

# EDUCATION DAILY®

The education community's independent daily news service

## ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

### Bill sparks debate about federal role in special ed

By Mark W. Sherman

Disability groups say schools must remain accountable for the performance of students with disabilities in a revised ESEA.

Some of those groups reiterated those concerns after Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, released a draft reauthorization bill Oct. 11.

The bill mirrors the Obama administration's "blueprint" for reauthorization, in which a small, fixed portion of schools are identified for sanctions.

Under current law, in contrast, most schools are likely to miss their AYP targets, according to the Education Department.

There is an opposing view, however — namely, that the whole idea of trying to ensure student success through federal legislation is mistaken.

The result is a dispute not just over the particulars of Harkin's bill, but over its larger purpose, as an instrument of social betterment.

Disability groups say Harkin is casting too small a net, when it comes to which schools are selected for interventions.

For example, only 10 percent of schools would suffer any consequences for poor student performance under his bill.

Granted, the other 90 percent of schools would still be subject to state accountability plans under Harkin's bill.

However, the bill does not require that states set targets for student performance, let alone meet federal ones.

Instead, it says merely that a state accountability plan is one that "expects the continuous improvement of all public schools in the State in the academic achievement and outcomes of all students, including the subgroups of students."

#### Wanting targets, not just data

That's a weak standard, according to Ricki Sabia, associate policy director for the National Down Syndrome Society.

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## Today's Highlights

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## COMPETITIVENESS

### NCEE pilots global curriculum in high schools

By Emily Ann Brown

The National Center on Education and the Economy is piloting a new program in which 21 high schools in four U.S. states are replacing existing curriculum with that used in top-performing countries. NCEE hopes the program leads to basic changes to high school structure.

The Excellence for All program — formerly the Board Examination Systems Program — is based on over 20 years of research by NCEE on nations that have consistently surpassed America on international exams measuring student performance, NCEE said in a statement.

The program's design incorporates features of secondary school systems in top-performing countries that appear to account for such achievement, said NCEE President Marc Tucker.

If pilot schools find success, he said he expects the system embodied in the program will be used to inform proposed changes to curriculum and assessment systems, as well as challenge conventional ways in which students progress through high school.

At its core, the initiative aims to better prepare students to excel in college without the need for remedial coursework, Tucker said. It's also intended to help students earn enrollment into a selective local community college or a technical

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## Title I Implementation

### FY '11 allocations revised, per short-term CR

In a bit of financial gymnastics that is unusual even for Congress, the FY 2011 Title I, Part A appropriation — the pot of money funding the current school year — was cut in the FY 2012 Continuing Resolution, P.L. 112-36, meaning school districts will have to revise either their SY 2011-12 or SY 2012-13 budgets downward, and state officials will need to recalculate numerous administrative equations.

Title I allocations are appropriated almost a full year in advance. Funds appropriated on Oct. 1, 2010, for FY 2011, for example, are actually made available to states and school districts in two tranches — part on July 1, 2011, and the remainder on Oct. 1, 2011, the first day of FY 2012. (In recent years, Congress has not adhered to this schedule, often finalizing the budget up to halfway through the fiscal year. Still, the second tranche of FY 2011 funds are awarded to districts on the first day of FY 2012.)

Thus, funds are not actually awarded to districts until after the fiscal year in which they were appropriated ends. The \$163 million cut in the Title I, Part A FY 2011 appropriation — a 1.5 percent rescission — will be counted as savings against future federal deficit calculations.

Because school districts have set their Title I budgets for the current school year, the Education Department is allowing states to apply the FY 2011 adjustments to LEA allocations in SY 2012-13, according to a memo to chief state school officers from acting federal Title I director Patricia A. McKee.

But that will only delay the financial pain, as well as the administrative headache associated with recalculating state administrative and school improvement set-asides, as well as LEA hold-harmless amounts.

McKee refers states to guidance published by the department in 2006, after a late correction to U.S. Census Bureau data prompted a similar revision.

## COMPETITIVENESS

### School district official lauds globally competitive curriculum

Corinth High School, of the Corinth (Miss.) School District, is one of 21 schools participating in a new national pilot program launched by the National Center on Education and the Economy this school-year.

The school's student body consists of 560 students, with white students representing more than half the population, 41 percent black, and about 3 percent Hispanic, explained District Superintendent Lee Childress.

Corinth is implementing the international curriculum designed by the University of Cambridge in England, as that particular program appealed most to administrators and school staff. He said it offers a "totally new approach" to providing education services

and also shaped "a new graduation path" for students, giving them an opportunity to exit high school early.

It also prescribes a real-world context to learning, among other aspects that engage students, he said.

This is the first time the district has used a curriculum such as this to help prepare high school students for 21st century careers and postsecondary study, he said, predicting the program will measurably boost high school completion rates.

"If our students are truly to become more competitive, we're going to have to look at models like this" and consider implementing the curriculum as early as the middle grades, he told *Education Daily*®.

### CURRICULUM (continued from page 1)

program, toward earning an industry-recognized certificate in a skill or trade, he added.

#### How it works

A mix of traditional public and charter schools located in Arizona, Connecticut, Kentucky and Mississippi are participating in the pilot, which commences this school-year, Tucker told *Education Daily*®.

School officials decide which curriculum and assessments to adopt, choosing only from programs offered by the College Board, University of Cambridge in England, the International Baccalaureate Program, and ACT.

NCEE divided these programs into two groupings: One set is used in the freshman and sophomore years, and the other is administered in the upper grades. Participating schools are required to select one lower-division program and one upper-division program.

Students who pass their lower division exam can either remain in high school and proceed to the upper-division program, or they can graduate as early as their sophomore year, earn a proficiency-based diploma authorized by the state, and immediately enroll in a local community college, Tucker explained. Students who take the latter route will not be required to take remedial courses, he said.

Yet students who don't pass the lower-division exams will be offered "customized programs put together by their high schools intended to address the areas where they struggled, so they can pass the exams on their next try," NCEE said. "The objective of the program is to get all students to this standard before they leave high school."

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation contributed to the planning, research, and evaluation phases of the pilot program and the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan is conducting an independent evaluation of its effectiveness, NCEE added.