



National School Boards Association

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NSBA ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

A Membership Benefit of NSBA National Affiliates

The 110th Congress: An overview of the education agenda

By Michael A. Resnick

The 110th Congress convened in early January with the Democrats in control of both chambers for the first time in 12 years. What will that mean for federal education policy and funding?

Before turning to the specifics, let's briefly look at the broader political context in which K-12 legislation will be considered. In the House, the Democrats outnumber Republicans by a 233-202 margin. Although Democrats have a working majority of 15, some of their members—including incoming freshmen from Republican-leaning districts—will have difficulties voting for legislation that pushes too hard to the left.

Moreover, recognizing the need for Democrats to project a centrist view to voters, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's first "100 hours" agenda is aimed at basic bread-and-butter issues like reducing the college tuition burden, addressing the costs for seniors in the Medicare prescription drug program, and raising the minimum wage—with possible relief on the alternative minimum tax to follow.

In the Senate, the Democrats enjoy a minimal 51-49 majority (with the support of two Independents). Moreover, since 60 votes are required to break a filibuster,

Senate Republicans are in a better position to block legislation that they don't like than their House counterparts.

In other words, even with their own constraints, Democrats in the House are more likely to produce legislation reflecting their party's agenda.

The Democrats will control the agenda

Despite these moderating factors, the Democrats will be in control of the legislative agenda, including determining which bills are moved to the floor, the process for considering amendments, and the scheduling of votes. The same is true at the committee level where the chairs will control bill writing and hearings to support legislation, as well as have the services of a larger staff than the Republican minority.

Meanwhile, President Bush's influence over legislation will increasingly wane since he has no election coattails to offer in 2008 and is currently hobbled by voter approval ratings in low 30s. Nonetheless, Bush does have the power of the bully pulpit, the power to veto legislation, and the power to influence votes through administrative decisions that affect specific states and congressional districts.

Generally, all of this means that the political parties and the White House will

need to compromise on issues they care about or and believe must be enacted into law. This will still leave plenty of room for both parties to make their ideological points and offer amendments that could produce close votes—including votes affecting education.

In K-12 education, the outgoing 109th Congress was marred by disappointment. With regard to funding, virtually all programs were cut or level funded in 2005 and 2006—including Title I (which funds the No Child Left Behind Act) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Further, Congress could not finish its work to update Head Start or to strengthen the E-rate program. Fixing NCLB was not on the table, nor were initiatives to support America's competitiveness through increased support for math and science in K-12.

The 110th Congress is poised to distinguish itself by constructively addressing all of these issues. The question is: will they? For example, on funding, the Democrats roundly criticized Republicans last year for shortchanging education.

An opportunity to increase funding

Now, as the party in power, their appropriations committee chairs, Sen.

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About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

About the National Affiliate Program

The National Affiliate Program extends NSBA's services directly to local school districts. School districts are eligible to join provided they are members in good standing of their state school boards associations.

About the Office of Advocacy and Issues Management

The Office of Advocacy and Issues Management implements NSBA's Action/Advocacy Agenda and carries out NSBA's lobbying efforts at the national level. By lobbying the Congress, the White House, and federal agencies, the office helps increase federal funding for local school districts and reduces costly federal mandates; helps improve federal education programs by making legislative and regulatory changes local board members support; protects the governance role of school boards from congressional attack; and promotes the role of school boards as a key democratic institution in our country's education system.

Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), who offered amendments last year to fully fund Title I, but was ultimately unsuccessful, and Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), a strong critic of Republican funding priorities, can make their avowed education commitment a reality.

Their funding efforts could get some help from the incoming chairs of the full committees that oversee education. Both Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) have expressed disappointment with the president's low budget priority for funding Title I and could hold up this year's scheduled NCLB reauthorization until the president goes along with the funding commitment they seek.

This could be an important negotiating lever, since the president has given strong indications that he cares about reauthorizing NCLB (which was his marquee domestic issue when his presidency began) and would want to influence its future direction. And, given his growing lame duck status, that will become increasingly difficult as his term winds down.

Moreover, Democratic leaders could put off the reauthorization until after a new president takes office and even threaten to change the name of the program—if Bush opposes the Democrats' funding increases. The big questions therefore are how large of a funding increase will the Democrats be willing to push for and how hard are they willing to push?

