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More Federal Education Programs?

As the spring thaw begins across the nation one can only wonder if we will begin to see a thaw in the Congressional ice jam that has prevented any significant changes to federal education programs over the past several years. [Education Week](#) recently reported that the backlog of Education Legislation that should have been reauthorized over the past few years has reached historic proportions. The following major education programs are far past due in the schedule of reauthorization:

- Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act- Reauthorized in 2006.
- Child Care and Development Block Grant Act- Reauthorized in 1996.
- Education Sciences Reform Act- Reauthorized in 2002.
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“No Child Left Behind Act”) - Reauthorized in 2002.
- Head Start Act- Reauthorized in 2007.
- Higher Education Act- Reauthorized in 2008.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act- Reauthorized in 2004.
- Workforce Investment Act- Reauthorized in 1998.

Currently it appears that there is little or no consensus in Congress to renew, revise or reduce any of these major programs. All of them are likely to see small funding reductions as a result of the federal budget sequester that Congress and the President let fall into place at the beginning of the month. It also appears that Congress will not be able to muster the necessary votes to make any changes in the federal budget for education or other programs. Instead sometime in the next few weeks Congress will pass a “continuing resolution,” that will allow current levels of funding (with sequester reductions included) to continue until the end of September.

In spite of this huge ice jam of federal programs President Obama in his [State of the Union](#) address called for federal funding for free preschool for all children.

The effectiveness of universal preschool has not been thoroughly researched. The much cited HighScope Perry Preschool Study that was conducted in the 1960's on 123 African-American students from high poverty backgrounds did indicate significant gains for the students in this particular program. The Perry Preschool study and [others](#) do show some positive effects for selected high quality preschool programs focused on children in poverty. However the President and many others “fudge” the research when they use such studies to promote a strategy of preschool for all instead of high quality programs targeted only at children in poverty.

There are three critical questions that must be considered before moving toward universal preschool: First, can we afford such a universal preschool? Second, even if we can afford universal preschool, should we pay for it for families who already provide their children with a strong home environment or private preschool experience? And third, is it in the best

interest of children and our culture to take children out of their families at an early age and place them in a public school setting?

The first question is merely a matter of budget priorities. The second question touches on the appropriate role of the federal government in funding education. The last question is the most vexing of the three.

As our schools become more and more secular I believe that the balance tilts away from federally funded preschools providing a clear benefit to our youngest children. In Chapter 19 of Matthew Jesus said, *"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."* Many children at a very young age have come to know the Lord through the influence of their parents sometimes working collaboratively with Christian preschool teachers. To place young children for six or more hours per day in government funded preschools where the teachers are prohibited from praying with the children, reading the bible to them or talking with them about the Lord could well be hindering them from coming to the Lord.

We need to be in prayer that as our Congress and the President work their way through the difficult political morass of their own making that they do not forget that our children need much more than just an education. Much of what they need is best provided in a home setting.

If you have thoughts or comments on this issue or other federal education issues please share them with us. You can address your thoughts and comments to JMitchell@ceai.org.

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