

EDUCATION DAILY®

The education community's independent daily news service

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Bills use existing funds to revamp parent involvement

By Tricia Offutt

Family engagement advocates hope to win congressional support for an overhaul of parent involvement that uses current ESEA funding streams for Title I and Title V rather than banking on new funding as proposed in a House bill introduced last session.

The Family Engagement in Education Act, H.R. 1821 and S. 941, was introduced Tuesday by Reps. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., and Todd Russell Platts, R-Pa., and Sens. Jack Reed, D-R.I., and Christopher Coons, D-Del. McCarthy introduced a similar bill last year that garnered 31 cosponsors, three of whom were Republicans, including Platts. The bills were referred to their respective chambers' education committees.

"Family engagement is a cost-effective way to turn around struggling students and close the achievement gap," McCarthy said in a statement. School spending would have to increase by more than \$1,000 per student to get the same achievement gains that occur when a parent is involved, according to research cited in the bills.

Advocates hope that the proposal will strike a chord with those who want to improve the parent involvement indicators in Title I without adding new spending, and allow for local control while providing states and districts with current research and more detailed guidelines.

"It's simple. Children succeed when families are involved," said Chuck Saylor, president of the National PTA. "That's why this legislation makes sense."

If passed, the legislation would raise the bar on parent involvement for Title I schools and districts while also providing more consistent and focused family engagement technical assistance and support. The companion bills propose an optional 1 percent state set-aside for family engagement out of existing Title I funds.

Alignment with ED wish list

Besides emphasizing "family engagement" instead of "parental involvement," the proposed

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Q&A: ASSESSMENTS

Expert: Group to explore the future of assessments

By Emily Ann Brown

Edmund Gordon, an educational psychologist and professor emeritus at Yale and Columbia Universities, will chair the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in K-12 Education.

As an advisor to the Educational Testing Services, which provided initial funding, Gordon spoke with *Education Daily*® about the two-year study group and shared his concerns regarding emerging changes in the U.S. education landscape, including what assessments may look like by 2050.

Following are edited excerpts from the conversation.

Q: *What are your views on current educational assessments?*

A: I have always had some reservations about the focus of psychometrics. A few months ago, some of us at ETS were talking about the possibilities. If the assessment enterprise continues with its present focus, it is likely to be outdistanced by developments in education.

In other words, what we're currently doing may no longer be appropriate for education. The heavy emphasis on standardized testing and its use to select, to predict, and to hold accountable is the least powerful use of assessment tools in education. I think assessment really ought to inform intervention.

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Partnership to offer STEM professional development

Activities use simple materials for complex lessons

By Wangui Njuguna

Recognizing a need to provide science, technology, engineering and math teachers with opportunities to design and test engaging lessons, the New York Hall of Science is using a \$ 1.5 million grant from the Verizon Foundation to work with 20 teachers to design experiments they can use in their classrooms.

Access to the museum is an example of the type of in-service training STEM educators need, said Brian Schnee, special education teacher at Queens Transition Center and a program participant.

Dorothy Bennett, the museum's director of Design-Based Learning in Schools, said the teachers, who come from 17 New York City and Nassau County schools, work with STEM experts to create hands-on activities that will be made available to other teachers and the public at NYSCI's new Verizon Center for Learning in STEM, opening in 2014.

Bennett told *Education Daily*® the goal is to serve 10,000 teachers a year through hands-on professional development at the museum or through online sessions.

"We're trying to create a place where teachers can think outside the box and take some risks," Bennett said. "We keep forgetting that our teachers need to be engaged and that they are creative if you give them the license to do that."

Although the museum has not yet determined the price of the professional development once the center opens, she said that "everyone here at NYSCI is committed to making them accessible without it being a great cost to districts."

Co-designer model

Bennett said the 20 design lab teachers are asked, for instance, to think about circuits and how they could use fabrics to teach it so students "get it in a kinesthetic way."

Teachers and STEM faculty at the museum consider challenges to instruction and incorpo-

rate solutions into the activity design. Once the team comes up with an activity, teachers are asked to experiment in their classrooms with a small group of students. Follow-up discussions center on what did or didn't work.

