



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



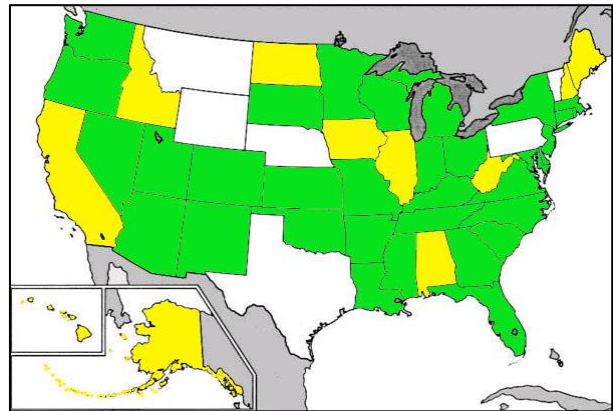
FEDERAL UPDATE: U.S. Department of Education Receives Requests for NCLB Waivers from Seven More States; Receives Intent from Nearly 900 Applicants Under Race to the Top-District Competition

On September 10, the U.S. Department of Education announced that it received requests for additional flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, from seven additional states (Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and West Virginia) in exchange for state-led reform in the areas of college- and career-ready standards, accountability and improvement, and teacher evaluation. In total, forty-four states have either requested waivers or been approved for waivers from certain NCLB requirements, including the provision requiring that 100 percent of students be proficient in reading and math by 2014.

“This is truly a nationwide movement, and the message from coast to coast is clear—America can’t wait any longer for real education reform,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “My hope is that Congress will come together to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but we know states need flexibility now.”

States that have been approved for waivers are shown in green on the map to the right, while states with outstanding requests for waivers are shown in yellow. States 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>.



An Update on the Race to the Top-District Competition

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has received notice from 893 potential applicants that they intend to apply for funding under the Race to the Top-District (RTT-D) competition. RTT-D will provide nearly \$400 million in federal funding for school districts to support reforms that will personalize learning, close achievement gaps, and prepare students for college and a career.

“I believe the best ideas come from leaders at the local level, and the enthusiastic response to the Race to the Top-District competition highlights the excitement that districts have to engage in locally designed reforms that will directly improve student achievement and educator

effectiveness,” said Duncan. “We hope to build on this nationwide momentum by funding districts that have innovative plans to transform the learning environment, a clear vision for reform and a track record of success.”

According to its [announcement](#), ED is accepting proposals from applicants across a variety of districts, including rural and nonrural districts; those that already received a Race to the Top state grant; as well as districts not participating. ED plans to award fifteen to twenty-five grants ranging from \$5 million to \$40 million, depending on the population of students served through the plan. Districts or groups of districts serving at least 2,500 students with 40 percent or more qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch were eligible to apply. Applications are due October 30, with awards being announced no later than December 31, 2012.

More information on the programs, including a list of potential applicants, can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district>.

WEBINAR: How to Incorporate Deeper Learning and Personalization into a Race to the Top-District Application

The U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top-District (RTT-D) competition places an absolute priority on personalization. However, creating a student-centered learning environment that strengthens deeper learning competencies—mastering core academic content, thinking critically, solving complex problems, and communicating effectively—can be a challenge for school districts. As districts draft their applications for the RTT-D competition, some may be struggling to incorporate personalization and deeper learning concepts.

On Thursday, October 4, from 4:00 –5:00 p.m. (ET), the Alliance for Excellent Education will host a webinar that will provide practical suggestions for designing new school models that exemplify deeper learning and personalization. Webinar panelists include **Bethany Little, managing partner at America Achieves; Scott Palmer, managing partner at EducationCounsel; Ross Wiener, vice president and executive director of the Education and Society Program at the Aspen Institute; and Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia.** They will discuss how districts can create a framework for implementing deeper learning and personalization and capture these concepts in their application.

To register for the webinar and ask questions of the panelists, visit <http://media.all4ed.org/registration-oct-4-2012>.



