healthy meals.
• Implement local school wellness policies.
• Establish demonstration projects to expand direct certification of children to receive free meals.
• Increase the federal reimbursement rate for school lunches.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., also pressed for passage of the bill, citing its importance to the future of America’s prosperity, competitiveness, and national security. “This bill is the fiscally responsible thing to do,” Pelosi added during the press call.

Nevertheless, fiscal concerns exist for S. 3307.

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said during the call that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program funds should not be cut to pay for the bill, a sticking point in the legislation that lawmakers hope to work out on Wednesday.

“I have concerns about how to pay for this legislation,” McGovern said Tuesday. “Cuts in SNAP don’t make sense to me. But we’ve been assured that the White House will restore those cuts; we want it to live up to those commitments.

“This is an incredible bill and we need to get it done now,” McGovern said.

OMNIBUS (continued from page 1)

postsecondary education attendance and completion rates … For the sake of our schools, colleges and students, as well as America’s future, please do not freeze education programs at last year’s levels.”

Jonathan Fansmith, president of CEF, and Joel Packer, executive director of CEF, said states and school districts need increased FY 2011 education funding in order to alleviate the effects of the termination of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding and deep cuts in state spending during the 2011-12 school year.

Earmark ban

Despite education groups’ anxiety about looming cuts, an amendment by Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., to S. 510, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, to ban earmarks failed on Tuesday by a 39-56 vote. The temporary ban on such earmarks for FY 2011, 2012 and 2013 would have eliminated federal funding for a number of national education programs such as National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools, Reading is Fundamental, Project Grad, National Writing Project, and Communities in Schools.

Education groups are also eyeing the final report Wednesday by the presidential National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which is to make recommendations on balancing the federal budget by 2015, excluding payments on the debt. A draft report by the commission’s chairmen, former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles and former Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., mostly spared K-12 from the budget knife and noted that investing in education, infrastructure and research and development is critical to ensuring national competitiveness — a philosophy in keeping with that of President Obama.

In advance of the commission’s report, Obama on Monday proposed a two-year pay freeze for civilian federal workers, but Republican leaders said that the proposal was just a first step in shrinking the deficit.

“Freezing civilian pay for federal workers is a step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough to shrink the size of our bloated government,” said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a senior member of the Senate Finance Committee and a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. “To put a halt to big government requires more than half-measures; it requires an assault on multiple fronts to combat this runaway growth.”

Hatch has proposed limiting government spending to what he called the historic average of 20 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product.