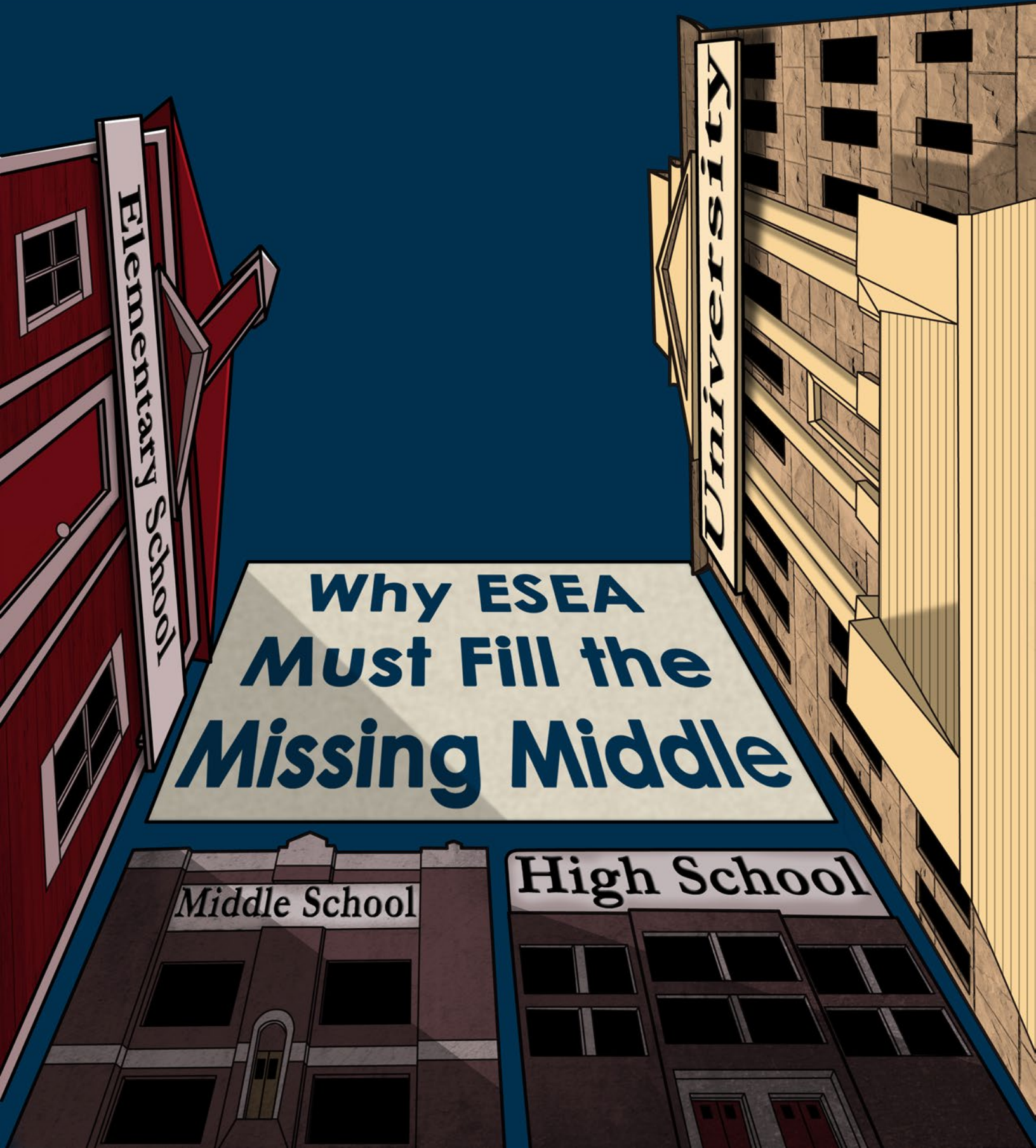


Never Too Late



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

May 2015



**Why ESEA
Must Fill the
Missing Middle**

Middle School

High School

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Acknowledgments

*This paper was written by **Rachel Bird Niebling**, senior policy and advocacy associate for comprehensive high school reform at the Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance), and **Phillip Lovell**, vice president of policy and advocacy for comprehensive high school reform at the Alliance. **Aharon Charnov**, website and video production manager at the Alliance, designed the cover art for this paper.*

