



**ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION**

# **Straight A's:**

## **A Citizen's Update on Education**

Volume 2 No. 8: April 22, 2002

---



### **NO ACTION EXPECTED ON CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PLAN: Spending Committees May Move Ahead**

With no major tax changes in the forecast, Congress has few incentives to reach agreement on an overall federal budget plan for fiscal year 2003. Working out the major difference between the House and Senate plans would require more time and energy than either the Republican House or the Democratic Senate is willing to spend. At stake, however, is the debate Members would like to have on issues such as education. For example, the Senate has allocated \$9 billion more than the House for domestic investments including \$5.6 billion more for education. This difference could be worked out among appropriators without agreeing on a final budget plan.

**Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA)** and **Rep. George Miller (D-CA)** who worked with the President to enact the new education bill have called for billions more for education than the House, Senate or President's plan. The Kennedy/Miller education budget would invest \$10 billion more in education for fiscal year 2003, an amount they say is necessary to implement the provisions if of the new law and to meet the federal commitment to fully fund special education. The final decision on how much Congress spends on education this year will be decided in the fall with passage of the Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations bill—just in time for congressional elections.



### **SCIENTIFICALLY BASED RESEARCH IN FOREFRONT OF EDUCATION POLICY: New Academy of Sciences Approved by House Committee**

On March 20, the House Education and Workforce Committee approved HR 3801, the *Education Sciences Reform Act*, a bill intended to replace the current Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) with a more streamlined organization called the Academy of Education Sciences. **Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Michael Castle (R-DE)** sponsored this legislation to align federal education research efforts with the provisions of Bush's *No Child Left Behind Act*.

## Scientifically Based Research in Forefront of Education Policy

(continued from p. 1)

OERI is currently responsible for conducting grant-funded research and projects, collecting statistics on the status and progress of the nation's education, and distributing information to the education community. Overseen by the National Education Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB), OERI is divided into four branches: The National Center for Education Statistics, the Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination, the National Library of Education, and five separate National Research Institutes – each of which over-sees research centers and reform programs.

The proposed bill would eliminate OERI and the office of the assistant secretary, replacing them with the Academy of Education Sciences and its director. A National Board for Education Sciences would oversee the Academy, which would consist of three national centers - education research, education statistics, and education evaluation - each headed by a commissioner.

The National Library of Education would disseminate information to the public and could include the continuation of funds to existing clearinghouses. The Secretary would oversee the Regional Educational Technical Assistance programs that could include combining current funds for labs, centers, and clearinghouses and redistributing them via a system of research grant competitions.

According to **Chairman Castle** *The Education Sciences Reform Act* aims to meet the goals of *No Child Left Behind*, specifically emphasizing scientifically based research:

*“This change, I believe, is significant. Quality education research, not fads or anecdotes, [should] inform decisions on the best way to improve student learning and narrow achievement gaps. By holding education research, evaluations, and statistics to new standards of quality, improving the focus of these activities so they address the needs of educators and policymakers, and laying the framework for the dissemination of high quality, scientifically valid information, I believe we can build the foundation to improve the education of our children and all of our nation’s students. And I believe my bill, H.R. 3801, is a good start.”*

### New “What Works” Clearinghouse

The U.S. Department of Education will create a national clearinghouse that provides education decision-makers with the tools they need to make choices that are guided by the best available scientific evidence. “The What Works Clearinghouse will allow users to determine which programs and practices have the strongest evidence of effectiveness based on solid, reliable, scientific research,” said **Grover “Russ” Whitehurst**, U.S. Assistant Secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

*For more information, access the press release at*  
<http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/03-2002/03252002a.html>



## NEW TOOLS FOR PARENTS: U.S. Department of Education Unveils New Web Site and Toolkit for Parents

Last week, **Secretary of Education Rod Paige** began a 25-city tour across America to foster support for the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Paige is seeking to educate and engage parents in the process of improving America's schools. "For *No Child Left Behind* to work, we need the energy, enthusiasm and expectations of parents," Paige told the crowd at a rally in Washington, DC.

According to Paige, parents should expect the following: 1) schools to be held accountable for resources and results; 2) schools and principals to be given the flexibility to use federal funds in order to solve local problems; 3) schools to use instruction based on solid research; and 4) all parents to have the option to get extra help for their children should a school fail to improve.

Paige released a new Web site, <http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov>, designed by the US Department of Education, which he hopes will become a major source of information for parents, educators and government officials. The site has a comprehensive "Where to Go" section that lists federal, national, state and local organizations that provide useful information about education. The Web site also contains fact sheets on the major issue components of the act: measuring progress, investing what works in getting students help, and reading achievement.

The Web site contains a **Parents' Tool Box** and features interactive CDs, guidebooks and downloadable brochures on subjects such as homework tips and reading tips for parents. The tool box also contains state-by-state information on the effects of *No Child Left Behind* along with statistics for local school districts.

