

Leaning Forward

A monthly report from Executive Director Tom Gentzel



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ESEA Moving Forward

For those who may have questioned whether the major federal education law ever would be reauthorized, at least one committee in the Congress last month answered with a resounding “yes”! In a historic 22-0 vote, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee moved its version of ESEA to the floor for further debate and a vote. Of course, approval by a committee is no guarantee that a piece of legislation will pass a chamber, let alone be signed into law, but the commitment of majority Republicans and minority Democrats to approve the proposal on a strong bipartisan basis is certainly an indication of a serious effort to reauthorize ESEA in this session of the Congress. On the other side of the Capitol, where the House version stalled after being approved on a nearly party-line basis in committee, the Senate action may be seen as an opportunity to try again to enact a bill in the coming months.

NSBA Active on Reauthorization

The school board voice has been clearly heard as lawmakers and their staffs have worked to craft a new version of ESEA. Our efforts actually started last year, before this Congress even convened, when our lobbyists began meeting with key Congressional offices to discuss our key recommendations for the legislation. We have offered language, presented research and experiences from the field and generally been in a supportive, consulting role. NSBA has a strong and growing presence on the Hill. In addition, we have kept our state association members well informed of developments through regular reports and conference calls. (This included a pre-markup teleconference for state association staffs less than 48 hours after our lobbyists received the 600 page draft bill.) During the Senate HELP Committee meeting, both NSBA and NSBAC were live tweeting as 57 amendments were being debated.

Future Ready Update

The Great Shuffle is underway! As reported last month, we recently sold NSBA’s headquarters in Alexandria, VA, a move that enables us to address both a significant pension liability as well as excess capacity (nearly one-third of the building is vacant). Staff is relocating onto two floors while renovation work takes place on the remaining three. Many employees will share offices and workstations, and telework during the construction period. We expect to be settled into the new space by the end of summer. Design plans are finalized and we are now securing needed permits. The IT staff has done an outstanding job upgrading our network and installing a new phone system that will enable us to forward calls to cell phones and to conduct conferences from multiple locations – especially helpful features during this transition time.

Farewell to Leaders

The NSBA family recently lost two of its former leaders, both retired state executive directors – Carl Rose of the Alaska Association of School Boards, and Ken Cole of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. Carl was state exec from 1988 to 2013, and during that quarter century played a major role in every education debate in his state and reshaped the state association into a full-service organization. Ken also had a long career with the Wisconsin association, serving as a staff member from 1968 to 1988 providing information and support for school boards in all areas of their work, then heading the organization from 1988 to 2005. Both also served as local school board members. Their passing is another reminder that the good work happening at NSBA today is being built on a foundation laid by others.

Departmental Updates

Public Advocacy and Communications (Lisa Bushey) – NSBA received excellent media coverage for its work on the ESEA reauthorization bill in the Senate, including in an article in *USA Today*. ... NSBA was featured in an NBC affiliate segment on “crowdfunding” for teachers’ classroom support that was broadcast in 40 media outlets in 22 states. ... The June issue of *American School Board Journal*, out soon, is the first to include “Urban Advocate” as a special section; it previously was a stand-alone publication.

Finance and Administration (Heather Dean) – Budget meetings with staff are nearly complete; a proposed 2015-16 association spending plan will be presented to the NSBA finance and executive committees this month, with board approval scheduled for early June. ... Business Development has rolled out new partnership tiers with several contracts under negotiation.

Federal Advocacy and Public Policy (Michael Zola) – In addition to very active lobbying on ESEA, staff attended the first House hearing on the child nutrition reauthorization and disseminated NSBA’s Pulse Poll on School Meal Requirements to members and staff of the House committee. ... The Center for Public Education’s new “Leading the Change” resources on improving student achievement in under-performing schools produced a big spike in traffic for the CPE website – surpassing 91,000 visits in March of this year compared to 21,500 during the same month last year.

Legal Advocacy and Office of General Counsel (Francisco Negrón) – NSBA and the Oklahoma State School Boards Association last month filed an *amicus* brief in a case testing a state law providing vouchers to students with disabilities. ... The governance documents adopted by the 2015 Delegate Assembly are now available on the NSBA website. ... COSA is likely to exceed budgeted revenue for its online legal education programs. Another webinar, on cloud computing, is scheduled this month.

Member and Leadership Services (Marie Bilik) – A facilitator’s guide for the new “Key Work” handbook is being written for presentation at the state association trainers’ meeting in June. ... The Annual Conference drew 7,300 persons to Nashville, including 4,837 paid registrants. The call for workshop proposals for the 2016 event is now open; the deadline is June 1. ... NSBA’s Technology Leadership Network conducted two site visits, in Ohio and Washington State, during the last week of April.

Recent Travel and Meetings

In addition to those cited above, my recent activities have included:

- Planning meetings with NSBA President John Tuttle, in Tulsa, and with John Heim, chair of the Organization of State Association Executive Directors, at the Kansas Association of School Boards offices in Topeka.
- A meeting with Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN), chair of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education of the House Education and Workforce Committee, to discuss ESEA reauthorization, child nutrition legislation and federal funding for education programs.
- Baltimore County’s annual “State of the Schools” celebration, in suburban Baltimore, MD.
- Annual Teacher of the Year recognition ceremony at the White House followed by a black tie dinner.
- An Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment, in Harrisburg, PA.
- Speaking to Education Policy Fellows at the Capitol, during their annual trip to Washington.
- A meeting with Alan Blankstein, author and education equity consultant, in Richmond, VA.
- Meetings with the chairman of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and with representatives of the National Council on School Facilities.
- An event honoring winners of the 2015 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.