



ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **DIGITAL LEARNING MEETS DIGITAL DEMOCRACY: Alliance for Excellent Education Accepting Public Feedback on New Digital Learning Draft State Legislation**

On August 1, the Alliance for Excellent Education began an unprecedented digital process asking the American public to participate in developing major new state legislation designed to make digital learning and educational technology available to all students around the country.

The proposed draft legislation, titled the Each Child Learns Act, will help states think strategically about how to incorporate technology into their classrooms to boost student learning and increase professional learning opportunities for teachers.

“This effort in digital democracy is about ensuring that each child has access to a high-quality, personalized learning environment powered by digital learning and the effective use of technology,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “At the same time, it’s about gathering input from the individuals most affected in the move to effectively implement technology to raise student outcomes.”

Between now and November 1, 2012, the Alliance will be accepting public input on the proposed draft legislation at [legislation@all4ed.org](mailto:legislation@all4ed.org) with the goal of making it a more valuable tool for policymakers and education professionals.

Driving the proposed legislation is the reality that the current U.S. education system cannot adequately prepare all students for the increasingly global economy. Instead of the current “one-size-fits-all” approach to educating students, the United States must move to an innovative student-centered instruction model that will personalize learning and prepare students for success in college and a career. For more than a year, the Alliance has been examining the types of legislative proposals every state will need to consider in order to make this transition.

The Each Child Learns Act outlines a student-centered education approach that focuses on developing personalized student paths for academic success and incorporating digital learning. The proposed draft legislation provides comprehensive planning, language, guidance, and timelines for states to use in transitioning to this more forward-thinking and modern public education system. A major principle of the legislation is that a more personalized learning experience, driven by strong teaching in combination with the effective use of technology, should be the basis for any transition to a system that embraces high-quality digital learning.

“This draft legislation is not about technology for technology’s sake—simply slapping technology on top of a textbook will not move the education needle very much,” said Wise.

“Instead, it’s about recognizing the great potential that effective technology has to transform the world of learning, particularly when it’s combined with powerful teaching and rigorous content.”

The proposed draft legislation lays out several main elements for states that are crucial to providing a personalized and high-quality digital learning opportunity for each student. They include

- developing a comprehensive strategy;
- transitioning to competency-based learning and eliminating “seat time” requirements;
- utilizing formative assessments delivered by technology to track student progress;
- providing teachers with enhanced continuing education and mentoring opportunities through the use of technology;
- establishing a mechanism to track student data so each child can be on a personalized learning path;
- helping all public schools to allow blended learning and other technology-enhanced instruction models;
- offering high-quality online classes for students—particularly those who need credit-recovery assistance or have special situations;
- writing strong policy safeguards into the law to carefully monitor the quality and accountability of providers; and
- increasing opportunities for access to internet devices and required technology infrastructure, such as high-speed broadband connections.

The Each Child Learns Act recognizes that every state has different educational needs, and therefore provides language that is adaptable and applicable to most, if not all, states. Throughout the draft legislation, there are sections that include two different options so states can choose which is most appropriate for their situation.

“Technology has made nearly everything in modern life more efficient, accessible, richer, and faster, yet students are frequently asked to ‘power down’ their smart phones, laptops, and other devices when they enter a classroom,” Wise said. “It is my hope that this draft legislation encourages states to think about how to take advantage of this technology to help students ‘power up’ and use their interest in technology as a new way to learn.”

On July 30, the Alliance held a webinar highlighting the recommended legislative actions and language that have been developed so far in the working draft. To watch archived video from the webinar, click on the image to the right or visit <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-jul-30-2012>.

The full working draft legislative language for the Each Child Learns Act and an executive summary are available at <http://www.all4ed.org/digitallearning/legislation>.





## **DIGITAL LEARNING DAY 2013 SET FOR FEBRUARY 6: New DigitalLearningDay.org Website Provides Opportunities for Everyone to Be Involved, Demonstrates How Digital Learning Is Improving Education**

On February 1, 2012, the Alliance for Excellent Education joined with thirty-nine states, 18,000 teachers, and nearly 2 million students for the first-ever national Digital Learning Day, an unprecedented campaign that celebrated teachers and highlighted successful instructional practice and effective use of technology in classrooms. Building on that success, the Alliance will host the second annual Digital Learning Day on February 6, 2013.



“Digital Learning Day is not just about technology; it’s about using technology effectively to help teachers improve learning outcomes for students,” said **Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia and president of the Alliance for Excellent Education**, the host of Digital Learning Day. “Digital Learning Day will demonstrate how great teaching and great instructional innovation, when combined with the effective use of technology, can help personalize and improve learning for every student.” (Visit <http://youtu.be/zlFnR13ksC0> or click on the image above to watch video of Gov. Wise announcing Digital Learning Day 2013.)

Digital Learning Day is a yearlong showcase of how technology joined with teaching can take learning in the United States to a much higher level and provide all students with experiences that allow them to graduate from high school prepared for college and a career. It involves educators from every grade, students, parents, community members, and policymakers at all levels sharing information and expertise, learning new practices, and highlighting successes.

