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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** May 9, 2014  
**TO:** TechMIS Subscribers  
**FROM:** Charles Blaschke, Blair Curry, and Suzanne Thouvenelle  
**SUBJ:** CGCS and SIIA Conference Highlights; Secretary Duncan's Priorities Over the Next Two Years; Congressional Opposition on Federal Funding for Common Core Implementation; and Recent SIG and High School Redesign Competitive Grant Awardees

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, we sent our annual TechMIS Special Report on Preliminary Title I District Allocations, listing districts that (before SEA adjustments) will be receiving an increase of \$200,000 or more and a 20 percent which is at least \$100,000. About 30 percent of the allocations will begin in July, with the remainder in October. These districts represent good opportunities for purchases of products and services between now and June 30<sup>th</sup> or September 30<sup>th</sup>, depending on the state using their portions of \$2 billion of previously carried over Title I funds. These districts are also good prospects over the next year. These districts ought to be Priority One districts to target now.

The Washington Update includes items of interest to most TechMIS subscribers:

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The highlights of the 2014 Council of Great City Schools Annual Legislative Policy conference addressed the recently-passed FY 2014 budget and proposed 2015 budget opportunities and several competitive grant programs, including School Improvement Grants. Legislative changes included in the FY 2014 budget on two new interventions (e.g., whole school reform strategy), according to USED officials, are still being developed, although many districts are moving quickly before guidance comes out.
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The SIIA Education Government Forum on mobile learning addressed a number of important issues through panel discussions, including curriculum/program alignment with Common Core Standards and assessments. SEA changes have, to some extent, paralyzed

the market, even for “newly-aligned” publishers’ curriculum/products; and the new FCC E-Rate Modernization Initiative (see February TechMIS Special Report) and student data privacy changes were also addressed.

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USED has announced new rounds of School Improvement Grants totaling more than \$159 million to seven states for most to continue turnaround efforts with lowest-achieving schools; some new start-up competitive grant priorities versus continuation grants are planned in certain states such as California.

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The House Education Committee has proposed its version of USED’s Institute of Education Sciences reauthorization and includes several provisions which have positive implications for many TechMIS subscribers who might be considering participation in USED sponsored future evaluations of interventions and related products.

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USED has announced the 24 grantees receiving more than \$100 million for high school reform funded out of U.S. Department of Labor H-1B visa fees from firms which hire foreign technology workers; this project announced last November is an example of USED efforts to fund some of its priority initiatives which Congress will not fund, through the use of other competitive programs over which there is some discretion given to the Secretary.

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GOP Senators’ have sponsored a recent proposal to bar USED from spending any more money on Common Core and related assessments; Secretary Duncan’s most recent testimony before appropriations committees argued “zero Federal grants” have been provided for Common Core implementation, which is one of the top three priorities of this Administration.

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A number of miscellaneous items are also addressed including:

- a) USED plans to place a “final priority” on appropriate funds from other agencies such as Department of HUD that support activities in designated Promise Zones, following a proposed priority published in the Federal Register (October 25<sup>th</sup>).
- b) The Sacramento School district, which is one of the eight California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts which received district waivers (including Los Angeles and Long Beach) is turning down the waiver for cost and teacher union related problems; and the district will revert back to being under NCLB provisions.
- c) USED has announced the availability of Innovation in Education (i<sup>3</sup>) grant applications for scale-up and validation projects following publication of applications

- for developmental grants in March; however, for-profit organizations are not allowed to participate directly, but some opportunities could exist, but are not likely.
- d) In one of her last duties before joining College Board, *Politics K-12* blogger Michele McNeil interviewed Secretary Duncan in mid-April to discuss his priorities for the remaining two and half years which include expanding high-quality early education, including pre-K development initiatives, and implementation of Common Core Standards and Assessments; however ESEA reauthorization was not listed as a priority.

State profile updates will be included in the next TechMIS issue. If anyone has any questions, please call Charles Blaschke directly at 703-362-4689.

# ***Washington Update***

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***Vol. 19, No. 4, May 9, 2014***

## **Highlights of 2014 Annual Legislative/Policy Conference of the Council of the Great City Schools**

On March 22-25, the Council of the Great City Schools held their Annual Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. which focused primarily on education funding included in the FY 2014 budget, the proposed FY 2015 budget recently submitted, and future education funding prospects 2016 and beyond. Highlights and some of the implications of the FY 2014 and FY 2015 and proposed funding, along with some clarifications and implications for future education budgets are noted below.

