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EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **THE DIGITAL LEARNING IMPERATIVE: New Alliance Report Shows How Digital Learning Connects Technology and Teaching to Meet Today's Educational Challenges**

Digital learning can connect middle and high school students with better teaching and learning experiences while also addressing three major challenges facing the nation's education system—access to good teaching, tight budgets, and boosting student achievement—according to a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

“To overcome these obstacles, the nation's education system cannot continue to conduct business as usual,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Applying technological tools of real-time data and assessments; adaptive software; online and digital content from many sources; and constant communication with students, parents, and others involved in a student's education process, the teacher is able to design the pathway that works best for each student to realize his or her maximum learning potential.

“Slapping a netbook on top of a textbook is not enough,” said Wise. “By applying technical tools, teachers can become true educational designers who harness the best pedagogy available to meet the individual needs of their students.”

The report, *The Digital Learning Imperative: How Teaching and Technology Meet Today's Educational Challenges*, comes one month in advance of the **first-ever national Digital Learning Day scheduled for Wednesday, February 1**, which is spearheaded by the Alliance.

“In just the last two years,” Wise noted, “many more states, districts, and school leaders are looking for technology solutions and the number of students taking online courses or using mobile devices to learn is soaring. Yet the nation's education system has made only incremental progress toward ensuring all students graduate from high school ready for college and a career.”

According to the report, which significantly updates and expands on an Alliance brief released in 2010, the United States faces three critical challenges in education:

- 1.) America's high schools are not improving fast enough so that all students are graduating college and career ready and able to compete in a rapidly changing world. Presently, the nation cannot meet President Obama's goals for college completion without dramatically improving the quality of learning in secondary schools.

- 2.) Continued economic strains on state and local tax bases mean most schools have little hope for new funding sources or increases anytime soon, forcing leaders to rethink how resources are used. State policymakers and education leaders will continue to be challenged with raising student performance amidst tightened budgets.
- 3.) Many students still do not have access to highly qualified, skilled teachers; the best available teaching strategies that meet their individual needs; or enriching learning experiences.

“Simply put, this report documents that without effective applications of technology, ‘we can’t get there from here,’” said Wise. “Incremental, fragmented progress will no longer meet the needs of students. When paired with effective teaching, personalized learning, and the elements of successful whole-school reform, technology can accelerate the pace of improvement.”

*The Digital Learning Imperative* highlights how effective educational technology strategies link the “Three Ts”—teaching, technology, and use of time—with overall whole-school reform strategies. Only when the Three Ts are used together can schools be expected to accelerate improvement.

The Alliance will showcase schools and teachers already using technology to improve teaching and learning in a national town hall meeting in Washington, DC during the first-ever national Digital Learning Day on February 1, 2012. Teachers, librarians, principals, administrators, and those who contribute to the learning of students are encouraged to sign up to participate in the day’s activities.

Download *The Digital Learning Imperative* at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/DigitalLearningImperative.pdf>.

To learn more about Digital Learning Day, visit <http://www.digitallearningday.org>.



**Thirty-three States and DC Committed to Celebrate Digital Learning Day: States Pledge Support for National Awareness Campaign Highlighting Technology’s Role in School Reform and Strengthening Instructional Practices**

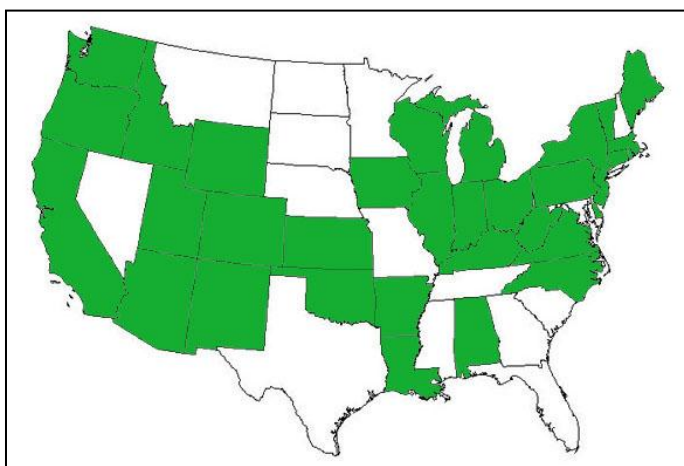
To date, two-thirds, or thirty-three, of the fifty states, plus the District of Columbia, have signed up as partners in support of the first-ever national Digital Learning Day taking place on Wednesday, February 1, 2012. Spearheaded by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Digital Learning Day is a national awareness campaign designed to celebrate innovative teachers and highlight instructional practices that strengthen teaching and personalize learning for all students.

