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StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



TO BE CONTINUED: Congress Passes Continuing Resolution to Keep Government Running, Buys Time to Pass Appropriations Bills

Because it failed to pass any of the twelve annual appropriations bills before the end of the fiscal year on September 30, Congress has resorted to a continuing resolution, which will maintain funding for programs in the amount that they received in the prior fiscal year until the resolution expires on December 3. This means that programs such as Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation Fund will not receive funding in the current continuing resolution because they were funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and did not receive funding through the regular Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations process.

Because the continuing resolution expires on December 3, lawmakers will not have much time to move the appropriations bills during the post-election, lame-duck session, which is scheduled to start on November 15. Given this tight schedule, it is unlikely that Congress will have time to move each of the appropriations bills individually. In fact, observers say that Democratic appropriators are considering a twelve-bill omnibus bill to fund the government in 2011. Such a bill could carry a price tag of more than \$1 trillion. Another option is to enact an additional continuing resolution that would keep the government running into early 2011, giving Congress even more time to pass the appropriations bills.

Complicating matters is the uncertainty surrounding the congressional elections. On one hand, Democrats hope to pass the fiscal year 2011 appropriations bills during the lame-duck session while they still have control of Congress. Republicans, meanwhile, would like to delay any spending decisions until 2011 when they might control one or both chambers of Congress.

“You have to wait for the election,” **Judd Gregg (R-NH), ranking Republican on the Senate Budget Committee and a senior appropriator**, told *CQ Weekly*. “It’s really hypothetical to try to predict what is going to happen in December. If we pick up a lot of seats, there won’t be a lot of desire to do much around here, except get to the next Congress.”



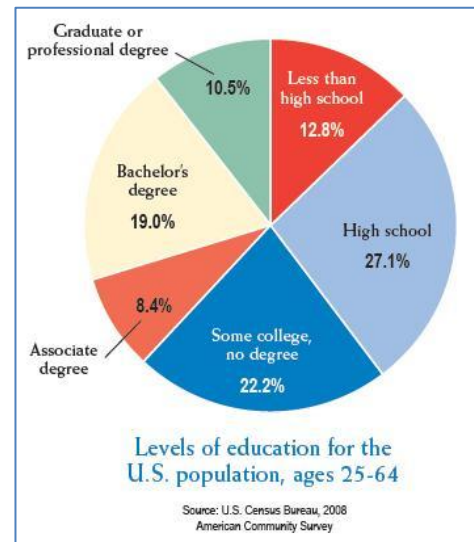
A STRONGER NATION THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION: A Call to the Nation to Vastly Improve College Attainment Rates

Two years ago, the Lumina Foundation for Education (Lumina) called for the United States to increase higher education attainment rates to 60 percent by the year 2025. The Indianapolis-based, private, independent foundation, nicknamed this initiative “Lumina’s Big Goal” and

reports on the country's progress in its annual report entitled *A Stronger Nation through Higher Education*.

This year's report finds that 37.9 percent of Americans aged twenty-five to sixty-four held a two- or four-year college degree. This represents a minimal increase from 2007 when the number was 37.7 percent. If the current rate of increase persists then by 2025 the United States will only have reached a higher education attainment level of less than 47 percent.

"Reaching the 'Big Goal' is a national economic and social imperative," said **Jamie Merisotis, Lumina's president and chief executive officer**. "The opportunity to change the rules of the game and create a higher education system capable of producing much higher levels of attainment is before us. We can get there, but we clearly have work to do."



To stay on track towards Lumina's "Big Goal," the United States needs to increase the number of college degrees awarded each year by 278,000 every year. However, given the current rate of degree production, the number of graduates can only be expected to increase by 112,000 per year; this means that an additional 166,000 college degrees are needed each year to hit the 60 percent attainment rate.

A Stronger Nation also provides progress information on a state-by-state basis, including the current level of higher education attainment, the rate of improvement in attainment over the past eight years, and the level of increase needed to reach the target. Each state profile also includes information at county levels.

"When we first set this Big Goal, we knew it would be ambitious, but now it is clear that not only is it necessary—it is also realistic and attainable," said Merisotis. "Different states have different challenges, but all states have a clear pathway to increase attainment rates."

