



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



SENATE APPROVES \$5.4 BILLION INCREASE FOR EDUCATION BUDGET: Large Differences in House and Senate Budget Resolution Versions Could Spell Trouble in Conference

On March 17, the House and Senate each passed versions of the fiscal year 2006 congressional budget resolution, but not before the Senate added \$5.4 billion for education and stripped \$14 billion in mandatory spending cuts to Medicaid. These changes are expected to make it difficult for conferees to agree on a compromise after Congress returns from its spring recess at the beginning of April.

“It will be impossible to develop a product everyone in both chambers will find perfect, but I am optimistic [**House Budget Committee**] **Chairman [Jim] Nussle (R-IA)** and I can produce a final product a majority will find acceptable,” said **Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH)**.

On the Senate side, a handful of Republican moderates—**Senators Norm Coleman (R-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), Mike DeWine (R-OH), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Arlen Specter (R-PA)**—joined Democrats to pass an amendment by **Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)** that provided an increase of \$5.4 billion for a variety of education programs. The amendment provided

- \$1.4 billion to increase the Pell Grant maximum to \$4,500;
- \$1.6 billion to restore cuts to TRIO, GEAR UP, LEAP, and Perkins loans, and to provide for cost-of-college increases in work study, graduate education, and SEOG scholarships, which provide an additional source of aid for exceptionally needy students;
- \$975 million to restore cuts to job training/adult literacy; and
- \$1.3 billion to restore cuts to vocational education.

The amendment also provided money to extend federal student loan forgiveness from the current maximum of \$17,500 to \$23,000 for math, science, and special education teachers who agree to teach in high-need schools.

“Today Democrats and Republicans worked together on behalf of America’s students to turn this era of globalization into a new era of opportunity for all Americans. I am pleased by my amendment’s passage and the signal it sends that this Senate can come together and restore Bush’s education budget cuts so that ... students can compete in the global economy,” Kennedy said.

Senate Approves \$5.4 Billion Increase for Education Budget

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Other education-related amendments approved by the Senate included a \$500 million increase in funding for the U.S. Department of Education offered by Senator Specter and an amendment offered by **Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO)** that increased funding for rural education by \$29 million.

While the Senate was able to add money for education through these amendments, it still passed a Senate budget resolution that calls on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee to make \$2.1 billion in cuts to mandatory programs in FY 2006 and a total of \$8.6 billion over five years.

The annual congressional budget resolution sets limits on the spending and tax legislation that Congress will consider for the rest of the year, but it is a nonbinding spending blueprint for Congress that is not signed by the president. Only the total amount of discretionary spending in the final budget resolution, not the specific program totals, is binding on the Appropriations Committees.

In his remarks prior to the vote on the Kennedy amendment, **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY)** noted the nonbinding nature of the budget resolution. “I could not agree that [the \$5.4 billion] will actually wind up adding money for education,” he said. “It gives the nonbinding suggestion that it be directed toward various higher education programs, but it does not guarantee it. The budget resolution controls the top-line discretionary number government-wide. No such suggestion is enforceable. There is no guarantee that this tax-and-spend amendment will result in one new dollar for education, let alone the programs suggested by the amendment.”

House Rejects Increases for Education

In the House of Representatives, **Representative David Obey (D-WI)** offered an amendment that would have increased spending by \$15.8 billion, \$8 billion of which would have gone to education and related programs. As Obey described it, the amendment would allow the House to “choose between the social Darwinism of the President’s budget and a different budget which more accurately reflects the message of the social gospel.”

To pay for the increase in spending, the amendment would have reduced the tax cut that individuals who make more than \$1 million receive, from \$140,000 to about \$27,000. According to Obey, such an adjustment would save enough money to devote \$10 billion to deficit reduction and an additional \$16 billion for education, health, science, veterans, homeland security, environment, law enforcement, and community development.

Ultimately, the amendment was defeated by a vote of 180 to 242, with 3 Republicans—**Representatives Michael Bilirakis (R-FL), Walter Jones (R-NC), and Heather Wilson (R-NM)**—supporting it, and 24 Democrats voting against it. (The complete list of roll call votes on the Obey amendment is available at <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2005/roll082.xml>.)

