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NATIONAL NEWS

ESEA Draft Ramps Up Role of Education Research

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

October 20, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/20/09research_ep.h31.html?tkn=NXVFIVpOtl2R7yfOQR%2Bqm64isykk43JJ%2BJha&cmp=clp-edweek

A slew of quiet changes in the proposed Senate bill to reauthorize federal education law would substantially increase the role of research in federal education programs.

The latest version of the bill reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, put forth by U.S. Sens. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, the chairman of the Senate education committee, and Sen. Michael B. Enzi, R-Wyo., the committee's lead Republican, was taken up by the panel on Wednesday after being introduced last week.

The bill has been controversial from the get-go, with civil rights groups criticizing its overhaul of the accountability system set up under the current law, the No Child Left Behind Act, and states and administrator groups voicing concern that its provisions are still too restrictive.

In comparison, the bill's research-related provisions seemed to be flying under the radar. They would:

- Greatly increase the percentage of federal program funds devoted to evaluation and technical assistance; from 0.5 percent to 1 percent in the case of federal Title I anti-poverty programs, and to 3 percent in most other programs;
- Set the [Institute of Education Sciences](#), the U.S. Department of Education's primary research arm, as the lead agency to evaluate federal education programs and require IES to help federal programs establish criteria for program effectiveness;
- Establish a permanent grant for the Investing in Innovation, or i3, program, originally created under the fiscal stimulus law, which provides three- to five-year competitive grants to conduct research to develop and scale up promising education programs and interventions; and
- Require more research evidence backing up the use of school improvement programs in some instances.

"I think they've got the fundamentals for a great [research] infrastructure in there," said James W. Kohlmoos, the president of the [Knowledge Alliance](#), a Washington-based group representing regional educational laboratories and other research organizations that receive federal research funding. "There's a recognition in total in this draft that we might be moving further down the road from ESEA being primarily an accountability bill to a solutions-oriented one that provides support for improvement."

While the bill would not allow IES to pool all evaluation money into a single pot—a change long requested by IES officials and the National Board for Education Sciences that advises it—the increase in evaluation set-asides could mean millions of additional dollars for IES. According to Sue Betka the deputy director of administration and policy at IES, the institute spend \$66.8 million for evaluations in fiscal 2011, including: \$11.1 million in general ESEA set-asides; \$7.8 million for Title I evaluation specifically; \$20.2 million for national program evaluations; and \$11.5 million for special education evaluations. Only \$16.2 million came from general research, development and dissemination funds for IES.

Moreover, the bill would solidify IES’s authority to evaluate Education Department programs, rather than splitting responsibility between IES and the department’s various program offices. The Education Department had already announced that starting this fiscal year, IES’s National Center of Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance would conduct all program implementation and effectiveness studies of 18 months or longer, but the Harkin-Enzi bill would increase that authority. It calls for IES to coordinate all federal program evaluations for the department and help establish the evaluation criteria for those programs on the front end.

“Generally I’m pleased the bipartisan bill shows confidence in IES and our ability to do this work,” said IES Director John Q. Eastor “We are very eager to work with program people from the very beginning to design programs that can result in strong evaluations with little burden on participants. When planning works that way, we can even make implementation less burdensome on participants.”

In the past, evaluations have been planned after large grants such as [Reading First](#) went out, making it more difficult to determine criteria and collect data to measure the program’s effectiveness.

“It’s awkward to have it divided that way,” said Grover J. “Russ” Whitehurst, the director of the [Brown Center on Education Policy](#) at the Washington-based Brookings Institution and formerly the director of IES. “It’s much better to have one captain of the ship rather than confused coordination of the bridge. You need that independence to carry out an evaluation of a program in the department.”

Moreover, Mr. Whitehurst said, “having a real secure pot of money, knowing it’s going to be there over a number of years would change the nature of the enterprise. Predictability of the fund would allow much more forward thinking about an evaluation plan. It would allow the evaluation of lots of programs that don’t get evaluated now, simply because there’s not enough in smaller programs to fund a real evaluation.”

Research in School Improvement

One example of the bill’s tougher requirements for research evidence comes in the area of school improvement. Under the bill, the bottom 5 percent of schools identified as “persistently low-achieving,” either for overall performance or for achievement gaps, would have to adopt one of a number of school improvement strategies. Among these, the “whole school reform” strategy allows districts create their own turnaround plans—but only using programs and interventions that have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in student outcomes on “more than one well-designed or well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study

That provision raised red flags for Mr. Whitehurst. “I think it repeats the error in NCLB of using ‘scientifically based research’ as a requirement for using federal funds when there wasn’t a sufficient base of scientifically rigorous research to do what was required,” Mr. Whitehurst said.