The Council's major advocacy focus has been funding for ESEA formula grants for Title I and IDEA which increased by \$624 million and \$490 million respectively in the FY 2014 budget. However, such increases in the FY 2014 budget only restores 83 percent of the previous year's sequestration amount, and the FY 2015 budget proposal does not restore any additional sequestration cuts from 2013, as Title I and IDEA are proposed level-funded for FY 2015. The \$100 million requested in the 2015 budget for IDEA would be used to fund competitive grants to states to implement the "results driven accountability" (RDA) system which would not increase funding to LEAs to serve students directly.

There will not be any new sequestrations for the upcoming FY 2015 budget year. For the Administration to receive increased

education funding for some of its other priorities such as pre-K, Head Start, among others, any such funding over the December 2013 Bipartisan Budget Agreement could require legislative action, which is not likely. However, given that many FY 2015 budget allocations are constrained by the BBA, there is not likely to be any movement on an FY 2015 budget prior to the year 2014 mid-term elections (i.e., there will not likely be any continuing resolution being proposed before the mid-term election as the discretionary budget ceiling impacting FY 2014 will be the same for FY 2015, and possibly even later years). The Administration's proposal for FY 2015 for the creation of a \$56 billion defense/domestic "Opportunity, Growth and Security" initiative is very likely not to come into fruition, especially if revenue increases are needed.

The very sobering budget message "takeaway" from the Conference was that the predictable slight increases in Title I and IDEA funding over the last few decades are nil and education programs will have to compete with other domestic programs for appropriated dollars.

The current impact of Title I funding beginning in July on member council member districts was illustrated in the Council's estimated (see March TechMIS Special Alert) Title I allocations for member districts. Of the 67 member districts, about 20 are estimated to receive increases in Title I funding allocations, even though nationwide 83 percent of the sequestration

last year has been restored. As one district official noted, in the next two years, the only way for a district to increase Title I funding appears to be to increase the number of poverty student counts in an annual Census survey since poverty counts weigh heavily in determining Title I district allocations (see March 27<sup>th</sup> Special Funding Alert).

The Council prepared handout materials which detailed the House and Senate reauthorization proposals for ESEA which were only slightly addressed during the session since no reauthorization is likely. The Council has called for LEAs to select interventions for Priority and Focus Schools rather than relying on SEAs to do so.

Several USED officials addressed School Improvement Grants which are large concerns of Council member districts. Assistant Secretary Deb Delisle responded to member districts' comments that there is a local capacity need for more experienced principals who specialize in turning around failing schools, which current guidance and regulations do not adequately take into account. She responded that the SIG program may not have zeroed in enough on the school leadership piece of the "turnaround puzzle," according to Education Week's *Politics K-12* blog (March 24<sup>th</sup>). Deputy Assistant Secretary of Policy for USED Scott Sargard also acknowledged that the pipeline of "high-quality turnaround principals is not large." Recent surveys by the Council revealed both principal shortages and other principal related problems exist (e.g., principals who wrote SIG grants are the ones being replaced and incoming principals have to make changes to the plan for which they were not involved). District officials are often concerned about what happens to

experienced principals' former schools once they go to the new SIG school.

In response to a question which was raised the previous day which was raised with Sargard about the new FY 2015 budget language allowing the use of "whole school reform strategies" and SEA "homegrown models," USED officials said they were "still thinking through how to put those new options into practice and what sort of standards would have to be established for organizations promoting whole school reform strategies to partner with SIG schools." *Politics K-12* also notes that the Department has not figured how and if ESEA waivers will be impacted by those changes to SIG. The blog also notes, "Presumably under the two new models enacted by Congress, states wouldn't necessarily have to use the SIG grants to do any of those things. The question is whether the Department would ultimately decide to give more wiggle room to schools that are getting the big multi-million dollar SIG grants to do turnaround work than it does to other low-performing schools under waivers. We still don't know." We also noted to Council staff that the FY 2015 proposed budget did not even reference the two new intervention models allowed under the SIG program.

During his brief comments to former associates (i.e., Secretary Duncan was Superintendent Chicago Public Schools) he applauded the reform efforts underway at the Council and basically asked Council leadership among the member districts to "keep the faith." He emphasized the need for field testing the two consortia assessments for Common Core to be implemented next year and noted that "we want to learn from mistakes and the

deficiencies” in order to improve them. He also called for continued support by the Council member districts for Common Core implementation and urged them to generate support from the “middle” while avoiding pitfalls by devoting energies to fight the extreme left or right in the ongoing principal battles. And last, he also called for cooperation and support for member districts for the E-Rate modernization initiative predicting that if districts do not police themselves in avoiding “fraud and abuse,” then “we will lose an opportunity for new dollars for technology.”

