



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



MOVING FROM TECHNOLOGY OPTIONAL TO TECHNOLOGY ESSENTIAL: Alliance President Testifies Before Michigan Senate Education Committee on Importance of Digital Learning to Preparing All Students for College and a Career

On May 23, **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, testified before the Michigan Senate Education Committee on how digital learning and the effective use of technology can help drive better learning for all students in Michigan regardless of their geography or socioeconomic status.



“We are at a crossroads and the next twenty-four months is a critical time to not only keep the wheels of progress turning, but to accelerate the rate of improvement through the effective use of technology,” Wise said. “It is time for those of us who are experiencing firsthand an emerging and ever-changing world of technology to ensure the nation’s education system is agile and flexible enough to offer its youth the high-quality education they deserve. By doing so, this challenging moment can be turned around by embracing common-sense progress in teaching and learning.”

During his testimony, Wise recognized Michigan’s “significant progress” in improving the educational opportunities for its students. Specifically, he cited Michigan’s move to promote online opportunities and offer professional development and data analysis tools for teachers. He praised **Michigan Governor Rick Snyder (R)** for his leadership in working with the legislature to pass a cyber charter bill expanding opportunities for online learning and pointed out that Michigan is one of forty-six states to adopt college- and career-ready standards known as the common core state standards.

Wise applauded the Michigan Department of Education and **State Superintendent Mike Flanagan** for leading the implementation of the nation’s first-ever high school graduation requirement that every student have an online experience. He expressed support for Flanagan’s efforts to move toward competency-based advancement through pilots and seat-time waivers and encouraged the Senate Education Committee to support Flanagan’s efforts in these areas.

While acknowledging the funding challenges that Michigan—like most states—is facing because of declining local, state, and federal revenues and a tight fiscal environment, Wise said that the state is being challenged to raise student performance for more and more children. “I had to balance budgets as a governor and it was never easy,” Wise stated. “It is going to require

thinking outside the box to allocate resources in a way that makes state dollars more productive and effective.”

Wise urged the Senate Education Committee to consider how digital learning fits into the broader education reform landscape and the demand for higher student performance. “The nation must move school improvement planning processes from ‘technology optional’ to those that are ‘technology essential,’” Wise said. “The objective is not about having the latest technology, it’s about improving learning by implementing solutions that support teachers and empower students.”

Wise also discussed what he calls the “three Ts”—teachers, technology, and time—that are essential to developing a comprehensive digital learning strategy and rethinking education. He cited several examples of schools and districts from around the country that are successfully using the three Ts to improve student outcomes. For example, he said Mooresville Graded School District in North Carolina implemented a digital conversion initiative in 2007 that shifted from print to digital content material and made an internet-accessible device available for every student and teacher. In the five years since, Mooresville’s graduation rate increased 25 percentage points and now ranks third in the state—even though Mooresville has one of the lowest per-pupil expenditures in the state, ranking ninety-ninth out of 115 districts.

Read Gov. Wise’s prepared testimony at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/MichiganSenateTestimony.pdf>.

More from Michigan: Wise and Snyder Promote “Blended Learning” in Joint Appearance

Following his May 23 testimony before the Michigan Senate Education Committee on digital learning, **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** and **Michigan Governor Rick Snyder (R)** spoke at a lunch event hosted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy on “blended learning,” which pairs online content with a traditional classroom experience supervised by a classroom teacher. During the event, both speakers stressed the importance of moving beyond technology for technology’s sake and underscored the critical role that teachers will play in the move toward digital content.



“It really should go back to looking at teaching practices, strategies—all those things are things that need to take place,” Snyder said as reported by MLive.com. “The biggest challenge is not the hardware element of it, but making sure you are working with teachers in a positive way that they are excited about. We want to empower our teachers so they can be participants in creating a new and different way.”

Later that afternoon, Wise spoke at another event in Michigan on digital learning with **State Superintendent Mike Flanagan** and **William Skilling, superintendent of Oxford County Schools**.

Watch video from both events at <http://www.mackinac.org/virtual>.



SECRETARY DUNCAN ANNOUNCES \$400 MILLION RACE TO THE TOP COMPETITION FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

On May 22, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** announced a new \$400 million Race to the Top (RTT) program for school districts to create plans for individualized classroom instruction aimed at closing achievement gaps and preparing each student for college and a career.