A larger budgetary perspective

The larger budget context will also count. Certainly, any savings gained when the cost of the war in Iraq winds down could boost the prospects for K-12 funding increases. But the new leadership will also be faced with competing priorities, such as deficit reduction, reducing the alternate minimum tax, and needs in other domestic areas that have also been underfunded.

Unfortunately, the incoming leadership has stated its intent to allow the Continuing Resolution that is providing temporary funding for education and other domestic programs at last year's level to go forward so they can move on to the fiscal year 2008 appropriations.

However, even if they take that step, it is possible that in extending the continuing resolution, or through a supplemental appropriations bill, additional funds will be provided to meet high-priority needs in select domestic programs.

So, while there is an opportunity for substantial funding increases, school board members and other education advocates still need to both prove their case and motivate their lawmakers to make that opportunity a reality.

Education committees have new chairs

When it comes to substantive legislation, it's unclear what the new education chairs will do. Over the past five years, both Kennedy and Miller have expressed general support for NCLB and have been just as resistant to make changes as the Republican committee chairs.

Although they have not announced any specifics, both have indicated their interest in strengthening the current requirements for highly qualified teachers, which Miller regards as adequate but minimal.

As with funding, the pace of the reauthorization could slow down if congressional leaders believe a delay would help win concessions from the White House on specific provisions. Further, it is likely that NCLB will not be the committee's first item of business.

Kennedy is much more likely to address minimum wage, college tuition, and prescription drugs first—leaving initial committee action on NCLB until later this spring.

It is too early to predict where the incoming education subcommittee chairs, Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Rep. Dale Kildee (D-Mich.), will take on NCLB or how much latitude they will have.

School board advocacy on NCLB essential

For school boards, the need for advocacy on NCLB is clear. They will have to prove the case for the changes they want. Further, the reauthorization process could be long—possibly extending beyond President Bush's term of office.

Although committee action is not expected for several months, the staffs are expected to begin work immediately to develop their respective chairmen's bills.

Strategically, it is much better if school board issues are addressed in the chairmen's bills rather than to try to resolve them by committee amendment—especially with regard to amendments that diverge from the position of the chairman's bill.

That means school board members will also need to work immediately to get their own members of Congress to promote their concerns—and the NSBA bill—with their colleagues on the education committees. ■

NSBA's agenda and the new Congress

Clearly, congressional passage of the provisions in NSBA's bill to correct the flaws in the No Child Left Behind Act is a top priority for our association, along with increases in appropriations to place Title I and IDEA on the path to full funding for the federal share of those programs.

NSBA's action agenda for the new Congress will also address the following school board priorities:

The E-rate

In each of the past several years, we obtained a one-year exemption from a federal grant procedure that would effectively kill the E-rate program. NSBA will again seek that remedy, as well as a permanent exemption.

Also the federal revenue stream that supports E-rate will need to be expanded while we work to defeat efforts by some members of Congress who want to end the program.

Teacher quality

In conjunction with the NCLB reauthorization, NSBA will seek several corrections to provide common-sense flexibility to the highly qualified teacher requirements, including concerns involving the

qualifications of teachers in special education, remote and rural schools, and specific academic subjects.

Additionally, we will seek increased financial aid and new program strategies to attract and recruit highly qualified

prospective teachers whose majors are in specific subjects, such as biology, or who plan to teach special education.

We also will encourage federal incentives for states to develop and implement accountability systems that track the preparedness and success of their teacher college graduates in the K-12 classroom.



NSBA will continue to pursue a greater emphasis on developmentally appropriate preschool readiness in local programs.



teachers, along with federal policy initiatives to help states ease the process for certifying highly qualified teachers who move across state borders.

As part of the reauthorization process for the higher education legislation, NSBA will seek federal incentives for universities to strengthen teacher preparation programs. Such programs should ensure that new teachers are well prepared to teach to their state's K-12 standards and can earn the academic credits required for teacher certification in four years—including those

Early education

In the pending Head Start reauthorization, NSBA will continue to pursue a greater emphasis on developmentally appropriate preschool readiness in local programs and ensure that they are articulated with the curriculum that students receive in their local schools when they enter kindergarten and first grade.

Further, we will seek a new preschool

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HAVE YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SIGNED THE PLEDGE TO AMERICA'S SCHOOLCHILDREN?