Discussions with some of the key Council member districts’ superintendents and other officials suggest the opportunities for additional discretionary funding by districts will be limited over the next year or so without changes in spending caps and increased funding support in Congress. On the other hand, the use of the President’s Executive Authority and the Secretary’s Discretionary Authority could help free-up different pots of money which could be used to improve programs for disadvantaged low-income students in urban districts. Some also felt that rather than attempting to change existing regulations or even laws which constrain flexibility on the part of districts, they felt that opportunities could be created by USED not enforcing existing regulation and laws to the extent they can do so without generating significant opposition from Congress.

### **Highlights of SIIA Education Government Forum on Mobile Learning**

On March 18-19, SIIA held its Annual Education Government Forum. While this

year’s focus was on mobile learning, some of the sessions addressed issues and identified implications of a more general nature, particularly related to E-Rate modernization, state policies, and Common Core assessments. Some of the important takeaways and implications for most TechMIS subscribers are noted below.

The session on Policies & Predictions by Education Pundits (Alyson Klein, Education Week’s Politics K-12 reporter, Michael Petrilli, EVP, Fordham Institute; and Andy Rotherham, Co-founder Bellwether Education) provided useful insights worthy of consideration along with appropriate implications. Petrilli acknowledged the large amount of press coverage of the backlash against the Common Core Standards and Assessment was coming from the right. However, with the exception of Indiana, most states have confirmed their adoption in a revised format. Rotherham agreed with Petrilli and argued that a major problem is assessment and one can expect more “trouble” from the left, especially from groups such as the New York Teachers Union. When the assessments roll out, “watch out for backfire.”

Both Petrilli and Klein argued there still remains a need for materials aligned with Common Core, even in Race to the Top states, while Rotherham suggested a need for independent groups to assess the degree of “alignment.” In a previous session, the Council of Great City Schools lead person on Common Core, Ricki Price Baugh, addressed the alignment issue in greater detail and presented possible solutions (see below). SIIA attendees raised questions about independent reviewers’ impact on market paralysis for materials which publishers have developed in accordance

with “publishers’ criteria” and general alignment guidelines, which, de facto, are being changed somewhat in some states.

Panelists also shared their thoughts and predictions on other issues addressed during the forum including:

- Rotherham predicted that the departure of representative George Miller, ranking Democrat on the Education Committee, could hurt implementation of Common Core Standards and Assessments;
- Petrilli argued that the major priority at the state level is now career and technical education and work preparedness as part of implementation of College and Career Readiness standards;
- Rotherham repeated his comments from last year that the Administration’s anti for-profit mentality represents an “ideological challenge” and firms need to approach Administration officials with the political sensitivities and knowledge about existing not-for-profit versus for-profit issues;
- Klein felt that the only new legislation Congress is likely to support among the President’s proposed priorities are some components of the Universal Pre-K Initiative, which will likely be included in the next Race to the Top competition and under the Childcare Development grant legislation recently passed by the Senate. However, the major technology initiative which does not require Congressional “district” funding or approval is the E-Rate modernization

initiative which could be “the biggest technology happening.”

The session on Common Core Standards and Assessments, moderated by David Byer of Apple included panelists Brandt Redd (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium), Ricki Price Baugh (Council of Great City Schools), Susan Van Gundy (Director of Assessment Technology, PARCC). Ricki Price Baugh (formerly of the Houston Independent school district), commenting on the upcoming field tests of the consortia assessments, said “uneven implementation” exists at the teacher and classroom level with only a few classrooms reaching intended “depth,” largely because of budget cuts. Moreover, many teachers are still using non-aligned tests, but there is a lot of sharing at the teacher level for teacher-developed materials. Susan Van Grundy (PARCC) said there is not enough “trouble shooting” capacity at the local level, and this lack of capacity “spills over” to broadband capabilities generally, not just for assessment. Brandt Redd (SBAC), commenting on the field tests, said that the items have been calibrated and there exist a number of “fallback item banks to rely on if current items have to be ditched.” No “scores” will result from the field tests except for internal use, which prompted Baugh to advise publishers not to start developing/revising curriculum based on “test prep” or other field test results. The Student Achievement Partnership Group is available to review existing curricula and materials from publishers if asked. They have also developed the “publisher’s criteria.” In addition, the Council of Great City Schools has developed a tool which can be used for determining alignment, especially for ELL groups.

