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EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's:

## A Citizen's Update on Education

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### **CONGRESS MOVES BUDGET RESOLUTIONS: Senate Resolution Gives Education \$5.4 Billion More Than President's Request**

Last week, Congressional action on the budget began in earnest when the House and Senate Committees drafted their budget plans and the House of Representatives passed its fiscal year 2003 budget resolution by a vote of 221 to 209. In accordance with its title, *A Wartime Budget to Secure America's Future*, the House budget resolution meets the President's request for defense and homeland security. The House budget met the President's request of a 2.8 percent education increase, but the Senate budget, yet to go to the Senate floor, added \$5.4 billion to the President's request. Both chambers included a reserve fund that would set aside funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Act in the coming years.

#### **House Budget Committee Rejects Honda Education Amendment**

Before sending the budget resolution to the House floor, the Republican-controlled House Budget Committee considered a Democratic amendment to provide more funding for education. The provision was voted down on a straight party line vote, 20 to 16. The amendment, offered by **Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA)** and several other Democrats, would have increased funding for programs included in the *No Child Left Behind Act*:

*"As a former High School teacher and principal, I agree that we must hold our students and teachers to higher national standards. However, it is essential that we understand that these standards must be a two-way street-if we truly expect our schools to meet the challenges of greater accountability and higher achievement outlined in H.R. 1, then the President and Congress need to ensure that we continue to fund educational initiatives."*

The Honda amendment would have raised Title I funding \$2.15 billion above the President's \$1 billion requested increase for a total increase of \$3.15 billion for fiscal year 2003. In addition, the Honda amendment would have allocated \$250 million for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Communities (after school programs), and another \$275 million for unspecified education programs.

## Senate Budget Committee Tops President's Education Budget by \$5.4 Billion

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The Democratic-controlled Senate Budget Committee, chaired by **Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND)**, reported its budget resolution on March 21. The resolution also meets the President's budget request for defense and homeland security, but includes \$5.4 billion more for education than the President proposes, bringing the total education increase to \$6.8 billion. Programs affected by the *No Child Left Behind Act* would see a \$2.6 billion increase over the President's budget. During the Budget Committee markup, Sen. Conrad saw greater spending on education as a method to preserve our economy:

*"We still need to make certain that we provide a high-quality education to every American, not only because all Americans deserve an education that will allow them to make the most of their potential, but also because investing in a first-class educational system is the best way to ensure the American economy will remain the strongest in the world."*

In addition to the wide gap in proposed education funding, a chief disagreement between the two chambers is that the Senate plan does not accept the President's proposal to permanently extend last year's tax cut beyond 2010. With a one vote majority in the Senate, the Democratic Leadership is expected to have a tough time getting the votes to adopt the budget plan they were able to get out of Committee on a straight party-line vote.



### **NEW FUNDING FOR SPECIAL ED STUDENTS? House and Senate Budget Resolutions Tackle Full Funding**

Last week, the House and Senate Budget Committees presented two alternatives that place Congress on a path to mandatory full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The House would set aside funding for five years but the Senate would fully fund IDEA by setting aside funding for 10 years.

When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it promised to provide 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure for each disabled child served. However, even with large increases in funding over the last five years, the federal portion of IDEA funds has never exceeded 15 percent.

The House Budget Committee fashioned a reserve fund that would guarantee an increase of at least the President's \$1 billion budget request for fiscal year 2003. Over the next four years, the plan reserves a 12 percent annual increase for IDEA. Future increases will depend on whether Congress and the President agree to make IDEA funds mandatory when they reauthorize the special education law later this year.

The Senate Budget Committee's resolution would fully fund IDEA by setting aside \$2.5 billion each year until IDEA is fully funded in 2008.