While the Harkin-Enzi bill includes fewer references to “scientifically based research” than NCLB does, it sets a more stringent definition for programs backed by scientifically based research. They must include randomized, controlled experiments or quasi-experimental studies—considered the “gold standard” of education research—which have results that can be repeated and have been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or panel of independent experts.

Since NCLB set randomized, controlled experiments as the bar for “scientifically based research,” the number of such trials has exploded. In the past five years, for example, regional educational laboratories conducted 25 studies using experimental designs. Yet critics have argued the time, expense, and ethical dilemmas posed by full experiments make them difficult to use for education

The Baltimore-based [Success for All Foundation](#) offers one of the few whole-school interventions with evidence backed by experimental studies yet its chairman, Robert E. Slavin, admitted. “If we [as a field] had to [implement the school improvement model] this afternoon it would be trouble; there wouldn’t be more than a half-dozen programs for whole-school reform that have that kind of evidence.” Mr. Slavin also writes an opinion blog for edweek.org.

However, Fred Doolittle, the vice president and K-12 policy director of the New York City-based research firm [MDRC](#), argued most schools could weave individual evidence-based interventions into their larger school improvement plan, and the requirement would drive demand for large-scale research on effective programs. “We’re not starting from scratch; over the last decade there has been a push for this kind of evidence in education and as a result the capacity to do this kind of work has expanded.”

Jon Baron, the president of the Washington-based [Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy](#), agreed. “You don’t need a million programs you need a few that are backed by strong evidence, and you’ll build more over time,” Mr. Baron said. “One of the reasons building additional valid evidence of things that work is so important is a lot of the interventions currently in use that people think are effective might not be achieving their intended goals.”

Expanding Research

Among the experts interviewed, there also seemed to be a consensus that a permanent Investing in Innovation grant program could

more quickly, help expand the research-backed programs available. The program provides tiers of grants, with various funding levels based in part on the level of evidence a program has already established.

“You encourage not just scaling up interventions backed by strong evidence, but these lower tiers are an opportunity for innovation, to see whether these programs are things that can work or not,” Mr. Baron said. “It opens it up to a much wider field. It’s attractive much larger groups and constituencies.”

During the mark-up of the Harkin-Enzi bill on Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Michael F. Bennet, D-Colo., planned to introduce an amendment to create a set-aside within the i3 program to develop the [Advanced Research Projects Agency-Education](#), or ARPA-Ed, modeled on a cutting-edge research group within the U.S. Department of Defense known as DARPA. ARPA-Ed, which was originally proposed as a \$90 million project in President Barack Obama’s 2012 budget plan, would focus on special projects “to aggressively pursue technological breakthroughs that transform educational technology and empower teaching and learning,” according to a statement from Sen. Bennet’s office. Sen. Bennet was unable to present the amendment Wednesday, as the mark-up was stopped for procedural reasons.

Mr. Slavin said he thought an ARPA-Ed addition could fill in gaps in i3. “When you want Disney or Pixar or National Geographic to get involved and solve some long-standing problems in education, I think [ARPA-Ed] could get them involved in a way that frankly a \$5 million [i3] grant over five years isn’t going to do,” Mr. Slavin said.

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How could a rewrite of No Child Left Behind scrap teacher evaluations?

Washington Post

By: Editorial Board

October 19, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-could-a-rewrite-of-nclb-scrap-teacher-evaluations/2011/10/18/gIQAxpIwL_story.html

POLITICS MAKES FOR strange bedfellows, but Senate Republicans doing the bidding of teachers’ unions is particularly unexpected. That, though, is what happened when an important provision on teacher evaluations [was knocked out](#) of a proposed rewrite of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Given that the legislation had already abandoned meaningful student achievement targets, the latest change renders the bill a non-starter.

The Senate’s education committee [is set to begin work Wednesday](#) on a proposed reauthorization of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#), known in its latest incarnation as No Child Left Behind. Sen. Tom Harkin, the Iowa Democrat who chairs the committee, released last week an 865-page bill that in its latest iteration is supported by Sens. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) No Child Left Behind needs an overhaul, and this attempt has commendable aspects, including a requirement that states set college- and career-readiness standards, the retention of reform initiatives such as Race to the Top and Promise Neighborhoods, and a federal focus on worst-performing schools.