In 2008, the most recent year for which data is available, Massachusetts had the highest percentage of adults with college degrees (49.6 percent), followed by Connecticut (46.6 percent), New Hampshire (46 percent), and Colorado (45.3 percent). On the other end of the spectrum, West Virginia had the lowest college attainment level (25.6 percent) just behind Arkansas (26.5 percent), Louisiana (27 percent), and Kentucky (29.2 percent). In order to reach the Big Goal, Nevada needs to achieve an annual percentage increase of 10.1 percent in college degrees while North Dakota only needs a 3.1 percent annual increase to reach the goal line by 2025. Nationwide, a 6.3 percent annual increase is necessary.

The report stresses that simply increasing college completion rates is not enough—efforts must also be made to close gaps in college participation and attainment for a range of underrepresented populations, including students of color, low-income and first-generation students, and adults. According to the report, only 18.6 percent of Hispanics, 22.5 percent of American Indians, and 26.2 percent of African Americans possess higher education degrees,

compared to 59.2 percent of Asians and 42.2 percent of whites. The report notes that it will be impossible to reach the Big Goal without closing these attainment gaps. To reach their goal, Lumina proposes a number of strategies for states including:

- increasing the rate at which students complete college degrees;
- providing ways for adults in the workforce to return to college to complete degrees; and
- focusing on the growing needs of low-income, first-generation, and minority students.

The report explains that colleges and universities must focus on both participation and completion for all students to increase attainment levels. It calls on higher education systems to better define the learning outcomes that students must obtain at each level of education and then ensure that academic programs give students the opportunity to achieve those outcomes.

A Stronger Nation uses data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey. Read the full report at http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation.pdf.

NO TIME TO WASTE: A Roadmap for SREB States to Lead the Nation in College Attainment Rates

A new report from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) calls for SREB states to share Lumina's goal of having 60 percent of working-age adults earn some type of high-quality credential by the year 2025.¹ *No Time to Waste: Policy Recommendations for Increasing College Completion* explains why this needs to be a top priority and provides a roadmap of actions for SREB states to take in order to significantly increase the number of students who complete associate's and bachelor's degrees and postsecondary career certificates of value.

"Reaching this goal will require a sea change in state policy and in how higher education operates, starting now," said **SREB President Dave Spence**. "Nothing less than economic and social progress in our region and across the nation is at stake."

Currently SREB states have between 26 and 44 percent of adults aged twenty-five to sixty-four with a two- or four-year college degree. States have incomplete data on the percentage of adults who hold career/technical certificates, something the report points out as one of the many issues that need to be addressed in order to reach the goal.

No Time to Waste outlines several other major policy recommendations for states. It suggests that states should make college completion a top priority and create statewide plans for improvement with detailed goals, roles, and responsibilities. It adds that postsecondary system leaders and individual institutions' presidents should be accountable for raising (1) the number of degrees and career certificates awarded annually, and (2) graduation rates.

The report recommends specific changes for states including identifying and requiring much-improved statewide measures to assess degree completion and related performance indicators for all public colleges and universities. To make college more accessible, the report calls for financing strategies and other education policies for meeting college-completion goals. It suggests that states improve college affordability by coordinating funding, tuition, and financial aid policies to enable more students to complete career certificates and degrees. The report also suggests that states support institutional productivity and cost-efficiency strategies that reduce students' excess credits toward degrees, result in timely degree completion at lower costs, and put in place a guaranteed statewide college-transfer system recognized by all public community colleges and universities.

To read the full report, visit http://publications.sreb.org/2010/10E10_No_Time_to_Waste.pdf.

¹ SREB states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.



BACK ON TRACK TO COLLEGE: Brief Profiles Successful High School Dropout Recovery Program in Texas

A new issue brief from Jobs for the Future (JFF) profiles a Texas school district for its success in recovering and graduating out-of-school youth and putting them on a pathway to college.

According to the brief, *Back on Track to College: A Texas School District Leverages State Policy to Put Dropouts on the Path to Success*, the Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District has graduated over six hundred former dropouts over the last two years.

Working with South Texas College, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school district created the College, Career, and Technology Academy (CCTA), a college-connected dropout recovery school that allows former dropouts to complete their high school diploma and transition into college courses when they are ready. Students at the academy focus only on what they need for graduation and college readiness, and begin college courses while finishing their high school requirements.

“CCTA’s success started with exemplary state policy,” said **Lili Allen, program director at JFF and coauthor of the report**. “Thanks to the commitment of Texas to improve graduation rates and reengage out-of-school youth, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo district has the support it needs to act on its own mission, draw these students back to the classroom to achieve a diploma, and enroll them in postsecondary courses.”