The House budget resolution calls for the Education and the Workforce Committee to cut \$2.1 billion from mandatory programs like student loans and school lunch in FY 2006 and \$21.4 billion over five years.

What Happens Next?

Senator Trent Lott (R-MS) has said that there is virtually no way that a House-Senate conference committee would agree to the Senate’s decision to exempt Medicaid from the billions of dollars in cuts to entitlement programs that the president has suggested. The House’s budget plan calls for as much as \$20 billion in cuts to Medicaid.

According to *Roll Call*, a newspaper covering Capitol Hill, “The ever-widening ideological rift between Senate GOP centrists and House Republican conservatives remains the biggest threat to a House-Senate compromise budget.” Ultimately, the battle may come down to whether enough Republican moderates are willing to accept cuts to Medicaid in order to save the budget resolution. Republican leaders in the House have expressed hope that the White House would get involved and help tip the balance to their side.

While many observers will be focusing on the size of the Medicaid cuts that emerge from conference, most people in the education community will be pushing Congress to accept the Senate version and its \$6.3 billion increase for education programs.

If Congress fails to agree on a budget resolution, it would be a major setback for Republicans in Congress and President Bush. Without a budget resolution, any vote to cut entitlement programs such as Medicaid and student loans would not be protected from a filibuster—meaning that Republicans would need sixty votes in the Senate versus a simple majority if a budget resolution were in place. With only fifty-five Republicans in the Senate, reaching the sixty-vote threshold could prove very difficult, if not impossible.



OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: New Report Finds Lack of Parental Involvement and Little Useful Information on No Child Left Behind

According to a new report by the Public Education Network (PEN), *Open to the Public: Speaking Out on No Child Left Behind*, Americans generally support the No Child Left Behind Act’s (NCLB) objectives, but say that they lack useful information about school performance and improvement. In addition, they say that efforts to get involved in schools are regularly rebuffed by school officials. Such lapses, the report argues, threaten to erode support for the law.

“Although the law mentions parent and community involvement more than three hundred times, the most dramatic shift in federal education policy is shutting out many of the nation’s parents and citizens from effective involvement with their schools,” said **Wendy D. Puriefoy, president of PEN**. “Rather than bringing Americans closer to their public schools, implementation of the law is making more Americans mistrust them.”

Open to the Public

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In a letter to President Bush, **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**, and key leaders in Congress, PEN cited these and other concerns about NCLB and asked for greater enforcement of the law's information requirements and parental involvement provisions. It went on to note:

Currently, children, their schools, and school districts are accountable for meeting annual targets for student performance. The states, which set the targets and establish the NCLB structure, face no consequences when large numbers of students fail to meet these targets. Penalties should be imposed upon states, parallel to those imposed upon school districts, when insufficient numbers of children within the state meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets. These should include the designation of states as "in need of improvement" or "in corrective action" with the concomitant assistance and sanctions described in NCLB.

PEN also suggested that schools should be rewarded for making AYP and not just punished when that goal is not achieved. It cited instances of immigrant students being pushed out of school and curriculum being narrowed to focus on test prep at the expenses of other subjects.¹ "To reduce these incidents," PEN said in its letter, "schools should receive AYP 'credit' for making significant progress toward proficiency targets, as well as crossing over the bar."

In its discussions with the public, PEN also found that while parents of children in low-performing schools "desperately" want improvement, they would prefer the option of receiving supplemental services before the option of transferring their child to another school. The report noted that the choice option was not working—not only because parents value neighborhood schools, but also because there are so few extra spots in higher-performing schools.

Participants also voiced concern about lowered performance standards, teacher quality, and insufficient funding, and worry that a single annual test could not determine progress either in an individual or a school.

PEN's findings were the result of a series of public hearings held over the last nine months in eight states—Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, California, Ohio, Texas, Tennessee, New York, and Illinois—that were attended by hundreds of people, as well as from more than twelve thousand responses to an online survey.

The complete report and supplemental materials are available at http://www.publiceducation.org/portals/nclb/hearings/national/Open_to_the_Public.asp.