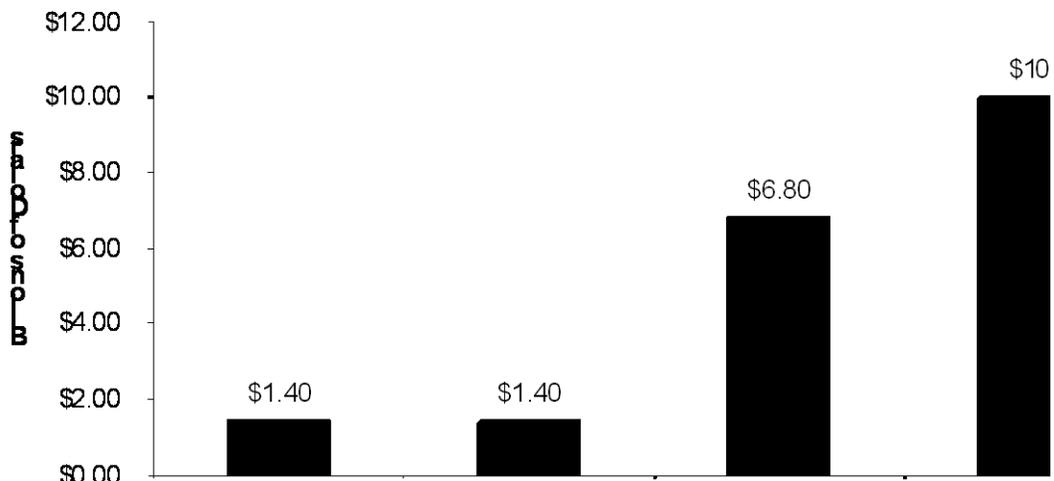
## KENNEDY, MILLER CALL ON PRESIDENT BUSH TO INCREASE EDUCATION SPENDING BY \$10 BILLION

In a letter to the White House on March 18, **Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA)** and **Rep. George Miller (D-CA)** called on President Bush to increase spending for education by \$10 billion over last year’s level. The letter was in response to a budget that Sen. Kennedy and Rep. Miller believed shortchanged education, especially after the higher standards mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act* signed into law just two months ago:

*“Mr. President, we have just stood side-by-side to demand that our schools ensure that every single child reaches challenging academic standards. If we fail to provide greater resources, we will send a very discouraging message about the importance of these reforms and severely diminish their chances of success.”*

In the letter, Sen. Kennedy and Rep. Miller note that the President’s budget falls \$4 billion short for Title I, cuts federal resources for teachers, and “includes only a \$1.4 billion increase for all of education—the smallest increase in seven years—while proposing more than 50 times that amount in additional tax cuts for the top 1 percent of taxpayers.”

**Fiscal Year 2003 Education Spending Plans**



## DEBT CEILING DRAWING NEAR; Congress Plays Politics With Crucial Measure

Going against calls from the White House, Republican leaders in the House of Representatives have yet to schedule a vote to raise the debt limit. This failure to act has forced **Treasury Secretary Paul H. O’Neill** to tap funds from Treasury bonds in one of the investment plans and replace them with non-interest bearing IOUs.

## Debt Limit Drawing Near

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The debt limit represents the combined total of publicly held debt and includes money owed to holders of Treasury bonds and other government securities plus the government's obligations to retirement trust funds. In a letter to congressional leaders on March 18, Secretary O'Neill indicated that the government would breach the debt ceiling by April 1. In order to prevent the government from exceeding the debt limit, currently set at \$5.95 trillion, Secretary O'Neill must resort to borrowing from the Treasury bonds to allow the government to continue paying its creditors. This action by the Secretary is not unprecedented. In 1996, Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin resorted to the same accounting practice when a similar stalemate arose between Congress and then President Bill Clinton.

Secretary O'Neill's creative accounting will buy House leaders time until April 15, when taxpayers begin filling the federal coffers with their returns. But the debt limit will need to be raised once again. Most likely the increase will be between \$300 and \$400 billion, but far short of the \$750 billion that Secretary O'Neill requested last November. Republican leaders plan to attach the legislation to an anti-terrorism supplemental spending bill that is expected to reach the House floor in mid-April.

