



# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## LET'S GET DIGITAL: On Digital Learning Day, Alliance Launched "Project 24" to Help School Districts Plan for Progress in Digital Learning

Signifying the growing importance and demand for digital learning strategies in the classroom, nearly 25,000 teachers, millions of students, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**, **U.S. Chief Technology Officer Todd Park**, and **U.S. Representative George Miller (D-CA)** joined the Alliance for Excellent Education on February 6 for the second annual Digital Learning Day, a national campaign that promotes digital learning and spotlights successful instructional technology practice in K–12 public school classrooms across the country. (Click on the image above to watch the [Digital Learning Day Digital Town Hall](#).)



As part of its celebration, the Alliance announced "Project 24," a ground-breaking new initiative to help school districts plan for and effectively use technology and digital learning. Already, more than 350 school districts, representing approximately 2.5 million students across forty-two states and the District of Columbia, have signed up for Project 24.

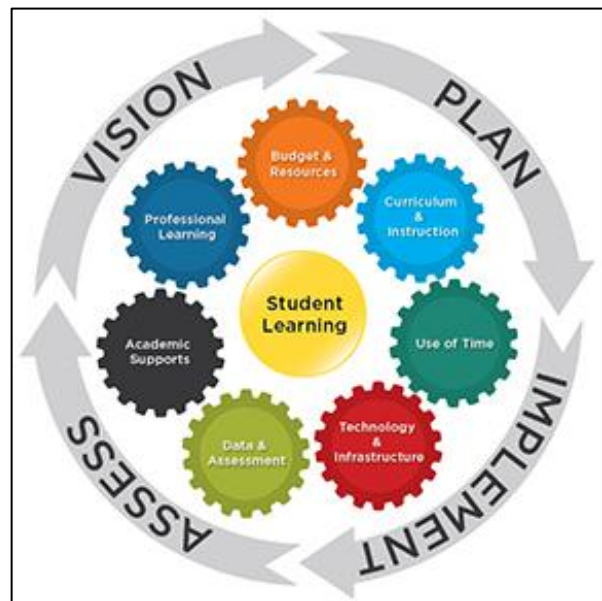
"If you're a school or district leader who is considering using education technology and digital learning in your schools, STOP—and go no further—until you have a comprehensive plan that addresses your district's specific challenges and learning goals for all students," said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. "Project 24 will help districts plan for the future and fully integrate digital learning into classrooms and school systems to achieve the goal of college and career readiness for all students."

The "24" in Project 24 represents the next twenty-four months, a time during which the nation's education landscape will change greatly as states and districts face numerous challenges, including the need to implement college- and career-ready standards for all students; utilize online assessments to gauge comprehension and learning; push for greater system and classroom innovation; deal with shrinking budgets; and contend with demands of states' waivers from key provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Project 24 will help to inform the incredibly important decisions that education leaders will need to make regarding each of these issues. To participate, a school district must (1) sign up at [www.all4ed.org/project24](http://www.all4ed.org/project24); (2) assemble a team composed of the district superintendent or a representative, a district curriculum leader, the district technology director, and a district professional development leader; and (3) take the [free self assessment](#). Upon completion of the self assessment, a confidential, customized report will be generated for each district.

“With Project 24’s self-assessment tool, district leaders can frame their vision for student learning, begin to recognize the various aspects of the system that need to be addressed, and specify how technology can help align these efforts to achieve higher college- and career-ready standards,” Wise said. “It will help district leaders move beyond counting computers and internet connections to analyzing how they can integrate technology into their instructional plans.”

Partnering with other national membership organizations,<sup>1</sup> the Alliance has identified a [framework with seven major components](#) that will provide education leaders in states and school districts with tools to make good decisions about how technology aligns with the goals and visions for their students. As shown in the image to the right, the framework will provide assistance to districts on (1) academic supports, (2) budget and resources, (3) curriculum and instruction, (4) data and assessments, (5) professional learning, (6) technology and infrastructure, and (7) use of time.



