



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



WAVE GOODBYE TO WAIVERS?: Key House Republicans Challenge Duncan's Plan to Grant Waivers to NCLB Requirements

Earlier this month, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** [outlined his options](#) for waiving certain requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) should Congress be unable to finish a reauthorization of the law by this fall. Last week, **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN)** and **House Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA)** [responded in a letter](#) to Duncan asking him to explain the U.S. Department of Education's "legal authority" for requiring states and schools to abide by certain changes in exchange for regulatory relief.

"The committee is optimistic a bipartisan consensus is possible on commonsense reforms that reduce the federal footprint in education and allow states and school districts the flexibility to meet the needs of their unique communities," Kline and Hunter wrote. "However, as we continue working to attain this goal, we must ensure temporary measures do not undermine our efforts. Toward that end, we respectfully request additional information about the Department's recent announcement that they will grant waivers to states and school districts."

Specifically, Kline and Hunter asked Duncan to provide the following information by July 1:

- 1) An explanation of the department's legal authority for requiring states and schools to abide by certain changes in exchange for regulatory relief
- 2) A detailed explanation of the department's proposal
- 3) An explanation of when the department's proposal will be finalized
- 4) An outline of the process for review and public comment; and
- 5) A timeline that clarifies when waivers would become effective

Kline and Hunter acknowledged that greater flexibility in the nation's education system is "urgently needed," but wrote the department's proposal is "cause for concern." They told Duncan that issuing new demands in exchange for relief "could result in greater regulations and confusion for schools and less transparency for parents" and "raises questions about the department's legal authority to grant conditional waivers in exchange for reforms not authorized by Congress."

According to the [New York Times](#), Kline went further in a conference call with reporters, "criticizing the administration's use of the \$5 billion Race to the Top grant competition to get states to adopt its reform agenda." Kline said Duncan "is not the nation's superintendent," adding that Congress gave the secretary "way too much authority in the stimulus bill when it said, 'Here's \$5 billion, go do good things for education.'"

On the conference call, Kline also outlined a timeline for rewriting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known NCLB, saying that he would move five bills to the House floor by the end of the year.

The Education and Workforce Committee has already passed the [Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act](#), which would eliminate more than forty federal education programs, including Striving Readers, Smaller Learning Communities, High School Graduation Initiative, and Enhancing Education Through Technology (Ed-Tech). On June 22, the committee approved the “Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act” (see box below), which will encourage the development and expansion of more high-quality charter schools.

Kline and Hunter said the three additional reform bills would improve funding flexibility, support quality teachers, and redefine accountability. The *New York Times* reported that committee approval for the flexibility bill could occur before Congress recesses for the summer, while the bills on teachers and accountability “will dominate the committee’s fall agenda.”

House Education and the Workforce Committee Approves Charter Schools Bill

On June 22, the House Education and the Workforce Committee approved a bill to reform and strengthen the current charter school program by a bipartisan vote of 34 to 5. The bill, the Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act, is the second in a series of education reform bills designed to revamp the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

“This legislation will open the doors of opportunity for parents and children across the country,” [said House Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Chairman Duncan Hunter \(R-CA\)](#), who is the bill’s sponsor. “By encouraging the development and expansion of more high-quality charter schools, not only will we offer fresh hope to the more than 400,000 students currently on charter school waitlists, we will also take a great step toward building a stronger, more successful education system.”

The bill also drew support from **Representative George Miller (D-CA), top Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee**. “When charter schools are run and managed effectively, and when they’re accessible and successful for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, they can be used as a tool to drive innovation in our schools,” [Miller said](#). “If we can keep up this pace of bipartisan action on education reform, and move forward with the rewrite of ESEA, we will be on track to dramatically transform our schools and finally bring them to the future.”

The bill would provide greater opportunities for states to support the development and expansion of successful charter schools while increasing charter school accountability and transparency. Specifically, the bill would strengthen quality authorizing practices, provide transparency on financial audits, and make student achievement and equal access part of the decision process for renewing and expanding charter schools.