*The **Alliance for Excellent Education** is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. www.all4ed.org*

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Introduction

When President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law in 2002, the U.S. national high school graduation rate was 72.6 percent.¹ Today, the national high school graduation rate has reached an all-time high of 81 percent² and the number of low-graduation-rate high schools has declined considerably.³ While this progress is notable, significant work remains to ensure *all* students graduate from high school prepared for college, a career, and civic life.

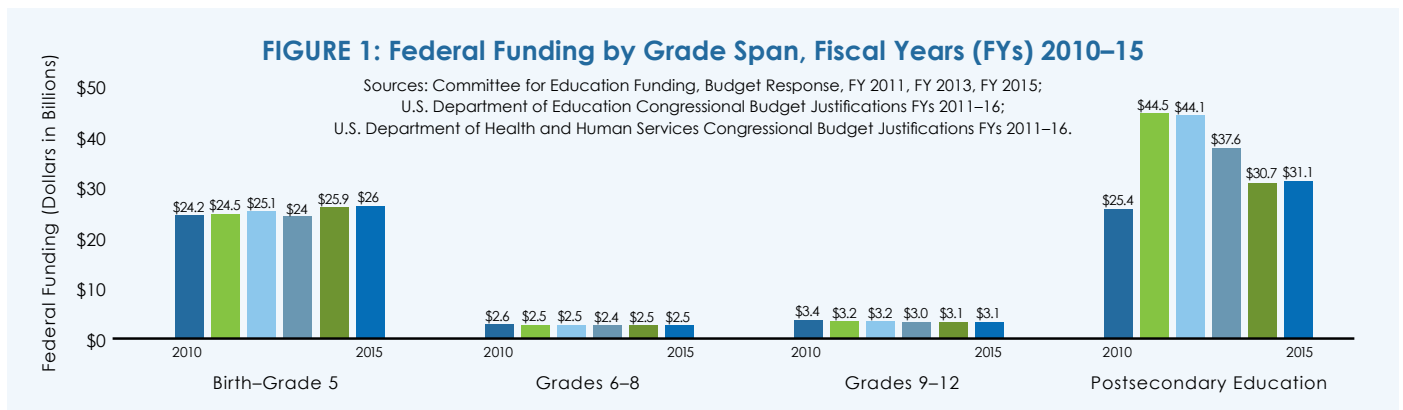
Twenty-nine percent of African American students and 25 percent of Hispanic students do not graduate from high school within four years, if at all,⁴ and there remain more than 1,200 high schools serving 1.1 million young people that fail to graduate at least one-third of their students.⁵ At the same time, federal funding for high school programs has stagnated, decreased, and even been eliminated through the years despite the successes that have resulted from federally funded efforts. The United States cannot continue to make progress toward ensuring that every student graduates from high school without supporting successful evidence-based reform in low-performing high schools.

The current work of the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides an opportunity to accelerate gains made in the overall national high school graduation rate and increase graduation rates for all student subgroups. ESEA must ensure that states and school districts target resources and reform toward high schools that repeatedly fail to graduate one-third or more of their students or consistently demonstrate low graduation rates among student subgroups. In addition, ESEA should include a specific funding stream dedicated to school turnaround and target funds toward these low-graduation-rate high schools.