These year-round activities will culminate in a live national webcast on February 6, 2013 from the Newseum in Washington, DC—that will feature national policymakers, education technology experts, and teachers from around the country, as well as state-of-the-art learning resources and tools. (A highlight reel from Digital Learning Day 2012, featuring the National Town Hall with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski, is available at <http://youtu.be/1Tq111qklEM>.)

In support of these activities, the Alliance will produce leading-edge policy papers, extensive expert online discussions, a digital learning webinar series, guest blogs, and other resources to help school leaders in K–12 public schools avoid pitfalls and implement effective instructional technology strategies to improve results.

The new Digital Learning Day website ([www.DigitalLearningDay.org](http://www.DigitalLearningDay.org)) includes comprehensive resources for teachers, principals, administrators, parents, as well as school district and community leaders. It also features specific ideas about how these individuals can participate at [www.DigitalLearningDay.org/participate/](http://www.DigitalLearningDay.org/participate/).



## **WHY DO TODAY WHAT YOU CAN PUT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW?: Congressional Leaders Agree to Postpone Spending Decisions Until New Congress Convenes in 2013**

With the federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 set to begin a little less than two months from now on October 1 and Congress yet to pass any of the twelve annual spending bills, key congressional leaders have agreed on a plan with President Obama to pass a stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution (CR), that will keep the government funded through March 2013 and avoid a government shutdown. The legislative language for the CR will be written during the August congressional recess.

Implicit in the agreement is that the memberships of the House of Representatives and the Senate—if not the White House as well—will be different when final spending decisions are made in March 2013. For example, if Republicans make gains in November—especially if they seize control of the Senate—federal spending will likely be cut below the \$1.047 trillion spending target in this agreement.

“This agreement reached between the Senate, the House, and the White House provides stability for the coming months, when we will have to resolve critical issues that directly affect middle class families,” said **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)** in a [statement](#). “The funding levels in the six-month CR will correspond to the top-line funding level of \$1.047 trillion. I hope that we can face the challenges ahead in the same spirit of compromise.”

The \$1.047 trillion is a key number because it represents an agreement between the House and Senate on how much the federal government should spend in FY 2013. Before the agreement was reached, the House was working with a spending target of \$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.

Given the highly partisan environment and the [insistence of leaders in both chambers to stick with their respective spending targets](#), the \$19 billion difference between the two chambers was unlikely to be resolved, making a government shutdown a very real possibility when the current fiscal year ends on September 30. Instead, with an agreement in place to use the Senate’s higher number, final spending decisions for FY 2013, including for federal education programs, should be much easier.

Members of the conservative Republican Study Committee agreed to go with the higher spending target in exchange for a longer CR that will extend temporary funding until the next Congress convenes in January. By pushing for a longer CR, they are betting that their party will make gains during the November elections that will make it easier to push through deeper spending cuts.

By coming to an agreement that will postpone the annual appropriations process, congressional leaders hope to spend the rest of the year—including a possible post-election “lame duck” session—on expiring tax cuts and the \$1.2 trillion in automatic across-the-board spending cuts over ten years, formally known as sequestration, that are set to occur on January 2.



## **UNDER THREAT: Senate Report and Hearing Examine Impact of Sequestration on Education**

Sequestration—the formal name of the \$1.2 trillion in automatic across-the-board spending cuts over ten years that are set to occur on January 2—will cause states and local communities to lose \$2.7 billion in federal funding in Fiscal Year 2013 for just three education programs alone—Title I, special education state grants, and Head Start—according to an analysis released on July 25 by **Senate Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education**



**Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA).** This funding loss would affect a combined 30.7 million children and cause approximately 46,000 employees to either lose their jobs or rely on “cash-strapped” states and localities to pick up their salaries, Harkin said. The report, *Under Threat: Sequestration’s Impact on Nondefense Jobs and Services*, which also includes the impact on the Departments of Labor and HHS, was the subject of a July 25 hearing by the subcommittee examining the impact that sequestration will have on education.

In his [opening statement](#), Harkin discussed the attention that cuts in defense spending have received, but he noted that domestic spending would also be significantly reduced by sequestration. “Sequestration wouldn’t apply only to defense,” Harkin said. “It would also have destructive impacts on the whole array of programs that undergird the middle class in this country—everything from education to job training, medical research, child care, food safety, national parks, border security, and safe air travel. These essential government services and programs directly touch every family in America, and they will be subject to deep, arbitrary cuts under sequestration.”

Based on two recent studies, Harkin argued that the economic effects to nondefense programs could be worse than cuts to Pentagon spending. The first, a December 2011 report from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, finds that investing \$1 billion in health care or education creates 54 percent and 138 percent more jobs, respectively, within the U.S. economy than spending \$1 billion on the military. Additionally, a July 2012 study commissioned by the Aerospace Industries Association finds that sequestration’s cuts to nondefense spending would reduce the U.S. gross domestic product during Fiscal Years 2012–21 by a greater amount (\$77.3 billion) than cuts to defense spending (\$72.1 billion).

