

# EDUCATION DAILY<sup>®</sup>

The education community's independent daily news service

## BUDGET 2009

### Educators: Stimulus points to higher Title I baseline

Political difficulties could arise from cutting funding later

By Frank Wolfe

Educators are hoping the \$13 billion included for Title I in both the House and Senate versions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act represents a new baseline for the program.

Yet it remains to be seen what will happen in many states if the additional federal money for Title I dries up in FY 2012, as the Title I stimulus monies are to flow only until Sept. 30, 2011. In addition to the Title I funds, the package in both congressional bodies includes \$79 billion for fiscal relief for states, \$13 billion for IDEA Part B, and \$15.6 billion for Pell Grants.

The administration has told leading legislators that the education increases are for the next two years and do not represent a baseline for future funding.

However, some say it will be extremely difficult politically and administratively for the administration to back off its new commitment to Title I and other programs. Indeed, many educators are expecting a new era of sustained increases in education funding.

"I think the House, the Senate and the administration are not putting \$13 billion into Title I lightly," said Mary Kusler, assistant director of government relations at the American Association of School Administrators. "They don't want to be in a position three years from now where they're cutting funding for education."

Education analysts worry, however, that the stimulus funding does nothing to address the inequities in the current Title I formulas and could be used as general education money, not for aid to low-income students.

"You've got to be naïve to think this money will go away someday," said Michael Petrilli, vice president of national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. "Any backtracking will be viewed as a cut."

(See **BASELINE** on page 3)

## Today's Highlights

Vol. 42, No. 19 • Monday, February 2, 2009

### EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

ED grant program provides funds for educational TV show ..... Page 3

The Week in Review ..... Page 2

Legislative Update ..... Pages 4-5

Daily Briefing ..... Page 6

## ASSESSMENTS

### States demonstrate value of international benchmarks

By Erin Uy

In results that experts say make the case for implementing common, international benchmarks across the nation, Minnesota and Massachusetts demonstrated in a recent international test that globally minded education reform efforts helped boost student achievement.

The states' academic gains since they began participating in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, a math and science test in which nearly 50 countries participated, will likely fuel the argument for benchmarking student achievement against international standards.

Education stakeholders in both Minnesota and Massachusetts, the only states to participate individually in TIMSS, have revamped math and science curriculum, professional development, assessments, and school leadership with respect to TIMSS outcomes and the education strategies of competing nations.

Minnesota and Massachusetts are poised to serve as models for the nation, said William Schmidt, a Michigan State University professor and leading TIMSS researcher. "So often we try to reform things and we never get anywhere," Schmidt said. The states' success is "a great story for the country, for states to see this isn't impossible."

(See **BENCHMARKS** on page 6)

## ED grant program provides funds for educational TV show

### New show to model reading comprehension skills for students in grades 1-3

By Wangui Njuguna

A television show in production with funding from an Education Department Ready to Learn Grant will give children in grades 1-3 a fun way to acquire reading comprehension skills, according to Parke Richeson, business manager for WTTW National Productions in Chicago.

WTTW's *Mission to Planet 429* is one of four educational television programs supported by ED, which will provide \$47.5 million for the shows' production, distribution of teaching resources, and evaluation of their impact and use of scientifically based research. The shows' total production cost is \$100 million.

The Ready-to-Learn discretionary grant, funded at \$24 million annually, supports educational television programs for children in preschool and elementary school. Since its inception in 2000, the grant program has provided funding for public television programming, including *Dragon Tales*, *Between the Lions*, *Arthur*, *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, *Reading Rainbow*, and *Sesame Street*.

The grant requires that a portion of the funding be dedicated to scientifically based research to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies the shows use.

Studies on *Sesame Street*, for instance, have found preschool-aged children who watch the show regularly showed "significantly greater growth in an assortment of academic skills related to the alphabet, numbers, body parts, shapes, relational terms, and sorting and classification," according to Shalom M. Fisch, president of MediaKidz Research & Consulting.

### Mining for information

*Mission to Planet 429* features two explorers visiting Earth from the Planet Cyron. Their mission is to gather information in order to save Cyron from peril.

Although other children's educational programs have focused on literacy, the show is the first to teach reading comprehension by "mining for information," according to marketing materials. The show's plot, dialogue, visuals and characters are designed to exhibit four key components of reading: confidence, comprehension behaviors, acquiring new words, and use of background knowledge.

Show producers hope that as 6- to 9-year-olds watch the characters decipher new information, they will gain an enthusiasm for reading and an understanding of how reading is used to problem solve, Richeson said in an e-mail.

The characters will model reading comprehension behaviors such as making inferences, questioning the text, rereading, and checking progress. Children will gain new vocabulary from the characters' various adventures.

The show will also emphasize the use of background knowledge when encountering new text.

"Kids will realize that they should always draw on what they already may know about, have seen, or read about before in order to try and decipher and understand a new situation or information being presented," Richeson said.

In addition to the show, books, Web content, and other teaching materials will also be available.

*Mission to Planet 429* is set to premiere on public television in 2010.

## BUDGET 2009

### BASELINE (continued from page 1)

Petrilli predicted a "radically different role" for the federal government in providing general aid to education, rather than a focused targeting of support for low-income schools.

"It is very likely that members of Congress will feel entitled to add more regulations on the nation's schools because they're providing more funding for the nation's schools," Petrilli said.

### Replacement funds

The new infusion of Title I dollars will replace dollars lost on the state level as a result of the recession, but will not begin to cover the shortfall in funds authorized under NCLB, said Rich Long, executive director of the National Association of State Title I Directors.

"Part of the money is designed not for traditional Title I funding, but a stimulus to hire

people or keep them from being fired," Long said.

Last week, Randi Weingarten, president of the 1.4 million-member American Federation of Teachers, echoed that sentiment and noted that New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was arguing in favor of the stimulus to prevent a raft of teacher layoffs. On Jan. 30, Bloomberg announced in his budget for next year plans to fire nearly 14,000 teachers and classroom aides.

But one state Title I director said it would be hard to plan for future hiring, given the uncertainty of the federal funding picture.

"My concern is whether it is a one-shot deal or whether they will sustain the funds in the future," said Laurie Matzke, Title I director for North Dakota. "Districts can't hire new teachers or establish preschool programs with the additional funds if they will just lose it all the next year."