High Schools Need More Support

As demonstrated in figure 1, between Fiscal Years (FYs) 2010 and 2015, federal funding for secondary school programs declined.⁶ Specifically, funding for several programs aimed at improving high schools and preparing students for graduation and the rigors of postsecondary education courses has decreased significantly during the last six fiscal years.⁷ Funding has declined for the

- School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, which focuses on raising student achievement in the lowest-performing elementary, middle, and high schools;⁸
- Advanced Placement (AP) Incentive program, which focuses on increasing the participation of low-income students in pre-AP and AP courses;⁹ and
- Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate (GEAR UP) program, which focuses on increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education.¹⁰



Moreover, the High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI), the only federal program dedicated exclusively to high school improvement by supporting dropout prevention and reentry programs, was eliminated in FY 2015.¹¹

This decline in funding exacerbates the problem of the “missing middle.” The term “missing middle” refers to the inequitable distribution of federal funds between grade spans, so named because federal resources for middle and high schools are paltry in comparison to investments in early childhood, elementary schools, and postsecondary education.

As highlighted in figure 2, the investment of federal education funding is extremely uneven among the grade spans. While the federal government should not reduce its spending in the early grades or postsecondary education, the federal government should strive for a more equitable allocation of resources. The U.S. Congress should make such an equitable allocation a top priority for the ESEA reauthorization. The returns on current investments in the early grades and postsecondary education will not be realized fully if the federal government does not build on those efforts by targeting investments to middle and high schools to prepare students for high school graduation. (See the appendix for additional information on the methodology used to calculate federal funding levels in figures 1 and 2.)

Getting Students to and Through High School

While investments in early childhood education and postsecondary education certainly are important, the federal government also must ensure that students receive the support needed to graduate from high school prepared for college, a career, and civic life. In fact, an econometric analysis conducted by Dr. James Heckman of the University of Chicago and Dr. Flavio Cunha of Rice University finds that while investments in early childhood are extremely important, they do not yield peak returns by themselves. Specifically the researchers state, “[e]arly investments ... not followed up by later investments are not productive.”¹²

Heckman and Cunha’s analysis simulated the effects of different investment strategies in disadvantaged young people throughout preschool, middle childhood, and adolescent years. The analysis finds dramatic improvements for high school graduation (see table 1 on the next page); increased college enrollment; and decreased conviction rates, probation, and welfare enrollment, among other things, for young people who received balanced intervention throughout childhood, as opposed to early childhood intervention only.

FIGURE 2: The Missing Middle—Federal Funding by Grade Span, Fiscal Year (FY) 2015

Sources: U.S. Department of Education Congressional Budget Justifications FY 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Congressional Budget Justifications FY 2016.