“I’m excited to see the momentum building for Digital Learning Day,” said Alliance President Bob Wise. “These states have really embraced the issue and are planning exciting statewide celebrations to support the numerous initiatives around the effective applications of technology in education.”

On Digital Learning Day, a virtual national town hall meeting will be webcast live from Washington, DC, and will include highlights from four to six satellite locations. The town hall meeting boasts support from

- twenty-five core partners made up of national membership organizations, and a broad array of stakeholder groups, including principals, school board, content area specialists, and instructional technology professionals;
- thirty-three states that are planning their own statewide celebrations;
- twenty-six instructional technology experts who are hard at work developing toolkits and resources to support educators at the state, district, school, and classroom levels; and
- nineteen nationally known companies and foundations, such as Intel Corporation, Google, and SMART Technologies.

The following states (shown in green on the map to the right) are signed up as partners for Digital Learning Day: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The District of Columbia has also signed up.



Celebrations of Digital Learning Day will be determined within each participating state. Some activities these states are planning include a proclamation from the state governor, a showcase of student work through digital learning, lesson plan contests for teachers, announcements of digital learning projects, and highlights of promising practices within and among states.

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), for example, will kick off the state's twenty-nine-day Web 2.0 Challenge on Digital Learning Day. Each day during February, IDOE will introduce a new resource complete with tutorials and tips on its blog; the challenge is for educators to explore the shared tools and post thoughts and ideas about how they could use them to enhance student learning. Additionally, the state will encourage districts to post a short video telling their own Digital Learning story to the IDEO YouTube channel.

“Educators all over Indiana work every day to advance and expand their efforts to take advantage of technology to improve student outcomes,” said **Candice Dodson, director of eLearning at IDEO**. “Digital Learning Day gives us—and all states—a chance to shine a light on the exciting ways digital learning is happening in schools.”

Learn more about Digital Learning Day or sign up to participate at <http://www.digitallearningday.org>.

## Webinar Showcases Promise of Digital Learning, Offers Ideas for National Digital Learning Day

On January 6, the Alliance held a webinar to highlight some successful schools and to provide more information about how individuals can get involved in Digital Learning Day and learn more about how technology can impact student learning.



The webinar featured **Ann Flynn, director of education technology and state association services at the National School Boards Association; Jayne Marlink, executive director of the California Writing Project; and Jason Pittman, a science teacher at Hollin Meadows Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia.** The webinar also featured **Alliance President Bob Wise**, who provided highlights from the new Alliance report, [\*The Digital Learning Imperative: How Technology and Teaching Meet Today's Education Challenges\*](#).

During the webinar, panelists discussed how digital learning has made a difference in the lives of students and teachers as well as the elements of success in digital initiatives. They also discussed their own plans for the first-ever national Digital Learning Day scheduled for February 1, 2012.

Video from the webinar is available at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-jan-6-2012>.



## CONGRESS PASSES BILL FUNDING U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: Education Funding Cut By \$100 Million, But Bill Restores Funding for Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program

On December 23, 2011, President Obama signed a Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 spending bill that will provide \$45.29 billion in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Education, a decrease of \$100 million compared to FY 2011 and \$3.5 billion less than the amount Obama requested in his FY 2012 budget. The bill is a part of an omnibus spending bill that includes nine regular appropriations bills and totals \$915 billion in discretionary spending.<sup>1</sup>

“Reaching a compromise on this bill was extraordinarily difficult,” said [\*\*Senator Tom Harkin \(D-IA\)\*\*](#), **chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**. “Some of the cuts will be painful and unpopular. But I believe this bill still preserves this subcommittee’s top priority: that every American deserves the right to a good education and job skills training; protection from illness and want; and an equal opportunity to reach one’s highest potential.”