The new law allows parents not only to become informed consumers but advocates for improving their school's performance. The annual report cards, required by *No Child Left Behind*, will allow parents to see how their school is doing and compare it to schools across the state.

*For a schedule of Rod Paige's future visits, see*  
<http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov/media/upcoming/index.html>

### **Darrell Green Youth Life Foundation**

Appearing with Rod Paige in Washington, D.C., Washington Redskins All-Pro Cornerback Darrell Green continued to demonstrate his commitment to children. Green started the **Darrell Green Youth Life Foundation** in 1988, which seeks to create opportunity for at-risk boys and girls through three principles: nurture the child, heal the family and rebuild the community. The Youth Life Foundation began with Fun Days in the Park to get children and families outside, safe and happy. The foundation then moved on to create Learning Centers, which offer physical activities, tutoring, mentorship and family nights. The Washington, D.C. Learning Center was so successful it has been the model for centers around the country.

*For more information on the Darrell Green Youth Life Foundation, link to <http://www.dgylf.org>*



## **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: Increasing Parental Involvement in Middle and High School**

**Recruiting New Teachers Inc.** has created a toolkit for middle and high school teachers called *Connect for Success: Building a Teacher, Parent, Teen Alliance*, funded by the **MetLife Foundation**. The publication addresses the growing gap between educators, students and parents once the students begin middle school. Its goal is to enable teachers to build partnerships with parents and provide tools to break down barriers to participation.

Family involvement has been shown to be crucial to student success. Yet, parental involvement has been shown to drop off dramatically – a full 50 percent – once a child begins middle school. In addition, teachers feel a growing alienation from parents and students due to the sheer number of students they teach and a growing lack of interest among parents in their children’s education. The guide offers tools to improve home-school communication, educate parents to help their children succeed and connect school experiences to college and careers.

Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. is a national organization formed in 1986 to raise respect for teaching, expand the pool of prospective teachers, and improve the nation’s teacher recruitment, development, and diversity policies and practices.

*To access the Recruiting New Teachers toolkit, link to  
<http://www.recruitingteachers.org/news/2002toolkit.html>*



## **CITY-WIDE READING INITIATIVES CONNECT ADULTS AND STUDENTS**

In cities all around the country, such as Seattle, Los Angeles, and Chicago, community reading programs for children are becoming a popular trend. Designed to promote literacy, these reading initiatives encourage students of entire cities to read the same book at the same time. Most of these initiatives are organized by public libraries and operate simultaneously with adult reading programs.

The program, *What If All Kids Read the Same Book?* was created by the Seattle library system and funded with \$500,000 from public, private and corporate sources. Growing out of the highly successful 1998 effort focusing on adult readers called *If All of Seattle Read the Same Book*, the goal inspired community-wide enthusiasm for reading by encouraging as many students as possible to read the same text. A study guide that meets curriculum standards acts as a support structure for teachers in using the book as a learning tool in the schools. More than 75,000 children will participate in this program by the end of the year.

In Los Angeles, **Mayor James K. Hahn** encourages ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-graders to read Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 and works with city libraries to pass out free copies of the book. The book's publisher – Ballantine – has also donated 500 copies to Los Angeles high schools to promote student interest in literature.

In Chicago, thousands of eighth-graders have joined the tens of thousands of adults in reading Night by Elie Wiesel as the second book in a city-wide reading program. Teachers believe the initiative gives students an opportunity for increased interaction with adults and the ability to relate what they are reading to the communities around them.

Professors at the University of Illinois at Chicago caution that city reading programs need to be tightly linked to the school's curriculum so as not to interfere with educational goals. But a Chicago eighth-grade teacher, Suzanne Suposnick, quoted in a recent Education Week article, thinks that the initiative helps students understand the book's lessons. "The year [for teaching] is short. You try and look for books that are well written and accessible to students, [but] you're also looking to get kids to see that this work is relevant to the world. If our particular community is reading the book, then students get a better sense of its importance."

*For more information about the Seattle program, visit <http://www.allkidsread.org/>*

*For more information about the Chicago program, visit <http://www.chipublib.org/003cpl/onebook/mockingbird.html>*

*To access the Education Week article, visit <http://www.edweek.com/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=29book.h21>*

### **Successful Team Read Approach**

The Seattle public schools have created a partnership between high school and elementary students called **Team Read**. This program pairs high school students as reading coaches with second or third graders who need extra help in reading. The high school tutors work with the students two days a week after school and can receive money for college, community service hours, or an hourly wage for their tutoring. The reading coaches must have a high grade point average and participate in training and guidance sessions.

Since its inception in 1998, the program has reached more than 4,700 students and is expanding each year. It is currently offered in 20 schools, with more than 600 reading coaches tutoring students. Evaluations have shown that reading skills have continued to improve since its inception and high school tutors have gained confidence and satisfaction from participating.

