



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



PRESIDENT BUSH PROMOTES HIGH SCHOOL AGENDA: Of \$1.5 Billion Plan for High Schools, \$200 Million Would Go to Striving Readers Program

Last week, President Bush outlined a \$1.5 billion high school initiative to help every high school student graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in college and be competitive in the workforce. The president spoke at J. E. B. Stuart High School in Falls Church, Virginia, joined by outgoing **U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige** and Secretary-nominee **Margaret Spellings**. Also in attendance were First Lady Laura Bush and members of the Virginia congressional delegation.

The initiative would raise the funding level for the newly created Striving Readers program from \$25 million in fiscal year 2005 to \$200 million in 2006. It would also support, through customized intervention plans, state efforts to help incoming ninth-grade students. State assessments to ensure that high school diplomas are “not merely a sign of endurance, but the mark of a young person ready to succeed” would be funded at \$250 million. Other elements of the initiative include increased funding for the Mathematics and Science Partnership program, an increase in support for advanced placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, and the creation of an incentive fund to reward teachers who demonstrate success.

Bush explained that this appearance was one of his first in 2005 because his administration is “dedicated to doing everything we can at the federal level to improve public education.” He continued, “You can’t have a hopeful America without a public school system that’s working to the best of its abilities.” Bush cited the nation’s 68 percent graduation rate and American fifteen-year-olds’ twenty-seventh place ranking out of thirty-nine countries in math literacy as evidence that high schools are not preparing students to compete in the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century.

Early Intervention Programs for At-Risk Ninth Graders and the Importance of Reading

In an effort to identify incoming ninth graders who are at risk of falling behind, Bush proposed an early intervention program through which high school teachers would analyze eighth-grade test data and design a program to help struggling students catch up while they are still able to do so. The program would be flexible, tailored to the needs of each student, and developed in consultation with a parent. To measure the program’s success and student progress, Bush proposed extending the annual NCLB testing requirement to include assessments in reading and math in grades nine, ten, and eleven. Currently, states are only required to test students in grades 3–8 and in one year of high school.

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President Bush talked at length about the importance of reading:

The principal of this great school said we spell hope: R-E-A-D. I thought that's a pretty darn good slogan. And the reason why that's a good slogan is to make sure every high school student has a chance to realize his or her dreams, each graduate must read—must know how to read. You can't—you cannot achieve in America if you cannot read and, yet, too many of our children cannot read.

To combat reading deficiencies among older students, the president's fiscal 2006 budget will ask Congress to expand his Striving Readers initiative to \$200 million. These funds would go to help more than one hundred school districts “train teachers in research-based methods so they can provide effective interventions for middle and high school students struggling in reading.” During his speech, Bush singled out **Sandy Switzer, J. E. B. Stuart High School's reading coach**, for her efforts in improving reading scores at the school. He explained that she ensures that students focus on reading, not only in reading classes but also in math and across the curriculum.

Rigorous High School Curriculum and Improving Teacher Quality

The International Baccalaureate program is another key to J. E. B. Stuart High School's success. Forty percent of Stuart's students are enrolled in an IB course—this in a school where two-thirds of the students are second-language learners from more than seventy countries. To promote a similar commitment to IB and advanced placement programs in schools across the country, President Bush will ask for \$52 million to ensure that teachers in low-income schools are well trained to teach AP and IB courses. The president would also provide \$45 million to help more states develop State Scholars programs, which encourage students to take more rigorous courses. In addition, he proposed giving \$1,000 in additional Pell Grant aid during the first two years of college to low-income students who successfully completed the State Scholars curriculum.

President Bush also outlined several proposals to encourage and reward good teachers. To improve secondary school students' math abilities, Bush would provide \$120 million for school districts to implement research-based programs that help math teachers strengthen their teaching skills. He called for an Adjunct Teachers Corps, which would provide teaching opportunities for professionals to teach middle and high school courses, especially math and science. Bush also proposed a \$500 million incentive fund that would allow school districts to provide financial rewards to teachers based on increased student achievement, teaching in low-income schools, or other criteria that the district chooses.

Consolidating Federal Funding Streams for High Schools

Bush announced his intention to improve the way the federal government funds high schools by providing flexibility for states and local districts to select the federal programs they need most.

The federal government—oh, we've got a lot of programs designed to help high school students . . . The problem is they're . . . prescriptions that may not meet the needs of the local high school, or the local school district—you know, a program to promote vocational education, or to prepare for college preparation, or to encourage school restructuring. They all sound fine, and they're all important. But they may not be what is necessary for a particular school district or a high school to achieve the objective of teaching every child to read and write and add and subtract. So I believe we ought to consolidate the high school improvement programs so that states have the flexibility to choose the program that works best for their students.

Extending NCLB into High Schools Could Meet Resistance on Capitol Hill

Many of Bush's proposals were included in his budget request for fiscal year 2005 but were rejected or watered down by Congress during the appropriations process last year. The president is likely to face similar or greater challenges this year, as Congress works to reduce the nation's budget deficit.

