

Federal dollars in private schools

A recent survey concluded that only about a third of adults nationwide knew that a significant piece of bipartisan federal educational legislation was passed by Congress this past winter. On January 8th, President Bush signed into law the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) re-titled as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). While it is true that the bill's passage continues the stream of federal K-12 school resources flowing to the states that was started during the Johnson administration in the '60's, it is also true is that the new law contains some important changes to that effort. What many also don't realize is that private schools may access many of these programs on behalf of their students.

Washington State spends nearly 5 billion dollars annually on its public education system. About seven percent of that amount is supported in federal dollars. Private school students enrolled in schools that choose to participate in these programs share proportionately in the allocations. While some schools, for philosophical reasons, have made a decision not to accept funds from governmental sources, it is important to note that the new law gives more flexibility to a school to direct these resources to the needs it deems best, continues to prevent any undue intrusion into the institution's mission or daily operations, and clearly strengthens provisions to include private school leaders in pre-planning opportunities before the funds are allocated. NCLB also contains new opportunities for parents and administrators to make choices that could have a positive impact for the children in their care.

The intended focus while drafting the new law was to "provide all children with a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education." A noble quest. Congress agreed that previous versions often contained language that was counterproductive to that goal. The bipartisan conference committee that came up with the final form of the bill reached consensus that this effort must:

- Create strong standards and accountability for results;
- Provide for state and local district flexibility;
- Reduce red tape;
- Focus on research-based approaches; and
- Expand choices for parents.

Following is a quick overview of the portions of NCLB that are open for private school student and school participation:

Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged

Basic Programs seeks to improve programs operated by districts to assist students in need of remediation in core subjects, particularly those children in high poverty areas.

Reading First provides assistance in establishing research-based reading programs for children K-3.

Even Start Family Literacy looks to establish unified family literacy programs including early childhood and adult and parenting education.

Education of Migratory Children provides funds to improve or establish programs for the children of migratory workers.

Title II – Preparing, Training and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals

Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund provides funds for professional development of staff including those in private schools.

Mathematics and Science Partnerships seeks to improve math and science teaching through a variety of activities.

Enhancing Education Through Technology funds innovative initiatives using technology, increasing access to technology, and professional development.

Title III – Language Instruction for Limited English Proficiency and Immigrant Students

Targets students needing English language acquisition, language enhancement, and help in meeting state academic standards.

Title IV – 21st Century Schools Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities

Safe and Drug Free Schools provides funds for drug and violence prevention, character education, community service projects, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs as well as other similar activities.

Community Learning Centers seeks to increase students' and communities' access to school building services, before and after school activities, and enrichment opportunities that help children state achievement standards.

Title V – Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs

Innovative Programs provides funding for education improvement programs, instructional and media materials, professional development and other activities.

Gifted and Talented Students targets research, demonstration projects, innovative strategies and activities designed to enhance the ability of schools to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged gifted and talented students.

This capsule only attempts to point the way for parents and schools to explore assistance for their programs through federal dollars. As of this spring, public and private school leaders have had just a few short weeks to sort through the nearly 1200 pages of the bill to figure out how to leverage these resources for the greatest good. Success of the programs will require new models of public-private school collaboration. We share the hope of Congress that the wise practitioners in our schools will, with this assistance, creatively reach the goal of serving all children fairly, equitably and with highest quality.

For more information on private schools accessing federal resources, try the U.S. Dept. of Education's Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) at www.ed.gov/offices/OIIA/NonPublic.