In response to a question at the February, 2014 Title I conference (see February 20 TechMIS Special Report) that a major concern was teaching third-graders keyboarding skills, the Smarter Balanced representative said that the field test results “will take into account” the fact that keyboarding skills might be inadequate at the third-grade level. He also noted that paper tests will be available for three years beginning with the FY 2015 rollout, but that paper tests are not being field tested. The PARCC representative said that their field tests will include using the paper test version. The Smarter Balanced representative also said that the field test which began this month will focus only on summative tests and not formative tests. Formative tests are supposed to be used to help inform instruction through periodic feedback. On several instances, all of the panelists called for more time and effort to be devoted to teacher professional development as part of the field tests. Many of the SIIA member attendees appeared to have unanswered questions at the completion of the session or appeared to be anxious about what was said.

During a session on Mobile Learning Implementation Opportunities & Challenges (which included panelists Peter Grunwald of Grunwald Associates and Jill Hobson, CTO for Forsyth County Schools, Georgia, moderated by Sue Adelman, Follett Publishing), recent “demand” survey results as well as several district demands were addressed. Hobson called for software that works with BYOT and provides content that operates “on their (the district’s) platform.” It should be categorized by distinct “objects” and smaller modules that can be used for collaboration and communication with school staff. The district is more concerned

about “return on learning” than “return on investment.” The type of teacher support should include “job shadowing and greater use of peer coaching.”

Jeff Livingston of McGraw-Hill Education, who moderated the session on State Policies for Technology & Digital Learning, raised the question regarding mobile devices: “where they are going?”. John Bailey, Executive Director of Digital Learning Now and former Technology Director of USED, noted that mobile devices have “a long way to go” and are not even considered eligible products under E-Rate now, which was pretty much confirmed in another session by FCC officials hoping to include Wi-Fi and related devices in E-Rate eligibility categories in the immediate future. Evo Popoff, Chief Innovative Officer of the New Jersey Department of Education, suggested that the growth of mobile devices depends on improvements and increases in infrastructure capability under E-Rate. During the session, a question was raised about the role of SEAs in evaluating mobile devices. Sam Rauschenberg, Deputy Director of the Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, indicated that his state was pilot testing BYOT devices and “their fit into one-to-one computing initiatives.” New Jersey’s Popoff’s said state departments are “not great in doing such evaluations of devices” and supported use of other organizations who facilitate volume discounts in conducting their own evaluations. In response to a question, John Bailey indicated that his organization has a new report on State Laws on Digital Learning and that, over the last four months, 70 bills have been introduced on privacy and technology in state legislatures.

During the closing session, USED Chief



Privacy Director Kathleen Styles, addressed a number of issues regarding USED suggestions on how to protect student data while using online education services. Her written comments generally were directed toward district best practices. However, some of those practices were focused on dealing/contracting with online service providers, some of which are highlighted below:

- “Make clear whether the data collected belongs to the school/district or the provider, describe each party’s responsibilities in the event of a data breach... and, when appropriate, establish minimum security controls that must be met and allow for a security audit.”
- “Define the specific purposes for which the provider may use student information, and bind the provider to only those approved uses...Specify with whom the provider may share (re-disclose) student information, and if PII from the students’ education records is involved, ensure that these provisions are consistent with FERPA...When appropriate, define what disclosure avoidance procedures must be performed to de-identify student information before the provider may retain it, share it with other parties, or use it for other purposes.”
- “Specify whether the school district and/or parents (or eligible students) will be permitted to access the data (and, if so, to which data) and explain the process for obtaining access.”
- “Given that the Department looks to schools and districts to comply with

FERPA and PPRA, be specific about what you will require the provider to do in order to comply with applicable state and federal laws, such as FERPA and PPRA, and what the provider agrees to do to remedy a violation of these requirements and compensate the school or district for damages resulting from the provider’s violation.”

For additional information about student protection rights as well as those of providers with specific guidance for SIIA members, contact Mark Schneiderman at SIIA.

### **USED Announces School Improvement Grants Totaling \$159 Million to Seven States for Turnaround Efforts With Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools**

Continuation School Improvement Grants include: Alaska (\$1.5 million), Illinois (\$22 million), New York (\$36 million), Pennsylvania (\$18.3 million), and South Carolina (\$7.2 million). USED also announced School Improvement Grants totaling \$64 million for Alabama and California. As the USED press release states, “Both Alabama and California will use these funds to make awards to a new cohort of their lowest-performing schools.” Alabama will receive \$7.4 million while California will receive about \$57 million. It is important to note that both of these SEAs will receive these funds to make awards to new groups of individual schools which are lowest-performing for the first time, and hence can provide opportunities for TechMIS subscribers with appropriate products and services. The 2014 Education

Budget Act language allows the use of the “whole school reform strategy” and SEA “homegrown” intervention models (which have to be approved by USED), along with the four originally prescribed intervention models, of which the “transformation” intervention model is the most often used. However, in the FY 2015 budget, no specific mention has been made of the additional two models. During the recent Council of Great City Schools Conference, Assistant Secretary Deb Delisle and her Deputy noted that USED is currently developing guidance for districts to follow regarding the addition of the two most recent intervention models -- whole school reform and SEA homegrown.

