

Federal agencies keep early childhood in focus

by Eric Karolak

On September 29, Congress adjourned and members headed home to their states and districts for the final weeks before Election Day. They plan to return to Washington, DC, on November 15 to finish the business of the 111th Congress, including final determinations of funding for key early childhood programs (see 'Congressional Update').

Meanwhile, federal agencies and offices have important and exciting early childhood efforts underway. Staff at the U.S. Department of Health and Human



Eric Karolak is Executive Director of the Early Care and Education Consortium, a public policy alliance of America's leading national, regional, and independent providers of quality early

learning programs. ECEC members operate more than 7,600 centers enrolling more than 800,000 children in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Dr. Karolak previously led the National Child Care Information Center, the largest Federal clearinghouse focused on child care and early education for low-income families. He has worked closely with states developing the technical aspects of child care assistance programs, quality rating systems, and partnerships across early childhood programs. He has conducted policy research and fiscal analysis in the areas of child welfare, child care, women's labor force participation, and public housing, and has testified before several state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. Dr. Karolak also has served as an advisor to a national quality initiative, a non-profit child care center, a local government commission, and a metropolitan United Way.

Services (HHS), and within it, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) — which manages both the Child Care and Development Fund and the Head Start program, among other initiatives — and the U.S. Department of Education have been hard at work. These agencies not only distribute funding to the states, but also provide critical guidance, resources, and information to state agencies, which in turn work directly with program providers like you (See 'Federal Agency Resources').

Child care

Just a few weeks ago, the Administration for Children and Families elevated the importance of child care policy work by creating an Office of Child Care. This is great news! The Office of Child Care is at the same administrative level as the federal Office of Head Start and has an overarching goal to ensure efforts are "child-focused, family-friendly, and fair to providers."

This year, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) — the federal child care law — marks its 20th year! To celebrate, the Administration for Children and Families hosted a symposium in late October. Speakers and participants reflected back on the accomplish-

ments of CCDBG and looked forward to what more can be done for children, families, and providers. Although the CCDBG law is overdue for reauthorization — that's how Congress periodically reviews and updates a program — discussions continue about reforms and resources to improve access and strengthen quality in child care. The Office of Child Care is already looking ahead at what information can be collected from states, and how to help states identify goals for advancing quality and improving subsidy administration under the current version of the law with current levels of resources. Other projects include looking at health and safety including licensing, cross-sector 'systems building,' the early childhood workforce and professional development, quality rating and improvement systems, and quality in school-age care. There is much to be done.

Head Start

You may have heard about the proposal for a new Head Start 'Designation Renewal System.' The Administration is reviewing an idea that would consider the level of quality of each Head Start grantee and require certain programs to re-compete for grant funding if they meet certain conditions. The point is to ensure the quality of programs. The review process includes an opportunity for experts in Head Start to

IMAGINE HOW THE WORLD WOULD LOOK IF EVERYONE USED THE SAME COLOR CRAYON.

Kids shouldn't have to settle for turquoise blue when they really want to draw with carnation pink. The same is true with insurance—your child care center shouldn't have to settle for an insurance program that doesn't exactly fit your needs. With Markel, you can choose the exact coverage you need to fully protect your center. Plus, you get expert risk management advice and compassionate claims services.

Putting the art of insurance to work at your center.



(800) 915-1907

www.childcareinsurance.com

Endorsed by:



weigh in about how to carry out something like this. This system, along with proposed revisions to the Program Performance Standards, which the Administration aims to circulate for comment before the year is out, indicate changes ahead for Head Start.

The Office of Head Start also is redesigning its system of training and technical assistance to best support grantees. This includes six 'national centers' that will share information, best practices, and training opportunities with grantees: an Early Head Start National Resource Center, a National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, a National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, a National Center on Programs Management and Fiscal Operations, and a National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. And look forward to celebrating the announcement of 10 Head Start/Early Head Start grantees that will soon be recognized as the 2010 Head Start Centers of Excellence.

Home visiting

As you may know, an investment in home visitation programs was included in the

health legislation passed by Congress earlier this year. ACF is working with the Health Resources and Services Administration (another division of HHS) to

Congressional Update

Each year, Congress works on 12 different Appropriations bills, which set the funding levels for programs for the next federal fiscal year. The annual deadline to complete this work is September 30, because the new fiscal year begins on October 1. This year, Congress was unable to complete all of their FY2011 appropriations work by that deadline, and instead, passed a Continuing Resolution (CR). A CR continues federal funding for CCDBG and Head Start (and other federal programs) at current funding levels until Congress can complete its budget work. The CR passed by Congress on September 29 extends FY2010 funding until December 3.

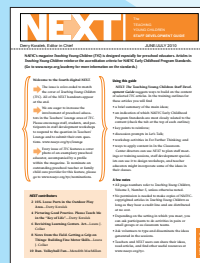
Meanwhile, the House of Representatives continues to negotiate a way forward on the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization, and that work is expected to continue when Congress returns in November. (The Senate has already completed work on its bill.)

For more information, including quick fact sheets and a guide to the federal funding process, please visit www.ececonsortium.org

Are you responsible for staff development?

Subscribe to
Teaching Young Children,
NAEYC's practical,
research-based magazine
that celebrates and
supports everyone who
works with preschoolers
and

*NEXT, The Teaching
Young Children Staff
Development Guide*



Ready-
to-use
training
from
NAEYC

To learn more and subscribe:

www.naeyc.org/tyc/next



What's in *TYC*?

- Research-based ideas
- Practical classroom strategies
- Engaging photos of good practice
- Guidance tips

How can you use *NEXT*?

- Plan staff meetings
- Design workshops
- Engage ECE students

co-operate these Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Grants. Guidance on state plans for use of those grant dollars was not yet available at press time. Details are greatly anticipated by state agency staff eager to expand or enhance home visitation-based services for families, which are a complement to early learning programs like child care and Head Start.

Real collaboration

Over the last year and a half, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan have emphasized the need to work collaboratively on efforts for early care and education. One of the ways they are pursuing this goal has been the creation of an Early Learning Interagency Policy Board which will work to improve the quality, coordination, and effectiveness of federal early learning programs in these two Departments. The Board is scheduled to meet on November 1. Another effort is the Early Childhood Communities Initiative, which

has been looking at ten real communities in detail to learn how they established their systems of early care and education. A report is expected in late November.

State advisory councils

You may have heard news in your state this year about an Early Childhood Advisory Council. These Advisory Councils were created in the Head Start Improvement Act, which passed in Congress in 2007. But they're not just about Head Start. Their purpose is to improve quality, expand availability, and enhance coordination of early childhood programs in the states. For some of you, this is a brand new entity in your state; for others, it's a new direction or initiative of an existing group of people. In either case, this is important to know about because dollars are now 'out the door' thanks to recent federal investment (with a required state match) to help these state councils really dig into the work of system building. Look to your state advocacy leaders to help keep tabs on what your state's early

childhood advisory council is interested in and working on. Your real on-the-ground experience with children, families, and policy might be of help to them!

Federal Agency Resources

Administration for Children and Families
www.acf.hhs.gov/

Health Resources and Services
Administration
<http://mchb.hrsa.gov/>

Office of Child Care
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/index.html

Office of Head Start
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov/

U.S. Department of Health and
Human Services
www.hhs.gov/