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Federal Legislation

Bills in Committee

S. 3129 — NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SCHOOL FINANCE TO MEET THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS ACT

S. 3129 was introduced on August 4, 1992 to create a National Commission on School Finance to meet the National Education Goals. The bill was introduced by Mr. Bingaman for himself, Mr. Cochran, and Mr. Reid. After introduction and two readings, the bill was referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

Finding that state governments have traditionally had the principal role in financing America's education system, which resulted in heavy reliance upon local property taxes and use of state-prescribed limits on spending per pupil and that the role of the federal government has been limited to contributing approximately 7 or 8 percent on the amount spent on education, and, further, that the rapid creation of an unusually competitive international economy has altered national education needs, makes the trained intellect of its citizens the new strategic resource for nations. In recognition of this finding, the United States has implemented education reform alternatives and set national education goals. This bill was presented to increase the likelihood of success for these goals by establishing alternative school finance mechanisms.

The bill proposed establishment of the National Commission on School Finance to Meet the National Education Goals. The Commission shall include twelve members — two shall be appointed by the President, three to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, two by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, three by the Majority Leader of the Senate, and two shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate. The membership of the Commission should be appointed so that it provides the Commission with expertise and experience in the provision and financing of elementary and secondary education.

The duties of the Commission are to study research in innovations that will help further understanding of what will be necessary and the costs involved to achieve the National Education Goals, investigating the consistency of and coherence of federal policy regarding educational equity of resources, the extent to which federal education laws and regulations promote the stated federal education policy, alternatives to current school finance mechanisms and the ability of schools and states to respond financially to the reform demands implied in the national education goals and the consequent objectives. Further responsibilities of the Commission in-

clude synthesizing and evaluating information on the cost-effectiveness of providing various educational services, the role of technology in improving education, the efficiency of the schools' management, international comparisons of expenditure levels, different teaching compensation policies, the impact of educational spending on student achievement and the willingness of localities and states to tax themselves to raise education revenues.

The Commission shall prepare and submit to the Congress an interim report within 18 months of the date of enactment of this Act and a final report within two years of such date.

S. 3134 — READY TO LEARN ACT

This act was introduced on August 5, 1992 and was referred to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources. The purpose of this bill is to expand the production and distribution of educational and instructional video programming and supporting educational materials for preschool and elementary school children as a tool to improve school readiness, to develop and distribute educational and instructional video programming and support materials for parents, child care providers, and educators of young children, and to expand services provided by Head Start programs. This bill amends the General Education Provisions Act by adding a new section, which reads:

“READY TO LEARN TELEVISION”

“SEC. 405A. (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary is authorized to implement programs to develop, produce, and distribute educational and instructional video programming for preschool and elementary school children in order to facilitate the achievement of the national education goals. In administering such programs, the Secretary shall ensure that such programming is made widely available to young children, their parents, child care workers and Head Start providers with support materials as appropriate to increase the effective use of such programming.

The bill further provides that in administering these programs, the Secretary shall set priorities regarding the educational needs of preschool and elementary school children; award grants for the development and dissemination of educational and instructional programming; award grants for the development and dissemination of training materials; establish and administer a Special Projects of National Significance Program to award grants to public and nonprofit private entities for the purpose of addressing limited English proficiency and increasing literacy skills; establish a clearinghouse within the Department; coordinate activities with Secretary of Health and Human Services; and provide con-

sultation to the Secretary of Commerce regarding the educational and informational needs of preschool and elementary school children.

The Secretary shall prepare and submit to the relevant committees of Congress a biannual report on the materials and information which have been provided. Further, the Secretary is empowered to contract with a public broadcasting entity for the distribution of educational video programming for preschool and elementary school children, parents, and child care providers, on at least one channel under a satellite interconnection. In addition, technical amendments to the Head Start Act and Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 were proposed.