“OVERLOOKED AND UNDERPAID”: New Alliance Report Examines How Title I Shortchanges High Schools

The largest federal initiative aimed at improving educational outcomes for low-income students does not effectively serve high school students, according to a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education. The brief, “Overlooked and Underpaid: How Title I Shortchanges High Schools and What ESEA Can Do About It,” finds that only 10 percent of the approximately \$14 billion Title I program supports high school students even though they account for nearly 25 percent of the nation’s low-income students.

“High schools are an afterthought in Title I,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Far too often, high-poverty high schools do not receive Title I funding, and in some instances, are not even eligible to receive it. As Congress works to rewrite No Child Left Behind, it must strengthen Title I to better meet the needs of the nation’s high schools without harming the nation’s elementary schools.”

The brief explains two disadvantages that low-income/high-poverty high schools face under the existing Title I program—funding and eligibility—and presents options for reforming the program through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind.

As the brief explains, all states and 90 percent of school districts receive funding from Title I, with each district deciding which schools receive funding and how much they receive. Most school districts allocate funding based on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, but this measure tends to underestimate poverty at the high school level because older students frequently fail to submit their free and reduced-price lunch forms. The brief provides specific examples in which high schools with higher poverty rates have often been skipped over in funding decisions in favor of middle and elementary schools with lower poverty rates.

As an alternative to the free and reduced-price lunch option, the brief suggests the use of a “feeder pattern,” which assigns poverty levels to a high school based on the average poverty rate of elementary schools that feed into it. Although permitted by the U.S. Department of Education and considered more accurate than the free and reduced-price lunch option, the feeder pattern calculation is only used by 4 percent of school districts.

Complicating matters for high schools, many high-poverty high schools are not eligible for Title I funds. In fact, the brief finds that nearly 1,300 high schools in which 50 percent or more of their students come from low-income families are not eligible for Title I funds.

According to the brief, Title I eligibility is more important now than in the past because federal programs can require Title I eligibility or create a funding priority for Title I-eligible schools. For example, a secondary school must either receive or be eligible for Title I funds in order to receive a School Improvement Grant (SIG), which are targeted to the nation’s lowest-performing schools. As a result, nearly 600 of the nation’s approximately 2,000 lowest-performing high schools, which have graduation rates less than 60 percent, are not eligible for Title I or SIG funds.

“Making serious progress on the nation’s dropout crisis means targeting resources and reform to the nation’s lowest-performing high schools,” Wise said. “But without changes to the way Title I is structured, many of these high-need high schools will not receive the assistance necessary to improve outcomes for their students. Since the days of George W. Bush’s presidency, policymakers have understood that Title I places high schools at a disadvantage, but they have done little to fix it.”

“Overlooked and Underpaid” offers the following recommendations for how policymakers can strengthen Title I as part of ESEA reauthorization:

- Require districts to use feeder-pattern projections to calculate high schools’ poverty rates and use this projection to allocate Title I funds if it is higher than the poverty rate based on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.
- Grant automatic Title I eligibility to high schools with a poverty rate of 35 percent or higher as determined by the feeder pattern.
- Reduce or eliminate the 75 percent threshold at which school districts are required to fund schools. Because high schools are larger than elementary schools, they are less likely to have poverty rates at or above 75 percent even though they may have significantly more poor students than their feeder elementary and middle schools.
- Target Title I funds to high schools so that they receive a share of Title I funding that is at least equal to the percentage of low-income students attending high schools in the district.

In conjunction with the release of the Alliance’s “Overlooked and Underpaid” brief, the Alliance also released a longer report written by **Wayne Riddle, an independent education policy consultant who served as a specialist in education policy at the Congressional Research Service from 1972 to 2009**. The longer report, *Title I and High Schools: Addressing the Needs of Disadvantaged Students at All Grade Levels*, provides greater detail on the allocation of Title I funds and an in-depth analysis of why high schools receive such a small share of Title I funding.