During the National Title I Conference in San Diego in early February, shortly after the FY 2014 budget was passed and the language changes became public, several developers of whole school reform models indicated they had already been contacted by districts who wanted to use their intervention models in their School Improvement Grant program. It is not clear whether these two models could be used to replace one or more of the existing models in Year 2 or 3 schools. However, it is clear that USED will have difficulties in limiting the use of the two additional models given the apparent priority being placed on greater flexibility in the School Improvement Grant program that Secretary Duncan has increasingly referred to and solid evidence that some of the two models are effective, as AIR found in its studies a decade ago.

## **The House Passes Bill to Reauthorize the USED Research Arm -- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) -- Includes Several Provisions Which Have General Positive Implications for Many TechMIS Subscribers**

The bipartisan bill to reauthorize IES, sponsored by Representative Todd Rokita (R-IN) and Representative Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), includes several provisions if passed by the Senate which could have positive implications for TechMIS subscribers with education technology-based instructional, evaluation, and related tools and applications.

During the Bush Administration, the use and misuse of “scientifically-based research” standards (SBR), mentioned more than 100 times in NCLB legislation, created problems for many companies with innovative products. The proposed reauthorization, as stated in the Bill Summary, “replaces ‘scientifically-based research standards’ with the term ‘scientifically-valid research’ (SVR).” The move to SVR upholds a strong standard of research, but is more inclusive than the current definition of the range of valid research methodologies utilized by IES. For example, the new definition allows IES to focus on those studies beyond experimental design and randomized controlled trials that help increase the relevance of the agency’s work. Moving to SVR also provides for consistency across definitions in the Education Science Reform Act, the Higher Education Act, ESEA, and the Head Start Act. This change was recommended in a 2013 Government Accountability Office report which argued that many existing programs have been proven effective in increasing student achievement, even though they did not meet

the rigor of SBR, according to the Bill Summary. Indeed, the White House was instrumental in including in the last Higher Education Act renewal and later “Striving Readers” competitive grant competition, seven methodologies which could be considered rigorous enough in providing findings which could be taken into account in determining a level of evidence that a product or service “was effective.” These ranged from the “gold bar” randomized experimental control design to less rigorous case studies. As Education Week’s *Politics K-12* blog (April 2<sup>nd</sup>) noted, this changing definition “gives IES more options when it comes to research methodology.”

The proposed IES reauthorization has a number of provisions which would strengthen and increase the focus, as well as the privacy, of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. It would also “add a new focus on examining the implementation of a particular policy or strategy, not just its impact.” As noted in the *Politics K-12* blog, “That will help practitioners and researchers get a better grasp of the reasons why a particular strategy is working -- or not -- explained Michele McLaughlin, the President of The Knowledge Alliance, which supports the legislation.” Some TechMIS subscribers who were involved in the 2003-07 “Technology Intervention Evaluation” conducted by Mathematica, an IES contractor, will recall that the first year’s finding from that randomized/experimental study was very negative in terms of the effects of the use of technology-based interventions on student performance. Many of the participating firms argued that, during the first year of the study, some of the technology interventions had not been “taken out of shipping crates” or “remained in closets” and the “Not

Invented Here” (NIH) syndrome was clearly at work. Actual implementation in many of the sites did not occur until the second or third year, when some positive results surfaced, even though the first year’s evaluation results received national attention, which created significant market paralysis in many areas. To the extent that IES and future evaluations take into account the degree to which technology or other interventions are well-implemented should be a major positive development which could encourage some firms to participate in any future national evaluations conducted by IES.

One overriding general area of improvement, identified as needed by the GAO report, is to increase the relevance of education research while maintaining rigor to ensure effective utilization and dissemination of IES priorities and products. A number of new initiatives would be implemented including:

- adding at least two practitioners to advise the IES director on education research needs in the classroom;
- including practitioners and policymakers at the state and local level, as well as researchers as partners, in providing input into IES activities; and
- ensuring all IES work is widely disseminated through various means to various audiences, including researchers, practitioners and policymakers.

While the proposed reauthorization of IES is similar to the bipartisan bill agreed on last year, some of the funding levels in the reauthorization, which precluded its passage last year, appear to be resolved under recent

budget actions. The House Committee bill by Rokita and McCarthy had support from House Education Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) and Representative George Miller (D-CA). The House-passed version will go to the Senate which has also begun the IES reauthorization process. Some observers feel that the Senate will build upon the House version and that a final reauthorization bill has good prospects for passage this year.

