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Public Education Policy And Progress



ARCHITECTS FOR CHANGE: National Association of Secondary School Principals Releases New Report on Reinventing High Schools

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) last week released *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, a tool that simultaneously challenges principals to take responsibility for school and student improvement and provides specific recommendations that will help them accomplish that objective.

“*Breaking Ranks II* is a grassroots, school-based reform effort that arrives just at the forefront of significant discussions over the shortcomings and needs of the nation’s high schools,” said **Gerald N. Tirozzi, NASSP Executive Director**. “As the White House, Congress, and state and local policymakers begin to debate the merit and issues surrounding high school reform, principals in high schools across the country will be receiving the *Breaking Ranks II* handbook and implementing successful strategies for high school reform.”

Building on the first *Breaking Ranks* report which was released almost a decade ago, the new report offers recommendations in three key areas: personalization and the school environment; collaborative leadership and professional learning communities; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The report was developed with the **Education Alliance at the Lab at Brown University** over a two-year period. Among its recommendations are:

- Every student should have a Personal Plan for Progress and a Personal Adult Advocate. Such personalization recognizes that each student learns differently and provides the support and guidance for each student to set, review and achieve his or her goals.
- High schools should consist of small learning communities and teachers’ student loads should be no more than 90 students. Such efforts are meant to improve “student attitudes, attendance, participation, and satisfaction,” allow time to address the instructional needs of each student and increase opportunities for professional development, curriculum writing, and instructional preparation.
- Recognizing that education is a continuum, high schools should be part of a K-16 partnership to enhance communication at different levels to ensure that students at each stage of the continuum will better understand what will be required of them at the succeeding stage.
- Every educator should have a Personal Learning Plan to ensure that “principals, teachers, and other staff members can address their own learning and professional development needs as they relate to improving student learning.”

Supporting Principals Who Break Ranks was also released by NASSP. This report stresses the crucial role of all levels of government in the process of successfully transforming high schools: “With the coordinated and focused efforts of principals, districts, states, and the federal government . . . high-performing high schools will flourish, raising the achievement of all students and, as a result, providing immeasurable benefits to our society as a whole,” it says.

Breaking Ranks II is available at: http://www.nassp.org/breakingranks/BRII_policy.pdf.



SECRETARY PAIGE TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS: Defends Bush Budget, but Faces Pointed Criticism on NCLB Funding

Testifying before the House Budget Committee, **U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige** defended President Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget request, stressing that the role of the U.S. Department of Education is to supplement state and local efforts, not to supplant them. Paige received support in this effort from **Rep. Richard "Doc" Hastings (R-WA)**, who chaired the committee hearing in place of **Rep. Jim Nussle (R-IA)**.

Paige spoke of the President's proposed increases for Title I and special education. He also discussed the new **Jobs for the 21st Century** program, which includes \$100 million for "striving readers" at the secondary school level. Paige also stressed the importance of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*:

In the time since No Child Left Behind became law, we have made tremendous progress in building a solid foundation for educational equity. Now as we enter the third year of this legislation, I believe we are witnessing an historic moment. No Child Left Behind extends the full promise of freedom to all of our nation's students. I can think of no more effective program to ensure the future strength, security and vitality of our nation.

Democrats criticized the administration for failing to fully fund *NCLB*. **Budget Committee Ranking Member Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)** raised concerns about the *NCLB* shortfall of \$9.4 billion below authorized levels. He also questioned the wisdom of the President's desire to eliminate many education programs and to reduce support for student loans.

Rep. George Miller (D-CA), one of the lead negotiators of *NCLB* and the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, was extremely critical of the proposed budget, saying:

This budget ... prioritizes tax cuts for the wealthy over education funding for the disadvantaged for the third year in a row. It is not enough to proclaim yourself the 'education President.' You need to provide leadership and make the decisions that strengthen our schools, eliminate the achievement gap, and make college affordable to all....

NCLB placed new challenges on our schools and teachers – challenges it is important that our educators meet: eliminating the achievement gap between poor and minority students and other students; improving accountability; upgrading teacher quality. Our communities are working hard to live up to their end of the bargain. When are the Bush Administration and Congress going to live up to theirs?

Lisa Graham Keegan, CEO of the Education Leaders Council (ELC), rebutted Rep. Miller's assertions about the need for additional support for *NCLB* implementation, citing a study by the ELC that found that Congress "not only provided the states with sufficient resources, but, in fact, may also have provide[d] them with more than enough." The study, entitled *NCLB Under a Microscope: A Cost Analysis of the Fiscal Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on States and Local Education Agencies*, examined new requirements that *NCLB* placed on the states and concluded that the federal government may have over funded *NCLB* "anywhere from

\$785 million anticipated in the 2004-2005 school year to approximately \$5 billion in the 2007-2008 school year.”

