



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress

This issue of Straight A's contains a special insert that outlines the spending totals for education programs that help middle and high school students as included in the president's budget. It also features versions of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending bills as passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate Committee on Appropriations.



SENATE COMMITTEE PROVIDES \$3.2 BILLION INCREASE FOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS: Final Budget Not Expected Until After Election

Last week, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to include \$58.85 billion (a \$3.2 billion—5.7 percent—increase over fiscal year 2004) for the U.S. Department of Education in the FY 2005 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending bill. The amount is \$1.2 billion higher than the bill passed by the House of Representatives earlier in September, and \$1.5 billion more than President Bush requested when he submitted his budget in February.

However, with only two weeks remaining until lawmakers plan to leave town for the campaign trail, most observers do not expect further appropriations action until an anticipated lame duck session in November. Such inaction has led congressional scholar **Norman Ornstein of the conservative American Enterprise Institute** to call this session of Congress “one of the least productive” in history. “Pretty pathetic,” he told *USA Today*. In addition to annual appropriations, the 108th Congress has left the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and the Higher Education Act on the table.

The additional funds included in the Senate Committee's bill are largely slated to restore programs that were recommended for elimination by the president. For example, the Smaller Learning Communities program, which the president's budget did not fund, and which only received \$102 million in the House version of the bill, was increased to \$174 million in the Senate—its full allocation for FY 2004.

Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding levels were also higher in the Senate's bill. Each was slated to receive a \$1 billion increase in the president's budget and in the House version of the Appropriations bill; in the Senate version, Title I would receive a \$1.1 billion increase, and funding for IDEA programs would grow by \$1.2 billion over last year.

Striving Readers, a program the president proposed in his budget to help improve the skills of teenage students who read below grade level, fared less well. While both President Bush's budget and the House of Representatives' authorization provide \$100 million for the program, the Senate version only provides \$25 million. The Alliance for Excellent Education, as well as

Senate Committee Provides \$3.2 Billion Increase for Education Programs

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several other national educational organizations, are advocating for the full \$100 million requested by the president.

To come up with the additional money necessary to support the proposed higher funding levels, **Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Arlen Specter (R-PA)** used a budget scoring technique that temporarily transferred \$3.2 billion from mandatory Supplemental Security Income payments. According to *CQ Weekly*, the “funding shifts should be enough to smooth the bill’s passage when the legislation goes to the Senate floor in the next month.” **Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)**, the leading Democrat on the subcommittee, called the spending measure a “really excellent bill.”

In spite of the apparent bipartisan support for this bill in the Senate, the funding shifts are not likely to remain when conference negotiations with the House of Representatives and the White House have concluded, due to anticipated objections from fiscal conservatives. *CQ Weekly* expects that appropriators will “probably agree to funding targets established in the House bill and mirrored for the most part in Bush’s budget request.” In all likelihood, the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill will be included in an omnibus bill that will not see action until after the election.



GRADUATION PLANS GAIN MOMENTUM ON CAPITOL HILL: Plan Would Help Students Progress Through High School and Identify Additional Supports Needed

In its flagship report, *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance for Excellent Education called for the development of a six-year plan for all entering ninth graders which would assess a student’s needs and identify courses, additional learning opportunities (such as tutoring), and other supports necessary to help the student graduate from high school and transition smoothly to college or a career.

Over the last several weeks, as Congress has considered the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, efforts have been made to include a similar proposal in this legislation. In the Senate, a bill has been introduced that permits the use of federal funding for the development of a written “graduation and career plan” for a secondary and technical education student. The bill would make the plan an “allowable use” of funding, but would not mandate funds be spent on it.

According to the Senate bill, the graduation and career plan would be developed with career guidance and academic counselors or other professional staff in consultation with parents. It would include a personalized map of the courses a student needs to graduate with a high school diploma as well as any other requirements for admission to an institute of higher education. The plan would also identify several options for a student beyond his or her high school graduation.

