



Policy Watch – November 2011

Spotlight

This month's Policy Watch provides an update on the Federal budget process and outlines the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) new survey standards. It also summarizes a bill that would create an office of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education within the Department of Education. The Office of Science, Technology and Policy is requesting comments on public access to peer-reviewed publications and digital data resulting from federally funded research. To close, Joseph Mahoney, Ph.D. shares his experiences as an SRCD Policy Fellow in the Office on Senator Jeff Bingaman.

I. Science Policy

Update on Fiscal Year 2012 Federal Budget Appropriations

On November 18, President Obama signed into law a fiscal year (FY) 2012 spending bill that will provide funding for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation and the National Science Foundation (NSF). The bill is referred to as a miniature omnibus bill or "minibus" as it contains three of the twelve annual appropriations bills. The programs and agencies of the federal government, such as the National Institutes of Health and the Institute of Education Sciences, not included in the minibus will continue to function under a Continuing Resolution until December 16th. Congress will likely pass an omnibus spending bill before the end of the year in order to complete the FY 2012 appropriations process.

The minibus provided NSF with \$7 billion for FY 2012, a 2.5 percent increase from its FY 2011 budget level. This figure is \$734 million below the President's budget request. Research and Related Activities at NSF received \$5.7 billion, a \$155 million increase. The Education and Human Resources Directorate received \$829 million, a \$32 million decrease. The Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate's budget will be determined by NSF leadership.

Super Committee Unable to Reach Agreement on Reducing the Federal Deficit

In August, Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011 to prevent the loss of federal borrowing authority and reduce the federal deficit over the next 10 years. The act established the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, or the "Super Committee," comprised of twelve members of Congress, six from each chamber. The committee was charged with coming up with a bipartisan agreement that would reduce the federal deficit by \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. On November 21, the Super Committee announced that its members are unable to reach such an agreement. The Budget Control Act provides an alternative venue to achieving \$1.2 trillion in required savings—automatic across-the-board cuts, or sequester. Half of these automatic cuts would come from defense programs, while the other half would come from discretionary spending. Some programs are exempted from cuts, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. However, programs such as Head Start, child care, and Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) would be vulnerable to cuts. "A letter from House Appropriations Committee Democrats to the Super Committee stated that, should the Committee fail to issue recommendations, the mandatory across-the-board cuts in 2013 would reduce the [National Institutes of Health] NIH budget by nearly 8 percent," as reported by the American Psychological Association's [Federal Budget Blog](#). "Under the same scenario, the [National Science Foundation] NSF budget would be cut by \$530 million." As the law stands, the automatic cuts are scheduled to take effect in October of 2013.

House Panel Holds Hearing on Identifying Effective Education Programs to Support Students and Teachers

On November 16, the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, House Education and Workforce Committee held a hearing entitled "Education Research: Identifying Effective Programs to Support Students and Teachers." Subcommittee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) noted that the federal government supports states, school districts, and the private sector in conducting education research through the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA), which authorizes the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) at the Department of Education. ESRA has been overdue for reauthorization since 2008. The first witness to testify before the Subcommittee, Dr. Grover Whitehurst, Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution and former Director of the Institute for Education Sciences, expressed that rather than mandating how states and local educational agencies (LEA's) should use research findings, Congress should create incentives for practitioners to use such findings in their programs. Dr. Carolyn Hoxby, an Economics Professor at Stanford University and Director of the Economics Education Program at the National Bureau of Economic Research, underscored that although IES has improved the state of education research, scientific

standards need to be raised as well. She also noted that the federal government should collect data on all aspects of education that can be measured. Steve Fleischman, the Deputy Executive Officer of Education Northwest, testified that ESRA can be improved by engaging consumers of the research, focusing on how to implement programs effectively, and supporting intermediaries who help sort through research findings. Finally, Dr. Eric Smith, Former Commissioner of Education in Florida, emphasized the importance of bridging the gap between research and dissemination. Chairman Hunter's closing statement to the panel noted that we "must find better ways to help states and school districts translate the best research principles into classroom practices." Click [here](#) for more information.

Department of Health and Human Services Releases New Survey Standards

On October 31, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released final standards to "more consistently measure race, ethnicity, sex, primary language, and disability status, thereby improving the ability to highlight disparities in health status and target interventions to reduce these disparities." The Affordable Care Act requires new standards for the collection and reporting of health care information based on race, ethnicity, sex, and primary language. Making data standards consistent will help identify the significant health differences that often exist between and within ethnic groups, particularly among Asian, Hispanic/Latino and Pacific Islander populations. By adding Mexican American and Chicano/a, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Hispanic Latino/a or Spanish origin as explicit categories required on all HHS-sponsored health surveys, researchers can better capture the individual ethnic group challenges that are often found within minority populations. This specificity allows for better measurement and tracking of health differences in these populations and better targeting of interventions. The new data collection requirements will also improve researchers' ability to consistently monitor more dimensions of health disparities among people with disabilities. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius noted that the new standards are a powerful set of tools to help us achieve our vision of a nation free of disparities in health and health care. Click [here](#) for more information.