Pledge to America's Schoolchildren
www.pledgetoamericasschoolchildren.org

NSBA recently launched the Pledge to America's Schoolchildren. We are urging school board members to ask their members of Congress to take a pledge to support five key legislative goals over the next two years.

By signing the pledge, we can create momentum and support for congressional action on these issues. In effect, we can help advance a federal agenda

that school boards have identified as important to them.

Please check the section on the pledge on NSBA's website, www.PledgeToAmericasSchoolchildren.org, for materials to assist you in contacting your representatives about the pledge. Use the site map to determine which of the federal lawmakers in your state have already signed.

PLEDGE TO AMERICA'S SCHOOLCHILDREN

This pledge represents my commitment to ensure America's schoolchildren receive the highest-quality public education and make certain that my schools continue to fulfill their essential role in our communities. Through my efforts in Congress, I pledge to actively support and collaborate with my local school boards to promote excellence and equity in raising student achievement.

As a member of Congress, I pledge to work and vote to:

- Improve the No Child Left Behind Act to give my school district(s) better measures for student and school performance and the support needed to close the achievement gap.

- Help my school district(s) meet the needs of students with disabilities by supporting the funding goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

- Support school readiness programs for children entering kindergarten in my school district(s).

- Help my school district(s) to attract, train, and retain highly qualified and effective teachers.

- Help my school district(s) to provide all students with 21st century skills and knowledge, including math, science, and technology.

Signed: _____

NCLB: A brew of fixes and expansions

The fixes: NSBA's bill

NSBA will be advocating for the 40 improvements to No Child Left Behind contained in our bill.

These improvements would allow states to have greater flexibility to use:

- Other measures of achievement, such as growth;
- More effective accountability measurements for English language learners and students with disabilities; and
- Common-sense approaches in applying sanctions in specific situations, such as

key lawmakers and various advocacy groups. Here is an overview of just some of the other proposals that are likely to be placed on the table:

- **National standards.** Although it doesn't seem politically feasible in this reauthorization, there is a wide range of voices calling for national standards for specific subjects. The goal is twofold: to ensure that standards in each state are high and to provide a better means of comparing state-to-state student achievement than the current system.

Recognizing the political hurdles, less-

other disciplines are advocating for core subject status to ensure that the stature of their subject areas and teachers are not diminished—including future approaches to teacher compensation.

- **Teacher qualifications v. teacher effectiveness.** NCLB's highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirement calls for a credential saying that a teacher has adequate knowledge of a subject to teach it. However, the credential alone does not say whether the teacher is effective.

Especially, as states acquire the tools to measure student growth and the means to determine the "value-added" by teachers (as distinguished from other factors like family income or education), the requirement for schools to measure, report, or otherwise address teacher effectiveness can be expected to enter into the NCLB reauthorization debate.

- **Equity in assigning effective teachers.** Some advocates are looking at ways to help schools in low-income areas or areas with low levels of student achievement to have a better chance of getting more effective and more experienced teachers.

Such proposals would require Title I schools to not only have the same percentage of highly qualified teachers as other schools but also for the teachers' average salary or experience in those schools to be the same as well.

- **The distribution of funds.** Beyond new requirements relating to the assignment of teachers, some groups and members of Congress are likely to support other federal incentives or mandates for states and local school districts to channel more of their own funds to those schools with the most academically challenged students.

The pluses and minuses of these and other major proposals will be sharply debated. But unless the flaws in the existing NCLB structure are fixed first, then some of these proposals, if adopted, will compound NCLB's current counterproductive consequences even further.

For example, if more subjects (like science) or more grade levels are counted in determining AYP, NCLB's current shortcomings will needlessly multiply the chances that a school will be identified as failing and become subject to sanctions that are costly, time-consuming, and poorly targeted as remedies. ■

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The next step is to seek co-sponsorship of the legislation to build pressure and consensus around the problems and remedies that NSBA has identified.

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when students are in multiple subgroups, when different subgroups fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in consecutive years, or when the number of students who are not proficient is proportionately small.

NSBA's bill also strategically targets sanctions on schools (such as school choice) to those students who actually fail AYP, allows greater flexibility in the use of those sanctions, provides funding "triggers" to limit NCLB's mandates in years when Congress does not meet its own funding commitment, and requires accountability for non-public schools in how well they serve Title I students. [Visit www.NSBA.org/advocacy/nclbcampaign for more details on the NSBA bill.]