Last week, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee unanimously passed its version of the Perkins bill, which was introduced by **Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY)**, to the Senate floor where it awaits final action. The bill enjoys bipartisan support and includes

Senate HELP Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH) and top Democrat **Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)** as cosponsors.

On the other side of Capitol Hill, the House of Representatives is also considering reauthorization of the Perkins Act. **Representative Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX)**, who also introduced the Graduation for All Act, proposed an amendment that would allow the use of Perkins funds for graduation and career plans, but he withdrew it when he learned it would garner opposition from the majority.

While the final outcome of the Perkins reauthorization is still up in the air due to the impending adjournment of Congress before the elections, the advocacy community remain hopeful that the different versions of the bill can be passed and the differences between the two resolved in conference before the election. One difference to be considered is whether the House will accept the Senate inclusion of the graduation plan as an allowable use of Perkins funds.

President Bush Proposes \$200 Million for Performance Plans

As mentioned in the last issue of *Straight A's*, President Bush recently called for a new \$200 million fund that states would use to encourage schools to develop performance plans, based on eighth-grade data, for entering high school students. These “performance plans” would build on the president’s Jobs for the 21st Century initiative that seeks to improve high schools and “ensure that every high school student graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in higher education and the workforce.”

The president’s proposal would also include periodic classroom-based assessment of individual students to determine progress and establish whether remedial work was needed. According to a fact sheet released by the White House, “Research shows that providing teachers with weekly information on the performance of individual students, with computer-generated suggestions on what to teach, what to review, and specific lessons for remedial work, is effective in accelerating student achievement and ensuring that students do not fall behind during an individual school year.”

The complete proposal, “Strengthening Education and Job Training Opportunities,” is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/09/20040902-3.html>.

Senate Democrats Introduce No Child Left Behind Improvement Act

Regulations issued for No Child Left Behind by the U.S. Department of Education do not currently require graduation rates to be broken down by minority subgroups. As part of new legislation introduced by the eight Democrats on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, a new \$100-million-a-year competitive grant program would help states to develop or increase the capacity of their data systems for assessment and accountability purposes, including the collection of graduation rates. The bill, No Child Left Behind Improvement Act, S. 2794, would also require states to report graduation rate data, broken down by various subgroups of students, to the federal government.

In addition to reporting twelfth-grade graduation rates, states receiving this money would have to report annual enrollment data for the beginning and end of the academic year for all schools in the state. This legislation would also include subgrants to local school districts for longitudinal data systems that would measure the progress and achievements of individual students.

The bill also authorizes \$250 million a year for school construction and renovation and \$50 million annually to promote more accurate testing of students, especially those in special education programs and with limited English skills.

More information is available at <http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=04Kennedy.h24>.



RECENT STUDY SHOWS NATIONAL BOARD–CERTIFIED TEACHERS IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A new study titled “National Board Certified Teachers and Their Student Achievements” concludes that a national teacher certification program helps improve student achievement. Published on September 8, 2004, in the *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, the study shows that students of teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) outperformed the students of noncertified teachers on a standardized test.

This study, authored by **Arizona State University** researchers **Leslie Vandevoort, Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, and David C. Berliner**, compares the academic performance of students in the elementary classrooms of thirty-five National Board–certified teachers (NBCTs) and their noncertified peers, in fourteen Arizona school districts. Four years of results from the Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT-9) in reading, mathematics, and language arts, in grades 3–6, were analyzed. In forty-eight final comparison points, using adjusted gain scores for students’ entering ability, the students in the board-certified teachers’ classes received better marks than their counterparts in the classes of non-NBCTs.

For 1999–2000, students of board-certified teachers made greater gains than students of non-board-certified teachers in 75 percent of the comparisons. The same was true for 2000–01. For 2001–02, 58.3 percent of the total comparisons showed that students of board-certified teachers made greater gains than their counterparts. In all, students of board-certified teachers outperformed students of non-NBCTs on 72.9 percent of the measures during the years 1999–03. Of the statistically significant findings, students in classrooms with NBCTs outperformed their non-NBCT counterparts 100 percent of the time.