A transcript of the hearing is available at: <http://www.house.gov/budget/hearings.htm>

NCLB Under a Microscope: A Cost Analysis of the Fiscal Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on States and Local Education Agencies is available at:
http://www.educationleaders.org/elc/events/elc_cost_study-04.pdf

Alliance for Excellent Education Advisory Group Member in the News

Don Deshler, Director for the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas, and a member of the Alliance’s adolescent literacy advisory group, met with **First Lady Laura Bush** the day after President Bush announced a new plan to help struggling readers in middle and high school. The meeting was part of a national effort by the Bush administration to generate support for initiatives introduced during the State of the Union speech.

“A lot of the students who can’t read are the ones who drop out because of frustration, because of embarrassment, because of all the social problems that come with illiteracy,” Mrs. Bush said, discussing the Striving Readers Initiative.

At the Center for Research on Learning, Deshler and his colleagues have developed and validated the *Strategic Instruction Model* and the *Learning Strategies Curriculum*, two mechanisms for improving the learning effectiveness of students with learning disabilities and the instructional effectiveness of teachers.

Mrs. Bush, who worked as a public school teacher and librarian in Houston, met with Deshler in Orlando, Florida, to discuss the Strategic Instruction Model, which could play a central role in a new national literacy initiative. During her visit, Mrs. Bush also toured Discovery Middle School and visited classrooms that have implemented the model.



DIPLOMA PROJECT RECOMMENDS CHANGING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION STANDARDS TO REFLECT “REAL WORLD” DEMANDS

Once seen as the key to success as an adult, today’s high school diploma no longer certifies that a graduate is ready to compete in the college classroom or the workplace. *Ready or Not: Creating a Diploma that Counts*, a report released by the American Diploma Project, says that high school graduates must master more English and mathematics if the value of the diploma is to be restored. The report includes a very detailed set of benchmarks that describe the specific English and mathematics knowledge and skills that graduates must master if they expect to succeed in postsecondary education or in high-performance, high-growth jobs. The American Diploma Project is a partnership of Achieve, Inc.; The Education Trust; and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

The report recommends that public secondary schools anchor their standards to the “real world” and that all high school students take quality college- and workplace-readiness courses. The report also advises the federal government to require all states to conduct a 12th-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) examination. The *No Child Left Behind Act* currently requires that the states conduct the NAEP examination of 4th- and 8th-graders only.

“People who grouse about high-school exit tests are voicing the wrong objection,” said **Thomas B. Fordham Foundation President Chester E. Finn Jr.** “What should spark real dismay is the

Diploma Project Recommends Changing High School Graduation Standards to Reflect “Real World” Demands

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gap between what states expect of high school graduates and what the real world demands for their success.”

According to the report, at least 28 percent of students entering college need remedial classes in English or math. Students taking remedial courses are 20 percent less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than their better-prepared colleagues. What is more, over 60 percent of employers rate high-school graduates’ skills in basic English and mathematics as fair or poor.

Several of the Diploma Project’s recommendations are already in place in existing law. The recommendation that the federal government require postsecondary institutions to provide information about the preparation of high school graduates is supported (though not met) by several existing initiatives, including the Federal **TRIO** Programs and **Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)**. TRIO is composed of several programs targeted to serve low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities to help them progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. GEAR UP connects a high school career to college success through partnerships that promote academic preparation and an understanding of necessary costs to attend college. Both programs have strong track records for helping disadvantaged students progress through the academic pipeline from middle school through college, but they currently serve only 10 percent to 20 percent of eligible students.

The President’s proposed **Jobs for the 21st Century Initiative** would provide \$33 million for an additional Pell award of up to \$1,000 to low-income students who participate in the State Scholars program, which encourages low-income students to complete a rigorous four-year course of study. Another \$12 million is proposed to increase the number of states implementing the State Scholars program. If enacted, such programs would support the Diploma Project’s recommendations that the federal government provide incentives for high school students to take appropriate courses and offer resources for states to align high school standards with skills desired by colleges and workplaces.

The complete report is available at:

<http://www.achieve.org/achieve.nsf/AmericanDiplomaProject?OpenForm>



THORNTON FUNDING IN LIMBO: Thousands March on Maryland Capitol to Demand More Money for Schools

Thousands of teachers, parents, and students from across Maryland marched on the State House earlier this month, demanding that **Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R)** keep his promise to increase education spending by \$1.3 billion a year by 2008.

In 1999, the Maryland General Assembly created a commission to study schools with high test scores and attendance rates and calculate the amount those schools spend on each student. The Thornton Commission (named for its chairman, **Prince George’s County school board chief**

Alvin Thornton) released its report in January 2002. Maryland's most successful schools, it said, spend \$6,000 per pupil per year, but the state provides \$2,500 less than that amount. Maryland lawmakers, responding to overwhelming public support, incorporated the commission's recommendations into law. The planned spending increase is designed to provide every child in the state with the kind of education currently available at Maryland's best schools.

