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Date: 10/13/2017 9:12:38 AM
Subject: [ED_REVIEW] ED Review (10/13/17)



October 13, 2017

HURRICANES HARVEY, IRMA, MARIA, AND NATE

On September 29, President Trump [signed into law](#) the *Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria Education Relief Act of 2017*, providing education relief in areas for which the President has declared a major disaster or emergency as a result of the recent storms. The legislation directs the Department to waive a requirement that colleges contribute matching funds under the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) Program and the Federal Work-Study (FWS) Program and reallocate funds for those programs to colleges in affected areas. It also requires the agency to distribute Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV) grants to private schools on an equitable basis.

The Department has already reallocated excess FSEOG funds to colleges directly impacted by the storms. Meanwhile, the agency is reviewing the reallocation process for FWS funds and expects to provide information about such funds in the near future. Colleges are notified by email through the [eCampus-Based System](#) when supplemental funding has been awarded ([update](#)).

Then, on October 6, Secretary DeVos [visited impacted schools](#) in southern Florida -- Everglades City School and Pinecrest Elementary School in Immokalee -- to speak with students and hear directly from teachers and administrators about their communities' recovery efforts and needs. "Witnessing the destruction brought by these hurricanes is heart-breaking, but it is even more heartening to see the resilience shown by those seeking to rebuild," she noted. "As these communities continue to return to normality, I am committed to reducing bureaucratic red tape so that those affected can get the relief they need expeditiously."

The Department maintains active communications with state and local K-12 school system officials, charter school associations, and private schools in impacted states and territories, while the Department's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) maintains active communications with all 965 affected institutions of higher education.

Note: the agency continues to add resources to its [Hurricane Help web site](#), in English and Spanish, and there is detailed information for college students, borrowers, and schools [here](#).

SCHOOL AMBASSADOR FELLOWS

Secretary DeVos announced the Department's 2017 cohort of [School Ambassador Fellows](#) last month. One teacher will serve as a full-time employee at the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C., while five teachers, a principal, and a counselor will remain in their schools and participate on a part-time basis. All the fellows recently convened at the Department for a three day-summit to meet with the Secretary to discuss their charge for the year, become familiar with federal education policy and agency staff, and begin exchanging ideas

for enhancing communications among educators, stakeholders, and policymakers.

The 2017 School Ambassador Fellows are:

- Melody Arabo, a third-grade teacher in a hybrid role at Keith Elementary School and 2015 Michigan Teacher of the Year from West Bloomfield, Michigan -- the full-time Washington, D.C.-based fellow;
- Matthew Scott Crisp, principal at Jackson Hole High School from Jackson, Wyoming;
- Elmer Harris, a fifth-grade teacher at Christa McAuliffe Elementary School from Colorado Springs, Colorado;
- Patrick O'Connor, Assistant Dean of College Counseling at Cranbrook Schools from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan;
- Megan Power, an elementary-level teacher at Design39Campus from San Diego, California; and
- Jennifer Ramsey, an elementary-level science teacher at KIPP DC Heights Academy from Washington, D.C.

The 2017 fellows will build on the work previous cohorts. “The fellowship program is designed to improve education for all students by involving practitioners in the development and implementation of national education policy,” the Secretary stated. “The fellows also work directly with Department staff members to inform our understanding of how policies and programs are implemented and experienced by students, educators, and families at the local level.”

FEDERAL STUDENT AID

The financial aid filing season officially began on October 1 with the launch of the 2018-19 [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA). Nearly 238,000 online applications were submitted the first day, representing an 8% increase compared to a year ago. Most students and parents are eligible to use the [IRS Data Retrieval Tool](#), which returned with added security and privacy protections, to electronically transfer their 2016 tax return information ([press release](#)).

Every year, more than 20 million FAFSAs are submitted, resulting in over \$120 billion in federal grants, loans, and work-study funds to help pay for college or career schools.

To assist students and parents in the process, FSA issued yet another informative blog: “[12 Myths About the FASFA Form and Applying for Financial Aid.](#)”

WHITE HOUSE NOMINATIONS

Last week, President Trump announced his intent to nominate three individuals to positions at the Department:

- [Mitchell Zais](#), to be Deputy Secretary of Education. Most recently, Zais served as South Carolina’s elected State Superintendent of Education. During his term in office, his agency’s budget was reduced, while on-time high school graduation rates increased every year to an all-time high. The number of public charter schools increased 78%, the number of charter school students increased 155%, and the number of students taking online courses increased 130%. Previously, he served 10 years as President of Newberry College in South Carolina. Also, he served 31 years as an infantry soldier in the U.S. Army -- retiring as a Brigadier General.
- [James Blew](#), to be Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development. Blew is director of Student Success of California, an affiliate of the 50-state Campaign for Achievement Now (50CAN), and former President of StudentsFirst, the national advocacy organization founded by former D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee. For more than a decade until 2014, he was a key advisor to the Walton family, serving as director of K-12 reform investments for the Walton Family Foundation. He has held advisory and governing roles for the America Federation of Children, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and Policy Innovators in Education Network.
- [Timothy Kelly](#), to be Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Kelly is State

Representative for the 94th District in Saginaw County, Michigan, in his third and final term. He chairs the House Education Reform Committee and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on School Aid. Prior to his election, he served one term as an elected county commissioner. He also served in former Michigan Governor John Engler's administration as the governor's education policy advisor and special advisor to the director of the Department of Career Development. And, he served in former Indiana Governor Evan Bayh's administration as director of the Human Resources Investment Council, director of the Council on Vocational Education, and development specialist for the Department of Commerce.

