



Federal News & Information – May 16, 2022

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

Last week, House Appropriations subcommittees held additional hearings with agency leaders as they consider the development of FY 2023 spending bills. While House and Senate Appropriations Committee leaders met a few weeks ago to discuss what might be topline spending numbers, there has not been news of additional progress on the issue. Regardless, House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) continues to aim for House passage of FY 2023 spending bills by the July 4 recess.

In other appropriations news, lawmakers went into last week looking to address supplemental spending for both COVID and Ukraine. They quickly decided to address the former at a later date and focus on the latter. The House passed a \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine earlier in the week, but the Senate left Washington, DC, for the weekend without approving the bill. Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) has a hold on the measure. His hold and the resulting requirement for a cloture vote will extend debate of the measure, which the White House said is needed by the end of the week. The pressure is on for Senate supporters of the bill.

In authorizing legislation news, the House-Senate conference on competitiveness legislation [met formally for the first time on Thursday](#). During the meeting, conference committee members spoke about their priorities and the importance of coming to a bipartisan agreement on this legislation. Leaders of the House and Senate education committees were among those offering remarks. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chair Patty Murray (D-WA) urged her colleagues to support the education provisions of the wide-ranging bill that would promote STEM pathways and invest in expanded K-12 computer science education. House Education and Labor Committee Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC) spoke critically of the bill at the convening, saying, in part, “In its current form, the House-passed COMPETES Act does more to hamstring our economy than to help America compete with China.” Varied advocacy groups are hopeful the House and Senate can produce a compromise bill this summer.

Both chambers will be in session this week, with Democratic leaders hoping to finalize the Ukraine spending bill as soon as possible.

ED TO STRENGTHEN RIGHTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

On Friday, May 6, the Department of Education (ED) announced its intent to strengthen and protect the rights for students with disabilities by amending regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the landmark disability civil rights law. Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in public and private programs and activities that receive federal financial

assistance, including schools and postsecondary institutions. ED's Office for Civil Rights will solicit public comments to help decide how best to improve current regulations to better assist America's students with disabilities. In addition to soliciting public comments, ED will hold listening sessions in the coming months. Learn more [here](#).

AXIOS HOSTS WEBINAR ON COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

On Tuesday, May 10, Axios justice and race reporter Russ Contreras and business reporter Erica Pandey hosted a webinar titled, "A Conversation on Accessibility and Affordability in Education." Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Christopher Nellum, executive director of The Education Trust, participated. Cardona offered high level remarks on the Department of Education's (ED) work to provide targeted relief to public servants through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. ED's implementation of a limited waiver would give borrowers credit for prior completed payments that would not otherwise count toward PSLF. In describing the decision, Cardona recounted a number of teachers who have had their balances forgiven. Cardona also said that the PSLF program should have been administering relief in 2017 under the previous administration, but due to a combination of "benign neglect" and necessary administrative fixes, borrowers were not seeing the intended relief reflected on their accounts, which resulted in high denial rates. Cardona additionally stressed the importance of evolving pathways to higher education, ensuring that alternative forms of higher education promote clear career pathways, and helping to promote two-year schools that have strong workforce partnerships. A recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).

NCTET HOLDS POLICY ROUNDTABLE ON FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND TECH

On Wednesday, May 11, the National Coalition for Technology in Education & Training (NCTET) hosted a policy roundtable at the Planet Word Museum in Washington, DC. The event focused on the future of education policy and featured Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel. In addition to comments from the chairwoman, attendees heard from a panel of education professionals, including Gregory Hutchings Jr., superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools; Cindy Sholtys-Cromwell, 2021 National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Digital Principal of the Year; Kristina Ishmael, deputy director of the Department of Education's (ED) Office of Educational Technology; and Kevin Hogan, reporter at The Hogan Reports. Rosenworcel examined federal policy designed to address technology and connectivity disparities and closing the "homework gap." She applauded the work of the FCC's Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries, also known as E-rate — a program intended to make telecommunications and information services more affordable for schools and libraries, which was modernized in 2014 to better address high-speed broadband issues. Rosenworcel detailed her extensive time visiting rural and low-income school districts across the U.S., where she witnessed first-hand the severe digital divide that nearly 12 million students experienced prior to the pandemic. Following the pandemic, "the homework gap became a full-fledged education gap," now effecting nearly 17 million students and was "too glaring to ignore," she stated. This prompted Congress to pass the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) in 2021, "the nation's first-ever program to help close the homework gap," she continued. Lastly, Rosenworcel unveiled her proposal for a new program to narrow the gap further, which she's termed "Wi-Fi on Wheels." Wi-Fi on Wheels would fund connectivity on school buses so that students have an additional

safe space to complete homework assignments while in transit to and from school or extracurricular activities. To date, the FCC has already provided nearly \$35 million through the ECF to help schools implement similar programs. The agency hopes to make Wi-Fi on Wheels eligible for E-rate support as well. Following Rosenworcel's comments, the panel continued the discussion and addressed several issues related to the future of education, which ranged from social and emotional learning and digital equity to professional development and cybersecurity. Learn more about NCTET [here](#).