



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



HOUSE COMMITTEE PASSES EDUCATION REFORM LEGISLATION: On Party-Line Votes, Committee Passes Accountability and Teacher Effectiveness Bills as Part of Work Rewriting NCLB

On February 28, the House Education and the Workforce Committee approved two pieces of legislation as part of its continuing work to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The two bills, the Student Success Act and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act, were approved by a party-line vote of 23–16 in both instances. Democrats on the committee, who were united in their opposition to the bills, offered a comprehensive amendment to each of the Republican bills, but they were defeated on party-line votes.

“With these proposals, we aim to shrink federal intrusion in classrooms and return responsibility for student success to states and school districts, said **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN)**, shown in the image to the right. “We’ll untie the hands of state and local leaders who are clamoring for the opportunity to change the status quo and revive innovation in our classrooms. And we will free states and school districts to provide every child access to the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed.”

Democrats said the approved legislation would “turn the clock back decades” on equity and accountability by dismantling the federal role in education and the core principals of equal opportunity that have been a part of federal education policy since 1965.

“These bills are not a serious attempt to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” said **Representative George Miller (D-CA), the top Democrat on the committee**. “The Republican bills dismantle equity in education for all students regardless of poverty, disability, or other challenges and send an unambiguous signal that college and career readiness is not a national priority. These bills send us in the wrong direction.”

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. 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 Student Success Act would eliminate NCLB’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision and permit states to create their own accountability systems. It would also remove federal requirements for basic, proficient, and advanced levels of achievement and require states to establish their own academic standards in reading and math. It does not require these standards to

be college- and career-ready, as required under the [bill that passed the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions last fall](#). The House 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. (Video of the committee's consideration of the two bills is available at http://edworkforcehouse.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=71.)

In a [statement](#), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, said that "bipartisan gains for the nation's high schools made under the Bush and Obama administrations would be threatened or lost" if the two bills are enacted. Specifically, Wise said the bills would eliminate the federal requirement for high school graduation rate accountability and, by not calling for necessary college- and career-ready standards, could "limit the ability of the U.S. Department of Education to support the state-led effort to implement common assessments aligned with these standards."

With passage of the Student Success Act and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act, the House Education and the Workforce Committee has now passed five bills as part of its work rewriting NCLB. The three previous bills 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.

Of these bills, only the Empowering Parents Through Quality Charter Schools Act has been passed by the full House of Representatives. The next step in the process could be consideration on the House floor, with Kline saying that he has asked **House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA)** about floor time.

The House's piecemeal approach differs from the Senate, where the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee [passed a single bipartisan bill](#) to overhaul NCLB on October 20, 2011. 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 moves a bipartisan reauthorization bill.

On February 28, Harkin expressed disappointment that the House Education and the Workforce Committee pushed through the Student Success Act and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act without actively engaging Democrats in the process. "There's no doubt that achieving bipartisan consensus on a critical and complex issue like education reform is difficult, [Harkin said](#). "But it is not impossible—we've been able to achieve it for decades on education, and even in this partisan environment we achieved it just last fall in the HELP Committee. I am disappointed that my House Republican colleagues have chosen to abandon decades of bipartisanship at this important moment, but continue to hope that they will rethink that approach so we can work together to strengthen education for all of America's students."

Twenty-Six New States and DC Request NCLB Waivers from U.S. Department of Education

As Congress continues to work on a rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), twenty-six new states and the District of Columbia (DC) formally submitted requests to the U.S. Department of Education for waivers from key provisions of NCLB on February 29. Those states are in addition to the eleven states to which the Obama administration [granted waivers on February 9](#).

“The best ideas to meet the needs of individual students are going to come from the local level,” [said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#). “Like the first round of waiver applicants, these plans will protect children, raise the bar, and give states the freedom to implement reforms that improve student achievement.”

The latest batch of states—Arkansas, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin—along with DC, submitted plans to raise standards, improve accountability, and support reforms to improve principal and teacher effectiveness.

According to a [U.S. Department of Education press release](#), these twenty-six states and DC will

- set performance targets based on whether students graduate from high school ready for college and career rather than having to meet NCLB’s 2014 deadline based on arbitrary targets for proficiency;
- design locally tailored interventions to help students achieve instead of one-size-fits-all remedies prescribed at the federal level;
- be free to emphasize student growth and progress using multiple measures rather than just test scores; and
- have more flexibility in how they spend federal funds to benefit students.

The twenty-seven waiver requests will be posted online at <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility> along with the names of the peer reviewers who will convene next month to review them. States seeking flexibility in the second round will be notified later this spring.

Only thirteen states have yet to request waivers from the U.S. Department of Education. Additional states are expected to do so by September 6 for the third round of review.



ALLIANCE PRESIDENT TO SERVE ON NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EDUCATOR PREPARATION

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, will serve on a new high-profile national commission to raise standards for teacher preparation across the nation and help ensure that every classroom in the United States has an effective teacher. Announced on February 28 by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the [Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting](#) will develop rigorous accreditation standards for educator preparation that will raise the bar for preparation providers. CAEP is a new accrediting body being formed through the unification of the two major organizations charged with assuring quality in educator preparation—the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council.

