



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



GETTING DEFENSIVE: House Spending Plan Would Cut Education and Other Domestic Spending to Preserve Military Spending

A spending plan being circulated by **U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers (R-KY)** would cut funding for the Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill by about \$35 billion, or 22 percent less than the current level, in favor of protecting spending for the military and homeland security. Working within an overall spending limit of \$967 billion, Rogers chose to allocate a total of \$625 billion for the Defense, Military Construction-Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security appropriations bills, a cut of \$4 billion or less than 1 percent from the current level.

“This is clearly an austere budget year—sequestration has taken a huge toll on discretionary spending,” [Rogers was quoted as saying by Politico](#). “This is the hand that sequestration has dealt us, and we have no choice but to try and make the best of what we have. It is my sincere hope that the House and Senate can come together on a sustainable budget compromise to replace sequestration and establish a responsible, single House and Senate top-line discretionary budget number.”

U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), top Democrat on the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, took a different view of Rogers’s plan. “The disinvestment proposed for health, education, and labor programs reveals that the majority believes that poor people, kids, college students, sick people, the unemployed and the disabled should just fend for themselves,” [DeLauro said](#). “The majority’s funding proposal would help create a permanent underclass in this country when we should be ensuring competitiveness in the global economy with robust education and training programs. ... The majority’s funding proposal tells our most vulnerable children that they just aren’t important to us and we are content to let them struggle for the rest of their lives.”

Rogers’s allocations, informally known as “302(b)s,” do not set funding levels for individual programs, but they do set the amount of federal money each individual appropriations bill is allowed to contain. However, reducing the overall amount of money available in the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill by such a large percentage means that many individual education programs are likely to take funding hits—exactly which ones will be determined later in the process. In the meantime, the House Appropriations Committee is expected to approve the 302(b) allocations on May 21.

Politico called Rogers’s plan a “prescription for more stalemate unless the House and Senate leadership begin to get more serious about budget negotiations with one another and President Barack Obama.”

President Obama, as well as Democrats in both the House and Senate, want to set a spending cap at \$1.058 trillion—approximately \$91 billion higher than Rogers’s plan—that assumes the sequester is eliminated. *CQ Roll Call* reported on May 17 that **U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)** plans to use a \$1.058 trillion spending cap and that she is expected to begin circulating her 302(b) allocations to the committee during the week of May 20.



OBAMA SEES DEEPER LEARNING IN ACTION: President Praises “Hands-On” Learning Approach, Advocates for Rethinking and Redesigning America’s High Schools

In a May 9 speech at Manor New Technology High School in Austin, Texas, President Obama called on Americans to rally around what he called the “single-greatest challenge” facing the nation—reigniting the “true engine of economic growth”—a rising, thriving middle class. He listed three things necessary to create more jobs and opportunity for the middle class: (1) making America a magnet for good jobs; (2) ensuring that hard-working people can achieve a decent living; and (3) helping people earn the education and develop the skills they need to succeed in good jobs. (Click on the image above to watch video of the president’s speech).



“Our economy can’t succeed unless our young people have the skills that they need to succeed,” Obama said. “And that’s what’s happening here, right at Manor New Tech. There’s a reason why teachers and principals from all over the country are coming down to see what you’re up to. Because every day, this school is proving that every child has the potential to learn the real-world skills they need to succeed in college and beyond.”

Manor (pronounced May-nor) New Tech is part of the [New Tech Network](#), a group of 115 schools in eighteen states that are designed to foster students’ abilities to understand core content and use their knowledge to think critically and solve problems, and to communicate effectively—the deeper learning competencies that are essential for their future. The school, like the others in the network, accomplishes this goal by integrating technology into every classroom and engaging students in a project-based approach that enables them to apply their learning to authentic situations.

Obama mentioned some of these projects in his address: “A history teacher might get together with a science teacher to develop a project on the impact of castles in world history and the engineering behind building castles. Or a group of students might be in charge of putting together a multimedia presentation about moral dilemmas in literature as applied in World War II.” In addition, as the president noted, students take part in internships, which give them hands-on experiences in real work settings, and they give as many as 200 speeches during their school career, which develops their communications skills. “I can relate,” Obama quipped.

In its short life—it opened in 2007—Manor has been enormously successful. With a highly diverse student body of which more than half receive free or reduced-price lunches, its students’ scores on state tests exceed the state average, its graduation rate is greater than 90 percent, and its college-going rate is nearly 100 percent. And, as Obama pointed out, 60 percent of those college-bound seniors were the first in their families to go on to higher education.

But he also pointed out that the school accepts students by lottery, because demand exceeds the available capacity.

“Every young person in America deserves a world-class education,” Obama said. “We’ve got an obligation to give it to them. And, by the way, that helps the whole economy. Every business in America [wants] to draw from the world’s highest-skilled and most educated workforce. We can make that happen. But we’re going to have to put our shoulder against the wheel and work a little harder than we’re doing right now as a nation.”

