

## Washington

# Negotiators Unveil Deal on Class-Size Plan

By Erik W. Robelen  
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The White House and congressional leaders struck a deal last week on President Clinton's class-size-reduction program that basically keeps it intact, but makes changes concerning the hiring of licensed teachers and districts' flexibility in spending class-size dollars.

Budget negotiators also agreed to raise discretionary spending for the Department of Education by about \$2.1 billion over last year's level to roughly \$35.6 billion in fiscal 2000. With an increase of slightly more than 6 percent from fiscal 1999, the total surpasses both the president's initial request and the amount Republicans had put in a budget bill vetoed by Mr. Clinton this month.

"The agreement we have reached has bipartisan support, and it keeps us on track to hiring 100,000 teachers by 2005," Mr. Clinton declared last Thursday.

Becky Campoverde, a spokeswoman for Republicans on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said Chairman Bill Goodling, R-Pa., was especially pleased about the program's heightened emphasis on

high-quality teachers and a provision allowing more funding for staff development. But, she added, "clearly, we would have liked much broader flexibility."

The agreement came after the rhetoric from both the Clinton administration and congressional Republicans had grown especially heated in recent days, as supporters and opponents of the program held competing press conferences leading up to the final deal.

The GOP had pushed through an original spending bill for the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education that would have allowed funding for the president's class-size program to be used by school districts for a variety of educational purposes. Citing that language and other concerns, Mr. Clinton vetoed the bill.

### Substantive Changes

Under the terms of the agreement as of late last week, \$1.3 billion would be appropriated for the second year of the class-size-reduction program, a \$100 million increase over fiscal 1999 but less than Mr. Clinton's \$1.4 billion request. At press time, discussions were continuing on



Education Secretary Richard W. Riley and Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., head to a news conference on education and the budget.

whether to add \$25 million.

The plan would raise from 15 percent to 25 percent the cap on how much of the aid could be spent on professional development of all teachers. It also would mandate that new teachers be certified, or have completed an al-

ternative route to certification, before they were hired with money from the federal program. Under current law, they can be hired so long as they are enrolled in a certification program.

"We think that's a very big  
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deal," said Amy Wilkins, a senior associate with the Education Trust, a Washington-based group that promotes higher achievement for poor and minority students. "It is the business of the federal government to ensure that every kid has a fully qualified teacher."

Furthermore, in districts where 10 percent or more of teachers were not state-certified, district officials could request waivers to use all of their fund-

ing for improving teacher quality, provided their states had been granted the added authority allowed under the federal Ed-Flex policy.

Beyond class-size reduction, the White House and Congress have also tentatively agreed on the rest of the Department of Education budget for the current fiscal year, though a few details were still being worked out late last week.

Under the plan, total funding for the department would rise from roughly \$33.5 billion in

fiscal 1999 to about \$35.6 billion. The president had proposed spending \$34.7 billion, and Republican leaders proposed \$35 billion, along with a 1 percent across-the-board agency-wide spending cut they also included in the vetoed spending bill.

Several significant changes were made to bridge differences between GOP lawmakers and Mr. Clinton. For one, negotiators agreed to boost the funding level from the vetoed bill by \$100 million for Title I grants to

school districts. That would raise the total for such grants to roughly \$7.9 billion, up from \$7.73 billion in fiscal 1999. After-school funding would be set at \$450 million, a \$150 million increase over the original Republican plan but still less than the president's \$600 million request. And \$200 million, or \$20 million more than in the vetoed bill, would be provided for the GEAR UP program. Another Clinton administration priority, GEAR UP seeks to encourage students from low-in-

come families to attend college. Fiscal 1999 funding stood at \$200 million for after-school programs and \$120 million for GEAR UP.

Congress last week approved another "continuing resolution," the fifth such stopgap-spending measure this fall. It allowed the government to continue operating through Nov. 17. The move was necessary because, although the new fiscal year began Oct. 1, five spending bills still have not been signed into law. Among those is the bill for the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education.