



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFS...

December 2007

Update: Where Are We with State Children's Health Insurance (SCHIP)?

Prior to adjourning for the August recess, both houses of Congress approved legislation to renew and expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). SCHIP is a state-federal partnership, created 10 years ago, that covers about 6.6 million children from low-income families not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid. It was estimated that the bipartisan bill would insure an additional 4 million children who would otherwise not be covered by 2012. President Bush vetoed the expansion bill.

In unison with National PTA and many state PTAs, NYS PTA took an active role in the campaign to override the President's veto. Letters supporting the override were sent to New York's 31 Congressional members along with two "calls to action" for the NYS PTA Board of Managers to send legislators electronic messages or make phone calls. Despite this effort the veto override fell short by 13 votes. New York's only "no" votes were from Congressmen Kuhl and Reynolds.

Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, vowed to bring back an amended bill. On Oct. 25th, the House passed an amended version of the bill (H.R. 3963). However, the 265-142 vote, though bipartisan, was not enough to secure the veto-proof margin proponents of the bill had hoped for. On November 1, the Senate passed the latest version of the reauthorization bill (H.R. 3963) by a vote of 64-30. Both houses are working on a compromise to make a veto-proof bill. For more information...

<http://www.chn.org/humanneeds/071029a.html>

<http://www.chn.org/humanneeds/071113d.html>

Around the State:

2008 Budget Plans Underway: Nearly \$2 billion for "High Needs" Schools

Board of Regents Chancellor Robert Bennett and Education Commissioner Richard Mills announced a proposal to increase state education aid by \$1.94 billion, with the majority of the funds going to the most needy schools. Of that \$1.94 billion, \$1.8 billion would be doled out under a foundation aid formula first proposed by Gov. Eliot Spitzer for the current year's state budget. About 73% of the increase would go to "high needs" districts and all schools would see a 2% increase, in contrast to the 3% minimum "save harmless" increase promised a year ago.

The proposal calls for an increase the number of career and technical education programs through \$6 million in challenge grants and awarding Regents diplomas to students who complete those industry-approved programs; additional funding for English Language learners through weighting the foundation formula; an expansion of universal pre-kindergarten; continued funding of Contract for Excellence, and; other new initiatives. For more information...

<http://www.legislativegazette.com/printable.php?id=2692>

http://www.nyssba.org/index.php?src=news&submenu=news_media&refno=69

Findings of the Governor's Task Force on Preschool Special Education

On November 16th, Governor Eliot Spitzer announced that the Task Force on Preschool Special Education released its final recommendations for improving the quality, funding and delivery of special education services to three- and four-year-old children with disabilities. Recommendations

include integrated Universal Pre-Kindergarten; increased role of school districts in decision making; streamlining reimbursement rate formulas and information and training campaign. For more information...

<http://www.ny.gov/governor/press/1116071.html>

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/preschool/taskforce/home.html>

Contracts for Excellence Approved

After the legislation was passed last April, school districts that received a minimum 10 percent increase in funding, roughly \$15 million, and had at least one low-performing school were required to enter into a Contract for Excellence.

The approval of the first 55 Contracts for Excellence filed by state school districts statewide was announced November 19th in Buffalo by Gov. Eliot Spitzer who has been working collaboratively with the NYS Legislature and NY State Education Department. The program requires underperforming school districts to develop and demonstrate plans for improving student achievement in order to receive additional state funding and will direct the spending of \$428 million this year on more than 1,500 schools.

<http://www.legislativegazette.com/printable.php?id=2726>

<http://www.timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=640546&category=STATE&newsdate=11/20/2007>

Around the Capitol:

Utah PTA Defeats Voucher Referendum

From the Utah State PTA: "PTA has been so excited about our work on this referendum. It was PTA that successfully brought the issue to the ballot. *It was the first time anyone knows of nationally that an item was brought to the ballot through the referendum process on totally volunteer efforts.* The experts who consulted with us said that it could not be done without paid signature gatherers. The experts did not understand PTA!!! The whole effort has rejuvenated so many citizens as they have come to see that they can make a difference. That has been so exciting for us!"

This was a critical win. If successful Utah was to be used as the staging ground for the major voucher push nationwide. Voucher law that had passed the Utah legislature together with the bill to amend it, were carefully crafted by the attorneys involved with a national movement. It was drafted in such a way to meet the constitutional concerns that have been raised in Florida and other places where vouchers have failed in the past

http://www.pta.org/ne_press_release_detail_1194476935937.html

http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5h3qRt_iAvMUQqQhogrxbITiSkrKwD8SONIQO0

President Bush Vetoes Education Spending Bill

On November 13th, President Bush placed the future of our nation's schools and students in doubt by vetoing the FY2008 Labor-Health & Human Services-Education funding bill (H.R. 3043). According to National School Boards Association Executive Director, Anne Bryant, "This veto affects all communities...our nation's 15,000 school districts", funding to close the achievement gap under NCLB and funding for students under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which remains critically under funded. For more information...

<http://www.nsba.org/site/doc.asp?TRACKID=&VID=2&CID=90&DID=41919>

<http://www.chn.org/pdf/2007/aprodifcongresspres.pdf>