



Federal News & Information – May 2, 2022

BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS

Last week, the House Appropriations Committee hosted 18 hearings on the topic of FY 2023 spending. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona appeared before the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education panel for a conversation on Thursday. While he discussed the importance of investing in the country's poorest schools, how to address the nationwide teacher shortage and the mental health issues facing students and teachers, some members of the panel questioned him repeatedly about the agency's oversight of charter schools, suggesting that the administration was trying to curtail their operations. In reply to those assertions, Secretary Cardona contended that the agency's regulatory actions are meant to bring transparency and accountability to charter schools, and he assured the panel that he is a supporter of "good" charter schools. Members of the panel also asked questions about the billions of dollars spent on education via various COVID relief bills and tracking their expenditure. Representative Ben Cline (R-VA) presented a list of school districts that have spent millions of dollars in pandemic relief funds on questionable investments, including synthetic turf fields, a weight room, football field drainage and outdoor tracks. Secretary Cardona said the agency is implementing new and better tracking of the funds in cooperation with states.

During the hearing, Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) — who also helms the full committee — said she is committed to getting FY 2023 spending bills done "on time" this year, and she and Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) had several exchanges about their working relationship that has supported such goals in recent years. The four leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees met last week to start discussing what might be the total amount of discretionary spending in this year's bills, as well as the split between defense and nondefense spending. That meeting supports the notion that a budget resolution will not be approved by either chamber anytime soon. House leaders are hoping to have allocations for the 12 appropriations bills by late May, with markups for at least some of the bills in June and floor consideration in July.

There was not any progress to report on the competitiveness legislation, or on what remnants of Build Back Better might still have a chance for enactment. However, May will be a busy month that will give members, staff and advocates a clearer idea of what might be completed before the mid-term elections are in full swing.

ED ANNOUNCES INVESTMENTS TO SUPPORT STUDENT RECOVERY

On Wednesday, April 27, the Department of Education (ED) announced that it was investing over \$220 million in government, private and public sectors to help support student recovery. Speaking on the funding, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said, "As we move beyond reopening, the Biden-Harris Administration and the Department of Education will remain laser-focused on helping students recover

academically from the pandemic and access the academic, mental health and other supports they need to thrive. We are already seeing the impact the American Rescue Plan is having on schools, students, families and educators — from increased access to academic and mental health supports to expanded summer learning and enrichment programs funded by federal pandemic relief funds. With additional investments from the department’s grant programs and the philanthropic community, we can scale our recovery efforts, make ARP dollars have an even greater impact, and ensure every student — no matter their background, family income or zip code — has the academic and mental health supports they need to succeed. In states and districts across the country, American Rescue Plan funds are having a direct impact on student, family and educators’ recovery.” The department’s American Rescue Plan (ARP) Summit focused on expanding summer learning and enrichment opportunities, philanthropic efforts and assisting with the Education and Innovation and Research Grant Program. To read a press release, click [here](#).

NASISP DISCUSSES IMPORTANCE OF SISIP IN EDUCATION

On Wednesday, April 27, the National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP) hosted a briefing on Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISIP). Phyllis Wolfram, executive director of CASE and panel moderator, began the webinar by sharing that specialized instructional support services were vital pre-pandemic and believes that they are even more crucial now, especially as people adjust to the “new normal.” Wolfram emphasized that these specialized skills have been proven to help students to excel socially, educationally and emotionally; however, she believes that greater awareness and utilization of these professionals is needed in order to continue to set students up for success. Wolfram was joined by Nicole Pfirmann, prevention and wellness supervisor at Mason City School; April Turner, school psychological services supervisor at the Maryland State Department of Education in Baltimore; Amber Weldon-Stephens, music therapy department chair and internship director with the Fulton County Schools; and Matt Lewis, principal of Garfield Elementary School. The panelists consisted of several educators and specialized instructional support professionals who shared the importance of expanding support services, incorporating nontraditional strategies to improve the all-around social and emotional well-being of students, and encouraging creativity as educators pursue solutions. When asked how Congress could better support education, the panelists believe that it is crucial for legislators to recognize the value in education, beyond the academics. They believe that when adequate tools and resources are not provided, students are not supported in every aspect of their development. They believe the solution begins by passing a budget that fully supports and prioritizes education, as well as providing clear guiding documents for district administrators on necessary specialized instructional support service personnel. To read more on NASISP, click [here](#).

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE DISCUSSES FY2023 ED BUDGET

On Thursday, April 28, the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) Subcommittee hosted a hearing titled, “Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Department of Education.” The hearing featured a single witness, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, who appeared to defend and explain the Biden administration’s FY 2023 budget request for the agency he leads. Secretary Cardona began by saying that the hearing is about the needs of students and how “we can work together” to meet them. He noted that since becoming secretary, he has visited

schools and college campuses nationwide, noting the differences between states and communities and affluent neighborhoods and poverty-stricken ones. “Our children are hurting,” he said, noting the young people are anxiety-ridden and depressed. “The teaching profession is in crisis,” he said, describing the shortage of teachers that all states are navigating. He went on to say that during his travels, concerns around what should or shouldn’t be taught in schools wasn’t a topic for his conversations with parents and suggested the topic had been weaponized for political gain. During the two-hour hearing, the secretary was questioned on many varied topics. Republican members of the panel, including Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) asked Secretary Cardona several times about the agency’s plans for regulating charter schools, suggesting that the agency opposed charters and was deliberately making it difficult for them. In response, the secretary repeatedly said that he is not opposed to charter schools, but feels they should be transparent and accountable, and forthcoming regulations from the department represent those goals. Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), in her closing remarks, shared her commitment to pass appropriations bills on time. She went on to note that 70% of students do not pursue traditional college studies and said it was important to ensure that other pathways exist. She went on to reiterate that “education is the great equalizer” and that no child should be denied a quality education. The chair noted that there are more challenges facing schools and colleges today than ever before, and that it is necessary to provide the needed support to overcome these challenges. The archived video of the hearing and witness testimony can be found [here](#).