



National School  
Boards Association

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# FEDERAL ActionAlert

NSBA ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

A Membership Benefit of NSBA National Affiliates

## The 109th Congress: weak on education

### School board advocacy needed for public education

By Michael A. Resnick

During this election year, congressional candidates have offered much rhetoric about the growing importance of education to the future of America's children and the nation in an increasingly competitive global world economy. However, in reality, Congress spent most of this year shifting between idle and reverse in its support for our nation's school children.

Here's the record as of September: No action has occurred to fix the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Bills to improve Head Start continue to languish, and amendments to secure the future of the E-rate are still pending.

On the bright side, the federal vocational education programs were reauthorized. And although a hurricane relief bill for schools was enacted, that one-year emergency funding measure was delayed for months to force adding private school vouchers. With regard to funding, this session of the 109th Congress has been as abysmal as the first session in 2005.

Despite the weak showing so far, the 109th Congress can still take steps to regain the momentum for education. Here are some of the key issues for public education leaders and NSBA's plans to address them:

#### No Child Left Behind

Congressional committees have held hearings on such topics as testing for students with disabilities and English lan-

guage learners (ELLs) and the use of academic growth to score adequate yearly progress (AYP).

However, legislation to revise NCLB won't be considered until a new Congress convenes next year. Even then, action might not be completed until 2008—or it could be put off until after the presidential election. The point is that school boards will need to advocate for the urgency as well as the merits of corrective legislation—or possibly face operating with the imperfections of the current program for several more years.

To help our effort, Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), a 17-term member of the House, introduced the No Child Left Behind Improvements Act of 2006 (H.R.5709). This bill has our full support, as it mirrors the 40 provisions in the bill drafted by NSBA that carries the same title.

Young plans to reintroduce his bill in January when the new session begins. As a result of efforts by school board members working with NSBA, other members of Congress are expected to sign on as co-sponsors. Meanwhile, NSBA is asking school board members to have their district provide us with anecdotal information through our "Why Report" surveys so we can tell the public school story—district by district—to support the key elements in this legislation.

#### Funding

If the 109th Congress has been running on idle in dealing with NCLB, it has been

driving in reverse on funding. Last year, Congress cut or level-funded most education programs, and the same strategy has emerged this year.

The biggest federal K-12 programs, Title I (which funds NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), are on track to be level-funded for another year—even though the cost of complying with the mandates of these programs rises year after year.

Several other programs were severely cut last year and could face further cuts this year. Most prominently, state education technology grants were funded at \$496 million in fiscal year 2005, cut to \$272 million last year, and have been slated for total elimination this year in the bill that cleared the House Appropriations Committee.

Recognizing how shabbily their funding committees have been treating education (as well as health and other domestic programs that make up the Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services spending bill), congressional leaders are seeking to delay floor votes until after the Nov. 7 election. In that way, individual members can avoid accountability to the electorate for diminishing education—including avoiding votes to increase or even restore funding. A lame-duck session could also set the stage for additional cuts.

NSBA is addressing the problem through its Campaign to Restore Federal Funding for America's School Children. Among other activities, NSBA sent more than 4,000 toolkits to National Affiliate school districts and Federal Relation Network members across the country.

The grassroots component of this campaign will help school board members communicate with their lawmakers that the federal education funding priority must be restored to their community—





