



# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## SENATE HELP COMMITTEE PASSES LEGISLATION TO REWRITE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

On October 20, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee passed a bill to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), by a bipartisan vote of 15 to 7. All twelve Democrats on the committee voted for the bill. They were joined by three Republicans: **Senators Mike Enzi (R-WY), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Mark Kirk (R-IL).**



“[This] is a victory—both for our nation’s children and for bipartisanship,” [said Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin \(D-IA\)](#). “After more than two years of hearings, debate, and negotiations, the HELP Committee has come together in a bipartisan way to approve comprehensive legislation to improve education for our nation’s children.” Harkin said the bill is “not perfect,” but is an “important step forward for America’s children.” He said he would continue to work with his colleagues on both sides of the aisle and education experts to “build on this strong foundation and improve this bill when it is considered by the full Senate.”

**Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), top Republican on the HELP Committee,** agreed that more work needs to be done when the bill reaches the Senate floor. “We must keep working in order to have true bipartisan education reform,” [Enzi said](#). “I thank my colleagues for their hard work and look forward to continuing to work with them as we move forward in the legislative process.”

**Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)** noted that the bill would provide much-needed accountability for high schools. “For too long, high schools across the country have looked the other way when their students dropped out,” [he said](#). “This bill, for the first time, shines a spotlight on these ‘dropout factories’ and requires them to make substantial improvements to better serve students who are at risk of dropping out.”

In a [statement](#), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia,** outlined several other provisions geared toward reforming the nation’s high schools. He said the bill would “level the playing field” for high schools by

allowing them to receive Title I funds—the federal government’s primary source of support for low-income students. He noted that high schools only receive 10 percent of Title I funds under NCLB even though they serve nearly one-quarter of low-income students, and said the bill would help to make sure that more high school students can benefit from these resources. Wise also said the legislation also supports state efforts to strengthen the reading and writing skills of all students, including those in middle and high school, and would help to ensure that the high school diplomas students receive are meaningful by calling for college- and career-ready standards.

“No Child Left Behind is a compact disc in an iPod world,” Wise said. “Today, it got a much-needed upgrade that will bring it—and the nation’s education system—into the twenty-first century. I urge the Senate to move this bill to the floor quickly. High school students have waited long enough for better policy from Washington, DC. For each additional day that action is delayed, another 7,000 students will drop out of school.”

Some provisions could slow down Senate approval of the bill—most notably the provision that would eliminate the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements found in NCLB. Instead, states would have to ensure that all students are making “continuous improvement” and identify the elementary, middle, and high schools in the bottom 5 percent of performance—including high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent—and implement turnaround strategies in those schools. These provisions seemingly providing different responses based on the type of school students attend have received criticism from business organizations as well as those representing students with disabilities, low-income students, and students of color.

In a [blog post on ed.gov](#), **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** also expressed concern that the bill would not go far enough to maintain a “strong commitment” to accountability. “Parents, teachers, and state leaders across the country understand that in order to prepare all of our young people to compete in the global economy, we must hold ourselves and each other accountable at every level of the education system—from the classroom to the school district, from the states to the federal government,” he wrote.

Duncan also noted that the Senate bill lacks a “comprehensive evaluation and support system” to guide teachers and principals in continuing to improve their practice. Just prior to the markup, Harkin and Enzi made a last-minute change to the legislation that would let states and districts determine how to evaluate teachers. Before the change, states would have been required to create teacher evaluation systems with input from educators.

The next step in the legislative process is a HELP Committee hearing on the bill on November 8. After the hearing, the bill could go to the Senate floor for consideration, and although no date has been set, Harkin says he hopes the legislation will reach the Senate floor before Thanksgiving.

One issue working in the bill’s favor is the bipartisan opposition to President Obama’s plan to grant waivers to states on certain NCLB requirements. In the absence of new legislation rewriting NCLB, the [president’s plan](#) would grant states flexibility from specific provisions of the law in exchange for state-led reform efforts to close achievement gaps, evaluate teachers and

principals, promote rigorous accountability, and ensure that all students are on track to graduate ready for college and a career.

During his [opening statement at the HELP Committee markup](#), Enzi offered several reasons why his republican colleagues should prefer the legislative route. “Members on my side should keep in mind that if they are concerned about issues such as mandated teacher and principal evaluations and performance measures, they should support today’s draft legislation which does neither, but is contained as a requirement in the president’s conditional waivers,” Enzi said. “If they are concerned about an unelected, unaccountable bureaucracy becoming a kind of National School Board, they should support this legislation, rather than allow the Secretary’s waivers to dictate the strings that come with state and local flexibility contained in the president’s waivers.”

Enzi is not alone in his opposition to the president’s waiver plan, a fact Harkin made clear after the markup. “I think both sides agree that we’d rather do it here than have waivers by the administration,” Harkin said. “After that, there [are] obviously a lot of differences, but that’s the nature of legislation.”

On the House side, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce is working on a piecemeal approach to rewriting NCLB rather than one comprehensive piece of legislation. So far, the committee has passed three pieces of legislation, but has yet to address some of the most significant issues within education policy, including accountability, teacher effectiveness, and funding levels for the largest federal education programs. The committee is expected to consider legislation addressing these issues between now and the end of the year.