The NSBA bill was introduced last year by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) and will be reintroduced in the 110th Congress. Several other bills have been introduced in the House and Senate that were developed with NSBA's involvement and contain components of our bill.

The next step is to seek co-sponsorship of the legislation to build pressure and consensus around the problems and remedies that NSBA has identified.

The expansions: Other proposals

In addition to advocating the NSBA bill, school board members will also need to address other initiatives proposed by

ambitious proposals might be advanced, such as tying NCLB accountability to performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), establishing national standards that states volunteer to adopt, or providing incentives for groups of states to develop shared standards.

- **Testing and accountability for more grades.** Currently, NCLB requires testing for accountability purposes in grades 3-8 and once in high school. President Bush has advocated that testing for AYP should occur at three grade levels in high school, including NAEP for 12th graders.

- **Accountability for science.** Given all the attention on the important role that an expanded home-grown work force of scientists will have on maintaining America's global competitiveness, several members of Congress have proposed that schools be held accountable under NCLB for student achievement in science. In other words, the law's current requirement to test students in science by the 2007-08 school year would evolve into AYP accountability for performance in subsequent years.

- **Expanding the number of core subjects.** NCLB currently identifies nine core subjects and confers special status to them—including the requirement that they be taught by highly qualified teachers. Several organizations representing

NCLB and highly qualified teachers

Currently, NCLB requires each state to demonstrate that all of its teachers who teach one or more of nine specified subject areas are meeting the law's highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements or face a loss of its NCLB administrative funds.

Although states were supposed to comply with this requirement by the end of the 2005-06 school year, none of them did.

States got one-year extension

Consequently, the U.S. Department of Education granted a one-year extension to any state that could:

- Make a good faith effort showing that it was making progress; and
- Demonstrate that highly qualified teachers were assigned to schools enrolling students from minority groups or low-income families at the same rate as they were assigned to other schools.

After pressing some states quite hard on such factors as providing adequate data in identifying specific HQT shortfalls and local plans for meeting the requirement, all states were given a one-year extension.

How HQT works

In essence, NCLB requires new middle and high school teachers of core subjects to show mastery of the course they teach through either their own academic studies (such as a college major in that subject) or passing a state exam.

New elementary school teachers have to meet the requirement in the same way through showing their mastery of elementary school pedagogy and knowledge of reading, writing, and math instruction.

Likewise, special education teachers who actually provide instruction in a core subject (rather than a consultative service to support or reinforce students' learning) must meet the HQT requirements for that subject (with some modifications), as well as meet the state's requirement for special education.

The Housse option

Experienced teachers were given the additional option of satisfying a state evaluation process—commonly known by its acronym Housse—that took other factors into account, such as experience in teaching the subject.

The Housse option was particularly useful for teachers with an academic

background in one subject, like chemistry, who then taught another subject for several years like physics or biology.

Generally, states failed to completely meet the 100 percent requirement in special education, in high-poverty schools, and in rural schools where teachers teach multiple subjects, especially in the sciences.

Possible changes to the law

As previously indicated, a shift toward addressing teacher effectiveness is expected to receive increased attention in the reauthorization of NCLB. Proposals are likely to be considered to increase the likelihood that the most effective teachers (beyond the credentials of HQTs) are assigned to low-achieving schools.

Broader proposals involving teacher effectiveness also might emerge. These proposals could involve federal support for more sophisticated state and local student assessment data systems to determine a teacher's "value-added." They also could address basic questions involving how teacher effectiveness should be measured—beyond student performance on a state test.

It is unlikely that the reauthorization would extend to reshaping how school systems formally evaluate and compensate teachers—other than perhaps in some voluntary or demonstration program. In addressing this issue, the Democratic leadership is likely to be sensitive to the concerns of the teachers unions, which are skeptical, at best, that teacher effectiveness can be accurately assessed at this time.

NSBA would like to see Congress provide incentives to states and districts eager to develop such systems—including their eventual use as an alternative path beyond credentialing requirements for veteran teachers to demonstrate that they are qualified.

