



**ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION**

Straight A's:

A Citizen's Update on Education

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POLICYMAKERS GATHER TO DISCUSS IMPROVING ADOLESCENT LITERACY

A recent national focus on reading has placed a greater importance on adolescent literacy. The **Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)**, in partnership with the **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)** and other government and private entities, convened a series of workshops to examine scientifically based research in this area and identify research needs.

Workshop 1

“State of the Science and Research Needs,” March 6-8 in Washington, DC, brought together education policy makers and researchers to discuss the present body of knowledge on adolescent literacy. In her welcoming remarks, **OVAE’s Assistant Secretary, Carol D’Amico**, described illiteracy as a personal burden for individuals and a threat to economic security.

Focusing on underachieving adolescents, **Dr. Donald D. Deshler, Director of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning**, listed four challenges for literacy instruction: 1) pressure on teachers to teach many complex curriculums, 2) lack of time in secondary school curriculum for literacy competencies, 3) secondary teachers’ reluctance to think of literacy acquisition as their central focus, 4) lack of hope, purpose, and self-esteem in struggling adolescent readers.

In his presentation on motivational instructional practices and barriers to reading, **University of Maryland’s Dr. John Guthrie** showed the correlation between low achievement and low motivation in adolescent readers.

Workshop 2

“Practice Models for Adolescent Literacy Success,” May 20 in Baltimore, tackled the need for research-based instructional practice to assist teachers in improving the literacy of all secondary school students. **Hans Meeder, Deputy Assistant Secretary of OVAE**, and **Peggy McCardle of NICHD** opened the workshop with comments on the importance of improving adolescent literacy by addressing basic research questions.

Adolescent Literacy Workshops

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Presenting her synthesis of recent research on adolescent literacy, **Mary E. Curtis** of the **Center for Special Education at Lesley University** laid the groundwork for the questions that researchers need to answer.

Among the questions that guided the workshop were:

- Why does it seem that learning to read is more difficult after age nine?
- Which reading abilities in early childhood are indicative of reading difficulties in adolescence?
- How do we motivate and re-engage secondary students who have experienced failure in literacy?

“Administrators and teachers in secondary schools throughout the United States have finally begun to realize the impact that insufficient reading ...skills have on the ability of students to acquire the information included in the core curriculum,” wrote **Keith Lenz**, research scientist at the **University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning**. “Such a reform effort at the school level must be based on a shared vision, shared knowledge base, shared responsibility, and shared accountability to be successful.”

Four models were presented as examples of current practices in reading instruction: *Corrective Reading*, *Language*, *Strategic Reading*, and *Strategic Instruction Model*.

Visit the Adolescent Literacy workshop’s Web site at <http://216.26.160.105/conf/nichd/>.

A Way to Improve Adolescent Literacy - *Strategic Instruction Model*

By using a collection of reading, writing, studying and learning strategies to guide teachers in their instruction of at-risk middle and high school students, the **University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning** created a curriculum development model, the **Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)**.

SIM comprises four components: literacy focused interventions, evidence based instruction, a culture of professional development, and an implementation framework. Tens of thousands of teachers use SIM, and over one thousand trainers are available across the country for professional and implementation guidance.

Michael Pressley, Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Notre Dame said this about SIM: “There are no quick fixes to the problems facing underachieving adolescents. Intensive, well-designed instruction is required from exceedingly well--trained teachers. What the Kansas team has designed and how they prepare teachers to use their interventions is right on target!”

For more information about the KU Strategic Instruction Model, visit www.ku-crl.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education Helps Link Learning to the Real World

Within the **U.S. Department of Education**, the **Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)** supports a wide range of policies, programs, and activities that help prepare young people and adults for further education and successful careers. A new initiative under the Bush administration, “**Preparing America’s Future**,” organizes OVAE’s efforts into three areas: preparing youth to complete high school ready for postsecondary education and employment, supporting community and technical colleges, and bringing English fluency and higher literacy to millions of underserved Americans. Congress appropriates approximately \$1.9 billion annually to programs under OVAE’s jurisdiction, including the Perkins Act which supports career and technical education in high schools and community colleges.

Learn more about OVAE at www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Continues to Focus on Reading

The **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)** is part of the **National Institutes of Health**, the U.S. biomedical research arm. NICHD supports and conducts research on a continuum of topics related to the health of populations, adults, families, and children, including influences on learning, reading and literacy. Much of its literacy research relates to the biological and developmental aspects of reading.

In 1998, Congress asked NICHD to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various reading-instruction practices and their potential use in classrooms. In December 2000, the **National Reading Panel** released a report presenting its conclusions and developed a set of rigorous standards to evaluate the research on the effectiveness of different instructional approaches used in teaching reading skills. The report focused on phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, teacher education and computer technology. Now NICHD is looking at adolescent literacy with the U.S. Department of Education.