But those positive components can’t compensate for the proposal’s retreat from accountability provisions, a retreat that rightly came under fire from civil rights and education-reform advocates. It’s a foregone conclusion that NCLB’s strict yardstick of Adequate Yearly Progress to measure student achievement will be scrapped, but the bill’s allowing states merely to show “continuous improvement” in student outcomes is a far cry from what is needed to ensure accountability for poor and minority students. One critic likened it to paying a kitchen contractor who never finishes the renovation as long as he promises incremental progress. Mr. Harkin said he wanted achievement targets in the bill but backed off in order to get support from Republicans, who are wary of any federal role in school policy.

The same impulse led to Mr. Harkin’s agreement over the weekend to drop a requirement that states develop teacher and principal evaluation systems. States and districts would have had great leeway in devising the details of the systems, but not enough to satisfy many Republicans. The [National Education Association](#), meanwhile, doesn’t like using student achievement to measure teacher effectiveness, which is a bit like measuring race car drivers by everything except how fast they go. So the NEA and GOP forged their alliance, and the provision was dropped. Mr. Alexander told us that states would be more successful in setting up teacher-evaluation systems without a lot of mandates from the federal government and that the bill contains incentives for states to undertake evaluation reform. “I am no friend of the NEA and they are no friend of mine,” Mr. Alexander told us.

The Obama administration is right to resist proposals that, under the mantle of bipartisanship, retreat from reform. Schools should be held accountable for improving student academic results, and teachers should be evaluated based on how well they teach. It’s sad that either one of those propositions remains controversial.

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Raise Teacher Ed. Standards, State School Board Group Says

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

October 19, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/10/raise_standards_for_teacher_ed_national_school_boards_group_says.htm?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+StateEdwatch+%28State+EdWatch%29

Teacher colleges need to give aspiring educators much more thorough, intense exposure to K-12 classrooms during their training—and set higher standards for admission—a group representing state school boards contends.

The National Association of State Boards of Education, in a [report](#) released today, says that experience in [actual classroom settings](#), as well as continued mentoring once teachers are on the job, are critical to keeping top-notch educators in the job.

But the report also says that the admissions standards for many teachers' colleges are unacceptably low—they may not, for instance, require minimum test scores or grade-point averages—and many of them draw candidates from the bottom two-thirds of their college classes.

Transforming that process is essential to raising the overall status of teaching profession to something approaching its lofty place in other, high-performing nations, the authors say.

"As foreign countries endure teacher shortages, they do not lower the standards for admission," the [NASBE](#) report explains, "but instead find innovative ways to recruit and induct candidates. These methods have yielded much lower attrition rates than the United States."

The report, titled "Gearing Up: Creating a Systemic Approach to Teacher Effectiveness," is the product of a study group, comprised of state board members from around the country, who were charged with examining better ways to educate, retain, and evaluate teachers. Many of the concerns it raises about teacher-education programs have been raised by other sources, [including](#) Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

The report also urges caution in states' creation and adoption of new teacher evaluation and [merit-pay systems](#). While teacher-compensation was one issue the authors were tasked with exploring, they said they concluded that it warrants a separate report, which they said NASBE should consider sponsoring.

(The authors did conclude, however, that boosting teacher salaries, in addition to improving working conditions, would likely lure more graduates from the top-third of college classes into the profession.)

When it comes to teacher evaluation—a [dominant issue](#) in K-12 these days—the authors recommend that student achievement, as well as observation, and measures of teacher content knowledge, be used to judge educator effectiveness. But they also said those systems should be designed carefully.

"[G]iven the uncertain correlation between student test scores and teachers' overall effectiveness, in even the best value-added data," the authors say, "creating an evaluation system in which student growth is a preponderant component of evaluation can jeopardize the fairness of the evaluation and teachers' trust in the process."

The report also urges state school boards to work with teacher-licensing boards to align certification requirements and evaluation standards, and ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality of teacher-education programs.

In addition, the authors say state boards and teacher colleges need to ensure that educators-in-training are given a broad range of experiences. Among them: learning to collaborate with colleagues, developing expertise with formative assessment, and spending time in well-monitored teacher [residency programs](#).

