



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP: Alliance Releases a Collection of Essays from America's Foremost Education Innovators

At its annual conference on American high school policy last week, the Alliance for Excellent Education released a collection of essays on leadership, authored by some of America's foremost education innovators. **Virginia Governor Mark Warner, former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, Melinda French Gates, and Carnegie Corporation of New York President Vartan Gregorian** are among the contributors who help to lay out a bold vision for secondary school leadership. *Profiles in Leadership: Innovative Approaches to Transforming the American High School* demonstrates that we know a great deal about how to educate every child to high standards. But the volume also clearly shows that improving educational outcomes for America's secondary students is a complex task requiring a variety of methods and the dedication of individuals within and outside of the school environment.

In his essay "Caring Enough to Lead," Riley writes that "the promise of No Child Left Behind is unfulfilled when we get to the high school years" because, when faced with limited funds, school districts have chosen to help students in the early grades, leaving high school students without the extra help they need to graduate. As a result, he writes, this policy "essentially gives up on one generation of children in order to save another."

Governor Warner's essay focuses on the strides that the Commonwealth of Virginia has made to increase the rigor of the high school senior year and better prepare students for college and the workforce. He also discusses the new opportunities that students have to earn college credits or career training while in their senior year. At the same time, Virginia has reached out to those students who need extra help to earn a standard diploma. As chairman of the National Governors Association, Warner has made high school reform his "chairman's initiative" for 2004–05, which means that the NGA will examine how to strengthen high schools by examining best practices throughout the fifty states.

Melinda French Gates writes about the "New Three R's" and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's efforts to help "rigor, relevance, and relationships" take root in school districts around the country. According to Gates, "classes should *challenge* children rather than bore them. Students should have one-on-one relationships with caring adults who have a stake in their success. And curricula should be connected to students' lives and aspirations." The Gates Foundation has partnered with school districts around the country to create new schools or help transform large, impersonal high schools into small schools "where students get personal attention and a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to their lives."

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Carnegie Corporation's Vartan Gregorian challenges foundations and nonprofit organizations to lead the high school reform movement through experimentation and investment in models that hold promise. "Over the years," he notes, "we have tried many recipes for change, and have learned something from even the least successful of our attempts. A large body of information on effective reforms has been developed, and while we no doubt need to learn more, the reasons we haven't *achieved* more in terms of educational improvement is not because of a lack of know-how. Rather, what we are missing, as a society, is the will and the resources to make schools effective, and also the sense of responsibility."

Approaches to reform vary widely depending on the needs of schools, districts, and communities. Nevertheless, the essays contained in this volume demonstrate that there are common themes when it comes to effective high school transformation. Collectively, the authors of these essays convey the message that leaders need to set clear, high expectations for all students; improve instruction through a targeted focus on literacy and math; select, train, and support quality teachers and school leaders; and build broad-based enthusiasm for change through proactive community engagement. The authors share their individual approaches to high school transformation, as well as their successes, challenges, and lessons learned, in the hope that others will be inspired to act now to change the high schools of tomorrow.

In our knowledge-based economy, our leading and most valuable natural resource is our people, and it is imperative that we ensure that every young person has access to a quality education. Their futures, and the future of our nation, depend upon it.

Profiles in Leadership: Innovative Approaches to Transforming the American High School, as well as a complete list of authors and essay titles, is available for download at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/ProfilesInLeadership/index.html>.



TEACHER LOAN FORGIVENESS EXPANDED: Congress Passes Temporary Fix for Student Loan Loophole, Transfers Savings to Expand Incentives for Teachers in High-Poverty Schools

Last week, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that would temporarily close a loophole that has allowed student loan providers to receive excess taxpayer subsidies and divert the savings toward enhancing loan forgiveness for teachers in hard-to-staff subjects. The bill, known as the Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act, received unanimous support in the House of Representatives and the Senate and is strongly supported by the White House.

