



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE SHARPENS BUDGET KNIFE: Subcommittee's Bill Would Cut Education Programs by \$1.1 Billion

Funding for the U.S. Department of Education would be cut by \$1.1 billion below last year's level based on the spending bill that passed the House Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Subcommittee on July 18. It is unknown when the full House Appropriations Committee will consider the bill, known as the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill.

"This legislation reflects our strong commitment to reduce over-regulation and unnecessary, ineffective spending that feeds the nation's deficits and hampers economic growth," [said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers \(R-KY\)](#). "A careful look was given to all programs and agencies in the bill, with the budget knife aimed at excess spending and underperforming programs, but also with the goal of making wise investments in programs that help the American people the most."

The bill would provide \$160 million for a comprehensive literacy program serving students from birth through grade twelve. It directs 15 percent of the funds to be used to serve children from birth through age five; 40 percent to serve students in kindergarten through grade five; and 40 percent to serve students in middle and high school, including an equitable distribution of funds between middle and high schools.

Funding for Title I and career and technical education state grants would be frozen at \$14.5 billion and \$1.1 billion, respectively, while special education would receive a \$500 million increase under the bill. On the whole, however, the bill would make a significant cut to K-12 education programs, including eliminations in funding for the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, the High School Graduation Initiative, and mathematics and science partnerships. It would also eliminate funding for two of President Obama's signature competitive grants programs—Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation (i3).

"We object to the net reduction of \$1.2 billion for elementary and secondary education programs, despite an increase to the special education account, which we always welcome," [said U.S. Representative Norm Dicks \(D-WA\)](#), **top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee**. "The biggest cut would come to programs that target our neediest students and are designed to bring major reforms and efficiencies to America's public schools. While the Republican leadership is quick to criticize the state of our public schools, it is at the same time abandoning the tools and resources to help states and local school districts to make the system better."

In total, the House subcommittee's version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill contains \$150 billion in discretionary funding for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, compared to \$158.8 billion in the version that passed the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 14.

The large disparity in the funding levels between the two bills is due to what *Politico* calls an “ongoing impasse” between House Republicans and Senate Democrats over how much the federal government should spend this year. On one hand, the House adopted a congressional budget resolution that capped discretionary spending in Fiscal Year 2013 at \$1.028 trillion, while the Senate chose to stick to the \$1.047 trillion amount set by last summer's Budget Control Act, which raised the debt ceiling. As the appropriations process got underway in mid-April, the different spending priorities became even clearer as the House allocated \$8 billion more for defense spending than the Senate, while the Senate chose to provide \$8 billion more in funding for labor, health, and education programs than the House.

Earlier this month, **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)** signaled that his chamber may not clear any spending bills this year because of the large difference between House and Senate spending levels.

“Until the Republicans get real, we can't [pass appropriations bills] because they have refused to adhere to the law that guides this country,” Reid was [quoted as saying in *Politico*](#). “We passed last August legislation that is now a law that set forth the spending for this country during the next fiscal year. They refuse to adhere to that, so that makes it hard to do these appropriations bills.”

In a [July 11 statement](#), Rogers called Reid's comments “extremely disappointing” and said that the twelve annual appropriations bills “cannot be swept under the rug and ignored until a more convenient political time.” Unless the bills are dealt with in a “judicious and responsible manner,” Rogers said the nation could once again “face the economic danger and instability of threats of a government shutdown.”

In more recent days, signs are emerging that Senate Democratic and Republican leaders believe they can come to an agreement on a stopgap spending measure, formally called a continuing resolution (CR), which would provide temporary funding and avoid a government shutdown when the current fiscal year ends on September 30.

Yet to be determined is the amount that the CR would contain or how long it would last, but indications are that the bill could last beyond Election Day and could extend until the end of December. House Republicans have said that they could vote for a CR containing the Senate's \$1.047 trillion funding level—rather than the House's \$1.028 trillion—if the CR extends into the early months of the 113th Congress, whose composition will be determined by this year's congressional elections in November. Republicans prefer this approach because they believe that their party will make gains on Election Day, making it easier to push for deeper cuts in spending when this newly constructed Congress begins in January 2013.

WAITING FOR SEQUESTRATION: OMB Director Urges Congress to Offset Impact of \$1.2 Trillion in Automatic Spending Cuts; Senate Committee to Examine Impact on Federal Education Programs

In addition to final appropriations for Fiscal Year 2013, another looming issue in federal spending is an automatic across-the-board cut totaling \$1.2 trillion over ten years, formally called “sequestration,” that will go into effect in January 2013 unless the U.S. Congress acts to change it by agreeing to a mix of tax increases and spending cuts to offset the amount. These cuts to military and domestic spending alike were triggered when the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, aka the “supercommittee,” failed to agree on a plan to reduce the nation’s deficit.

