

National PTA urges sustained funding for PIRCs

The Obama administration has proposed consolidating funds for Parental Information and Resource Centers with grants for charter schools and public school choice, a move that has the National PTA asking whether PIRCs will sustain their current funding levels.

PTA, which met in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, has put parental involvement, including ESEA's statutory requirements and PIRC funding in the FY 2011 budget, on its legislative agenda. The organization would like assurance that the centers would continue at their current funding level of \$39.3 million under the proposed \$490 million Expanding Educational Options program.

"We're told they're supportive, but we haven't seen it in writing," PTA President Chuck Saylor told *Education Daily*®. "Is it going to be distributed in a similar fashion as we have seen it in the past?"

Without going into specifics about how much funding PIRCs would receive under the consolidated program, ED spokeswoman Elaine Quesinberry said grantees in public school choice and charter school programs "would be required to develop and implement parent information and outreach strategies."

"It is too early in the process to have any specific

details on these strategies," she said. "Ensuring that families are provided with better and clearer data on the schools in their communities and are engaged in their children's education is a priority throughout the ESEA reauthorization proposal."

Assurances sought

Saylor said he understands the administration's efforts to support best practices and encourage competition, but said PTA's concerns stemmed from previous budget cuts for the program under the Bush administration.

PTA lobbied in support of sustained funding then and is doing so now, he said, because PIRCs need to be "adequately" funded to continue partnerships with school districts in low-income communities. PTA and PIRCs, for instance, collaborate in an initiative to get parents in a dozen urban areas participating in their children's schools and to increase parents' awareness of PTA as a resource in Title I schools.

"The [Obama] administration and ED have really bent over backwards to say that parent engagement is one of the keys to school success they support," Saylor said. "There are some things that are absolutely excellent in PIRC. We just hope we don't lose that momentum."

PTA proposes increase in Title I parent involvement set-aside

By Wangui Njuguna

School districts that receive at least \$500,000 in Title I, Part A funds are currently required to spend at least 1 percent for parent involvement, but National PTA President Chuck Saylor said the organization is working to craft legislation that would ensure that parental engagement activities are not treated as "more or less a check-off box."

He explained that the legislation would support scaling up parental engagement best practices and increase the amount LEAs must set aside for parent involvement activities from 1 percent of an LEA's Title I allocation to 2 percent.

"There is no central mechanism to translate federal parent involvement policies into general practice in states and local communities," according to the organization's 2010 policy agenda. "Thus, there is little evidence that states, districts, and schools are implementing [ESEA]'s parent involvement provisions to meaningfully engage families in the education of their children."

Saylor said Rep. Carolyn McCathy, D-N.Y., has expressed an interest in introducing the bill, which would codify PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, including examples of action plans for creating a wel-

coming school environment, promoting student success, and working with other community resources to engage parents in their children's education.

PTA is also calling on the Education Department to establish performance standards and indicators that will support states, districts and schools in the implementation and evaluation of effective family engagement practices and policies.

Other recommendations include:

- Establish state-level family engagement coordinating councils, composed of family members and other stakeholders, to coordinate and integrate systemic family engagement initiatives that support children from cradle to career.
- Amend Title II to include teacher and principal training on models of family engagement that increase student achievement.
- Extend parental involvement requirements to SEAs and LEAs under the Title I, Part D Neglected & Delinquent program to include state-, local- and school-level family involvement plans, including for each correctional facility.

The standards are available at www.pta.org/2037.htm. Read the complete policy agenda at www.pta.org/PPA10.pdf.