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FLORIDA NEWS

Elia named 'District Data Leader of the Year' by Florida DOE

St. Petersburg Times

By: Rebecca Catalanello

October 19, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/elia-named-district-data-leader-year-state-doe>

The Florida Department of Education named Hillsborough school superintendent MaryEllen Elia the state's "2011 District Data Leader of the Year." The award, according to a DOE press release, "recognizes school leaders who support and encourage the use of data among their staff to change classroom culture, and identifies districts that communicate the relevance of student data to teachers, administrators, parents and other education stakeholders." Elia, left, was chosen from five finalists, it says, "based on her leadership in gathering stakeholder input to create customized school- and district-level performance scorecards, as well as building a comprehensive, secure, user-friendly dashboard that combines a variety of data for her district." For more information on the new award, head on over to the DOE's [website](#).

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Two Miami Schools in Danger of Closing...Again

NBC Miami

By: Christina Hernandez

October 19, 2011

<http://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Two-Miami-schools-in-danger-of-closing-again-132107853.html>

Hundreds packed Miami Edison's auditorium Tuesday night to talk about one thing: How to keep Miami Edison and Miami Central Senior High Schools open.

The schools are once again in danger of closing unless they can meet certain student achievement goals.

The Florida Department of Education's Deputy Chancellor tried to put the rumors to rest.

"We don't want to close your school," Dr. Diana Bourisaw said. "We don't have the ability."

But the Board of Education does, and if the two schools do not meet certain requirements this school year, they may close even after last year's major improvement.

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said the students are priority number one.

"This is a battle that is never fought to an end," Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said.

Parents came into the meeting with signs reading "Our schools are not for sale."

A second meeting is scheduled for next month so parents, educators and officials can continue to discuss ways of improvement.

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Florida: Superintendent Patton: Collier schools must meet, exceed standards

Naples Daily News

By: Heather Carney

October 19, 2011

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2011/oct/19/superintendent-kamela-patton-collier-schools-to/>

The Collier County School District lags behind the state in reading, science and math — and it needs to do better, Superintendent [Kamela Patton](#) said halfway through her first of six town hall presentations.

"It is what it is," Patton said. "I'm not afraid to show people the whole picture."

Speaking to about 50 parents, school board members, administrators and students at Everglades City School Wednesday evening Patton said Collier schools need to better educate students so that they are on par with the state and national performance levels. She said the way to achieve academic success is by prioritizing student achievement, early childhood education, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, and workforce development.

"Our goal is to meet the state standards and then to surpass those scores," she said.

Patton also urged parents to be their child's first educator by reading to them. She said reading is the No. 1 thing a parent can do to make sure their child is prepared for school.

"Read to them, let them read to you, and read alongside them," she said. "Your child needs to see you reading ... they model your behavior."

Although Patton didn't specifically address it during her presentation, parents and students spoke to Everglades City School's slide from a B to an F and its recent placement onto the state's list of schools most in need of improvement. On Tuesday, the district incorrectly reported the school, which educates 168 K-12 students, dropped from an A to an F.

"It's hard and different ... in a rural community like ours," said Tina Collins, a mother of three children at Everglades City school.

She said that without the parent and community support, efforts to help students die out. But Collins sees changes in the school — a new principal, Cherise Brummer, and additional academic coaches — that will raise student performance.

Brummer said by having the district's support, the school will get back on track.

"Our needs here are just as important as in Naples or Marco Island," Brummer said. "The district is realizing that the parents want that same access."

Tenth-grader Kristin McMillin said she appreciates the district has an interest in her school. McMillin, who hopes to attend college and study nursing, said because Everglades City students live in such a small town, they are often sheltered.

"In a way it's hard for us ... but we didn't have to be an F school," she said. "People just didn't try."

Patton said she is ensuring that Everglades City will not receive an F ever again.

"I'm not going to allow anything but the best here," she said. "Anything in between is not acceptable."

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STATE NEWS

Ohio waiting on NCLB waiver

The Columbus Dispatch

By: Jennifer Smith Richards

October 13, 2011

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/blogs/the-eteam/2011/10/nclb-waivers.html>

As expected, the Ohio Department of Education notified the U.S. Department of Education last week that it plans to seek waivers for No Child Left Behind.

But it doesn't plan to submit its request until February. Several states already have applied and their waiver requests will either be granted or denied by the federal department in December. States that wait until February will hear back from the federal education department in the spring. Top state education officials traveled to Washington, D.C., a few weeks ago to hear about the waiver options.

Patrick Gallaway, spokesman for the state Education Department, said officials haven't decided yet which portions of the law they hope to bypass.