In announcing the competition, [Duncan said](#) it was “aimed squarely at the classroom level” and the “all-important relationship” between teachers and students. “With this competition, we are inviting districts to show us how they can personalize and individualize education for a set of students in their schools,” he said. “We must take classroom learning beyond a one-size-fits-all model and bring it into the twenty-first century.”

The U.S. Department of Education is positioning the district-level competition as the “next phase” to the RTT state-level competition, which it said has “inspired dramatic education reform nationwide” and led forty-six states to “pursue higher standards, data-driven decisions making, greater support for teachers, and turnaround interventions in persistently low-performing schools.” The district competition will build on those principles at the classroom level and provide teachers with strategies and tools—including digital learning, which is featured prominently in the proposed requirements—to help every student learn at his or her own pace.

Duncan said the program would fund roughly twenty grants in the range of \$15 million to \$25 million. He added that the competition would be designed so that rural areas and school districts in states that did not win RTT state-level grants would have an equal opportunity to compete for the funds.

Specifically, districts or groups of districts serving at least 2,500 students with 40 percent or more qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch are eligible to apply and can request funding to support learning strategies that personalize education in all or a set of schools, within specific grade levels, or select subjects.

According to the department’s [RTT district competition draft executive summary](#), successful districts will “provide the information, tools, and supports that enable teachers to truly differentiate instruction and meet the needs of each child.” They will “organize around the goal of each child demonstrating content and skills mastery and credentialing required for college and career” and “will allow students significantly more freedom to study and advance at their own pace—both in and out of school.” Successful districts will also create opportunities for students to identify and pursue areas of “personal passion.” The document stresses that each of these student-directed learning opportunities will occur in the context of ensuring that each student demonstrates mastery in critical areas identified in college- and career-ready standards.

The department adds that school districts that successfully implement this approach to teaching and learning will “lay the modern blueprint for raising student achievement, decreasing the achievement gap across student groups, and increasing the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers.”

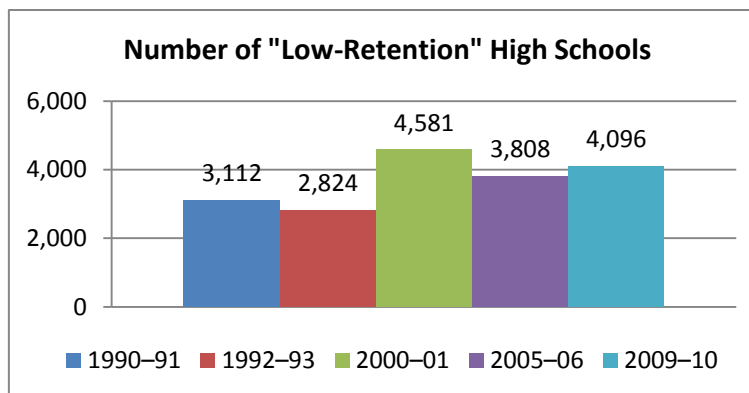
The department is inviting comments on the proposed requirements until June 8. The final requirements will be released this summer with grants awarded by December 31, 2012. More information on the program, including eligibility criteria, application requirements, and selection criteria, is available at <http://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition>.



CONDITION OF EDUCATION 2012: Report Includes Special Focus on High Schools, Finds that One-Quarter of High Schools Are “Low-Retention”

In addition to summarizing important developments and trends in education using the latest available data, *The Condition of Education 2012*, issued annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), includes a special section that provides a closer look at high schools in the United States over the past twenty years.

In its analysis of high school completion, the report uses several different measures, including the number of high schools that are considered “low-retention.” In these high schools, the senior class is 70 percent or less than the size of the freshman class that entered four years earlier.¹ In School Year 1990–91, 3,112 regular public high schools (24 percent) were considered low-retention. As



shown in the chart above, that number increased to 4,581 high schools (32.4 percent) in SY 2000–01 before dropping slightly to 4,096 high schools (26.4 percent) in SY 2009–10.

