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EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's:

## A Citizen's Update on Education

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### ALARMING TEACHING STATISTICS FUEL NEED FOR CHANGE: U.S. Secretary of Education's Report Outlines Reform Effort

**U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige** issued a call to states to radically transform the teacher certification system by raising standards and lowering bureaucratic barriers that keep many highly qualified candidates from pursuing teaching careers.

The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality: *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge*, issued last week at the first annual Teacher Quality Evaluation Conference, found that most state teacher certification exams are much too easy to ensure content knowledge. At the same time, most states require teaching candidates to take a full course load of education classes.

The report highlighted high-quality alternative routes to certification such as **Teach for America** and the **New Teachers Project, Transition to Teaching, and Troops-to-Teachers** and encouraged states to use them as models to dramatically streamline certification. These programs recruit talented college graduates and seasoned professionals from other fields and simplify their entry into the classroom. They also provide structured support for these new teachers through mentoring and other professional development. The U.S. Department of Education hopes that eliminating burdensome certification requirements will encourage more high-quality candidates to enter the field and enable states to meet the requirements of the new *No Child Left Behind Act*.

**Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers**, agreed with many of the reports recommendations, but called for more support for teachers: "They need quality hands-on experience and access to ongoing professional development and support. . . . More resources must be available to improve teacher education programs and to attract the most qualified people to the teaching profession." **National Education Association President Bob Chase** was less enthusiastic in his reaction to the report: "Claims that inexperienced college grads can be as successful as formally trained teachers are insulting and demeaning to qualified members of the teaching profession."

## Alarming Teaching Statistics Fuel Need for Change

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The report found startling statistics on the training of U.S. teachers. Only 41 percent of eighth-grade math teachers studied math in school—30 percentage points lower than the international average. In English, teachers who did not have at least a minor in English literature, communications, or journalism teach one-fifth of all public school students in grades seven through 12. In history and physical science, teachers who have never studied the subject in any concentrated way teach more than half of America's students.

In a recent article for the *History News Network* (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/hnn/>), **Diane Ravitch** discusses the results of the 2001 National Assessment of Educational Progress in U.S. history and ties poor performance by high school seniors in part to low-quality teachers. Ravitch notes that “history and physics are the two fields in which a majority of teachers are ‘out-of-field.’” She concludes by asking that states insist that teachers of U.S. history “be expected to demonstrate their knowledge . . . by taking and passing a subject-matter test no less rigorous than the one that the students must take to graduate from high school.”

### U.S. Department of Education Issues Draft Guidance for new \$2.85 Billion Teacher Quality Grants Program

The U.S. Department of Education recently issued its draft guidance to provide assistance to state and local program administrators as they implement the *Improving Teacher Quality State Grants* program to meet the new law's requirement for a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom by the 2005-2006 school year. “Highly qualified” means that the teacher:

1. Has obtained full state certification as a teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state, and does not have certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;
2. Holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree; and
3. Has demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches.

These requirements will be imposed this fall on all new elementary school teachers. New middle and high school teachers must meet these requirements and pass subject-matter tests or have the equivalent of an undergraduate major, graduate degree, or advanced certification in their field.

The new teacher quality grant program, Title II, Part A, replaces the focus on professional development for math and science in favor of support for teacher professional development across all core academic subjects. It focuses on preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality teachers and principals and can be used in some instances to fund teacher bonuses, preparation, induction, support, and ongoing development. A number of well-designed studies indicate that teacher quality has a powerful effect on student academic achievement: Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that children assigned to three effective teachers in a row scored at the 83 percentile in math at the end of fifth grade, while children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row scored at the 29<sup>th</sup> percentile.

According to the department, the guidance should be “viewed as a living document that will be modified as needed.” *Secretary Paige's press release (contains link to complete draft guidance):*  
<http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/06-2002/06072002a.html>.

*Searchable database of all teacher and principal grant opportunities:*  
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/TPR/index.html>.

## **Non-Traditional Methods Used to Attract Highly Qualified Teachers**

The *No Child Left Behind* requirement that all newly hired teachers be highly qualified will force educators and community leaders to come up with creative solutions to recruiting and retaining skilled individuals who want to teach. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, the Dallas Independent School District needs to fill at least 450 teacher vacancies and is turning to five surrounding states for applicants. Earlier this month, the district began a media blitz in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas urging certified teachers to move to Dallas.

In an article for the *L.A. Times*, Jenifer Ragland writes that California is turning to its many laid-off tech employees to fill teacher shortages in math and science. With help from a \$1.6 million state grant, California hired about 200 former high-tech employees. The grant money will help participants pay for tuition, books, testing fees and other services needed to obtain certification. Many participants teach under an internship program while attending certification classes at night.

*Dallas Morning News:*

<http://www.dallasnews.com/latestnews/stories/060702dnmetteacher.4edee.html>.

*Los Angeles Times:* <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-000039088jun03.story>.