Other issues could involve expanding professional development programs, improving college preparation of incoming teachers, producing more math and science teachers, improving alternative certification procedures, and strengthening national and multistate teacher recruitment networks and procedures. Current concerns over the HQT requirements will most likely be addressed, as well.

In the event the overall reauthorization of NCLB does not move forward during the 110th Congress, it would still be possible for Congress to address teacher quality

issues through other legislation, including the potential reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

The local impact of HQT proposals

As members of Congress consider various proposals relating to teachers, school boards will need to inform their representatives of the personnel and contract implications for their school system.

Under current law, teacher contract provisions take precedence—even if they run contrary to NCLB compliance. So, if NCLB is amended to require that teachers be assigned based on experience, salary, or other measures of effectiveness, will your school district encounter compliance problems resulting from the seniority provisions in contracts relating to teacher assignments?

More issues to consider

School board members also need to consider these issues:

- What are the most challenging issues regarding teacher assignments currently facing your district, and is there any specific action Congress could take to provide assistance?
- If teacher effectiveness is measured, how will your approach or policies regarding compensation, professional development, or assignment be affected?
- Can federal incentives to provide additional compensation to recruit and retain teachers in specific subjects or schools be accommodated within your teacher contracts?
- Would you expect any difficulties establishing a local system of differential pay based on school assignment or subjects taught, or in providing special bonuses or living allowances—or setting aside enough funds for those purposes?
- Would the elimination of the Housse provisions create any difficulties for your district in fully meeting the HQT requirements? Would it be problematic for certain subject-area teachers or would it have no negative impact on your district?
- Has your district made use of alternative certification options to ensure your schools have teachers who meet the HQT requirements, and, if so, are your principals satisfied with the work done by teachers who used alternative pathways?
- Are you encountering any problems with the current alternative certification procedures? ■

NCLB: The education questions

Much of the controversy over NCLB has focused on technical questions regarding the statistical validity or common-sense manner in which adequate yearly performance should be determined or how it should be used to label schools as successful or unsuccessful.

As important as these issues are, the reauthorization presents an important opportunity for Congress to step back and seek answers to the more important questions: Whether—and how—NCLB is helping or hurting student achievement.

While members of Congress will be given research supporting various points of view, they should have the benefit of knowing the first-hand observations from their own school districts. Accordingly, in determining how best to advise your own representatives—as well as to gain an accurate perspective regarding the impact of NCLB on your students and schools—you may want to talk with your superintendent regarding the utility of conducting a board workshop on NCLB to answer the following basic questions:

- Has NCLB identified and increased the focus on lower-achieving groups of students and schools that might otherwise have escaped attention?
- Has the increased emphasis on accountability for student performance on specific tests positively or negatively affected your overall education program?
- Have specific subjects or curriculum, areas of character development, or student exposure to certain instructional methods (such as projects or debates) really been narrowed in favor of teaching to the test? If so, has that been beneficial or harmful?
- Has the emphasis on accountability for the test inspired teachers and students to do better, or has it created a negative climate or negative attitudes toward learning?
- Has NCLB helped close the achievement gap for lower-performing students while increasing the performance of more advanced students?
- How have the highly qualified teacher requirements improved the qualifications or effectiveness of your teachers,

including teachers in schools that face challenges closing the achievement gap? Are there aspects of these requirements that have had a negative impact or are not feasible in your school district?

- What flaws in NCLB's current accountability system do you expect to be so problematic next year—or four or five years down the road—that they must be fixed in this reauthorization?
- How, if at all, would you like NCLB accountability to be extended to cover more subjects, grade levels, or levels of performance (such as advanced performance) and why?
- How effective are the current sanctions (school choice, supplemental tutoring, or restructuring) in spurring increased academic achievement in your schools? What else, if anything, should the federal government be doing to support raising student performance?
- What programs or strategies will you need to put in place to meet NCLB's current requirements four or five years from now? How much more will they cost than current expenditures? ■

NCLB: School board involvement is essential

It is essential that school boards in each state and of each demographic and geographic characteristic—urban, suburban, and rural—be actively involved in the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind for the following reasons:

First, since the inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (of which NCLB is a part), Congress has made significant changes about every six years. So the changes that are made now will impact your school system at least through 2013-14.

Second, since the performance bar will continue to rise, any flaws in the existing program that aren't fixed now, along with any new flaws that are added, are likely to increasingly have more and more unnecessary negative repercussions on your schools as each year goes by.