"We want to hear from stakeholders what they would like to see and how they feel the waiver will help increase student achievement. The discussions will be ongoing and will address the portions of NCLB that are most critical to student success," he said in an email.

[States can apply](#) to scrap a keystone of No Child Left Behind, the requirement that all students become proficient in math and reading by 2014. Rules that require money for poor students in underperforming schools to be spent on tutoring or transfers to better schools also can be scrapped. In fact, the idea that a school could be labeled as failing if even a small segment of its student population isn't improving quickly enough can be wiped away by using the waiver process.

Some school districts (including [Springfield City](#)) have pleaded with ODE to seek waivers quickly. Others, including civil-rights activists, worry that eliminating portions of the law cause schools to overlook the importance of highlighting and closing the achievement gap between groups of students.

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Idaho won't compete for preschool money

Associated Press

By: Jessie L. Bonner

October 19, 2011

http://magicvalley.com/news/state-and-regional/idaho-won-t-compete-for-preschool-money/article_9a0696ba-fa8b-11e0-9a69-001cc4c002e0.html

The state has decided it will not apply for a multi-million dollar education grant from the federal government aimed at increasing access to early learning programs for low-income and disadvantaged children.

States had a Wednesday deadline to apply for up to \$50 million to improve preschool education programs during the latest round of the U.S. Department of Education's "Race to the Top" contest. The state Department of Education confirmed that Idaho has decided to skip the process.

The agency led by public schools chief Tom Luna recommended last month that Idaho abandon efforts to compete for the money, citing concerns about the state expanding its current public education system with one-time funding.

"Nothing has changed," said department spokeswoman Melissa McGrath. "Our biggest concern is still the one-time money and what happens after it goes away."

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's office notified the U.S. Department of Education in July that the state intended to apply for the Early Learning Challenge. Idaho was among a handful of states that do not fund a statewide prekindergarten program but had still planned to compete for the money.

One of the goals of the grant program was to help states that have traditionally not funded early education programs launch those efforts. But among the top concerns for Idaho's Department of Education was that state lawmakers have not yet put a prekindergarten policy in place.

The agency also had reservations about taking on a new program while carrying out other initiatives such as Luna's "Students Come First" plan, which includes a series of substantial changes for public schools that include in laptops for high school students while also making online learning a requirement.

"Anytime somebody approaches us with a grant opportunity or a new project, we have to decide whether we have the capacity to do the work. And while that was not the greatest concern, it was a concern," McGrath said.

The U.S. Education Department announced the Early Learning Challenge in May, saying the program aims to do away with an uncoordinated system of preschool programs that often leave the poorest children without options and allow bad schools to go unchecked.

Education advocates said the federal focus on early learning is critical to making quality preschool and prekindergarten to all children. The program also represents the third round of the federal government's "Race to the Top" competition, which doled out nearly \$4 billion to states last year.

Idaho was among states shut out during the first round of the federal grant competition.

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Maryland teachers to discuss new evaluations

Washington Post

By: Michael Alison Chandler

October 18, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/maryland-schools-insider/post/maryland-teachers-to-discuss-new-evaluations/2011/10/18/gIQAmH5SuL_blog.html

Maryland teachers will have a chance to talk to top state education officials this weekend about controversial new evaluations under development, during the annual convention for the Maryland State Education Association.

Ought to be an interesting discussion.

The evaluations that are already being tested in seven jurisdictions, including Prince George's County, are [part of the state's \\$250 million Race to the Top grant](#).

They make half of a teacher's review — and ultimately pay and tenure decisions — contingent on student growth, including test scores in the subjects that have standardized state tests.

Since many teachers think test scores are an over-simplified and misleading measure of success, this has been a sore point for the unions. Twenty-two of the 24 unions representing Maryland jurisdictions opposed the Race to the Top application in large part because of this. And the [Montgomery County Board of Education](#) along with the Frederick County Board of Education also took a stand against it.

Montgomery County already has a [nationally recognized](#) teacher evaluation system that includes test scores but also [incorporates a lot of training and mentoring](#). It's been a successful model that the union and school leaders have been willing to fight to maintain.

But with the new evaluations in motion - it's unclear how it will all shake out.

Many of the unions that opposed the evaluations in theory are now working with their local school districts to work on the practical details now, said Adam Mendelson, a spokesman for the Maryland State Education Association.

The union, which represents 71,000 public school educators across Maryland, is an affiliate of the National Education Association, the largest professional union in the country.

The convention is being held Friday and Saturday in Ocean City. Here's a link to [the agenda](#).

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