“Some members of Congress warn that defense contracting firms will lay off employees if sequestration goes into effect,” Harkin said. “They say nothing of the tens of thousands of teachers, police officers, and other public servants in communities all across America who would also lose their jobs. A laid-off teacher is just as unemployed as a laid-off defense contractor.”

Harkin’s report analyzes the potential state-by-state impact of sequestration on key programs representing a combined \$35.9 billion, or 79 percent, of the U.S. Department of Education’s nonexempt discretionary funding. For example, the report finds that more than \$41 million



would be cut from the School Improvement Grant program, which focuses on turning around the nation's lowest-performing schools, while cuts to career and technical education would mean that 1.1 million fewer students would be served by the program.

Harkin said he released the report to help the public understand why democrats are opposed to any “unbalanced approach” that protects defense spending and preserves tax cuts for the wealthy while “ignoring cuts to nondefense services, including education, that are so critical to the middle class.”

**Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), top Republican on the subcommittee**, agreed in his [opening statement](#) that the across-the-board cuts mandated under sequestration “are not the answer to confront our fiscal problems,” but he questioned the report’s accuracy because the Obama administration had not provided “any concrete information” to make the assumptions it contains.

“Sequestration is not the right approach to end our fiscal turmoil,” Shelby said. “We need to find a solution to this problem now and end the uncertainty crippling school districts, small businesses, and education providers.... While the Chairman and I agree that sequestration will have a severe and detrimental impact on the Department of Education, we cannot forget how we got to this point in the first place. Our nation is \$15.8 trillion in debt; a number that grows by \$42,000 a second.”

Testifying at the hearing, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** outlined how the U.S. Department of Education would implement a sequestration of FY 2013 funds. Specifically, Duncan pointed to an analysis by the Congressional Budget Office estimating that sequestration would require a 7.8 percent reduction in funding for nondefense discretionary programs.<sup>1</sup>

Among specific education programs, Title I support would be cut by \$1.1 billion, which would cut off funding to over 4,000 schools serving more than 1.8 million disadvantaged students, Duncan said. Additionally, more than 15,000 teachers and aides could lose their jobs. For special education state grants, sequestration would impose a cut of more than \$900 million, which would eliminate federal support for 11,000 special education teachers, aides, and other staff.

Duncan noted that “even without sequestration,” domestic discretionary spending was already declining at the federal, state, and local levels. He highlighted the positive effect of “historic” education reforms such as Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants that will “contribute to future growth and prosperity” and argued that it “just makes no sense at all” to undermine this progress by sequestering federal funds.

“The long-term impact of sequestration could be even more damaging, as it would jeopardize our nation’s ability to develop and support an educated, skilled workforce that can compete in the global economy,” Duncan said. “Indeed, it would be hard to overstate the devastating impact of

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<sup>1</sup> For school districts worried about federal funding being cut in the middle of the 2012–13 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 if this decision had not been made include Title I, School Improvement Grants, special education, and career and technical education, which represent the four programs that will receive FY 2013 funding from both 2012 advance appropriations and 2013 regular appropriations.

sequestration as a signal not just to the nation, but to the world, that we are no longer able or willing to prioritize investment in the best guarantee of our future success and prosperity: the education of our children.”

The hearing also featured a panel of educators who discussed the local and state impacts that sequestration would have. **Billy Walker, superintendent of Randolph Field Independent School District**, a public school district located wholly on Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, focused on the cut to Impact Aid. He said approximately half of his funding comes from the U.S. Department of Education and called Impact Aid the “lifeblood” for his district. In anticipation of the cuts in federal education funding, Walker had to eliminate an elementary reading specialist and librarian; a middle school reading specialist and secretary; a secondary English teacher, science teacher, and math teacher. He also had to eliminate the districts one-to-one laptop initiative as well as the baseball, cross country, and swimming programs.

Other witnesses at the hearing were **June Atkinson, North Carolina state superintendent of public instruction**; **Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute**; and **Tammy L. Mann, president and chief executive officer of the Campagna Center**.

Video and witness testimony from the hearing are located at <http://bit.ly/Q2pe8q>.

*Under Threat: Sequestration’s Impact on Nondefense Jobs and Services* is available at <http://bit.ly/N0yoaC>.



**A Summer Postcard from  
the Alliance for Excellent Education**

Dear *Straight A's* Reader,

With schools around the country out for summer and Congress out of town for its August recess, the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—will be taking a brief summer vacation.

The next issue of *Straight A's* will be on September 17. In the meantime, please follow the Alliance on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/all4ed](http://www.twitter.com/all4ed), like the Alliance on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/all4ed](http://www.facebook.com/all4ed), and visit the Alliance’s “[High School Soup](#)” blog for the latest education news and events.

***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>.