In Texas, the state provides incentives for school districts to recover dropouts and enable postsecondary transitions for all students. For example, Texas allocates per-pupil funding based on average daily attendance (ADA) for recovered students immediately, without the one-year or sometimes two-year delay found in many other states. Texas also allows school districts to collect ADA funding to help young people up to age twenty-six receive high school diplomas. The state encourages school districts to reengage dropouts by giving districts credit in the state’s accountability system for recovering dropouts. The state also includes former dropouts in the district’s high school longitudinal completion rate if former dropouts graduate with their cohort or remain enrolled and progress toward a degree. If they drop out again, they are only counted once as a dropout in the district’s longitudinal completion rate for the state’s accountability system.

On the college- and career-readiness fronts, Texas requires all school districts to make the equivalent of twelve hours of college credit available to students while in high school. The state also has a high school allotment that can be used to cover the costs for tuition, fees, and textbooks for students taking dual-credit courses.

When it first opened its doors in fall 2007, CCTA initially targeted dropouts who were within three credits of graduating or only needed to pass portions of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the state’s standardized graduation exit exam. To promote the program, **Dr. Daniel King, superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District**, and his team launched an intensive recovery campaign supported by area mayors, school leaders and staff, and other community leaders. Team members knocked on the

doors of students who had left the rolls at the end of the last school year and not returned. Within the first month, two hundred students enrolled in CCTA.

After enrolling at CCTA, students have a one-on-one meeting with school staff to review what they lack for graduation—both in terms of credits and TAKS—and discuss what they need to do to turn around their performance. Students then enroll in a course of study that addresses these gaps, and CCTA staff arrange a flexible schedule that allows this older population to maintain family and work obligations. CCTA also strongly emphasizes helping students develop foundational and critical-thinking skills needed for postsecondary success. After students pass the English language arts TAKS, they are eligible to enroll in a limited selection of college courses. Options for dual enrollment include medical terminology, welding, business computing technology, and others.

Since opening its doors, CCTA has expanded to serve students lacking up to five credits instead of three. Additionally, students in the district's high schools who end their senior year without the credits and/or TAKS needed to graduate are automatically enrolled in CCTA for summer school, and for as many subsequent semesters as are needed.

Download the complete brief at

<http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/BackOnTrackCCTA-091510.pdf>.



CLOSING THE TALENT GAP: New McKinsey Report Outlines Strategy for Attracting and Retaining “Top-Third” College Students in Teaching Field

Top-performing countries in education recruit 100 percent of their teacher corps from the top third of the academic cohort. In the United States, however, only 23 percent of new teachers come from the top third; in high-poverty schools, the number is only 14 percent. So says *Closing the Talent Gap: Attracting and Retaining Top-Third Graduates to Careers in Teaching*, a new report from McKinsey & Company that outlines how the United States could attract and retain more students with strong academic backgrounds into the teaching profession.

“The world’s best-performing school systems make great teaching their ‘north star,’” the report states. “They have strategic and systematic approaches to attract, develop, retain, and ensure the efficacy of the most talented educators—and they make sure great teachers serve students of all socio-economic backgrounds. The U.S. does not take a strategic or systematic approach to nurturing teacher talent. Buffeted by a chaotic mix of labor market trends, university economics, and local school district and budget dynamics, [the U.S. has] failed to attract, develop, reward or retain outstanding professional teaching talent on a consistent basis.”

The good news is that improving teaching effectiveness has become a major reform theme in the United States, as many school districts and states are finding new ways to measure, evaluate, reward, coach, and replicate effectiveness in teaching, the report notes. However, most of these efforts focus on improving the effectiveness of teachers already in the classroom or retaining the best and dismissing the least effective. Meanwhile, little attention has been paid to what the report calls “altering the value proposition” of teaching to draw young people with strong academic backgrounds to the profession.

The practice in the United States is markedly different from the world's top performers in education. According to the report, countries such as Singapore, Finland, and South Korea focus on recruiting, developing, and retaining "top third+" students as one of their central education strategies. In these countries selection process and teacher training is more like that of medical school and residency than of a typical American school of education. Additionally, some of these countries also pay for tuition and fees and provide students with a stipend while they train. To maintain an ideal balance of teachers, these governments monitor the demand and regulate supply to match it. By doing so, they can guarantee jobs and competitive compensation to teachers who complete the selective training. At the same time, they offer opportunities for advancement and growth and bestow enormous prestige on the profession.

