



ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's:

## An Update on Public Education: Policy and Progress

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### **EMPTY-HANDED GOVERNORS?: NGA Denied Federal Relief in Meetings with President Bush**

Faced with growing state budget deficits, governors from around the country came to Washington for the **National Governors Association (NGA)** winter meetings and pleaded their case for more federal resources to meet federal mandates. In a unified voice, Republican and Democratic governors asked for help to meet demands for stepped-up homeland security, increasing costs of special education and the funding that was promised for the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*. But their pleas fell on deaf ears at the White House.

On Feb. 25, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that President Bush, a former governor of Texas, bluntly suggested that states already get plenty of federal dollars and should expect no more help from Washington. The President asked governors to support his new \$670 billion tax-cuts package—which gives no financial relief to states—and pointed to the costs of fighting the war on terrorism and the impending war with Iraq. The President portrayed himself as handcuffed by the estimated \$307 billion federal budget deficit and pointed to the \$400 billion in grants to states that he included in his fiscal 2004 budget request. **Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell** told *The Wall Street Journal* that the \$400 billion is largely dictated by formulas that reflect health care costs and rising caseloads.

In their dealings with Congress, governors decided not to put a dollar figure on their request for federal help for homeland security and education, but to bide their time until budget negotiations begin on Capitol Hill in the coming months. Governor Rendell speculated that states would need close to \$20 billion to shoulder the financial burden of these new requirements.

### **Lack of Federal Funding Could Threaten the Implementation of *NCLB***

For education, the President's 2004 budget offers no additional funds above the amount Congress appropriated this year. At the same time, *NCLB* requires states and local school districts to have a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by school year 2005-6, test every child every year in grades three through eight and implement procedures to monitor

## **NGA Denied Federal Relief in Meetings with President Bush** (Continued from p. 1)

“average yearly progress” toward the goal of all students being at the state-defined proficiency level by 2014. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the shortfall in promised funds for carrying out *NCLB* was a big complaint from governors in both parties. Many education experts believe that because of the costs involved it may be difficult if not impossible to fulfill these mandates, without the substantial federal investment promised in the law. They also warn that the entire education reform movement could be jeopardized if Congress and the administration fail to allocate the resources promised when *NCLB* was enacted a year ago.



### **INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION PAYS OFF: International Report Links Education Spending and Economic Growth**

According to a report issued last week, investments in education that were made by 16 countries may have directly contributed to their economic growth. The report, issued by the **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization** and the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development** found that all but three countries—Egypt, India, and Tunisia—demonstrated a correlation between education investment and economic improvement.

In fact, for each year that the average level of schooling of the adult population is raised, there is an increase of 3.7 percent in long-term economic growth. In Malaysia, for example, citizens completed an average of 3.22 years in school in 1960 and the country reported a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2,000. By 2000, the average number of years in school had increased to 9.31 and the per capita GDP had nearly tripled. In Brazil, the average years of school completed in 1970 was 3.69 years and the per capita GDP was approximately \$3,800. In 2000, Brazil’s average number of years in school grew to 7.50, and the per capita GDP was over \$8,000.

One of the major factors contributing to economic and educational growth is a low rate of unemployment, according to the report. It concluded that a well-educated citizenry is more likely to be employed. The report also said that investments in education not only benefit the individual, but are likely to increase the general level of knowledge in society as well.

The report found a positive correlation between education investment and per capita GDP in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uruguay, and Zimbabwe.

The complete report is available at:  
<http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/9603011E.PDF>



## **PRINCIPAL'S PLEDGE: Secondary School Principals Hold Themselves Accountable for *NCLB* Requirements, but Ask for Resources to do the Job**

Last month, at the **National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP)** annual conference, secondary school principals and assistant principals from across the country gathered in San Diego, Calif. to sign a pledge to support the intent of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in return for a federal commitment to provide the necessary funding for secondary school improvement.