¹ According to *Academic Atrophy: The Condition of Liberal Arts in America's Public Schools*, a 2004 report by the Council for Basic Education, the amount of time teachers spend on social studies, geography, civics, and other related subjects has decreased at the elementary level, while time spent on reading, mathematics, and science has increased since the implementation of No Child Left Behind. Additionally, the report said that time allocated to foreign languages, art, and music has decreased at both elementary and secondary levels—especially among schools with high minority populations.



FROM THE CAPITAL TO THE CLASSROOM: New Report Finds Encouraging Signs of Positive Impact, but Calls for Midcourse Corrections in Year Three of NCLB

In the third year of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a majority of states and districts are reporting that students' scores on state tests are rising and that the law has focused greater attention on students who need extra help to learn, according to a new report from the Center of Education Policy (CEP). However, the report, *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, also found that many states and districts lack the capacity to help all schools that were "in need of improvement" and that many officials believe the goal of 100 percent proficiency for all students by 2014 is unrealistic.

"After three years of No Child Left Behind, state and district officials have made it clear: student performance is up and achievement gaps are closing," said **Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP**. "But those officials have also made it clear that the long-term success of the law is at risk unless the federal government can offer more support to bridge the capacity gap now preventing states and districts from effectively reaching all of the schools that need help."

In a survey of education officials in 49 states and 314 school districts, CEP found that 36 states (73 percent) and a majority of districts (72 percent) saw improvements in student achievement. They also reported a narrowing in the achievement gap between white students and other key subgroups including blacks, Hispanics, and English-language learners.

In spite of these improvements, officials in many states and districts were skeptical that they could provide assistance to schools in need of improvement, which, according to the report, account for about six thousand Title I schools in each of the last three years—the highest concentrations of which have been in urban and very large districts.

The report notes that a lack of funding remains an issue. "Despite the challenges faced in helping all of the schools that have been identified for improvement, a majority of the districts received less federal Title I funding in 2004–2005 than they did in the previous year, and while the overall federal education budget has grown in smaller percentages in 2004 and 2005 than in previous years, it now stands to be cut in 2006, according to President Bush's request." As a result, the report said, forty-two of twenty-nine states indicated that providing assistance to all schools identified for improvement poses a "serious" or "moderate" challenge. Forty-five states said that staff size and thirty-one states said staff expertise marked a "serious" or "moderate" challenge.

In a response, **Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Ray Simon** said that the report's "perpetual cry for more money . . . simply does not comport with the facts: since taking office President Bush has increased education funding by \$13.8 billion, or 33 percent."

In addition to the funding issue, other key challenges identified by states and districts included

- ensuring equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers;
- working with English-language learners; and
- narrowing the curriculum.

From the Capital to the Classroom (Continued from p. 5)

Like the citizens surveyed in the PEN report, school leaders identified school choice and supplemental services as issues of concern. A majority of districts (69 percent) said they didn't know what effect school choice had on student achievement, with only 3 percent saying that it is raising achievement even somewhat. Similarly, 42 percent of districts did not know what effect supplemental services had, though 20 percent believed that achievement was raised "somewhat or to a great extent."

To further investigate the effect of the law's implementation on different types of school districts, CEP conducted in-depth case studies across the nation and found that the law is having a "markedly different impact" in various settings.

In its conclusion, the report noted support for the goals of NCLB and encouraging signs of positive impact. "But problems persist that have been exacerbated by the way the Act has been administered," it noted. "Mid-course corrections must be made in federal administration, funding, capacity, and other areas if the nation expects to see long-term, sustainable improvements in student achievement."

The complete report and case studies are available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/pubs/nclby3/>.



COLLEGE DREAMS LIKELY TO FADE FOR MANY STUDENTS: High School Sophomores Have High Hopes but Low Math and Reading Scores