Districts will have access to the [Project 24 Team of Experts](#), a team of nationally recognized leaders with a demonstrated record of success in effectively using technology to help advance student outcomes. Additionally, the Alliance is developing a two-year schedule of virtual activities that will allow district leaders to collaborate and share information while receiving guidance from the Project 24 team of experts. These resources include webinars, instructional videos, profiles of successful districts, and interactive chats and blogs.

“Make no mistake; digital learning holds the key to preparing millions of additional students for college and productive careers, but districts need to approach this opportunity with sound planning to get the best results,” said Wise. “Going forward, our goal is to get every district to sign up and start planning.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Alliance is pleased to be working with the following national organizations to develop content and resources for Project 24: American Association of School Administrators; Council of Chief State School Officers; Consortium for School Networking; Digital Promise; Education Commission of the States; International Society for Technology in Education; Learning First Alliance; National Association of State Boards of Education; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; Rural School and Community Trust; and Software & Information Industry Association.

The launch of Project 24 coincided with the Alliance's second annual [Digital Learning Day](#), during which educators from across the country gave interactive digital lessons, collaborated with colleagues over the internet, or simply tried something new with technology in their classrooms. Throughout the day, more than 1,000 participating teachers, education leaders, and others interacted with digital teaching experts and each other through a series of live online chats. (Transcripts from the live chats are available at <http://www.digitallearningday.org/chat>.) Additionally, Rep. Miller took over the Digital Learning Day Facebook page from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., answering questions and responding to comments at <http://www.facebook.com/NationalDigitalLearningDay>.

For the first time, Digital Learning Day also incorporated hands-on instructional demonstrations, in which Secretary Duncan and more than 100 teachers from the Washington, DC metro area were shown sample lessons by digital teaching experts specializing in math, science, civics/social studies, and English language arts.



Secretary Duncan, Gov. Wise, and teachers from the Washington, DC metro area watch a lesson from Dan Wallace, an astronomy teacher at Quakertown Community School District (PA).

The morning demonstrations were followed by the Digital Town Hall, which featured U.S. Chief Technology Officer Todd Park and Rep. Miller, senior Democratic member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. The Digital Town Hall featured educators and highlighted effective digital learning strategies from Dysart Unified School District (AZ), Quakertown Community School District (PA), Cajon Valley Union School District (CA), and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (FL).

“All school districts, regardless of their size or makeup, stand to benefit from this revolution in teaching and learning,” said Wise. “That’s why the Alliance is bringing together students, teachers, school leaders, and many others on Digital Learning Day to show the best practices in the use of classroom technology and move forward with a national digital learning agenda.”

Digital Learning Day enjoyed support from nearly [fifty national core partners](#) made up of education leadership organizations as well as generous support from more than [twenty-five corporate partners](#). Digital Learning Day 2013 builds on last year’s inaugural event that included participation from thirty-nine states, 15,000 teachers, and 1.7 million students.

More information on Project 24 is available at [www.all4ed.org/project24](http://www.all4ed.org/project24). More information on Digital Learning Day is available at <http://digitallearningday.org>.



## STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Spotlighting Governors' Speeches in Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, and New Mexico

### Alaska: Parnell Sets 90 Percent High School Graduation Rate Goal

In his [state of the state address on January 16](#), Alaska Governor Sean Parnell (R) set a goal of raising Alaska's high school graduation rate from under 70 percent—where it stands now—to 90 percent by 2020.

Parnell outlined several requirements the state would need to meet to accomplish the goal, including a greater commitment to childhood literacy, an “unwavering focus” on low-performing schools, and innovation. Parnell said the “promise of digital learning” would help the state deliver “world-class instruction” to its students anytime, anywhere. “When it comes to learning online, Alaska should be first in line,” Parnell said.

### Delaware: Teachers Take Center Stage in Markell's Speech

“I have never been more excited about the great work being done in our schools,” Delaware Governor Jack Markell (D) said in his [January 17 state of the state address](#). “For this, we have Delaware educators to thank.” Markell titled his speech “Leading In the World We Now Live In” and said he believes this “new world” begins in schools and with the students of today who will become the workforce members and leaders of tomorrow.