II. Social Policy

Employment

Pathways Back to Work Act introduced in Senate

On November 15, Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced the Pathways Back to Work Act. The bill would create a \$5 billion Pathways Back to Work Fund to address issues of employment. The bill would provide \$2 billion for subsidized employment programs patterned on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Fund that created 260,000 jobs in 2009 and 2010. It would provide \$1.5 billion for summer and year-round employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth. It would also establish a \$1.5 billion competitive grant program for promising and research-based work and learning opportunities to help low-skilled youth and adults obtain jobs and credentials. The bill was referred to the Senate HELP Committee.

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)

STEM Education Innovation Act of 2011 Introduced in House

On November 4, Representative Mike Honda (D-CA) introduced the STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] Education Innovation Act of 2011. The bill would establish the Office of STEM Education within the Department of Education. The Assistant Secretary of STEM Education would integrate, coordinate and improve the Department's K-12 and higher education STEM educational efforts and regularly consult with stakeholders, research professionals, industry and businesses in STEM-related fields. The bill would institute a State Consortium on STEM Education to bring together a group of states to take the lead in shaping best practices in STEM education, in addition to developing strategies to increase participation of underrepresented populations in STEM disciplines. The bill would establish the Education Innovation Project to promote the development of transformational technologies for the classroom by providing grant funding to outside entities—including for-profit companies, foundations, nonprofits and institutions of higher learning—to develop educational technology innovations for STEM education and the greater educational community. The bill was referred to the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

III. Invitations for Input and Participation

Request for Comments and Input

Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), on behalf of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), is seeking comments from the public on policy options for expanding public access to federally funded peer-reviewed scholarly articles. The multi-agency Task Force on Public Access to Scholarly Publications, established by the 2010 reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, will issue a report to Congress describing public access to the results of federally funded unclassified research, the status of agency policies for public access to publications resulting from federally funded research, and a summary of public input collected from this request for information (RFI). Specifically, OSTP seeks public comment on the following questions identified by the Task Force:

- Are there steps that agencies could take to grow existing and new markets related to the access and analysis of peer-reviewed publications that result from federally funded scientific research?
- What specific steps can be taken to protect the intellectual property interests of publishers, scientists, Federal agencies, and other stakeholders involved with the publication and dissemination of peer-reviewed scholarly publications resulting from federally funded scientific research?
- What are the pros and cons of centralized and decentralized approaches to managing public access to peer-reviewed scholarly publications that result from federally funded research in terms of interoperability, search, development of analytic tools, and other scientific and commercial opportunities?
- Are there models or new ideas for public-private partnerships that take advantage of existing publisher archives and encourage innovation in accessibility and interoperability, while ensuring long-term stewardship of the results of federally funded research?
- What steps can be taken by Federal agencies, publishers, and/or scholarly and professional societies to encourage interoperable search, discovery, and analysis capacity across disciplines and archives?
- How can Federal agencies that fund science maximize the benefit of public access policies to U.S. taxpayers, and their investment in the peer-reviewed literature, while minimizing burden and costs for stakeholders, including awardee institutions, scientists, publishers, Federal agencies, and libraries?
- What is the appropriate embargo period after publication before the public is granted free access to the full content of peer-reviewed scholarly publications resulting from federally funded research?

Comments are due by January 2, 2012. Click [here](#) for more information.

Public Access to Digital Data Resulting From Federally Funded Scientific Research

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), on behalf of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), is seeking comments from the public on policies and standards to promote long-term preservation of and access to digital data resulting from federally funded scientific research. The Interagency Working Group on Digital Data, established by the 2010 reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, will issue a report to Congress describing priorities for development of agency policies for ensuring broad public access to the results of federally funded unclassified research, the status of agency policies for public access to digital data resulting from federally funded research, and a summary of public input collected from this request for information (RFI). Specifically, OSTP seeks public comment on the following questions identified by the Task Force:

- What specific Federal policies would encourage public access to and the preservation of broadly valuable digital data resulting from federally funded scientific research, to grow the U.S. economy and improve the productivity of the American scientific enterprise?
- What specific steps can be taken to protect the intellectual property interests of publishers, scientists, Federal agencies, and other stakeholders, with respect to any existing or proposed policies for encouraging public access to and preservation of digital data resulting from federally funded scientific research?
- How can stakeholders (e.g., research communities, universities, research institutions, libraries, scientific publishers) best contribute to the implementation of data management plans?
- How could funding mechanisms be improved to better address the real costs of preserving and making digital data accessible?
- What additional steps could agencies take to stimulate innovative use of publicly accessible research data in new and existing markets and industries to create jobs and grow the economy?
- What mechanisms could be developed to assure that those who produced the data are given appropriate attribution and credit when secondary results are reported?
- How could Federal agencies promote effective coordination on digital data standards with other nations and international communities?