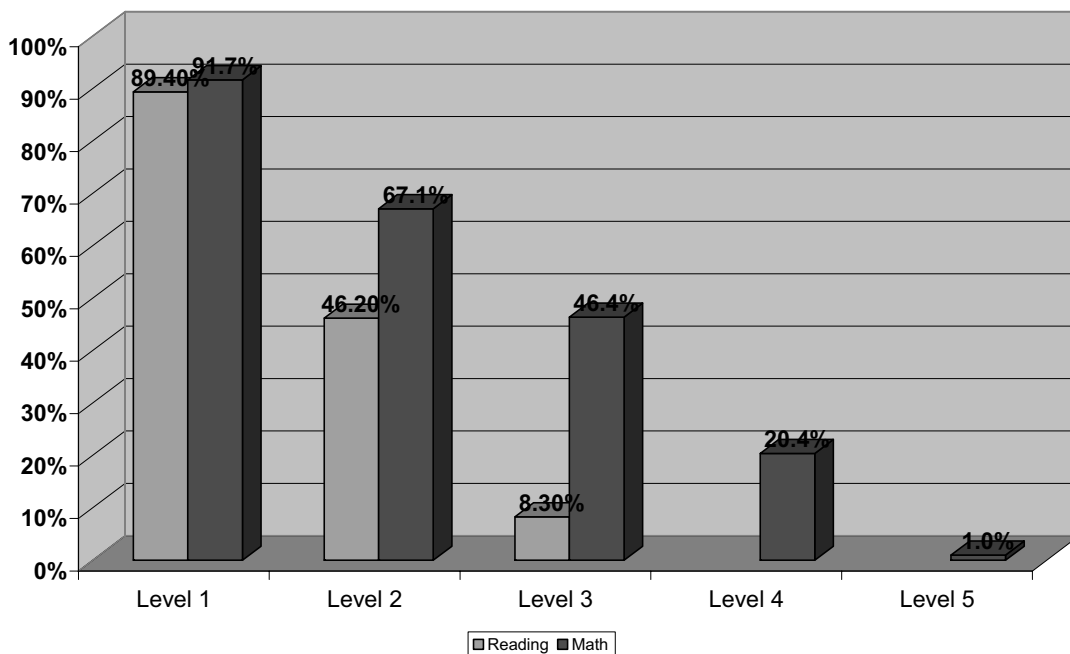
Nearly three-fourths of the nation's high school students plan to get a bachelor's degree or higher. But over 50 percent of students who held that expectation could not read at a proficient level, and over 80 percent could not perform intermediate-level math, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES also found that only about half of students are enrolled in a college preparatory program. The report, *A Profile of the American High School Sophomore in 2002*, surveyed tenth graders during the spring term of the 2001–02 school year and examined the cohort's sociodemographic characteristics, school experiences, tested achievement in reading and math, and educational expectations and plans.

"This report shows that we as a society have done an excellent job of selling the dream of attending college," said U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. "But we have to make sure that we are preparing high school students to succeed once they get in the door."

The 2002 sophomore cohort had high educational expectations: 36 percent expected to graduate from a four-year program while an additional 36 percent expected to obtain a master's degree (20 percent) or a PhD, MD, or other advanced doctoral or professional degree (16 percent). Only about 10 percent expected to take some college classes, and 8 percent of the cohort expected to complete only high school or less.

However, given the relatively few number of students who scored at high levels in math and reading, the 2002 sophomore cohort needed to make up quite a lot of ground to be considered ready for college, as the chart below demonstrates.

Percentage of high school sophomores, by demonstrated reading and math proficiency: 2002



Source: *A Profile of the American High School Sophomore in 2002*

In the chart above, reading levels represent the following skill sets:

- (1) simple reading comprehension;
- (2) ability to make relatively simple inferences beyond the author's main thought and/or to understand and evaluate abstract concepts; and
- (3) ability to make complex inferences or evaluative judgments that require piecing together multiple sources of information from the passage.

Math levels represent the following skill sets:

- (1) simple arithmetical operations on whole numbers;
- (2) simple operations with decimals, fractions, powers, and roots;
- (3) simple problemsolving requiring the understanding of low-level mathematical concepts;
- (4) understanding of intermediate-level mathematical concepts and/or multistep solutions to word problems; and
- (5) complex multistep word problems and/or advanced mathematics material.

After the sophomores of 2002 complete or leave high school, they will continue to be the focus of researchers' attention. In 2006, a new study will examine the educational and labor market activities of those who drop out of high school, the transition of students who do not proceed directly to postsecondary education or the workplace, and the students' persistence in attaining educational goals, among other matters.

The complete report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005338>.

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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