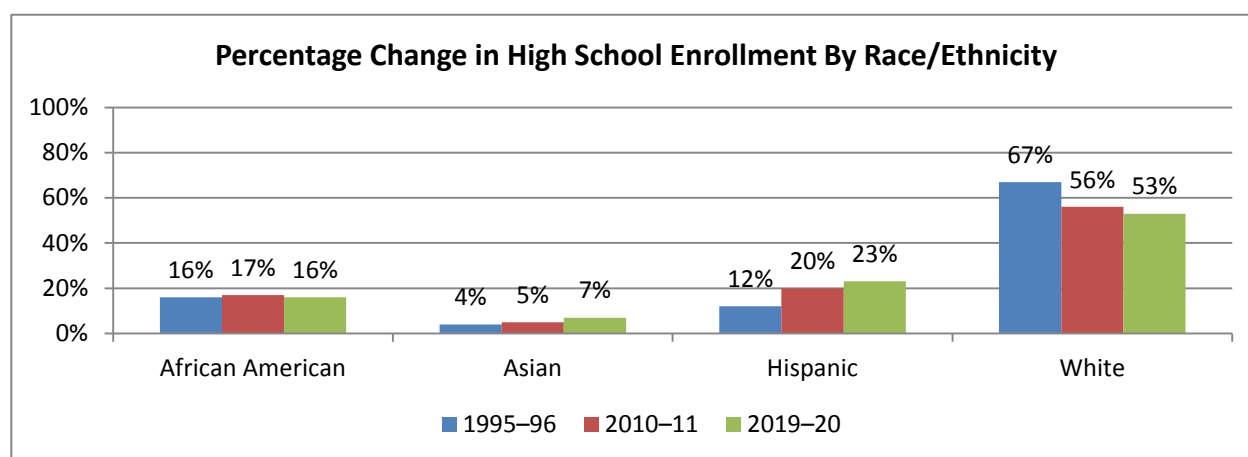
The report also examines trends in the status dropout rate, which represents the percentage of sixteen- to twenty-four-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (i.e., diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate). It finds that the overall status dropout rate declined from 12 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2010. Most notably, the status dropout rate for Hispanic students fell from 32 percent to 15 percent. Even with the decrease, however, Hispanic students continue to have a higher status dropout rate than white students (5 percent) and African Americans (8 percent).

The final completion statistic the report examines is Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), which is based on a ratio of diplomas conferred compared to an incoming freshman class from four years earlier. The report notes that the national AFGR increased from 73.7 percent in SY 1990–91 to 75.5 percent in SY 2008–09. During that time, thirty states saw an increase in their AFGR, including Vermont, which saw a 10-percentage-point increase. Twenty states saw their AFGR decline by more than 5 percentage points, including New Mexico (5.3 percentage points), Wyoming (6.0 percentage points), and Nevada (20.7 percentage points).

¹ Low-retention high schools should not be confused with low-performing high schools, also known as “dropout factories,” in which 60 percent or less of students graduate within four years.

In addition to high school completion data, the report includes significant data on high school enrollment, finding large increases in enrollment from the SY 1990–91 until SY 2010–11, followed by a period of slower growth that is driven largely by increases in the number of Hispanic students. According to the report, enrollment in grades nine through twelve increased from 11.3 million in SY 1990–91 to 15 million in SY 2010–11. By SY 2021–22, high school enrollment is projected to grow only slightly to 15.5 million.

By SY 2021–22, the report projects that white students will account for only 53 percent of the enrollment in grades nine through twelve, down from 67 percent in SY 1995–96. As shown in the graph below, enrollment for African American students will remain steady at around 16 percent, while enrollment of Hispanic students will grow dramatically from 12 percent to 23 percent. The percentage of Asian students is expected to increase from 4 percent to 7 percent.



In its analysis of course-taking habits of high school seniors, the report finds that the percentage of high school graduates from the Class of 2009 who took science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes was higher than their peers from the Class of 1990 in nearly every subject studied, including geometry, Algebra II, biology, chemistry, and physics. The only subject in which a decrease was identified was Algebra I, which fell from 77 percent in 1990 to 69 percent in 2009. The report attributes the decrease to more students from the Class of 2009 taking Algebra I prior to high school.

The report also examines the explosion in the number of students enrolling in distance education courses. According to the report, distance education courses are “credit-granting, technology-delivered, have either the instructor in a different location than the students, and/or have the course content delivered in, or delivered from, a different location than of the students.” In SY 2002–03, there were 222,000 high school students enrolled in digital courses; by SY 2009–10, that number had grown to 1.3 million. Among school districts, 53 percent had some high school students who were enrolled in distance education courses in SY 2009–10.