Comments are due by January 12, 2012. Click [here](#) for more information.

IV. Information Sources

New Reports

Rebuilding the Mosaic: Fostering Research in the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences at the National Science Foundation in the Next Decade

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) released a report on findings from a year-long study on the programmatic priorities of the SBE Directorate, including an analysis of more than 252 white papers submitted by the public. Four major topic areas have been identified within the wealth of ideas received including: population change; sources of disparities; communication, language, and linguistics; and technology, new media, and social networks. The report finds that future SBE research must be interdisciplinary, data-intensive, and collaborative. The SBE Directorate will continue to explore planning activities that will: (1) strengthen the ability of the directorate to support interdisciplinary research, develop human capacities, and build out the data and organizational infrastructure; (2) consider approaches required to shift resources to relevant priorities; and (3) prioritize planning and implementation. Click [here](#) for more information.

Programs That Support At-Risk Youth

A new report from the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF's) Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) presents research-based frameworks that can be used to develop programs for at-risk youth. The report, *Synthesis of Research and Resources to Support At-Risk Youth*, also describes the risk factors for at-risk youth and approaches that can help these youth achieve self-sufficiency. At-risk youth include youth aging out of foster care, runaway and homeless youth, youth receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), teenage parents, and juvenile offenders. The report suggests that programs for at-risk youth should reflect the specific needs of at-risk youth, target the youth as well as their families and communities, be culturally diverse, and incorporate both resilience and human capital development perspectives. Click [here](#) for more information.

Electronic Newsletters and Resources

COSSA Washington Updates Online

The November 7th issue of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) *Washington Update* is available [here](#).

The November 21st issue of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) *Washington Update* is available [here](#).

NIH Extramural Nexus

News and updates on NIH extramural grant policies, processes, events, and resources are posted on a continuous basis. The Extramural Nexus also incorporates a blog, "Rock Talk," by NIH Deputy Director of Extramural Research Dr. Sally Rockey, which is open for comments by readers. The Extramural Nexus is available [here](#).

V. Spotlight on SRCD Fellow

Joseph L. Mahoney, Ph.D.

I am a mid-career SRCD Congressional Policy Fellow on leave from my faculty position in the Department of Education at the University of California, Irvine. My research focuses on child and adolescent social-educational development and I have been particularly interested in the role of out-of-school time for the academic, psychosocial, and physical health and development of young people. I have a strong interest in the interface between developmental research and social policy and this motivated me to pursue the SRCD Congressional Policy Fellowship.

My overall goal for this Fellowship is to understand the role of science in policy construction, particularly as it relates to education issues for school-age children. Through the Fellowship experience I hope to be able to make my own work more policy relevant and share what I have learned with my colleagues and students. Some of the basic questions that interest me include: When is science likely to be used in developing education policies? What role does science play in the balancing of competing interests during the policy development process? What kind of scientific evidence is apt to be used most (and least) often? Is policy constructed with attention to implementation and evaluation issues?

I am pleased to be serving as an Education Policy Fellow in the office of Senator Jeff Bingaman. Senator Bingaman is a senior member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and has been influential in shaping the legislation to reauthorize our federal education policy -- the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Now in my second month working in Senator Bingaman's office, I have already had the opportunity to participate in significant aspects of education policy, including efforts to update the ESEA.

There is widespread agreement that the "one size fits all" approach to our nation's current education policy -- known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act -- has not achieved its intended goals and is long overdue for reauthorization. Last month the Senate HELP Committee marked up and passed out of Committee a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the ESEA by a vote of 15 in favor, 7 opposed. Several of Senator Bingaman's priorities -- incentives to increase the numbers of low-income students taking Advanced Placement coursework and tests, ensuring schools have funds to adopt needed educational technology in the classroom, increasing Title 1 funding for high schools, provisions to turn around high school "dropout factories" with graduation rates below 60%, expanded learning time to increase the length of the school day, week or year, and health education -- are included in this legislation. The next step for this bill would be consideration on the Senate floor.

Prior to the markup, I worked with Senator Bingaman on an amendment to the ESEA reauthorization that concerned the professional development needs of the after-school workforce. This amendment was accepted as part of the base bill. I also attended meetings of the HELP Committee and assisted in staffing Senator Bingaman in meetings in our office, with other members of the HELP Committee, and during the markup itself.

Some of my other projects include working on legislation concerned with the training needs of child protection professionals to identify abused, neglected, and exploited children and supporting STEM education for children in low-income areas. In addition, I have met with constituents and advocates on a range of education-related issues.

Although I am at an early stage in the Fellowship, my experience has already been remarkable. My knowledge of the policy-making process has grown along with my appreciation for the complexity of decision-making involved in developing viable legislation. I envision returning to my academic position with a much broader network of connections in the policy arena, a stronger understanding of how science interfaces with policy making, in general, and around issues of education and out-of-school time, in particular. Taken together, I should be better able to conduct policy-relevant research and will enjoy communicating what I have learned my students and colleagues.