Obama outlined several education reforms he is pushing to meet this goal: (1) give every child in America access to high-quality, public preschool; (2) recruit and train 100,000 new teachers in science, technology, engineering, and math and help the nation’s most talented teachers serve as mentors for their colleagues; (3) rethink and redesign America’s high schools; and (4) make college more affordable.

Obama said Manor was a model for what a twenty-first-century high school should look like. He noted that the school’s hands-on learning approach prepares its graduates for the demands of a high-tech economy. “What makes this place special is, is that there’s all this integration of various subjects and actual projects, and young people doing and not just sitting there listening, so we’ve got to reward schools—like this one that focus on the fields of the future, use technology effectively to help students learn, and are also developing partnerships with local colleges and businesses so that a diploma here leads directly to a good job,” Obama said.

Obama laid down the challenge: “There are too many kids in America who are not getting the same kinds of opportunities, through no fault of their own. And we can do better than that. Every young person in America deserves a world-class education. We’ve got an obligation to give it to them.”

A transcript of the president’s speech is available at <http://1.usa.gov/YSYZu3>.

Portions of this article originally appeared in a blog post written by Alliance Senior Fellow Robert Rothman for the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog. Rothman’s complete article is available at http://www.all4ed.org/blog/president_obama_sees_deeper_learning_action.



ESEA IN PLAY?: House Education and the Workforce Committee to Move Forward on NCLB Rewrite “In the Coming Months,” Chairman Kline Says

Originally signed into law more than a decade ago by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) technically expired in 2007. On several occasions over the last few years, various attempts have been made by both political parties in Congress to rewrite the law, but they ultimately fell short. Since 2012, President Obama has granted waivers to [thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia](#) from some of NCLB’s requirements, including the one requiring that 100 percent of students be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Although Republicans and Democrats alike have expressed concerns about the waivers, they have been unable to pass legislation to replace them.

During a May 7 U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee hearing titled, “Raising the Bar: Exploring State and Local Efforts to Improve Accountability,” both **Chairman John Kline (R-MN)** and **Representative George Miller (D-CA), the Committee’s top Democrat**, gave a glimmer of hope to education advocates hoping for an NCLB rewrite when they expressed a willingness to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as NCLB.

In his [opening statement](#), Kline criticized the waivers as a “short-term fix to a long-term problem” and said that they left school leaders facing uncertainty, “knowing the federal requirements they must meet to maintain their waiver are subject to change with the whims of the administration.”

Kline said the committee will move forward with a proposal to rewrite NCLB “in the coming months” based on four principles that Republicans believe are critical to rebuilding and strengthening the nation’s education system: (1) restoring local control and encouraging states and school districts to develop their own accountability plans; (2) reducing the federal footprint by eliminating duplicative or ineffective federal programs; (3) focusing on teacher effectiveness by allowing states and school districts to develop their own teacher evaluation systems based in part on student achievement; and (4) empowering parents to select the school that best fits their children’s needs.

Noting that states, districts, and schools are making “large-scale” transitions to new standards, new assessments, new accountability, and new school improvement systems and teacher evaluation systems, Miller said these transitions were occurring without a federal partner.

“Between congressional inaction on ESEA and sequestration, we have created an uncertain environment and we’re not offering people the support that could help them succeed in a time of massive transformation,” Miller said in his [opening statement](#), adding that a “proper” reauthorization of ESEA presents an “incredible opportunity to take schools into the future.”



Like Kline, Miller said he had “deep concerns” with the waivers and their implementation, but he acknowledged that he understood why the administration undertook the waiver process. “Many of those concerns stem from the states wanting to adopt policies that reach back to pre-No Child Left Behind, such as proposing to diminish or to not have subgroup accountability,” Miller said. “We all agree, Democrats and Republicans and the administration, that the federal role should shift in this reauthorization. States, districts, and schools should be able to manage their schools in a way that current law doesn’t allow.”

Issues that Miller outlined as priorities for Democrats included identifying and improving low-performing schools, having high expectations for students and schools that ensure students graduate ready to succeed in college and the workforce, and maintaining a commitment to civil rights.

The hearing also featured testimony from **Louisiana Department of Education Superintendent John White; Northfield Public Schools (MN) Superintendent Chris Richardson; Eric Gordon, chief executive officer of Cleveland Metropolitan School District; and Matthew Given, chief development officer of Edison Learning (Atlanta, GA).**

Witnesses identified several positive benefits from NCLB, including its focus on data that highlighted achievement gaps between student subgroups. Still, witnesses called NCLB “deeply flawed” and said that the gains they were seeing were often in spite of NCLB and not because of it. Some specific flaws they identified were NCLB’s “one-size-fits-all” improvement models and its failure to consider subjects such as science, social studies, the arts, and twenty-first-century workforce skills.