In a recent op-ed in *Education Week*, **NASSP Executive Director Gerry Tirozzi** explains that while *NCLB* provides a great deal of support to principals at the elementary school level, it “provides little support to secondary schools to improve teacher instruction and student achievement, or to bring those students [who] have fallen behind up to grade level.” He calls for a major new federal funding initiative that will provide the resources that middle and high school students need to succeed, and he borrows from the Alliance report, *Every Child a Graduate*, to make his case.

The Principal's Pledge asks for specific legislation dedicated to the needs of secondary school students. It also outlines programs that would help middle and high school teachers and principals educate and graduate their students. The pledge calls for an adolescent literacy initiative that would provide every middle and high school with a literacy coach and appropriate professional development for all staff to improve the reading and writing skills of every student. It also asks for funding to provide every principal and teacher intensive, high-quality, and ongoing professional development to meet the requirements of *NCLB*, and programs and federal incentives to attract and retain high-quality principals and teachers.

According to Tirozzi, “Middle level and high school leaders are ready to do their part. Their willingness to sign the *Secondary School Principal's Pledge* at our annual convention [confirms] it. Their message in signing the pledge will be clear: ‘Hold us accountable, but provide us with the resources to get the job done!’ We cannot continue toward an educational commitment that expects so much, but provides so little.”

The complete Principal's Pledge can be found on the NASSP Web site at:  
[http://www.nassp.org/news/reciprocal\\_agreement.htm](http://www.nassp.org/news/reciprocal_agreement.htm)

Gerry Tirozzi's op-ed can be found at:  
[http://www.edweek.com/ew/advertorials/Ish23\\_NASSP.pdf](http://www.edweek.com/ew/advertorials/Ish23_NASSP.pdf)



## **INVESTING IN EDUCATION IS A TOP PRIORITY: Education Spending Should be Protected from State Budget Cuts According to New Poll**

A new national poll found that voters believe that state legislatures and governors should protect education spending from the cuts necessary to reduce state budget deficits. The poll, released by the **Public Education Network** and *Education Week* on Feb. 24, found that respondents rank education and health care as the number one and two priorities in a list of programs that they believe should be saved from cuts. In an unpublished finding,

## Investing in Education is a Top Priority

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the poll also showed that most voters believe the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* reforms should not overemphasize early education, but should focus on all grades K-12.

According to the poll, voters were well aware of the financial turmoil that states are facing. In fact, most people polled believe that their state budget is in deficit, and they are concerned about how this will impact future state spending and how budget cuts will affect them personally. Sixty percent of those polled were willing to pay more in taxes to improve public education. Support grows, particularly among Republicans, to 67 percent overall if the tax increase is targeted for education.

Respondents felt that most officeholders are not held accountable for their actions on education. They also believe that their mayor or county supervisor and their state legislator need to play a larger role in advocating for quality public education, especially in fighting for more federal dollars. However, they place the responsibility of funding the implementation of *NCLB* squarely on the federal government. The poll found that 42 percent of voters are less likely to vote for a U.S. Senator or Congressperson who voted against a measure to provide significant federal funds necessary to implement the *NCLB*. Unfortunately, only 56 percent of the respondents said they had seen, heard, or read about the law, despite its status as one of President Bush's top priorities in the 2000 campaign and a main focus of his first year in office.

A majority of those polled said they believe that the best way to improve education is to improve teacher quality. They support the provision in *NCLB* that requires every middle and high school teacher to have a degree in the subject he or she teaches by 2005.

The full findings of the Public Education Network/Education Week poll are available at: <http://www.publiceducation.org/pdf/2003ExtendedPollReport.pdf>



### **GATES FOUNDATION DONATES \$31 MILLION FOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS: Gift Will Create 168 Schools for Students Failed by Traditional Large Comprehensive High Schools**

Last week, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation pledged more than \$31 million to create a nationwide network of 168 alternative high schools that will serve over 36,000 students who cannot get the support services they need from traditional large comprehensive high schools. The schools will be in cities across the country, including Boston, Denver, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta. The gift is part of a Gates campaign to create no fewer than 1,000 new small schools in the next 18 months.