### **Teach for America: Providing Low-Income Students with High-Quality Teachers**

**Teach for America (TFA)** corps members are outstanding and diverse (last year, 38 percent of corps members were people of color) recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit to teach two years in urban and rural public schools in low-income communities. This fall, TFA will place more than 1,700 corps members from an applicant pool of more than 14,000, the largest number in the organization's history. In 2002, seven percent of the graduating seniors at Yale University and 14 percent of Spelman College seniors applied to Teach For America. Schools that yielded the largest number of Teach for America corps members included: University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of Virginia, Northwestern University, University of California-Berkeley, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Emory University, and University of Texas-Austin.

Since 1990, the organization has placed 8,000 corps members in 16 urban and rural areas, and these teachers in turn have taught more than 1 million children.

To learn more about Teach for America, visit: <http://www.teachforamerica.org/tfa/>.



**EDUCATION SHOULD BE THE LEADING URBAN PRIORITY:  
It's Education Stupid!**

The **executive director of the Federation for Community Planning, John Begala**, recently wrote that education should be the top urban priority at the national, state and local levels. In a guest article for *The School Administrator*, a monthly publication by the American Association of School Administrators, Begala called on all public systems serving children to concentrate on education.

## **Education Should be the Leading Urban Priority**

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“[O]ne public service is associated with practically every economic, social, public health and civic strength, and its absence or failure is associated with nearly every economic, social, health and civic problem,” he wrote. “That service is public education.”

The problems contributing to education failures – broken homes, mental illness, poor health, crime, abuse and neglect – are beyond the reach of schools, but are addressed by many organizations in isolation from the schools. Begala articulated a need to bind together those efforts with “leadership from school system executives in partnership with public and private health and social service organizations.”

His recommendations include making educational attainment a first priority for local leaders, requiring that any foundation serving children and families support academic success along with its own agenda, developing a system of sharing data between family service agencies and schools, and expanding social services delivered in schools, especially for secondary students. The June 2002 article sums up its message in the title: “It’s Education, Stupid.”

*To read John Begala’s article, visit [The School Administrator](http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2002_06/col_Begala.htm) at [www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2002\\_06/col\\_Begala.htm](http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2002_06/col_Begala.htm).*

### **An Education Election? Poll Reveals National Voter Emphasis on Education**

Forty-four percent of adults surveyed in a Gallup Poll last month said education was “extremely important,” placing it among the top three most important issues. In choosing which party in Congress they say would do a better job dealing with education, there was a toss-up – 41 percent said Democrats and 35 percent said Republicans.

While education may still be up for grabs, the other two top issues have already been claimed – Republicans have a clear lead on responding to terrorism and Democrats have a clear lead on protecting Social Security. The poll suggests that education and how the parties shape their message on the issue could determine the 2002 congressional elections.

*For more results from the poll, visit the Gallup’s website at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) or Ruy Teixeira’s poll analysis at <http://www.tompaine.com/feature.cfm/ID/5749/view/print>.*



### **EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL HEADS FOR QUICK AGREEMENT IN CONFERENCE: \$1 Billion Included for Pell Grants**

Backed by leaders in both parties, the fiscal 2002 spending supplemental appears to be headed toward a quick compromise in conference. The Senate-passed version would cost \$31.5 billion, approximately \$4.4 billion more than the House-passed version. Regardless of the final cost, the supplemental will include \$1 billion to cover the Pell grant shortfall.

Appropriators are expected to split the difference between the two versions and then send the conference report to both chambers for final passage before the July 4 recess. The President has indicated that he would veto the \$31.5 billion Senate version, but has yet to take a position on the anticipated conference bill. Many observers believe the supplemental fight will mirror the appropriations endgame – with the Senate coming in with a higher amount than the House, the chambers splitting the difference in conference, and the President ultimately deciding whether he will sign an amount greater than his budget number.

Absent an agreed-upon budget plan, the supplemental is an attractive vehicle to set a discretionary spending ceiling for 2003 that would force an agreement at the beginning of the appropriations process rather than at the end. However, it is still unclear whether the supplemental spending bill will include a debt limit increase or set a discretionary spending ceiling for 2003.



## **COLLEGE TUITION COSTS RISING: Undergrads Drained by Debt**

Today, more high school students than ever before hope to go to college and earn a degree, but high tuition costs and lack of financial aid has forced many undergraduates, especially lower-income students, to choose between their studies and work. Far too often, students choose to work during college to avoid a huge debt after graduation. While such a decision reduces students' chances of graduating, many have no other choice if they want to fulfill their dream of a college degree.

### **Family Income**

Tuition at four-year public colleges has increased 28 percent since 1990, but the median family income has increased by only 11 percent. Today, tuition and fees represent 16 percent of a middle-income family's budget and 60 percent of a low-income family's. A study by the **National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education** concluded that tuition at four-year public schools rose faster than family income in 41 states. Meanwhile, tuition at two-year community and technical schools, formerly a more affordable option, rose at a faster rate than family income in 24 states.

