

From: ASBO International [SBDaily@asbo.custombriefings.com]
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Customized Briefing for Petter Turnquist

March 10, 2009

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Leading the News

Stimulus Aid Usage Guidelines Place Demands For Improvement On States, Districts.

[Education Week](#) (3/9, Klein, McNeil) reported that "the eagerly awaited federal guidelines on some \$100 billion in stimulus funding for education aim to pump money out quickly, while giving the U.S. Department of Education leverage to demand improvements from states and districts." On March 7, a restriction was issued involving "the \$53.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, the bulk of which is aimed at steadying faltering state budgets." It stipulates that "states won't get all of their stabilization funds at once. Instead, 67 percent...will go out within two weeks of a state's submission of its application." The remainder of the funds "will go out state by state as the department approves states' plans to comply with the assurances required under the law." The Education Department "stresses that the stimulus funding is short-term money that may not be sustainable in future budgets." The guidance "emphasizes that districts and states should use the money for shorter-term investments so there isn't a 'funding cliff.'"

Florida Must Spend More On Education To Receive Stimulus Aid, Lawmaker Says. In the [Orlando Sentinel's](#) (3/9) School Zone blog, Leslie Postal wrote that according to U.S. Rep. Alan Grayson (D-FL) "Florida must agree to spend more on public education" in order to receive "its full share of federal stimulus money." The state "is line to get \$2.2 billion in 'state stabilization' funds as part of the federal government's massive economic stimulus project. But to get that money, it must promise that education funding in the next several fiscal years would not fall below that provided in the 2005-06 year." Postal points out that "If only state funding -- not local money -- is counted, Florida already is below 2006 levels. But if both state and local dollars count (and both are merged in the state's education funding formula) Florida is okay right now."

From ASBO International

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Business & Financial Management

Officials Of Arizona District To Choose Between Cutting Salaries, Eliminating Positions.

The [Yuma \(AZ\) Sun](#) (3/10, Wilken) reports, "The Yuma Union High School District School Board will have to make 'painful' decisions about where to make cuts, says" Superintendent Toni Badone, "but it's a difficult task without knowing how much money the district will lose due to the state's budget crisis." According to Badone, "the Legislature still hasn't finalized the 2010 budget, which has an estimated \$3 billion deficit." Still, she said that school officials expect that most of the cuts will come "from personnel, with 85 percent of the district's \$54 million maintenance and operations budget going toward salaries and benefits." The school board has the option of either "cutting salaries and keeping jobs" or "keeping fewer jobs, which means letting some of the 1,017 district employees go." Board members will "consider the two options at its meeting Wednesday, March 11."

Louisiana District Spent \$22,000 On Airline Expenses In 2008, Records Show.

Louisiana's [News Star](#) (3/9, Leader) reported that "more than \$34,000 in transportation and hotel charges for 2008 on the Monroe City School Board's purchasing card shows a board that likes to travel." This week, "the News-Star will file a public records request...seeking detail of all purchases on the Monroe City School Board's purchasing card as well as any reimbursements that may have been made by board members or employees." According to "records released earlier this month" listing "expenditures made on the Monroe City School Board's purchasing card," \$22,232 was spent on "airline charges." Other charges include \$7,884.59 in hotel expenses and "A payment to [www.surveymonkey.com](#), a company that provides information on conducting surveys, for \$200."

District's Level-Funded School Budget Would Eliminate Crossing Guards, Increase Athletic Fees.

Massachusetts' [Enterprise News](#) (3/10, Melanson) reports, "Crossing guards could be gone if the Police Department's budget is cut, and athletic fees could triple if town meeting in June approves a level-funded school budget, school officials said Monday." Later this month, "the School Committee will present" to selectmen "a draft, level-funded \$9.3 million fiscal 2010 budget that represents no spending increase over this year's budget." The proposed budget would cut "a full-time Middle-Senior High School teacher and a full-time elementary school health teacher, something School Superintendent Patricia Oakley said she hopes could be accomplished through attrition."

Legislation

Texas Lawmakers Seek To Erase Instruction Spending Rule For School Districts.

Texas' [American-Statesman](#) (3/10, Embry) reports that Texas Gov. Rick Perry's (R) "four-year-old mandate that schools spend at least 65 percent of their money on classroom instruction is under fire from key lawmakers in Perry's own party." Last week, House Public Education Committee Chairman Rob Eissler (R) "filed legislation last week to erase the requirement. ... Eissler said he filed House Bill 2262 because the standard has not been feasible for districts that vary in enrollment and geographic size." Furthermore, Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Florence Shapiro added, "Many of the school districts cannot meet that mandate. ... There are so many other activities and so many other things that are not included in that 65 percent that it skews the numbers." According to the American-Statesman, Gov. Perry's "mandate has never been popular with school districts, and schools haven't suffered much of a penalty for not meeting it."

Nevada Legislators Consider Creating "Rainy Day Fund" For Education.

The [AP](#) (3/10) reports, "A bill creating a 'rainy day fund' to cover budget deficits in Nevada's K-12 school system was debated Monday by Senate Finance Committee members." The fund would receive money "from excess revenue in the state's education budget that would normally revert to the state general fund," according to one insider. In 2007, "about \$164 million in education funding reverted to the general fund and was used for non-education purposes."

New Mexico Lawmakers Considering Gross Receipts Tax Increase For Education Funding.