Although Ehrlich proposed a \$326 million increase for this year, he has said the state cannot afford to meet the spending plan in future years without additional funding that legalized slot machine gambling would provide. Maryland is currently facing a \$700 million deficit. **Assistant House Minority Whip William J. Frank (R)** agreed with the governor and said that the money to fund the plan did not exist. "If the state were to fund the plan, it would require deep cuts in spending on the environment and corrections," he told *The Washington Times*.

Ehrlich has asked the state's schools superintendent to investigate the circumstances surrounding the march on the Capitol. The investigation will focus on the decisions of at least two county school systems to encourage students and teachers to attend the march by closing schools early, providing bus transportation, and offering community service credits to students who attended and wrote about their experience.

"Thornton Plan Funding Demanded" is available at:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A26938-2004Feb9.html>

"Ehrlich Requests Probe of Rally" is available at:
<http://washingtontimes.com/metro/20040211-121226-2821r.htm>

New Study Questions Florida's School Funding System

A new study by the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research recommended that state legislators scrap or modify parts of Florida's school funding formula, known as the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). FEFP was intended to equalize educational funding between counties with high property values and those that were "pupil rich and property poor." At the time it was enacted in the 1970s, FEFP was hailed as one of the greatest educational reforms in the country.

The University of Florida (UF) study took issue with two parts of Florida's formula, the "sparsity supplement," which gives extra money to rural counties with few people scattered over wide areas, and the "district cost differential," which allocates more school funding to areas, often large urban districts, with a high cost of living. Both programs were started as a way to defray higher costs for hiring teachers and running schools in these geographic regions. According to **UF researcher James Dewey and economics professor David Denslow**, recent studies do not conclusively show that rural districts have higher expenses. They argue that the district cost differential should be changed and the sparsity factor should be eliminated.

Any efforts to implement the study's recommendations seem likely to be met with serious resistance, at least according to initial comments from some Florida lawmakers. "I'll chain myself to the Capitol before that happens," **State Sen. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D)**, told the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

Read the complete article at:
<http://www.heraldtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040211/NEWS/402110403/1060>



“KING’S DREAM OR PLESSY’S NIGHTMARE?”: New Report Finds Backward Movement in School Desegregation

According to a new report, U.S. schools in all regions of the country are becoming more segregated for both African American and Latino students. *Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare?* found that in many districts where a court-ordered mandate halted desegregation efforts in the past decade, there has been a significant increase in segregation. The largest increase in segregation has taken place in the South, where court decisions and civil rights laws produced the most integrated schools in the country over the last three decades.

The report, issued by the **Civil Rights Project at Harvard University**, examines changes in the country and in districts directly affected by the *Brown* decision. It also considers the effects of the *Oklahoma City v. Dowell* Supreme Court decision, which allowed a return to segregated neighborhood schools.

“For more than a decade, we have been headed backward toward greater segregation for black students,” the report says. “For Latinos, who have recently become the largest group of minority students, segregation has been steadily increasing ever since the first national data were collected in the late 1960s. . . . Both groups tend to be segregated in high poverty schools that are deeply unequal in measurable ways.”

On average, rural and small town school districts are the nation’s most integrated for both African Americans and Latinos. The report found that, “central cities of large metropolitan areas are the epicenter of segregation,” but segregation is also severe in smaller central cities and even in suburban rings of large cities, according to the report:

We now have a massive migration of black and Latino families to our suburbs, but the migration is producing hundreds of newly segregated and unequal schools and frustrating the dream of the middle class minority families for access to the most competitive schools. The process of spreading segregation threatens suburban communities with problems like those that ghettoization brought to larger and larger parts of central cities.

Overall, these highly segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are powerfully related to unequal educational opportunity. Students in these schools often face conditions that their counterparts in segregated white schools rarely experience. Indeed, as researcher Cynthia Prince wrote in *The Challenge of Attracting Good Teachers and Principals to Struggling Schools*, “The more impoverished and racially isolated the school, the greater the likelihood that students in the school will be taught by inexperienced teachers, uncertified teachers, and out-of-field teachers who do not hold a degree in the subject they are assigned to teach. Schools with these characteristics are invariably low-performing schools.”

Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare? is available at:
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/resseg04/brown50.pdf>

On the Calendar

As follow-up to its High School Leadership Summit held last October in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Department of Education has announced a series of seven regional high school summits. These summits will help state teams create short- and long-term plans for strengthening outcomes for youth, improving high schools and meeting the vision of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The regional meetings will be held:

March 12-13 in Billings, Montana, with state teams from Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming;

March 26-27 in Atlanta, Georgia, with state teams from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee;

April 16-17 in Phoenix, Arizona, with state teams from Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah;

April 23-24 in St. Louis, Missouri, with state teams from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin;

May 7–8 in Sacramento, California, with state teams from Alaska, American Samoa, California, Guam, Hawaii, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, and Washington;

May 14-15 in Cleveland, Ohio, with state teams from Delaware, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia; and

May 21-22 in Boston, Massachusetts, with state teams from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and DOD schools.

More information is available at:

<http://preview.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hsinit/index.html#region>

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 six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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