Certainly, Bush's plan to extend the No Child Left Behind Act's focus on testing and standards into high schools is likely to meet resistance on Capitol Hill—and not just from Democrats who say the administration has not sufficiently funded No Child Left Behind. "I don't know if there's political will on [Capitol Hill] to expand testing in high school," **Krista Kafer, an education policy analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation**, told the *Los Angeles Times*.

In that same *Los Angeles Times* article, **U.S. Representative George Miller (D-CA), the top Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee** and one of the chief architects of NCLB, said that he would not work with Bush on a high school bill unless the president agreed to fully fund NCLB. For fiscal year 2005, Miller and other Democrats contend that NCLB's Title I program, which directs funding to disadvantaged students, is by itself underfunded by over \$7.75 billion.

In a statement, **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, who introduced a high school reform bill during the 108th Congress, applauded the President's increased commitment to literacy programs in high schools, but was concerned that his proposal "places a premium on testing and, without the right investment, threatens to leave more students behind."

In remarks at the National Press Club just a few hours after President Bush's speech, **Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), the ranking minority member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee** and another leading developer of NCLB, also stressed the importance of fully funding that law.

I welcome President Bush's remarks today on improving our high schools. But, it's clear that unless we fund the reforms under the No Child Left Behind Act for earlier grades and younger children, what we do in high schools will matter far less. We are past the point where we can afford only to talk the talk, without walking the walk. It's time for the White House to realize that America cannot expand opportunity and embrace the future on a tin cup education budget.

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Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), the new HELP Committee chairman, expressed a more positive tone in response to the president's speech. "I applaud the president's commitment to high school reform," he said. "High schools are an integral part of our public education system, and more effective federal support is an important part of improving student achievement, particularly with respect to math, science, and reading skills." However, Enzi did raise a concern about the president's plan to consolidate funding streams and stressed the importance of continued support for vocational and technical education as a critical component of high school education.

President Bush's complete remarks are available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050112-5.html>.

"Bush's Latest Brainchild Could Be Left Behind" is available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/education/la-na-schools4jan04,1,5715643.story>.

A statement from Alliance interim president Cynthia H. Sadler is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/press.html>.



"WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE": Bush Designee Margaret Spellings Promotes High School Agenda During Senate Confirmation Hearing

During a confirmation hearing in which she received accolades from senators of both political parties, **Margaret Spellings** shed some light on President Bush's rationale for expanding No Child Left Behind into high schools. Spellings, who received unanimous approval from the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) to serve as President Bush's choice to succeed **Rod Paige** as U.S. Secretary of Education, is expected to face an easy confirmation by the full Senate later this month.

During her testimony, Spellings discussed the need to extend the policy foundation of the No Child Left Behind Act to the high school level. Citing the nation's 67 percent high school graduation rate, she drew attention to the president's proposals to help middle and high school students who have fallen behind in reading and math, extend assessments to grades 3–11, and create a high school intervention initiative that focuses on reading skills in the "critical ninth-grade year."

In responding to a question from HELP Committee Chairman Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) on how the administration would ensure that more students graduate from high school, Spellings said that the president believes that "what gets measured, gets done." She explained that the assessment and data information systems that were put in place in grades 3–8 by NCLB are working to let teachers and parents know how students are doing and are really working to improve education at that level. She said that the president believes that same theory should work for high schools. She also highlighted the importance of reading and stressed that far too many kids have gotten through middle school and into high school without the requisite reading skills to be able to perform successfully.

In her previous job as the president's domestic policy advisor, Spellings helped draft the No Child Left Behind Act and worked behind the scenes, from the White House, on implementation issues. This experience, combined with her time advising Bush when he was the governor of Texas, led Senator Enzi to tell Spellings, "You have more than ten years of experience with these issues on the local, state, and national level and I don't think anyone has a better understanding of the president's position on them. You will now be in the perfect position to promote his agenda and ensure that we continue to make progress on an issue that I know is as important to you as it is to him."

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) also praised Bush's decision to tap Spellings to replace Secretary Paige. "I hope it's not the kiss of death for the right wing," he said, "but I've welcomed the opportunity to work with Margaret Spellings over the past four years on education. We've had our differences, but I believe she's an inspired choice to be Secretary of Education at this critical moment in our nation's history, and I look forward very much to working with her in the years ahead."

During a year when Congress is scheduled to debate reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, Spellings noted the "great opportunity" to "meet the needs of older students and adults to help them compete and succeed in our ever-more-competitive world."

Video of Margaret Spellings's testimony is available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/staff/bios/spellings-nomination.html>.

Senator Enzi's opening statement is available at <http://www.senate.gov/~enzi/spellnom.htm>.

Senator Kennedy's statement is available at <http://www.senate.gov/~kennedy/statements/05/1/2005106454.html>.