“When millions of children are not graduating, we have a civic, economic and social disaster on our hands,” said **Tom Vander Ark, the foundation’s executive director for education**. “This represents nothing short of a massive failure of America’s high schools. The good news is that we can reverse this trend. More students will succeed if communities provide a rich variety of education options, and effective alternative schools are one such option.”

According to research conducted by the **Manhattan Institute**, between the ninth and 12th grades, more than 1 million students will leave school without a diploma. The problem is even more striking among Hispanics and African Americans, who are only graduating at a rate of 50 percent. The Gates Foundation believes part of the dropout problem can be blamed on large, impersonal high schools that are particularly common in urban and other high-poverty settings.

Read the complete announcement on the Gates Foundation Web site at:  
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/education/smallhighschools/announcements/announce-030226.htm>



### **REPUBLICANS INTRODUCE NEW VOUCHER LEGISLATION: Plan Would Create Private School Choice Programs While Expanding Teacher Loan Forgiveness**

On Feb. 14, Republican leaders in the U.S. Senate introduced S. 4, the “Opportunity for Every Child Act of 2003,” a bill that would create a new \$75 million private school voucher program and a six-year \$45 million voucher program in Washington, D.C. The bill, which mirrors several programs that were included in the President’s budget, also includes an expansion of the student loan forgiveness program and a small increase in the teacher tax credit for out-of-pocket classroom expenses.

As recently as 2000, during debate on the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, Congress soundly defeated three voucher amendments. However, now that Republicans control both chambers of Congress, as well as the White House, they are willing to reopen the debate on school choice. In addition, supporters point to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that recently upheld a Cleveland program that allows public money to be used for private and parochial schools as a reason to readdress the issue in legislation.

According to the bill’s text, public school choice, as provided in the *NCLB*, has not been a meaningful option for parents in rural and urban areas because of “capacity constraints.” The bill would provide options to parents in rural and urban areas whose children attend public schools that have been identified as low performing. Low-income students in these schools would have the opportunity to attend a private school if their public school cannot transfer them to another public school that has not been identified for school improvement. The bill authorizes \$75 million for the program in fiscal 2004 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the four succeeding fiscal years.

#### **Teacher Student Loan Forgiveness**

The bill would expand student loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,500 for those who agree to teach mathematics, science, and special education in a high-need school for at least 5 years. However, unlike the President’s budget proposal, this legislation would not make the teacher loan forgiveness program mandatory. Under the Republican congressional plan, not every teacher who qualifies for the program would be guaranteed loan forgiveness. The President’s proposal makes that guarantee. The bill also increases the tax deduction for out-of-pocket classroom expenses from \$250 to \$400.

## Republicans' Voucher Proposal for Washington, D.C.

The legislation would also create the "District of Columbia Scholarship Corporation," a private, nonprofit corporation, which would determine student and school eligibility for participation in the proposed Washington, D.C., voucher program. The bill authorizes \$7 million for the program in fiscal 2004, \$8 million in 2005, and \$10 million for each year from 2006 through 2009. It suggests that D.C. parents "are in particular need of more options, including the possibility of sending their child to private school," because the District has the "lowest student performance averages of any school system in the Nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)." However, one could argue that parents who live in Washington, D.C., have more choices than parents in any other city in the country.

In the District of Columbia, parents and students have a choice between hundreds of public schools inside and outside their neighborhoods. At least 10 percent of the 68,000 district students have chosen to attend schools outside of their neighborhoods. D.C. students are also allowed to transfer to schools outside of the District if they receive permission from the desired school's principal and pay that school district's tuition fee.

D.C. public officials fear that public vouchers will drain funds from the public schools and programs, as well as from existing school choice options, such as charter and magnet schools. The capacity of private schools to accept D.C. voucher recipients is also questioned. Voucher proponents stress the idea that competition among all schools would pressure school officials and staff to reform and improve their schools or close down for lack of attendance.

