



July 25, 2005

## Higher Education Act Reauthorization Offers Mixed Bag

As "Legislative Update" went to press, the House Education Committee was continuing its markup of legislation, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005 (H.R. 609), that would reauthorize the law that provides more than \$70 billion in higher education aid to students and colleges and universities. NEA has played a significant role in several amendments and saw important victories in scaling back attempts to make federal funding available to for-profit colleges and universities.

Among the improvements made:

- An amendment by Michael Castle (R-DE) that limits the scope of federal funding made available to for-profit colleges and universities. As introduced, the bill would have expanded the definition of higher education institutions to include for-profits.
- An amendment by Luis Fortuño (R-Puerto Rico) that protects funding for higher education institutions that serve blacks and Hispanics.

Setbacks include:

- A lack of focus on student aid by defeating an amendment to double the maximum Pell Grant award to \$11,600 over the next five years. A token increase passed.
- A provision to include a merit pay proposal. The Teacher Incentive Fund provides \$500 million for grants to design performance-based pay systems.
- An amendment was defeated that would have prohibited the Education Department from enforcing its new policy that threatens to reverse progress women and girls have made under Title IX in sports and academics. Under the new policy, all a school has to do to show it is providing its female students with equal opportunities to play sports is to

send each of its female students an e-mail survey asking whether they have the interest and ability to play additional sports.

Issues pending include:

- An amendment by Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) to ensure safeguards in expanding distance education to prevent rapid expansion to "fly by night" web programs. The current rule excludes institutions that provide more than 50 percent of their coursework by distance education from receiving federal funding.
- An amendment by Michael Castle (R-DE) to maintain the requirement that for-profit schools cannot rely on federal student aid for more than 90 percent of revenues.

## **NEA Helps Stop Expansion of D.C. Vouchers to MD, VA**

Private school vouchers won't spread from Washington, D.C., to the adjoining states of Virginia and Maryland, thanks to the efforts of a coalition that includes NEA, other education and parent groups and D.C. elected and civic leaders.

Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) withdrew his proposal last week to allow D.C. voucher students to attend private high schools in Maryland and Virginia, saying there was not enough time to pass legislation in time for the fall semester. Brownback, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee on the District, sought to expand the nation's only federally funded private school voucher program.

The year-old taxpayer funded program provides up to \$7,500 for D.C. students to attend private or religious schools in the city.