"This bill will protect taxpayers by shutting down these excess subsidies to lenders . . . and it will use the money to help teachers and poor schools across the country," said **Representative John Boehner (R-OH)**, chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, who, with **Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH)**, proposed the bill.

Specifically, the bill will expand federal student loan forgiveness from the current maximum of \$5,000 to a new maximum of \$17,500 for math, science, and special education teachers who agree to teach for five years in a Title I school (those schools with a poverty rate over 40 percent). This provision would not replace the current \$5,000 loan forgiveness program for other teachers in Title I schools.

Similar legislation, introduced by **Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC)**, passed the House of Representatives in July 2003, but never saw action on the Senate floor. A key difference between the two bills was that the Wilson legislation included an amendment by **Representative George Miller (D-CA)** that added loan forgiveness for reading teachers.

In its report *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance called for a plan that would provide enhanced loan forgiveness for all teachers in high-need areas, including reading, English, and history teachers. Although the Congress-passed bill does not expand loan forgiveness to that extent, it is a step in the right direction, and will help attract high-quality teachers to the areas that need them the most.

Despite his support for the bill, Representative Miller, the top Democrat on the Education and Workforce Committee, warned that the Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act would only close the loophole partway, and only for one year. “Today’s bill is a welcome, though overdue, step forward,” he said. “But students and teachers should be disappointed that Republicans chose to protect excessive bank profits instead of further expanding higher education opportunities.”

In response, Chairman Boehner said that reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, expected next year, would close the loophole forever. “Make no mistake about it: we’re closing this loophole, and once it’s closed, it isn’t coming back,” Boehner said. “The only question is whether Democrats and Republicans can agree on how much money should be used within the Higher Education Act. In the meantime, this bill gives us the chance to close down the subsidies now, and use the money for something we can all agree is a worthy cause.”

The bill will repeal portions of a 1980 law that was enacted to ensure that college loans remained affordable during a time of rising interest rates. Under that law, some lenders had been able to receive interest payments totaling 9.5 percent on federally backed loans. The U.S. Department of Education then paid the difference between the 9.5 percent figure and the students’ variable rate, currently about 3.5 percent. In February, President Bush asked Congress to end the subsidy, which had been projected to exceed \$4.9 billion over the next ten years, according to *CQ Weekly*.

A copy of Boehner’s statement is available at
<http://edworkforce.house.gov/press/press108/second/10oct/teacherloans100704.htm>.

A copy of Miller’s statement is available at
<http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/releases/rel10704.html>.



D.C. TUITION ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM RECEIVES 50 PERCENT FUNDING INCREASE

As part of the Washington, D.C., spending bill, Congress last week approved \$25.6 million (a \$8.7 million, or 50 percent, increase over last year) for a program that covers the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates for D.C. high school graduates at public colleges and universities throughout the United States. Since its creation in fall 2000, the DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG) has awarded over \$63 million to more than 6,500 District students, many of whom are first-generation college attendees.

The brainchild of **Representative Thomas M. Davis III (R-VA)** and **Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)**, DC TAG was created to “level the playing field” for District residents. The District of Columbia has few public colleges; thus, low- and middle-income District high school graduates have historically had few options. DC TAG provides access to a network of state-supported institutions, giving graduates the opportunity to select from a much broader array of options.

Over a four-year period, the number of D.C. high school graduates who enrolled as freshmen in colleges and universities nationwide increased by 28 percent, from 1,750 in 1998 to 2,230 in 2002, and it is expected that these numbers will continue to grow. Over the same period, the national average increase was only 5 percent.

DC TAG covers the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates for up to \$10,000 a year or \$50,000 over a lifetime. The program also provides \$2,500 a year in tuition assistance to D.C. graduates who attend private colleges and universities in the counties surrounding the District. Finally, D.C. graduates who attend private Historically Black Colleges and Universities farther afield are also eligible for \$2,500 annually in tuition assistance.

