

ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



STATE OF THE UNION PREVIEW: In Email to Supporters, Obama Highlights Economy and Jobs, Education, Deficit Reduction, and Bipartisanship

In a [video emailed to supporters over the weekend](#), President Obama outlines some of the major themes that he will cover in his State of the Union address on January 25. Obama stresses that the economy and job creation will be his principal focus, but he also mentions education, debt reduction, and bipartisanship.

In the video, Obama calls the last two years “as tough as anything we’ve gone through since the Great Depression.” He says that the economy is “growing again,” but there is still “a lot more work to do.”



For that reason, Obama says that his “number one focus is going to be making sure that we are competitive, that we are growing, and we are creating jobs not just now but well into the future.” He says his goal is to make the United States economy the “most innovative, dynamic economy in the world.” Part of that is making sure that American students are able to compete with workers anywhere in the world. “Now to do that, we’re going to have to out-innovate, we’re going to have to out-build, we’re going to have to out-compete, we’re going to have to out-educate other countries,” he says. At the same time, Obama acknowledges that the nation has to deal with its deficits and debt in a responsible way and make the government “leaner and smarter.”

STATE OF THE UNION BINGO IS BACK!!

On Tuesday, January 25 at 9:00 p.m. (EST), President Obama will deliver the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress and millions of Americans watching from home. The State of the Union address allows the president to report on the condition of the nation, but it also gives him a national stage on which to outline his legislative agenda for the coming year.

But will his legislative agenda include education? The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind, is long overdue for a revamp. Will the president use the State of the Union to call on Congress to reauthorize the law in 2011? And will he offer any specific proposals on what the reauthorization should include?

To help you keep track of these and other issues, the Alliance for Excellent Education has brought back its popular State of the Union Bingo game. There are three different versions of Bingo cards if you want to play with friends or you want to play more than one card at a time. Bingo cards and instructions on how to play are available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/SOTUBingo2011.

UPCOMING WEBINAR: State of the Union Wrap-Up on Thursday, January 27

On Thursday, January 27 at 2:30 p.m. (EST), the Alliance will hold an interactive webinar to review some of the big takeaways from President Obama's State of the Union address and will analyze how his speech could impact the prospects for education reform in 2011.

The webinar will feature Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, and members of the Alliance's federal advocacy team who will answer questions submitted by webinar participants.

To register for the webinar and ask questions, go to <http://media.all4ed.org/registration-january-27>.

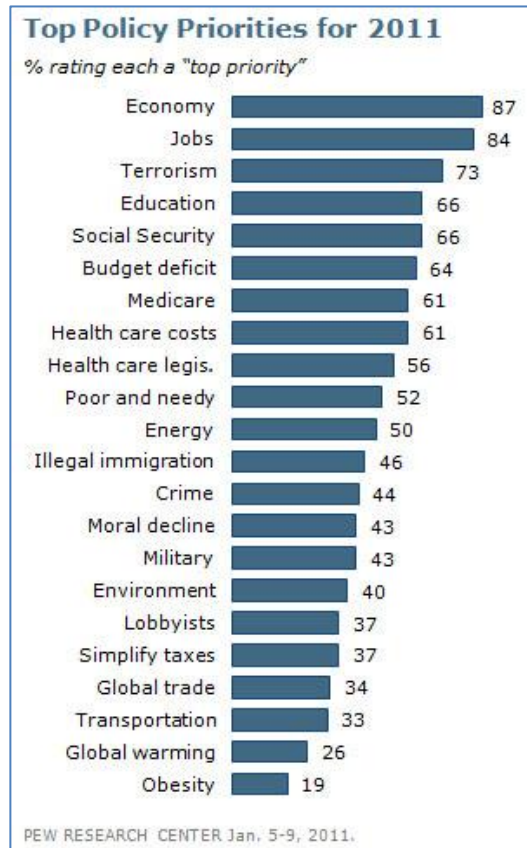


EDUCATION AMONG AMERICANS' TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2011: Education Ranks Fourth, Ahead of Reducing the Budget Deficit, According to New PEW Poll

During a time when politicians in Washington, DC are heavily focused on reducing the federal budget deficit, a new poll from the PEW Research Center for the People & the Press finds that the American public would rather see politicians act to improve the economy and the job situation, defend against terrorism, and improve education.