Visit NICHD at
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/default.htm>

Learn more about the National Reading Panel’s Report at
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm>



REP. FATTAH UNVEILS STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE

Before a Senate panel on equal access to high quality educational resources, **Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA)** unveiled his new *Student Bill of Rights*, which would make states accountable for providing an equal educational opportunity for all students.

Rep. Fattah rolled out his bill last week at a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing led by **Sens. Chris Dodd (D-CT)** and **Mike Enzi (R-WY)**. The hearing discussed the federal government’s role in ensuring equal access to a high quality education across states and local school districts and the manner in which states finance education.

Fattah Unveils Student Bill of Rights

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Rep. Fattah's bill would require states to certify with the Secretary of Education that their public school system operates on an equal statewide basis, offering all students access to educational inputs necessary to achieve high academic outcomes.

After working closely with **Rep. Johnny Isakson (R-GA)**, who also testified at the hearing, Rep. Fattah's new legislation focuses on providing adequate educational resources to all children, regardless of income level or place of residency. Toward this end, the bill would require every public school system to provide seven essential elements for learning: 1) instruction from a high quality teacher; 2) rigorous academic standards; 3) small class size; 4) up-to-date instructional materials; 5) state-of-the-art libraries; 6) updated computers; and 7) qualified guidance counselors.

In defending the need for his legislation, Rep. Fattah remarked:

"To deny children such opportunities or access is, in essence, a denial of their basic right to become prosperous and competent adults, not to mention highly intellectual individuals. For it is education that provides us with the values and skills necessary for living productive lives. If no child is to be left behind, then all children must be given an equal opportunity to compete."

While continuing to search for consensus on the level of federal involvement, the hearing brought to light the widespread discrepancies in education funding and education resources across school districts. **Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-MA)** and **Paul Wellstone (D-MN)** joined Dodd and Enzi and spoke about the specific challenges that their states face in providing an equal education to every child.

Citing a need to fundamentally change the way the United States deals with a child's education, Sen. Dodd explained the challenge the nation must overcome:

"Whether an American child is taught by a high quality teacher in a small class, has access to the best courses and instructional materials, goes to school in a new, modern building, and otherwise benefits from educational resources that have been shown to be essential to a quality education, still depends on where the child's family can afford to live. A child's education should be determined by the size of their dreams, not the numbers of their zip code."

Appearing at the invitation of Sen. Enzi, **Judy Catchpole, Wyoming Superintendent of Instruction**, described Wyoming's school financing system, which provides the same money for each student and then adjusts the amount depending on unique local demographics. She argued that while such a system may yield different funding levels (\$7,009 in Cheyenne versus \$14,715 in Arvada/Clearmont), both school districts have good schools and the system is in accordance with the Wyoming Constitution's requirement of a "complete and uniform, proper and adequate" education.

Michael Rebell, Executive Director and Counsel for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, provided a national overview of educational inequities, and the detrimental impact of inadequate resources—both in funding and services—on the educational outcomes of low-income students. He also made the case that equity in education funding improves educational outcomes, and that money does matter in helping students to become successful, productive citizens.

In his testimony, **Hugh Price, Director and CEO of the National Urban League** urged Congress to follow up the tougher standards and standardized tests in the *No Child Left Behind Act* with a focus “just as intense” on what it takes to meet these higher expectations. He specifically drew attention to the plight of urban and rural children to whom he referred as hostages in “communities with low tax bases, with weak commitments from states to provide quality education, and skinflint taxpayers who oppose providing equal and adequate support for all schools in their state.” To combat this inequality, Price proposed higher salaries for young graduates with masters degrees and challenged the federal government to “take the lead” in financing the economic incentives needed to attract stronger educators to these high-need school districts.



HOUSE PASSES EMERGENCY SPENDING BILL; SENATE ACTION TO BEGIN AFTER MEMORIAL DAY RECESS

Last week, the House finally passed an emergency spending supplemental for 2002 that included \$28.8 billion in funds, primarily to bolster the military, increase funding for homeland security, and provide additional relief to New York City. The bill also included \$1 billion to offset the Pell Grant shortfall. (For an explanation of the Pell Grant shortfall, see <http://www.all4ed.org/newsletters/Volume2No9.htm>.)

During debate on the bill, temperatures began to rise among Democrats, Republicans, and appropriators alike. In an attempt to establish some sort of control on discretionary spending, Republican leaders included language “deeming” that the House budget resolution’s \$759 billion would act as the spending ceiling. House appropriators were furious with the move, which they believed set the bar too low to meet the nation’s spending needs. Ultimately, the motion passed 216 to 209 with several Republican members of the Appropriations Committee voting “no” or “present” in protest.