The second part of the study surveyed principals to get their impressions of board-certified teachers and the general NBPTS assessment process. About 85 percent of the principals thought their board-certified teachers were among the best teachers ever supervised, though almost 10 percent of the principals reported their NBCTs to be average teachers. More than 90 percent of the principals believed that the NBPTS is contributing to the improvement of teacher quality. Furthermore, when asked if they believe that the NBPTS is contributing to improvements in student achievement, 70 percent of the principals believed this to be true. The other 30 percent had no opinion, but did not disagree with the perception of the majority.

Though the NBPTS claims that it does not *need* student achievement data to show that it is identifying exemplary teachers—much as medical boards invest little time in assessing actual patient health but are satisfied in showing that their doctors are “exemplary” by virtue of passing the board tests—this study nevertheless focuses “on student outcome data for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), providing a more rigorous test of board certification in education than is typically done in medicine, law or accountancy.”

Adding to a recent flurry of academic research regarding the usefulness of a national system of teacher certification, the authors of this study reject criticism that the board-certification process only identifies *already* motivated teachers. They claim that the NBPTS is succeeding in its mission to identify exemplary teachers—and not to inculcate any specific pedagogical values.

The authors of the study support the “content validity” of the board assessments as being substantive and valuable to both teachers and students. They defend the certification process as “a reasonable compromise between a) prohibitively expensive classroom observations and analyses of teaching, requiring data collection over many different days of teaching, with different observers on different days, and b) a very cheap and quick paper and pencil test of teacher competence, with the likelihood of seriously limited validity.”

They conclude: “The Board assessments identify teachers whose students produce more learning per year than do the students of non-board certified teachers, including those that tried but did not pass the exam.”

The full text of “National Board Certified Teachers and Their Student Achievements” can be found online at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n46/v12n46.pdf>.



TEXAS JUDGE OVERTURNS SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM: Deems “Robin Hood” Funding System Unconstitutional

On September 16, a Texas district judge declared the state’s education funding system unconstitutional and ruled that the existing law violates the Texas constitution’s requirement that the state provide “sufficient and equitable” funding for its public schools. The judge, John Dietz, gave Texas lawmakers until October 2005 to develop a new system. Without a plan by that time, Dietz would halt state funding. **Texas Governor Rick Perry** and legislative leaders pledged to work on a new school finance plan when the regular session begins in January 2005.

“Are we prepared for a future in Texas that is dismally poor, needy and ignorant?” asked Dietz. “The answer is ‘I think not.’” Dietz cited lower test scores among low-income students as proof that the gap in educational achievement was widening between rich and poor districts. “The solution seems obvious,” he said. “Texas needs to close the education gap. But the rub is that it costs money to close the educational achievement gap. It doesn’t come free.”

The case, *West Orange-Cove Consolidated School District v. Alanis*, was brought by more than three hundred school districts, both rich and poor. The districts charged that the state finance system does not provide enough money for schools to meet higher state and federal standards. Currently, the state’s share of education funding had dropped to a historic low of 38 percent.

The Texas system, commonly referred to as “Robin Hood,” was created in 1993 and forced richer school districts to share their property tax revenues with poorer districts. In addition, many of the districts had been forced to tax at the statutory cap of \$1.50 per \$100 for school maintenance and operations. Dietz agreed that this cap amounted to an unconstitutional state property tax.

The Texas lawsuit was part of a nationwide trend of school districts that have gone to court to seek judgments on their states’ systems for financing public schools. Plaintiffs have already won victories in California and New York.

Additional information on the ruling is available at <http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/metropolitan/2798240>.



BUMPS IN THE ROAD LEAD TO A WORTHWHILE DESTINATION: Clifford Janey Named Superintendent of Washington, D.C., Schools

After a long search, Washington, D.C., finally announced the appointment of a new superintendent of schools. **Clifford B. Janey**, formerly an educator in Boston and Rochester, New York, has been signed to a three-year contract. While the selection process has seen “well publicized bumps in the road,” **school board member Tommy Wells** told the *Washington Post*, “the destination has been worth it.”