Download the “Overlooked and Underpaid” policy brief, which includes a state-by-state breakdown of the number of high-poverty high schools that are Title I eligible in each state, at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/OverlookedUnderpaidTitleI.pdf>.

Download Wayne Riddle’s *Title I and High Schools* report at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TitleIandHSs.pdf>.



THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR: Minority Males Lag Behind in High School and Beyond, According to College Board Report

Nearly half of young men of color aged fifteen to twenty-four who earn their high school diploma will end up unemployed, incarcerated, or dead, according to a new report from the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. The study also finds that minority men fall behind their peers in educational attainment and many fail to attend college or earn a postsecondary degree. The report, *The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress*, provides an in-depth analysis of educational attainment and achievement data for minority males including African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics/Latinos, and Native Americans and Alaska Natives.

“At a time when our nation is committed to reclaiming its place as the leader in higher education, we can no longer afford to ignore the plight of young men of color,” said **Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board**. “As long as educational opportunities are limited for some, we all suffer. We rise as one nation and we fall as one nation. But if we keep working hard—if we keep listening to each other and to our students—we can soften our landings and reach historic new heights.”

According to the report, just 26 percent of African Americans, 24 percent of Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, and 18 percent of Hispanic Americans have at least an associate degree. In each of these racial and ethnic groups, young women outperform young men in earning high school diplomas and the disparity is even more significant at the postsecondary level. The report shows that across all ethnic groups, as compared to their female peers, men are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to gain access to and complete college.

The report cautions that the framing around the discussion of academic achievement of minorities often leaves little opportunity to recognize and discuss the disparities within one minority group. For example, although Asian Americans are commonly cited as the highest-performing group on a variety of academic measures, educational outcomes among Asian Americans differ greatly when examining socioeconomic status, immigration status, and gender.

In addition to academic achievement, the report examines other factors and finds that more than 51 percent of Hispanic males, 45 percent of African American males, 42 percent of Native American males, and 33 percent of Asian American males aged fifteen to twenty-four will end up unemployed, incarcerated, or dead. In 2008, large proportions of minority men aged fifteen to twenty-four with high school diplomas were unemployed—34 percent of black men, 47 percent of Latinos, 39 percent of Native Americans, and 30 percent of Asian Americans.

The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color provides the following recommendations to address the educational problems experienced by many young men of color:

- Make improving outcomes for young men of color a national priority.
- Increase community, business, and school partnerships to provide mentoring and support to young men of color.
- Reform education to ensure that all students, including young men of color, are college and career ready when they graduate from high school.
- Improve teacher education programs and provide professional development that includes cultural- and gender-responsive training.
- Create culturally appropriate persistence and retention programs that provide wraparound services to increase college completion for men of color.
- Produce more research and conduct more studies that strengthen the understanding of the challenges faced by males of color and provide evidence-based solutions to these challenges.

Download the full report at <http://bit.ly/lzTFRW>.



IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY AROUND THE WORLD: New Report Shares Lessons from Two-Day International Summit on Teaching Profession

As part of a two-day summit in New York City in March, education ministers, teachers, union leaders, and other education experts from sixteen high-performing and rapidly improving countries and regions gathered to discuss how education systems recruit, develop, and keep enough highly effective teachers necessary to prepare all students for the fast-changing,

knowledge-based global economy.¹ A new report released in early June by the U.S. Department of Education and Asia Society outlines discussions held at the summit and shares lessons from around the world on how to strengthen the teaching profession.

“The practices of top-performing countries can help America accelerate student achievement and elevate the teaching profession,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “The lessons outlined in the *International Summit on the Teaching Profession* report reinforce the understanding of education leaders around the world that a high-quality teaching profession is built on common principles and cornerstones in different education systems.”