“The quality of a child’s teacher is the single most important school-related factor influencing student achievement,” said Wise. “With the development of the common core state standards, it is even more urgent to improve teacher effectiveness in delivering instruction.”

Through his leadership of the Alliance and in his role as chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Wise has focused on the vital role that powerful teaching can play in transforming the nation's schools. He has also studied how high-performing nations around the world, such as those in Finland, Ontario, and Singapore, have used highly developed systems for recruiting, preparing, developing, and retaining teachers and school leaders to attain high levels of student performance. (More information on the Alliance's work on teacher effectiveness is available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/TeachersLeaders.)

“The good news is that more has been learned in recent years about the features of quality preparation and professional development that increase teaching effectiveness, including opportunities for extensive and well-supervised clinical training, collaboration between universities and school districts, and the use of portfolios to document and improve teacher effectiveness. Unfortunately, state and district regulatory systems for teacher preparation and licensure have not incorporated many of these elements,” Wise said.

The Commission is taking the recommendations of the [Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning](#) to the next level. The Panel's report, released in November 2010, says it is time to “turn teacher education upside down.” The Panel urges increased oversight and expectations for educator preparation and the expansion of new delivery models in which teacher candidates work more directly in clinically based settings from the beginning of their preparation, as in medical education. The Panel also calls for preparation programs to operate through new types of partnerships between higher education and P-12 schools in which both systems share responsibility for preparation.

When it becomes operational in 2013, CAEP will accredit more than 900 teacher-education institutions across the nation, producing approximately 175,000 graduates annually.

For more information on the Commission, visit www.caep.org.



MARKED IMPROVEMENT: New York City's Small High Schools of Choice Boost Graduation Rates by 8.6 Percentage Points, MDRC Analysis Finds

A new report from MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research firm, finds that small public high schools of choice in New York City narrow the educational attainment gap; markedly improve graduation prospects, particularly for disadvantaged students; and boost students' college readiness in English. According to the report, *Sustained Positive Effects on Graduation Rates Produced by New York City's Small Public High Schools of Choice*, students attending these schools had a 67.9 percent on-time graduation rate, compared to 59.3 percent for students who did not—a difference of 8.6 percentage points.

“These results demonstrate clearly that high school reform at scale is possible, with potentially important implications for federal School Improvement Grant funding as well as high school turnaround efforts underway in every district in America,” said **Gordon Berlin, president of MDRC**. “While more certainly needs to be done if all students are to be prepared for college and careers, the small school strategy as implemented in New York provides a solid foundation on which to build.”

The small schools of choice (SSCs) featured in the report are small, academically nonselective, public high schools. Each serves approximately 100 students per grade in grades nine through twelve and was created to serve some of the district's most disadvantaged students. Located mainly in neighborhoods where large failing high schools had been closed, SSCs "provide a realistic choice for students with widely varying academic backgrounds," according to the report.

The report finds positive graduation effects for virtually every subgroup, including students with low entering proficiency in math and English, males and females, blacks and Hispanics, and eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch. It follows a June 2010 MDRC report showing that SSCs increased students' likelihood of earning credits, progressing through school, and graduating in four years with Regents diplomas. This year's report extends the analysis by one year and allows for examination of a second cohort of students to reach graduation.

The complete report is available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/614/policybrief.pdf>.

POSITIVE RETURNS: RAND Report Finds 166 Percent Return on Investment for National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is an intensive residential and mentoring program for high school dropouts ages sixteen to eighteen who are unemployed, drug free, and have either no police record or a police record limited to juvenile offenses. It currently operates in twenty-seven states and Puerto Rico and graduates more than 8,200 young people each year. Released on February 28, a cost-benefit analysis by the RAND Corporation finds that the program has positive effects on the educational attainment and employment outcomes of its participants and a significant return on taxpayer dollars.

According to the report, *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe*, the program generates net benefits of \$25,549 for each admitted cadet or \$2.66 in social benefits for every dollar expended. The program's return on investment of 166 percent is "considerably higher than that estimated for other rigorously evaluated social programs ... and state welfare-to-work programs that seek to alter the life course of disadvantaged youth and young adults," the report finds.

For their first twenty-two weeks in the program, ChalleNGe participants, who are called cadets, are housed together on a National Guard base or training center for a "residential phase." During these weeks, they are immersed in a quasi-military environment in which they focus on "discipline, academic excellence, teamwork, physical fitness, leadership, and service to the community," according to the report. The academic component of the program prepares cadets for the GED (General Education Development) exam given at the end of the residential phase. After completing the residential phase, graduates return to their communities, continue in higher education, or enter the military.

