Looking Ahead to 2013: Federal Policy, School Safety, and Digital Learning

January 2013
Why Education Insider?

The Value

**Whiteboard Advisors** is a policy-oriented consulting practice. We provide proprietary research and strategic support to investors and philanthropic donors, government leaders, and entrepreneurs who seek unparalleled understanding of the education policy and business environment.

**Education Insider** helps those who need quality information to make high-stakes decisions about the direction of federal policy. Education Insider combines the wisdom of informed crowds with expert analysis to offer unparalleled information, analysis, and forecasting on a range of federal education policy issues and likely outcomes.

Education Insider conducts an anonymous survey of a small group of key education influentials (policymakers, thought leaders, and association heads) to get their thoughts and commentary about the context of the current debate and possible outcomes. This helps surface the underlying dynamics that can affect the trajectory of policies, positively or negatively, and go deeper than the conventional wisdom and rhetoric.
Why Education Insider?

The Process

Education Insider is a monthly report that cuts through the noise and provides real-time insights on national education policy trends, debates, and issues—from the handful of decision makers that are really driving the process. We combine a survey of key education influencers with our own analysis to provide a unique perspective on the current state of debate.

Who Are The Insiders?
Influential leaders who are shaping federal education reform, including individuals who have or are currently serving as key policy and political “insiders,” such as:

- Current and former White House and U.S. Department of Education leaders;
- Current and former Congressional staff;
- State education leaders including state school chiefs and former governors; and
- Leaders of major education organizations, think tanks and other key influentials
Executive Summary

A new high of **63%** of Insiders think ESEA Reauthorization will take place after January 2015.

Insiders are evenly split **50/50** in their views about whether the Sandy Hook tragedy will catalyze additional funding or legislative measures for school safety.

**60%** of Insiders think that states will put more, or much more, emphasis on digital learning in 2013, whereas only **29%** feel the same way about emphasis at the Federal level.

- Insiders are split about whether Washington will pass **school safety legislation** in the wake of the Newtown tragedy, but see difficult prospects for anything ambitious.

- Insiders see more potential for **digital learning initiatives** at the state level than in Washington during 2013.

- A majority of Insiders do not see the Administration making inroads with **teacher preparation** reform in 2013.

- Insiders continue to see the SBAC **Common Core assessment consortia** on the wrong track and have mixed views on the PARCC consortia.

- Insiders continue to give **Congress** low approval ratings and remain split on the **Administration**. Prospects for **ESEA reauthorization** remain slim with even more Insiders forecasting 2015 as the earliest timeline.
Table of Contents

- TRACKING MEASURES 6
- LOOKING AHEAD TO 2013 11
## Job Approval on Education

### Congress

- **Approve:** 96%
- **Disapprove:** 4%

### Administration

- **Approve:** 52%
- **Disapprove:** 48%

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Questions (asked separately on Insider survey): **Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress/the Administration is handling education?**
As time goes on, the percentage of Insiders who do not believe ESEA reauthorization will occur until January 2015 or later continues to grow.

**Question:** About when do you believe a final ESEA bill will be signed into law?
Insider Insight: Reauthorization Timing

Why?

• “If ever…. Can Congress get anything done? I doubt it.”
• “No obeisance focused on it.”
• “With the budget and the continuous kicking of the can, the calendar can’t and won’t handle big reauthorizations this year, thus leaving ESEA to stand in line with countless other discretionary programs.”
• “Newtown and the fiscal cliff compromise just made what was really hard even harder.”
• “Even with the ascension of Lamar Alexander, Harkin still won’t have the capacity to reach a deal.”
• “Not a priority.”
• “Too much on Congress’ plate and the waivers need time to be assessed to see if they are functional. If not then there will be a push to reauthorize ESEA after 11 plus years.”
• “Are you kidding? There’s zero interest in doing so.”
• “There’s no reason to do so.”
• “With Obama re-elected, there is little reason for the Department to pursue a reauthorization in Congress until it has had the chance for waivers to run their course.”
• “There’s no urgency to move a bill, especially from the Department of Education.”
Are the assessment coalitions on the right track or wrong track?

**PARCC**

- Apr. '12: 73% Right Track, 27% Wrong Track
- June '12: 83% Right Track, 17% Wrong Track
- July '12: 85% Right Track, 15% Wrong Track
- Aug. '12: 65% Right Track, 35% Wrong Track
- Sept. '12: 69% Right Track, 31% Wrong Track
- Nov. '12: 62% Right Track, 38% Wrong Track
- Dec. '12: 52% Right Track, 49% Wrong Track
- Jan. '13: 55% Right Track, 45% Wrong Track

**SBAC**

- Apr. '12: 29% Right Track, 71% Wrong Track
- June '12: 44% Right Track, 56% Wrong Track
- July '12: 42% Right Track, 58% Wrong Track
- Aug. '12: 27% Right Track, 73% Wrong Track
- Sept. '12: 33% Right Track, 67% Wrong Track
- Nov. '12: 33% Right Track, 67% Wrong Track
- Dec. '12: 29% Right Track, 71% Wrong Track
- Jan. '13: 27% Right Track, 73% Wrong Track
Insider Insight: Right Track / Wrong Track

Why do you believe PARCC and SBAC are on the right or wrong track?

