

SEN. MURKOWSKI'S EDUCATION NEWSLETTER FOR THE WEEK OF MARCH 22, 2010

Opportunities for Grants and Positive Recognition

Bank of America Foundation Educational Grants support K-12 and higher education, with an emphasis on ESL and early childhood initiatives and professional development. Eligibility is limited to school districts. See <http://www.bankofamerica.com/foundation> for each individual state's applicable funding areas.

DonorsChoose.org Grants is a simple way to provide students in need with resources that our public schools often lack. At this not-for-profit web site, teachers submit project proposals for materials or experiences their students need to learn. If interested contact <http://www.donorschoose.org/about/about.html>.

Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes - Youth Leadership Award honors outstanding young leaders ages 8 to 18 who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet. Twenty-five winners will be selected. Nominees must have participated in their heroic work within the twelve months prior to the nomination deadline of April 30 and must be legal residents of, and currently residing in, the United States or Canada. More information: <http://www.barronprize.org/index.html>

New What Works Clearinghouse Topic Area and Intervention Reports

WWC has launched a new topic area -- Students with Learning Disabilities. You can access the WWC Students with Disabilities Topic Area page at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/Topic.aspx?tid=19>. Reports are pending on the following Interventions for students with disabilities: Alphabetic Phonics, Barton Reading and Spelling System®, Dyslexia Training Program, Foundations®, Herman Method™, Project Read® Phonology, Read 180®, Read Naturally®, Unbranded Orton-Gillingham-based Interventions, and Wilson Reading System®.

Intervention Report on the Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS) program: WWC reviewed 31 studies that investigated the effects of LiPS on students with learning disabilities. WWC found LiPS to have potentially positive effects on alphabets, reading fluency, and math. There were no discernible effects on reading comprehension, and potentially negative effects on writing for students with learning disabilities. Read the report at: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/learning_disabilities/lips/

Intervention Report on three Voyager Reading Programs. The three programs, Voyager Passport, Voyager Passport Reading Journeys, and Voyager Universal Literacy System, are programs for students with learning disabilities. None of the 44 studies meet WWC evidence standards. Therefore, conclusions may not be drawn based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Voyager reading programs on students with disabilities. To view the full report please visit: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/learning_disabilities/voyager/

USED Publishes States' Allocation of Qualified School Construction Bonds

The U.S. Treasury and the U.S. Department of Education announced \$11 billion in allocation authority to issue Qualified School Construction Bonds. These bonds can be used to finance the construction, rehabilitation, or repair of public schools or to purchase land on which public schools will be built. Eleven billion was also allocated in 2009 for these bonds. The total allocation is \$6.6 billion for the 50 states and \$4.4 billion for the 103 eligible large school districts across the country. Alaska has been allocated \$28,163,000.

USED Holds Rural Education Conference Call - Transcript Available

USED held a conference call with stakeholders regarding ESEA and rural education on March 16th. You can read the transcript of that call at <http://www.ed.gov/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Rural-ESEA-Conference-Call-03-16-10.doc>.

Task Force on Childhood Obesity Seeks Your Comments

The U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health and Human Services are asking the public for ideas to help the Task Force on Childhood Obesity come up with recommendations for public and private sector actions to solve the problem of childhood obesity. The Task Force is intended to enhance coordination between private sector companies, not-for-profits, agencies within the government and other organizations to address the problem of childhood obesity. State, Tribal, and local authorities, and other interested persons that can assist with the Task Force's development of a detailed set of recommendations to solve the problem of childhood obesity. Specific information is available at: www.regulations.gov/search/Regs/home.html#documentDetail?R=0900006480abdc63. Comments should be submitted on line at: www.regulations.gov, or by fax or mail to: Director, Office Executive Secretariat, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Room 116-A Whitten Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20250. Fax number: (202) 720-7166.

USED Releases NCLB Blueprint for Reform, Senate HELP Committee Takes Testimony from Secretary Duncan

- The Department's Blueprint for Reform for NCLB is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint>;
- You can read Secretary Duncan's testimony to the Senate HELP Committee at <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/03/secretary-duncan-testifies-on-blueprint-for-reauthorizing-esea>;
- Watch the Senate HELP Committee hearing at <http://help.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=45361c35-5056-9502-5deb-a3d743977e08>.

NOTE: The Senate HELP Committee hearing scheduled for March 25th on ESEA Standards and Assessments has been postponed to April 28th at 2:00 pm EST.

Murkowski Comments on Administration's Proposed Overhaul of No Child Left Behind

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, today raised questions about the administration's proposed reform of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), saying proposals to help the lowest-performing schools improve won't work in states with lots of rural and remote communities such as Alaska.

Murkowski made her comments at a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee hearing to consider the administration's recently released NCLB reform blueprint. Education Secretary Arne Duncan appeared before the panel to defend the proposal.

Murkowski explained that in Alaska, as in many parts of the country, teacher and principal turnover are a major problem -- not a solution. The blueprint would compel the lowest-performing schools either to fire principals and teachers, close the school and send the students elsewhere, or bring in some other entity to run the school.

Noting that many villages are without indoor plumbing, potable water, and have poor housing, Murkowski told Duncan that "these are not conditions that most people will be able to handle."

"So when we talk about the options, such as replacing the principal, this is our problem. We can't keep good people there," she said.

Murkowski said that reforms made to NCLB should work for all schools, whether urban or rural, and allow for flexibility - not a one-size-fits-all approach.

"I think we've got to have the ability to be flexible, to look at different things, to say what might work in Iowa or Wyoming, even though they're rural, doesn't necessarily translate to Alaska," said Murkowski. "So I would hope that you have, within your blueprint a level of flexibility and ability to resolve things like this."

Murkowski has introduced her own bill, the School Accountability Improvement Act, that, like the administration's NCLB blueprint, gives schools credit for improvement based on individual students' achievement. Murkowski's proposal also would provide additional flexibility for Native language immersion schools to show that children are learning, improve Highly Qualified Teacher provisions to address teacher effectiveness, reform NCLB's school choice and tutoring provisions, improve opportunities for parental involvement in schools, and improve how schools are held accountable for the performance of students with disabilities and English language learners. Murkowski will work to incorporate the elements of her bill once the HELP Committee begins to write a reauthorization of NCLB.