

K-12 Education Legislation and Funding Update webinar

August 30, 2023

Question and Answer Segment

Note: Content has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity

Science of Reading/ELA

Q: Between funding uncertainties and Science of Reading legislation and trends, how might this impact decisions on supplemental ELA curriculum? Is there hesitation to make a purchase or an opportunity to make a change?

A: It depends on the state legislation and regulation that shapes the initiative and to what extent it gives opportunities to core and supplemental publishers. Companies need to do their research and analysis.

Q: Will districts that recently purchased "approved" ELA materials be reimbursed for those purchases?

A: They should be if there's a contract between a vendor and district.

Q: How can I support literacy, holistically and across early childhood education & secondary education, without overstepping any state mandated training/curricula from the state on Science of Reading (from policy to practice-level implementation)?

A: A lot of state legislation is very broad and they let the Department of Education and State Board of Education establish regulations. Every state is training in different ways. Some are mandating that teachers get trained and turning to the post-secondary sector to do that. Others are wanting to have their own very extensive professional development programs.

Q: Will new state programs related to Science of Reading for instructional materials generally be winner take all?

A: It really depends on the state. We have seen some states with very short lists, where it may not be winner take all, but 3 or 4 winners take all. Unlike the established adoption states, many of these states that have new Science of Reading programs have not done adoptions before. They don't have the regulations and disclosures typical of adoption states, so you will have to spend a lot of time going state by state.

Q: How has The Science of Reading/ Structured Literacy changed Federal/State funding for districts/schools?

A: We've seen a strong uptick in funding for Science of Reading programs. Most of the Science of Reading initiatives have been funded with new monies or special allocations from the states, particularly over the past several years. Whether they're taking money away from established ELA funding in districts, it could be happening at the K-3 level, but we really don't know.

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Education Funding/Policy

Q: Will there be an extension of ESSER III?

A: There's no appetite in the United States Congress for extending these funds. \$80 billion remains available, which is roughly, 43% of the funds. One exception to an extension is if it's a large capital project, like a new HVAC system in a school. If you're a provider of software, instructional materials, ed tech items, professional development, I can't imagine there'll be any extensions.

Q: What is the expected outlook for Perkins funding after 2024?

A: It falls into that bucket of federally funded programs, that have seen very good funding over the past couple of years. I see Perkins as flat, up probably one, maybe two percent. You never know, the Department of Education could take the money it gets from Congress and adjust the allocations. It's my guess that the Biden administration will give an across-the-board increase.

Q: What are you hearing and seeing around policy on AI in education?

A: There have been some bills about Chat GPT. Legislators in some states got very concerned and that legislation had more to do with the ability of certain AI apps and platforms to support cheating at the college level, but also, at the K 12 level. What I've seen more than anything with K-12, with AI, is let's have a study or let's have a commission in the state, which usually says that legislators really don't know much about the topic.

The Department of Education earlier this year put out a booklet on artificial intelligence and education which I've sent to a number of clients, and I think they found it to be somewhat or very helpful.

Q: How do you see funds for operating expenditures (e.g., software subscriptions) impacting capital expenditures (e.g., hardware)? What's likely to be cut first as a result of ESSER and the like coming to an end?

A: Capital expenditures are likely to be cut first. There was a great deal of funding for and purchasing of devices during the pandemic. Going forward, districts will want to make sure those devices have updated software and support. In other words, operating expenditures will be the priority.

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Q: As a nonprofit in the education sector, we ask our program partners (mainly schools) to contribute 20% of the cost. How can I assist them in finding funding to support their portion of the cost?

A: There are many opportunities for obtaining grants for schools and education programming. However, the grant landscape is very large. It consists of government grants from all types of entities: federal, state, and local. There are also grants available from an array of foundations, non-profit associations, and corporations. All of this adds up to an expansive and complex grant landscape. The best way to navigate this landscape is to hire a consultant or advisory service that specializes in helping clients find and apply for education grants.

DEI and Divisive Concepts Legislation

Q: What are strategies around managing concerns with DEI legislation, especially if DEI mindset is at the heart of how we develop our curriculum and manage our company?

A: You'll need to find out what states have passed such concepts and be aware of what states you're operating in. Look at FAQs and guidance from the state boards of education to see if they might be helpful. You may find yourself wanting to operate in other states, even though you may be missing big opportunities, for example, in Florida. I've seen publishers walk away from certain states because they didn't want to deal with certain concepts. It just means being nimble and navigating those states.

Q: Do you think we'll continue to see ""divisive concept"" legislation, and how will it impact future purchases?

A: I don't see this type of legislation going away anytime soon because it sells to a certain part of the electorate, to a certain type of voter. Over time, these bills or these laws may be amended or revised but frankly, I don't see many more states adding these.