THE URGENCY OF NOW: New Schott Foundation Report Calls for “Support-Based Reform Agenda” to Increase High School Graduation Rates Among Black and Latino Males

Nationwide, only 52 percent of black males and 58 percent of Latino males graduated in four years from the high school Class of 2010, compared to 78 percent of white males, according to *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2012*, a new report from the Schott Foundation for Public Education. The report outlines a need for a “support-based reform agenda,” which it says can address a “pushout” and “lockout” crisis in the American education system in which too many students are no longer in schools receiving critical educational services, and those who are still in school are not fully engaged and able to access the available support to fully excel.

“We have a responsibility to provide future generations of Americans with the education and the skills needed to thrive in communities, the job market, and the global economy. Yet, too many

black and Latino young boys and men are being pushed out and locked out of the U.S. education system or find themselves unable to compete in a twenty-first-century economy upon graduating,” said **John H. Jackson, president and chief executive officer of the Schott Foundation**. “These graduation rates are not indicative of a character flaw in the young men, but rather evidence of an unconscionable level of willful neglect, unequal resource allocation by federal, state, and local entities, and the indifference of too many elected and community leaders. It’s time for a support-based reform movement.”

Since 2004, when the Schott Foundation began its biennial reports on the subject, the national high school graduation rate for black males had increased from 42 percent in 2001–02 to 52 percent in 2009–10. During the same time period, the high school graduation rate had increased from 46 percent to 58 percent for Latino males and from 71 percent to 78 percent for white males. Even with this progress, however, the graduation gap between black and white males had closed by only three percentage points, meaning that it would take nearly fifty years for black males to achieve the same high school graduation rate as their white male counterparts, the report finds.

Among states with the largest numbers of black students, North Carolina (58 percent), Maryland (57 percent), and California (56 percent) have the highest high school graduation rates for black males, while New York (37 percent), Illinois (47 percent), and Florida (47 percent), have the lowest, the report finds. For male Latino students, Arizona (68 percent), New Jersey (66 percent), and California (64 percent) have the highest high school graduation rates among the states with the largest Latino enrollments, while New York (37 percent), Colorado (46 percent), and Georgia (52 percent) have the lowest.

Among school districts, the report highlights Montgomery Country (MD), Newark (NJ), Cumberland County (NC), Baltimore County (MD), and Guilford County (NC) for having high school graduation rates for black males above 65 percent. It credits Maryland’s above-average graduation rates to “support-based strategies” that address the needs of diverse students and praises North Carolina for its personal education plans that provide the additional academic and social support its students need.

On the other end of the spectrum, the report singles out Rochester (NY), which has a 9 percent high school graduation rate for black male students, and New York City, where the graduation rate is 28 percent for black males. It notes that New York City has “been a leader” in the standards-based reform agenda, but it has not provided the “supports so that a critical mass of black and Latino male students have an opportunity to reach the standards.”

According to the report, efforts over the past decade to raise standards, improve assessments, and evaluate teachers “are not effective drivers toward significantly changing conditions for students who are in need of more student-centered approaches.” Instead, the report calls for (1) reducing and reclaiming the number of students who are no longer in schools receiving critical educational services, and (2) improving the learning and transition opportunities for students who are present, but who are neither fully engaged nor able to access the available support to fully excel.

Specifically, the report urges for an end to the “rampant” use of out-of-school suspensions as a default disciplinary action, arguing that these actions decrease learning time for the most vulnerable students and increase the number of dropouts. It also calls for expanded learning time and increased opportunities for a “well-rounded education,” which includes arts, music, physical education, robotics, foreign language, and apprenticeships. Finally, the report recommends that states and cities conduct a “redlining” analysis of school funding—both between and within districts—and “work with the community and educators to develop a support-based reform plan with equitable resource distribution to implement sound community school models.”

The Urgency of Now is available at <http://www.blackboysreport.org/urgency-of-now.pdf>.