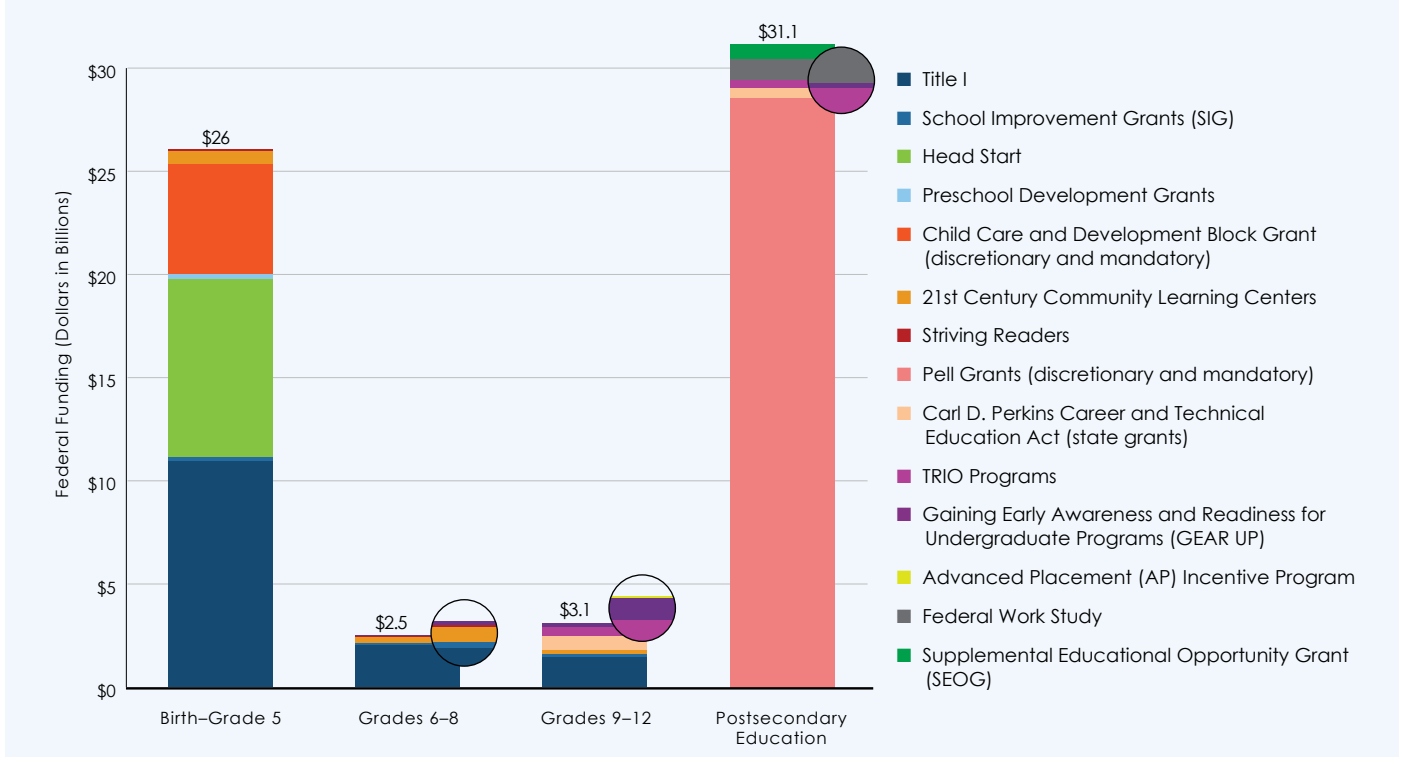


TABLE 1: The Impact of Intervention on High School Graduation Rates¹³

Type of intervention	High school graduation rate
No intervention	41%
Early childhood intervention only	66%
Early childhood and adolescent intervention	85%
Balanced intervention throughout childhood	91%

Moreover, a series of studies published by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) shows that even students who leave middle school “on track” to graduate are susceptible to falling off track in high school.¹⁴ UChicago CCSR considers a student “[o]n-[t]rack” to graduate if he or she earns at least five full-year course credits (10 semester credits) and no more than one semester F in a core course (English, math, science, or social science) in their first year of high school.¹⁵ UChicago CCSR researchers find that the ninth-grade transition was a key turning point for students because course failure can become common in high school, even among students with strong grades and test scores in eighth grade. However, students who complete their ninth-grade year on track are almost four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who are off track. In fact, UChicago CCSR finds a student’s on-track status in the ninth grade is more predictive of high school graduation than his or her race/ethnicity, level of poverty, or test scores.¹⁶

This research shows that it is not too late to target resources and interventions toward students at the high school level. Indeed, it is a critical component of closing high school graduation rate gaps.

Examples of Success

Although federal funding for secondary school programs and school turnaround efforts has waned, several early examples of successful federal investments in high schools exist. While results on the long-term impacts of these interventions are not available yet, these short-term successes are promising and warrant continued investments.

High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI)

The federal government eliminated HSGI in 2015. While HSGI received funding, it provided discretionary grants to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to support dropout prevention and reentry programs in high schools with dropout rates that exceed their annual state average dropout rate. SEAs and LEAs also used funds to support activities in the middle schools that feed into the identified high schools.¹⁷

- The **Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS)** (Alabama) received \$8.2 million over five years (FYs 2010–14) to implement a middle and high school dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery initiative at Ben Cato Rain High School and its feeder middle school, Palmer Pillans Middle School.¹⁸ At Ben Cato Rain High School, 89 percent of students participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program and 93 percent are African American. At Palmer Pillans Middle School, 96 percent of students participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program and 94 percent are African American.¹⁹

