

CAN Report

“Show me the Money!!” say Special Educators

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While the past few months have witnessed a continuing downturn in the economy that is likely to impact schools next year, there is some good news concerning funding for students with exceptionalities. With a new President in place working with a Congress controlled by his own democratic party, we are seeing a positive change in funding that should help us through this downturn and as we work to provide quality services to our students. Specifically, since January 1, Congress has approved the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), commonly known as the economic stimulus plan, finished work on the budget for the current fiscal year, and has received President Obama's budget request for the next fiscal year.

ARRA includes the largest increase in Special Education funding that we have ever seen. Specifically, the economic stimulus bill will fund grants to states for IDEA Part B at \$11.3 billion, Section 619 at \$400 million and Part C at \$500 million. Permit me to put this into perspective. IDEA Part B funding is currently at about \$10.9 Billion for the year. If you have been listening to the arguments for many years now, you realize that each year, we have to fight to get a modest increase, usually much, much less than \$1 billion. In fact, IDEA Part B funding at the time that President Obama took office was at about 17% of the promised 40% of the costs of educating children with disabilities, a level that it has hovered around for several years. ARRA more than doubles that funding by adding an additional \$11.3 billion to current funding and bring us to about 34% for the next year. Part C funding for early intervention, which has been stuck at around \$435 million dollars for the past few years, received

an increase of \$500 million dollars, also more than double. Finally, Section 619 funding, for Pre-school Special Education, also more than doubled its funding of about \$374 million with an increase of \$400 million. In addition, the ARRA provides for a CEC-backed extension on the moratorium for several controversial Medicaid regulations that would cut or eliminate reimbursements for services mandated by IDEA, as well as funding for other health and education initiatives.

The Department of Education issued a statement in early March describing the timetable for the availability of these ARRA funds for IDEA and guidelines for their use. Most notably, the guidelines suggest that, among a few other things, they may be used to “Obtain state-of-the art assistive technology devices and provide training in their use to enhance access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.”

These remarkable increases will initially go to the States who should be passing them down to local school districts. In addition, ARRA also provides a total of \$53.6 billion for a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This money is intended to go to states to provide fiscal relief to prevent tax increases and cutbacks in critical education and other services. The Act limits how these funds may be used, but included under the permissible areas are activities under IDEA. Also, ARRA includes \$650 million for the Enhancing Education Through Technology, an existing program under ESEA that encourages the use of technology in our schools to improve student achievement.

While the ARRA will provide some wonderful and needed new monies to our schools for special education, the annual budget process continues. Recall that our fiscal year begins October 1 of each year. Each year the president issues his or her budget request to Congress way back in February and asks that Congress act on it by the following September 30. With President Bush, a Republican, in office and the Congress controlled by Democrats, and with the Presidential and Congressional election taking much time, this past years process bogged down and the fiscal year began on October 1, 2009 without agreed upon appropriations in most areas, including education. In order to keep the government operating, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution to keep funding the government at the previous year's appropriation levels. With a new administration in place, Congress has recently completed its work on funding for the current fiscal year that it began several months ago. While it is based on prior thinking, it still contains fairly good news for children with exceptionalities, including modest increases in IDEA Part B, Part C, and some of the support programs in Part D. Regrettably it includes a decrease in the Technology and Media Service program under Part D. Level funding was provided for Section 619 (pre-school special education) and for The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act. As that appropriations process represents the past administration and its workings with Congress, the outcome is not particularly meaningful of future directions in funding.

What are important to note is the appropriation requests President

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President's Message

Betty Nelson, President

The beginning of 2009 has been a flurry of activity for TAM. In January several TAM members presented pre-conference workshops at the TRLD Conference (Technology, Reading and Learning Diversity) in San Francisco as part of a new partnership. In January we also continued our presence and association with the ATIA Conference (Assistive Technology Industry Association) in Orlando. Many TAM members presented at this conference and we also were advisors for the Research and Professional Development strand. We have already begun our preparation and role responsibilities for ATIA's new conference which will debut in Chicago in October.

In April TAM was very active at CEC in Seattle. TAM sponsored over forty

(40) feature, concurrent and poster sessions throughout the conference. Several members also presented in a featured assistive technology strand sponsored by CEC and coordinated by TAM member Dave Edyburn. Seattle also featured a TAM Board meeting, our annual business meeting with our membership and a membership social that was sponsored jointly with the Division of Visual Impairments (DVI).

This year will bring some exciting changes as we move forward with efforts to "go green" in keeping with CEC's move in the same direction... more on that in the near future. We are also developing new and exciting products for training and information regarding assistive technology implementation in our schools.

Last, but certainly not least, we are seeking nominations for our Board. The positions that are open include Vice President (this position is a four year commitment and the nominee must have held a previous position on the Board) and Secretary. Nominations should be forwarded to Past President Tara Jeffs at JEFFST@ecu.edu

I want to express my appreciation to each of you for your commitment to membership in TAM. We are one of the few CEC Divisions that actually grew in membership last year. Let's maintain that trend!

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Obama and his administration make to Congress for future fiscal years. While working to address the current economic crisis, President Obama did deliver his budget "blueprint" for fiscal year 2010 to Congress in late February. The \$3.6 trillion blueprint outlined broad spending, but we had to wait a few months until specific numbers emerged for our IDEA programs as well as for the Javits Gifted and Talented. When those figures were released for IDEA Programs, CEC was disappointed that funding did not increase or decrease the amount these programs were funded in FY2009. The Administration explained its choice to level fund IDEA based on the amounts of money allocated to IDEA in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The Administration believes its

request for level funding "is appropriate" because much of the ARRA dollars will be available in FY2010 for the 2010-2011 school year. In addition, the President's budget recommended curtailing any funding for the Javits Gifted and Talented program. CEC will continue to work with members of Congress, who must act on the President's request, to improve funding.

Thus, with the economic crisis continuing we can see a bright light in the acknowledgement, through the Economic Stimulus Plan, those jobs need be created or saved in special education. We await the nomination of a new Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, recommendations on the reauthorization of NCLB and perhaps even the

beginnings of discussions about reauthorizing IDEA. It should be an exciting couple of months.

Conference Update

TAM was recently invited to participate in the International Association for Special Education conference in Alicante, Spain at the University of Alicante. Several TAM members presented a strand on assistive technology and universal design for learning. These members were Jim Gardner, Diane Painter, Sarah McPherson, Deborah Newton, Betty Nelson, and John Castellani. Our presence at this conference helps to make TAM an international organization.