### **Study's Results Show No Difference Between Private and Public Schools**

A new study of 16 public, private, and charter schools in California suggests that differences between private and public schools in effectiveness and operation may have been exaggerated. In fact, the biggest difference in performance that the three researchers, Luis A. Benveniste, Martin Carnoy, and Richard Rothstein found between the schools was more likely attributable to the student body's socioeconomic status than to the public/private designation.

The report suggests that policies based on the value of competition in the education marketplace are questionable. Critics of the study claim that the sample size of the study was too small to draw conclusions. The study, published in a book titled *All Else Equal: Are Public and Private Schools Different?*, adds to a growing list of research with mixed findings on how a private school education affects a student's standardized test scores.

The researchers found similarities between better-off private and public schools and similarities between low-income private and public schools. Low-income private and public schools were both characterized by teacher shortages, little latitude to try innovative teaching ideas or to eliminate ineffective teachers, as well as low parent involvement. In fact, the report found that private schools serving low-income students were more likely to resemble public schools serving a similar population than private schools serving a more affluent student body. "We were actually surprised at how few differences we found," Benveniste said. "In the absence of the religious imagery on the walls, it's really hard to tell whether you're in a private school or a public."

For more information, read the *Education Week* article at:  
<http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=19private.h22>

## **Charlotte, N.C., Program Teaches Reading to High School Students**

A new program in high schools throughout the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., area is working to improve the reading skills of 1,700 high school freshmen with “Corrective Reading,” which is published by SRA/McGraw Hill. According to *The Charlotte Observer*, the program is being used in 16 of 18 high schools in hopes that it will “boost achievement by replacing shame and silence about poor reading skills with a belief that it’s never too late to learn.”

*The Charlotte Observer* article cites the Alliance report, *Every Child a Graduate*, which found that “hundreds of thousands of high school students can barely read on the eve of their high school graduation.” Charlotte-Mecklenburg area high schools are no different. According to Assistant Superintendent Lloyd Wimberley, 200 to 300 out of the 800 or so freshmen who entered Myers Park High School each year could not read high school texts when he served as principal several years ago.

Without assistance, these students would likely be left to bide their time in high school until they eventually failed or even dropped out. Independence High School Principal Rick Hinson told *The Charlotte Observer* that students “can’t do geometry, they can’t do the biology, they can’t do the history, they just can’t unless they’ve got a good, solid foundation in reading.”

Read more about the efforts underway in Charlotte-Mecklenburg high schools at:  
<http://www.charlotte.com/mld/charlotte/living/education/5195872.htm>

## **A Must Read: “Reaching Rommel,” A Fourth Grader’s Adventure in Reading**

“I learn[ed] Rommel can’t read on the first day of class at Mildred Green Elementary School.”

Thus begins Tyler Currie’s narrative of his experience teaching fourth grade at Mildred Green Elementary School and his encounter with Rommel Sales, a 10-year-old student who can’t read. What follows is an adventure that begins with Currie giving Rommel drawing assignments designed to keep him at bay while Currie works with other students in the class and ends with a dramatic transformation that shows how almost anyone can learn how to read if given the appropriate support.

Read the complete article at:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32224-2003Feb19.html>

## **Last word**

“As President Bush stood in front of the Capitol and took the oath of office, he knew our nation faced an urgent challenge. He believed that education is a civil right, just like the right to vote or to be treated equally. And it’s the duty of our nation to teach every child well, not just some of them.”

--*U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige at the Hoover Institution’s Task Force on K-12 Education’s Symposium, “Our Schools and Our Future: Are We Still at Risk?,” Feb. 26, 2003*

Read Secretary Paige’s complete speech at:  
<http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/02-2003/02262003.html>

**Straight A’s: An Update on Public 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 6 million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



ALLIANCE FOR  
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1101 Vermont Ave., NW  
Suite 411  
Washington, DC 20005



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ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Alliance for Excellent Education 1101 Vermont Ave., NW Suite 411 Washington, DC 20005

Susan Frost, Executive Director; Jason Amos, Associate Editor  
Phone: (202) 842-4888 Fax (202) 842-1613  
Alliance@all4ed.org <http://www.all4ed.org>