

House and Senate Roll Out Their FY09 Budget Proposals

This month, the US House of Representatives and the Senate each adopted separate versions of a 2009 Congressional Budget Resolution, the final, approved version of which will serve as a blueprint for the upcoming appropriations process. Both versions reject President Bush's proposed cuts for the U.S. Department of Education, but differ slightly in the overall totals for discretionary spending and in the funding they would provide for education.

The House adopted its FY09 budget resolution (H Con Res 312) by a vote of 212-207. It provides an increase of \$7.1 billion or 9 percent over the President's FY09 request for education and training. The Senate adopted its FY09 budget resolution (S Con Res 70) by a vote of 51-44. The Senate budget provides \$5.4 billion above the President's FY2009 request for the U.S. Department of Education and \$4.8 billion over the FY08 enacted amount (8% increase). Overall, the Senate blueprint would provide \$18 billion more in total discretionary spending than the amount that the president requested in his FY 2009 budget. Senate Budget Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) heralded the resolution, saying, "This budget will strengthen the economy, create jobs, and make America safer. It will allow for additional stimulus for the economy to respond to the current economic downturn. It provides tax relief for the middle class. It makes needed investments in energy, education, infrastructure, and health care. It supports our troops, cares for our veterans, and protects the homeland."

While the passage of the Senate and the House's Budget Resolutions could lead to more money for education, generally, and education technology, specifically, in FY09, the Congressional Budget Resolution serves only as a guide for the appropriations process to come and does not have the force of law as the President does not actually enact it. In fact, Budget Resolutions are traditionally big-picture documents that do not address funding levels for specific programs. The appropriations committees in each chamber will take up the task of determining specific federal program spending levels in the coming months.

When Congress returns from recess on March 31st, it is expected that the House and Senate will begin work on a compromise FY09 Budget Resolution that irons out differences between the two versions, with a goal of completing work on a final Congressional Budget Resolution by April 15th. If the compromise resolution retains overall discretionary spending levels that are significantly higher than those proposed by the President, something that appears increasingly likely, we could again see a veto showdown between the President and Congress over appropriations legislation.

Appropriations Letters in Support of EETT Funding Circulated in Both the House and the Senate

Despite little legislative action on the FY09 appropriations front, education technology

funding advocacy efforts quickened in March with the release of letters from Congressional supporters of education technology. In a letter dated March 19, 2008, 23 House members wrote House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI) and Labor, HHS and Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman James Walsh (R-NY) to request that the Committee fund the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program at \$496 million in FY09, the level at which the program was funded in FY05. The letter stated: “We believe that EETT plays an essential role in our nation’s schools fulfilling the student achievement, teacher quality and parental involvement provisions of NCLB. Moreover, the EETT program enables students to develop the technology skills and knowledge that improve their employment prospects in the highly competitive global economy of this century and, by extension, the economic outlook for America as a whole.”

The letter was led by Representatives Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) and Judy Biggert (R-IL), both of whom are lead sponsors of the Achievement Through Technology and Innovation bill, which would revamp EETT. In total, nine members of the House’s Education and Labor Committee, which authorized EETT, signed the letter, including Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee Chairman Dale Kildee (D-MI).

Over on the Senate side, Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) have taken the lead in circulating a letter that requests Senate Appropriators to fund EETT at \$496 million. This letter cites strong academic improvements as a result of excellent technology implementations in five states: Maine, Texas, Missouri, Iowa and North Carolina. To date, ten Senators have signed-on, with many more expected to add their signatures before the March 31 deadline.