The [AP](#) (3/10, Massey) reports that "a proposal to revamp how New Mexico allocates money to public schools cleared the House on Monday and lawmakers are looking at an increase in the gross receipts tax to pay for proposed educational improvements." The House-approved legislation "provides for a new school funding formula that supporters say will ensure New Mexico meets its constitutional obligation to provide for a system of public schools 'sufficient for the education of' all students." Still, implementing "the proposal will require a nearly \$350 million annual increase in state aid but the legislation makes clear that the new funding formula will not go into effect until that money is available."

Georgia Senate Approves Bill Easing Transition For Students With Military Parents.

The [AP](#) (3/10, McCaffrey) reports, "Children whose parents are in the military would have an easier time changing Georgia schools under a bill approved unanimously in the state Senate on Monday," that would ease the transition for children with parents in the military "as they shuffle from school to school. Similar legislation passed last year that would have had Georgia join a multistate education compact backed by the Pentagon. But Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue vetoed the measure, arguing it would cost the state money; he did not say how much." The Senate bill "passed on Monday would have Georgia adhere to the compact without becoming a dues-paying member." According to state Sen. Ed Harbison (D), "the bill would affect about 40,000 military children in Georgia."

Emergency Funding Prevents Oregon School Districts From Having To Shorten School Year.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) (3/10, Murphy) reports, "Plummeting tax revenue has left schools across the country on the ropes, but in few places has the situation been quite so dire as in Oregon -- which has no sales tax, severe limits on property taxes...and a corporate tax structure that allows companies with multimillion-dollar profits to pay as little as \$10 a year." Last week, the state "Legislature passed an emergency \$51-million appropriation" ending the "flood of red ink [that] had threatened to close two-thirds of Oregon's 197 school districts before their scheduled last day." According to the Times, "the prospect of early closures is particularly alarming in Oregon, where school calendars already are three weeks shorter than the national average." Now, "in the search for a way out of Oregon's budget woes, legislators are turning their attention to the state's minimum corporate income tax."

Stimulus Does Not Solve Problems With NCLB Accountability Measures, Some Educators Say.

[Education Week](#) (3/9, Klein) reported, "Even as states and school districts prepare to absorb billions of dollars in economic-stimulus aid for education, policymakers and analysts are quietly discussing whether the infusion of federal cash may reshape the landscape around reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act." Some say that the claim that NCLB is under-funded "has less validity after passage last month of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, whose aims include stemming a potential wave of layoffs and programmatic cuts in education." But "some practitioners and education organizations argue...that problems with the accountability system at the heart of the No Child Left Behind law remain unchanged."

Operations

Los Angeles School Officials Seek To Reduce Impact Of Seniority On Teacher Lay Offs.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) (3/10, Song, Mehta) reports, "Cutting enthusiastic, effective teachers just because they're new is not good for students, say some district officials and education reform advocates. Unions leaders say it's an issue of fairness." In the Los Angeles Unified School District, "instructors with less than two years of experience are expected to be" laid off before teachers with more experience. Still, "some top L.A. Unified officials believe layoffs could rob the district of their most enthusiastic employees, and are trying to find ways to keep them." Several "districts across the state, including L.A. Unified, are offering early retirement packages to employees, which would help retain younger teachers." Meanwhile, school "board members have questioned whether the district can circumvent firing by seniority." One board member "said she would push the district to revise the law to allow districts to retain teachers based on merit."

Virginia District Remains Divided Over Elementary Math Textbooks.

The [Washington Post](#) (3/10, B5, Birnbaum) reports, "Prince William County [VA] elementary schools will continue to teach mathematics with a textbook series that has drawn parent criticism and national scrutiny, despite deep divisions in the community over whether students should be given other options." The School Board last week "split 4 to 4 on a proposal that would have allowed parents to choose between" Pearson Education's *Investigations in Number, Data, and Space* textbook "and a more traditional math curriculum." Critics say that *Investigations* "fails to help students learn basic skills and facts." Last month, "a federally sponsored study of first-grade test scores in schools that used four kinds of textbooks" showed that *Investigations*, "known for a student-centered approach that emphasizes creative ways to solve problems, trailed in the comparison." Meanwhile, "educators who have championed *Investigations* say it helps students develop a deeper conception of math fundamentals before they take on complicated topics."

Nutrition

All Students Eligible For Meal Program At Elementary School In West Virginia.

[WCHS-AM](#) Charleston, WV (3/10) reports on the two-year-old "Mount Hope Eats" project at Mount Hope Elementary School in Fayette County. "The EATS stands for Everyone at the Table is Served. It's a program that entitles every student in our school to receive free meals, breakfast and lunch," said Principal Randall Rhodes. The program "began in January of 2007 as a way to make sure children were getting healthy meals." Mount Hope is able to provide meals to all students, regardless of "their family income," through donations from churches, civic organizations, and individuals in the community.

Also in the News

Study Reveals Hardships Faced By Homeless New York City Youths.

The [New York Times](#) (3/10, A23, Bosman) reports, "Many homeless youths in New York City are victims of abuse who grew up in foster care or other institutions and now lack jobs, a high school education, birth certificates and adequate health care, according to a study" from Covenant House, "which operates shelters for young people." The "study, one of the largest-ever examinations of young homeless people in New York, found that their future did not look much better --

because they are dangerously isolated from mainstream channels of work, family life and basic schooling." The study "examined 444 people between the ages of 18 and 21 who entered the Covenant House Crisis Center between October 2007 and February 2008."

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[Association of School Business Officials International](#) | 11401 North Shore Drive | Reston, VA 20190

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