Middle School Matters: Improving the Life Course of Black Boys

For more information on the challenges that many black boys face in the classroom, access videos and presentations from the ETS symposium, “Middle School Matters: Improving the Life Course of Black Boys,” held earlier this summer during the Children’s Defense Fund’s national conference.

The symposium focused on the various academic, social-emotional, psychological, and developmental experiences and needs of America’s 1.5 million black boys ages nine through thirteen who are in middle school and the appropriate educational experiences and conditions required to position these students for educational success.

For more information, visit

http://www.ets.org/s/achievement_gap/conferences/middle_school_matters/overview.html.



READY (OR NOT): Only 43 Percent of the Class of 2012 Met College Readiness Benchmark on SAT

Only 43 percent of students in the high school Class of 2012 met the SAT benchmark¹ indicating that they were prepared for college, as reported in *The SAT® Report on College & Career Readiness: 2012*, released by the College Board on September 24. Among individual subjects, 55 percent were considered college ready in mathematics, compared to only 49 percent in critical reading, and 45 percent in writing.

According to the report, students who met the subject-level college-ready benchmarks were more likely to have completed a core curriculum² and participated in rigorous honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. For example, 83 percent of students who took honors or AP math met the math benchmark. The same was true for 71 percent in critical reading and 66 percent in writing.

“This report should serve as a call to action to expand access to rigor for more students,” said **Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board**. “Our nation’s future depends on the strength of our education system. When less than half of kids who want to go to college are

¹ The SAT benchmark score of 1550 indicates a 65 percent likelihood of achieving a B⁺ average or higher during the first year of college, which research suggests is indicative of a high likelihood of college success and completion.

² A core curriculum is defined as four or more years of English; three or more years of mathematics; three or more years of natural sciences; and three or more years of social sciences and history.

prepared to do so, that system is failing. We must make education a national priority and deliver rigor to more students.”

The good news is that the number and diversity of students taking the SAT continues to grow. According to the report, more than 1.6 million students in the Class of 2012 took the SAT, making it the largest class of SAT takers in history. Of that class, 45 percent were students of color, making it also the most diverse class of SAT takers ever.

The SAT[®] Report on College & Career Readiness: 2012 is available at <http://bit.ly/QDryHS>.



STATE HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS: As State Exit Exams Transition Toward College and Career Readiness, New CEP Report Raises Possibility of More Students Being Left Behind

State high school exit exams continue to evolve, increasingly focusing on college and career readiness, a new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) finds. The broad acceptance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), now adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia, has prompted many states to amend their exit exam policies, often raising student expectations and questions of how to graduate students from high school who do not meet the more rigorous standards.

According to the report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition*, twenty-five states currently issue exit exams—tests that high school students must pass in order to receive a diploma—and one additional state plans to do so. These states educate 69 percent of public school students nationwide; the percentages are even higher among African Americans students (71 percent), low-income students (71 percent), English language learners (ELLs) (83 percent), and Hispanic students (85 percent).

Among states with exit exams that have adopted the CCSS, most plan to replace their current exit exams in English language arts and mathematics with new assessments aligned to the CCSS that are being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. According to the report, a “large majority” of states planning this move believe that the new assessments will be more rigorous than their current ones.

As states begin to shift to the more rigorous, college- and career-ready standards inherent in the CCSS and the new assessments that will accompany them, many students—especially students of color, low-income students, and ELLs—could be left behind, the report finds.

“Students who are already struggling with the current state standards will soon be expected to pass exit exams aligned with more rigorous standards, and there’s a good chance many will fail to do so,” said **Shelby McIntosh, CEP research associate and author of the report**. “While high schools should prepare all students for college or careers, policymakers must consider whether all students have had the opportunity to learn the content of these new, more rigorous standards before attaching such high stakes to the exams.”