In a [recent op-ed for *Politico*](#), **Jeffrey Zients**, acting director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), outlined some of the “devastating” effects that the sequestration would have on the nation and urged Congress to take action to prevent it from happening.

“The sequester wasn’t meant to be implemented,” Zients writes. “It was designed to cause cuts so deep that just threatening them would force members of Congress to agree on a big, balanced package of deficit reduction. The truth is that no amount of planning or reports will turn the sequester into anything other than the devastating cut in defense and domestic investments that it was meant to be. What’s needed is action to avoid the sequester by passing balanced deficit reduction that the president can sign into law, not searching for ways to cushion the blow on defense—and nondefense—programs.”

Zients notes that sequestration would cut overall domestic spending by about 8 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office. However, because these cuts must be implemented only on January 2, after a quarter of the fiscal year has gone by, the actual percentage cut to the remaining funds could easily reach double digits. He adds that the cuts would result in 100,000 kids losing their places in Head Start and more than 25,000 teachers and aides being laid off. Additional analyses by the [American Association of School Administrations](#) and [National Education Association](#) paint equally dark pictures.

For school districts worried about federal funding being cut in the middle of the 2012-2013 school year, the U.S. Department of Education recently issued a [memo to chief state school officers](#) saying that it will “take the sequester from funds that would become available in July 2013 for school year 2013-14, not from the 2012 advance appropriations available in October 2012.” Specific programs that could have been affected had this decision not been made include Title I, School Improvement Programs, special education, and career and technical education, which represent the four programs that receive Fiscal Year 2013 funding from both 2012 advance appropriations and 2013 regular appropriations.

To better determine the impact that sequestration will have on federal education programs, the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee will hold a hearing on July 25. The hearing will feature **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**, as well as state and local education leaders and researchers. More information on the hearing is available at <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/events.cfm?date=7/25/2012>.



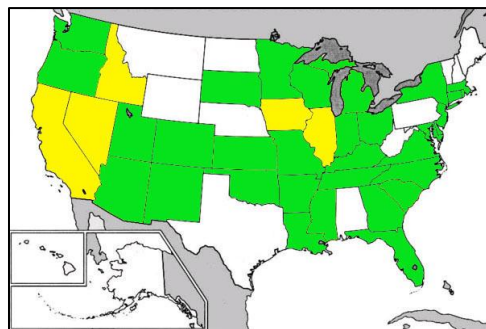
SUMMER WAIVE(RS): Six Additional States and the District of Columbia Receive NCLB Waivers; To Date, Thirty-Two States and DC Have Received Waivers

Only July 19, the Obama administration granted additional flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to six additional states (Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Oregon, and South Carolina) and the District of Columbia (DC) in exchange for state-led reform in the areas of college- and career-ready standards, accountability and improvement, and teacher evaluation. In total, thirty-two states and DC have received waivers from certain NCLB requirements, including the provision requiring that 100 percent of students be proficient in reading and math by 2014.

“More and more states can’t wait any longer for education reform,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “A strong, bipartisan reauthorization of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act remains the best path forward in education reform, but as these states have demonstrated, our kids can't wait any longer for Congress to act.”

States that have been approved for waivers are shown in green on the map above while states with outstanding requests for waivers are shown in yellow. States (plus Puerto Rico) that have not requested a waiver or withdrew its waiver (Vermont) are shown in white.



Additional information on the waiver process is available at <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility>.

Archived Video Now Available for Alliance's Recent Federal Policy Webinar

If you missed the Alliance for Excellent Education's July 19 webinar updating recent federal action on education reform, archived video from it is now available.

During the webinar, members of the Alliance's federal advocacy team provide updates on the NCLB waiver process, House and Senate action on education funding, and reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Watch video from the webinar at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-jul-19-2012>.



ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH: New Report Labels U.S. Learning Gains “Middling” Compared to Rest of the World