MCPSS collaborated with the City of Mobile, Bishop State Community College, Mobile Works (Workforce Investment Board), and the Region 9 Southwest Workforce Development Council to implement the HSGI grant. At Palmer Pillans Middle School, a graduation advocate provides academic guidance and support to at-risk students. Supplemental instruction in reading and mathematics is offered to struggling students. The school system offers a summer bridge program for incoming ninth graders as they transition from the middle school to the high school. Staff members at Ben Cato Rain High School were required to reapply for their positions. The high school also implemented a more engaging and rigorous academic program that includes AP and dual-enrollment courses. The district also created a new Diploma Plus program for over-age and under-credited students.²⁰

These interventions within MCPSS are improving student academic achievement and attainment of a high school diploma. Between School Years (SYs) 2011–12 and 2012–13,

- the graduation rate increased by 7 percentage points (from 70 percent to 77 percent);

- the percentage of students in grades nine through twelve earning one-quarter of credits needed to graduate increased by 12 percentage points (from 83 percent to 95 percent); and
- the percentage of students who enrolled in eighth grade and enrolled in ninth grade the following year increased by 23 percentage points (from 76 percent to 99 percent).²¹
- **Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS)** (Missouri) received \$6.5 million over five years (FYs 2010–14) to implement a dropout prevention, intervention, and reentry program in collaboration with the St. Louis Public Schools Foundation at each of its six largest high schools: Beaumont, Gateway, Roosevelt, Soldan, Sumner, and Vashon.²² On average, 82 percent of the students attending these high schools participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program and 86 percent of the students are African American.²³

Entering ninth graders whom middle school counselors identify as at-risk for dropping out receive assistance and support and are required to enroll in a 120-hour summer academic transition program. A two-person team follows each identified student during the first two years of high school, intervening with the student and his or her family to address attendance, behavior, or academic issues if they arise. Teachers in the program are trained in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) strategies, such as Cornell note taking, and group collaboration to implement these strategies in their classrooms. SLPS implemented College Summit's Launch Program curriculum for all eleventh-grade students to prepare them for postsecondary education and a career. The project also supports the implementation of the A+ Schools Program, which provides free college tuition at a Missouri public community college or an eligible career or technical school to students who meet certain attendance, academic, and community service requirements.²⁴

These interventions within SLPS also are bearing positive results for the participating schools. Between SYs 2011–12 and 2012–13,

- the graduation rate for the participating schools increased by 11 percentage points (from 57 percent to 68 percent); and

- the percentage of students in grades nine through twelve at participating schools earning one-quarter of credits needed to graduate from high school increased by 11 percentage points (from 87 percent to 98 percent).²⁵

School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program

SIG is a federally funded program that awards grants to SEAs, which then allocate those funds to LEAs through competitive grants, to support intervention in the lowest-performing elementary, middle, and high schools.²⁶

- **McKay High School** in Salem, Oregon, received \$12.8 million in SIG funding for SY 2010–11 through SY 2012–13 to implement school improvement interventions and extend learning time.²⁷ At McKay, 85 percent of students participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program, 61 percent are Hispanic, 11 percent are English language learners (ELLs), and 11 percent are students with disabilities.²⁸

McKay High School used SIG funds to develop multiple graduation pathways for students, which included academic workshops, Saturday tutoring programs, and summer school classes. Students who did not meet proficiency on state assessments were required to participate in academic workshops in their areas of weakness. The workshops were offered in reading, writing, and math and were open to all McKay students, but were mandatory only for those students who were not meeting proficiency. With SIG funds, McKay High School





strengthened its Saturday Academy (which is open to all McKay students) to include a language program for ELLs with low levels of English proficiency, a tutoring program, and computer sessions with open access to online credit-recovery courses. McKay also offered intensive summer school programming, including a transitional program for incoming freshman, credit-recovery opportunities for students who failed core academic classes, and English-language instruction.²⁹