Harkin says that he met with members of the House Education and the Workforce Committee prior to the Senate markup to talk about the process of reconciling the different approaches to rewriting NCLB and remains optimistic that the House could act quickly if the Senate were able to pass a bipartisan bill. Should Congress be able to come to an agreement and pass a bill to rewrite NCLB prior to the end of the year—and the president signs it into law—it could negate the need for waivers.

“There is no reason why Congress should not be able to send legislation fixing No Child Left Behind to the president by Christmas,” Alexander said in a [speech on the Senate floor](#).

**ESEA ON THE WAY?: Alliance Webinar to Examine Prospects of Senate HELP Committee Bill Reaching—and Passing—the Full Senate**

On **Tuesday, November 1, from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.**, the Alliance for Excellent Education will hold a webinar that will examine key changes in the bill that the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee passed to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind.

The webinar will feature members of the Alliance’s federal advocacy team, who will also answer questions from webinar viewers.

**To register for the webinar or ask a question, visit**  
<http://media.all4ed.org/registration-nov-1-2011>.



## REMEDICATION EXASPERATION: New York City, Wyoming, and Ohio Focus on College Students' Needs for Remedial Courses

Only 21.4 percent of freshmen who enter high school in New York City graduate from high school four years later ready to succeed in college and only 50.4 percent actually enroll in college, according to [new data released by the New York City Department of Education last week](#).

“Our message to schools is clear: students need to be meeting a higher bar and doing more rigorous work if they are going to be ready for life after high school,” said **New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott**. “It’s important that our principals, teachers, students and families are on the same page in this effort and understand the goal is not just graduating, but graduating college and career ready.”

The data was part of the fifth annual progress reports for the city’s 495 high schools, transfer high schools, and young adult borough centers. The progress reports award letter grades to schools based on student progress toward graduation; performance on standardized tests and course work; student attendance; and parent, student, and teacher attitudes about schools. This year, for the first time, the reports also include data on how many students in each high school take and perform well in advanced courses, graduate ready for college, and enroll in a college after graduation.

According to the data, thirty-eight of the 353 schools with available data (11 percent) graduated 50 percent or more of its students college and career ready. On the other end of the spectrum, 151 out of 353 schools (43 percent) graduated less than 10 percent of its students ready for college or a career.

In discussing ways that the city could boost college readiness among its graduates, **New York City Department of Education Chief Academic Officer Shael Polakow-Suransky** told the [New York Times](#) that the tests by which students were measured needed to be better at assessing the skills students would need after graduation, like analytical writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. “One of the biggest barriers, right now, to real college readiness is that our state exams have not shifted to focus on college readiness yet,” he told the [New York Daily News](#).

New York City is not the only locale relying on data to get a handle on how to better prepare students for success after high school. In Wyoming, a new study presented to the state legislature’s Joint Education Committee finds that more than half of the new students entering Wyoming community colleges are not prepared for college-level math and English courses. Specifically, it finds that 33 percent of community college students needed remedial math in the fall of 2006, 7 percent needed remedial English classes, and another 15.5 percent required remedial courses in both math and English.

At the University of Wyoming, 23 percent of entering students required remedial math. According to the [Associated Press](#), trustees at the university are considering raising admission standards while also providing more support for new students in need of remediation.

Providing more support for students is one way to tackle remediation needs. An opposite response would be to eliminate remedial courses, something the Ohio university system is considering, according to the [Hamilton Journal-News](#). The article notes that about 40 percent of college freshmen in Ohio need to take remedial courses because they are not ready for college-level work.

Under the plan, Ohio would end subsidies for “developmental” courses at most university main campuses. Regional and branch campuses, as well as community colleges will continue to receive state funding to support remedial courses. By shifting remedial courses away from universities and toward regional and community colleges where tuition costs are lower, proponents of the plan hope that it will save students and the state money.

“Remediation is very expensive at the college level and needs to be done in high school,” **Kim Norris, spokesperson for Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Jim Petro**, who was quoted in the article. It notes that the regents are pushing for a tenth-grade assessment that would flag students who may need extra help before they graduate from high school.

In May, the Alliance for Excellent Education released an issue brief, “[Saving Now and Saving Later: How High School Reform Can Reduce the Nation’s Wasted Remediation Dollars](#),” finding that remedial education—courses designed for postsecondary students on basic skills that they did not master in high school—costs the United States an estimated \$5.6 billion.



### ***HIDDEN COSTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES: New Report Estimates Federal, State, and Local Governments Spent Nearly \$4 Billion on Community College Students Who Dropped Out After First Year***

Between the 2004–05 school year and the 2008–09 school year, nearly \$4 billion in federal, state, and local tax dollars was spent on first-year, full-time community college students who dropped out before earning an associate’s degrees or certificate and did not return for a second year. So says *The Hidden Costs of Community Colleges*, a new report from the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

“Taxpayers are investing billions of dollars to support students who never complete their first year,” said **Mark Schneider, coauthor of the report and a vice president at AIR**. “And these students are paying tuition, borrowing money, and taking time away from work to pursue certificates or degrees they aren’t getting. We must pay far more attention to the high costs of low retention rates.”

