UPDATE ON ESEA

As Congress looks at its to-do list for the work period after the July 4th recess, it’s hard to predict exactly when any action on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) may occur.

In the Senate, floor consideration of the Every Child Achieves Act (S. 1177), the Senate HELP Committee version of a reauthorization bill, will begin right after the recess, on July 7. Previously, NCSL sent a letter to the chair and ranking member of the HELP Committee, Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) respectively, praising this bipartisan legislation. NCSL continues to work to for the inclusion of language in the final bill to ensure a greater role for state legislators in promoting collaboration between federal and state education programs.

The U.S. House of Representatives yanked its reauthorization bill, the Student Success Act (H.R. 5), off the floor in February. There are reports that the bill could be brought to the floor under a new rule that allows members to vote on three new amendments in addition to final passage of the bill. These amendments are expected to include a measure that would allow states to opt out of the federal accountability system altogether, and a measure that allows federal funds for low-income students to follow students to the school of their choice (including private schools). It will be a busy week Washington, D.C.!

NCSL LEADERS VISIT THE WHITE HOUSE, SPEAK WITH DUNCAN

On Friday, June 12, state legislative leaders from around the nation came to the nation’s capital to participate in NCSL’s Leaders Symposium. Along with the opportunity to hear from well-known policy experts and top leaders in Congress, the legislators had the opportunity to visit the White House and discuss a range of topics with cabinet-level officials.

One of the liveliest sessions came when leaders sat down with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Duncan discussed the administration’s priorities for education, including reforming No Child Left Behind and ensuring access to a quality education for all students. He spoke about finding an agreeable balance on testing requirements and ensuring that standards remain high.
BUDGET ON THE MOVE

The House Appropriations Committee passed its version of Labor-HHS-Education spending bill for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2016 by a 30-21 vote on Wednesday, June 25. This spending bill funds federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education, at $153 billion, for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. Funding in the bill is a $3.7 billion reduction from FFY15 enacted levels, and $14.6 billion below the amount President Obama requested in his budget proposal. In terms of education spending, the measure would eliminate 19 programs at the U.S. Department of Education that the committee majority describe as duplicative or ineffective, or that do not have existing authorization. Eliminated programs include school improvement, preschool development and teacher incentive grants. It would increase spending for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) special education grants to states by more than $500 million over FFY 2015 enacted levels, bringing the federal share of special education funding from 16 percent to 17 percent. It would fund Title I at the FFY 2015 level of $14.5 billion, and add $22 million in new funding for grants to support new charter schools. It would also set the maximum Pell Grant at $5,915. The bill would block the Obama administration’s gainful employment and teacher preparation regulations, and prohibit the department from moving forward with regulations to establish a college ratings system. The Senate Appropriations Committee voted 16-14 on Thursday, June 25, to approve its measure.

Budget sequestration levels will continue to be an issue, as spending caps largely freeze FFY 2016 discretionary spending at FFY 2015 levels. Overall, the appropriations process for FFY 16 has a long way to go.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

The U.S. Department of Education announced last week that it will not pursue a college ranking system it proposed last year. Instead, it will introduce new tools to help students compare college costs and outcomes.

For more information on federal education issues, please contact Lee Posey (lee.posey@ncsl.org) or Ben Schaefer (ben.schaefer@ncsl.org), or call NCSL’s Washington Office at (202) 624-5400.

Registration for the 2015 Summit is now open! Click the image at right for more information!