News & Notes

Early in the opening session of the 118th Congress, House Education and Workforce Committee Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) announced plans to focus the committee’s work on parents’ rights legislation, reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and updating federal workforce programs. In March, she quickly secured House passage of a parents’ rights bill (H.R. 5), which would require schools to expand parents’ rights to review curriculum and budgets, inspect books and other library materials, and receive information about violent activity in schools. The Senate is not expected to consider this legislation, so it is unlikely to become law.

On the other side of the Capitol, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Chairman Sanders (I-VT) plans to focus his committee’s 2023 work on increasing educator pay, supporting healthy and safe instructional spaces, promoting higher education access and affordability, and expanding child-care access and affordability. He also announced a plan to work this spring with the committee’s ranking member, Senator Cassidy (R-LA), to update the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), which authorizes the work and programs of the Institute for Educational Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. In April, the two senators issued a joint request for information to secure public input that will inform the committee’s ESRA work. ESRA authorizes technical assistance for state education agencies and school districts through a system of regional labs and comprehensive centers. The law also authorizes the vitally important state longitudinal data systems program.

Congress also started the appropriations process for fiscal year 2024, and on March 9, President Biden sent his annual budget request to Congress. The president is seeking significant increases in the overall education budget, including large increases for Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Both formula programs are NASBE budget priorities. During the spring and summer, we expect the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to hold public hearings about the budget and to begin writing the annual spending bill that funds the U.S. Department of Education. The spending process can be expected to be contentious and extend late into the year.

The department has also been busy. On March 24, it issued a Dear Colleague letter calling for the end of corporal punishment in schools. The agency also published a notice in the Federal Register on March 31 requesting information on successful approaches to innovative assessment implementation to help inform improvements to the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA). The request specifically asks (1) whether including a planning period would be helpful to the state in its development work, (2) what additional considerations or approaches to comparability for the innovative assessment the department ought to consider, and (3) whether states would be more likely to submit an application if the department provided one or two planning years. Comments were due on May 1.

Reg Leichty and Jamie Brandon of Foresight Law + Policy provided this update.

Figure 1. Current FAFSA Completion Rates by State

Source: Data Insight Partners, FAFSA Tracker–National. Reprinted with permission.