



## Florida School Boards Association FEDERAL NEWS & INFORMATION

April 11, 2022

### BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS

March saw a lot of appropriations action. The FY 2022 omnibus bill was enacted and the White House released its FY 2023 budget request. While some House Appropriations subcommittees held hearings last week, including one on [social and emotional learning](#), and there was [hope for progress on a COVID relief package](#), Congress left Washington, DC, on Thursday night for a two-week recess. That means there will not be much more activity on spending this month.

The [COVID bill](#) is on hold for now, but it did win bipartisan support as it was developed. This was partly because it is funded by rescinding unspent relief funds. This includes \$500 million of unclaimed funding that the American Rescue Plan allocated to institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). Of the total \$39.5 billion in HEERF, almost all was awarded by formula to IHEs last spring. The Department of Education gave IHEs another chance to apply for the funding last month, and most of the remaining funds are being rescinded in this bill. The situation around this bill can be characterized as “fluid.”

Education advocates watching for progress on the House-Senate conference negotiations of their respective competitiveness bills were pleased to see that conferees were officially appointed. Dozens of members of the House and Senate were appointed this week, conveying the broad scope of the bill and perhaps portending the complexity of the negotiations. At least groups sending letters on the bills know to whom they should address them. A speedy conference continues to be the goal, but the number of conferees and the thousands of pages of legislative language suggest that goal will be a difficult one to achieve.

The next two weeks should be quiet ones for those who work on and around Capitol Hill.

### WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCES ACTION PLAN ON SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

On Monday, April 4, the White House announced the Biden-Harris Action Plan for Building Better School Infrastructure. According to a release from the White House, the plan will “upgrade our public schools with modern, clean, energy efficient facilities and transportation — delivering health and learning benefits to children and school communities, saving school districts money, and creating good union jobs. The action plan activates the entire federal government in leveraging investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and American Rescue Plan to advance solutions including energy efficiency retrofits, electric school buses, and resilient design.” The plan outlines improvements in key areas, including: (1) invest in more efficient, energy-saving school buildings; (2) improve classroom air quality through the American Rescue Plan; (3) help schools access resources and best practices; (4) expand clean and safe school transportation; (5) support for rural, tribal and Puerto Rican schools; and (5) investments to improve school energy efficiency and indoor air quality. To read the fact sheet on the action plan, click [here](#).

### HOUSE EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE MARKS UP WIOA

On Tuesday, April 5, the House Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) [held](#) a mark-up of his draft proposal of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The legislation was last reauthorized on a bipartisan basis in 2014 with authorized funding levels expiring in fiscal year 2020 (October 1, 2019). The House bill reauthorizes \$74 billion in WIOA programs through 2028. In his opening statement, Chairman Scott asserted that underinvesting in workforce development allows other countries to outcompete the U.S. economy. He also stressed the equity-related improvements of the legislation such job training for disconnected youth and justice-impacted individuals. Chairman Scott noted that the bill expands the ability of community colleges to provide employment and training opportunities,



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leading to credentials in industries that are in-demand. In her opening remarks, Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC) said the bill was a missed opportunity for bipartisanship. She called WIOA 2022 a “great disappointment” as it fails to empower workers to gain the skills that they need to have a successful career and spends unnecessary taxpayer dollars. She added that the bill expands the role of the federal government, increases the size of state and local workforce boards, and expands organized labor’s influence while limiting input from job creating employers: “job creators know best what skills workers need to be successful.” Other members’ opening statements echoed those of their respective leadership. Amendments were offered, but the substitute amendment to clarify and improve the bill was the only amendment to pass. Traditionally, workforce programs have enjoyed bipartisan support. Yet, the WIOA 2022 legislation passed the House Committee on Education and Labor on a party line vote of 29-21. This legislation is now pending floor consideration of the full U.S. House of Representatives. While the Senate Health Education, Labor and Pension Committee has held a few hearings on workforce programs, the Senate outlook for WIOA reauthorization is unclear. To watch all (or some portions) of the markup, go [here](#).

### **BIDEN ANNOUNCES EXTENSION ON STUDENT LOAN PAUSE**

On Wednesday, April 6, President Biden extended the moratorium on federal student loan payments through August 31. The extension is considerably shorter than what many Congressional Democrats have been requesting. Democratic leaders had been requesting that the administration extend the deadline until the end of the year. In fact, nearly 100 lawmakers led by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) sent a letter to Biden asking him to extend the pause until at least the end of the year. Many progressives in Congress want the payment pause extended as a precursor to wide-scale debt cancellation that they want Biden to pursue through executive action. However, other more centrist Democrats in Congress had also called on the Biden administration to at least extend the moratorium into next year. Democrats and advocates for student loan borrowers have said that more relief is needed as Americans face higher costs as a result of rising inflation gripping the economy. But some economists have argued that the extension itself could add to the inflation crisis. To read an article on the extension, click [here](#).