These interventions are improving student achievement for McKay students. Between SY 2009–10 (the year before the SIG interventions began) and SY 2012–13 (the last year of the SIG grant),

- the high school graduation rate remained steady at 74 percent even though the state simultaneously implemented new, more challenging graduation rate requirements;³⁰
- the percentage of students proficient in reading increased by 33 percentage points (from 49 percent to 82 percent);
- the percentage of students proficient in math increased by 33 percentage points (from 48 percent to 81 percent).³¹

- **Frederick Douglass High School (FDHS)** in Baltimore, Maryland, received a \$4.2 million SIG grant to implement school improvement interventions beginning in SY 2011–12.³² At FDHS, 78 percent of students participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program, 98 percent of the students are African American, and 24 percent are students with disabilities.³³

After receiving SIG funding, FDHS opened a night school where students can be tutored or take credit recovery courses. The high school also expanded its recording and media production studio and law program to prepare students for future careers in those fields and created innovation studies and public policy learning “academies” to cater to the diverse interests of students. FDHS also formed a partnership with Baltimore City Community College to give students the opportunity to earn college credit through a dual-enrollment program.³⁴

These strategies are increasing student achievement at FDHS. Between SY 2010–11 (the year before the SIG interventions began) and SY 2013–14 (the last year of the SIG grant)

- the high school graduation rate increased 8 percentage points (from 49 percent to 57 percent);³⁵ and
- the percentage of students proficient in math increased by 14 percentage points (from 32 percent to 46 percent).³⁶

Additional Nonfederally Funded Examples

In addition to the federally funded HSGI and SIG program described above, several reform initiatives that are supported through a mix of private, federal, state, and local resources are demonstrating positive results.³⁷ For example, in California, school districts are partnering with local industries to provide students with a “next-generation” high school experience through Linked Learning. This systemic reform effort transforms the traditional high school experience by integrating rigorous academics with career-based classroom learning, real-world workplace experiences, and personal student support. As a result, students are graduating from high school and going on to postsecondary education at higher rates than their peers who are not participating in Linked Learning.

For example, **Porterville Unified School District (PUSD)** (California) began implementing Linked Learning in select high schools in 2009. PUSD serves a student population that is 86 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged and 79 percent Hispanic.

Yet in 2012, the district had graduation rates for all students and student subgroups that exceeded the state averages. The high school graduation rate in PUSD for ELLs, for example, was 10 percentage points higher than at the state level (72 percent versus 62 percent). Outcomes comparing students participating and not participating in Linked Learning pathways within Porterville also are impressive. Linked Learning students in Monache High School's Multimedia Tech Academy, for example, have a postsecondary education enrollment rate that is 8 percentage points higher than their peers not enrolled in the Linked Learning program (32 percent versus 24 percent), and a postsecondary education persistence rate that is 24 percentage points higher than their peers not enrolled in the program (67 percent versus 43 percent).³⁸

In addition, a multiyear rigorous evaluation³⁹ shows that New York City's high school reform initiative increased the percentage of students who graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education. Through New York City's small schools of choice (SSCs) reform initiative, large low-performing high schools were replaced with smaller, higher-performing high schools that focus on increased rigor and personalization. The evaluation finds that the SSCs had a higher overall graduation rate than the control group schools—a 71.6 percent graduation rate for those attending an SSC compared to a 62.2 percent graduation rate for the control group, a 9.4 percentage-point difference overall.⁴⁰ The SSCs also had an overall postsecondary education enrollment rate that was 8.4 percentage points higher than that of the control group schools, while African American males who attended an SSC had a postsecondary education enrollment rate that was 11.3 percentage points higher than the enrollment rate of their control group peers.⁴¹

Conclusion

Evidence demonstrates that investments in high school turnaround efforts have succeeded. Moreover, research shows that the current federal strategy of investing in the early years and in postsecondary education, while largely skipping over middle and high schools, is unlikely to yield the greatest returns. ESEA reauthorization provides the opportunity to implement a more coherent, evidence-based policy of reform and investment that includes middle and high schools.