Team Read represents a collaboration among a business and community based organization, several private investors, and the Seattle public school system.

*For more information, link to <http://www.teamread.com/about.htm>*



## DEBATING FOR SUCCESS: Students Argue Their Way to the Top

Kennedy High School, often considered to be one of the worst schools in the United States, is not the type of place you would expect to find a debate team. The students rank in the lowest tier on state standardized tests, and SAT scores average in the low 300s on both verbal and math. In addition, the district is so poor that more than 80 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced-price school lunches and more than half of the teachers leave each year. Yet, despite its last place finish in 1999, the Richmond, Calif. high school finished first in the Bay Area Urban Debate League in 2000, only its second year of debating.

The Bay Area Urban Debate League is part of a larger organization, the **Urban Debate League**, which arranges funding for teams, grants scholarships, and recruits schools in low-income areas to create debate squads. The goal of the organization is to offer low-income students the opportunity to improve verbal, research and critical-thinking skills that debating provides. The program, begun in 1985 in Atlanta, received a funding boost from George Soros' **Open Society Institute** and now reaches more than 3,000 students in 100 schools across the nation.

Students believe that competing against wealthy students from private and suburban schools (the vast majority of debate teams are white and high income) is an advantage. "We do things to flaunt that we're from Kennedy," a student says, "...and then we beat them, and they're, of course, shocked."

The debate team at Kennedy High is an excellent example of individual student transformation. All members of the debate team are determined to go to college. And although most students were performing below average before joining, all have improved dramatically -- becoming at least B students. Participants have also gained confidence from the support of a peer group that values academic success. "What I like best about debate is how it's changed me," a student says, "It used to be that when I opened the newspaper, I read the sports section and the comics. Once I got into debate, I started to look at the front page, and this year I actually start by reading the editorials."

The strains on the Urban Debate League are many. For one thing, grants from Soros' Open Society only last three years, after which teams must find their own funding. In addition, the debate season is nine months long, which requires a high level of commitment from both the team coach and the students. However, Eddie Wexler, the coach of the Kennedy High team, says the results are worth the effort: "Urban debate is transformative in an individual sense. It directly changes the lives of kids in a way that the big, sweeping school reforms do not. My kids' analytical skills have taken off. And some of the most shy, timid kids have been emboldened in the most positive way. Debate has helped my kids find their voices."

*For more information on the Urban Debate League, link to <http://debate.uvm.edu/udl/udl.html>*

### Student Finds Her Voice in Debate

Patricia Smith arrived at Kennedy High School when her family moved from Oakland due to “family difficulties.” Because she moved mid-year, she had to attend Kennedy; no other school had openings. Yet despite an admitted distaste for the school, Smith has managed to prosper, in large part due to her involvement with the debate team. Patricia has turned into a straight-A student since joining the team, and has gained experience in speaking to a crowd, presenting proposals and using debate for self-expression. Missing only one competition because she was taking the SAT, Patricia is now in the running for valedictorian with a grade-point average above 4.0. She plans to apply to top-tier colleges where she will either study law or public relations.

To access this story link to: <http://www.teachermagazine.org/tm/tmstory.cfm?slug=07debate.h13>



### IMPROVING LITERACY: School Libraries Targeted for Improvement

Imagine a child coming home from school with a backpack overflowing with library books. Most parents would be delighted that their child had discovered the magical world of literature, yet in some cases those books may be more than a little outdated.

**Secretary of Education Rod Paige** recently examined some antiquated examples from books collecting dust in a Houston school library: “Some day man might even be able to travel to the moon,” read one passage.

Congress addressed these concerns in the *No Child Left Behind Act* when it authorized \$250 million in competitive grants for school districts to improve library facilities and personnel training. The program, *Improving Literacy Through School Libraries*, is targeted toward high-poverty school districts. Last year, Congress appropriated only \$12.5 million for this program, and President Bush has requested no additional funding increase for the coming year. While Congress prepares to make a decision on funding for this initiative, librarians across the country are keeping their fingers crossed.

According to the American Library Association, “In today’s information age, an individual’s success, even existence, depends largely on the ability to access, evaluate, and utilize information.” In reflecting this belief, *Improving Literacy Through School Libraries* also contains funding for technologically advanced school library media centers, along with the hiring of professionally certified school library media specialists. Librarians who apply for and receive funding are also authorized to facilitate Internet links and other resource-sharing networks, while making these resources available to students during non-school hours.

As sponsor **Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI)** stated when proposing this legislation, “In a multi-cultural, rapidly-changing world, our students are placed at a major disadvantage if the only scientific, historical and geographic materials they have access to are outdated and inaccurate.” *Improving Literacy Through School Libraries* is a positive step forward in providing children with new skills that can help them achieve their goals.

**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.