Democrats are poised to use the vote on raising the debt limit as further evidence that last year's tax cut ate away at budget surpluses, brought a return to deficit spending and consumed scarce resources for domestic programs such as education.



### **NATIONAL FOCUS ON HIGH SCHOOLS CONTINUES: Small High Schools Program Receives Funding Boost**

The **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation** announced this week that they would invest more than \$40 million to help start 70 small high schools around the country. The program will give disadvantaged students college-level work in their last two years of high school, which will enable them to earn a high school diploma as well as an associate's degree or two years of college credit. This funding is part of a larger national trend toward encouraging smaller schools for high school students.

The money will be distributed through eight intermediary organizations that will develop the school plans. Boston-based **Jobs for the Future**, an organization that promotes innovative reform in education and workforce development, will serve as the lead coordinator and policy advocate for the effort. The money will help over 25,000 students from Appalachia to New York City, and the schools are expected to open as early as 2003. "These new small schools will help bridge the gap between high school and college, where we lose too many students," said **Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director of Education for the Gates Foundation**.

Small schools have a strong advocate in the Gates Foundation. The Foundation has committed more than \$345 million to schools and districts throughout the United States in order to create small schools, or transform large high schools into smaller learning communities.

## National Focus on High Schools Continues

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The Gates Foundation, along with the **KnowledgeWorks Foundation** and the **Ford Foundation**, gave \$31.5 million to Ohio in order to turn large low-performing urban high schools into small and innovative learning centers. This is the largest private investment in public education in Ohio's history. The grants are statewide, and KnowledgeWorks will coordinate the selection of which schools receive the money. The new schools are scheduled to begin operating in 2004.

The **US Department of Education** also contributes to small schools through their **Smaller Learning Communities Program**, which is a \$125 million competitive federal grant program that assists communities in creating smaller learning environments in large high schools. The funds assist planning and implementation of such programs in up to 200 school communities around the country. *[Note: In fiscal year 2003, the President's budget proposes to eliminate funding for the Smaller Learning Communities program.]*

The small schools movement originated with the concern that today's students are being "warehoused" in large comprehensive school complexes. Approximately 70 percent of American high schools students attend schools with at least 1,000 students, and nearly 50 percent of high school students attend schools enrolling more than 1,500 students. Small school advocates recommend between 300 students and 900 students to a school.

Research has shown that, on average, small school students have higher achievement and graduation rates and fewer discipline problems. Parents, students and teachers report they are more satisfied with small-school environments. According to a recent **Public Agenda** report, parents whose children attend small high schools were more likely to say that teachers help struggling students (75 percent versus 48 percent in large schools). Parents whose children were in large schools were more likely to believe students were alienated (40 percent to 23 percent), and likely to dropout (43 percent to 21 percent).

This is true in urban, rural and suburban areas. At-risk students have made the most dramatic increases in achievement in small schools. A poor student in a large school is ten times more likely to be a low performer than a poor student in a small school. The research is so definitive that former **Secretary of Education Richard Riley** commented that the value of small schools has been "confirmed with a clarity and a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research."

### **Campus Magnet School, Queens, New York**

The Campus Magnet School in Queens, New York is the host of four schools under the same roof. Freshman and sophomores can choose which of the four schools to attend: the Business, Computer Applications and Entrepreneurship school, the Humanities and the Arts school, the Law, Government, and Community Service school or the Mathematics, Science, Research and Technology school. Each school enrolls 525 students.

Host schools have become more popular than brand new small schools because the implementation cost is lower and students can still enjoy extra-curricular activities and a diverse curriculum. Students may take classes in other schools, and the entire host school shares the library and the sports teams. Students have shown dramatic improvement in attendance, achievement and graduation rates since the inception of the small-school program.

## National Focus on High Schools Continues

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### Parham School, Cincinnati, Ohio

Small schools can also be affiliated with a community agency. The Parham School in Cincinnati, Ohio shares facilities with Families FORWARD, a social service agency. Parham serves 425 students in grades pre-K through 8, 98 percent of which are African American and 89 percent of which come from low-income families. Families FORWARD works with parents and students to identify their priorities, provides family counseling and conducts classes on social issues. The percentage of students passing 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade exams have more than doubled since the school's inception, leading the Parham School to be called "a model for the entire nation."