The report breaks out spending into three categories: (1) state and local government costs to help pay for the education of students who did not return for a second year (\$3 billion); (2) states’ costs for the same purpose (\$240 million); and (3) the federal government’s costs (\$660 million). In the 2008-09 school year alone, the report finds that federal, state, and local governments spent nearly \$1 billion on first-time, full-time community college students who dropped out before their second year, which is an increase of nearly 35 percent from five years ago. The report is careful to note that these estimates are only a portion of the overall taxpayers’ costs, as they do not cover part-time students or other government spending such as capital expenditures that help support community colleges.

In addition to providing an overall number, the report breaks out spending in each state. By combining state grants with state and local spending, it finds that eight states (California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin) spent \$20 million or more in the 2009-10 school year on students who drop out before their second year.

According to the report, the hidden costs of community college are rising as enrollments increase while completion rates are on the decline. Over the last ten years, community college enrollments have risen by about 25 percent and now total more than 6 million students, the report finds. In 2009, more than 800,000 students started community college, but as the report notes, far too many of these students will fail to reach the finish line and far too few will even make it past the first year. Specifically, the report finds that about 20 percent of full-time students who begin their studies at a community college do not return for a second year. The report identifies the high number of community college students in need of remediation as “one of the most consistently identified barriers” to higher persistence and graduation rates.

“Given the central role that community colleges play in the nation’s plans to regain its position as the number one country in the world when it comes to college-educated adults, and given the increasing fiscal difficulties facing individual states and the nation as a whole, it is clear that ‘business as usual’ is far too expensive,” the report notes. “Better ways are needed to ensure that the students who enter a community college expecting to earn an associate’s degree or a certificate finish the first lap and ultimately cross the finish line.”

The report offers several ways to increase completion, including allowing students to earn credit for proven competencies rather than simply through seat time and using technology to increase flexibility and personalize the rate at which students attain necessary skills. It adds that students, parents, taxpayers, and government officials need access to better data on student learning and the labor market success of graduates from programs and campuses.

*Hidden Costs of Community Colleges* is available at [http://www.air.org/files/AIR\\_Hidden\\_Costs\\_of\\_Community\\_Colleges\\_Oct2011.pdf](http://www.air.org/files/AIR_Hidden_Costs_of_Community_Colleges_Oct2011.pdf).



**THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT DILEMMA AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS: New Report Examines Benefits for Special Education Students Who Earn a Diploma Compared to Those Who Do Not**

Similar to the advantages that non-special education high school graduates possess over high school dropouts, special education students who earn a high school diploma are more likely to attend a postsecondary institution, secure meaningful employment, and avoid the criminal justice system than special education students who leave high school without a diploma, according to a new report from the California Dropout Research Project at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

“The social and economic consequences of dropping out are a serious problem not only for young people who received special education services, but also for their families, schools, communities, and society as a whole,” the report notes. “Although these problems are similar to

those experienced by their peers who did not receive special education services, they seem to be more pronounced for special education students.”

The report, *The High School Dropout Dilemma and Special Education Students*, finds that approximately 13 percent of all special education students aged fourteen to twenty-one who exited school during the 2008–09 school year did so by dropping out or moving without continuing their education. The report acknowledges several problems with determining a dropout rate for special education students, but finds that the dropout rate for special education students tends to be higher than the rate for non–special education students based on a study of ten states with comparable data.

The report is able to determine dropout rates within different disability categories. It finds that students with emotional disturbance (20.7 percent) have much higher dropout rates than all other special education students, while those with autism (8.5 percent), deaf-blindness (11.7 percent), visual impairments (8.2 percent), hearing impairments (8.1 percent), speech-language impairments (8.4 percent), and orthopedic impairments (11.7) had much lower rates.

Upon examining benefits that special education graduates enjoy over their counterparts who fail to earn a diploma, the report finds that the personal costs of dropping out among special education students are enormous and can far exceed the challenges encountered by non–special education students who drop out. For example, up to two years out of high school, 56 percent of special education dropouts had been arrested and 34 percent had been on probation or parole, compared with 19 percent and 16 percent of special education high school graduates. Additionally, the report finds that 39 percent of special education graduates enrolled in some kind of postsecondary education institution within two years after leaving high school—more than four times the enrollment rate of dropouts (9 percent).

The report finds that the reasons special education students drop out are often similar to those of students in the general population. “Dropping out is influenced by an array of factors related to the student’s social background, educational experiences, and community setting in which he or she resides,” the report reads. “It is a gradual process of disengagement from school that includes reduced participation, less successful outcomes, and reduced sense of identification and belonging, culminating in the student’s early departure from school.” However, the report also finds that special education students are less likely to drop out if they spend more time in general education classes, receive tutoring services, and are in schools that maintain high expectations for academic achievement and school completion.

The complete report is available at [http://cdrp.ucsb.edu/pubs\\_reports.htm](http://cdrp.ucsb.edu/pubs_reports.htm).

***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, 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>.