According to the poll, conducted January 5–9, 87 percent of Americans believe that strengthening the economy should be a top priority this year, followed closely by 84 percent who think that improving the job situation should be a top priority for the president and Congress in 2011. Americans also believe that defending against terrorism (73 percent), improving education (66 percent), and securing Social Security (66 percent) should be top priorities among the twenty-two issues tested. As shown in the graphic to the right, reducing the budget deficit (64 percent), ranks behind each of these other priorities.

In polling conducted every January since 2001, education has consistently finished in the top five issues in the PEW poll and is up slightly—from 65 percent—compared to last year's poll. The top gainer compared to last year was dealing with illegal immigrants, which increased by 6 percentage points from last year. Also making gains from last year were strengthening the economy (up 4 percentage points), reducing the budget deficit (up 4 percentage points), and improving the job situation (up 3 percentage points). The biggest decreases were in defending against terrorism (down 7 percentage points) and strengthening the military (down 6 percentage points).



When broken down by party affiliation, the economy and jobs ranked first among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, while education ranked third among Democrats and Independents, but ninth among Republicans.

The complete results from the poll are available at <http://people-press.org/report/696/>.

Partisans Agree: Boost Economy, Improve Job Situation

Top policy priorities for...

Republicans	Democrats	Independents
90% Economy	88% Jobs	88% Economy
87% Jobs	87% Economy	81% Jobs
83% Terrorism	78% Education	67% Education
69% Social Sec.	76% Health costs	67% Terrorism
68% Deficit	72% Terrorism	65% Social Sec.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 5-9, 2011. Q26.



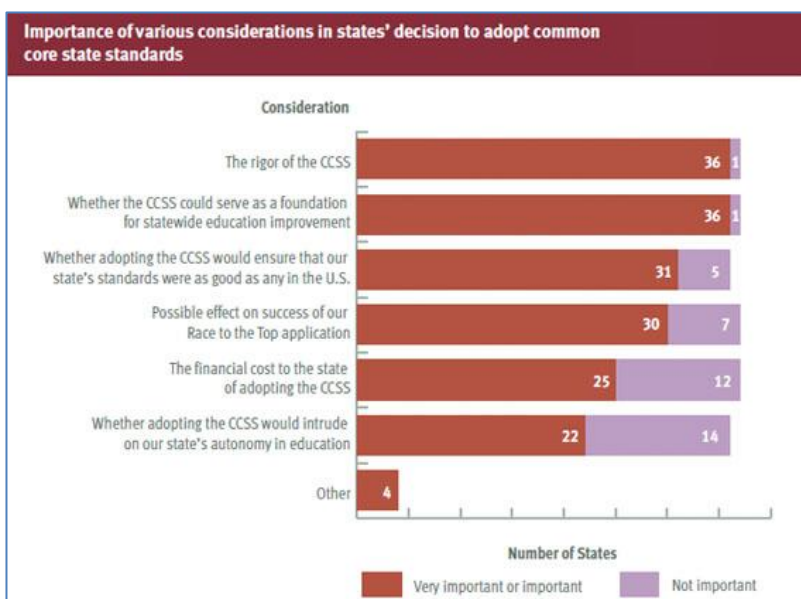
STATES' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: New Report Reveals States' Progress and Plans for Implementing the Common Core

Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have adopted common core state standards in English language arts and mathematics.¹ In an effort to learn states' progress and plans for implementing the common core state standards, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) surveyed state deputy superintendents of education or their designees and compiled their responses in a new report, *States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards*.

CEP received responses from forty-two states and the District of Columbia, which the report counts as a state. At the time of the survey, which ended in mid-November, thirty-two states reported that they had adopted the common core state standards. Of the eleven remaining states, four said that they had adopted the common core state standards provisionally, one said that it had decided not to adopt the standards, and six had not yet made a decision. Of the thirty-seven states that had either adopted, provisionally adopted, or decided not to adopt the standards, thirty-one said their decision would not change in 2011. Only three states said they might change their decision about adopting the standards.

When asked why they adopted the common core state standards, state officials cited educational quality issues more often than Race to the Top as important factors in their state's decision. As shown in the graph to the right, thirty-six states cited the rigor of the common core state standards (CCSS) as a "very important" or "important" factor in their decision. Only one state said that the rigor of the standards was not important.

According to the report, states that have adopted the common core state standards are moving forward with little resistance, but full implementation may be



¹ Minnesota adopted the common core state standards in English language arts but not math.

several years away for most of them. It finds that many states anticipate that it will take until 2013 or later to fully implement the more complex changes associated with the common core state standards such as changes in assessment, teacher evaluation, and teacher certification. Of the twenty-seven states that plan to change student assessments by 2013 or later, six gave 2015 as the timeline.

