



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

It's not too often — fortunately, you might say — that I will take advantage of my opportunity with you here to enter into high-minded discussions of federal education policy, and I don't intend to do so today ... not too much, anyway.

On second thought, though, I suppose my three-column series on postsecondary education finance, which ran in this space through September, was exactly that. Hmm. Maybe I really *do* need to come up with some fresher and lighter topics once I crank up the column again for the spring semester on January 20! Nonetheless ...

Many readers know that the nascent portion of my career was spent in K-12 education, and my experience in elementary and secondary ed was capstoned by a stint as the state superintendent of schools for Illinois.

If your sweat and toil for SIU happens to be on the non-academic side of the house, you might be surprised to learn that many of us who are administrators — and who have come up through the academic ranks — do our best (albeit not very well some of the time) to still stay somewhat connected to our disciplines and the major developments that take place within them. SIUC Provost Susan Ford, as one example very familiar to me, remains highly engaged as an anthropologist and active researcher.

While not nearly involved in my own discipline as Susan has been in hers, for anyone even passively watching the K-12 scene over the past dozen years, it has been impossible to ignore the impact and reach of the defining federal policy for America's public schools during that period: the No Child Left Behind Act.

Even if you're not a follower of K-12 education policy, unless you've been living off the grid for a decade, you have heard of this (some would say) detested law that was the most recent iteration of its progenitor, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. To quote Alyson Klein in *Education Week* (a national newspaper of record for K-12, akin to the *Chronicle* for HIED): "Congress seems to be on the verge of leaving the almost-universally despised No Child Left Behind Act ... well, behind." And indeed, last week the United States House of Representatives passed by a wide bipartisan margin a successor bill to guide elementary and secondary education policy going forward — the Every Student Succeeds Act — designed to reverse the worst of NCLB's excesses. ESSA now goes over to the U.S. Senate.

The purpose of giving this little background, however, is not to get into a dissection of the current law's weaknesses (and there are many), but rather to suggest that what the Congress has done to improve federal K-12 policy might have some parallel for us in higher education — as we await the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (the last one being in 2008).

There is thinking in some circles that since NCLB has been almost disposed of, attention can soon turn to reauthorization of the HEA ... and that is something that we will need to pay close attention to when it happens. According to the American Council on Education, assuming that the new K-12 bill is enacted, the "path may be cleared" for Congress to work on a new HIED bill as soon as next year.

As with the federal elementary and secondary act, the Higher Education Act is so broad and sweeping that there will be only a few aspects of college and university operations not encompassed within it. So we'll see where all that leads.

Some well-known policy types in DC and elsewhere have expressed a very different view — namely,

that HEA reauthorization will be kicked down the road for several years, maybe even until after the 2020 elections! Whether or not that's the case, I don't know. But Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chair Lamar Alexander of Tennessee — a former U.S. Secretary of Education — has said he wants to tee up movement on the Higher Education Act sooner rather than later, now that NCLB is out of the way.

No matter the case, whenever the HEA finally gets placed on the legislative docket, I think we can identify some important approaches or guiding themes that our elected officials rightly hewed to in their fix of No Child Left Behind — lessons that are critical and which we *must* see reflected in the next version of the Higher Education Act ... no matter when that may be:

- The Every Student Succeeds Act governing K-12 removes any opportunity for the Secretary of Education to serve as a de facto national superintendent of schools — which he has largely been able to do throughout his seven-year appointment. I worked closely with Secretary Duncan throughout my term as state supe — during which time Arne was serving as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools — and he is a good person with high integrity. But so much centralized power is difficult to wield effectively in a sector as varied and divergent as American higher education; states and the institutions themselves should combine to at least hold equal standing. Any successor act needs to maintain a goodly degree of decision making and control at the state and local levels — to the extent possible, while still ensuring equity and efficiency — thus supporting a more diffuse distribution of power.
- Under the new ESSA, the states gain more control over their accountability structures. While states still must assess students in grades 3-8, and once in high school, it is now up to each state to decide how much and in what manner tests should count for exhibiting accountability. Especially as tax-supported public institutions, we ought never shy away from demonstrating our accountability to multiple stakeholders. However, this devolution of the accountability function allows institutions to better show their effectiveness in myriad ways that account for different institutional types, student demographic profiles, expected outcomes, regional service demands, and the like. It may be that the Department of Education is now starting to understand this and changing direction, at least a little: You may have noted in June that USED dramatically scaled down a plan to actually rate colleges — backing off to a revised college scorecard website as a consumer information [tool](#).
- As alluded to above, most federal education acts are a huge conglomeration of stuff mashed up and then dished out under various “titles” or sections, which are further divided into subtitles, parts, subparts, chapters, and subchapters. The successor K-12 law rightfully advances the increased consolidation of federal education policy for the elementary and secondary levels. To illustrate: ESSA takes what had been dozens of separate programs and, instead, includes them within a block grant. Numerous of those programs hadn't seen significant funding for years — and the block grant approach will allow schools to target which programs they put their federal funding behind to get the biggest bang for the buck given unique institutional needs. In some schools that may be education technology ... in others, Advanced Placement ... while still others will focus on partnerships in the STEM fields. As long as block granting is not used as cover to decrease federal support, this approach — to the extent it can be applied to us in the HIED sector — allows necessary flexibility and institution-driven decision making.
- Finally, Diane Ravitch, a prolific writer, researcher, and blogger on ed policy — in talking about the waning days of NCLB — called for the K-12 community to “celebrate the demise of a terrible law that saw punishment as the federal strategy for school reform.” This never works. Over the last few years, we've witnessed a growing chorus of prominent foundations, think tanks, national consortia (usually funded by panoply of interest groups), individual philanthropists, and other do-gooders tending to the higher education fields who would take us down the same punitive path as NCLB did, in hopes of “improving” and “fixing” the public schools. Yes — we can and must join as partners with the feds to address the most intractable problems facing our universities and students. As an example: All of us can share some risk in dealing with the growing level of defaulted student loans (endemic in the for-profit sector) through such things as reducing over-borrowing and pushing on completion efforts. But any notion of penalizing all students and institutions in an attempt to address the egregious behavior of a few bad actors won't fly. It never worked for me when I was teaching school ... and it won't with federal education policy either. The good news, however, is that the Senate HELP Committee seems to be starting to get that for us — as they've been commissioning policy papers over the past year to identify ideas that could eventually make their way into the HEA reauthorization bill.

Well ... sorry! I guess this *has* turned into another policy essay. But all this is important stuff for us, and I want to make sure I do my part to keep the entire SIU Community apprised of what's at stake depending upon how things unfold in Washington over the coming years. I'll use this venue to provide (hopefully shorter) updates when warranted.

As you read at the top of this missive, we'll be taking a pause in the *Connection* — coming back to you on January 20. There has been NO movement on the state budget for higher education, nor for many social service agencies desperately needing funds, over the past two weeks. Of course, if that changes, I'll make sure to provide a status update or other report to you as warranted.

I know we still have to push through finals and commencements, but let me say once again: My best to everyone for a fun, safe, and restful break period. Enjoy your time with family and friends. If you're traveling, come back to us safely. And for those SIU staffers who serve as critical 24/7 personnel (e.g., police, physical plant, broadcasting, clinical providers, and others) working for us through the holidays, thank you for your dedication to our University.

See you in 2016!

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



The commitment of SIUC and the psychology department to both student learning and research attracted pediatric psychologist Karla Fehr to the faculty in 2014. Karla, who earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, has tremendous passion for teaching, conducting research and providing clinical services to children and adolescents.

An assistant professor in the clinical psychology program, Karla is specifically interested in working with children in medical settings or with chronic medical conditions. She says she wants to ensure “positive emotional, behavioral and social outcomes of children and adolescents within the context of their medical condition.”

Behavioral sleep medicine is an important area of study for Karla. She is looking into parent knowledge of healthy sleep habits in children and adolescents, and how that impacts whether the parents seek treatment for those issues and what types of treatments are pursued.

“A particular area of interest of mine is adapting interventions for use with preschool-aged children, as there are often not as many interventions available for these young children,” she explains. “In this area, I am currently working on developing and testing a targeted intervention to teach coping strategies to young children (ages 4-6) with difficulties falling or staying asleep.”

Play interventions and pretend play also figure prominently into Karla's research. She is focusing on using pretend play as a way of teaching coping strategies to children to target specific pediatric issues – such as falling and/or staying asleep.

“Since young children cannot often verbally discuss their worries, play can be used to help them express themselves and learn to cope with those fears,” she said.

Karla, who works closely with the Clinical Center at SIUC and teaches mostly graduate-level courses, also is exploring which aspects of pretend play abilities are important in helping preschool-aged children develop coping and problem-solving skills.

Karla is a great example of our faculty's commitment to research that enhances the well-being of people everywhere.