### **HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES (LHHS-ED) SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON SEL AND WHOLE CHILD**

On Wednesday, April 6, the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) subcommittee hosted a virtual hearing titled, "Social and Emotional Learning and Whole Child Approaches in K-12 Education." The two-hour hearing focused on evidence supporting social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions and the best use of these resources in schools. Chairwoman DeLauro (D-CT) began the hearing stating, “Decades of adolescent development research have shown that all aspects of a child’s well-being must be supported if we are to ensure their success.” She noted that SEL interventions are a key strategy used by educators to help support the whole child. Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) began his opening statement by admitting he does not have much experience or knowledge about the topic, but defined SEL as a curriculum. Cole then pointed to the criticism presented by some that SEL is a conduit for radical policies and an effort to remove parental involvement in their student’s education and development. While he did not endorse this view, he reaffirmed his point that the federal government should not play a role in supporting specific curriculum and must ensure parents can be engaged in their child’s educational experience, noting that it is not the federal government’s purview to dictate curriculum in K-12 schools. The archived video of the hearing and witness testimony can be found [here](#).



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### **EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS HOST ATTENDANCE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

On Wednesday, April 6, Attendance Works, IEL and campaign partners kicked off their 2022 Attendance Awareness Campaign, with the first webinar of their campaign series titled, “Keep Kids Engaged and Showing Up for Learning: Relationships, Routines, and Partnerships.” The webinar began with a brief overview and introduction of the 2022 Attendance Awareness Campaign from Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works, and Kwesi Rollins, vice president of IEL. The purpose of this campaign is to showcase how schools working with community partners can strengthen relationships, social-emotional skills and promote daily attendance routines essential to student learning and well-being, especially given the challenges of the pandemic. Chang set the foundation of this discussion by explaining chronic absence as a student missing so much school that they are deemed academically at-risk, which is consistently defined as missing 10% of school or more. This can lead to greater risk of poor academic performance, disengagement and dropping out. Research shows that pre-pandemic, 8 million students were chronically absent and now, chronic absence has likely tripled. Christina Sepulveda, vice president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Garden Grove, stated that their clubs primarily serve the Southern California area, with a focus on areas with high need and low levels of financial stability. The pandemic has impacted their services and specifically their attendance. Currently, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Garden Grove serve 4,300 youth daily, which is a decrease in comparison with the 6,000 youth served daily prior to the pandemic. Lastly, Aaron Philip Dworkin, chief executive officer of the National Summer Learning Association, joined the panel to discuss his experience with summer learning programs and emphasized the importance of extended learning. To access the full 2022 Attendance Awareness Campaign and the first installment of Attendance Works’ messaging and engagement toolkit, click [here](#).

### **EDUCATION GROUPS DISCUSS BIDEN ADMINISTRATION’S MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY**

On Wednesday, April 6, the USC-Brookings Schaeffer Initiative for Health Policy and The Commonwealth Fund facilitated a discussion on President Biden’s strategy regarding mental health and the work mental health organizations and advocates are doing on the ground. Susan Rice, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, opened the discussion with a statement that she believes improving mental health is foundational in building a better, healthier America. She referenced President Biden’s commitment at the State of the Union to transform how we address mental health through three steps: building a system with enough capacity to treat everyone, connecting everyone to services they need, and supporting all Americans to improve their health and wellbeing in the first place. David Blumenthal, the president of the Commonwealth Fund, led a brief interview of Rice where they discussed various initiatives aimed at improving child mental health services through increased funding for programs, combating workforce shortages in mental health professions, increasing access to telehealth, integrating behavioral health services into primary care, and providing greater investment in community mental health services, especially in communities of color and indigenous populations. The event concluded with a panel discussion between mental health experts, stakeholders and advocates moderated by Richard Frank, director of the USC-Brookings Schaeffer Initiative for Health Policy, where they discussed the need for innovative evidence-based solutions for the country’s mental health crisis. To access the full webinar and learn more, click [here](#).

### **ED SECRETARY CARDONA DISCUSSES COVID’S IMPACT ON EDUCATION**

On Thursday, April 7, Washington Post Live hosted a virtual conversation with Education Secretary Miguel Cardona and Washington Post Deputy Newsletter Editor Paige W. Cunningham about the impact of the pandemic on students. The short, 20-minute discussion dove into the concerning statistics on student mental health; the impact of closures at public, private and charter schools; and disparities in the education system. “It’s becoming clear the massive toll that



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school shutdowns and the pandemic took on students. We've seen both lagging test scores and troubling data on the mental health of students," Cunningham began. "The message really is that we need to maintain a level of urgency, and reopening schools is just a first step," Secretary Cardona followed. He continued, "Students have experienced a lot of trauma, so our schools have to look different, using [American Rescue Plan] funds... We have to make sure that when they come back to our schools, they're coming back to different schools." Specifically, schools that have more mental health supports, better after-school and summer programming, tutoring and better parent engagement processes, Secretary Cardona emphasized. "While the influx of money is there, we must match that with an urgency to improve our schools," he stated. As it relates to educational equity and disparities, the secretary noted that the agency is increasing Title I budgets to make sure they are addressing those issues. Secretary Cardona additionally addressed teacher shortages, stricter regulations on charter schools, state legislation on parental rights and gender identity in schools, and the agency's anticipated new Title IX rules, specifically as it relates to trans students in sports and other extracurricular activities. To watch the full webinar, click [here](#).