Third, the federal government has now become a driving force in education and this reauthorization could add features that will make it an even stronger force. Apart from the details, a local perspective is needed to help federal lawmakers

understand the appropriate role for both the federal government and the mission of public education.

Fourth, the 2006 election opened a window of opportunity for local constituents to be heard. However, if those local constituents don't take advantage of that opportunity, the same "business as usual" and "inside the beltway" mentality that created the original flaws in NCLB will take over. This will include lobbying by the various interests that have a financial or ideological stake in how this law affects the programs, resources, and mission of your public schools.

Taking all of these factors together, this reauthorization must be done right. School boards, as the elected education leaders in their locality, can speak accurately and knowledgeably for their school system and for the real world of their community—including the broader vision it has for the education of its children.

To ensure that the reauthorization of the NCLB gets off to a good start, here are some steps your school board, working

with your superintendent, can take:

- Conduct a board workshop to determine the specific benefits and concerns that your board has with NCLB and the changes that are needed.
 - Have your school board pass a resolution calling on your House and Senate members to support the NSBA bill to fix NCLB—including the problems your school district has identified.
 - Contact your House and Senate members and urge them to co-sponsor the NSBA bill.
 - Contact the media to make sure news reporters understand how NCLB's flaws are affecting your school district and tell them about the responses you've received from your representatives and senators to support your concerns and the NSBA bill.
- NSBA has developed a NCLB toolkit that includes model resolutions, letters to members of Congress, and op-ed articles, as well as a summary of the NSBA bill. [For details, visit www.nsba.org/nclb campaign.] ■

Funding counts: Greater investment in Title I and IDEA crucial

Over the past few years, Congress turned its back on funding education. Many programs were cut or level funded, including Title I and IDEA.

More specifically, following the enactment of NCLB in 2002, Congress made an initial effort to put significantly more money into Title I (NCLB's main funding source). But for fiscal year 2004, funding was increased by just 5 percent. Funding was then increased by 3 percent for FY 2005 and was cut slightly for FY 2006.

The funding increases for IDEA have followed a similarly disappointing pattern over the past three years.

Earlier this year, during the debates on funding for fiscal year 2007, the House and Senate appropriations committees voted to level fund Title I and IDEA.

However, in September, congressional leaders decided to halt their work on domestic appropriations until after the elections, so they wouldn't have to face the voters with a poor record on education and other domestic spending. Hence, the House and Senate committee bills never reached the floor for a vote.

Following the election, Congress returned for a lame-duck session principally to deal with domestic funding for several federal agencies. But with the change of party control in Congress, the leadership of the 109th Congress chose to adjourn without making hard decisions on funding priorities. So, Congress passed a continuing resolution that would level-fund most domestic programs through Feb. 15, 2007.

In other words, the tough choices on funding for the fiscal year 2007 appropriations will now be left to the Democrats as they also begin consideration of the federal budget for 2008.

Apart from the sheer size of Title I (\$12.7 billion) and IDEA (\$10.7 billion), funding for these programs is especially important to school boards because they involve federal mandates that Congress promised to partially offset when it enacted those laws.

In the case of IDEA, lawmakers promised to pay a share equal to 40 percent of the extra cost involved. But Congress never provided more than 20 percent, and its recent funding decisions have brought the federal share below 18 percent—leaving the other 82 percent to local school

districts (and whatever funds they receive from their state).

Even with the initial funding spurt, Title I was never close to being funded at the level Congress authorized when it passed NCLB. Like IDEA, Title I funding is funded at around half the amount promised—which itself is only a fraction of the amount school districts will need to have the programs in place to make sure their schools can meet their adequate yearly progress goals and comply with the highly qualified teacher requirements.

Taken together, the shortfall between what Congress promised for fiscal year 2007 and the amount level funding would produce for Title I and IDEA would be more than \$18 billion.

For both programs, the cost of the mandates will continue to rise. For IDEA, the costs frequently involve health-related services (which rise faster than inflation), the use of new expensive technologies, and ensuring that the programs provided

will enable students to make AYP. As beneficial as all of these services are, the increasing costs of meeting the federal requirements is significant.