"The best available evidence indicates that admission to the ChalleNGe program has substantial positive effects on educational attainment," the report reads. "The analyses described in this report suggest that the social benefits of this increase in educational attainment in terms of higher lifetime labor market earnings (as well as smaller benefits associated with a decrease in criminal activity and social welfare dependency and an increase in service to the community) outweigh the social costs of operating the ChalleNGe program."

The complete report is available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2012/RAND_TR1193.pdf.

More information on the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program is available at <http://www.ngycp.org/site/>.



STATE OF THE STATES: Governors Stress Education-Economy Link, NCLB Waivers, High School Graduation Rates, and Common Core State Standards

In his [state of the state address](#) on February 8, **Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy (D)** proposed a \$128 million increase in funding for education. Noting that “much” of the increase would be targeted to the state’s lowest-performing districts, Malloy urged legislators to take a realistic look at the number of struggling schools and direct more attention toward their reform.

“Let’s be honest with ourselves, and let’s speak bluntly: many parts of our system of public education are broken,” Malloy said. “In too many places, public schools are failing their two most basic missions: to provide children with an equal, world-class education, irrespective of race or income, and to ensure that their skills and knowledge match the needs of Connecticut’s employers. As I traveled around the state last summer on my jobs tour, nothing was more frustrating than a refrain I heard from too many employers. They said, ‘I have job openings, but I can’t find workers in Connecticut with the skills to fill them.’”

Malloy offered a six-point plan to guide education reform efforts in the state that includes: (1) Increasing access to and quality of early childhood education; (2) address Connecticut’s system for delivering state resources to the schools; (3) transform schools with the “worst legacies of low achievement;” (4) strengthen and expand high-quality school models; (5) remove red tape and barriers to success; and (6) do a better job of helping and supporting teachers.

Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton (D) spoke proudly on the progress that the state has made in improving education through winning the federal “Race to the Top” competition, offering alternative licensing measures for teachers, increasing per-pupil aid, and enacting the “Read by Third Grade” initiative.

During his [state of the state address](#) on February 15, Dayton also touted the U.S. Department of Education’s approval of Minnesota’s No Child Left Behind waiver as a testimony to the federal government’s confidence in the positive direction of Minnesota’s education reform. “Our challenge this year is to put all of it to work for the schoolchildren, parents, teachers, and administrators throughout Minnesota,” Dayton said.

Dayton implored Minnesota legislators to invest in state education due to the increasing importance of education to stimulating the economy. He noted that 70 percent of Minnesota’s jobs will require some kind of postsecondary degree by 2018. “Our postsecondary students need more than degrees; they need the world’s best educations so they can thrive in that world,” Dayton said. “And Minnesota will not thrive unless they do.”

During his [state of the state address](#) on February 7, **Ohio Governor John Kasich (R)** reiterated that education is a civil right and that more must be done to bring quality education to underserved areas. Kasich conceded that while Ohio boasts an impressive 80 percent graduation rate statewide, the state is failing to address the 65 percent graduation rate for urban areas.

Kasich also noted that 41 percent of college students have to take remedial courses in math and English, driving up the cost of college and burdening students with debt. “This is not sustainable. America has been falling behind and Ohio is stuck in the middle and we need to fix it.”

Through proposed and existing efforts, Kasich touched on increasing school vouchers, removing the cap for charter schools, introducing a school ranking system, and teacher evaluation.

Wyoming Governor Matt Mead (R), during his February 13 [state of the state address](#), articulated the importance of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education in preparing Wyoming children for the changing economy and global atmosphere. He noted that the state’s economy, which is heavily focused on computing and natural resources, demands workers with knowledge and skills in the STEM fields.

Mead also defended the state’s decision to adopt the common core state standards. “Now is the time, without regard to what the federal government may want, for us to step up, refuse to be left behind and accept common core standards as determined by Wyoming citizens,” Mead said. “We are not signing on with federal curriculum. These are Wyoming standards. We are signing on to a better future for our children by demanding more rigorous standards.”

Registration Now Open for 2012 Building a Grad Nation Summit

On March 18–21, the America’s Promise Alliance will host the “Building a Grad Nation” summit in partnership with the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic Enterprises, and Johns Hopkins University’s Everyone Graduates Center. The summit, which is free of charge, is the premier annual event of Grad Nation, the growing movement of dedicated organizations, individuals, and communities working to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and the twenty-first-century workforce.

The central theme of this year’s summit is the strong connection between quality education and thriving, economically sound communities. The summit will provide an important national platform to continue to build awareness about high school graduation and postsecondary success issues; help participants create valuable connections across networks; inspire and motivate by highlighting local, state, and national successes; educate and engage participants through collaborative discussions; provide participants with the tools and knowledge they need to turn awareness into action, and to potentially replicate successes seen elsewhere; and report on the nation’s progress on key indicators relevant to the Grad Nation goals.

The summit will bring together hundreds of community organizations, educators, local and state leaders, nonprofit organizations, businesses, youths, and others in Washington, DC to share progress and inspire action. To register for the summit or learn additional details, including confirmed speakers and agenda, visit <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Summit.aspx>.

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>.