

Federal Investment in K-12 Education Technology Providing Critical Funding for the Integration of Technology Into Teaching and Learning

The Issue

Federal investment is critical to elementary and secondary education and to the availability and effectiveness of education technology and digital content. SIIA's interest in this is twofold. First, federal funds help ensure all students have the opportunity to meet high academic standards, become productive citizens in our democracy and economy, and help fill the nation's shortage of skilled high-tech workers. Second, they provide a continuous and predictable funding stream for education technology to expand the market for digital content and better integrate technology into teaching and learning.

While funding for education and education technology have increased substantially in recent years, the need continues to grow in the form of rising enrollments, a continuation of the digital divide, and a need for teacher training in areas such as technology. With the federal government experiencing its first budget surpluses in decades and the economy strong, now is the time for increased investment. However, there are many competing interests, and congressional skepticism toward federal aid for K-12 education, including education technology, is widespread.

Congress appropriates federal funding for K-12 education and education technology programs on an annual basis through a year long legislative process. This federal investment now exceeds \$21 billion, including about \$1.5 billion in direct and indirect support for education technology. Federal funding constitutes about 7 percent of total elementary and secondary education spending, but that share increases to between one-quarter and one-third for education technology.

SIIA Position

Federal funding provides about one-third of total public support for education technology and is therefore critical to its integration and effectiveness. These resources help to both ensure all students have the opportunity to meet high academic standards and acquire the necessary workforce skills, as well as provide the continuous and predictable funding stream necessary to expand the market for digital content and ensure continued industry research and product development.

Federal education technology investment supports the use and integration of modern resources to maximize learning opportunities and student achievement. In the U.S. today, less than 20 percent of public schools are considered "high tech," while a striking 80% of teachers do not feel adequately prepared to take advantage of technology in their classrooms.

Federal education technology investment empowers teaching and learning in all educational settings-especially where students are most at risk of academic failure. This investment is derived from a number of critical education programs, including Title I, Title II Eisenhower Professional Development, Title VI Innovative Strategies, and the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund and

Challenge Grants programs. These and other federal programs account for nearly a third of the entire K-12 school investment in technology.

Federal funding for education technology is vital because it is used by schools to (1) plan their technology investments, (2) acquire instructional and administrative software and hardware, (3) improve teacher training in technology, (4) maintain classroom level technical support, and (5) assess the results of technology adaptations against increases in student achievement.

Current Status

The FY2001 budget process is once again expected to be a highly contentious one, with no area more affected by election year politics than education. Securing a substantial increase in federal education and education technology investment will require sustained lobbying on the part of advocates. SIIA members can make a difference as proponents for investing in technology to improve teaching and learning. Industry must explain in precise terms why education funding, including for school technology access, is such a critical area for federal leadership and investment. SIIA members should also enlist the support of educators in making the case.

Congress and the President reached agreement last September to increase fiscal year 2000 federal education spending by some \$2.2 billion (6%), including about \$45 million more for education technology programs. Recently, President Clinton kicked off the FY2001 debate with a proposal to increase federal education funding by \$4.5 billion (12.6 percent), which would constitute the largest every increase. (FY2001 starts October 1, 2001, but for most federal education programs it corresponds to the 2002-2003 school year.)

Among the key issues to be resolved in the budget resolution is the annual appropriations spending cap. In 1997, Congress and the President reached a multi-year balanced budget agreement that included tight budget caps strictly limiting spending growth. However, both Congress and the Administration have had a difficult time living under those unrealistic caps, and have turned to budget gimmickry in the last two years to remain artificially under the caps. This year, with the strong economy producing considerable budget surplus, it is expected that Congress will agree to raise those caps. The question now being debated among the Republican Majority is by how much. Both parties appear committed to reserving the Social Security surplus for that program, but there exists a sizeable and growing surplus outside of Social Security. Other competing interests include paying down the national debt and cutting taxes.

Additional Information

For additional information, please visit SIIA's Web site at <http://www.sii.net>, or contact Mark Schneiderman at (202) 452-1600, ext. 329, or marks@sii.net.