During his testimony, Richardson discussed how Northfield teachers were grouped into professional learning communities (PLCs) by grade level or subject area and were responsible for analyzing student data to address their needs. “Each PLC team combs data, identifies students not on track, determines appropriate interventions, [and] implements those interventions,” Richardson said. “Many students are back on track within six weeks.”

In one high school, longitudinal data revealed that failing classes as a freshman increased the chances that a student would not graduate on time or drop out. In response, the PLC developed an academy for struggling students that included smaller classes and individualized instruction after school hours. After implementing the program, the percentage of freshmen failing dropped from 25 percent to 8 percent and the graduation rate went up to 96 percent.

Northfield was also able to raise the graduation rate of its Latino immigrant students, who make up about 12 percent of the student population, from 36 percent to more than 90 percent by implementing a program called Tackling Obstacles Raising College Hopes (TORCH) that helps support and provide career exploration postsecondary opportunities for these students. As a result, the school saw an 1,100 percent increase in TORCH graduates accessing postsecondary education.

Witness testimony and archived video from the hearing are available at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=332571>.



TEACHING TO THE CORE: New Council of Chief State School Officers and Aspen Institute Report Bridges Divide Between Teacher Effectiveness Standards and Common Core Implementation

State education agencies (SEAs) must play a pivotal role in the implementation and performance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)—adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia—if states are to see gains in teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes, a new policy report from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Aspen Institute finds. The report, *Teaching to the Core: Integrating Implementation of Common Core and Teacher Effectiveness Policies*, offers ten organization and functional recommendations to help state departments succeed in carrying out the new responsibilities necessary to see long-term improvements in teacher and student outcomes.

“States are actively seeking ways to provide greater support to teachers and principals on both Common Core implementation and teacher evaluation so educators have the tools, resources, and time they need to effectively change their practice for the benefit of their students,” said **CCSSO Executive Director Chris Minnich**. “This Aspen Institute and CCSSO paper will help states by describing the linkages between implementation of Common Core and teacher effectiveness policies.”

As school districts and states across the country debate and implement new teacher evaluation policies, planning for possible timeline conflicts with the implementation of the CCSS is important. The report raises a concern that teachers will be evaluated based on outdated measures of student progress toward college and career readiness once the new standards are in place. “This sends a mixed signal to teachers regarding the system’s priorities: Focus on teaching the old standards, or focus on transitioning to the Common Core?,” the report asks.

The solution to integrating new teacher effectiveness policies with the CCSS is for SEAs to take a more hands-on role with the goal of creating a culture of adaptation and adherence to the new standards. The report offers ten recommendations for SEAs to succeed in this transition.

The first six recommendations focus on organizational design and functions of state departments:

- (1) Create a planning and management group made up of key leaders and support personnel, along with leading educators and principals, involved in the rollout of the CCSS and teacher effectiveness policies.
- (2) Acquire and develop the internal knowledge and expertise necessary to ensure that the CCSS are implemented with integrity and fidelity.
- (3) Ensure that professional development activities for teachers are plentiful and reflect the expectations within the CCSS.
- (4) Create and support professional networks of school district leaders, principals and teachers to accelerate professional learning and deeper understanding of the CCSS in conjunction with teacher evaluations.
- (5) Enable and prioritize instructional shifts toward the CCSS in classrooms and in teacher evaluations.

- (6) Create a single, coordinated communications plan for college and career readiness that highlights the value of the CCSS and the linkages with teacher effectiveness policies.

The final four recommendations explore changes in practice at state departments:

- (7) Require that the language and definitions outlining high-quality teaching practices used in teacher evaluations be aligned with the CCSS.
- (8) Insist that assessments used in the evaluation of teachers measure the CCSS.
- (9) As a complement to teacher evaluations, develop principal evaluation criteria that highlight the importance of implementing the CCSS with fidelity.
- (10) Support innovations in educators' daily schedules that provide time for teachers to collaborate on CCSS-related activities during the school day.

Ultimately, the report notes, SEAs must reinvent themselves from agencies that oversee how school districts use state and federal funds to ones that support continuous improvements in learning standards and teacher effectiveness policies. With an SEA's leadership and involvement, educators and students can maximize the opportunities presented with the implementation of the CCSS, improving student outcomes and equity for all students.

"Breaking down organizational silos is essential," said **Ross Wiener, author of the report and executive director of the education and society program at the Aspen Institute**. "Common Core and teacher evaluation must work together as two parts of a whole. This is system-level work that shouldn't fall on the shoulders of individual schools or teachers."

Teaching to the Core is available at <http://bit.ly/12mxzvl>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free 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 education 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 www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance's "High School Soup" blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).