STALLED IN SECONDARY: On Third Anniversary of NCLB, New Report Finds Little Improvement Among Middle and High School Students

According to a new report from the Education Trust, student achievement in reading and math at the high school level, after two years of NCLB implementation, has not kept up with increases at the elementary school level. The report, *Stalled in Secondary: Student Achievement Lags in Middle Grades and High School*, found that too many states are not making progress in closing achievement gaps.

Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust, said that the report should not surprise anyone. "Over the years, policymakers and educators have focused energy and resources on the elementary grades," she said. "And proportionately more elementary schools receive Title I funds and are thus more directly affected by NCLB's resources and accountability provisions."

As the chart on page 6 shows, the report found the most progress in middle school math, where twenty-four of twenty-eight states saw improved overall performance. In middle school reading, however, overall achievement rose in only sixteen of twenty-seven states. At the high school

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level, while eleven states saw increased performance in reading, nine states saw reading scores decrease or remain the same.

	Middle Schools		High Schools	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
States with Higher Overall Performance	16	24	11	14
States with No Change in Overall Performance	3	4	3	1
States with Lower Overall Performance	8	0	6	6
Total Number of States Analyzed	27	28	20	21

Source: *Stalled in Secondary: A Look at Student Achievement Since the No Child Left Behind Act.*

While closing the achievement gap was one of the key goals of NCLB, the report found little evidence of it occurring at the secondary school level. At the high school level, the Latino-white gap grew or stayed the same for both reading and math in more states than it narrowed. The same was true for the achievement gap between poor and nonpoor high school students. Between African-American high school students and their white peers, the math achievement gap grew or remained the same in ten states.

At the middle school level, more states saw reading achievement gaps narrow instead of widen, but in some instances the gap narrowed because the scores of white students decreased. In math, the report pointed out “disturbing trends” in the Latino-white gap, which “grew wider or stayed the same in more states than it narrowed.” In addition, the gap between poor and nonpoor students grew or remained the same in nine states.

The report builds on an earlier Ed Trust report that found that states are moving in the right direction at the elementary school level. In fact, of the twenty-nine states surveyed, all but one showed increased overall achievement in math at the elementary school level. In reading, twenty of twenty-eight states showed improvement.

“For far too long, we’ve been operating on this notion that education is like inoculation—that if we get it right for kids in those early years, we can prevent later school failure,” Haycock said. “Experience tells us this assumption is wrong. Education is more like nutrition. You have to start early with that quality diet—and then continue all the way up the line.”

The complete report is available at <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/stalled+in+secondary.htm>.



NEW REPORT FINDS A “LONG, UPHILL ROAD” TO MEETING STATE AND NATIONAL LITERACY GOALS

Insufficient progress is being made to bring students to proficiency in reading by the 2014 goal set by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) according to a new report from the RAND Corporation. The report, *Achieving State and National Literacy Goals, a Long Uphill Road: A Report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York*, calls on policymakers to accept responsibility for improving reading instruction in later grades through increased attention and resources.

The RAND study examined results on state reading tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment for each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia to assess the condition of literacy in the United States. The study's timeline did not allow for detailed analyses of the state assessments or the results, but merely sought to report on the data. Although the state tests are not analogous and the rigor of the tests varies widely, the results nevertheless indicate that too few adolescents—particularly African Americans and Hispanics—are meeting state and national benchmarks.

NCLB requires states to adopt standards for all students. States must establish performance goals and track the progress of all students on these goals. The stated ambition of NCLB is that, at the end of twelve years (2014), all students will read at proficient levels or above. In several states, the report found that fewer than half of the students met the state proficiency standards. In no state do even half of the students meet the NAEP national literacy standard of proficiency. Furthermore, the wide disparity in the achievement levels of student subgroups makes reaching the 100 percent proficiency goal for all students a more challenging task for certain schools and districts.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Education dismissed the RAND analysis and stressed that it was too soon to make such judgments on the prospects for meeting the federal goal. "We're only a few years into these reforms, and just because we're not there yet doesn't mean we abandon kids and the goal of having them all at grade level," **Susan Aspey, U.S. Department of Education press secretary**, said.

Other observers indicate the results are unsurprising, given the low priority given to literacy beyond the primary grades. "With little or no access to high-quality reading instruction beyond grade 3 or 4 and little remediation, much less expert, intensive reading instruction, why would we expect the data presented to look any different?" **Richard Allington, the vice president of the International Reading Association**, said to *Education Week*.

The RAND report warns that the failure of our schools to teach our students to read at proficiency has dire consequences: "It is clear that simply mandating standards and assessment is not going to guarantee success. Unless we . . . are prepared to focus attention and resources on this issue, our schools are likely to continue producing students who lack skills and are ill-prepared to deal with the demands of postsecondary education."

The report is available at <http://www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR180/>.

The complete *Education Week* article is available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16rand.h24.html>.

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