### **USED Announces 24 Grantees Receiving a Total of \$107 Million for High School Redesign Funded Out of U.S. Department of Labor H-1B Visa Fees From Firms Hiring Foreign Technology Workers**

Through a program created by an Executive Order last year, the White House has announced 24 grantees under the \$107 million “Youth CareerConnect Grant Program.” The new initiative, announced in the State of the Union address, “encourages America’s school districts, institutions of higher education, the workforce investment system and their partners to integrate rigorous and educational standards with work experiences and skills in ways that enhance instruction and deliver real-world learning opportunities for students.” As the White House Fact Sheet states, “President Obama has made clear that he is committed to making 2014 a year of action by taking steps -- both with Congress and on his own -- to expand opportunity for all Americans.” Funding for the project comes from fees paid by firms hiring H-1B visa foreign technical workers. This use of alternative funding sources, along with a proposed \$180-\$200 million in proposed STEM activities included in several versions of

proposed immigration bills, are examples of the Administration’s intent to use funding from new alternative, as well as existing funding sources, which allow some flexibility to fund the Administration’s priorities.

The Youth CareerConnect schools are designed to be U.S. talent pipeline primarily in STEM-related areas through:

- Integrated Academic and Career-Focused Learning -- preparing students for in-demand industries employment, post-secondary education, long-term occupational skills training, or registered apprenticeships;
- Work-Based Learning and Exposure to the World of Work;
- Robust Employer Engagement through work-based learning, mentoring in areas such as advanced manufacturing and other science, technology, engineering and math fields;
- Individualized Career and Academic Counseling to strengthen career and post-secondary awareness and explore opportunities beyond high school; and
- Integrated Post-secondary Education and Training while students are still in high school leading toward credit for post-secondary degrees or certificates or industry credentials.

This newly-funded initiative has some components currently used in various Race to the Top grants and i<sup>3</sup> grants, including requirements for a match of 25 percent of grant awards.

Among the grantees receiving about \$7

million each are New York City, Denver, Los Angeles, Pike Township (Indianapolis), Prince Georges County (Maryland), and Clinton, South Carolina. Examples of the types of activities and foci of individual grants vary with virtually all touching on some aspect of overall STEM goals, including:

- Los Angeles Unified School District (\$7 million) to build career academies in six high schools focusing on healthcare, biotechnology, and other technology-related industries, including summer internships for 10,000 students;
- New York City (\$7 million) for two early college high schools, similar to IBM P-TECH models, to include diesel mechanic and dental hygiene apprenticeships;
- Laurens County School District in Clinton, South Carolina (\$6.8 million) to reshape three high schools for skilled jobs in computer science and engineering by expanding individualized learning time and project-based learning experiences;
- Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, Indianapolis (\$7 million) to expand career academies in advanced manufacturing and logistics and expanding STEM academies to ensure a more diverse STEM workforce;
- Denver School District (\$7 million) to create and expand STEM pathways in eight schools through use of job shadowing, paid internships, and opportunities for students to apply skills and knowledge learned in classrooms to workplace learning experiences.

All grantees are listed in [Education Week's Politics K-12](#) blog (April 7<sup>th</sup>).

A number of other directly-related activities were also announced by the White House, including an information sharing website about Youth CareerConnect Model Ideas which, among other things, provides opportunities for outside funders to make new investments in best practice models and to identify new partners. The website is hosted by the National Career Academy Coalition and College and Career Academy Support Network, with funding from Pacific Gas & Electric. Supporting organizations include: Rockefeller Foundation, IBM Foundation, Irvine Foundation, and the National Academy Foundation.

Concurrent with the above announcement, Vice President Joe Biden and Jill Biden, before the American Association of Community Colleges, announced a new Registered Apprenticeship College Consortium, which is “part of a broader workforce training push from the Administration which aims to lead to as much reform as it can without new legislation.” As U.S. Secretary of Labor, Thomas Perez, stated during the ceremony, “Strengthening the common sense connection between apprenticeships and colleges is just one of the ways that we are transforming apprenticeships for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.” Secretary Perez also stated, “As a result of this exciting new consortium, graduates of a Registered Apprenticeship program will not only have better access to jobs that lead to a sustainable career, but they’ll also have better access to an education -- all with little or no debt.”

Almost as a footnote to the White House

Fact Sheet and recent announcements regarding the Youth CareerConnect initiative, the White House statement notes that the President's FY 2015 budget includes \$150 million for High School Redesign, which, among other things, would personalize learning opportunities, support educational needs and interests of students, and provide academic wraparound support services for students who need them. This proposal requires Congressional appropriations, which are not likely.