Schnee said the professional development has helped him teach living environment and general science courses to students with disabilities.

"With [that] particular population, you don't want to get them frustrated," he said, noting that student engagement in STEM is important even in general education.

"I am really good at adaptation and modification. The first project we had was to build a motor. I color-coded the wires and trays with pictures, so all the students needed to do was follow the directions," he said, adding that students also use their ingenuity to create once presented with an idea.

Since joining the design lab in February, Schnee said students are talking about projects he has introduced to them. He added that he's learning a lot about how to use simple materials to explain difficult concepts, such as "how can we come up with something tactile so students learn cell membranes [and] how will I teach this?"

Looking ahead

Bennett said the design lab is working with a range of teachers, including those new to the profession. Several teachers are from Title I schools, she added.

Teachers receive a stipend, she said, adding that the hope is that there will be continued private funding and new federal grants to expand the program. Some program expansion possibilities include engaging current fellows to be master teachers to assist new fellows and recruiting from their schools in order to strengthen STEM departments.

More information is available at www.nysci.org/learn/research/designlab?preview=1&psid=1&ph=4eff.



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Positive youth development practices improve outcomes

By Kim Riley

When Title I administrators and staff utilize positive youth development strategies to empower students, they will realize school success, experts say.

PYD strategies used simultaneously can help reduce risk behaviors while promoting an atmosphere where students thrive, says Peter C. Scales, a developmental psychologist and senior research fellow at the Search Institute.

“Fostering positive developmental experiences helps students achieve at higher levels,” Scales says.

Scales, along with Clay Roberts, a senior trainer for Vision Training Associates, examined the role of PYD strategies in schools during a webinar last month sponsored by the Education Department’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools’ Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center.

Their bottom line is: “Care + Challenge = Improved Performance.” Show students you care and challenge them, they say, and school success follows naturally.

Cumulative effect

PYD strategies enhance a range of “nutrients” or strengths in young people’s lives, explains Scales, who says the idea is to use

them to intentionally affect multiple aspects of a student’s life (family, school, community, and peer group) in order to promote a cumulative effect — “a vertical pile-up effect of developmental nutrients.”

The more positive developmental nutrients a student has, for instance, the less you’ll see anti-social behavior and victimization in school.

“The specific application of PYD to schools is especially critical for those that are underachieving, regardless if they’re rural, urban, or suburban,” Scales says. “It can help change the mindset” of a school and create “a lasting impact.”

Evaluate elements

The five key elements of PYD, as outlined by Roberts, are to:

1. Build positive relationships
2. Provide opportunities
3. Sharpen skills
4. Promote positive values
5. Shape positive self-perceptions

Being a nurturing school doesn’t conflict with being an intellectually challenging school, Scales notes, and both work together to make school success happen.

“A caring and fair staff produces academic confidence,” he says. “It’s about improving how students learn and succeed.”

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BILLS (continued from page 1)

legislation includes several components that the Education Department favors, such as doubling the district-level parent involvement set-aside and allowing for a state-level Title I family engagement reservation. The reservation could be used for supporting and monitoring family engagement efforts, creating state family engagement coordinating councils, and awarding grants to local family engagement centers.

The proposed bills also address ED’s interest in outcomes-based family and community engagement plans that move away from “random acts” of family engagement and toward strategic partnerships focused on student achievement and school improvement.

States would be encouraged to keep tighter tabs on what resources and supports districts and schools need, and the success of family engagement strategies at the state and local levels.

Here are a few highlights from the proposed legislation:

- **Federal research and vision.** ED would establish an office for family engagement. The legislation also proposes that the Institute of

Education Sciences, along with an advisory committee appointed by the education secretary, “develop recommended metrics on family engagement in education” and “provide recommendations on the integration of metrics into state accountability and longitudinal data systems.” The Government Accountability Office would study family engagement expenditures and implementation barriers.

- **State annual reports.** In annual reports to ED, states would include details on family engagement efforts and how schools and districts are being supported.

