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January 5, 2018 (Happy New Year!)

YEAR-END ACTIONS

On December 22, President Trump [signed into law](#) the *Further Additional Continuing Appropriations Act, 2018*. The bill provides funding at approximately the Fiscal Year 2017 level through January 19 for the ongoing activities and projects of the federal government, including education. It also extends funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through March 31.

That same day, the President signed into law the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*, including several provisions relating to education. For example, the bill would allow families investing in 529 education savings plans for college to withdraw up to \$10,000 annually to pay for qualified education expenses in K-12 public or private schools or homeschools (House Ways and Means Committee [resources](#)).

Also, the White House issued a [fact sheet](#) on the Trump Administration's Year One accomplishments ([press briefing](#)).

REMINDER: SCHOOL AMBASSADOR FELLOWS

[Apply](#) now for the Department's 2018-19 [School Ambassador Fellowship Program](#). This program enables outstanding teachers, principals, counselors, librarians, and other school-based professionals interacting with students on a daily basis to bring their expertise to the Department and expand their knowledge of the national dialogue on education. In turn, fellows facilitate the learning and input of other educators and community members. As in previous years, applicants may choose to apply as Washington Fellows -- a full-time appointment where fellows are based in residence at the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C. -- or as Campus Fellows -- a part-time appointment where fellows collaborate with the agency while maintaining their regular school responsibilities in their home communities. The application closes January 31 at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. (Note: For some inspiration, check out the recent "Voices in the Field" [interview](#) with 2017-18 School Ambassador Fellow Melody Arabo.)

ESSA UPDATE

The Department has provided initial feedback to [33 states and Puerto Rico](#) that submitted *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) consolidated state plans in September. States received notes from external, independent peer reviewers, as well as specific information from Department staff about changes needed to ensure they are meeting the requirements under the statute. Providing feedback is an opportunity for the agency to work with states and offer technical assistance to help improve outcomes for students.

ESSA requires the Secretary to issue a written determination within 120 days of a state's submission of its plan, unless the state requests additional time for its revisions.

Meanwhile, the Department issued a [Federal Register notice](#) inviting applications under ESSA's Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority. The Secretary may allow up to seven states -- or groups of states, provided the total number of states approved is seven or fewer -- to pilot new kinds of tests in a select number of school districts, with the goal of expanding them statewide. This authority may be appealing to states moving toward more project-based forms of assessments. The application package is available [here](#). States are encouraged to submit a notice of intent to apply by February 2; the deadline for applications is April 2. (Note: States interested in this authority but unable to implement an innovative assessment in the 2018-19 school year should contact Donald.Peasley@ed.gov about technical assistance in advance of future application opportunities.)

EARLY LEARNING REPORTS

The Department's Office of Early Learning announced that, through the Preschool Developments Grants (PDG) Program, states have increased access to high-quality preschool programs to over 34,000 four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. The outcome is among the data captured in the recently released [PDG Progress Update](#). The update summarizes trends that emerge in [annual performance reports](#).

Also, the Preschool Development and Expansion Grant Technical Assistance (PDGTA) Program released a free new series of webinars and accompanying materials designed to enhance early learning professionals' confidence in supporting young children's higher order thinking and learning related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). This series, [STEM in Early Learning](#), includes 11 modules. Featured are presentations from national experts, suggested research readings, and practical application activities.

Furthermore, the Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance (ELCTA) Program released "[Taking on the Challenge: Building a Strong Foundation for Early Learning](#)." This report summarizes the progress of Early Learning Challenge (ELC) Program grantees over the duration of the program, including the three phases of grantees. It covers the major focus areas of ELC: coordinated state systems, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, supporting the early childhood workforce, enhancing data systems, family engagement, strengthening local and community initiatives, and measuring progress -- including through developmental screenings and kindergarten-entry assessments (see also [executive summary](#) and [state profiles](#)).

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Last month, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy released the Administration's [response](#) to the [final report](#) of the President's Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis and a [summary](#) of actions taken by the Administration in 2017. President Trump has directed his Administration to focus on developing solutions and helping individuals, families, and communities cope with this national public health emergency. The federal government has already taken several actions in response.

ODDS AND ENDS

- By a voice vote, the Senate confirmed the nominations of [Johnny Collett](#) to be Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and [Douglas Webster](#) to be Chief Financial Officer.
- Also, the President announced his intent to appoint James Lynn Woodworth to be the Department's Commissioner of Education Statistics. Dr. Woodworth is currently at the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University's Hoover Institute. A Marine Corps veteran, he previously spent 11 years as a public school teacher in Arkansas.
- In a special [blog post](#), two Michigan teachers describe their students' experiences using a buddy system to collaboratively explore computer coding.

- The Department's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released a trove of new data on: [public elementary and secondary students, schools, and districts](#); [postsecondary enrollment, employees, finance, and academic libraries](#); [postsecondary admissions, student financial aid, graduation rates, and outcome measures](#); and [student victimization in U.S. schools](#).
- [SITE ASSESS](#), a new mobile application from the agency's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, allows school and district personnel to walk around a building and grounds and examine their safety, security, accessibility, and emergency preparedness.

QUOTE TO NOTE

"As we approach the final days of the year, it is truly incredible to think of how much we have accomplished on our journey together. Since the election we have created more than two million jobs for hardworking, wonderful families.... Unemployment is at a 17-year low. The stock market is at an all-time high, and continues to go up, up, up. We want to keep it going.... Because of you, your patriotism, your devotion, your love for family, we will be able to pass on the blessings of American liberty and prosperity to our children and our grandchildren. Together, we are protecting our magnificent heritage and reaching for glorious destiny. Melania and I want to wish every American a very Happy New Year.... We're doing things that nobody thought possible. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help."

-- President Donald Trump (12/30/17), in his [weekly address](#) to the nation

UPCOMING EVENTS

January is [National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month](#), culminating in the celebration of National Freedom Day (February 1). Trafficking can involve school-age youth, particularly those made vulnerable by challenging family situations, and can take a wide variety of forms, including forced labor, domestic servitude, and commercial sexual exploitation. Seeking some guidance? "[Human Trafficking in America's Schools](#)" is a guide for school staff with information on risk factors, recruitment, and how to identify trafficking; what to do if one suspects trafficking, including sample protocols and policies; and other useful resources and potential partnership opportunities. Also, watch the webinar: "[Integrating Human Trafficking with Emergency Operations Plans \(EOPs\) for K-12 Schools](#)."

January is also [National Mentoring Month](#).

The Corporation for National and Community Service is asking Americans to appropriately honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy on January 15 by making the holiday a day ON -- versus a day off. MLK Day became a national day of service in 1994, when Congress passed legislation to give the holiday even greater significance. A dedicated [web site](#) offers up a toolkit to plan for the day of service, enables organizers to register projects nationwide, and provides free lesson plans on Dr. King's legacy of service.

On January 16 at 11:00 a.m. ET, the Department will host the opening of the National PTA Reflections Student Arts Showcase, titled "What Is Your Story?" The opening will feature remarks by National PTA President Jim Accomando and performances by students in several mediums, including dance choreography, film production, literature, and music composition. A ribbon-cutting ceremony, reception, and exhibit viewing will conclude the opening to celebrate the award-winning student works and their educators. "What Is Your Story?" will stay on display through February. To RSVP to attend the opening or learn more about the agency's year-round exhibit program, please contact Jacquelyn.Zimmermann@ed.gov.

[National School Choice Week](#) (NSCW) is January 21-27. The effort recognizes all K-12 options, including traditional public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, online academies, and homeschooling. Over the past seven years, there have been more than 58,000 NSCW events in the country and around the world.

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