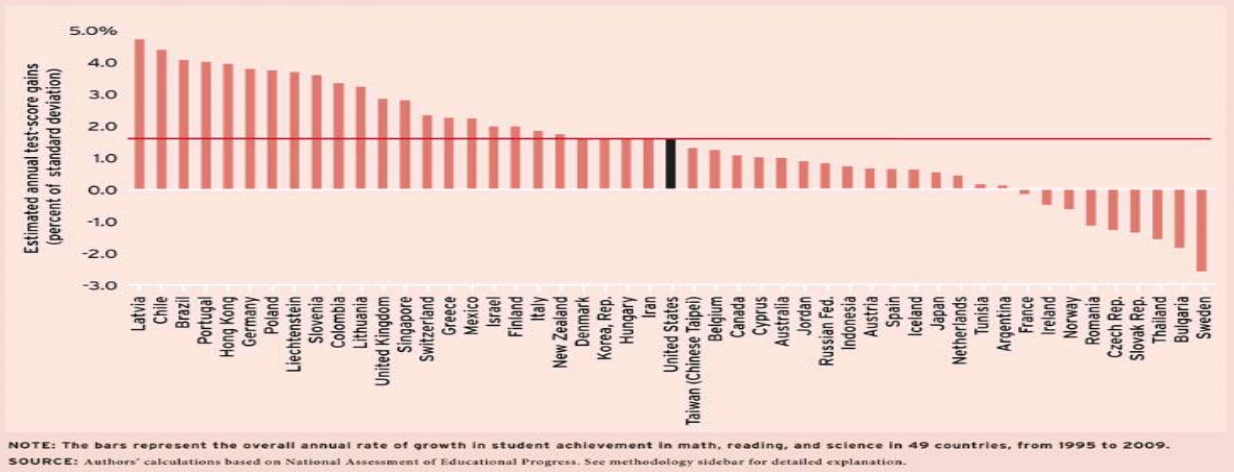
Learning gains in the United States between 1995 and 2009 compared to the rest of the world have been “middling, not stellar,” according to a new report by the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at Harvard University. Based on one series of tests given in the United States (National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), and three series of tests administered by international organizations (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the report provides estimates of learning gains for the United States and forty-eight other countries. The report, *Achievement Growth: International and U.S. State Trends in Student Performance*, also examines changes in student performance in forty-one states within the United States.

“While twenty-four countries trail the U.S. rate of improvement, another twenty-four countries appear to be improving at a faster rate,” the report finds. “Nor is U.S. progress sufficiently rapid to allow it to catch up with the leaders of the industrialized world.”

According to the report, test-score performance in the United States has improved annually at a rate of about 1.6 percent of a standard deviation, or about 22 percent of a standard deviation over the fourteen years within the scope of the report. As shown in the graph below, this rate of improvement places the United States in the middle of the pack, behind Latvia, Chile, and Brazil, all of which improved at an annual rate of 4 percent of a standard deviation. The United States also trailed other high-performing countries, such as Singapore, Finland, and Korea.

Barely Keeping Pace (Figure 1)

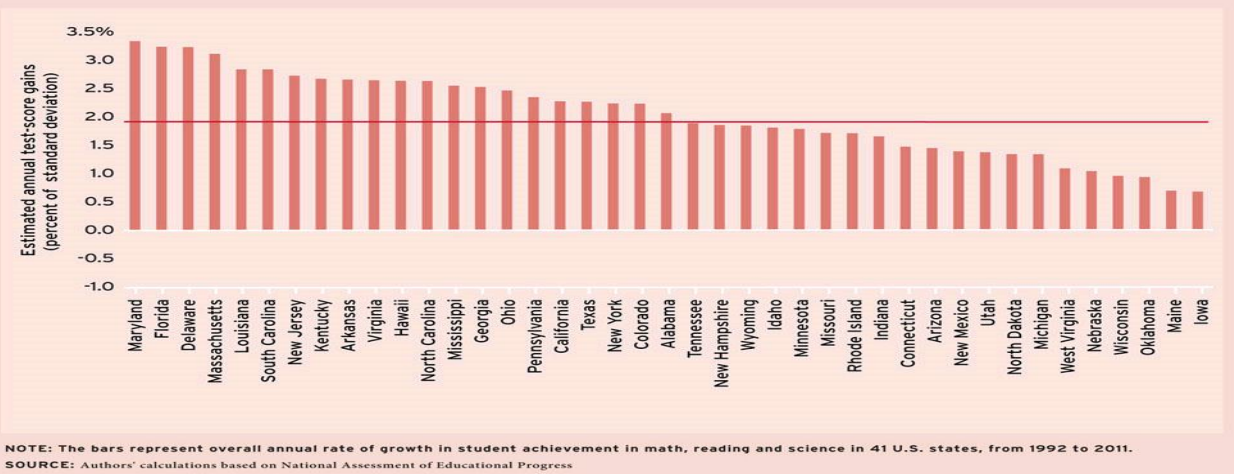
U.S. rate of improvement is in the middle of the pack.



At the state level, progress was far from uniform across the United States, the report finds. Maryland, with an average annual gain of 3.3 percent of a standard deviation placed first among states, followed by Florida and Delaware at 3.2 percent, as shown in the graph below.¹

State Test Score Gains Vary Dramatically (Figure 2)

Maryland, Florida, and Delaware improve as much as Iowa, Maine, and Oklahoma trail.