### **GOP Senators Propose to Bar USED for Spending Any More Money on Common Core and Related Assessments While Secretary Duncan Most Recent Testimony Before House Appropriation Subcommittee Argues Zero Federal Grants Had Been Provided for Common Core**

Ten Republican senators have sent a letter (April 4<sup>th</sup>) to Chairman Tom Harkin of the Senate HELP Committee asking for a prohibition against USED providing any "additional" funding to states for adopting the Common Core Standards and Assessments, or otherwise support implementation of the Common Core standards or acceptable alternatives and their assessments. The letter recommends language to be included in the USED appropriation and was signed by Senators Pat Roberts (KS), Chuck Grassley (IA), Tom Coburn (OK), Rand Paul (KY), and Mike Enzi (WY), and other key Republicans. Several provisions would prevent the Secretary of Education from using funds:

- "to require a State or local education agency to develop or implement any

set of academic content standards common to multiple States, including Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, or any other specified set or type of academic content standards selected by the Secretary, or assessments aligned with such standards..."

- "to award any grant, contract, or cooperative agreement to a consortium of States that requires or specifically authorizes the development of assessments aligned with any set of academic content standards common to multiple States, including the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, or any other specified set or type of academic content standards selected by the Secretary."

Perhaps more critical at this stage of Common Core implementation is the language which would prevent any USED Federal funds to be used to implement or develop assessments selected by states to implement Common Core standards or alternative rigorous state standards approved by a state and/or USED. It would appear to preclude any additional funding to the two Common Core assessment consortia, beyond the \$360 million allocated four years ago, and possible use of other USED program funds (e.g., Title II Teacher Quality) to train staff or otherwise implement state assessments selected (by SEAs) from other groups such as ACT, College Board, University of Kansas, AIR, among others. According to the letter, the other group's consortia which have received USED contracts to develop alternative ELL

assessments and alternative assessments for severely cognitively impaired students with disabilities would also be subject to the ban on providing additional USED funds to support their efforts, although this is not clear.

Concurrent with the release of the letter from the ten GOP senators, in his testimony on April 8<sup>th</sup> before the House Appropriations Subcommittee, Secretary Duncan continued to defend the use of competitive grants (versus formula funds) included in the FY 2015 budget request (see March 2014 TechMIS Special Report). Also, the Secretary “continued to distance himself from the Common Core State Standards,” as reported by Education Week’s Politics K-12 blog (April 8<sup>th</sup>). The Secretary argued that he was a “...big proponent of high standards. Whether or not they’re common or not is secondary.” He also noted that there were “zero” Federal grants tied to the Common Core. The \$360 million Race to the Top competition, which resulted in the funding of the two assessment consortia, and the additional funding (about \$40-\$50 million) for the other consortia developing alternative tests for English language learners and students with severe cognitive impairments. Additional funding which was originally proposed to the two consortia (Smarter Balanced and PARCC) to fund curriculum guides was subsequently “reprogrammed.” As reported by Politics K-12, “Duncan’s testimony, which didn’t contain such nuances, illustrates the fine line the department continues to walk between supporting states as they implement common core, and not giving critics ammunition to cry ‘federal overreach.’”

According to several seasoned education

policy observers, the new priority being placed on career readiness and, more generally, career and technical education reform (see related Washington Update item on Youth CareerConnect Grant Program) can be considered as a diversionary technique to further distance USED from direct financial support for Common Core implementation.

### **Miscellaneous (a)**

USED plans to place a “final” priority on appropriate discretionary grant programs that support activities in designated Promise Zones, following a proposed priority published in the Federal Register (October 25<sup>th</sup>). The new “final” priority (March 27 Federal Register) notes that while the “number of Promise Zone communities is relatively small, the number of discretionary grants that might support Promise Zones is not so limited.” On the other hand, it states, “the Secretary recognizes that this priority will not be appropriate for all discretionary grant programs. Each discretionary grant program is in the best position to work with its constituent communities and to determine the priorities critical to achieving their program outcomes...The Promise Zones priority will not be used if it is not appropriate to the intent or purpose of a program or would somehow diminish its effect.”