Markell said the way to ensure students' continued success is to recruit, train, and reward great teachers and presented three ways to attract more great teachers to the state. First, he would strengthen the standards for entry into the teaching profession by requiring teachers to take an assessment, similar to the bar exam, demonstrating their knowledge and teaching skills. Second, he would recognize teachers who excel as “teacher leaders,” and pay them extra for serving as role models, helping other teachers, and putting their experience to work in the classroom. Finally, Markell would strengthen Delaware's compensation system to incentivize teaching in high-need schools and critical subjects, raise starting teacher pay, and reward teacher leadership.

Markell also focused on ensuring that students are equipped with the skills they need to obtain jobs. He proposed the creation of a “Delaware skills bank,” which would keep an inventory of essential skills needed for in-demand jobs and occupations in the state and use it to ensure that training programs provide workers with the right opportunities. “Once workers have completed the training they need to fill in-demand jobs, we should make sure that employers know it, by providing these workers with a Career Readiness Certificate that employers respect and trust,” Markell said.

### Georgia: Deal Focuses Resources on K–12, HOPE Scholarship; Aims to Increase State's High School Graduation Rate

“We can do better,” Georgia Governor Nathan Deal (R) said of his state's education system in his [January 17 state of the state address](#). He said the state currently ranks forty-five out of forty-



seven states that reported high school graduation rates under the new cohort method, which tracks individual students throughout their high school career.

Deal emphasized that the state needs to modernize the way it spends taxpayer dollars to produce more positive results in public schools. He noted that while most state agencies have seen their budgets cut for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 and FY 2014, the funding for education would increase. Specifically, his budget would provide an additional \$156 million for enrollment growth in FY 2013, and \$147 for enrollment growth and salary increases for teachers based on training and experience in FY 2014.

Directly addressing parents of children who are thinking about dropping out of school, Deal said they should remind their children that, by dropping out, they are “condemning themselves to the lowest rung on the employment ladder.” He added that parents should “prepare [potential dropouts] to continue to live at home because the jobs that will be available to them will be few indeed.”

In addition to his K–12 initiatives, Deal praised the state’s efforts to save the HOPE scholarship program over the last two years. He said his budget would increase funding for the scholarship program by 3 percent over last year, bringing the total funds for HOPE to nearly \$600 million in FY 2014. Additionally, he said his budget would focus HOPE funds going to technical colleges toward occupations, such as commercial driving, nursing, and early childhood education, where “jobs are available and shortages actually exist.”

### **Hawaii: Abercrombie Looks to Digital Learning to Raise Educational Achievement**

**Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie (D)** pledged to transform teaching and learning in Hawaii’s public schools through greater access to technology in his [January 22 state of the state address](#).

Abercrombie set a goal of delivering current curriculum materials on a digital device—such as a tablet or laptop—to every public school student within three years. “Having students with curriculum materials on a digital device solves the problem of not having enough textbooks or obsolete textbooks,” he said.

Abercrombie said the state was using its \$75 million federal Race to the Top grant to align curriculum and instruction with the Common Core State Standards, which Hawaii and forty-five other states have adopted. “Common curriculum statewide is no easy task, which is why we are seeking dedicated funds for teacher training to empower them with current instructional innovations,” he said. “Our students will be engaged in learning, and graduate with the knowledge and preparation for using these technological tools in college and the workplace.”

### **Iowa: Branstad Presents Plan to Revitalize Iowa’s School System; Focuses on Teachers and College and Career Readiness**

In his [state of the state address on January 15](#), **Iowa Governor Terry Branstad (R)** said it was an “economic and moral imperative” that all students finish high school ready for college or

career training and outlined a three-point plan to “revitalize” a school system “designed for the twentieth century.”

Branstad proposed that a high school student be able to earn a new college- or career-ready “seal” in addition to their diploma by taking and passing a college-entrance or workforce-readiness test. The test would be administered at the state’s expense and would signal to business and education leaders that a student is prepared to meet real-world expectations.