Although the bill includes many spending cuts, it contains an unexpected gain in the restored funding for the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) program, which promotes literacy from birth through grade twelve.

Originally instituted by President George W. Bush as a program targeting struggling readers in middle and high school, the SRCL program was reconfigured in 2010 to provide broad support to states in placing literacy at the center of strategies to improve educator effectiveness and school performance. In 2010, states received \$10 million each in formula grants to convene a

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<sup>1</sup> The omnibus bill includes the following appropriations bills: Defense; Energy and Water; Financial Services; Homeland Security; Interior and Environment; Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education; Legislative Branch; Military Construction and Veterans’ Affairs; and State-Foreign Operations.

literacy leadership team to draft literacy plans with a broad group of stakeholders, which resulted in plans underway by forty-eight states. In 2011, six states—Georgia, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Texas—shared \$180 million in discretionary grants to implement their plans in local school districts. (See box below for a recent Alliance webinar on this subject.) As part of an [agreement on final spending levels for FY 2011](#), Congress eliminated funding for the program. However, under the bill signed by the president last month, the SRCL program will receive \$160 million in FY 2012.

“My reaction is one of gratitude and surprise,” said **Phillip Lovell, vice president of federal advocacy for the Alliance for Excellent Education**. “Like anything else in life, once something is gone, it’s hard to get it back. This program is just getting under way, so to cut it before it has a chance to demonstrate results didn’t make a lot of sense.”

In addition to the SRCL program, competitive programs—favored by President Obama and **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** but opposed by some members of Congress who favored formula programs—will also receive funding when some predicted they would not. Specifically, the School Improvement Grant program for states will receive \$534 million; Investing in Innovation will receive \$149 million; and Race to the Top will receive \$549 million, which is much less than the \$900 million that Obama requested in his budget and the nearly \$700 million it received in FY 2011. This year, school districts, as well as states, will be eligible to apply for Race to the Top funding.

Among the larger, more established programs in the bill, Title I will receive \$14.5 billion, an increase of about \$74 million and special education state grants will receive \$11.6 billion, an increase of about \$112 million.

The bill supports funding for other programs as well; the High School Graduation Initiative will receive \$49 million; career and technical state grants will receive \$1.1 billion; TRIO will receive \$840 million; GEAR UP will receive \$302 million; and Statewide Data Systems will receive \$38 million.

The fact that Republicans and Democrats in Congress were able to come to an agreement on a final bill for the U.S. Department of Education, as well as other departments and agencies, was seen as a positive step by many of the legislators involved in the negotiations.

“With the exception of the Department of Defense, all of these agencies have been running on a continuing resolution for well over a year now,” said [Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye \(D-HI\)](#) on December 17, when the agreement was announced. “This must stop. It is no way to run a government, particularly one that must learn to do more with less. How can an agency be more efficient when it is operating under budget plans that were developed two or even three years ago? ... If the Senate passes this measure and the president signs it into law, we will have succeeded in enacting each of our bills prior to end of the calendar year for the first time since 2009.”

A complete list of funding totals for programs under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Education is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget12/12action.pdf>.



## GOING TO SCALE: Comprehensive Birth-Through-Grade-Twelve State Literacy Plans

On January 5, the Alliance for Excellent Education held a webinar featuring representatives from two states that have created literacy plans to meet students' needs from birth through grade twelve.

During the webinar, participants provided an overview of the key elements of the state literacy plans and discussed how states are positioning literacy as the linchpin of secondary reforms to prepare all students for college and a career.