“These vital grants were threatened by the success of the program,” said Norton. “We cannot allow Congress to underfund TAG, which is already sending more than 6,500 D.C. students to more than 150 public and private colleges nationwide. The 30 percent increase in college attendance and the great success of TAG in stemming catastrophic taxpayers flow out of the city speaks for itself.”

The president is expected to sign the D.C. appropriations bill, which also contains \$40 million for a school improvement program. Like last year, the money will be split among public school improvements (\$13 million), charter schools (\$13 million), and “opportunity scholarships” (i.e., vouchers) to promote school choice (\$14 million).

During the current school year, about twelve hundred low-income District students received grants through the choice program of up to \$7,500 toward tuition at private schools. However, not all applicants received awards. In fact, only 296 slots were available for the 540 public school students who applied from grades 6–12. For grades in which applicants exceeded available spaces, voucher recipients were selected through a lottery.

More information on DC TAG is available at http://seo.dc.gov/services/post_secondary_financial_assistance/tuition_assistance/index.shtm.



OHIO'S EDUCATION MATTERS: New Poll Finds Overwhelming Support for Increasing High School Graduation Rates and College Enrollment Among Ohioans

In a speech to the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce earlier this year, **Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan** warned that U.S. workers must be better educated if they are to find jobs in a rapidly changing economy. He said we must provide “rigorous education and ongoing training to all members of our society,” and went on to note that better education in elementary, middle, and high schools was needed to increase the wages of lower-skilled workers and to diminish growing income inequality.

This stark reality appears to have hit home in Ohio, one of the few states where jobs and the economy outranked Iraq and terrorism in the priorities of voters in the weeks leading up to election day. Since the last presidential election, in 2000, Ohio has lost a quarter of a million jobs, including 180,000 within the manufacturing sector. It has seen the unemployment rate rise from 3.9 percent to 6.3 percent.

To their credit, the people of Ohio seem to understand Greenspan’s warning and appear willing to embrace his advice. In fact, according to a recent poll, “Ohio’s Education Matters,” an overwhelming majority—85 percent—of Ohioans say that they want the state to “focus on increasing high school graduation rates and college-going rates, for all students, and they want the state to ensure that all students are academically prepared for college if they choose to attend.”

“I find it encouraging that Ohioans seem to understand the importance of higher education to this state,” said **Chad Wick, president and CEO of KnowledgeWorks Foundation**, which conducted the poll. “But we have a lot of work to do in Ohio if we are going to match reality with the public’s desire for a better education system that works for all students.”

Currently, Ohio has an overall high school graduation rate of 70.7 percent, which is slightly higher than the national average of 68 percent, according to research by the Urban Institute. However, in urban areas the graduation rate takes a nosedive—in Cleveland (a 30 percent graduation rate), Columbus (34.3 percent), Cincinnati (32.4 percent), and Toledo (38.8 percent), for example, the rates are dismal.

Even among those students who do manage to graduate from high school, most face an uphill battle in college. In Ohio, while 59 percent of high school graduates go directly to college after high school, only 55 percent of first-year freshmen in four-year degree programs earn a bachelor’s degree in six years or less. In addition, 39 percent of first-year freshmen in universities and colleges across the state had to take at least one remedial course in the 2001–02 school year.

These results are reflected in the KnowledgeWorks survey, which found that only 58 percent of participants think that graduating high school seniors have the skills to succeed in college—an 8 percent drop from a 2002 study. When it comes to success in the economy, only 48 percent of Ohioans think that graduating high school seniors have “necessary skills and training to succeed in full-time jobs”—a 14 percent drop from two years ago.

Ohio's Education Matters

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The report found that a “low-skilled workforce and lower earnings for workers hampers Ohio’s economy” and that low college-attainment levels in Ohio have “reduced the state’s per capita income, above the national average 40 years ago, to below the average per capita income nationally today.” Statewide, this loss reflects an aggregate cost of \$17.5 billion in total lost personal income.

