Appropriations/ Funding

This is the perfect time of year to be in Washington, DC to influence education funding decisions. Setting federal funding levels is split into two separate processes: budget and appropriations. The budget process sets the overall amount of money that Congress can spend on discretionary areas such as education, health and training and mandatory programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and the school lunch program. The appropriations process takes the overall amount of money dedicated for discretionary funding and assigns funding to specific programs. Currently Congress is working to finish the budget process for the coming year.

At the beginning of February, President Bush presented his FY 2009 (2009 – 2010 school year) budget to Congress and proposed to level-fund education. This cut would have included the first major proposed cut to IDEA, drastic reductions to Safe and Drug Free Schools and the elimination of the Education Technology Block Grant and Perkins Career and Technical Education Program. Once again, President Bush submitted his budget to Congressional budget committees controlled by the Democrats; therefore, those committees did not give much thought to his budget.

Instead the Senate passed a budget that provided an additional $8.8 billion over the President’s levels that could be spent on education and workforce training programs, with specifically $5.4 billion of that slated for education. The House was able to pass a budget that provided an additional $7.1 billion for all education and training programs. The next step is to iron out the differences between the Senate and House bills and get to the same number. This will hopefully be finished during the AASA advocacy conference.

Once the Budget is completed and again approved by both the House and the Senate, Congress will move onto the appropriations process. It is here that school administrators should advocate for IDEA funding, funding for Title I and other local district priorities. Members, especially those on the Appropriations Committees, will look forward to hearing our arguments. The timing of the AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference is perfect for making the case for an increased investment in education. Be sure to talk both in terms of actual dollar requests and specific services you will be able to provide for students with additional funding.

Talking Points:
1. Urge Congress to increase their investment in public education by providing a significant increase for IDEA this year of at least $2 billion. This would bring the federal contribution to IDEA funding to 20 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure for every child in special education instead of the current 17 percent. It is time for Congress to live up to its promise to fully fund IDEA.
2. Ask members of Congress to provide additional funding for Title I to help meet the federal commitment of assisting students in poverty. AASA supports the change of the Title I funding formula to include targeting based solely on the percentages of low-income students, instead of including the raw numbers of poor students. This disproportionately hurts rural and small school districts.
3. Urge your members of Congress to support the continuation of the Title I hold harmless for local districts that prevents states from reducing a local district’s allocation as they set aside the state four percent for school improvement purposes.
4. Urge your members of Congress to oppose passage of any funding bills or amendments that cut federal support for education.