Democrats, meanwhile, were outraged at a different provision in the supplemental that would increase the debt limit without a clean vote or at least an opportunity to argue that the \$1.35 trillion tax cut was the reason that the debt limit needed to be raised.

Before recessing for Memorial Day, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported out a \$31 billion spending supplemental that is expected to go to the full Senate the week of June 3. Bipartisan negotiations are still ongoing as to whether the Senate bill will include an increase in the debt limit or a deeming provision that would set a discretionary spending ceiling. At stake may be the amount Congress agrees to spend in education this year.



EDUCATION IS KEY ISSUE IN FLORIDA ELECTION: Governor's Race Spotlights Public Concern about Schools

The Florida gubernatorial race seems to be boiling down to one issue--education. **Gov. Jeb Bush** recently signed into law a bill that gives more authority to state universities, more autonomy to community colleges, and more flexibility to public schools. One of the more important provisions focuses on ending social promotion by providing specific criteria for sending a student to the next grade. However, Democratic Party leaders are criticizing Gov. Bush for both his policies and the present state of Florida's public education system.

The Florida Chamber Foundation's *New Cornerstone Study*, released April 8, reveals stark education statistics. According to the report, Florida ranks 42nd in the nation in per-pupil spending, and ranks 45th in the high school completion rate, graduating only 60 percent of its students. The report called for Florida to spend 18 percent more a year on public schools to approach the national median funding level for K-12 education.

Former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno may be Bush's primary competition come November, but at the moment another candidate is making a push for the Democratic nomination by focusing his campaign on education. **Bill McBride**, a Tampa attorney new to politics, has been outspoken about the need for universal pre-kindergarten, smaller class sizes, and higher teacher salaries. He has gained credibility by substantiating his campaign promises with fiscal objectives: He proposes to raise the cigarette tax by 50 cents a pack while reinstating other sales taxes to fund these programs.



TEEN INK PROVIDES AN OUTLET FOR PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD VOICES

Teen Ink, a national magazine of student writing, was founded in 1989 by Stephanie and John Meyer, a former teacher and publisher respectively. Teen Ink publishes the work of students of all abilities from every state in the country. John Meyer says about the magazine's mission:

"There's a wide variety of students in the middle, who are not special-needs or disadvantaged, they're not gifted-and-talented, and they are struggling to reach their potential too. They also need some recognition, some attention, some encouragement...Our goal is to give as many students a chance to be published for the first time and, at the same time, balance that with the need to have Teen Ink be as good a publication as it can be."

The magazine currently reaches 5,000 teachers in all 50 states who distribute Teen Ink to their students. It is used as a teaching tool and as a forum for student thoughts in writing classes and workshops. The publication has grown at a significant rate in the last 13 years. Last year it could only publish 10 percent of the 40,000 submissions it received.

The publisher, **Young Authors Foundation**, gives out an award for Best Interview of the Year. The contest encourages teens to interview everyday heroes and rewards the winner with an interview with a celebrity. Past celebrity interviews have included Hillary Clinton, Colin Powell, and Martin Sheen.

For more information on *Teen Ink*, link to <http://www.teenink.com>

To link to the recent *Teacher Magazine* story, <http://www.edweek.org/tm/tmstory.cfm?slug=08print.h13>



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES \$10 MILLION FOR PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced \$10 million for grants that focus on recruiting, mentoring, and training principals and assistant principals to serve in high-need schools. The Department expects to award approximately 22 grants.

Grantees can use funds to provide financial incentives to aspiring new principals, provide stipends to principals who mentor new principals, carry out professional development programs in instructional leadership and management, and provide incentives that are appropriate for teachers or individuals from other fields who want to become principals.

For applications contact the Education Publication Center (ED Pubs) at 877-433-7827 or visit the Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/ordering.jsp>.



MORE MONEY FOR TITLE I SCHOOLS IN THE FALL: DISTRICT ALLOCATIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Last year, Congress gave a large increase in funding—from \$8.7 billion to \$10.4 billion—for Title I in order to help states meet the higher standards mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. As a result, state allocations increased across the board this year. States gained from 4.5 percent (Mississippi) to 31 percent (District of Columbia and Hawaii), with the average gain about 20 percent.

Title I is the largest federal initiative aimed at closing the achievement gap between rich and poor children. In “*Investing in Excellence: Making Title I Work for All Children*,” the Alliance advocated an expansion of the Title I program in order to provide support to all students—both elementary and secondary.

The Alliance report is available online at: <http://www.all4ed.org/report.htm>
Readers may access the Title I, Part A district allocations at <http://www.TitleIonline.com>.

Straight A's: A Citizen's Update on Education is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C., 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. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a non-profit organization working to make it possible for America's six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.