• “PARCC is focused on providing a higher quality product, that’s for sure.”
• “No. Both continue to operate with such opacity it is hard to know where things stand. This is a view held by practitioners on the ground as well.”
• “It’s not that they’re on the wrong track in terms of their intentions -- it’s all about execution, and both consortia are struggling mightily with getting the work done on time and with quality.”
• “One is hanging on, and the other is DOA.”
• “It’s time for them to share with states (and the world) how they’re going to handle the ‘cut score’ challenges that are beginning to be issues of extreme and legitimate concern in many quarters.”
• “On the right track but behind schedule and may run out of funding.”
In the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy, do you expect to see new legislation/funding passed into law to address school safety concerns?

Insiders are evenly split on whether the tragedy that resulted at Sandy Hook will spur new legislation or funding for school safety.

Question: In the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy, do you expect to see new legislation/funding passed into law to address school safety concerns?
Why or Why Not?

- “There is enough emotion generated to overcome the inertia.”
- “Gun safety yes, but likely no new funding specifically for schools.”
- “Something small will pass. Other actions won’t involve legislation.”
- “Given some of the cuts to school safety funding over the past several years, I think Congress could easily add some funding back--although I suspect funding would be minimal.”
- “Anything that involves guns even tangentially seems pretty likely to lead to gridlock.”
- “I expect the Administration to use budgetary and executive authority to react to Sandy Hook, but I am not sanguine that Congress will pass any new, school safety-related legislation.”
- “Nothing of consequence.”
Why or Why Not?

• “If this tragedy doesn’t spurred some action nothing will. Don’t know if it will come from Congress or Executive Branch but I think some (probably relatively small in the end) positive change will occur.”
• “This will be bound up within the gun-control legislation issue, the outcome of which is unknowable at this time.”
• “What happened at Sandy hook was not a failure of school safety laws but of the mental health system that fails to help people until they commit a crime.”
• “More of a state and local issue; maybe make tougher law on school gun free zones but that is about it. Other gun laws address more than schools.”
• “The typical reactionary legislation that won’t do much will be proposed (e.g. competitive grants for innovative ways to address school safety). The likelihood of this approach passing is minimal, but will make for typical theater.”
State Emphasis on Digital Learning

Insiders feel that states will place at least the same or more emphasis on digital learning in 2013.

Question: On a scale 1 to 5, will we see more, less, or the same amount of emphasis among STATE policymakers on digital learning in 2013 than in 2012?
Insider Insight: State Emphasis on Digital Learning

Why or Why Not?

• “Squirrel!”
• “More. Interest in digital learning is growing in K-12 and exploding in postsecondary.”
• “Other things will take up state policy maker time. Digital learning important but not over taking school finance, funding and other issues.”
• “A little more at the edge perhaps. But more technology at the margin has been the problem all along.”
• “For the first time in recent memory, you’re seeing a groundswell for really implementing online courses or some technology component that goes beyond just the typical computer in the classroom and really does disrupt the traditional model. Part of this is a product of shrinking state budgets and the need to think outside of the box so I can only guess it will expand.”
Federal Emphasis on Digital Learning

Insiders are more mixed about what may happen at the Federal level in terms of digital learning in 2013, with the majority voting for the status quo.

Question: On a scale 1 to 5, will we see more, less, or the same amount of emphasis among FEDERAL policymakers on digital learning in 2013 than in 2012?
A majority of Insiders doubt that the Obama Administration will take concrete steps to improve teacher preparation in 2013.

Question: Will the Obama Administration be able to take concrete steps to improve teacher preparation in 2013?
Insider Insight: The Obama Administration and Teacher Preparation Programs

Why or Why Not?

• “No money for incentives to drive change.”
• “The ed schools know how to fight this stuff off, if the Administration thought the for-profits were tough just wait.”
• “Depends on Congress, which is unknowable at this time. (So far we have zero evidence that the new Congress will accomplish anything on any topic.)”
• “It’s too much of a slog and the unions hate it. They will turn their attention to technology.”
• “The final steps of the negotiated rulemaking process are overdue and will be acted upon.”
• “They don’t know how to work with Congress and their regulatory proposals are meaningless.”
• “The work will be done outside of the administration. While an interest not a high priority and not much can be done other than using the bully pulpit.”
• “I say no, meaning they don’t really have the authority to do much, but they’ll likely find some thin reed to base changes either through regs, guidance, etc.”
• “It sounds like this is a priority for the Department, and the AACTE has already tried to make inroads on Capitol Hill.”
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