The summit sought to shine a spotlight on the teaching profession; identify and share the world’s best policies and practices in developing a high-quality profession; examine ways of engaging teachers in education reform; and initiate an ongoing international dialogue on the teaching profession. The report, *Improving Teacher Quality Around the World: The International Summit on the Teaching Profession*, focuses on four overarching themes from the summit: (1) teacher recruitment and preparation; (2) development, support, and retention of teachers; (3) teacher evaluation and compensation; and (4) teacher engagement in education reform.

The report notes that many countries, including Brazil, the People’s Republic of China, Japan, and the United States, among others, are “deeply concerned” about current or potential widespread teacher shortages, especially in certain subjects or within certain geographic areas or demographic groups. As the report explains, some countries have responded to shortages by lowering standards for entering teachers while others have experienced success with recruitment efforts targeted at specific groups. However, high-performing countries such as Finland and Hong Kong pay significant attention to attracting, selecting, and preparing high-quality teachers. As the report explains, Hong Kong defines proper entry requirements, recruits the best potential teachers and trains them well, and creates an attractive, professional working environment.

The report describes how Finland has transformed itself from a timber and agriculture–based economy to a modern, technology-based economy, and has done so largely on the strength of its teachers. In Finland, only one in ten applicants is accepted into a program to become a primary school teacher. Applicants must go through two rounds of selection by the university, and then must complete a rigorous teacher-education program supported by the government.

The report notes that China places a strong emphasis on professional development for teachers in rural areas. In 2010 alone, 1.1 million teachers received professional development, with an emphasis on twenty-three provinces in central and western China. To help reach teachers in rural areas, China makes extensive use of technology to support teachers through satellite-based transmission of training and professional-development programs led by master teachers. In Shanghai, where students had the highest overall performance in reading, math, and science, every teacher must have several open classes each year so that other teachers—including trainees—can learn from them.

¹ Participating countries and regions at the summit were Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the People’s Republic of China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The report also notes that there was “clear agreement” among summit participants on the importance of support and mentoring for teachers in their first year or two of teaching. However, it also noted that the proportion of beginning teachers who do not receive mentoring and induction “varies enormously between the countries represented at the Summit from less than 10 percent to more than 70 percent.”

Discussion on teacher evaluation and compensation focused on Singapore’s Advanced Performance Management System, which is not intended to calibrate teacher ability or rank teachers. Instead, it is used to assess key competencies such as the role of teachers in the academic and character development of their students, the pedagogic initiatives and innovations teachers have developed, and their contribution to their colleagues and the school, among others. In Singapore, the report notes, learning outcomes are defined broadly and not just by examination results, and the evaluation process is meant to “create a regular dialogue between teacher and supervisor that is frequent, clear, and detailed regarding ways the teacher can improve.”

When talking about teacher engagement in education reform, the report highlights Norway where the Norwegian teachers’ union, which represents 85 percent of teachers, worked with the national government to redesign national tests. It also spotlights what Secretary Duncan characterized as the “tough-minded collaboration” between management and teachers’ unions in the United States to improve student achievement, with Duncan saying that the United States needs to engage teachers on a wider scale if it is to get all schools to where they need to be.

“The report concludes that achieving consistency in teaching quality has become central to the agenda of every country,” said **Vivien Stewart, author of the report and senior advisor for education at the Asia Society**. “To make progress, governments and teachers’ organizations will need to work together, as they did at the summit, to invent a new vision for the teaching profession.”

Stewart notes that the report is not meant to be a proceeding of the summit, but that it does try to capture the main issues that arose during the discussions. She suggests that the report be read in conjunction with [Building a High-Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from Around the World](#), a more detailed report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that frames the discussion during the summit and describes the international evidence base, general principles, best practices, and innovations in the field of teaching.

Improving Teacher Quality Around the World: The International Summit on the Teaching Profession is available at <http://asiasociety.org/files/lwtw-teachersummitreport0611.pdf>.

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. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Emily Kingsland, writer; and Kate Bradley, copyeditor.

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>.