Speakers included **Melissa Colman**, executive director of the teaching and learning unit for the Colorado Department of Education; **Jill Slack**, director of the Louisiana Department of Education's literacy office; **Mariana Haynes** and **Phillip Lovell**, senior fellow and vice president of federal advocacy, respectively, from the Alliance for Excellent Education. Webinar video is available at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-jan-5-2012>.



## HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN KLINE RELEASES DRAFT LEGISLATION ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

On January 6, **U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce Chairman John Kline (R-MN)** released two draft pieces of legislation on accountability and teacher effectiveness as part of the committee's work to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The two bills, the Student Success Act and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act, follow three other bills the committee has passed in its piecemeal approach to rewriting NCLB.

"The upcoming ten-year anniversary of No Child Left Behind provides an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing our nation's classrooms," [Kline said](#). "There is a strong sense of urgency that the heavy-handed law must be reformed to ensure more children have access to the quality education they deserve. Today, I'm pleased to release draft legislation that will change the status quo and put more control into the hands of the teachers, principals, superintendents, and parents who know the needs of children best."

The Student Success Act would eliminate NCLB's adequate yearly progress (AYP) provision and "[return] responsibility for student achievement to states, school districts, and parents, while maintaining high expectations," according to a [summary of the bill provided by the House Education and the Workforce Committee](#).

The bill would remove federal requirements for basic, proficient, and advanced levels of achievement and require states to "establish academic standards that apply to all students and schools in the state in at least reading and math." The bill would largely maintain NCLB's current testing schedule, as well as the law's requirement that states disaggregate student subgroup data. However, it eliminates the current requirement for testing in science, and it would also eliminate the School Improvement Grant program and divert those funds to the Title I program.

The Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act would require school districts to develop a teacher evaluation system after seeking input from parents, teachers, school leaders, and other staff in the school. The bill would require that student achievement data be a "significant" part of the evaluation and that evaluations be used to make personnel decisions.

The three previous bills the committee passed as part of its work rewriting NCLB include the [Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act](#), which would eliminate more than forty education programs, including the High School Graduation Initiative and Striving Readers; the [Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act](#), which would update and reauthorize the federal program supporting charter schools; and the [State and Local Funding Flexibility Act](#), which, opponents believe, would lead to fewer resources supporting low-income students.

Although Democrats offered input on the three previous bills, the recently drafted bills on accountability and teacher effectiveness were a Republican-only endeavor. In a [statement](#) on the NCLB anniversary, **Representative George Miller (D-CA), top Democrat on the Education and the Workforce Committee**, accused Kline of “abandoning efforts to reach a consensus” on NCLB reform. “Instead of pushing a partisan bill down a predictable path of failure, it’s time that Congress come together to get things done on behalf of the American people,” Miller said.

Upon releasing the two pieces of legislation, Kline noted that they were “not final legislation” but “a step forward in the ongoing debate on the best way to improve education in America.” He called education reform “an issue that will shape future generations,” adding, “we cannot afford to let the conversation stall.”

In a [statement](#), Alliance President Bob Wise said bipartisan gains for the nation’s high schools made under the Bush and Obama administrations, such as accountability for graduation rates and a greater focus on the nation’s lowest-performing high schools, would be threatened or lost under the House committee’s proposal. “Without these key components for the nation’s high schools, the push to drive education reform into the twenty-first century could run out of gas,” Wise said.

The House piecemeal approach differs from the comprehensive approach in the Senate, where the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee passed a single bipartisan bill to overhaul NCLB. During a November 10 speech on the Senate floor, **Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)** implied that the Senate would not move further on the committee-passed bill until the House of Representatives passed its version of the bill.

“Without a bipartisan bill coming out of the House, I believe it would be difficult to find a path forward that will draw the support we need from both sides of the aisle to be able to send a final bill to the president that advances education for America’s students,” [Harkin said](#). “Here in the Senate, we have demonstrated that it is possible to reach bipartisan consensus despite the thorny issues in education. We all need to work together in a bipartisan way to replace the No Child Left Behind Act with a new and better law.”

***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; Kenya Downs, communications associate; 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>.