“States are making progress and see strong support for common core standards, but this is going to take a long time and a sustained effort to see through,” said **Jack Jennings, CEP president and chief executive officer**. “It’s also noteworthy that states vary on approaches to higher education policy and on how much they will require districts to do to support the new standards.”

Indeed, most officials from states that have adopted the common core state standards were unsure whether their state plans to align undergraduate admission requirements of first-year college curriculum with the common core state standards, the report finds. Among the major challenges states cited to implementing the standards, states most frequently mentioned developing teacher evaluation systems geared to the standards and finding the funding necessary to support implementation.

The complete report is available at <http://bit.ly/dXQHpt>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES 2011: Governors Recognize the Importance of Investments in Education

Despite tough budget times, many governors have prioritized K–12 education in their state of the state addresses. Specifically, several governors focused on linking teacher tenure to student performance; the importance of digital learning; and highlighting the link between education and the economy.

Alaska: Parnell Addressees Progress in Improving Rural and Higher Education

During his second [state of the state address](#) on January 19, **Governor Sean Parnell (R)** explained how Alaska has made progress in providing its children “more access to life-transforming education.” He highlighted how five hundred children located in three different rural areas of the state now have access to brand new schools and discussed the Alaska Performance Scholarship. The scholarship program, formerly known as the Governor’s Scholarship, was introduced in 2010 and is granted to qualifying students to help pay for up to four years of tuition at a higher education institution in Alaska. This year, more than nine thousand high school seniors took advantage of the scholarship opportunity and Parnell predicts that 30,000 more students will be involved in the program over the next three years.

“Our goal is a transformational education for every student; one that adequately prepares them for postsecondary education and good jobs,” said Parnell. “We describe the Alaska Performance Scholarship as an invitation to excellence but it’s so much more. Every student willing to take the challenge of a more rigorous curriculum can earn these scholarships. Over the long term, these scholarships will have a profound impact on the quality of life in Alaska, and on our state’s ability to compete in a global economy.”

Idaho: Otter Proposes Targeted College- and Career-Ready Investments

On January 10 during his [state of the state address](#), Governor C. L. “Butch” Otter (R) called for a slight increase in Idaho’s general funds for public schools during fiscal year (FY) 2012 while recommending at least a 2 percent budget reduction for most of the other state agencies. Last year, the governor called for a reduction in general funds for public school appropriations resulting in a \$128 million hit for students.

Otter specifically called for investments in a third year of math and science for high school students and a program to cover all Idaho juniors’ college entrance exam fees. He also emphasized making a shift from a teacher salary system that rewards tenure to one that rewards performance.

The governor recognized that Idaho continues to outperform national averages on math and reading while spending less than half the amount per student than New York, New Jersey, or Washington, DC. He also gave special attention to the growth of the Idaho Education Network (IEN), a push for the use of information technology in the state, and its role in expanding access to education.

“I’ve talked with the teachers and the high school students who have already earned 1,300 college credits by using the IEN,” said Otter. “I’ve seen how a calculus teacher in Eagle can reach students in Sandpoint and Sugar City. I’ve seen how our Idaho students can use the IEN to take interactive guided tours of world-class resources like the Great Barrier Reef, the Holocaust Museum, the Alaska Sea Life Center, and NASA facilities. And just as importantly, I’ve seen how the IEN is becoming a true community and economic development resource.”

According to a [recent article](#) by the Associated Press, Idaho Superintendent Tom Luna presented a \$68 million education reform plan for FY 2012 that would continue to expand classroom technology and tie teacher pay to merit while providing bonuses for those who take on hard-to-fill positions and leadership roles.

Arkansas: Beebe Increases Per-Student Spending

“In many states, the budget process has become one of triage, where leaders desperately are trying to save whatever services they can in the face of gaping deficits,” said **Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe (D)** during his [state of the state](#) address on January 11. “That we do not face such bleak crises here is a source of pride.”

The governor based his proposed budget for the coming fiscal year on predicted small increases in state revenue. Although he called for nearly all agencies and services to remain funded at the same levels as this year, his budget includes a 2 percent increase in per-student funding. He also requested a 1 percent increase in higher education funding to help the state colleges and universities counterbalance rising student enrollments and asked administrators to be “measured and modest” when considering raising tuitions.