H.R. 5175 — GANG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT OF 1992

H.R. 5175 will amend the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 to provide assistance in achieving gang-free schools and communities. The Act will give the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention the authority to enter into contracts with public and private nonprofit agencies, organizations, and institutions to establish and support programs and activities that involve families and communities. The programs and activities for which funds will be available are numerous; they include counseling, education and social services, organization of neighborhood and community groups, and training and assistance to adults who have significant relationships with current or potential gang members. In addition, funds are available to develop innovative means to address problems of juveniles convicted of serious offenses; provide treatment to gang members; promote juvenile involvement in lawful activities in gang areas; develop policies and activities in schools that promote a safe learning environment; assist potential and current gang members in obtaining appropriate educational instruction; and expand the availability of prevention and treatment services for juvenile drug abuse and recidivism. Fifteen percent of the appropriations under the Act may be used to research gangs, evaluate effective programs, and increase public knowledge on programs and funds available under the Act. Applications for grants are to be submitted in accordance with guidelines established by the Administrator and requirements within the Act.

H.R. 5490 — UNIVERSAL STUDENT NUTRITION ACT OF 1992

H.R. 5490 will amend the National School Lunch Act to establish an optional universal school lunch program. Congressional findings within

5490 state that school breakfast and lunch programs are vital to the well-being of children, that while many are served by the program, many eligible low-income students do not participate. In addition, the administrative cost and complexity of the school lunch program cause many schools to drop out of it. Currently, the lunch and breakfast programs are established and administered under separate statutory authority. H.R. 5490 would create a universal school lunch and breakfast program with payment rates being equal to the national average cost of producing a school lunch and the national average cost of producing a school breakfast. Any school participating under the National School Lunch Act or the school breakfast program under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 would be able to elect to participate in the universal program. Schools would receive the same level of commodities that they currently receive under the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act. Dietary Guidelines for the lunch and breakfast programs would no longer be "on the basis of tested nutritional research," but rather "in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans developed by the Department of Agriculture."

H.R. 5781 — PUBLIC SCHOOL REDEFINITION ACT OF 1992

H.R. 5781 will establish a demonstration program that encourages educational agencies to assist teachers, parents, and communities in establishing new and more effective public schools and provides criteria to use in establishing the schools.

The Act contains numerous Congressional findings, including one which states that public education should be defined by outcomes and requirements that protect the public interest, not simply by ownership or control of facilities and programs by a local educational agency. Towards that end, the Secretary is authorized to award grants to state educational agencies to conduct an outcome-based public school program.

An outcome-based public school is defined as a school that is consistent with First Amendment prohibitions against the establishment of religion; provides programs for targeted grades and ages; does not charge tuition; complies with Federal Civil Rights legislation; is subject to the same federal and state audit procedures as any other school in the state; meets all state and local health and safety requirements; and enters a partnership and outcomes agreement with a school board, local educational agency, joint board, State educational agency, or any other State or public agency. In the event that more students apply for admission than can be accommodated, the school is to admit students through the use of a lottery system.

If a state elects not to participate in the program the Secretary is authorized to award a grant to an outcome-based public school that serves

the state. Grants are subject to a matching funds requirement and are received by submitting an application which describes the objectives and outcomes to be achieved by the school as well as methods by which to measure progress.

H.R. 5898

H.R. 5898 was introduced and referred to the Committee on Education and Labor on August 12, 1992. Starting in 1994, H.R. 5898 would amend Public Law 874, so that each local educational agency which has a school district bisected by federal property will receive an amount equal to 150 percent of the amount received by the agency in fiscal year 1992, adjusted for inflation.

The upward adjustment does not apply in any fiscal year in which amounts appropriated are insufficient to provide each school district an amount equal to 100 percent of the amount received by the local educational agency in the fiscal year 1992, adjusted for inflation.

The amendment is not to be construed to prohibit any adjustment of amounts received by a local educational agency under subsection (a) of Public Law 874 as a result of a change in the amount of federal property owned by the United States in the school district of the agency.