Specifically, ESEA reauthorization must accomplish the following goals:

- Include dedicated funding for school turnaround that is focused on a state's lowest-performing schools. Specifically, the reauthorized ESEA should maintain a dedicated funding

stream for school turnaround as included in the Every Child Achieves Act approved by the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) on April 16, 2015.

- Implement evidence-based, comprehensive reform among high schools that fail to graduate one-third of their students (i.e., high schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent) as proposed in [an amendment offered by Senator Elizabeth Warren \(D-MA\)](#) during the HELP Committee's consideration of the Every Child Achieves Act. Comprehensive reform must address the multitude of factors demonstrated by research to contribute to school improvement, ranging from effective school leadership to nonacademic support.⁴²
- Address gaps in achievement and high school graduation rates within state accountability policy. ESEA must require states to implement interventions in high schools where one or more student subgroups miss one or more state-set performance targets for two or more years as proposed in [an amendment offered by Senator Chris Murphy \(D-CT\)](#) during the HELP Committee's consideration of the Every Child Achieves Act. Federal law should not prescribe the specific interventions. Rather, school districts and schools must implement evidence-based interventions based on a comprehensive assessment of student needs and the school's and district's capacity to address them. Interventions must address the array of factors identified in the needs assessment that led to a school's underperformance.
- Authorize funding for "next-generation high schools" that will implement new models for school turnaround in the lowest-performing schools, expose students to the workforce, and provide students with college credit while in high school as proposed by the Next Generation High Schools Act (S.696) and in [an amendment offered by Senator Tammy Baldwin \(D-WI\)](#) during the HELP Committee's consideration of the Every Child Achieves Act.
- Target new funding under Title I, Part A, to high schools in order to address the "missing middle."⁴³

Federal funding to support improvement in high schools is creating positive results and must be maintained. Without support for secondary schools, federal investments in early learning and postsecondary education will not realize their fullest potential. Congress must use ESEA reauthorization as an opportunity to fix the "missing middle" to prepare all students for college, a career, and civic life.

Endnotes

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Appendix

Methodology for Figures 1 and 2

Figures 1 and 2 in the main text include allocations for those federal education programs that received an appropriation of approximately \$1 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 for which an estimate can be made regarding the percentage of funding provided across grade spans: early childhood/elementary (birth–grade 5 in figures 1 and 2), middle school (grades 6–8 in the figures), high school (grades 9–12 in the figures), and postsecondary education. In addition, programs that specifically target middle and/or high school students (grades 6–12) that received funding during any fiscal year between 2010 and 2015 are included. Federal loans are excluded from the analysis.

The analysis for this paper allocates funding for Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and Child Care Development Block Grants (CCDBG) only to the birth–grade 5 grade span. The analysis allocates funding for the High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI), Advanced Placement (AP) Incentive Program, and Smaller Learning Communities only to grades 9–12. The analysis allocates Pell Grants, Federal Work Study, and the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) program funding only to postsecondary education. Other programs included in the analysis are allocated using the methods described below.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)

GEAR UP grants are designed to begin no later than seventh grade and grantees (which can include local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and community organizations) must provide services to students through twelfth grade, but may extend one year past graduation thus spanning seven years.¹ The analysis for this paper allocates one-seventh of the GEAR UP funds to each year of education in the program. Therefore, the category for grades 6–8, which includes seventh

and eighth grades, receives two-sevenths (28.57 percent) of GEAR UP funds; the category for grades 9–12 receives four-sevenths (57.14 percent) of GEAR UP funds; and postsecondary education, which includes grade thirteen, receives one-seventh (14.29 percent) of GEAR UP funds.