- **PIRCs reconfigured.** Statewide Family Engagement Centers (a retooling of the current Parental Information and Resource Centers) would be funded through current Title V authorizations. PIRCs’ focus would shift to statewide leadership and capacity-building rather than direct services.

- **Staff training.** The proposal calls for state and local Title I plans to explain how teachers and principals will be trained and supported in their work with families. Title II funds could be used to provide family engagement training.

White House

Obama names chairman of intellectual disabilities advisory committee

President Obama on Tuesday appointed a former Massachusetts representative as chairman of the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities and named 14 people as committee members.

The committee advises the president and the Health and Human Services secretary on national issues and policies that affect citizens with intellectual disabilities.

James T. Brett, president and CEO of the New England Council, who served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, will chair the committee.

Funding Alert

Street Outreach Program (HHS)

Scope: The Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families seeks to

support projects providing services to youth living on the streets and in unstable situations. Projects should aim to increase young people's safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency, and to help them build permanent connections with caring adults, with the goal of getting them off the streets.

Deadline: June 24.

Funds: Grants up to \$200,000. A 10 percent program match is required.

Eligibility: State, county, city, township, and special district governments; public housing authorities/Indian housing authorities; Native American tribal governments and organizations; nonprofit organizations; and faith- and community-based organizations.

Contact: Marnay Cameron, ACYF Operations Center, c/o Lux Consulting Group, 8405 Colesville Road, Suite 600, Silver Spring, MD 20910; (866) 796-1591.

E-mail: fysb@luxcg.com.

Web: www.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&oppld=89893.

Q&A: ASSESSMENTS

GROUP (continued from page 1)

Q: *The commission is composed of about 20 scholars in the fields of psychometrics, public policy and education sciences. What is your goal?*

A: As my commission follows my lead, we will end up discussing the purposes of assessment and they will endorse the position that will inform and improve teaching and learning. We are not likely to object to its use in selection, and prediction and accountability — we don't object to those functions.

We predict that instruments, even the way in which we use our data, will change. And one function of the commission is to think about the nature of those changes. We are thinking about where the field ought to be 25, 30, 40 years out.

In order to move it there we need to start now. The kinds of changes that are going to be made are not likely to be made overnight.

Q: *Are there any trends occurring now in the assessment field that the commission plans to explore?*

A: There is a strong movement toward critical thinking, and toward the construction of knowledge and the mastery of knowledge. Modern technologies make it possible for learners to have access to far more information than I had as a kid.

The task may no longer be to know as much as you can. The task may be to know how to access as much information as you can and how to manage it. One of my students called it "how to manage the chaos created by an overload of information."

A test item might be a problem in which the task is to determine what information is needed for the problem, access that information, then select the most appropriate for addressing the problem most sufficiently.

Your test, therefore, is not primarily a test of the knowledge you're carrying around with you, but

your capacity to collect, manage, even learn new stuff in the interest of solving a particular problem.

Q: *What other changes do you foresee in the future of educational assessment?*

A: Our test tradition is to test individual capacity. I envision a time when testing will measure the capacity to participate in and contribute to a group-solving process.

And if you look at people in some of the more cutting-edge R&D work, even some of the production work, that's what they're doing now. It's not necessarily done by individuals. It's often done by groups of people.

If the accountability functions persist, we're going to have to find ways to track individual contribution, but the performance will require that you do it not as an individual but as a group of people, which is called distributed intelligence or distributed knowledge.

Q: *Will your research have any impact on what the two state consortia are considering as they develop next generation assessments under the Race to the Top assessment program?*

A: Probably not. The commission will monitor that. But we consider what we're about to be quite different in at least two respects. The consortia have an immediate, short-term focus and they are trying to make the best of assessment where it currently is. It is not a revolutionary force in the nature of assessment. It is a force for change in the way of utilizing assessment and the ways in which we go about doing current assessments.

The commission, we hope, will be much more futuristic, much more visionary on what education as enterprise is likely to look like 25 years out — what kind of changes will likely occur and what demands will those changes make to the assessment industry. I don't think the consortia are thinking about that now.