Similarly, under NCLB, the costs will continue to escalate as the mandates escalate. For example, in this past year, schools were held accountable for the performance of a wider range of students as more grades had to be tested in many states. Next year, all teachers will have to be highly qualified, and the year after, science will be tested.

Meanwhile, the performance bar keeps rising—which means more aggressive programming will be needed to ensure that the most academically challenged students succeed, regardless of the cost. These program strategies will involve costs for such things as smaller class size, summer school, increased professional development for teachers, more instructional materials, and improved facilities.

While the cost of complying with

NSBA'S ADVOCACY RESOURCES

As the 110th Congress progresses, school board members can guide their representatives to make the policy and funding decisions that best support the educational needs of the students in their communities. NSBA's advocacy website provides weekly legislative updates and calls to action on key votes that can be accessed at www.nsba.org/advocacy.

Additionally, members of our Federal Relations Network (FRN) and National Affiliate Advocacy Network (NAAN)* receive electronic and telephone calls to action.

By clicking on our website's "write to Congress" icon, you can e-mail your members of Congress (with the option of using a prewritten letter and editing to reflect your district's issues).

Further, on key votes FRN and NAAN members receive telephone calls about the issue with the option of being automatically connected, toll-free, to their lawmaker's office or provided a toll-free 800 number if they wish to call later.

Network members also receive reports on the content of pending legislation, data requests to help demonstrate the impact of federal policy on your school district, and cost saving analyses and tips to help your district implement legislation once it is enacted.

Issue briefs are available on our website that outline the policy arguments and legislative strategies relating to each the issue discussed in this Action Alert. For a broader treatment of the issues, you can download the materials prepared for our upcoming Federal Relations Network Conference, Jan. 28-30 in Washington, D.C. More than 900 local school board members and state associations leaders will be at this conference to bring the NSBA agenda to Capitol Hill in our opening round with the 110th Congress.

• *FRN members are appointed by state school boards associations. A board member from a National Affiliate school district can join the NAAN, which is a benefit of the National Affillate program.*

NCLB and IDEA will continue to rise, many school districts are facing new financial difficulties.

Retrenchment in the housing market is having an impact on property assessments and, ultimately, local property tax revenues, which is the main local revenue sources that support support education. At the same time, state governments are also facing significant difficulties—including rising Medicaid and pension costs.

To date, the incoming appropriations committee chairs appear willing to ratify the domestic funding decisions made by their predecessors for fiscal 2007 by extending the continuing resolution for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The question is whether education will be among the exceptions meriting additional funding, certainly the need exists. Also since our programs are funded one year in advance of their use, our funding cycle has not yet begun (these funds will be available for the 2007-08 school year). Hence, we can plan for the increases; whereas in other areas the funding cycle is half over.

Local school boards have a compelling funding case to make—especially for Title I and IDEA increases. It is especially important that they make that case now since lawmakers will be making budget decisions for two fiscal years in the coming months: not only finishing work on the FY 2007 budget, but beginning to address funding for FY 2008. ■

AGENDA

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funding stream for those public schools that want to either provide preK services directly or through subgrants. Funding for this optional program must come through

The Pledge to America's Schoolchildren

In addition to advocating for specific legislative proposals in each of the areas described above, NSBA is asking members of Congress to sign a "Pledge to America's Schoolchildren."

“

NSBA will support ongoing research to help identify the level of science, technology, and math that students who ultimately enter those fields will need in K-12.

”

a separate appropriation—not from existing K-12 funding.

International competitiveness

NSBA will support ongoing research to help identify the level of science, technology, and math that students who ultimately enter those fields will need in K-12, as well as the educational foundation in those areas that all students should have.

Further, we will seek increased federal financial incentives to attract and retain math and science teachers—including professionals in the field pursuing teaching careers. For those seeking career changes, the requirements for their training programs and alternate certification procedures must be as effective as possible—but not unnecessarily costly or time consuming.

This pledge embraces the basic goals sought in our agenda and is, in effect, a broad platform for the action NSBA would like the 110th Congress to take over its two-year period. Once they get their lawmakers to sign the pledge, school board members should be in a better position to talk with them about the issues and obtain their support as votes on specific legislation arise.

The pledge is a grassroots campaign for NSBA's National Affiliate and Federal Relations Network members.

For more information, see the box on page 3.

Michael A. Resnick is associate executive director for advocacy and issues management at NSBA.



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