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins)

The allocation of Perkins funding between secondary education/high schools (grades 9–12) and postsecondary education fluctuates. According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), in “FY 2010, states allocated 64 percent of their Perkins Title I subgrant funds to secondary school programs and 36 percent to postsecondary education programs, on average, about the same proportions as in FY 2001.”² In addition, a survey of states administered by the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium finds the allocation between high schools and postsecondary education to be 61 percent and 39 percent respectively.³ Therefore, the analysis for this paper allocates Perkins funds according to the following breakdown: 60 percent to grades 9–12 and 40 percent to postsecondary education.

School Improvement Grants (SIG)

According to an analysis by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), 37.9 percent of schools that received SIG funds were elementary schools, 21.4 percent were middle schools, and 35.5 percent were high schools. The nonstandard percentage for the IES analysis was 5.1 percent.⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the nonstandard percentage is divided among the birth–grade 5, grades 6–8, and grades 9–12 grade spans, adding 1.7 percent to each grade span. Therefore, the paper allocates SIG funds according to the following breakdown: 39.6 percent to birth–grade 5, 23.1 percent to grades 6–8, and 37.2 percent to grades 9–12.

¹ “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/faq.html#question10> (accessed April 23, 2015).

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *National Assessment of Career and Technical Education: Final Report to Congress*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2014), https://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/uploads/NACTE_FinalReport2014.pdf (accessed April 23, 2015).

³ Email correspondence with Steve Voytek, government relations manager, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, April 3, 2015.

⁴ These percentages are based on schools that received SIG grants as part of Cohort II. S. Hurlburt, S.B. Therriault, and K.C. Le Floch, *School Improvement Grants: Analyses of State Applications and Eligible and Awarded Schools* (NCEE 2012-4060) (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2012), <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20124060/pdf/20124060.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2015).

Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) Program

The analysis for this paper allocates SRCL funds as mandated by the appropriations language that established the program: 15 percent of funds are used to serve children birth through age five; 40 percent of funds are used to serve students in elementary school; and 40 percent of funds are used to serve students in middle and high school.⁵ For the purposes of this analysis, 55 percent of SRCL funds are allocated to birth–grade 5, while grades 6–8 and grades 9–12 each receive 20 percent of SRCL funds.

Title I

According to an analysis by ED, elementary schools receive 76 percent of Title I dollars, middle schools receive 14 percent, and high schools receive 10 percent.⁶ Therefore, this analysis allocates 76 percent of Title I funds to birth–grade 5, 14 percent to grades 6–8, and 10 percent to grades 9–12.

TRIO

TRIO programs include three high school programs: Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Upward Bound Math–Science.⁷ For this analysis, the appropriations for these three programs are added together and allocated to grades 9–12. To determine the postsecondary education allocation for TRIO programs, this analysis subtracts the high school funding total (which includes funding for Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Upward Bound Math–Science) from the total TRIO appropriation.

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)

According to a report from ED, 50 percent of the 21st CCLC grant funds served elementary schools, 20.4 percent served middle schools, and 11.8 percent served high schools. ED's analysis, however, also included categories of schools as "elementary–middle" and "middle–high." The elementary–middle grades received 10.8 percent of 21st CCLC funds and the middle–high grades received 3.5 percent.⁸ For this analysis, the allocations for elementary–middle and middle–high grades are divided in half and added to each respective grade span. Therefore, this analysis allocates 21st CCLC funds according to the following breakdown: 55.4 percent to birth–grade 5, 27.55 percent to grades 6–8, and 13.55 percent to grades 9–12.

⁵ Consolidated Appropriations Act 2010, Public Law 111-117, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ117/pdf/PLAW-111publ117.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2015).

⁶ J. Chambers et. al., *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume IV—Targeting the Uses of Federal Education Funds*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2009), p. 49, <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/nclb-targeting/nclb-targeting.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2015).

⁷ New America Foundation, "Federal Programs for High School Interventions," <http://febp.newamerica.net/background-analysis/high-school-interventions> (accessed April 23, 2015).

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Analytic Support for Evaluation and Program Monitoring: An Overview of the 21st CCLC Performance Data: 2009–2010 (Seventh Report)*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2011), p. 21.



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