In the meantime, following a [committee hearing](#), the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is considering the nomination of [Carlos Muñiz](#) to be the agency's General Counsel.

SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT PRIORITIES

This week, the Department released the [Secretary's proposed priorities](#) for competitive grant programs and launched a 30-day public comment period. Once the agency considers the comments received and issues final priorities, the Secretary may choose to use one or more of them in competitions for new grant awards this year and in future years. These priorities align with the vision set forth by the Secretary in support of high-quality educational opportunities for students.

The priorities will allow the Department and program participants to focus limited federal resources in areas of greatest educational need and on multiple issues related to improving student outcomes, including expanding educational options; promoting innovation, streamlining education, and reducing red tape; and supporting career pathways, citizenship, STEM/computer science, and school climate.

For more information about these priorities, including the rationale for each, and to submit comments, view the [Federal Register notice](#).

ODDS AND ENDS

- By [Executive Order](#), President Trump extended a number of advisory bodies, including the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans, the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, and the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- In a [New York Post op-ed](#), Assistant to the President Ivanka Trump calls for the teaching of technology starting in kindergarten.
- In recognition of [Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) Awareness Month](#), a youth advocate explains how understanding teachers make [all the difference](#) for students.
- A [blog post](#) recaps the September opening of an exhibit of Scholastic Art and Writing Award winners from across the country, with a special exhibit of winners from Harris County, Texas.
- Two additional blog posts recount this year's [Green Strides Tour](#) across Georgia: "[Taking Learning Outside](#)" and "[The Path Begins: Forest Kindergarten](#)."
- A [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to institutions of higher education from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education outlines the wind-down of the Federal Perkins Loan Program.
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released [new data](#) providing a more comprehensive look at undergraduate students successfully completing postsecondary education. Unlike previously reported graduation rates, Outcome Measures account for non-traditional students, such as those attending part time or transferring schools. For the 2016-17 academic year, eight years after entering a postsecondary institution, the percentage of students who had completed their degree was 53.6% at four-year schools and 31.6% at two-year schools ([blog post](#)).
- NCES' "[Projections of Education Statistics to 2025](#)" provides national data on enrollment, graduates, teachers, and expenditures at the elementary and secondary education level and enrollment and degrees at

the postsecondary level for the past 15 years and projections to year 2025.

- The IRS reminds educators about [work-related tax benefits](#) that may help them reduce what they pay in taxes.
- A new [report](#) from the White House Council of Economic Advisers spotlights how deregulation can increase economic growth ([blog post](#)).

QUOTES TO NOTE

“In moments of tragedy and horror, America comes together as one -- and it always has. We call upon the bonds that unite us -- our faith, our family, and our shared values. We call upon the bonds of citizenship, the ties of community, and the comfort of our common humanity. Our unity cannot be shattered by evil. Our bonds cannot be broken by violence. And, though we feel such great anger at the senseless murder of our fellow citizens, it is our love that defines us today -- and always will, forever. In times such as these, I know we are searching for some kind of meaning in the chaos, some kind of light in the darkness. The answers do not come easy. But, we can take solace knowing that even the darkest space can be brightened by a single light, and even the most terrible despair can be illuminated by a single ray of hope.”

-- President Donald Trump (10/2/17), in a [statement](#) on the shooting in Las Vegas

“I’ve just received a briefing on the status of the wildfires affecting California -- 17 wildfires burning across Northern California alone; additional fires, as we saw from afar, in Southern California yesterday. Most heartbreakingly, we were informed that 13 people have lost their lives as these fires have moved rapidly forward. More than 2,000 homes and businesses destroyed, [with] tens and thousands of more in harm’s way.... To California, we say...we are with you, our prayers are with you, and we will be with you every day until we put the fires out and stand with these families to rebuild these communities.”

-- Vice President Mike Pence (10/10/17), in [remarks](#) after a briefing on California wildfires

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Department’s [2017 ParentCamp](#) will be held October 23 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Parents, students, educators, and faith-based and community leaders are invited to discuss experiences, concerns, and solutions in order to make informed decisions about their children’s education in a series of workshop sessions facilitated by agency staff and invited guests. Please register online by 5:00 p.m. ET today; seating is limited, and all attendees must register.

Registration is still open for the 2017 [Federal Student Aid \(FSA\) Training Conference](#) in Orlando (November 28-December 1). This event will provide the most up-to-date information on *Higher Education Act* (HEA) Title IV programs and federal policies and procedures affecting customers and partners.

On December 1, the Department and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) will host a [workshop](#) to explore the intersection of the *Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act* (COPPA) Rule and the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA). This workshop will solicit input from a variety of vendors, schools, parents, advocates, and privacy professionals on navigating COPPA and FERPA while implementing education technology in a classroom setting. Interested parties can find a full list of questions and information about submitting comments [here](#).

ED Review is a product of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach, State and Local Engagement

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