

daily Report

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California Math Standards/NSF

Last month, the head of the Education Directorate at the National Science Foundation sent a letter to the Chair of the California State Board of Education criticizing the state's draft math standards, which were subsequently adopted. The letter suggested that these standards (which were selected over a set developed by a commission appointed by State Superintendent Delaine Eastin) had substituted a "nostalgic" focus on computational skills for the ability to solve challenging problems. Moreover, the letter hinted that NSF would pull the awards at six Urban Systemic Improvement sites in California if the proposed standards were approved. The letter has caused much consternation among conservatives as an inappropriate federal intrusion, and some of our prominent national test supporters (such as Bill Bennett) have come under pressure to withdraw their support. This week DPC and OSTP worked with NSF to produce a letter from NSF Director Lane to the California State Board clarifying that it is the job of states to set standards and that NSF would not pull the award based on California's math standards, and emphasizing the importance of basic skills. The final letter will be shared with Bennett and others.

Study on Urban Education

This week Education Week issued its annual report on education reform in the 50 states, focusing on the progress in urban school districts. The study noted that approximately 40% of students in urban districts reached the basic level on the most recent NAEP 4th grade reading and 8th grade math and science exams in 1994 and 1996, compared to over 60% in each of these subjects in non-urban areas. The study also found discrepancies in resources, with urban districts spending about \$500 less per child annually than non-urban districts. The Education Week issue also discussed, in detail, a dozen reform strategies being pursued to raise achievement in districts around the nation; your existing and planned initiatives (including the new Education Opportunity Zones proposal that you announced in December) match up very well to support most of these key areas.

In addition to your strong statement linking urban school improvement and the need for high national standards, Secretary Riley released a statement noting that your FY 99 education budget will reflect major new investments for fixing failing schools, higher standards, school construction and teacher quality, helping to catalyze change in urban districts.

IDEA Regulations to Be Published Next Week. Next week the Department of Education will publish proposed regulations implementing the Administration's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization bill. On potentially controversial discipline issues, proposed regulations reflect guidance already issued to the field with little negative feedback. One new provision which may generate some opposition requires that, in a child placement dispute between a parent and a public agency, if the hearing officer agrees with the parent's position, the decision must be implemented at that point, even if the agency appeals. This may be criticized by school officials, but is likely to be strongly supported by parents and advocates. The regulations also reflect the Department's interpretation of statutory requirements regarding services to youth with disabilities incarcerated in adult correctional facilities, currently the subject of a dispute with California and an appropriations rider sponsored by Rep. Riggs.

Suit Filed Challenging University of Michigan Admissions Policies. This week the organization that successfully represented the plaintiffs in the Hopwood case filed suit in Federal district court alleging that the University of Michigan's admissions policies unconstitutionally discriminate against white students. The plaintiffs point to grids which allegedly indicate that grades and standardized test scores are applied differently to whites and nonwhites. University officials respond that the grids only served as one among many sets of guidelines, rather than a rigid barrier. A diversity plan called the Michigan Mandate has increased minority enrollment at the school from 12.7% in 1986 to just over 25% this year.

National Tests. DPC and legislative affairs staff are continuing to work with appropriators and House and Senate leadership to find a suitable legislative compromise.

Charter Schools and Vouchers. On Friday the House passed a special rule linking the bipartisan Riggs-Roemer charter schools bill with the HELP voucher bill, also sponsored by Rep. Riggs. The rule, which passed 214 to 198, provides for separate consideration of the two bills, but would automatically add the voucher bill to the charter bill once both have passed the House. Although Speaker Gingrich spoke in favor of the rule, it was opposed by 8 - 10 Republicans, with 2 Democrats voting to approve the rule. Earlier this week OMB issued a SAP warning that if the charter bill were amended to include the voucher provisions, senior advisors would recommend a veto. Further House action is scheduled for Tuesday.

Indian Education. DPC staff met with Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of Education staff to review a proposed Executive Order on Native American K-12 education and to identify other possible Indian education initiatives.