“When Iowa can brag about having the best-educated workforce anywhere, more businesses will locate and expand in Iowa,” Branstad said. “As a result, more young people will stay in Iowa because they can land good jobs that pay well, and allow them to enjoy a great quality of life.”

The centerpiece of Branstad’s plan to revitalize Iowa’s schools revolves around a new \$160 million teacher leadership compensation structure that would establish new career pathways to “keep our best performing teachers in classrooms throughout their entire careers.” Branstad also introduced the “Teach Iowa Initiative,” which will recruit top students to become teachers by boosting the beginning minimum teacher salary from \$28,000 to \$35,000 a year and offering tuition reimbursement for highly talented new graduates who teach in Iowa schools for five years. The program will place a priority on students who major in hard-to-staff subjects, such as math and science, but it will reward teachers in other majors as well. It will also create a pilot program to expand the traditional one semester of student teaching to a year-long apprenticeship in partner schools.

### **Nevada: Sandoval Focuses on English Language Learners, Early Literacy, and Dropout Prevention**

Calling literacy the “key to long-term” success, **Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval (R)** outlined a proposal in his [January 16 state of the state address](#) to ensure that all Nevada schoolchildren can read by grade three. The proposal includes \$20 million over two years for early education and an expansion of all-day kindergarten at the state’s most at-risk schools. “If we expect children to read by [third grade], we cannot continue to ignore all of the data that tells us all-day kindergarten is a critical foundation for a child’s success,” Sandoval said.

Turning his focus to high school graduation rates, Sandoval proposed a new investment in Teach for America to help recruit, train, develop, and place top teacher and leadership talent in Nevada. He also called for an expansion of the Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) initiative from seven Nevada schools to up to fifty more high schools serving 2,000 additional high school students by 2014. JAG prevents dropouts by placing a specialist in each high school it serves to work with the most at-risk students.

Noting that more than 15 percent of Nevada’s students—including more than 50,000 students in the Clark County School District—are English language learners, Sandoval proposed \$14 million for an initiative targeting these students. “The challenges these students confront are wholly different from those faced by their peers, yet our obligation to them is no less important,” he said. “Reality dictates that we acknowledge that reading levels, graduation rates, and college readiness will not improve until we appropriately focus on these students.”

Among his other proposals, Sandoval said he would introduce an “opportunity scholarship bill,” which would give businesses a tax credit for making contributions to a scholarship fund that would be distributed on a means-tested basis for students at low-performing schools to use at a school of their choice. He also called for a data system that would link student performance to teacher effectiveness.

### **New Mexico: Martinez Focuses on Dropout Reduction**

**New Mexico Governor Susan Martinez (D)** believes dropping out of high school is not an option for students in her state but lamented the fact that only 63 percent of the state’s students graduate in four years.

“Those dropping out are not statistics—they are our children,” Martinez said. “They were once little boys and little girls who believed they could one day fly a spaceship to the moon, who once saw themselves becoming a doctor, or firefighter, or scientist, or whatever they dreamt they could be. But somewhere along the line, the system failed them. They lost hope and they dropped out, dashing those dreams. We have an obligation to focus on raising our graduation rate and better prepare our high school students for New Mexico’s workforce or for college.”

To that end, Martinez highlighted several successful dropout prevention programs during her [January 15 state of the state address](#). For example, she spoke of Dona Ana County’s “The Bridge” program, which allows students to earn an associate’s degree while obtaining their high school diploma. Martinez noted that not a single student has dropped out of the Bridge since its inception in 2009. Wanting to see more programs like the Bridge, Martinez said she will pursue a plan to take what the Bridge has accomplished in Dona Ana County and bring it to other areas of New Mexico.

Martinez also included \$2.5 million in her budget to expand Advanced Placement (AP) courses by training enough AP teachers so that every child in New Mexico can participate and waive the fee for AP tests for low-income minority students. She also proposed a statewide dropout warning system to train parents and teachers on warning behaviors from students at risk of dropping out of high school in order to help them stay in school.

***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>.