

Good Saturday Morning! Please find the May 8, 2021 Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update at the Conclusion of this message. If you have any questions regarding information in this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Have a great weekend!

Best,

J.T.

Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update

May 8, 2021

Congressional Update

House Examines ED Budget Proposal

Last month, President Biden released an initial “skinny” budget [request](#) to Congress containing high-level information regarding the administration’s funding priorities for the coming 2022 federal fiscal year (FY22). While a more detailed budget request is expected later this month, the release of this skinny budget formally began the wider Congressional budget and appropriations process. This process typically includes opportunities for members of the President’s cabinet to speak to the budget request in more detail before Congressional committees as they consider appropriations legislation for the coming year.

This Wednesday, May 5, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona [testified](#) before the House Appropriations Committee about President Biden’s vision for the U.S. Department of Education (USED)—a component of the President’s budget request that is proposing a 40 percent increase for the Department and related education programs over current funding levels. Democrats on the committee, led by Chairwoman DeLauro (D-CT), spoke largely in favor of the proposed budget, and applauded the administration for its prioritization of education issues. Committee Republicans, led by Ranking Member Cole (R-OK), primarily argued that President Biden’s proposed \$29.8 billion increase for USED was unnecessary and wasteful, particularly on the heels of several large-scale pandemic relief packages which provided billions in additional support for education above and beyond the Department’s regular budget.

and career and technical education (CTE). Secretary Cardona’s written testimony can be viewed [here](#) and a webcast of the full hearing can be viewed [here](#). Secretary Cardona is expected to similarly testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee in the coming weeks, although a date has not yet been set. More recently this week, House Chairwoman DeLauro has said that she expects subcommittee and full committee markups of Congress’ FY22 appropriations bills for USED to occur in June with full bill passage sometime in July.

House Subcommittee Explores Pandemic’s Impact on Students with Disabilities

On Thursday, May 6, the House Education and Labor Committee’s Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee held a hearing focused on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students with disabilities. Witnesses included disabilities rights advocates and special education practitioners alike who provided first-hand accounts of how students with disabilities have handled the pandemic, with several noting the importance of additional funding that must be used to continue to serve this vulnerable student population. Throughout the hearing lawmakers raised the need to return to in-person instruction to better support more students with disabilities and explored strategies to better serve these groups of students. A recording of the hearing, including written testimony, can be found [here](#).

Administration Update

USED Launches School Reopening Clearinghouse

Late last Friday, April 30, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) launched the “Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices” [clearinghouse](#), a web portal that contains a slew of examples of how schools, colleges, and universities are safely reopening campuses. The clearinghouse is part of an earlier Executive Order issued by President Biden directing USED to facilitate the sharing of best practices among the education community as the nation collectively works to overcome the pandemic. The clearinghouse is organized around three topical areas—Safe and Healthy Environments, Supports for Students, and Teacher, Faculty and Staff Well-Being—and contains over 180 unique resources to browse. The Department intends to update the clearinghouse as other best practices emerge. To be added to the clearinghouse, submissions can be sent to this [link](#).

Emergency Connectivity Fund Takes Shape

Since the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act ([P.L. 117-2](#)), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been working to establish rules implementing a \$7.171 billion “Emergency Connectivity Fund” (ECF). The ECF would allow eligible schools and libraries to use these funds to purchase connectivity equipment and devices on behalf of students and educators. As structured, the ECF is intended to help more students and staff gain access to internet-capable devices and reduce the homework gap exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. These efforts are timely especially considering [recent research](#) from the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) finding that access to such devices is a crucial ingredient to student success.

The FCC had been soliciting public feedback and input for the past several weeks on the ECF. NSBA filed comments in the proceeding and has been working [with our national partners](#) to help ensure the agency crafted the rules to defer key decisions about how to best use the funds to school district leaders. Following that comment period, the agency released a draft [Report and Order](#) providing a short additional period for stakeholders to weigh-in on the FCC’s proposed approach. The draft Report and Order emphasizes that the FCC is committed to a simplified application process, is seeking to promote price transparency, is willing to forgo competitive bidding, includes Wi-Fi on busses, and is deferential to schools and libraries as to what counts as “off campus” locations for the purposes of the ECF. The FCC is expected to release the final version of this order May 10.

New Legislation

[H.R.3004](#) To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to create a pilot program to award grants to units of general local government and community-based organizations to create jobs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: [Rep. Wilson, Frederica S. \[D-FL-24\]](#)

[H.R.2993](#) To authorize the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Program and for other purposes. Sponsor: [Rep. Pocan, Mark \[D-WI-2\]](#)

[H.R.2987](#) To increase the amount of loan forgiveness available to teachers. Sponsor: [Rep. Luria, Elaine G. \[D-VA-2\]](#)