Beebe recognized that the state had made significant progress in improving K–12 education and now holds a sixth-place national ranking as determined by [Education Week](#). He mentioned that in the past, funding allocated to closing the achievement gap had been stashed away and not dedicated to fixing the problem. As a result, he said he was working with the state legislature to ensure that those funds are spent on active efforts to help students while still allowing districts to hold some funding in reserve.

Indiana: Daniels Calls for More Parent Choice

Governor Mitchell E. Daniels (R) focused more than half of his [state of the state address](#) on education, and emphasized the importance of teacher quality in turning around Indiana’s schools. He said that under the current teacher evaluation system, 99 percent of Indiana teachers are rated effective; however, if that were true then 99 percent, and not the current one-third, of students should be passing national tests. He recommended that teachers earn tenure by proving their ability to help kids learn instead of earning it by seniority. The governor also put forth a new accountability system that would evaluate teachers on an ‘A’ to ‘F’ grading system saying, “There will be no more hiding behind jargon and gibberish.”

Citing his visits to local high schools, Daniels observed that many students complete their K–12 graduation requirements in less than twelve years. He proposed providing these students with another option. “We should say to these diligent young people, and their families, if you choose to finish in eleven years instead of twelve, we will give you the money we were going to spend while you cruised through twelfth grade, as long as you spend that money on some form of further education. Let’s empower our kids to defray the high cost of education through their own hard work, by entrusting them with this new and innovative choice.”

In an effort to bolster more local control for schools, Daniels ordered the Indiana Board of Education to remove unnecessary requirements that consume time or money without contributing to student learning. He took a hard line on teacher unions saying that they can go over the line when they spend their time and energy on decisions such as the color of the teachers’ lounge or who can monitor recess. Daniels also expressed his support for more parent choice and the expansion of charter schools.

In an interview with the [Journal Gazette](#), **Indiana high school teacher Renee Albright** responded to the governor’s inaugural remarks, saying, “It’s insulting. It makes it sound like we’re sitting there wallpapering the bathrooms in our school instead of educating our students.” Albright disliked the suggestion that teachers do not put kids first and commented, “In twenty-five years I’ve been teaching, nothing has ever been enough. We’re supposed to sharpen the swords for our own execution.”

Delaware: Markell Focuses on Helping Students Compete in a Global Economy

During his third [state of the state address](#), **Delaware Governor Jack Markell (D)** focused on the importance of preparing students to compete with their international peers. He explained why he strongly supports a regulation requiring students to complete a course in world language in order to graduate.

“The international insurance firm Cigna employs five hundred people in North Wilmington who service workers all over the world,” said Markell. “Cigna has support centers in many different countries, and they’ve found that their employees are most productive when they speak multiple languages. Their employees in Belgium speak an average of three languages. We helped Cigna stay in Delaware, but if we want companies like them to grow, they need workers here ready to meet the challenge of communicating around the world.”

The governor announced a new partnership with the Chinese Hanban Institute to bring teachers from China to Delaware so schools could offer Chinese language courses online to students across the state without incurring significant costs. He also described science, engineering, technology, and mathematics (STEM) education as a “language that underpins most of the innovation that drives global growth” and discussed the formation of a STEM Council and STEM Residency Program to ensure that the state’s schools offer high-quality curriculum and attract teachers with STEM experience. He also emphasized the importance of adopting and implementing the common core state standards so all students are prepared to compete on a global level.

Markell recognized the work of teachers, administrators, business leaders, and parents in developing a Race to the Top plan that helped win the state \$100 million in federal funds. Delaware’s plan consisted of improving its assessment system, linking teacher evaluations to student growth, creating more time for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues, expanding Advanced Placement courses, and attracting effective teachers to the lowest-performing schools using incentive pay.

Also included in the state’s 2010 Race to the Top application was the launch of Partnership Zone (PZ) schools. These selected schools receive grants of up to \$2.2 million over a period of four years to implement one of four turnaround options designed to significantly improve student outcomes. The Delaware Department of Education calls for PZ schools to work with the school community in order to determine which turnaround method is the best fit. During his speech, Markell was proud to announce that each of the PZ schools had submitted bold reform plans that included “leadership and staffing changes, hiring flexibility, the creation of focused academies, and the implementation of longer school days and school years.”

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. *Straight A’s* contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Emily Roosa, 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>.