According to the report, states that were furthest behind in 1992 have generally made the most gains. The same does not hold true at the international level, where nations with rapid gains can be identified among countries that had high initial scores and countries that had low ones, the report finds. For example, Latvia, Chile, and Brazil, were relatively low-ranking in 1995. Conversely, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom were already high-performing nations in 1995 and have continued to advance relatively rapidly.

The complete report is available at <http://hvr.me/MC2a1p>.

¹ Because of non-participation in the early NAEP assessments, Alaska, Illinois, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, and Washington could not be included in the report.

“LIVE” FROM LONDON: Alliance President Bob Wise Reports on Educational Olympics

With the opening ceremonies for the 2012 Summer Olympics right around the corner, Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, “jetted” off to London to provide coverage of the competition. But he will not be reporting on the athletic competition, he will be discussing the international academic competition that America’s students are engaged in every day.

The series will contain six short videos focusing on U.S. students’ performance internationally, major changes that have occurred in education policy, lessons from top-performing nations, and promising practices for boosting student achievement. The first two videos in the series are available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/2012Olympics.



EDUCATION FOR LIFE AND WORK: National Research Council Report Says “Deeper Learning” Is “Essential” for Success in Twenty-First Century

A new report from the National Research Council (NRC) finds that the educational approach known as “deeper learning”—deep content knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge to think critically, solve problems, communicate effectively, and be self-reflective about learning—is “essential” for the development of twenty-first-century competencies that individuals need to succeed throughout their educational career and adult lives.

“The term ‘deeper learning’ may be new, but its basic concepts are not,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, in reaction to the report. “Deeper learning is what highly effective educators have always provided: the delivery of rich core content to students in innovative ways that allow them to learn and then apply what they have learned. The NRC report confirms that this type of education—once available to only a few elite students—is now necessary for all.”

According to the report, *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, deeper learning allows individuals to develop expertise in a particular domain of knowledge and/or performance that can then be applied to answer questions and solve problems. “While other types of learning may allow an individual to recall facts, concepts, or procedures, deeper learning allows the individual to transfer what was learned to solve new problems,” the report notes.

The report points out that technological advances have reduced the demand for routine skills in favor of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal competencies that allow individuals to “adapt effectively” to changing situations. “When the goal is to prepare students to be able to be successful in solving new problems and adapting to new situations, then deeper learning is called for,” the report notes. “Calls for such ‘twenty-first-century skills’ as innovation, creativity, and creative problem-solving can also be seen as calls for deeper learning—helping students develop transferable knowledge that can be applied to solve new problems or respond effectively to new situations.”

The report cites evidence suggesting that these abilities, particularly the ability to think critically and solve problems, is associated with positive outcomes. It also finds considerable evidence that increased educational attainment strongly predicts higher adult earnings, better health, and increased civic engagement.

According to the report, the importance of these abilities is reflected in the common core state standards in English language arts and mathematics that have been adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia. For example, the standards place a heavy emphasis on asking students to use evidence to make arguments. The NRC framework for K–12 science education, which will form the basis of next-generation science standards that are currently under development, also calls for deeper learning, the report finds.

The report identifies two significant challenges to making deeper learning available to more students. The first is ensuring that teachers understand how to teach so that students learn deeply. Fortunately, there is evidence that instructional practices can work, and the report outlines a set of principles for instruction for deeper learning, as well as concrete examples of practices that produce impressive results. Unfortunately, the report notes that such instruction “remains rare” in U.S. classrooms because few effective strategies and programs to foster deeper learning exist.

The second challenge is around assessments. Because tests have such a strong influence on classroom practice, the design and implementation of assessments that measure deeper learning competencies is critical. Two consortia of states, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, are developing assessments that are intended to measure student performance against the common core state standards, and they have pledged to create tests that measure the full range of standards. If they succeed—and if states use these assessments rather than fall back on less-expensive but more limited tests—the report states, “they will provide a strong incentive for states, districts, schools, and teachers to emphasize these critical facets of twenty-first-century competencies as part of disciplinary instruction.”

The report recommends that states and the federal government establish policies and programs—in the areas of assessment, accountability, curriculum and materials, and teacher education—to support students’ acquisition of transferable competencies. For example, it suggests that the Congress should “facilitate the systemic development, implementation, and evaluation of educational interventions targeting deeper learning processes and the development of transferable competencies” when it reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act.

The complete report is available at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13398.

Editor’s note: The Alliance for Excellent Education will hold a webinar on *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century* on September 12. Look for the invitation to hit your inbox in the coming weeks.

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>.