The report also examines increases in the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education in the fall after graduation and the growing gap between male and female graduates in the pursuit of higher education. According to the report, the percentage of high school graduates who immediately enrolled in a two- or four-year college increased from 60

percent in 1990 to 70 percent in 2010. A significant gap was identified between the percentage of students from low-income families (52 percent) electing higher education compared to those from high-income families (82 percent).

More troubling could be the slowing rate at which males pursue higher education after high school compared to their female counterparts. According to the report, 62 percent of females enrolled in higher education immediately after high school graduation in 1990 compared to 58 percent of males—a gap of 4 percent. In 2010, however, 74 percent of females pursued higher education compared to only 63 percent of males—a much larger gap of 11 percent. The pattern continued for students who planned to graduate from a four-year college, with 53 percent of males planning to do so in 2010 versus 66 percent of females—a gap of 13 percent in 2010 compared to a 5 percent gap that existed in 1990.

The Condition of Education 2012 includes various high school student achievement data, including the 2008 long-term trend National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the main NAEP tests in civics, geography, and history, and the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment. It also examines high school attendance and its impact on student achievement, school safety, and extracurricular activities and work. For example, it finds that the percentage of students participating in extracurricular activities changed little between 1990 and 2010, with the exception of sports, in which participation increased from 36 percent to 40 percent. What did change during that time, however, was the percentage of students aged sixteen or older who were employed, which fell from nearly one-third (32 percent) in 1990 to just 16 percent in 2010.

In total, *The Condition of Education 2012* includes forty-nine indicators of important developments and trends in U.S. education based on data that was available by March 2012, including participation rates in education, elementary and secondary education and outcomes, and postsecondary education and outcomes.

Download the complete report at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012045.pdf>.



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: New Report Outlines Greater Role for CTE in Common Core Implementation

A new report from Achieve urges academic and career and technical education (CTE) leaders at the state and local levels to “break down the silos between their disciplines” and find ways to ensure that the common core state standards “rigorously engage” all students in both academic and CTE courses. The report, *Common Core State Standards & Career and Technical Education: Bridging the Divide Between College and Career Readiness*, was developed in partnership with the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium.

“The common core state standards have the power to transform U.S. education and ensure it is anchored in the goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers,” said **Michael Cohen, president of Achieve**. “The CTE community has a critical role to play in this work. CTE courses not only reinforce and provide real-world context for the new math and [English

language arts]/literacy standards, but, if aligned with the common core, can also provide students with multiple opportunities to master and apply college- and career-ready knowledge and skills.”

The report acknowledges that a “substantial gap” exists between (1) the opportunity and need for the CTE community to engage and (2) the CTE community’s current level of involvement in the implementation of the common core state standards. It notes that nearly half of states responding to an Achieve survey said they have no CTE representation on their common core implementation teams.

“Common core state standards implementation presents tremendous opportunity for CTE and academics to better align to improve student career readiness, but too many states and school districts are neglecting this important connection point,” said **Janet Bray, executive director of ACTE**. “This paper is a key tool that will help guide state and local leaders and improve understanding about how to include CTE in the common core implementation process. Our hope is that all school leaders will follow the good examples provided by these leading states.”

The report offers strategies that state and district leaders can use to better involve the CTE community as they implement common core state standards in English language arts and mathematics. Specifically, it summarizes what state leaders are currently doing to integrate common core state standards and CTE, such as forming cross-disciplinary teams for planning and implementing the standards; enhancing literacy and math strategies within CTE instruction; and fostering CTE and academic teacher collaboration. It also identifies common barriers and challenges that state leaders face.

The report’s findings are based on a survey of state CTE directors and state common core state standards coordinators, as well as in-depth follow-up interviews with eight states (California, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, and Oregon).

“The concept of college and career readiness represents a sea change in the way we think about public education. States leading common core implementation are supporting educators to shift the structure and focus of their schools and classrooms to reflect this change—the standards emphasize problem solving, written communication, and reading comprehension,” said **Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Gene Wilhoit**. “In order to successfully prepare students for college and career in this way, implementation must not be a responsibility relegated to just a few staff within a state, district, or school, but ingrained in the system’s collective goals, across departments, and throughout the state.”

The complete report is available at
<http://www.achieve.org/files/CCSS-CTE-BridgingtheDivide.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; 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>.