A great challenge for states issuing high school exit exams is and will continue to be graduating the 10 percent to 30 percent of students who fail exit exams. Every state that issues an exit exam offers students multiple opportunities to pass the exam before completing twelfth grade. Many states offer other routes to graduation as well, including taking an alternate assessment, such as the ACT or SAT; permitting students to use portfolios of course work to demonstrate knowledge; offering exit exam waivers; and presenting an alternate certificate of graduation (that often is not a diploma equivalent). In addition, fourteen states fund remediation programs aimed at elevating students' learning gains to help them pass their exit exam. Only three states provide an alternate path specifically designed for ELLs.

“Even with the introduction of student support services and alternate routes, the impacts of exit exams on historically lower-performing groups are not fully known and have yet to be fully addressed,” the report warns.

Despite the challenges inherent with issuing state exit exams, proponents continue to maintain that requiring students to pass an exit exam raises academic achievement and increases college and career readiness. On the flip side, opponents of state exit exams cite the lower high school graduation rates associated with these exams, claiming that it is unfair to deny a student a diploma based on a single test. Opponents also continue to be concerned about the lack of access many disadvantaged communities have to a quality education that is needed to prepare them for success on these exams.

Yet another piece in this complicated puzzle is the role that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act plays. Many states continue to use exit exams, in part, as a “two birds with one stone” approach to assessing knowledge and meeting NCLB reporting requirements.

“Using state exit exams to comply with NCLB accountability requirements may also bring negative incentives,” the report cautions. “One well-documented concern of NCLB is that it puts pressure on states to focus on reading and math at the expense of other subjects, which could impact a state’s decision about which subjects to test as a graduation requirement.”

Many states using an exit exam to meet their NCLB requirements set different cut scores for each purpose; usually the passing score for graduation is lower than that of NCLB reporting. Despite the myriad concerns and questions inherent with issuing exit exams, their use continues to grow among states. The impacts of the CCSS, NCLB, and attempts at matriculating lower-achieving students remain to be seen.

“Policymakers must ask themselves if these expectations, and the assessments used to measure progress toward them, should come with stakes so high they prevent some students from graduation from high school at all,” the report suggests.

State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition is available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=408>.



TEXAS TECH TALK: Alliance President Stresses Importance of Digital Learning in Testimony Before Texas Joint Interim Committee

On September 24, **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, testified before the Texas Joint Interim Committee to Study the Public School Finance System on how digital learning and the effective use of technology can play a part in helping drive better learning for all students in Texas, regardless of their geography or socioeconomic status.

In his testimony, Wise recognized Texas's leadership in technology use to narrow achievement gaps. Specifically, he praised the Klein Independent School District's innovative use of laptops and professional development for their teachers in improving the educational opportunities and quality of learning for its students. (For video demonstrating Klein's use of technology in the classroom, visit <http://youtu.be/ZNmbYAlPEcs>.) In addition, Wise cited the Floydada Independent School District's Technology Immersion Pilot program, through which its middle and high schools have experienced double-digit gains in all core subject areas.

While acknowledging the funding challenges that Texas faces because of declining local, state, and federal revenues and tight budgets, 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 innovative thinking to allocate resources in a way that makes state dollars more productive and effective."

Wise recommended that the Joint Interim Committee consider how digital learning can be part of the solution. Incorporating digital learning includes making sure every student has access to an internet-enabled device, but he warned, "Don't just lay a netbook on top of a textbook." Ensuring teachers are trained and have opportunities for professional development is a necessary component for success.

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. "Teachers have a critical role to play as the nation continues to progress from yesterday's learning environments to those that are more tailored, flexible, robust, and challenging. At the same time, technology can be a 'force-multiplier' for teachers, permitting them to reach more students than ever before," Wise said. "Only when the three Ts are used together can schools be expected to accelerate improvement."

Read Gov. Wise's prepared testimony at [http://www.all4ed.org/files/Texas Interim Committee Testimony.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/Texas%20Interim%20Committee%20Testimony.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; Cyndi Waite; and Kate Bradley.

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>.