

Policy Watch

By C. Michael Ferraro and Jennifer Homer

ASTD and local chapter leaders keep an active eye on new resources and initiatives affecting training professionals, both at the federal and state levels.

To help members stay current on public policy activities that affect the learning and development field, ASTD monitors activities at the federal and state levels in the United States and regularly provides updates through this column and the quarterly ASTD Policy Brief at www.astd.org/publicpolicy.

With the help of IBM, ASTD recently posted a new tool to help learning professionals identify state resources for training, including grant funding, tax credits, and other public programs for specific industries and populations. The tool, posted at www.astd.org/publicpolicy, provides the name of each state-based training program, the status of the program, and a direct link to more information.

WorkforceFlorida.com is one example. The state offers the Quick Response Training (QRT) Program, which provides grant funding for customized training at new or expanding businesses, and the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Program, which provides grant funding for customized training at existing for-profit businesses.

On September 30th of this year, a group of ASTD chapter leaders and members of the Public Policy Council met with 18 congressional staffers to discuss several issues important to the learning and development community. Discussions for the meetings were first centered on the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) reauthorization, which has recently stalled with no action on the Senate side in recent months. It is likely that this issue will not be taken up again until the next legislative session in 2011.

The second discussion centered on a permanent extension of Section 127 of the IRS tax code for educational tax

credits. This provision of the tax code had been extended for 10 years and is up for renewal. Currently, there are two bills (S. 2851 and H.R. 5600) under consideration to make this a permanent part of the tax code.

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After the meetings on Capitol Hill, ASTD participants took part in a debrief session to discuss their experiences and next steps to help local chapters move forward in these areas.

In addition to the Workforce Investment Act and Section 127 of the IRS code, ASTD is following the U.S. Department of Education's proposed "gainful employment rule" that calls for for-profit schools and occupational training schools to prepare students for "gainful employment in a recognized occupation."

For-profit schools have been under scrutiny by members of the Senate's Health, Education, Labor,

and Pensions (HELP) Committee in recent months based on the perceived connection between increased student debt and fewer opportunities to gain employment. The Department of Education's proposed rule changes include provisions to police the quality of the for-profit higher education system and the integrity of student aid, and to provide more direction to describe states' responsibilities to authorize proprietary schools.

The Department of Education received more than 9,000 comments related to the proposed rule changes. Agency officials pushed back the publication of the final rule from the original target date of November 1 to sometime in early 2011.

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