Waiting for the Governor’s Budget Proposal

There is some news to report from over the holidays, but basically everyone is waiting for release of the Governor’s 2013-14 budget proposal on January 10.

Recent articles and blogs have indicated that when he announces his budget, the Governor will push again for substantial school finance reform, modeled largely after his weighted student funding proposal from last year. However, columnist John Fensterwald reported that Department of Finance staff had indicated that the new proposal would avoid the term “weighted student funding”. He reported Finance staff as saying “some had misunderstood ‘weighted student formula’ to imply that the extra dollars would follow each individual student from school to school, like a voucher. But extra money would be allocated based on numbers of disadvantaged students per district, not per school, and local school boards, not school site administrators, would decide how the money would be spent.”

Restore Adult Education?

Meanwhile, the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) created something of a stir in December by releasing a report recommending that separate categorical funding be restored for adult education. In their report, “Restructuring California’s Adult Education System”, the LAO recommends:

“Specifically, we recommend the Legislature restore adult education as a stand-alone categorical program once flexibility sunsets at the end of 2014-15. Given that virtually all school districts have redirected at least some of these categorical funds to cover K-12 instructional costs… we recommend the Legislature require districts to spend on adult education in 2015-16 whatever they spent on the program in a specified prior year (such as 2012-13).”
The full report may be obtained at: http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2012/edu/adult-education/restructuring-adult-education-120412.pdf

CDE Announces Federal ESEA Waiver on Brink of Being Denied

In an interesting development, on December 21, 2012, State Superintendent Torlakson and State Board President Kirst sent a letter to county and district superintendents informing them that he had received no formal response from the US Department of Education (ED) to California’s ESEA waiver request. In that letter, they also commented: “However, recent conversations with ED staff indicate ED is prepared to deny our request.”

For a copy of the letter from Torlakson and Kirst, go to: http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/el/le/yr12ltr1221.asp

US Department of Education Declines California's Request for ESEA Waiver

In a letter dated January 4, 2013 from Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education, to Dr. Michael Kirst, President of the California State Board of Education, the Department of Education declined California's request for an ESEA waiver. Duncan wrote, "...a State must have college- and career-ready expectations in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students and develop aligned assessments; develop and implement a system of differentiated recognition, leader evaluation and support systems that include, as a significant factor, data on student growth; and reduce duplication and unnecessary burden."

Further, Duncan wrote, "Because California's request did not indicate that California intended to meet that high bar, I am declining to exercise my authority to approve your waiver request."

A copy of the letter (Letter to Dr. Michael Kirst) is attached.
January 4, 2013

Dr. Michael W. Kirst
President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Kirst:

Thank you for your June 15, 2012, letter requesting a waiver to exempt local educational agencies within California from certain provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended. Specifically, you sought waivers of sections 1116(b) and (c) for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years.

Section 9401 of the ESEA permits me to waive, with certain enumerated exceptions, any statutory or regulatory requirement of the ESEA. In deciding whether to grant such a waiver, I must determine if a State’s waiver will increase academic achievement and improve the quality of instruction for students. It was with these twin goals in mind that I offered each State the opportunity to request a package of waivers of certain ESEA requirements, including most of sections 1116(b) and (c), in exchange for a rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plan designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. To receive this flexibility, a State must have college- and career-ready expectations in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students and develop aligned assessments; develop and implement a system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; support effective instruction and leadership through teacher and leader evaluation and support systems that include, as a significant factor, data on student growth; and reduce duplication and unnecessary burden. These principles are described in the document titled ESEA Flexibility (updated June 7, 2012), which is available at http://www.ed.gov/esa/flexibility.

For a waiver of nearly all of the requirements of ESEA sections 1116(b) and (c) to result in meeting the goals of increased academic achievement and improved quality of instruction set forth in ESEA section 9401, I believe that a State must agree and be prepared to take on the rigorous reforms required by all of the principles of ESEA flexibility in exchange for that waiver. Because California’s request did not indicate that California intended to meet that high bar, I am declining to exercise my authority to approve your waiver request.
Thank you for all that you do to support improving educational outcomes for the children of California. We look forward to continuing our partnership to meet this shared goal.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arne Duncan

cc: Honorable Tom Torlakson, Superintendent of Public Instruction