



ISSUE BRIEF

Striving Readers

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Prepared by: Michelle White, Senior Associate
mwhite@wpllc.net

On March 22, Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Jeff Session (R-AL) introduced S. 958, the Striving Readers Act of 2007 which seeks to address the literacy needs of students in grades 4 - 12.

This issue brief addresses the following topics:

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Status and Strategy

During the 109th and 110th Congress, the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE), the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) have taken the lead in securing sponsorship and support for the Striving Readers Act. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has recently joined these three groups in actively soliciting support for the bill through aiding with language changes, making visits to legislative offices, and collaborating with other associations. The ultimate goal is to have the Striving Readers language included in the “base bill” related to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The first steps in the process are to introduce “stand alone” bills in both the Senate and House, with the intention of convincing staff and Members to incorporate that language into any initial ESEA reauthorization bill. In order for the authorizers to include the language, substantial support and acceptance of the stand alone bill must be evident.

SENATE ACTION

Since introduction, S. 958 has met a warm response. The bill's original sponsors, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL), have championed the measure, and currently there are fourteen additional cosponsors. They are: Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI); Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM); Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH); Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC); Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS); Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT); Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM); Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL); Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA); Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA); Sen. John Kerry (D-MA); Sen. Blanche Lincoln (R-AR); Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK); and Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS).

HOUSE ACTION

Advocates have turned their attention to the House and efforts to introduce a companion to the Senate measure in that chamber. Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY) has agreed to be the lead sponsor. Currently, the organizations identified above are working together with other organizations to identify and secure a Republican lead. A number of Republican Members of Congress are being approached to co-sponsor the bill.

Bill Summary

The Striving Readers Act seeks to improve student achievement in adolescent literacy for middle level and high school students by establishing adolescent literacy initiatives aimed at increasing high school graduation and college readiness.

- **Grants:** 5 year grants to states, awarded on a formula basis according to poverty and 8th grade reading scores on NAEP. States in turn award competitive grants to school districts, with priority for those districts with certain levels of poverty and literacy, and some consideration for the number or percentage of schools deemed in need of improvement under NCLB.
- **State Uses:** States use funds for:
 - Creating statewide literacy teams to develop and implement literacy initiatives
 - Providing professional development to teachers in core subjects
 - Improving teacher education and state licensure in adolescent literacy
 - Reporting literacy achievement to the public
 - Participating in evaluations of the program
- **Local Uses:** Districts use funds for
 - Developing adolescent literacy plans, with a professional development component, for each school served
 - Training school leaders to administer adolescent literacy plans
 - Administering diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to improve literacy
 - Collecting, analyzing, and reporting literacy data

- Hiring literacy coaches, acquiring materials or interventions including software, training parents to support literacy, or connecting out-of-school learning with in-school instruction
- **Evaluation:** States submit two progress reports on literacy achievement. The U.S. Department of Education shall conduct a scientifically valid, quantitative and qualitative 5-year evaluation of the program.

How does the current Striving Readers program work?

- The U.S. Department of Education makes competitive grants directly to school districts.
- FY2006 funding was \$29.7 million, enough for only 8 grants.
- Striving Readers is a Title I demonstration program funded solely through the appropriations process.

As many know, the Department of Education currently runs a grant program titled Striving Readers. While similar in intention, S. 958 differs from this program in the following ways:

- This bill would authorize Striving Readers and expand it to serve every state according to a formula. States, in turn would award grants competitively to districts.
- This bill would require grantees to evaluate their program but not to perform randomized trials (currently required). Randomized trials often put districts in the difficult position of denying interventions to students who want and need them.
- This bill would give states flexibility to serve any middle or high school grade; the current program only serves grades 6-12, leaving out grades 4 and 5.

Conclusion

Timing for this initiative is being governed by the reauthorization of ESEA. Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee George Miller (D-CA) have indicated that they will be drafting legislation in May and plan to have action on the floor by the August Congressional recess.

While there has been a great deal of support from both sides of the aisle for the concept of legislation addressing the literacy needs of adolescents, the political reality is that the Striving Readers Act represents a new and expensive program – with an authorized level of \$200 million in the first year. In the coming months, work will continue toward garnering more cosponsors for the Senate bill and to the introduction of a widely supported companion bill in the House.