



Spring 2007

The ASTD Policy Brief is a quarterly report on Congressional activity and other public policy news that impacts the workplace learning and performance (WLP) profession.

Legislative Update – 110th Congress

The 110th Congress began in January with a new Democratic majority and a new focus on learning as the key to U.S. competitiveness.

From the outset, the House Education and Labor and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committees have set their sights on reauthorizing three key education and workforce development laws: No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the landmark elementary and secondary education law first passed in 2002; the Higher Education Act, which governs federal assistance to individuals and institutions of higher learning; and the Workforce Investment Act, which established the nation's public workforce system.

Reauthorizing NCLB has been the top priority of Rep. George Miller (D-CA) and Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), the new chairs of the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over NCLB. In addition to concerns about funding for the law, there have been several high-profile reports in the last few years indicating that many U.S. secondary students are not adequately prepared for entry into the workforce or for post-secondary studies. Business groups in particular have encouraged lawmakers to address these concerns to ensure a strong "pipeline" of future employees.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) provides for a number of financial assistance programs, including Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, and support for institutions of higher learning. As Congress begins to tackle this legislation, one issue that will be of interest to workplace learning and performance (WLP) professionals is the treatment of part-time students. Under current law, part-time students are largely ineligible for post-secondary educational assistance, despite the fact that more than 70 percent of today's college students are considered non-traditional. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) has introduced a bill (S.301) that would permit schools to waive restrictions on such students, and Senate staffers have indicated interest in expanding access for part-time students. The Senate's version of the bill may be introduced as early as May, while the House expects to follow shortly thereafter.

With NCLB and HEA on the front burner, lawmakers have postponed action on reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which created a system of local career centers ("One-Stop Centers"), where employers and individuals can access job training and other career services. The law was due for reauthorization in

2003, but Congress has been unable to produce a final bill. The programs under WIA continue to be funded, but there is broad consensus that improvements to the system are necessary.

With the release of his Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 budget proposal, President Bush called for a significant restructuring of WIA to emphasize individual choice in training. The proposal called for the creation of Career Advancement Accounts (CAA), which would provide individuals with up to \$6,000 over two years for job training. At the same time, the administration recommended a cut of more than \$300 million in overall funding for the program. Congress is unlikely to adopt the administration's recommendations, but the future of the reauthorization is still unclear. It is doubtful that either chamber will introduce draft legislation earlier than this summer, meaning that final action on WIA may have to wait until 2008.

In addition to these bills, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (America COMPETES) Act (S.761), a massive bill designed to increase investment in research and education in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. The Senate passed the bill on April 25th by a vote of 88-8.

Congress is also considering legislation that would provide federal tax incentives for training and lifelong learning. In January, Representative Jerry Weller (R-IL) introduced the Technology Retraining and Investment Now (TRAIN) Act (H.R.244), which would establish a tax credit equal to 50 percent of an organization's expenses for information and communications technology training. In March, Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN) introduced the Competitiveness through Education, Technology, and Enterprise (COMPETE) Act of 2007 (S.833), which includes the same tax credit language.

Another bill of interest is the Lifelong Learning Accounts Act of 2007 (S.26), introduced by Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA). The bill calls for a ten state demonstration project to examine Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs), portable education accounts that individuals could use to support educational activities. Employers and employees could each make tax-deferred contributions of up to \$500 per year to an employee's LiLA, and employees would be permitted to take the account with them in the event of separation.

ASTD will continue to advocate for policies that support a highly skilled workforce and enhance U.S. competitiveness throughout the 110th Congress. We encourage ASTD members to contact their legislators and express support for WIA reauthorization and for passage of H.R.244 (TRAIN Act), S.833 (COMPETE Act), and S.26 (Lifelong Learning Accounts Act.)

ASTD Initiates Formation of a Technical Advisory Group on Educational Services to Represent US Interests in ISO

ASTD has joined with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to form a U.S. Technical Advisory Group (US/TAG) to coordinate U.S. input to a newly formed International Organization for Standardization (ISO) technical committee (ISO/TC 232) on Educational Services. The new ISO committee discussed needs for global standardization in the fields of learning, education (particularly vocational

education), and training. Consensus on standards within ISO/TC 232 is expected to be finalized by 2010.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. is the largest exporter of educational services in the world, and educational services make up the U.S.'s fifth largest service export. The work of ISO/TC 232 is intended to help organizations, individuals, and countries determine the most suitable training and development programs for their workforce; which programs are the most effective; how to accurately measure learning results; and how to standardize the quality of programs. Through Technical Committees organized to develop standards for each field, ISO publishes international standards for each profession, fostering cooperation and trade among participating countries (currently at 157).

ASTD Public Policy Sessions at ICE 2007

ASTD Public Policy will host a number of educational sessions at ASTD's International Conference & Exposition, which will be held in Atlanta, GA, June 3-6, 2007:

"Bridging the Skills Gap" – A panel discussion on ASTD's new white paper, "Bridging the Skills Gap," and how a variety of organizations have addressed their skill shortages.

"Business Solutions: An Employer's Guide to the Workforce Investment System" – The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) will present a session on accessing the public workforce system and provide an overview of DOL priorities for 2007.

"How to Access and Influence Public Sector Training Dollars" – This session will educate participants on how to take advantage of federal, state, and local government training resources.

"Capitalizing on Industry-Driven Products for Tomorrow's Workforce" – Representatives from the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment & Training Administration will discuss the federal government's High Growth Job Training Initiative and the ready-for-market tools and products developed through the program.

For additional information, or to register for ASTD's 2007 International Conference & Exposition, please visit <http://astd2007.astd.org>.

ASTD to Release *Infoline* on Federal and State Training Resources

ASTD Press will release a new *Infoline* on accessing public sector training resources in June 2007. Developed by ASTD Public Policy, the publication provides a practical guide to accessing federal and state grants, taking advantage of training tax credits, and utilizing the public workforce system under WIA.