Realizing the need for a highly skilled labor force in the future, 91 percent of Ohioans think it is “very important” or “somewhat important” for the state to increase the percentage of students who go to college. In addition, 85 percent of respondents think it is “very important” for the state to increase the percentage of urban high school students who receive their high school diploma, and 86 percent believe that the state should set a goal of all students graduating from high school. Finally, 96.1 percent of Ohioans strongly agreed that “education is essential for a democratic society and a healthy economy,” with 72 percent saying that they would protect and defend education as they would freedom.

The public in Ohio also appears to be supportive of ongoing strategies to help improve public high schools and raise college enrollment among their graduates. Nearly 76 percent of survey respondents agreed that students were more likely to drop out of large high schools with one thousand or more students than they were from schools with fewer than four hundred students. A movement is already underway in Ohio, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to create more of these small schools. This fall, nearly 25,000 Ohio high school students started the school year in fifty-eight autonomous small schools. Previously, these students would had been bunched into eighteen larger, comprehensive high schools.

“Public expectations for the education system are high,” Wick said. “That message from Ohioans should help keep us on the course of transforming the education system in this state so that all children have an opportunity to succeed.”

The complete polling results are available at <http://www.kwfdn.org/poll/2004/>.



NEW GAO REPORT FINDS THAT RURAL SCHOOLS FACE A UNIQUE CHALLENGE IN MEETING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND PROVISIONS

According to a new report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), rural school districts “faced challenges in meeting No Child Left Behind (NCLB) student proficiency goals and implementing teacher qualification requirements.” The report, *No Child Left Behind Act: Additional Assistance and Research on Effective Strategies Would Help Small Rural Districts*, also found that rural districts faced some of these challenges “to a greater extent than nonrural districts.”

The report found several challenges to NCLB implementation that are unique to rural districts around the country. For example, rural districts are more likely to enroll a large number of economically disadvantaged students who lack access to valuable resources, such as libraries and computers, that could be used to increase student achievement. Other key obstacles affecting

rural districts' ability to implement NCLB include geographic isolation, limited access to teacher training facilities, and internet line maintenance difficulties.

To meet these challenges, rural districts were more likely to increase computer capacity. However, small rural districts—defined as school districts located fifty-five miles or farther from a metropolitan area, and having three hundred or fewer students—were less likely to report using other strategies to improve student achievement, such as teacher mentoring.

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2002, the U.S. Department of Education has tried to address the challenges incumbent in rural education by establishing a task force on rural issues and by awarding a \$10 million grant (in September 2004) to the National Center for Research and Development in Rural Education.

However, the GAO report found that rural officials needed further assistance in providing teacher development opportunities and in identifying effective remedial services to improve student achievement. For example, it found that “almost three-quarters of rural district officials” reported a need for information on remedial services that will help students meet academic proficiency goals. In addition, small rural districts and those that may be very isolated “continued to face unique challenges in recruiting, retaining, and training teachers, and lacked strategies to address them.” Overall, 52 percent of rural districts reported teacher recruitment and retention as a problem, compared to 36 percent of nonrural districts. Professional development opportunities for rural teachers were also limited because small staffs made it difficult to release teachers and administrators for conferences and other training.

The report noted that current research on the effectiveness of different strategies to improve student performance is limited and asked the Department of Education to direct its National Research and Development Center on Rural Education to focus on effective, scientifically based methods that can be applied to improve student performance in small rural districts.

In a response from the Department of Education at the end of the report, **Deputy Secretary of Education Eugene W. Hickok** expressed satisfaction in the report's finding that the department “made considerable efforts and progress in promulgating regulations, providing assistance, and working with the states in the first two and a half years of NCLB implementation.” However, he also noted that the report's authors might not have understood all the actions that the department had already undertaken and provided more detailed information on past and planned efforts by the department in the area of rural education.

In the 2001–02 school year, rural districts comprised 25 percent of all school districts in the country.

The complete GAO report is available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04909.pdf>.

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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