Janey faces, to say the least, daunting challenges. Currently there is no coordinated curriculum for the city’s schools, and standardized test scores are among the lowest in the country. Only 63 percent of students receive their high school diplomas and more than half of the city’s eighth graders read “below basic” according to the National Assessment of Education Progress.

Over a twenty-one-year career in the Boston public school system, Janey rose from a middle school reading teacher to chief academic officer, the system’s top instructional leader. From Boston, he moved to Rochester, serving as superintendent of schools from 1995 to 2002. There, Janey reduced class sizes and supported a one-year mentoring program for newly certified teachers. At the elementary level, he focused relentlessly on literacy; fourth-grade scores rose from 24 to 47 percent over two years. To address the district’s low graduation rate he gave students more flexibility, allowing them three to five years to complete their high school requirements. He also transformed Benjamin Franklin High School—where enrollment had dropped from four thousand to fewer than one thousand—into three career high schools.

However, at the same time, another crisis was brewing within the district. When he left with what the *Washington Post* described as an “ambiguous legacy,” he also left behind a cash flow crisis that approached \$50 million. According to **Rochester Mayor William A. Johnson Jr.**, Janey refused to make cuts prior to the 2001–02 school year. “We could no longer spare the schools,” Johnson told the *Post*. “We were making cuts in every other department.”

Johnson, who headed the Urban League of Rochester at the time, said he grew frustrated with Janey’s attitude, which he described as “‘We are doing God’s work here, trying to educate poor urban children, and if you can’t accept that, then you are obstructing that.’” In his defense, Janey said that making cuts in the middle of the school year would have disrupted student learning.

“Where supporters believed him to be determined, cerebral and idealistic, detractors viewed him as stubborn, aloof and impractical,” the *Washington Post* reported. “But even his fiercest opponents do not question his intelligence and his almost fervent commitment to children and their educational achievement.”

At the event announcing Janey’s hiring, substitute teacher Robert Brannum and William Wilson of the Ward 7 Education Committee said they hoped Janey would make dramatic improvements, but wondered whether individual agendas on the school board and within the school system would allow him to do so, said the *Washington Post*. “He’s going to have to make some folks mad to be successful,” Brannum said.

Read the complete article at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A1331-2004Aug14>.

Become a New Leader!

New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) is fostering high academic achievement for every child by attracting, preparing, and supporting the next generation of outstanding school leaders for our nation's urban public schools.

This year NLNS is seeking approximately 110 highly motivated individuals nationwide to become New Leaders principals in Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York City, California's Bay Area, Memphis, and a new city to be announced in January 2005. Accepted applicants will possess an *unyielding belief in the potential of all children to achieve academically at high levels*, a record of success in leading adults, knowledge of teaching and learning, and a relentless drive to lead an excellent urban school.

The New Leaders for New Schools application for the 2005–06 program year will become available on November 1, 2004. **Priority deadline is December 7, 2004. All applications must be submitted online at <http://www.nlns.org>.** Questions can be addressed to info@nlns.org or (646) 792-1070.

Speak Up Day for Students is Wednesday, October 20, 2004!

The Alliance for Excellent Education is proud to be an Outreach Partner for NetDay's second annual Speak Up Day for Students. Mark your calendars now for this online event during which students across the country speak out about using technology and the internet. NetDay, a national nonprofit organization, is launching a revised survey this October with an exciting goal to collect input from 500,000 students on the issues that matter to them and to their schools.

Last year's Speak Up Day survey reached 210,000 K–12 students from three thousand schools in all fifty states as well as Department of Defense Overseas Schools. A national report of the data was shared with local, state, and national decisionmakers including the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and members of Congress.

(See the report or look up your school's data online at http://www.netday.org/speakupday2003_report.htm.)

The Alliance is working with NetDay to make sure that every student has an opportunity to be involved in the landmark collection of student voices this year.

The survey will be open for student input October 11–20. Schools can register starting September 23. More details are available at <http://www.NetDay.org>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress 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 nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America's secondary school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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