

By Sally McConnell, NAESP Associate Executive Director for Government Relations

## An Item for the Next Congress' To-Do List

When the 111th Congress is sworn in next January, the new and returning senators and representatives will face a long list of legislative priorities. For education, there are the much-discussed marquee items—the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; currently No Child Left Behind) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—as well as the child nutrition reauthorization. There is also the matter of finalizing the appropriations for fiscal year 2009, which must be addressed in March because that is when the stopgap funding bill expires.

We suggest the addition of another item to the to-do list for the 111th Congress: a focus on the whole child, manifested in the passage and enactment of the Children's Budget Act, the Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act, and other legislation designed to publicize the nation's true level of commitment to children and provide for programs and services that will ultimately enhance academic achievement.

### Addressing the Needs of the Whole Child

Any discussion of education policy must include consideration of the needs of the whole child and the impact that addressing—or failing to address—those needs has on academic achievement and overall school success. Educators know very well the barriers to learning that are created by hunger, ill health, neglect, and other problems that confront many children every day. It seems that every month or so another report is published that provides evi-

dence of the increasingly dire straits in which many children find themselves as the economy slows down, food prices rise, and the number of children without health insurance increases.

In NAESP's extensive set of recommendations for the ESEA reauthorization, the section titled "Supplementing the K-12 Program" calls for the establishment of a system of coordinated services in each state whereby schools, government agencies, and community entities would come together in a well-planned way designed to ensure that children's physical, emotional, and educational needs are met. NAESP supports a variety of whole-child legislation introduced in the 110th Congress and will continue to lobby the members of the upcoming Congress for such measures. This includes such bills as the Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act to authorize funds to increase the number of nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists in schools. We've also joined forces with some new partners in support of legislation to codify a more realistic definition of homelessness, enabling parents and guardians in homeless families to more easily avail themselves of assistance while attempting to create more stable environments for their children.

### Key Budget Items

The Association is also involved in efforts to require that proposed and actual funding of federal children's programs be separately identified in the U.S. president's annual budget proposal. First Focus, the advocacy arm of the America's Promise Alliance, is leading a sizeable coalition that includes NAESP and other

national and state organizations and foundations calling for the creation of a federal children's budget. Viewed as a way to reveal the true status of children's programs among federal priorities, the children's budget would present the past, current, and proposed funding levels for the gamut of children's programs administered by agencies throughout the federal government. According to data released by First Focus, many children's programs have experienced shortfalls, and only one penny out of every new nondefense dollar spent by the federal government during the past five years has gone to children's programs. This has resulted in a 10 percent decline in the share of federal spending that has been allocated to children's programs during that period of time.

Creating a separate children's budget category would cost nothing, but it would elicit increased attention to children's programs and, it is hoped, lead to an increase in federal spending on programs and services for children. Already, a number of state and local governments produce children's budgets. The Children's Budget Act was introduced in both chambers of Congress this year and will be introduced anew as the 111th Congress gets under way. This legislation has bipartisan support, a rarity in today's heated political climate.

Principals live out their commitment to the well-being of children every day, and NAESP makes child welfare issues a priority in our advocacy work. No education policy or program can be successful until each child is seen as a unique individual and considered in the context of his or her physical, social, and familial environment. ■