### **Grants, Loans, and Debt**

In the recent economic downturn states have cut higher education funding, forcing public schools to raise tuition. Federal Pell grants, created in 1972 to aid low-income students, covered a maximum of 77 percent of college costs in 1979, but in 2000-01 that figure is only 40 percent. To cover costs, students took out \$37 billion in federal student loans in 2000-01.

The median loan debt for low-income students at public four-year colleges has skyrocketed. In 2000, students graduating from families earning \$30,000 or less averaged \$14,199 in debt -- compared to \$7,187 in 1993. This problem figures to only worsen as the college student population rises 20 percent in the next decade, with most of the increase from low-income and minority students.

## College Tuition Costs Rising

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### Consequences

With three-quarters of students working and one-quarter working full time, students are making choices with consequences contrary to their goals of obtaining a degree. One-third of students working 15 hours or more a week drop out, compared to 16 percent for those who work less, and nearly half of part time students leave school compared to 16 percent of full timers, according to the **American Council on Education**.

“The whole financing system seems to be shifting in ways that may reduce opportunities for students with the least ability to pay,” said **Lawrence E. Gladieux**, former executive director of policy analysis for the College Board.

See *EdWeek's "College Students Strain to Cover Rising Tuition at Public Institutions,"*  
[http://www.edweek.org/ew/ew\\_printstory.cfm?slug+38.aid/h21](http://www.edweek.org/ew/ew_printstory.cfm?slug+38.aid/h21).

See the *Philadelphia Inquirer's June 9 article "College Dreams Slipping Away,"*  
<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/living/education/3431342.htm>.



### FIRST LADY PROMOTES LIBRARIES AND NEW FOUNDATION TO HELP INNER-CITY AND RURAL LIBRARIES

“School libraries help teachers teach and children learn,” noted **Laura Bush** at a *White House Conference on School Libraries* on June 4. Co-hosted with **Dr. Robert Martin**, director of the **Institute of Museum and Library Services**, the conference featured a distinguished group of speakers and panel of practitioners sharing their research and experiences on “what works in school libraries.”

“Children and teachers need library resources – especially books – and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. Books, information technology, and school librarians who are part of the school’s professional team are basic ingredients for student achievement,” said the First Lady, a former public school teacher and librarian.

Emphasizing the vital role libraries play in education and the importance of literacy, **Dr. Vartan Gregorian**, **President of the Carnegie Corporation**, remarked, “Our nation cannot afford the ‘luxury’ of having one-fifth of its population illiterate: for reading is a means to education; education is a means to knowledge; knowledge is a means to power and a bright future.”

**Christine DeVita**, **president of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds**, demonstrated the role of philanthropies in improving school libraries with a description of **Library Power**, their effort to revitalize elementary and middle school libraries. “Library Power has helped renovate library space, purchase new books, map library resources to the goals of the classroom curriculum, and create professional development opportunities and tools for teachers and librarians,” she said.

**Susan Neuman, assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education,** discussed a **William Penn Foundation** study of public libraries in varying communities across Philadelphia, stressing the extra help students need to fully benefit from libraries. “[A]ll children will not use the materials to their fullest extent without supportive adults and librarians who will [create] an informational society that provides access to all,” she said, stressing the importance of teacher-librarian collaboration.

In her closing remarks, the First Lady announced the new leadership council of the **Laura Bush Foundation for America’s Libraries. Bill Marriott** will serve as chairman. The foundation was established in 2001 to bring books to inner-city and rural school libraries.

“A love of books – of holding a book, turning its pages, looking at its pictures, and living its fascinating stories – goes hand-in-hand with a love of learning,” Bush said. “And every child in America should have access to a well-stocked school or community library.”

*For more information on the foundation, the conference or the speakers’ full presentations, visit [www.laurabushfoundation.org](http://www.laurabushfoundation.org).*

#### **THE ANNENBERG CHALLENGE: Lessons and Reflections on School Reform**

Billionaire **Walter H. Annenberg’s** gift spread \$1.1 billion among 2,400 schools generating modest gains among participating schools, but falling short of the dramatic gains envisioned when the Annenberg Challenge was launched in 1993.

A report released last week by the Annenberg Challenge found that the philanthropist’s initial \$500 million investment, which was later matched by \$600 million from corporations, philanthropies and other benefactors, “did not work miracles, but it breathed new life into American education. It brought hope to schools that had been all but abandoned . . . [and] changed the public’s beliefs about what is possible in public education.”

Annenberg’s gift funded 18 projects around the country, which then made grants to individual schools to improve teacher training and reduce class size. Benefits of the program included higher achievement in some schools, a renewed interest in arts education, and new community support for public education.

*The complete report is available at <http://www.lessonsandreflections.org/lessons/report.pdf>.*

**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.