Based on market research that McKinsey conducted among nine hundred top-third American college students and 525 current teachers with similarly strong academic backgrounds, it learned that major new efforts are required for the United States to attract and retain more top-third+ talent to teaching. Currently, most students see teaching as an unattractive profession in terms of the quality of the people in the field, professional growth opportunities, and compensation. In fact, only 9 percent of the top-third college students surveyed say they plan to go into teaching.

According to the report, a combination of improved compensation and other features such as better school leaders and working conditions could dramatically increase the proportion of top-third new hires in high-needs schools and districts.

McKinsey estimates that the United States could hire more than double the portion of top-third+ new hires in high-needs schools—going from 14 percent to 34 percent—by making several changes not related to raising teacher salaries. These reform strategies include providing high-needs schools with effective principals, offering ongoing training comparable to the best professional institutions, improving "shabby and sometimes unsafe" working conditions, and providing performance bonuses of 20 percent. The report estimates that these changes would cost roughly \$10–\$30 million per year for one of the largest school district (50,000–150,000 students) and approximately \$66 million for an average-sized state.

Drawing the majority of teachers from among top-third+ students, however, would require substantial increases in compensation to close real and perceived gaps between teachers' compensation and that of other careers open to top students, the report notes. McKinsey's research finds that raising the share of top-third+ new hires in high-needs schools from 14 percent to 68 percent would mean paying new teachers around \$65,000 with a maximum career compensation of \$150,000 per year. Such a proposal would cost large urban school districts \$100–\$290 million per year and \$630 million for the average-sized state.

The report suggests that a U.S. version of a top-talent strategy might aim to transform schools of education directly, give districts the power to demand better-equipped educators, or rely more heavily on identifying effective and ineffective teachers early in their careers. But for an American top-third+ strategy to work, the nation would need to address not only the attraction and retention of top-third graduates to teaching, but also the many levers that support the efficacy of teachers once they are in the classroom.

Closing the Talent Gap suggests exploring top-third+ strategies with pilot programs in high-needs districts or in a state, with a new “Race to the Top Third” grant competition or through collaborations among school systems, philanthropic institutions, and other education stakeholders.

The report notes that simply “sprinkling” top-third academically credentialed teachers into the current system is not a silver bullet for producing dramatic gains in student achievement. It acknowledges that U.S. research on whether teachers’ academic backgrounds significantly predict classroom effectiveness is mixed, but suggests that bringing in more teachers with stronger academic backgrounds will allow the United States to learn whether such a strategy can work.

The report concludes by saying that progress on a top-third approach will require research, experimentation, and learning, but the economic and social returns from getting it right could be enormous.

Read the complete report at <http://bit.ly/cEgmbo>.

Alliance Now Accepting Proposals on Digital Learning

The Alliance for Excellent Education is now accepting proposals for an online forum it will host highlighting successful practices in middle and high school education with online/blended learning and technology. The forum will offer an opportunity for policymakers, educators, researchers, advocates, the media, and others to learn about promising practices that prepare all students for college and work. It will feature schools, districts, and states that are effectively using online/blended learning and technology to raise student outcomes.

The Alliance welcomes proposals that include the innovative use of online/blended learning and/or technology to drive or support middle and high school reform that ensures students are college and work ready, including those at school, district, or state levels. Proposals should specify how the highlighted program has increased student achievement, graduation rates, and college- and work-readiness rates. Also of interest are programs that show evidence of increased attendance, decreased discipline problems, improved teaching skills, equitable teacher distribution, and improved leadership and school climate. Quantitative data is best though qualitative data is also useful. Proposals should also explain how the presenter plans to illustrate lessons learned from their work, and should discuss the implementation, sustainability, and scalability of the program, as well as implications for school, district, state, and/or national education policy.

Proposals not focused on secondary level initiatives that promote college and work readiness will not be considered. Submitting a proposal may also lead to additional opportunities to highlight your school, district, or state in other Alliance for Excellent Education efforts. **The deadline for submitting proposals is November 1, 2010.**

More information on proposal guidelines, requirements, and directions on how to submit a proposal is available at http://www.all4ed.org/blog/call_presenters_digital_learning.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. For more information about the Alliance, visit <http://www.all4ed.org>.