*Additional examples are found in the report, *Smaller, Safer, Saner Successful Schools*:  
<http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/saneschools.pdf>*

*Public Agenda report, *Sizing Things Up*:  
<http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/smallschools/smallschools.htm>*



### **OFF THE BENCH: First Lady Laura Bush Steps to Plate as Advocate for Quality Teachers**

**First Lady Laura Bush** has taken an active role in reforming public education, leading efforts to promote literacy and early childhood education. Now she has turned her attention to improving teacher conditions and alleviating teacher shortages. Demonstrating her commitment, Mrs. Bush hosted a major conference on teacher quality.

Education leaders, researchers, practitioners and policymakers gathered March 5 for Mrs. Bush's *White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers*. Focusing on the quality of teacher education, on teacher shortages, and on accountability for teaching standards and student achievement, the conference addressed how to immediately improve teacher training and support.

"Our obligation to America's teachers is as clear and strong as our obligation to America's children," Mrs. Bush said in her opening remarks. "Teachers deserve all the knowledge and support we can give them." Avoiding the topic of salary gaps, the First Lady mentioned the intangible awards of affecting children's lives. "Teaching is the greatest community service of all," she said.

The twelve speakers, including **U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige**, discussed research, credentialing, training, programming and recruiting methods. In a statistically laden presentation, **Assistant Secretary of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Grover J. Whitehurst** demonstrated the direct relationship between effective teacher preparation and professional development on the one hand and student achievement on the other. In one study he cited, children assigned to three "effective" teachers in a row scored in the 83<sup>rd</sup> percentile in math at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, while children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row scored in the 29<sup>th</sup> percentile," clearly proving that quality teachers matter.

Whitehurst found that certification and licensure aren't true measures of teacher effectiveness because of varying state certification requirements and other factors. His analysis found that the "most important influence on individual differences in teacher effectiveness is teachers' general cognitive ability, followed by experience and content knowledge."

In the discussion of teacher certification, **Frederick M. Hess, a professor at University of Virginia**, embraced what he called a "common sense model of competitive certification" that "would create new opportunities to enhance the quality and relevance of professional development." He suggested applicants for teaching certification should be required to hold at least a B.A., be subjected to a rigorous criminal-background check, and be required to pass a test demonstrating competency of essential knowledge and skills. Hess says these criteria would enhance the talent pool by making teaching more competitive.

**American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman** articulated the basic changes needed in teacher preparation and the urgency of the problem. "Most teachers...will tell you they felt unprepared when they entered the classroom...This should never be the case."

On March 14, **Mrs. Bush** briefed the House Education and Workforce Committee on these issues, summarizing the conference's findings and supporting both the President's *No Child Left Behind Act* and his proposed budget as the proper methods for reforming education: "Teachers are the heart and soul of our schools," Mrs. Bush told the committee. "The Conference gave us new insights and understandings of the challenges ahead as we work to support our 'soldiers of democracy' – America's teachers."

*White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers remarks can be viewed in full at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/news-speeches/speeches/fl20020305.html>.*

*The First Lady's remarks before the committee can be viewed at: [www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/news-speeches/speeches/fl20020314.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/news-speeches/speeches/fl20020314.html).*

### **New Publication on No Child Left Behind: A Must-Read for Educators and Community Leaders**

The Learning First Alliance, a national partnership of leading education associations, released a new guide to *The No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The paper highlights the important changes in the law and offers information about the funding provided by NCLB for the coming year. The Learning First Alliance further engages the reader by posing challenges for schools and communities as they implement the new law.

*The guide, Major Changes to ESEA in the No Child Left Behind Act can be accessed via the web at <http://www.learningfirst.org/pdfs/nochildleft.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 help make it possible for every child in America to receive an excellent education.