Education Week’s Politics K-12 blog (March 26<sup>th</sup>) suggested that Promise Neighborhoods which offers wraparound services, would be a top candidate to apply “extra credit” for Promise Zones although other potential candidates could include some of the new safety and school climate initiatives or possibly even some School

Improvement type activities in districts which are located in Poverty Zone communities. The range of “preferences” in competitive grants could include “absolute priorities” to “competitive preferences” which award additional points. A growing list of Promise Zones include: San Antonio, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Southeastern Kentucky, and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

January 8, 2014 Fact Sheet: President Obama’s Promise Zones Initiative:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/08/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-promise-zones-initiative>

Federal Register (March 27<sup>th</sup>):

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-03-27/pdf/2014-06828.pdf>

### Miscellaneous (b)

The Sacramento School District, one of the eight California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts (including Los Angeles and Long Beach) which received district NCLB Flexibility waivers, is turning down its waiver and will revert back to NCLB provisions. California currently does not have a state waiver for NCLB Flexibility. As reported in *Education Week’s Politics K-12* blog (April 9<sup>th</sup>), Interim Superintendent Sara Noguchi said the waiver under NCLB has impeded the district’s progress in working with its teacher union. She reportedly also said that the district does not endorse NCLB but will “...continue to advocate for more systemic changes to its [NCLB] top-down approach to accountability.” The Sacramento Teachers Association celebrated the “death” of the CORE district waiver which would have

incorporated student test scores into teacher evaluations.

### Miscellaneous (c)

USED has announced new competitions and priorities for the Innovation in Education (i<sup>3</sup>) “validation,” “scale-up,” and “development” grants (announced in March) that will be funded at approximately \$135 million. For the “validation” grants competition, up to \$12 million for each project will be funded, while “scale-up” grants will provide up to \$20 million to fund each project that not only shows strong evidence of effectiveness, but those which enable expansion across the country. All i<sup>3</sup> projects will be required to have an independent evaluation.

For the “scale-up” and “validation” grants, there are a number of competitive and invitational priorities beyond the absolute priorities. Some of these include projects which improve cost effectiveness, high-quality early learning, STEM-related activities, among others, which interested parties should review in the April 24<sup>th</sup> *Federal Register*. For “scale-up” competitive grants, USED appears to be looking for grantees which have not been previously funded in the i<sup>3</sup> program.

Eligible applicants do not include for-profit organizations, which however may be able to participate as evaluators and/or as vendors of certain product components on scale-up or validation grants. However, because of the law creating the i<sup>3</sup> program, direct participation of for-profit organizations have in the past, been very, very limited.



## Miscellaneous (d)

In an interview on April 11<sup>th</sup> with Michele McNeil, Education Week reporter, Secretary Duncan outlined his priorities for the next two and half years, which include the early childhood initiative, implementation of Common Core State Standards, Race to the Top initiatives, and the so-called 50-state teacher-equity strategy. Secretary Duncan emphasized that the early childhood initiative could have a huge impact, but it is “clearly an up-hill battle.” He acknowledged the progress being made in cities such as San Antonio and New York City, along with new funding initiatives in some states. However, he said, “If we want to do more early childhood we need more money to do that,” he argued, but added, “but we’re not sitting around waiting on it.”

When asked about his legacy with respect to flagship projects such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, and Promise Neighborhoods, he stated, “... if the progress stops when the money stops then we would have failed,” regarding Race to the Top as an example. He also noted new efforts underway this year: “Stuff we’re doing around technology and the FCC and the private sector...Love to partner with Congress. Love to get more resources. But we’re moving very, very fast.”

Regarding the so-called 50-state teacher-equity strategy, he noted that his staff is working now on recommendations even though he acknowledged that civil rights groups have expressed disappointment with his equity agenda of ensuring that students in high-poverty schools have equal access to effective teachers to ensure the opportunity gaps are closed. Some of the alternatives

being considered could affect major programs such as Title I and the allocation of resources at the district level. One example is proposals from groups such as the Center on American Progress which would replace the current use of average teachers’ salaries for “comparability” determination purposes with actual individual teachers’ salaries. Some have argued that the total amount of resources allocated to individual teachers should be taken into account such as technology delivered on-demand support for younger, less experienced teachers used in high-poverty Title I schools.

When McNeil asked whether the Secretary can’t say the words Common Core anymore, which in recent Congressional hearings he has referred to “higher standards, common or not,” he reiterated, “The hard part is implementing them, and that takes time and how you support teachers and work with students and parents. It’s been uneven in places. We get none of the credit. All of the leadership and all of the push and the courage is coming from the state and local level.”

While Secretary Duncan has talked about USED initiatives with a sense of urgency and that states cannot take forever for implementation, Duncan concluded, “If it’s with our Race to the Top resources, that’s correct. If it’s with our waivers, again, when they’ve made agreements in good faith we expect them to keep those agreements. If they choose not to, they absolutely have the right to not, for whatever reason. There’s no value judgment. This work is really hard. It’s not for the faint of heart. We might have to go in a different direction.”

