

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization: Research and Best Practices on Successful School Turnaround

Useful Facts for the U.S. House of Representatives Education and Labor Committee Hearing
May 19, 2010

Fewer than two thousand high schools contribute nearly half of the nation's high school dropouts. In these schools, less than 60 percent of freshmen will graduate with their peers in four years.^a These lowest-performing high schools are chronically underperforming and require consistent, coherent, and focused attention from the district, state, and federal levels to turn around. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently titled No Child Left Behind, provides insufficient support to do so.

THINGS TO KNOW

The nation's lowest-performing high schools—high schools with a graduation rate of 60 percent or less—are a national problem. They exist in every state and nearly every congressional district. Given the significant number of dropouts they produce, effectively addressing these schools would have an enormous impact on the national dropout crisis.

- **Every state and 80 percent of congressional districts have at least one school where less than 60 percent of freshmen graduate four years later.**^b (See state figures below.)
- **An estimated 420,000 students in the class of 2007 dropped out from these schools. Included in that figure are 58 percent of all black and 50 percent of all Hispanic dropouts.**^b

The nation's lowest-performing high schools often fall under the radar of the federal school improvement and accountability system; therefore, their problems are not being addressed by federal policy.

- **Nearly one third (31 percent) of these lowest-performing schools are ineligible for funds under Title I of ESEA**, the basic federal funding for schools with high percentages of low-income students. Receipt of Title I funds triggers schools' participation in the law's accountability and improvement system.^b (See state figures below.)
- **These schools are also ineligible for School Improvement Grants**, the primary source of support for improving low performing schools.^c
- **Despite their dismal graduation rates, 36 percent of the lowest-performing schools in School Year 2006–07 actually made Adequate Yearly Progress.**^b

The nation's lowest-performing high schools are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all turn-around strategy will be ineffective in addressing these schools' unique challenges.

- **Despite common perception that dropouts are an urban problem, just 51 percent of the lowest-performing high schools are urban, while 21 percent are rural.**^b
- **Nearly one quarter of these high schools are small schools of just four hundred students or fewer.**^b
- **Over 150 of the lowest-performing high schools are charter schools.**^b

Failure to adequately address these schools will result in severe consequences not only to their students, but to the nation as a whole.

- It is estimated that without improvements to the nation's high schools, **twelve million students will drop out in the next decade at a cost of more than \$3 trillion to the U.S. economy.**^d (For further reading, see *Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy* at <http://all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>.)

FLAWS IN THE CURRENT LAW

- The accountability and improvement system set up by the current version of ESEA does not adequately identify, nor does it effectively address, the nation's lowest-performing high schools.
- Current school improvement approaches outlined in ESEA are not sufficiently driven by data indicating the nature or severity of the problems in these schools. Thus, they often do not lead to improvement efforts that can reasonably be expected to be effective for turnaround.
- There is no dedicated funding stream aimed toward the turnaround and continuous improvement of low-performing high schools. As a result, high schools receive significantly less federal funding for improvement than do elementary schools. (For more information, see http://www.all4ed.org/files/MissingMiddle_FY2010.pdf.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

A reauthorized ESEA should:

- Establish accountability for meaningful progress on graduation rates and college and career readiness for all students and subgroups in all high schools, regardless of receipt of Title I funds.
- Leverage state- and district-led improvement systems that are differentiated, data driven, and prioritize the lowest-performing high schools, such as that proposed by the Graduation Promise Act (S. 1698, H.R. 4181).
- Provide a regular, formula-based funding stream to support solutions to address the needs of all low-performing high schools, prioritizing the lowest-performing.
- Build the capacity of states and school districts to provide targeted, comprehensive, and systemic supports and interventions to schools, school staff, and students.

Additionally, at least 40 percent of funding for School Improvement Grants in Fiscal Year 2011 should be directed to the lowest-performing high schools and their feeder middle schools.

For additional legislative recommendations, visit
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/ESEAREcs.pdf>.

^a Read more about these schools in *Prioritizing the Nation's Lowest-Performing Schools* at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/PrioritizingLowestPerformingSchools.pdf>. The Alliance for Excellent Education is grateful to Bob Balfanz and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University for the data that served as the basis for the analysis of these schools.

^b T. Tucci, "Prioritizing the Nation's Lowest-Performing High Schools" (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

^c Title I eligibility is a prerequisite for SIG eligibility.

^d J. Amos, *Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

^e The Obama administration included a 40 percent set-aside within School Improvement Grants for secondary schools in its FY 2010 budget request; the Senate included this proposal in its version of the FY 2010 Labor-HHS-ED appropriations bill. The set-aside was not included in the final appropriations bill.

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State	Number of Lowest-Performing High Schools ^a	Percentage of High Schools Considered Lowest-Performing	Percentage of Lowest-Performing High Schools Ineligible for Title I Funds ^b
Alabama	40	11%	35%
Alaska	22	20%	9%
Arizona	46	13%	7%
Arkansas	10	4%	60%
California	153	14%	7%
Colorado	25	10%	80%
Connecticut	13	6%	38%
Delaware	11	35%	0%
District of Columbia	5	19%	0%
Florida	164	35%	29%
Georgia	120	34%	61%
Hawaii	13	25%	31%
Idaho	4	3%	50%
Illinois	70	12%	3%
Indiana	16	4%	63%
Iowa	3	1%	33%
Kansas	12	4%	25%
Kentucky	22	10%	5%
Louisiana	46	16%	4%
Maine	2	2%	50%
Maryland	24	13%	100%
Massachusetts	33	10%	33%
Michigan	82	12%	1%
Minnesota	11	3%	27%
Mississippi	37	15%	30%
Missouri	24	5%	96%
Montana	4	5%	0%
Nebraska	6	3%	83%
Nevada	38	49%	97%
New Hampshire	2	3%	100%
New Jersey	15	4%	53%
New Mexico	41	36%	54%
New York	133	14%	22%
North Carolina	81	22%	100%
North Dakota	4	4%	25%
Ohio	80	10%	4%
Oklahoma	22	7%	55%
Oregon	4	1%	75%
Pennsylvania	54	9%	6%
Rhode Island	8	17%	0%
South Carolina	87	45%	10%
South Dakota	4	5%	50%
Tennessee	29	10%	0%
Texas	183	14%	29%
Utah	4	4%	25%
Vermont	1	2%	0%
Virginia	24	8%	100%
Washington	19	6%	37%
West Virginia	2	2%	100%
Wisconsin	28	6%	4%
Wyoming	2	4%	50%
National	1,883	12%	31%

^a A count of lowest-performing schools was conservatively developed by the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University from the set of all regular and vocational high schools with one hundred or more students enrolled in the 2007–08 school year that had a promoting power of 60 percent or less. Schools were identified based on their three-year-average promoting power for the Classes of 2006, 2007, and 2008.

^b Eligibility is for the 2007–08 school year.